LULU'S LIBRARY, VOLUME III

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Cover

LULU'S LIBRARY.

BY

LOUISA M. ALCOTT,

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE WOMEN," "AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL," "LITTLE MEN," "EIGHT COUSINS," "ROSE IN BLOOM," "UNDER THE LILACS," "JACK AND JILL," "JO'S BOYS," "HOSPITAL SKETCHES," "WORK, A STORY OF EXPERIENCE," "MOODS, A NOVEL," "PROVERB STORIES," "SILVER PITCHERS," "SPINNING-WHEEL STORIES," "A GARLAND FOR GIRLS," "AUNT JO'S SCRAP-BAG."

VOL. III.

RECOLLECTIONS OF MY CHILDHOOD.
A CHRISTMAS TURKEY, AND HOW IT CAME.
THE SILVER PARTY.
THE BLIND LARK.
MUSIC AND MACARONI.
THE LITTLE RED PURSE.
SOPHIE'S SECRET.
DOLLY'S BEDSTEAD.
TRUDEL'S SIEGE.

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Louisa May Alcott

I.
RECOLLECTIONS OF MY CHILDHOOD.

One of my earliest memories is of playing with books in my father's study,–building towers and bridges of the big dictionaries, looking at pictures, pretending to read, and scribbling on blank pages whenever pen or pencil could be found.

Many of these first attempts at authorship still exist; and I often wonder if these childish plays did not influence my after-life, since books have been my greatest comfort, castle-building a never-failing delight, and scribbling a very profitable amusement.

Another very vivid recollection is of the day when running after my hoop I fell into the Frog Pond and was rescued by a black boy, becoming a friend to the colored race then and there, though my mother always declared that I was an abolitionist at the age of three.

During the Garrison riot in Boston the portrait of George Thompson was hidden under a bed in our house for safekeeping; and I am told that I used to go and comfort "the good man who helped poor slaves" in his captivity. However that may be, the conversion was genuine; and my greatest pride is in the fact that I have lived to know the brave men and women who did so much for the cause, and that I had a very small share in the war which put an end to a great wrong.

Being born on the birthday of Columbus, I seem to have something of my patron saint's spirit of adventure, and running away was one of the delights of my childhood. Many a social lunch have I shared with hospitable Irish beggar children, as we ate our crusts, cold potatoes, and salt fish on voyages of discovery among the ash heaps of the waste land that then lay where the Albany station now stands.

Many an impromptu picnic have I had on the dear old Common, with strange boys, pretty babies, and friendly dogs, who always seemed to feel that this reckless young person needed looking after.

On one occasion the town-crier found me fast asleep at nine o'clock at night, on a doorstep in Bedford Street, with my head pillowed on the curly breast of a big Newfoundland, who was with difficulty persuaded to release the weary little wanderer who had sobbed herself to sleep there.

I often smile as I pass that door, and never forget to give a grateful pat to every big dog I meet, for never have I slept more soundly than on that dusty step, nor found a better friend than the noble animal who watched over the lost baby so faithfully.

My father's school was the only one I ever went to; and when this was broken up because he introduced methods now all the fashion, our lessons went on at home, for he was always sure of four little pupils who firmly believed in their teacher, though they have not done him all the credit he deserved.

I never liked arithmetic or grammar, and dodged these branches on all occasions; but reading, composition, history, and geography I enjoyed, as well as the stories read to us with a skill which made the dullest charming and useful.

"Pilgrim's Progress," Krummacher's "Parables," Miss Edgeworth, and the best of the dear old fairy tales made that hour the pleasantest of our day. On

Sundays we had a simple service of Bible stories, hymns, and conversation about the state of our little consciences and the conduct of our childish lives which never will be forgotten.

Walks each morning round the Common while in the city, and long tramps over hill and dale when our home was in the country, were a part of our education, as well as every sort of housework, for which I have always been very grateful, since such knowledge makes one independent in these days of domestic tribulation with the help who are too often only hindrances.

Needle-work began early; and at ten my skilful sister made a linen shirt beautifully, while at twelve I set up as a dolls' dressmaker, with my sign out, and wonderful models in my window. All the children employed me; and my turbans were the rage at one time, to the great dismay of the neighbor's hens, who were hotly hunted down that I might tweak out their downiest feathers to adorn the dolls' head-gear.

Active exercise was my delight from the time when a child of six I drove my hoop round the Common without stopping, to the days when I did my twenty miles in five hours and went to a party in the evening.

I always thought I must have been a deer or a horse in some former state, because it was such a joy to run. No boy could be my friend till I had beaten him in a race, and no girl if she refused to climb trees, leap fences, and be a tomboy.

My wise mother, anxious to give me a strong body to support a lively brain, turned me loose in the country and let me run wild, learning of Nature what no books can teach, and being led, as those who truly love her seldom fail to be,

"Through Nature up to Nature's God."

I remember running over the hills just at dawn one summer morning, and pausing to rest in the silent woods, saw, through an arch of trees, the sun rise over river, hill, and wide green meadows as I never saw it before.

Something born of the lovely hour, a happy mood, and the unfolding aspirations of a child's soul seemed to bring me very near to God; and in the hush of that morning hour I always felt that I "got religion," as the phrase goes. A new and vital sense of His presence, tender and sustaining as a father's arms, came to me then, never to change through forty years of life's vicissitudes, but to grow stronger for the sharp discipline of poverty and pain, sorrow and success.

Those Concord days were the happiest of my life, for we had charming playmates in the little Emersons, Channings, Hawthornes, and Goodwins, with the illustrious parents and their friends to enjoy our pranks and share our excursions.

Plays in the barn were a favorite amusement, and we dramatized the fairy tales in great style. Our giant came tumbling off a loft when Jack cut down the squash-vine running up a ladder to represent the immortal bean. Cinderella rolled away in a vast pumpkin; and a long black pudding was lowered by invisible hands to fasten itself on the nose of the woman who wasted her three wishes.

Little pilgrims journeyed over the hills with scrip and staff, and cockle-shells in their hats; elves held their pretty revels among the pines, and "Peter Wilkins'" flying ladies came swinging down on the birch tree-tops. Lords and ladies haunted the garden, and mermaids splashed in the bath-house of woven willows over the brook.

People wondered at our frolics, but enjoyed them; and droll stories are still told of the adventures of those days. Mr. Emerson and Margaret Fuller were visiting my parents one afternoon; and the conversation having turned to the ever-interesting subject of education, Miss Fuller said,–

"Well, Mr. Alcott, you have been able to carry out your methods in your own family, and I should like to see your model children."

She did in a few moments,–for as the guests stood on the doorsteps a wild uproar approached, and round the corner of the house came a wheelbarrow holding baby May arrayed as a queen; I was the horse, bitted and bridled, and driven by my elder sister Anna, while Lizzie played dog and barked as loud as her gentle voice permitted.

All were shouting, and wild with fun, which, however, came to a sudden end as we espied the stately group before us, for my foot tripped, and down we all went in a laughing heap, while my mother put a climax to the joke by saying with a dramatic wave of the hand,–

"Here are the model children, Miss Fuller!"

My sentimental period began at fifteen, when I fell to writing romances, poems, a "heart journal," and dreaming dreams of a splendid future.

Browsing over Mr. Emerson's library, I found "Goethe's Correspondence with a Child," and was at once fired with the desire to be a second Bettine, making my father's friend my Goethe. So I wrote letters to him, but was wise enough never to send them, left wild flowers on the doorsteps of my "Master," sung Mignon's song in very bad German under his window, and was fond of wandering by moonlight, or sitting in a cherry-tree at midnight till the owls scared me to bed.

The girlish folly did not last long, and the letters were burned years ago; but Goethe is still my favorite author, and Emerson remained my beloved "Master" while he lived, doing more for me, as for many another young soul, than he ever knew, by the simple beauty of his life, the truth and wisdom of his books, the

example of a good great man untempted and unspoiled by the world which he made nobler while in it, and left the richer when he went.

The trials of life began about this time, and my happy childhood ended. Money is never plentiful in a philosopher's house; and even the maternal pelican could not supply all our wants on the small income which was freely shared with every needy soul who asked for help.

Fugitive slaves were sheltered under our roof; and my first pupil was a very black George Washington whom I taught to write on the hearth with charcoal, his big fingers finding pen and pencil unmanageable.

Motherless girls seeking protection were guarded among us; hungry travellers sent on to our door to be fed and warmed; and if the philosopher happened to own two coats, the best went to a needy brother, for these were practical Christians who had the most perfect faith in Providence, and never found it betrayed.

In those days the prophets were not honored in their own land, and Concord had not yet discovered her great men. It was a sort of refuge for reformers of all sorts, whom the good natives regarded as lunatics, harmless but amusing.

My father went away to hold his classes and conversations, and we women folk began to feel that we also might do something. So one gloomy November day we decided to move to Boston and try our fate again after some years in the wilderness.

My father's prospect was as promising as a philosopher's ever is in a money-making world; my mother's friends offered her a good salary as their missionary to the poor; and my sister and I hoped to teach. It was an anxious council; and always preferring action to discussion, I took a brisk run over the hill and then settled down for "a good think" in my favorite retreat.

It was an old cart-wheel, half hidden in grass under the locusts where I used to sit to wrestle with my sums, and usually forget them scribbling verses or fairy tales on my slate instead. Perched on the hub, I surveyed the prospect and found it rather gloomy, with leafless trees, sere grass, leaden sky, and frosty air; but the hopeful heart of fifteen beat warmly under the old red shawl, visions of success gave the gray clouds a silver lining, and I said defiantly, as I shook my fist at fate embodied in a crow cawing dismally on a fence near by,–

"I *will* do something by-and-by. Don't care what, teach, sew, act, write, anything to help the family; and I'll be rich and famous and happy before I die, see if I won't!"

Startled by this audacious outburst, the crow flew away; but the old wheel creaked as if it began to turn at that moment, stirred by the intense desire of an ambitious girl to work for those she loved and find some reward when the duty was done.

I did not mind the omen then, and returned to the house cold but resolute.

I think I began to shoulder my burden then and there, for when the free country life ended, the wild colt soon learned to tug in harness, only breaking loose now and then for a taste of beloved liberty.

My sisters and I had cherished fine dreams of a home in the city; but when we found ourselves in a small house at the South End with not a tree in sight, only a back yard to play in, and no money to buy any of the splendors before us, we all rebelled and longed for the country again.

Anna soon found little pupils, and trudged away each morning to her daily task, pausing at the corner to wave her hand to me in answer to my salute with the duster. My father went to his classes at his room down town, mother to her all-absorbing poor, the little girls to school, and I was left to keep house, feeling like a caged sea-gull as I washed dishes and cooked in the basement kitchen, where my prospect was limited to a procession of muddy boots.

Good drill, but very hard; and my only consolation was the evening reunion when all met with such varied reports of the day's adventures, we could not fail to find both amusement and instruction.

Father brought news from the upper world, and the wise, good people who adorned it; mother, usually much dilapidated because she *would* give away her clothes, with sad tales of suffering and sin from the darker side of life; gentle Anna a modest account of her success as teacher, for even at seventeen her sweet nature won all who knew her, and her patience quelled the most rebellious pupil.

My reports were usually a mixture of the tragic and the comic; and the children poured their small joys and woes into the family bosom, where comfort and sympathy were always to be found.

Then we youngsters adjourned to the kitchen for our fun, which usually consisted of writing, dressing, and acting a series of remarkable plays. In one I remember I took five parts and Anna four, with lightning changes of costume, and characters varying from a Greek prince in silver armor to a murderer in chains.

It was good training for memory and fingers, for we recited pages without a fault, and made every sort of property from a harp to a fairy's spangled wings. Later we acted Shakespeare; and Hamlet was my favorite hero, played with a gloomy glare and a tragic stalk which I have never seen surpassed.

But we were now beginning to play our parts on a real stage, and to know something of the pathetic side of life, with its hard facts, irksome duties, many temptations, and the daily sacrifice of self. Fortunately we had the truest, tenderest of guides and guards, and so learned the sweet uses of adversity, the value of honest work, the beautiful law of compensation which gives more than it takes, and the real significance of life.

At sixteen I began to teach twenty pupils, and for ten years learned to know and love children. The story-writing went on all the while with the usual trials

of beginners. Fairy tales told the Emersons made the first printed book, and "Hospital Sketches" the first successful one.

Every experience went into the caldron to come out as froth, or evaporate in smoke, till time and suffering strengthened and clarified the mixture of truth and fancy, and a wholesome draught for children began to flow pleasantly and profitably.

So the omen proved a true one, and the wheel of fortune turned slowly, till the girl of fifteen found herself a woman of fifty, with her prophetic dream beautifully realized, her duty done, her reward far greater than she deserved.

[image]

Chapter I tailpiece

[image]

Kitty gives the bunch of holly to the little girl.–PAGE 36.

II.

A CHRISTMAS TURKEY, AND HOW IT CAME.

"I know we could n't do it."

"I say we could, if we all helped."

"How can we?"

"I've planned lots of ways; only you mustn't laugh at them, and you must n't say a word to mother. I want it to be all a surprise."

"She 'll find us out."

"No, she won't, if we tell her we won't get into mischief."

"Fire away, then, and let's hear your fine plans."

"We must talk softly, or we shall wake father. He's got a headache."

A curious change came over the faces of the two boys as their sister lowered her voice, with a nod toward a half-opened door. They looked sad and ashamed,

and Kitty sighed as she spoke, for all knew that father's headaches always began by his coming home stupid or cross, with only a part of his wages; and mother always cried when she thought they did not see her, and after the long sleep father looked as if he did n't like to meet their eyes, but went off early.

They knew what it meant, but never spoke of it,–only pondered over it, and mourned with mother at the change which was slowly altering their kind industrious father into a moody man, and mother into an anxious over-worked woman.

Kitty was thirteen, and a very capable girl, who helped with the housekeeping, took care of the two little ones, and went to school. Tommy and Sammy looked up to her and thought her a remarkably good sister. Now, as they sat round the stove having "a go-to-bed warm," the three heads were close together; and the boys listened eagerly to Kitty's plans, while the rattle of the sewing-machine in another room went on as tirelessly as it had done all day, for mother's work was more and more needed every month.

"Well!" began Kitty, in an impressive tone, "we all know that there won't be a bit of Christmas in this family if we don't make it. Mother's too busy, and father don't care, so we must see what we can do; for I should be mortified to death to go to school and say I had n't had any turkey or plum-pudding. Don't expect presents; but we *must* have some kind of a decent dinner."

"So I say; I'm tired of fish and potatoes," said Sammy, the younger.

"But where's the dinner coming from?" asked Tommy, who had already taken some of the cares of life on his young shoulders, and knew that Christmas dinners did not walk into people's houses without money.

"We 'll earn it;" and Kitty looked like a small Napoleon planning the passage of the Alps. "You, Tom, must go early to-morrow to Mr. Brisket and offer to carry baskets. He will be dreadfully busy, and want you, I know; and you are so strong you can lug as much as some of the big fellows. He pays well, and if he won't give much money, you can take your wages in things to eat. We want everything."

"What shall I do?" cried Sammy, while Tom sat turning this plan over in his mind.

"Take the old shovel and clear sidewalks. The snow came on purpose to help you."

"It's awful hard work, and the shovel's half gone," began Sammy, who preferred to spend his holiday coasting on an old tea-tray.

"Don't growl, or you won't get any dinner," said Tom, making up his mind to lug baskets for the good of the family, like a manly lad as he was.

"I," continued Kitty, "have taken the hardest part of all; for after my work is done, and the babies safely settled, I 'm going to beg for the leavings of the holly and pine swept out of the church down below, and make some wreaths and sell

them."

"If you can," put in Tommy, who had tried pencils, and failed to make a fortune.

"Not in the street?" cried Sam, looking alarmed.

"Yes, at the corner of the Park. I 'm bound to make some money, and don't see any other way. I shall put on an old hood and shawl, and no one will know me. Don't care if they do." And Kitty tried to mean what she said, but in her heart she felt that it would be a trial to her pride if any of her schoolmates should happen to recognize her.

"Don't believe you 'll do it."

"See if I don't; for I *will* have a good dinner one day in the year."

"Well, it does n't seem right for us to do it. Father ought to take care of us, and we only buy some presents with the little bit we earn. He never gives us anything now." And Tommy scowled at the bedroom door, with a strong sense of injury struggling with affection in his boyish heart.

"Hush!" cried Kitty. "Don't blame him. Mother says we never must forget he's our father. I try not to; but when she cries, it's hard to feel as I ought." And a sob made the little girl stop short as she poked the fire to hide the trouble in the face that should have been all smiles.

For a moment the room was very still, as the snow beat on the window, and the fire-light flickered over the six shabby little boots put up on the stove hearth to dry.

Tommy's cheerful voice broke the silence, saying stoutly, "Well, if I 've got to work all day, I guess I 'll go to bed early. Don't fret, Kit. We 'll help all we can, and have a good time; see if we don't."

"I 'll go out real early, and shovel like fury. Maybe I 'll get a dollar. Would that buy a turkey?" asked Sammy, with the air of a millionnaire.

"No, dear; one big enough for us would cost two, I 'm afraid. Perhaps we 'll have one sent us. We belong to the church, though folks don't know how poor we are now, and we can't beg." And Kitty bustled about, clearing up, rather exercised in her mind about going and asking for the much-desired fowl.

Soon all three were fast asleep, and nothing but the whir of the machine broke the quiet that fell upon the house. Then from the inner room a man came and sat over the fire with his head in his hands and his eyes fixed on the ragged little boots left to dry. He had heard the children's talk; and his heart was very heavy as he looked about the shabby room that used to be so neat and pleasant. What he thought no one knows, what he did we shall see by-and-by; but the sorrow and shame and tender silence of his children worked a miracle that night more lasting and lovely than the white beauty which the snow wrought upon the sleeping city.

Bright and early the boys were away to their work; while Kitty sang as she dressed the little sisters, put the house in order, and made her mother smile at the mysterious hints she gave of something splendid which was going to happen. Father was gone, and though all rather dreaded evening, nothing was said; but each worked with a will, feeling that Christmas should be merry in spite of poverty and care.

All day Tommy lugged fat turkeys, roasts of beef, and every sort of vegetable for other people's good dinners on the morrow, wondering meanwhile where his own was coming from. Mr. Brisket had an army of boys trudging here and there, and was too busy to notice any particular lad till the hurry was over, and only a few belated buyers remained to be served. It was late; but the stores kept open, and though so tired he could hardly stand, brave Tommy held on when the other boys left, hoping to earn a trifle more by extra work. He sat down on a barrel to rest during a leisure moment, and presently his weary head nodded sideways into a basket of cranberries, where he slept quietly till the sound of gruff voices roused him.

It was Mr. Brisket scolding because one dinner had been forgotten.

"I told that rascal Beals to be sure and carry it, for the old gentleman will be in a rage if it does n't come, and take away his custom. Every boy gone, and I can't leave the store, nor you either, Pat, with all the clearing up to do."

"Here's a by, sir, slapin illigant forninst the cranberries, bad luck to him!" answered Pat, with a shake that set poor Tom on his legs, wide awake at once.

"*Good* luck to him, you mean. Here, What's-your-name, you take this basket to that number, and I 'll make it worth your while," said Mr. Brisket, much relieved by this unexpected help.

"All right, sir;" and Tommy trudged off as briskly as his tired legs would let him, cheering the long cold walk with visions of the turkey with which his employer might reward him, for there were piles of them, and Pat was to have one for his family.

His brilliant dreams were disappointed, however, for Mr. Brisket naturally supposed Tom's father would attend to that part of the dinner, and generously heaped a basket with vegetables, rosy apples, and a quart of cranberries.

"There, if you ain't too tired, you can take one more load to that number, and a merry Christmas to you!" said the stout man, handing over his gift with the promised dollar.

"Thank you, sir; good-night," answered Tom, shouldering his last load with a grateful smile, and trying not to look longingly at the poultry; for he had set his heart on at least a skinny bird as a surprise to Kit.

Sammy's adventures that day had been more varied and his efforts more successful, as we shall see, in the end, for Sammy was a most engaging little

fellow, and no one could look into his blue eyes without wanting to pat his curly yellow head with one hand while the other gave him something. The cares of life had not lessened his confidence in people; and only the most abandoned ruffians had the heart to deceive or disappoint him. His very tribulations usually led to something pleasant, and whatever happened, sunshiny Sam came right side up, lucky and laughing.

Undaunted by the drifts or the cold wind, he marched off with the remains of the old shovel to seek his fortune, and found it at the third house where he called. The first two sidewalks were easy jobs; and he pocketed his ninepences with a growing conviction that this was his chosen work. The third sidewalk was a fine long one, for the house stood on the corner, and two pavements must be cleared.

"It ought to be fifty cents; but perhaps they won't give me so much, I'm such a young one. I'll show 'em I can work, though, like a man;" and Sammy rang the bell with the energy of a telegraph boy.

Before the bell could be answered, a big boy rushed up, exclaiming roughly, "Get out of this! I'm going to have the job. You can't do it. Start, now, or I'll chuck you into a snow-bank."

"I won't!" answered Sammy, indignant at the brutal tone and unjust claim. "I got here first, and it's my job. You let me alone. I ain't afraid of you or your snow-banks either."

The big boy wasted no time in words, for steps were heard inside, but after a brief scuffle hauled Sammy, fighting bravely all the way, down the steps, and tumbled him into a deep drift. Then he ran up the steps, and respectfully asked for the job when a neat maid opened the door. He would have got it if Sam had not roared out, as he floundered in the drift, "I came first. He knocked me down 'cause I 'm the smallest. Please let me do it; please!"

Before another word could be said, a little old lady appeared in the hall, trying to look stern, and failing entirely, because she was the picture of a dear fat, cosey grandma.

"Send that *bad* big boy away, Maria, and call in the poor little fellow. I saw the whole thing, and *he* shall have the job if he can do it."

The bully slunk away, and Sammy came panting up the steps, white with snow, a great bruise on his forehead, and a beaming smile on his face, looking so like a jolly little Santa Claus who had taken a "header" out of his sleigh that the maid laughed, and the old lady exclaimed, "Bless the boy! he's dreadfully hurt, and does n't know it. Come in and be brushed and get your breath, child, and tell me how that scamp came to treat you so."

Nothing loath to be comforted, Sammy told his little tale while Maria dusted him off on the mat, and the old lady hovered in the doorway of the dining-room,

where a nice breakfast smoked and smelled so deliciously that the boy sniffed the odor of coffee and buckwheats like a hungry hound.

"He 'll get his death if he goes to work till he's dried a bit. Put him over the register, Maria, and I 'll give him a hot drink, for it's bitter cold, poor dear!"

Away trotted the kind old lady, and in a minute came back with coffee and cakes, on which Sammy feasted as he warmed his toes and told Kitty's plans for Christmas, led on by the old lady's questions, and quite unconscious that he was letting all sorts of cats out of the bag.

Mrs. Bryant understood the little story, and made her plans also, for the rosy-faced boy was very like a little grandson who died last year, and her sad old heart was very tender to all other small boys. So she found out where Sammy lived, and nodded and smiled at him most cheerily as he tugged stoutly away at the snow on the long pavements till all was done, and the little workman came for his wages.

A bright silver dollar and a pocketful of gingerbread sent him off a rich and happy boy to shovel and sweep till noon, when he proudly showed his earnings at home, and feasted the babies on the carefully hoarded cake, for Dilly and Dot were the idols of the household.

"Now, Sammy dear, I want you to take my place here this afternoon, for mother will have to take her work home by-and-by, and I must sell my wreaths. I only got enough green for six, and two bunches of holly; but if I can sell them for ten or twelve cents apiece, I shall be glad. Girls never *can* earn as much money as boys somehow," sighed Kitty, surveying the thin wreaths tied up with carpet ravellings, and vainly puzzling her young wits over a sad problem.

"I 'll give you some of my money if you don't get a dollar; then we'll be even. Men always take care of women, you know, and ought to," cried Sammy, setting a fine example to his father, if he had only been there to profit by it.

With thanks Kitty left him to rest on the old sofa, while the happy babies swarmed over him; and putting on the shabby hood and shawl, she slipped away to stand at the Park gate, modestly offering her little wares to the passers-by. A nice old gentleman bought two, and his wife scolded him for getting such bad ones; but the money gave more happiness than any other he spent that day. A child took a ten-cent bunch of holly with its red berries, and there Kitty's market ended. It was very cold, people were in a hurry, bolder hucksters pressed before the timid little girl, and the balloon man told her to "clear out."

Hoping for better luck, she tried several other places; but the short afternoon was soon over, the streets began to thin, the keen wind chilled her to the bone, and her heart was very heavy to think that in all the rich, merry city, where Christmas gifts passed her in every hand, there were none for the dear babies and boys at home, and the Christmas dinner was a failure.

"I must go and get supper anyway; and I 'll hang these up in our own rooms, as I can't sell them," said Kitty, wiping a very big tear from her cold cheek, and turning to go away.

A smaller, shabbier girl than herself stood near, looking at the bunch of holly with wistful eyes; and glad to do to others as she wished some one would do to her, Kitty offered the only thing she had to give, saying kindly, "You may have it; merry Christmas!" and ran away before the delighted child could thank her.

I am very sure that one of the spirits who fly about at this season of the year saw the little act, made a note of it, and in about fifteen minutes rewarded Kitty for her sweet remembrance of the golden rule.

As she went sadly homeward she looked up at some of the big houses where every window shone with the festivities of Christmas Eve, and more than one tear fell, for the little girl found life pretty hard just then.

"There don't seem to be any wreaths at these windows; perhaps they 'd buy mine. I can't bear to go home with so little for my share," she said, stopping before one of the biggest and brightest of these fairy palaces, where the sound of music was heard, and many little heads peeped from behind the curtains as if watching for some one.

Kitty was just going up the steps to make another trial, when two small boys came racing round the corner, slipped on the icy pavement, and both went down with a crash that would have broken older bones. One was up in a minute, laughing; the other lay squirming and howling, "Oh, my knee! my knee!" till Kitty ran and picked him up with the motherly consolations she had learned to give.

"It's broken; I know it is," wailed the small sufferer as Kitty carried him up the steps, while his friend wildly rang the doorbell.

It was like going into fairy-land, for the house was all astir with a children's Christmas party. Servants flew about with smiling faces; open doors gave ravishing glimpses of a feast in one room and a splendid tree in another; while a crowd of little faces peered over the balusters in the hall above, eager to come down and enjoy the glories prepared for them.

A pretty young girl came to meet Kitty, and listened to her story of the accident, which proved to be less severe than it at first appeared; for Bertie, the injured party, forgot his anguish at sight of the tree, and hopped upstairs so nimbly that every one laughed.

"He said his leg was broken, but I guess he's all right," said Kitty, reluctantly turning from this happy scene to go out into the night again.

"Would you like to see our tree before the children come down?" asked the pretty girl, seeing the wistful look in the child's eyes, and the shine of half-dried

tears on her cheek.

"Oh, yes; I never saw anything so lovely. I 'd like to tell the babies all about it;" and Kitty's face beamed at the prospect, as if the kind words had melted all the frost away.

"How many babies are there?" asked the pretty girl, as she led the way into the brilliant room. Kitty told her, adding several other facts, for the friendly atmosphere seemed to make them friends at once.

"I will buy the wreaths, for we have n't any," said the girl in silk, as Kitty told how she was just coming to offer them when the boys fell.

It was pretty to see how carefully the little hostess laid away the shabby garlands and slipped a half-dollar into Kitty's hand; prettier still, to watch the sly way in which she tucked some bonbons, a red ball, a blue whip, two china dolls, two pairs of little mittens, and some gilded nuts into an empty box for "the babies;" and prettiest of all, to see the smiles and tears make April in Kitty's face as she tried to tell her thanks for this beautiful surprise.

The world was all right when she got into the street again and ran home with the precious box hugged close, feeling that at last she had something to make a merry Christmas of.

Shrieks of joy greeted her, for Sammy's nice old lady had sent a basket full of pies, nuts and raisins, oranges and cake, and–oh, happy Sammy!–a sled, all for love of the blue eyes that twinkled so merrily when he told her about the tea-tray. Piled upon this red car of triumph, Dilly and Dot were being dragged about, while the other treasures were set forth on the table.

"I must show mine," cried Kitty; "we 'll look at them to-night, and have them to-morrow;" and amid more cries of rapture *her* box was unpacked, *her* money added to the pile in the middle of the table, where Sammy had laid his handsome contribution toward the turkey.

Before the story of the splendid tree was over, in came Tommy with his substantial offering and his hard-earned dollar.

"I 'm afraid I ought to keep my money for shoes. I 've walked the soles off these to-day, and can't go to school barefooted," he said, bravely trying to put the temptation of skates behind him.

"We 've got a good dinner without a turkey, and perhaps we 'd better not get it," added Kitty, with a sigh, as she surveyed the table, and remembered the blue knit hood marked seventy-five cents that she saw in a shop-window.

"Oh, we *must* have a turkey! we worked so hard for it, and it's so Christmasy," cried Sam, who always felt that pleasant things ought to happen.

"Must have turty," echoed the babies, as they eyed the dolls tenderly.

"You *shall* have a turkey, and there he is," said an unexpected voice, as a noble bird fell upon the table, and lay there kicking up his legs as if enjoying the

surprise immensely.

It was father's voice, and there stood father, neither cross nor stupid, but looking as he used to look, kind and happy, and beside him was mother, smiling as they had not seen her smile for months. It was not because the work was well paid for, and more promised, but because she had received a gift that made the world bright, a home happy again,–father's promise to drink no more.

"I 've been working to-day as well as you, and you may keep your money for yourselves. There are shoes for all; and never again, please God, shall my children be ashamed of me, or want a dinner Christmas Day."

As father said this with a choke in his voice, and mother's head went down on his shoulder to hide the happy tears that wet her cheeks, the children did n't know whether to laugh or cry, till Kitty, with the instinct of a loving heart, settled the question by saying, as she held out her hands, "We have n't any tree, so let's dance around our goodies and be merry."

Then the tired feet in the old shoes forgot their weariness, and five happy little souls skipped gayly round the table, where, in the midst of all the treasures earned and given, father's Christmas turkey proudly lay in state.

[image]

Chapter II tailpiece

[image]

"Grandpapa Ladle cheered them on, like a fine old gentleman as he was."–PAGE 55.

III.
THE SILVER PARTY.

"Such a long morning! Seems as if dinner-time would never come!" sighed Tony, as he wandered into the dining-room for a third pick at the nuts and raisins to

beguile his weariness with a little mischief.

It was Thanksgiving Day. All the family were at church, all the servants busy preparing for the great dinner; and so poor Tony, who had a cold, had not only to stay at home, but to amuse himself while the rest said their prayers, made calls, or took a brisk walk to get an appetite. If he had been allowed in the kitchen, he would have been quite happy; but cook was busy and cross, and rapped him on the head with a poker when he ventured near the door. Peeping through the slide was also forbidden, and John, the man, bribed him with an orange to keep out of the way till the table was set.

That was now done. The dining-room was empty and quiet, and poor Tony lay down on the sofa to eat his nuts and admire the fine sight before him. All the best damask, china, glass, and silver was set forth with great care. A basket of flowers hung from the chandelier, and the sideboard was beautiful to behold with piled-up fruit, dishes of cake, and many-colored finger-bowls and glasses.

"That's all very nice, but the eating part is what *I* care for. Don't believe I 'll get my share to-day, because mamma found out about this horrid cold. A fellow can't help sneezing, though he can hide a sore throat. Oh, hum! nearly two more hours to wait;" and with a long sigh Tony closed his eyes for a luxurious yawn.

When he opened them, the strange sight he beheld kept him staring without a thought of sleep. The big soup-ladle stood straight up at the head of the table with a face plainly to be seen in the bright bowl. It was a very heavy, handsome old ladle, so the face was old, but round and jolly; and the long handle stood very erect, like a tall thin gentleman with a big head.

"Well, upon my word that's queer!" said Tony, sitting up also, and wondering what would happen next.

To his great amazement the ladle began to address the assembled forks and spoons in a silvery tone very pleasant to hear:–

"Ladies and gentlemen, at this festive season it is proper that we should enjoy ourselves. As we shall be tired after dinner, we will at once begin our sports by a grand promenade. Take partners and fall in!"

At these words a general uprising took place; and before Tony could get his breath a long procession of forks and spoons stood ready. The finger-bowls struck up an airy tune as if invisible wet fingers were making music on their rims, and led by the stately ladle like a drum-major, the grand march began. The forks were the gentlemen, tall, slender, and with a fine curve to their backs; the spoons were the ladies, with full skirts, and the scallops on the handles stood up like silver combs; the large ones were the mammas, the teaspoons were the young ladies, and the little salts the children. It was sweet to see the small things walk at the end of the procession, with the two silver rests for the carving knife and fork trotting behind like pet dogs. The mustard-spoon and pickle-fork went

together, and quarrelled all the way, both being hot-tempered and sharp-tongued. The steel knives looked on, for this was a very aristocratic party, and only the silver people could join in it.

"Here 's fun!" thought Tony, staring with all his might, and so much interested in this remarkable state of things that he forgot hunger and time altogether.

Round and round went the glittering train, to the soft music of the many-toned finger-bowls, till three turns about the long oval table had been made; then all fell into line for a contradance, as in the good old times before every one took to spinning like tops. Grandpa Ladle led off with his oldest daughter, Madam Gravy Ladle, and the little salts stood at the bottom prancing like real children impatient for their turn. When it came, they went down the middle in fine style, with a cling! clang! that made Tony's legs quiver with a longing to join in.

It was beautiful to see the older ones twirl round in a stately way, with bows and courtesies at the end, while the teaspoons and small forks romped a good deal, and Mr. Pickle and Miss Mustard kept every one laughing at their smart speeches. The silver butter-knife, who was an invalid, having broken her back and been mended, lay in the rack and smiled sweetly down upon her friends, while the little Cupid on the lid of the butter-dish pirouetted on one toe in the most delightful manner.

When every one had gone through the dance, the napkins were arranged as sofas and the spoons rested, while the polite forks brought sprigs of celery to fan them with. The little salts got into grandpa's lap; and the silver dogs lay down panting, for they had frisked with the children. They all talked; and Tony could not help wondering if real ladies said such things when they put *their* heads together and nodded and whispered, for some of the remarks were so personal that he was much confused. Fortunately they took no notice of him, so he listened and learned something in this queer way.

"I have been in this family a hundred years," began the soup-ladle; "and it seems to me that each generation is worst than the last. My first master was punctual to a minute, and madam was always down beforehand to see that all was ready. Now master comes at all hours; mistress lets the servants do as they like; and the manners of the children are very bad. Sad state of things, very sad!"

"Dear me, yes!" sighed one of the large spoons; "we don't see such nice housekeeping now as we did when we were young. Girls were taught all about it then; but now it is all books or parties, and few of them know a skimmer from a gridiron."

"Well, I 'm sure the poor things are much happier than if they were messing about in kitchens as girls used to do in your day. It is much better for them to be dancing, skating, and studying than wasting their young lives darning and preserving, and sitting by their mammas as prim as dishes. *I* prefer the present

way of doing things, though the girls in this family *do* sit up too late, and wear too high heels to their boots."

The mustard-spoon spoke in a pert tone, and the pickle-fork answered sharply,–

"I agree with you, cousin. The boys also sit up too late. I 'm tired of being waked to fish out olives or pickles for those fellows when they come in from the theatre or some dance; and as for that Tony, he is a real pig,–eats everything he can lay hands on, and is the torment of the maid's life."

"Yes," cried one little salt-spoon, "we saw him steal cake out of the side-board, and he never told when his mother scolded Norah."

"So mean!" added the other; and both the round faces were so full of disgust that Tony fell flat and shut his eyes as if asleep to hide his confusion. Some one laughed; but he dared not look, and lay blushing and listening to remarks which plainly proved how careful we should be of our acts and words even when alone, for who knows what apparently dumb thing may be watching us.

"I have observed that Mr. Murry reads the paper at table instead of talking to his family; that Mrs. Murry worries about the servants; the girls gossip and giggle; the boys eat, and plague one another; and that small child Nelly teases for all she sees, and is never quiet till she gets the sugar-bowl," said Grandpa Ladle, in a tone of regret. "Now, useful and pleasant chat at table would make meals delightful, instead of being scenes of confusion and discomfort."

"I bite their tongues when I get a chance, hoping to make them witty or to check unkind words; but they only sputter, and get a lecture from Aunt Maria, who is a sour old spinster, always criticising her neighbors."'

As the mustard-spoon spoke, the teaspoons laughed as if they thought *her* rather like Aunt Maria in that respect.

"I gave the baby a fit of colic to teach her to let pickles alone, but no one thanked me," said the pickle-fork.

"Perhaps if we keep ourselves so bright that those who use us can see their faces in us, we shall be able to help them a little; for no one likes to see an ugly face or a dull spoon. The art of changing frowns to smiles is never old-fashioned; and lovely manners smooth away the little worries of life beautifully." A silvery voice spoke, and all looked respectfully at Madam Gravy Ladle, who was a very fine old spoon, with a coat of arms on it, and a polish that all envied.

"People can't always be remembering how old and valuable and bright they are. Here in America we just go ahead and make manners and money for our-selves. *I* don't stop to ask what dish I 'm going to help to; I just pitch in and take all I can hold, and don't care a bit whether I shine or not. My grandfather was a kitchen spoon; but I'm smarter than he was, thanks to my plating, and look and feel as good as any one, though I have n't got stags' heads and big letters on my

handle."

No one answered these impertinent remarks of the sauce-spoon, for all knew that she was not pure silver, and was only used on occasions when many spoons were needed. Tony was ashamed to hear her talk in that rude way to the fine old silver he was so proud of, and resolved he 'd give the saucy spoon a good rap when he helped himself to the cranberry.

An impressive silence lasted till a lively fork exclaimed, as the clock struck, "Every one is coasting out-of-doors. Why not have our share of the fun inside? It is very fashionable this winter, and ladies and gentlemen of the best families do it, I assure you."

"We will!" cried the other forks; and as the dowagers did not object, all fell to work to arrange the table for this agreeable sport. Tony sat up to see how they would manage, and was astonished at the ingenuity of the silver people. With a great clinking and rattling they ran to and fro, dragging the stiff white mats about; the largest they leaned up against the tall caster, and laid the rest in a long slope to the edge of the table, where a pile of napkins made a nice snowdrift to tumble into.

"What *will* they do for sleds?" thought Tony; and the next minute chuckled when he saw them take the slices of bread laid at each place, pile on, and spin away, with a great scattering of crumbs like snowflakes, and much laughter as they landed in the white pile at the end of the coast.

"Won't John give it to 'em if he comes in and catches 'em turning his nice table topsy-turvy!" said the boy to himself, hoping nothing would happen to end this jolly frolic. So he kept very still, and watched the gay forks and spoons climb up and whiz down till they were tired. The little salts got Baby Nell's own small slice, and had lovely times on a short coast of their own made of one mat held up by grandpa, who smiled benevolently at the fun, being too old and heavy to join in it.

They kept it up until the slices were worn thin, and one or two upsets alarmed the ladies; then they rested and conversed again. The mammas talked about their children, how sadly the silver basket needed a new lining, and what there was to be for dinner. The teaspoons whispered sweetly together, as young ladies do,–one declaring that rouge powder was not as good as it used to be, another lamenting the sad effect of eggs upon her complexion, and all smiled amiably upon the forks, who stood about discussing wines and cigars, for both lived in the sideboard, and were brought out after dinner, so the forks knew a great deal about such matters, and found them very interesting, as all gentlemen seem to do.

Presently some one mentioned bicycles, and what fine rides the boys of the family told about. The other fellows proposed a race; and before Tony could

grasp the possibility of such a thing, it was done. Nothing easier, for there stood a pile of plates, and just turning them on their edges, the forks got astride, and the big wheels spun away as if a whole bicycle club had suddenly arrived.

Old Pickle took the baby's plate, as better suited to his size. The little salts made a tricycle of napkin-rings, and rode gayly off, with the dogs barking after them. Even the carving-fork, though not invited, could not resist the exciting sport, and tipping up the wooden bread-platter, went whizzing off at a great pace, for his two prongs were better than four, and his wheel was lighter than the china ones. Grand-papa Ladle cheered them on, like a fine old gentleman as he was, for though the new craze rather astonished him, he liked manly sports, and would have taken a turn if his dignity and age had allowed. The ladies chimed their applause, for it really was immensely exciting to see fourteen plates with forks astride racing round the large table with cries of, "Go it, Pickle! Now, then, Prongs! Steady, Silver-top! Hurrah for the twins!"

The fun was at its height when young Prongs ran against Pickle, who did not steer well, and both went off the table with a crash. All stopped at once, and crowded to the edge to see who was killed. The plates lay in pieces, old Pickle had a bend in his back that made him groan dismally, and Prongs had fallen down the register.

Wails of despair arose at that awful sight, for he was a favorite with every one, and such a tragic death was too much for some of the tender-hearted spoons, who fainted at the idea of that gallant fork's destruction in what to them was a fiery volcano.

"Serves Pickle right! He ought to know he was too old for such wild games," scolded Miss Mustard, peering anxiously over at her friend, for they were fond of one another in spite of their tiffs.

"Now let us see what these fine folks will do when they get off the damask and come to grief. A helpless lot, I fancy, and those fellows deserve what they 've got," said the sauce-spoon, nearly upsetting the twins as she elbowed her way to the front to jeer over the fallen.

"I think you will see that gentle people are as brave as those who make a noise," answered Madam Gravy, and leaning over the edge of the table she added in her sweet voice, "Dear Mr. Pickle, we will let down a napkin and pull you up if you have strength to take hold."

"Pull away, ma'am," groaned Pickle, who well deserved his name just then, and soon, thanks to Madam's presence of mind, he was safely laid on a pile of mats, while Miss Mustard put a plaster on his injured back.

Meanwhile brave Grandpapa Ladle had slipped from the table to a chair, and so to the floor without too great a jar to his aged frame; then sliding along the carpet, he reached the register. Peering down that dark, hot abyss he cried,

while all listened breathlessly for a reply, "Prongs, my boy, are you there?"

"Ay, ay, sir; I 'm caught in the wire screen. Ask some of the fellows to lend a hand and get me out before I 'm melted," answered the fork, with a gasp of agony.

Instantly the long handle of the patriarchal Ladle was put down to his rescue, and after a moment of suspense, while Prongs caught firmly hold, up he came, hot and dusty, but otherwise unharmed by that dreadful fall. Cheers greeted them, and every one lent a hand at the napkin as they were hoisted to the table to be embraced by their joyful relatives and friends.

"What did you think about down in that horrid place?" asked one of the twins.

"I thought of a story I once heard master tell, about a child who was found one cold day sitting with his feet on a newspaper, and when asked what he was doing, answered, 'Warming my feet on the "Christian Register."' I hoped my register would be Christian enough not to melt me before help came. Ha! ha! See the joke, my dears?" and Prongs laughed as gayly as if he never had taken a header into a volcano.

"What did you see down there?" asked the other twin, curious, as all small people are.

"Lots of dust and pins, a doll's head baby put there, Norah's thimble, and the big red marble that boy Tony was raging about the other day. It's a regular catch-all, and shows how the work is shirked in this house," answered Prongs, stretching his legs, which were a little damaged by the fall.

"What shall we do about the plates?" asked Pickle, from his bed.

"Let them lie, for we can't mend them. John will think the boy broke them, and he'll get punished, as he deserves, for he broke a tumbler yesterday, and put it slyly in the ash-barrel," said Miss Mustard, spitefully.

"Oh! I say, that's mean," began Tony; but no one listened, and in a minute Prongs answered bravely,–

"I 'm a gentleman, and I don't let other people take the blame of my scrapes. Tony has enough of his own to answer for."

"I'll have that bent fork for mine, and make John keep it as bright as a new dollar to pay for this. Prongs is a trump, and I wish I could tell him so," thought Tony, much gratified at this handsome behavior.

"Right, grandson. I am pleased with you; but allow me to suggest that the Chinese Mandarin on the chimney-piece be politely requested to mend the plates. He can do that sort of thing nicely, and will be charmed to oblige us, I am sure."

Grandpapa's suggestion was a good one; and Yam Ki Lo consented at once, skipped to the floor, tapped the bits of china with his fan, and in the twinkling of an eye was back on his perch, leaving two whole plates behind him, for he was a

wizard, and knew all about blue china.

Just as the silver people were rejoicing over this fine escape from discovery, the clock struck, a bell rang, voices were heard upstairs, and it was very evident that the family had arrived. At these sounds a great flurry arose in the dining-room, as every spoon, fork, plate, and napkin flew back to its place. Pickle rushed to the jar, and plunged in head first, regardless of his back; Miss Mustard retired to the caster; the twins scrambled into the salt-cellar; and the silver dogs lay down by the carving knife and fork as quietly as if they had never stirred a leg; Grandpapa slowly reposed in his usual place; Madam followed his example with dignity; the teaspoons climbed into the holder, uttering little cries of alarm; and Prongs stayed to help them till he had barely time to drop down at Tony's place, and lie there with his bent leg in the air, the only sign of the great fall, about which he talked for a long time afterward. All was in order but the sauce-spoon, who had stopped to laugh at the Mandarin till it was too late to get to her corner; and before she could find any place of concealment, John came in and caught her lying in the middle of the table, looking very common and shabby among all the bright silver.

"What in the world is that old plated thing here for? Missis told Norah to put it in the kitchen, as she had a new one for a present to-day–real silver–so out you go;" and as he spoke, John threw the spoon through the slide,–an exile forevermore from the good society which she did not value as she should.

Tony saw the glimmer of a smile in Grand-papa Ladle's face, but it was gone like a flash, and by the time the boy reached the table nothing was to be seen in the silver bowl but his own round rosy countenance, full of wonder.

"I don't think any one will believe what I 've seen, but I mean to tell, it was so *very* curious," he said, as he surveyed the scene of the late frolic, now so neat and quiet that not a wrinkle or a crumb betrayed what larks had been going on.

Hastily fishing up his long-lost marble, the doll's head, and Norah's thimble, he went thoughtfully upstairs to welcome his cousins, still much absorbed by this very singular affair.

Dinner was soon announced; and while it lasted every one was too busy eating the good things before them to observe how quiet the usually riotous Tony was. His appetite for turkey and cranberries seemed to have lost its sharp edge, and the mince-pie must have felt itself sadly slighted by his lack of appreciation of its substance and flavor. He seemed in a brown-study, and kept staring about as if he saw more than other people did. He examined Nelly's plate as if looking for a crack, smiled at the little spoon when he took salt, refused pickles and mustard with a frown, kept a certain bent fork by him as long as possible, and tried to make music with a wet finger on the rim of his bowl at dessert.

But in the evening, when the young people sat around the fire, he amused

them by telling the queer story of the silver party; but he very wisely left out the remarks made upon himself and family, remembering how disagreeable the sauce-spoon had seemed, and he privately resolved to follow Madam Gravy Ladle's advice to keep his own face bright, manners polite, and speech kindly, that he might prove himself to be pure silver, and be stamped a gentleman.

[image]

"Presently she sat down and let them tap her cheeks."–PAGE 82.

IV.
THE BLIND LARK.

High up in an old house, full of poor people, lived Lizzie, with her mother and Baby Billy. The street was a narrow, noisy place, where carts rumbled and dirty children played; where the sun seldom shone, the fresh wind seldom blew, and the white snow of winter was turned at once to black mud. One bare room was Lizzie's home, and out of it she seldom went, for she was a prisoner. We all pity the poor princesses who were shut up in towers by bad fairies, the men and women in jails, and the little birds in cages, but Lizzie was a sadder prisoner than any of these.

The prince always comes to the captive princess, the jail doors open in time, and the birds find some kind hand to set them free; but there seemed no hope of escape for this poor child. Only nine years old, and condemned to lifelong helplessness, loneliness, and darkness,–for she was blind.

She could dimly remember the blue sky, green earth, and beautiful sun; for the light went out when she was six, and the cruel fever left her a pale little shadow to haunt that room ever since. The father was dead; the mother worked hard for daily bread; they had no friends; and the good fairies seemed to have forgotten them. Still, like the larks one sees in Brittany, whose eyes cruel boys put out that they may sing the sweeter, Lizzie made music in her cage, singing to baby; and when he slept, she sat by the window listening to the noise below for company, crooning to herself till she too fell asleep and forgot the long, long days that had no play, no school, no change for her such as other children know.

Every morning mother gave them their porridge, locked the door, and went away to work, leaving something for the children's dinner, and Lizzie to take care of herself and Billy till night. There was no other way, for both were too helpless to be trusted elsewhere, and there was no one to look after them. But Lizzie knew her way about the room, and could find the bed, the window, and the table where the bread and milk stood. There was seldom any fire in the stove, and the window was barred, so the little prisoners were safe; and day after day they lived together a sad, solitary, unchildlike life that makes one's heart ache to think of.

Lizzie watched over Billy like a faithful little mother, and Billy did his best to bear his trials and comfort sister like a man. He was not a rosy, rollicking fellow, like most year-old boys, but pale and thin and quiet, with a pathetic look in his big blue eyes, as if he said, "Something is wrong; will some one kindly put it right for us?" But he seldom complained unless in pain, and would lie for hours on the old bed, watching the flies, which were his only other playmates, stretching out his little hands to the few rays of sunshine that crept in now and then, as if longing for them, like a flower in a cellar. When Lizzie sang, he hummed softly; and when he was hungry, cold, or tired, he called, "Lib! Lib!" meaning "Lizzie," and nestled up to her, forgetting all his baby woes in her tender arms.

Seeing her so fond and faithful, the poor neighbors loved as well as pitied her, and did what they could for the afflicted child. The busy women would pause at the locked door to ask if all was right; the dirty children brought her dandelions from the park; and the rough workmen of the factory opposite, with a kind word, would toss an apple or a cake through the open window. They had learned to look for the little wistful face behind the bars, and loved to listen to the childish voice which caught and imitated the songs they sang and whistled, like a sweet echo. They called her "the blind lark;" and though she never knew it, many were the better for the pity they gave her.

Baby slept a great deal, for life offered him few pleasures, and like a small philosopher, he wisely tried to forget the troubles which he could not cure; so Lizzie had nothing to do but sing, and try to imagine how the world looked. She had no one to tell her, and the few memories grew dimmer and dimmer each year. She did not know how to work or to play, never having been taught, and mother was too tired at night to do anything but get supper and go to bed.

"The child will be an idiot soon, if she does not die," people said; and it seemed as if this would be the fate of the poor little girl, since no one came to save her during those three weary years. She often said, "I'm of *some* use. I take care of Billy, and I could n't live without him."

But even this duty and delight was taken from her, for that cold spring nipped the poor little flower, and one day Billy shut his blue eyes with a patient sigh and left her all alone.

Then Lizzie's heart seemed broken; and people thought she would soon follow him, now that her one care and comfort was gone. All day she lay with her cheek on Billy's pillow, holding the battered tin cup and a little worn-out shoe, and it was pitiful to hear her sing the old lullabies as if baby still could hear them.

"It will be a mercy if the poor thing does n't live; blind folks are no use and a sight of trouble," said one woman to another as they gossiped in the hall after calling on the child during her mother's absence, for the door was left unlocked since she was ill.

"Yes, Mrs. Davis would get on nicely if she had n't such a burden. Thank Heaven, my children are n't blind," answered the other, hugging her baby closer as she went away.

Lizzie heard them, and hoped with all her sad little soul that death would set her free, since she was of no use in the world. To go and be with Billy was all her desire now, and she was on her way to him, growing daily weaker and more content to be dreaming of dear baby well and happy, waiting for her somewhere in a lovely place called heaven.

The summer vacation came; and hundreds of eager children were hurrying away to the mountains and seashore for two months of healthful pleasure. Even the dirty children in the lane felt the approach of berry-time, and rejoiced in their freedom from cold as they swarmed like flies about the corner grocery where over-ripe fruit was thrown out for them to scramble over.

Lizzie heard about good times when some of these young neighbors were chosen to go on the poor children's picnics, and came back with big sandwiches buttoned up in their jackets, pickles, peanuts, and buns in their pockets, hands full of faded flowers, and hearts brimming over with childish delight at a day in the woods. She listened with a faint smile, enjoyed the "woodsy" smell of the green things, and wondered if they had nice picnics in heaven, being sorry that Billy had missed them here. But she did not seem to care much, or hope for any pleasure for herself except to see baby again.

I think there were few sadder sights in that great city than this innocent prisoner waiting so patiently to be set free. Would it be by the gentle angel of death, or one of the human angels who keep these little sparrows from falling to the ground?

One hot August day, when not a breath came into the room, and the dust and noise and evil smells were almost unendurable, poor Lizzie lay on her bed singing feebly to herself about "the beautiful blue sea." She was trying to get to sleep that she might dream of a cool place, and her voice was growing fainter and fainter, when suddenly it seemed as if the dream had come, for a sweet odor was near, something damp and fresh touched her feverish cheek, and a kind voice

said in her ear,–

"Here is the little bird I 've been following. Will you have some flowers, dear?"

"Is it heaven? Where's Billy?" murmured Lizzie, groping about her, half awake.

"Not yet. I'm not Billy, but a friend who carries flowers to little children who cannot go and get them. Don't be afraid, but let me sit and tell you about it," answered the voice, as a gentle hand took hers.

"I thought maybe I 'd died, and I was glad, for I do want to see Billy so much. He's baby, you know." And the clinging hands held the kind one fast till it filled them with a great bunch of roses that seemed to bring all summer into the close, hot room with their sweetness.

"Oh, how nice! how nice! I never had such a lot. They 're bigger 'n' better 'n dandelions, are n't they? What a good lady you must be to go 'round giving folks posies like these!" cried Lizzie, trying to realize the astonishing fact.

Then, while the new friend fanned her, she lay luxuriating in her roses, and listening to the sweet story of the Flower Mission which, like many other pleasant things, she knew nothing of in her prison. Presently she told her own little tale, never guessing how pathetic it was, till lifting her hand to touch the new face, she found it wet with tears.

"Are you sorry for me?" she asked. "Folks are very kind, but I 'm a burden, you know, and I 'd better die and go to Billy; I was some use to him, but I never can be to any one else. I heard 'em say so, and poor mother would do better if I was n't here."

"My child, I know a little blind girl who is no burden but a great help to her mother, and a happy, useful creature, as you might be if you were taught and helped as she was," went on the voice, sounding more than ever like a good fairy's as it told fresh wonders till Lizzie was sure it *must* be all a dream.

"Who taught her? Could I do it? Where's the place?" she asked, sitting erect in her eagerness, like a bird that hears a hand at the door of its cage.

Then, with the comfortable arm around her, the roses stirring with the flutter of her heart, and the sightless eyes looking up as if they could see the face of the deliverer, Lizzie heard the wonderful story of the House Beautiful standing white and spacious on the hill, with the blue sea before it, the fresh wind always blowing, the green gardens and parks all about, and inside, music, happy voices, shining faces, busy hands, and year after year the patient teaching by those who dedicate themselves to this noble and tender task.

"It must be better'n heaven!" cried Lizzie, as she heard of work and play, health and happiness, love and companionship, usefulness and independence,– all the dear rights and simple joys young creatures hunger for, and perish, soul

and body, without.

It was too much for her little mind to grasp at once, and she lay as if in a blissful dream long after the kind visitor had gone, promising to come again and to find some way for Lizzie to enter into that lovely place where darkness is changed to light.

That visit was like magic medicine, and the child grew better at once, for hope was born in her heart. The heavy gloom seemed to lift; discomforts were easier to bear; and solitude was peopled now with troops of happy children living in that wonderful place where blindness was not a burden. She told it all to her mother, and the poor woman tried to believe it, but said sadly,–

"Don't set your heart on it, child. It's easy to promise and to forget. Rich folks don't trouble themselves about poor folks if they can help it."

But Lizzie's faith never wavered, though the roses faded as day after day went by and no one came. The mere thought that it was possible to teach blind people to work and study and play seemed to give her strength and courage. She got up and sat at the window again, singing to herself as she watched and waited, with the dead flowers carefully arranged in Billy's mug, and a hopeful smile on the little white face behind the bars.

Every one was glad she was better, and nodded to one another as they heard the soft crooning, like a dove's coo, in the pauses of the harsher noises that filled the street. The workmen tossed her sweeties and whistled their gayest airs; the children brought their dilapidated toys to amuse her; and one woman came every day to put her baby in Lizzie's lap, it was such a pleasure to her to feel the soft little body in the loving arms that longed for Billy.

Poor mother went to her work in better spirits, and the long hot days were less oppressive as she thought, while she scrubbed, of Lizzie up again; for she loved her helpless burden, heavy though she found it.

When Saturday came around, it rained hard, and no one expected "the flower lady." Even Lizzie said with a patient sigh and a hopeful smile,–

"I don't believe she 'll come; but maybe it will clear up, and then I guess she will."

It did not clear up, but the flower lady came; and as the child sat listening to the welcome sound of her steps, her quick ear caught the tread of two pairs of feet, the whisper of two voices, and presently two persons came in to fill her hands with midsummer flowers.

"This is Minna, the little girl I told you of. She wanted to see you very much, so we paddled away like a pair of ducks, and here we are," said Miss Grace, gayly; and as she spoke, Lizzie felt soft fingers glide over her face, and a pair of childish lips find and kiss her own. The groping touch, the hearty kiss, made the blind children friends at once, and dropping her flowers, Lizzie hugged the new-comer,

trembling with excitement and delight. Then they talked; and how the tongues went as one asked questions and the other answered them, while Miss Grace sat by enjoying the happiness of those who do *not* forget the poor, but seek them out to save and bless.

Minna had been for a year a pupil in the happy school, where she was taught to see with her hands, as one might say; and the tales she told of the good times there made Lizzie cry eagerly,–

"Can I go? Oh, *can* go?"

"Alas, no, not yet," answered Miss Grace, sadly. "I find that children under ten cannot be taken, and there is no place for the little ones unless kind people care for them."

Lizzie gave a wail, and hid her face in the pillow, feeling as if she could not bear the dreadful disappointment.

Minna comforted her, and Miss Grace went on to say that generous people were trying to get another school for the small children; that all the blind children were working hard to help on the plan; that money was coming in; and soon they hoped to have a pleasant place for every child who needed help.

Lizzie's tears stopped falling as she listened, for hope was not quite gone.

"I 'll not be ten till next June, and I don't see how I *can* wait 'most a year. Will the little school be ready 'fore then?" she asked.

"I fear not, dear, but I will see that the long waiting is made as easy as possible, and perhaps you can help us in some way," answered Miss Grace, anxious to atone for her mistake in speaking about the school before she had made sure that Lizzie could go.

"Oh, I 'd love to help; only I can't do anything," sighed the child.

"You can sing, and that is a lovely way to help. I heard of 'the blind lark,' as they call you, and when I came to find her, your little voice led me straight to the door of the cage. That door I mean to open, and let you hop out into the sunshine; then, when you are well and strong, I hope you will help us get the home for other little children who else must wait years before *they* find the light. Will you?"

As Miss Grace spoke, it was beautiful to see the clouds lift from Lizzie's wondering face, till it shone with the sweetest beauty any face can wear,–the happiness of helping others. She forgot her own disappointment in the new hope that came, and held on to the bedpost as if the splendid plan were almost too much for her.

"Could I help that way?" she cried. "Would anybody care to hear me sing? Oh, how I 'd love to do anything for the poor little ones who will have to wait."

"You shall. I 'm sure the hardest heart would be touched by your singing, if you look as you do now. We need something new for our fair and concert, and

by that time you will be ready," said Miss Grace, almost afraid she had said too much; for the child looked so frail, it seemed as if even joy would hurt her.

Fortunately her mother came in just then; and while the lady talked to her, Minna's childish chatter soothed Lizzie so well that when they left she stood at the window smiling down at them and singing like the happiest bobolink that ever tilted on a willow branch in spring-time.

All the promises were kept, and soon a new life began for Lizzie. A better room and well-paid work were found for Mrs. Davis. Minna came as often as she could to cheer up her little friend, and best of all, Miss Grace taught her to sing, that by and by the little voice might plead with its pathetic music for others less blest than she. So the winter months went by, and Lizzie grew like mayflowers underneath the snow, getting ready to look up, sweet and rosy, when spring set her free and called her to be glad. She counted the months and weeks, and when the time dwindled to days, she could hardly sleep or eat for thinking of the happy hour when she could go to be a pupil in the school where miracles were worked.

Her birthday was in June, and thanks to Miss Grace, her coming was celebrated by one of the pretty festivals of the school, called Daisy Day. Lizzie knew nothing of this surprise, and when her friends led her up the long flight of steps she looked like a happy little soul climbing to the gates of heaven.

Mr. Constantine, the ruler of this small kingdom, was a man whose fatherly heart had room for every suffering child in the world, and it rejoiced over every one who came, though the great house was overflowing, and many waited as Lizzie had done.

He welcomed her so kindly that the strange place seemed like home at once, and Minna led her away to the little mates who proudly showed her their small possessions and filled her hands with the treasures children love, while pouring into her ears delightful tales of the study, work, and play that made their lives so happy.

Lizzie was bewildered, and held fast to Minna, whose motherly care of her was sweet to see. Kind teachers explained rules and duties with the patience that soothes fear and wins love; and soon Lizzie began to feel that she was a "truly pupil" in this wonderful school where the blind could read, sew, study, sing, run, and play. Boys raced along the galleries and up and down the stairs as boldly as if all had eyes; girls swept and dusted like tidy housewives; little fellows hammered and sawed in the workshop and never hurt themselves; small girls sewed on pretty work as busy as bees; and in the schoolroom lessons went on as if both teachers and pupils were blessed with eyes.

Lizzie could not understand it, and was content to sit and listen wherever she was placed, while her little fingers fumbled at the new objects near her, and her hungry mind opened like a flower to the sun. She had no tasks that day,

and in the afternoon was led away with a flock of children, all chattering like magpies, on the grand expedition. Every year, when the fields were white with daisies, these poor little souls were let loose among them to enjoy the holy day of this child's flower. Ah, but was n't it a pretty sight to see the meeting between them, when the meadows were reached, and the children scattered far and wide with cries of joy as they ran and rolled in the white sea, or filled their eager hands, or softly felt for the dear daisies and kissed them like old friends? The flowers seemed to enjoy it too, as they danced and nodded, while the wind rippled the long grass like waves of a green sea, and the sun smiled as if he said,–

"Here's the sort of thing I like to see. Why don't I find more of it?"

Lizzie's face looked like a daisy, it was so full of light as she stood looking up, with the wide brim of her new hat like the white petals all round it. She did not run nor shout, but went slowly wading through the grass, feeling the flowers touch her hands, yet picking none, for it was happiness enough to know that they were there. Presently she sat down and let them tap her cheeks and rustle about her ears as though telling secrets that made her smile. Then, as if weary with so much happiness, she lay back and let the daisies hide her with their pretty coverlet.

Miss Grace was watching over her, but left her alone, and by and by, like a lark from its nest in the grass, the blind girl sent up her little voice, singing so sweetly that the children gathered around to hear, while they made chains and tied up their nosegays.

This was Lizzie's first concert, and no little prima donna was ever more pelted with flowers than she; for when she had sung all her songs, new and old, a daisy crown was put upon her head, a tall flower for a sceptre in her hand, and all the boys and girls danced around her as if she had been Queen of the May.

A little feast came out of the baskets, that they might be empty for the harvest to be carried home, and while they ate, stories were told and shouts of laughter filled the air, for all were as merry as if there was no darkness, pain, or want in the world. Then they had games; and Lizzie was taught to play,–for till now she never knew what a good romp meant. Her cheeks grew rosy, her sad little face waked up, she ran and tumbled with the rest, and actually screamed, to Minna's great delight.

Two or three of the children could see a little, and these were very helpful in taking care of the little ones. Miss Grace found them playing some game with Lizzie, and observed that all but she were blindfolded. When she asked why, one whispered, "We thought we should play fairer if we were all alike." And another added, "It seems somehow as if we were proud if we see better than the rest."

Lizzie was much touched by this sweet spirit, and a little later showed that she had already learned one lesson in the school, when she gathered about her

some who had never seen, and told them what she could remember of green fields and daisy-balls before the light went out forever.

"Surely my little lark was worth saving, if only for this one happy day," thought Miss Grace, as she watched the awakened look in the blind faces, all leaning toward the speaker, whose childish story pleased them well.

In all her long and useful life, Lizzie never forgot that Daisy Day, for it seemed as if she were born anew, and like a butterfly had left the dark chrysalis all behind her then. It was the first page of the beautiful book just opening before the eyes of her little mind,–a lovely page, illustrated with flowers, kind faces, sunshine, and happy hopes. The new life was so full, so free, she soon fell into her place and enjoyed it all. People worked there so heartily, so helpfully, it was no wonder things went as if by magic, and the poor little creatures who came in so afflicted went out in some years independent people, ready to help themselves and often to benefit others.

There is no need to tell all Lizzie learned and enjoyed that summer, nor how proud her mother was when she heard her read in the curious books, making eyes of the little fingers that felt their way along so fast; when she saw the neat stitches she set, the pretty clay things she modelled, the tidy way she washed dishes, swept, and dusted, and helped keep her room in order. But the poor woman's heart was too full for words when she heard the child sing,–not as before, in the dreary room, sad, soft lullabies to Billy, but beautiful, gay songs, with flutes and violins to lift and carry the little voice along on waves of music.

Lizzie really had a great gift; but she was never happier than when they all sang together, or when she sat quietly listening to the band as they practised for the autumn concert. She was to have a part in it; and the thought that she could help to earn money for the Kindergarten made the shy child bold and glad to do her part. Many people knew her now, for she was very pretty, with the healthful roses in her cheeks, curly yellow hair, and great blue eyes that seemed to see. Her mates and teachers were proud of her, for though she was not as quick as some of the pupils, her sweet temper, grateful heart, and friendly little ways made her very dear to all, aside from the musical talent she possessed.

Every one was busy over the fair and the concert; and fingers flew, tongues chattered, feet trotted, and hearts beat fast with hope and fear as the time drew near, for all were eager to secure a home for the poor children still waiting in darkness. It was a charity which appealed to all hearts when it was known; but in this busy world of ours, people have so many cares of their own that they are apt to forget the wants of others unless something brings these needs very clearly before their eyes. Much money was needed, and many ways had been tried to add to the growing fund, that all might be well done.

"We wish to interest children in this charity for children, so that they may

gladly give a part of their abundance to these poor little souls who have nothing. I think Lizzie will sing some of the pennies out of their pockets, which would otherwise go for bonbons. Let us try; so make her neat and pretty, and we 'll have a special song for her."

Mr. Constantine said this; and Miss Grace carried out his wish so well that when the time came, the little prima donna did her part better even than they had hoped.

The sun shone splendidly on the opening day of the fair, and cars and carriages came rolling out from the city, full of friendly people with plump purses and the sympathetic interest we all take in such things when we take time to see, admire, and reproach ourselves that we do so little for them.

There were many children; and when they had bought the pretty handiwork of the blind needle-women, eaten cake and ices, wondered at the strange maps and books, twirled the big globe in the hall, and tried to understand how so many blind people could be so busy and so happy, they all were seated at last to hear the music, full of expectation, for "the pretty little girl was going to sing."

It was a charming concert, and every one enjoyed it, though many eyes grew dim as they wandered from the tall youths blowing the horns so sweetly to the small ones chirping away like so many sparrows, for the blind faces made the sight pathetic, and such music touched the hearts as no other music can.

"Now she's coming!" whispered the eager children, as a little girl climbed up the steps and stood before them, waiting to begin.

A slender little creature in a blue gown, with sunshine falling on her pretty hair, a pleading look in the soft eyes that had no sign of blindness but their steadfastness, and a smile on the lips that trembled at first, for Lizzie's heart beat fast, and only the thought, "I 'm helping the poor little ones," gave her courage for her task.

But when the flutes and violins began to play like a whispering wind, she forgot the crowd before her, and lifting up her face, sang in clear sweet tones.

THE BLIND LARK'S SONG.

We are sitting in the shadow
Of a long and lonely night,
Waiting till some gentle angel
Comes to lead us to the light;
For we know there is a magic
That can give eyes to the blind.
Oh, well-filled hands, be generous!
Oh, pitying hearts, be kind!

Help stumbling feet that wander
To find the upward way;
Teach hands that now lie idle
The joys of work and play.
Let pity, love, and patience
Our tender teachers be,
That though the eyes be blinded,
The little souls may see.

Your world is large and beautiful,
Our prison dim and small;
We stand and wait, imploring,
"Is there not room for all?
Give us our children's garden,
Where we may safely bloom,
Forgetting in God's sunshine
Our lot of grief and gloom."

A little voice comes singing;
Oh, listen to its song!
A little child is pleading
For those who suffer wrong.
Grant them the patient magic
That gives eyes to the blind!
Oh, well-filled hands, be generous!
Oh, pitying hearts, be kind!

It was a very simple little song, but it proved wonderfully effective, for Lizzie was so carried away by her own feeling that as she sang the last lines she stretched out her hands imploringly, and two great tears rolled down her cheeks. For a minute many hands were too busy fumbling for handkerchiefs to clap, but the children were quick to answer that gesture and those tears; and one impetuous little lad tossed a small purse containing his last ten cents at Lizzie's feet, the first contribution won by her innocent appeal. Then there was great applause, and many of the flowers just bought were thrown to the little lark, who was obliged to come back and sing again and again, smiling brightly as she dropped pretty courtesies, and sang song after song with all the added sweetness of a grateful heart.

Hidden behind the organ, Miss Grace and Mr. Constantine shook hands

joyfully, for this was the sort of interest they wanted, and they knew that while the children clapped and threw flowers, the wet-eyed mothers were thinking self-reproachfully, "I must help this lovely charity," and the stout old gentlemen who pounded with their canes were resolving to go home and write some generous checks, which would be money invested in God's savings-bank.

It was a very happy time for all, and made strangers friends in the sweet way which teaches heart to speak to heart. When the concert was over, Lizzie felt many hands press hers and leave something there, many childish lips kiss her own, with promises to "help about the Kindergarten," and her ears were full of kind voices thanking and praising her for doing her part so well. Still later, when all were gone, she proudly put the rolls of bills into Mr. Constantine's hand, and throwing her arms about Miss Grace's neck, said, trembling with earnestness, "I 'm not a burden any more, and I can truly help! How can I ever thank you both for making me so happy?"

One can fancy what their answer was and how Lizzie helped; for long after the Kindergarten was filled with pale little flowers blooming slowly as she had done, the Blind Lark went on singing pennies out of pockets, and sweetly reminding people not to forget this noble charity.

[image]

Chapter IV tailpiece

[image]

Tino runs away from home.–PAGE 105.

V.
MUSIC AND MACARONI.

Among the pretty villages that lie along the wonderful Cornice road which runs from Nice to Genoa, none was more beautiful than Valrose. It deserved its name,

for it was indeed a "valley of roses." The little town with its old church nestled among the olive and orange trees that clothed the hillside, sloping up to purple mountains towering behind. Lower down stretched the vineyards; and the valley was a bed of flowers all the year round. There were acres of violets, verbenas, mignonette, and every sweet-scented blossom that grows, while hedges of roses, and alleys of lemon-trees with their white stars made the air heavy with perfume. Across the plain, one saw the blue sea rolling to meet the bluer sky, sending fresh airs and soft rains to keep Valrose green and beautiful even through the summer heat. Only one ugly thing marred the lovely landscape, and that was the factory, with its tall chimneys, its red walls, and ceaseless bustle. But old ilex-trees tried to conceal its ugliness; the smoke curled gracefully from its chimney-tops; and the brown men talked in their musical language as they ran about the busy courtyard, or did strange things below in the still-room. Handsome black-eyed girls sang at the open windows at their pretty work, and delicious odors filled the place; for here the flowers that bloomed outside were changed to all kinds of delicate perfumes to scent the hair of great ladies and the handkerchiefs of dainty gentlemen all the world over.

The poor roses, violets, mignonette, orange-flowers, and their sisters, were brought here in great baskets to yield up their sweet souls in hot rooms where, fires burned and great vats boiled; then they were sent up to be imprisoned in pretty flasks of all imaginable shapes and colors by the girls, who put gilded labels on them, packed them in delicate boxes, and sent them away to comfort the sick, please the rich, and put money in the pockets of the merchants.

Many children were employed in the light work of weeding beds, gathering flowers, and running errands; among these none were busier, happier, or more beloved than Florentino and his sister Stella. They were orphans, but they lived with old Mariuccia in her little stone house near the church, contented with the small wages they earned, though their clothes were poor, their food salad, macaroni, rye bread, and thin wine, with now and then a taste of meat when Stella's lover or some richer friend gave them a treat on gala days.

They worked hard, and had their dreams of what they would do when they had saved up a little store; Stella would marry her Beppo and settle in a home of her own; but Tino was more ambitious, for he possessed a sweet boyish voice and sang so well in the choir, at the merrymakings, and about his work, that he was called the "little nightingale," and much praised and petted, not only by his mates, but by the good priest who taught him music, and the travellers who often came to the factory and were not allowed to go till Tino had sung to them.

All this made the lad vain; and he hoped one day to go away as Baptista had gone, who now sang in a fine church at Genoa and sent home gold napoleons to his old parents. How this was to come about Tino had not the least idea, but

he cheered his work with all manner of wild plans, and sang his best at Mass, hoping some stranger would hear, and take him away as Signor Pulci had taken big Tista, whose voice was not half so wonderful as his own, all had said. No one came, however, and Tino at thirteen was still at work in the valley,–a happy little lad, singing all day long as he carried his fragrant loads to and fro, ate his dinner of bread and beans fried in oil, with a crust, under the ilex-trees, and slept like a dormouse at night on his clean straw in the loft at Mariuccia's, with the moon for his candle and the summer warmth for his coverlet.

One day in September, as he stood winnowing mignonette seed in a quiet corner of the vast garden, he was thinking deeply over his hopes and plans, and practising the last chant Father Angelo had taught him, while he shook and held the sieve high, to let the wind blow away the dead husks, leaving the brown seeds behind.

Suddenly, as he ended his lesson with a clear high note that seemed to rise and die softly away like the voice of an angel in the air, the sound of applause startled him; and turning, he saw a gentleman sitting on the rude bench behind him,–a well-dressed, handsome, smiling gentleman, who clapped his white hands and nodded and said gayly, "Bravo, my boy, that was well done! You have a wonderful voice; sing again."

But Tino was too abashed for the moment, and could only stand and stare at the stranger, a pretty picture of boyish confusion, pleasure, and shyness.

"Come, tell me all about it, my friend. Who taught you so well? Why are you here, and not where you should be, learning to use this fine pipe of yours, and make fame and money by it?" said the gentleman, still smiling as he leaned easily in his seat and swung his gloves.

Tino's heart began to beat fast as he thought, "Perhaps my chance has come at last! I must make the most of it." So taking courage, he told his little story; and when he ended, the stranger gave a nod, saying,–

"Yes, you are the 'little nightingale' they spoke of up at the inn. I came to find you. Now sing me something gay, some of your folk-songs. That sort will suit you best."

Anxious to make the most of his chance, Tino took courage and sang away as easily as a bird on a bough, pouring out one after another the barcaroles, serenades, ballads, and drinking-songs he had learned from the people about him.

The gentleman listened, laughed, and applauded as if well pleased, and when Tino stopped to take breath, he gave another nod more decided than the first, and said with his engaging smile,–

"You are indeed a wonder, and quite wasted here. If *I* had you I should make a man of you, and put money in your pocket as fast as you opened your mouth."

Tino's eyes sparkled at the word "money," for sweet as was the praise, the

idea of having full pockets bewitched him, and he asked eagerly, "How, signor?"

"Well," answered the gentleman, idly tapping his nose with a rose-bud which he had pulled as he came along, "I should take you to my hotel at Nice; wash, brush, and trim you up a little; put you into a velvet suit with a lace collar, silk stockings, and buckled shoes; teach you music, feed you well, and when I thought you fit carry you with me to the *salons* of the great people, where I give concerts. There you would sing these gay songs of yours, and be petted, praised, and pelted with bonbons, francs, and kisses perhaps,–for you are a pretty lad and these fine ladies and idle gentlemen are always ready to welcome a new favorite. Would you fancy that sort of life better than this? You can have it if you like."

Tino's black eyes shone; the color deepened in his brown cheeks; and he showed all his white teeth as he laughed and exclaimed with a gesture of delight,–

"Mio Dio! but I *would*, signor! I 'm tired of this work; I long to sing, to see the world, to be my own master, and let Stella and the old woman know that I am big enough to have my own way. Do you really mean it? When can I go? I'm ready now, only I had better run and put on my holiday suit and get my guitar."

"Good! there 's a lad of spirit. I like that well. A guitar too? Bravo, my little troubadour, we shall make a sensation in the drawing-rooms, and fill our pockets shortly. But there is no haste, and it would be well to ask these friends of yours, or there might be trouble. I don't *steal* nightingales, I buy them; and I will give the old woman, whoever she may be, more than you would earn in a month. See, I too am a singer, and this I made at Genoa in a week." As he spoke, Signor Mario pulled a well-filled purse from one pocket, a handful of gold and silver coin from the other, and chinked them before the boy's admiring eyes.

"Let us go!" cried Tino, flinging down the sieve as if done with work forever. "Stella is at home to-day; come at once to Mariuccia,–it is not far; and when they hear these fine plans, they will be glad to let me go, I am sure."

Away he went across the field of flowers, through the courtyard, up the steep street, straight into the kitchen where his pretty sister sat eating artichokes and bread while the old woman twirled her distaff in the sun. Both were used to strangers, for the cottage was a picturesque place, half hidden like a bird's nest in vines and fig-trees, with a gay little plot of flowers before it; travellers often came to taste Mariuccia's honey, for her bees fared well, and their combs were running over with the sweetness of violets and roses, put up in dainty little waxen boxes made by better workmen than any found at the factory.

The two women listened respectfully while Signor Mario told his plan in his delightfully gracious way; and Stella was much impressed by the splendor of the prospect before her brother. But the wise old woman shook her head, and declared decidedly that the boy was too young to leave home yet. Father Angelo was teaching him well; he was safe and happy where he was; and there he should

remain, for she had sworn by all the saints to his dying mother that she would guard him as the apple of her eye till he was old enough to take care of himself.

In vain Mario shook his purse before her eyes, Stella pleaded, and Tino stormed; the faithful old soul would not give up, much as she needed money, loved Stella, and hated to cross the boy who was in truth "the apple of her eye" and the darling of her heart. There was a lively scene in the little room, for every one talked at once, gesticulated wildly, and grew much excited in the discussion; but nothing came of it, and Signor Mario departed wrathfully, leaving Mariuccia looking as stern as fate with her distaff, Stella in tears, and Tino in such a rage he could only dash up to the loft and throw himself on his rude bed, there to kick and sob and tear his hair, and wish there might be ten thousand earthquakes to swallow that cruel old woman up in the twinkling of an eye.

Stella came to beg him to be comforted and eat his supper, but he drew the wooden bolt and would not let her in, saying sternly,–

"I *never* will come down till Mariuccia says I may go; I will starve first. I am not a child to be so treated. Go away, and let me alone; I hate you both!"

Poor Stella retired, heart-broken, and when all her entreaties failed to change their guardian's decision, she went to consult Father Angelo. He agreed with the old woman that it was best to keep the boy safe at home, as they knew nothing of the strange gentleman nor what might befall Tino if he left the shelter of his own humble home and friends.

Much disappointed, Stella went to pray devoutly in the church, and then, meeting her Beppo, soon forgot all about the poor little lad who had sobbed himself to sleep upon his straw.

The house was quiet when he awoke; no lights shone from any neighbor's windows; and all was still except the nightingales singing in the valley. The moon was up; and her friendly face looked in at the little window so brightly that the boy felt comforted, and lay staring at the soft light while his mind worked busily. Some evil spirit, some naughty Puck bent on mischief must have been abroad that night, for into Tino's head there suddenly popped a splendid idea; at least *he* thought it so, and in his rebellious state found it all the more tempting because danger and disobedience and defiance all had a part in it.

Why not run away? Signor Mario was not to leave till next morning. Tino could easily slip out early and join the kind gentleman beyond the town. This would show the women that he, Tino, had a will of his own and was not to be treated like a child any more. It would give them a good fright, make a fine stir in the place, and add to his glory when he returned with plenty of money to display himself in the velvet suit and silk stockings,–a famous fellow who knew what he was about and did not mean to be insulted, or tied to an old woman's apron-string forever.

The longer he thought the more delightful the idea became, and he resolved to carry it out, for the fine tales he had heard made him more discontented than ever with his present simple, care-free life. Up he got, and by the light of the moon took from the old chest his best suit. Moving very softly, he put on the breeches and jacket of rough blue cloth, the coarse linen shirt, the red sash, and the sandals of russet leather that laced about his legs to the knee. A few clothes, with his rosary, he tied up in a handkerchief, and laid the little bundle ready with his Sunday hat, a broad-brimmed, pointed-crowned affair with a red band and cock's feather to adorn it.

Then he sat at the window waiting for dawn to come, fearing to sleep lest he be too late. It seemed an almost endless night, the first he had ever spent awake, but red streaks came in the east at last, and he stole to the door, meaning to creep noiselessly downstairs, take a good hunch of bread and a gourd full of wine and slip off while the women slept.

To his dismay he found the door barred on the outside. His courage had ebbed a little as the time for action came; but at this new insult he got angry again, and every dutiful impulse flew away in a minute.

"Ah, they think to keep me, do they? Behold, then, how I cheat the silly things! They have never seen me climb down the fig-tree, and thought me safe. Now I will vanish, and leave them to tear their hair and weep for me in vain."

Flinging out his bundle, and carefully lowering his old guitar, Tino leaned from the little window, caught the nearest branch of the tree that bent toward the wall, and swung himself down as nimbly as a squirrel. Pausing only to pick several bunches of ripe grapes from the vine about the door, he went softly through the garden and ran away along the road toward Nice as fast as his legs could carry him.

Not till he reached the top of the long hill a mile away, did he slacken his lively pace; then climbing a bank, he lay down to rest under some olive-trees, and ate his grapes as he watched the sun rise. Travellers always left the Falcone Inn early to enjoy the morning freshness, so Tino knew that Signor Mario would soon appear; and when the horses paused to rest on the hill-top, the "little nightingale" would present himself as unexpectedly as if he had fallen from heaven.

But Signor Mario was a lazy man; and Tino had time to work himself into a fever of expectation, doubt, and fear before the roll of wheels greeted his longing ears. Yes, it was the delightful stranger!–reading papers and smoking as he rode, quite blind to the beauty all around him, blind also to the sudden appearance of a picturesque little figure by the roadside, as the carriage stopped. Even when he looked, he did not recognize shabby Tino in the well-dressed beggar, as he thought him, who stood bare-headed and smiling, with hat in one hand, bundle in the other, and guitar slung on his back. He waved his hand as if to say, "I

have nothing for you," and was about to bid the man drive on, but Tino cried out boldly,–

"Behold me, signor! I am Tino, the singing boy of Valrose. I have run away to join you if you will have me. Ah, please do! I wish so much to go with you."

"Bravo!" cried Mario, well pleased. "That is a lad of spirit; and I am glad to have you. I don't steal nightingales, as I told you down yonder; but if they get out of their cages and perch on my finger, I keep them. In with you, boy! there is no time to lose."

In scrambled happy Tino, and settling himself and his property on the seat opposite, amused his new master with a lively account of his escape. Mario laughed and praised him; Luigi, the servant, grinned as he listened from the coach-box; and the driver resolved to tell the tale at the Falcone, when he stopped there on his return to Genoa, so the lad's friends might know what had become of him.

After a little chat Signor Mario returned to his newspapers, and Tino, tired with his long vigil and brisk run, curled himself up on the seat, pillowed his head on his bundle and fell fast asleep, rocked by the motion of the carriage as it rolled along the smooth road.

When he waked, the sun was high, the carriage stood before a wayside inn, the man and horses were gone to their dinners, and the signor lay under some mulberry-trees in the garden while Luigi set forth upon the grass the contents of a well-filled hamper which they had brought with them, his master being one who looked well after his own comfort. The sight of food drew Tino toward it as straight as a honey-jar draws flies, and he presented himself with his most engaging air. Being in a good humor, the new master bade the hungry lad sit down and eat, which he did so heartily that larded fowl, melon, wine, and bread vanished as if by magic. Never had food tasted so good to Tino; and rejoicing with true boyish delight in the prospect of plenty to eat, he went off to play Morso with the driver, while the horses rested and Mario took a siesta on the grass.

When they set forth again, Tino received his first music lesson from the new teacher, who was well pleased to find how quickly the boy caught the air of a Venetian boat-song, and how sweetly he sang it. Then Tino strummed on his guitar and amused his hearers with all the melodies he knew, from church chants to drinking-songs. Mario taught him how to handle his instrument gracefully, speak a few polite phrases, and sit properly instead of sprawling awkwardly or lounging idly.

So the afternoon wore away; and at dusk they reached Nice. To Tino it looked like an enchanted city as they drove down to it from the soft gloom and stillness of the country. The sea broke gently on the curving shore, sparkling

with the lights of the Promenade des Anglais which overlooks it. A half circle of brilliant hotels came next; behind these the glimmer of villas scattered along the hillside shone like fireflies among gardens and orange groves; and higher still the stars burned in a violet sky. Soon the moon would be up, to hang like a great lamp from that splendid dome, turning sea and shore to a magic world by her light. Tino clapped his hands and looked about him with all the pleasure of his beauty-loving race as they rattled through the gay streets and stopped at one of the fine hotels.

Here Mario put on his grand air, and was shown to the apartment he had ordered from Genoa. Tino meekly followed; and Luigi brought up the rear with the luggage. Tino felt as if he had got into a fairy tale when he found himself in a fine parlor where he could only sit and stare about him, while his master refreshed in the chamber beyond, and the man ordered dinner. A large closet was given the boy to sleep in, with a mattress and blanket, a basin and pitcher, and a few pegs to hang his clothes on. But it seemed very nice after the loft; and when he had washed his face, shaken the dust off, and smoothed his curly head as well as he could, he returned to the parlor to gloat over such a dinner as he had never eaten before.

Mario was in a good humor and anxious to keep the lad so, therefore he plied him with good things to eat, fine promises, and the praise in which that vain little soul delighted. Tino went to bed early, feeling that his fortune was made, and his master went off to amuse himself at a gaming-table, for that was his favorite pastime.

Next day the new life began. After a late breakfast, a music lesson was given which both interested and dismayed Tino, for his master was far less patient than good old Father Angelo, and swore at him when he failed to catch a new air as quickly as he expected. Both were tired and rather cross when it ended, but Tino soon forgot the tweaking of his ear and the scolding, when he was sent away with Luigi to buy the velvet suit and sundry necessary articles for the young troubadour.

It was a lovely day; and the gay city was all alive with the picturesque bustle which always fills it when the season begins. Red-capped fishermen were launching their boats from the beach, flower-girls hastening from the gardens with their fragrant loads to sell on the Promenade, where invalids sunned themselves, nurses led their rosy troops to play, fine ladies strolled, and men of all nations paced to and fro at certain hours. In the older part of the city, work of all sorts went on,–coral-carvers filled their windows with pretty ornaments; pastry-cooks tempted with dainty dishes; milliners showed hats fresh from Paris; and Turkish merchants hung out rich rugs and carpets at their doors. Church-bells chimed; priests with incense and banners went through the streets on holy

errands; the Pifferoni piped gayly; orange-women and chestnut-sellers called their wares in musical voices; even the little scullions who go about scouring saucepans at back doors made a song of their cry, "Casserola!"

Tino had a charming time, and could hardly believe his senses when one fine thing after another was bought for him and ordered home. Not only the suit, but two ruffled shirts, a crimson tie for the lace collar, a broad new ribbon for the guitar, handkerchiefs, hose, and delicate shoes, as if he was a gentleman's son. When Luigi added a little mantle and a hat such as other well-dressed lads of his age wore, Tino exclaimed, "This also! Dio mio, never have I known so kind a man as Signor Mario. I shall serve him well and love him even better than you do."

Luigi shrugged his shoulders and answered with a disagreeable laugh, "Long may you think so, poverino; I serve for money, not love, and look to it that I get my wages, else it would go ill with both of us. Keep all you can get, boy; our master is apt to forget his servants."

Tino did not like the look, half scornful, half pitiful, which Luigi gave him, and wondered why he did not love the good signor. Later he found out; but all was pleasant now, and lunch at a café completed the delights of that long morning.

The rooms were empty when they returned; and bidding him keep out of mischief, Luigi left Tino alone for several hours. But he found plenty of amusement in examining all the wonders the apartment contained, receiving the precious parcels as they arrived, practising his new bow before the long mirror, and eating the nuts that he had bought of a jolly old woman at a street corner.

Then he went to lounge on the balcony that ran along the front of the hotel, and watched the lively scene below, till sunset sent the promenaders home to dress for dinner. Feeling a sudden pang of homesickness as he thought of Stella, Tino got his guitar and sang the old songs to comfort his loneliness.

The first was hardly ended before one after the other five little heads popped out of a window farther down the balcony; and presently a group of pretty children were listening and smiling as the nice boy played and sang to them. A gentleman looked out; and a lady evidently listened, for the end of a lace flounce lay on the threshold of the long window, and a pair of white hands clapped when he finished a gay air in his best style.

This was his first taste of applause, and he liked it, and twanged away merrily till his master's voice called him in just as he was beginning to answer the questions the eager children asked him.

"Go and dress! I shall take you down to dinner with me presently. But mind this, *I* will answer questions; do *you* keep quiet, and leave me to tell what I think best. Remember, or I pack you home at once."

Tino promised, and was soon absorbed in getting into his new clothes; Luigi came to help him, and when he was finished off, a very handsome lad emerged from the closet to make his best bow to his master, who, also in fine array, surveyed him with entire approval.

"Very good! I thought you would make a passable butterfly when you shed your grub's skin. Stand up and keep your hands out of your pockets. Mind what I told you about supping soup noisily, and don't handle your fork like a shovel. See what others do, smile, and hold your tongue. There is the gong. Let us go."

Tino's heart beat as he followed Mario down the long hall to the great *salle à manger* with its glittering *table d'hôte* and many guests. But the consciousness of new clothes sustained him, so he held up his head, turned out his toes, and took his place, trying to look as if everything was not very new and dazzling to him.

Two elderly ladies sat opposite, and he heard one say to the other in bad Italian, "Behold the lovely boy, Maria; I should like to paint him."

And the other answered, "We will be amiable to him, and perhaps we may get him for a model. Just what I want for a little Saint John."

Tino smiled at them till his black eyes sparkled and his white teeth shone, for he understood and enjoyed their praise. The artistic ladies smiled back, and watched him with interest long after he had forgotten them, for that dinner was a serious affair to the boy, with a heavy silver spoon and fork to manage, a napkin to unfold, and three glasses to steer clear of for fear of a general upset, so awkward did he feel.

Every one else was too busy to mind his mistakes; and the ladies set them down to bashfulness, as he got red in the face, and dared not look up after spilling his soup and dropping a roll.

Presently, while waiting for dessert, he forgot himself in something Mario was saying to his neighbor on the other side:–

"A poor little fellow whom I found starving in the streets at Genoa. He has a voice; I have a heart, and I adore music. I took him to myself, and shall do my best for him. Ah, yes! in this selfish world one must not forget the helpless and the poor."

Tino stared, wondering what other boy the good signor had befriended, and was still more bewildered when Mario turned to him with a paternal air, to add in that pious tone so new to the boy,–

"This is my little friend, and he will gladly come and sing to your young ladies after dinner. Many thanks for the honor; I shall bring him out at my parlor concerts, and so fit him for his place by and by. Bow and smile, quick!"

The last words were in a sharp whisper; and Tino obeyed with a sudden bob of the head that sent his curls over his eyes, and then laughed such a boyish

laugh as he shook them back that the gentleman leaning forward to look at him joined in it, and the ladies smiled sympathetically as they pushed a dish of bonbons nearer to him. Mario gave him an indulgent look, and went on in the same benevolent tone telling all he meant to do, till the kindly gentleman from Rome was much interested, having lads of his own and being fond of music.

Tino listened to the fine tales told of him and hoped no one would ask him about Genoa, for he would surely betray that he had never been there and could not lie as glibly as Mario did. He felt rather like the little old woman who did not know whether she was herself or not, but consoled himself by smiling at the ladies and eating a whole plateful of little cakes standing near him.

When they rose, Tino made his bow, and Mario walked down the long hall with his hand on the boy's shoulder and a friendly air very impressive to the spectators, who began at once to gossip about the pretty lad and his kind protector, just as the cunning gentleman planned to have them.

As soon as they were out of sight, Mario's manner changed; and telling Tino to sit down and digest his dinner or he would n't be able to sing a note, he went to the balcony to smoke till the servant came to conduct them to Conte Alborghetti's salon.

"Now mind, boy; do exactly as I tell you, or I 'll drop you like a hot chestnut and leave you to get home as you can," said Mario, in a sharp whisper, as they paused on the threshold of the door.

"I will, signor, indeed I will!" murmured Tino, scared by the flash of his master's black eye and the grip of his hand, as he pulled the bashful boy forward.

In they went, and for a moment Tino only perceived a large light room full of people, who all looked at him as he stood beside Mario with his guitar slung over his shoulder, red cheeks, and such a flutter at his heart that he felt sure he could never sing there. The amiable host came to meet and present them to a group of ladies, while a flock of children drew near to look at and listen to the "nice singing boy from Genoa."

Mario, having paid his thanks and compliments in his best manner, opened the little concert by a grand piece upon the piano, proving that he was a fine musician, though Tino already began to fancy he was not quite so good a man as he wished to appear. Then he sang several airs from operas; and Tino forgot himself in listening delightedly to the mellow voice of his master, for the lad loved music and had never heard any like this before.

When Tino's turn came, he had lost his first shyness, and though his lips were dry and breath short, and he gave the guitar an awkward bang against the piano as he pulled it round ready to play upon, the curiosity in the faces of the children and the kindly interest of the ladies gave him courage to start bravely off with "Bella Monica,"–the easiest as well as gayest of his songs. It went well;

and with each verse his voice grew clearer, his hand firmer, and his eyes fuller of boyish pleasure in his own power to please.

For please he did, and when he ended with a loud twang and kissed his hand to the audience as he always used to do to the girls at home, every one clapped heartily, and the gentlemen cried, "Bravo, piccolo! He sings in truth like a little nightingale; encore, encore!"

These were sweet sounds to Tino; and he needed no urging to sing "Lucia" in his softest tones, "looking like one of Murillo's angels!" as a young lady said, while he sang away with his eyes piously lifted in the manner Mario had taught him.

Then followed a grand march from the master while the boy rested; after which Tino gave more folk-songs, and ended with a national air in which all joined like patriotic and enthusiastic Italians, shouting the musical chorus, "Viva Italia!" till the room rang.

Tino quite lost his head at that, and began to prance as if the music had got into his heels. Before Mario could stop him, he was showing one of the little girls how to dance the Salterello as the peasants dance it during Carnival; and all the children were capering gayly about the wide polished floor with Tino strumming and skipping like a young fawn from the woods.

The elder people laughed and enjoyed the pretty sight till trays of ices and bonbons came in; and the little party ended in a general enjoyment of the good things children most delight in. Tino heard his master receiving the compliments of the company, and saw the host slip a paper into his hand; but, boylike, he contented himself with a pocket full of sweetmeats, and the entreaties of his little patrons to come again soon, and so backed out of the room, after bowing till he was dizzy, and bumping against a marble table in a very painful manner.

"Well, how do you like the life I promised you? Is it all I said? Do we begin to fill our pockets, and enjoy ourselves even sooner than I expected?" asked Mario, with a good-natured slap of the shoulder, as they reached his apartment again.

"It is splendid! I like it much, very much! and I thank you with all my heart," cried Tino, gratefully kissing the hand that could tweak sharply, as well as caress when things suited its owner.

"You did well, even better than I hoped; but in some things we must improve. Those legs must be taught to keep still; and you must not forget that you are a peasant when among your betters. It passed very well to-night with those little persons, but in some places it would have put me in a fine scrape. Capers! but I feared at one moment you would have embraced the young contessa, when she danced with you."

Mario laughed as poor Tino blushed and stammered, "But, signor, she was

so little, only ten years old, and I thought no harm to hold her up on that slippery floor. See, she gave me all these, and bade me come again. I would gladly have kissed her, she was so like little Annina at home."

"Well, well, no harm is done; but I see the pretty brown girls down yonder have spoiled you, and I shall have to keep an eye on my gallant young troubadour. Now to bed, and don't make yourself ill with all those confections. Felice notte, Don Giovanni!" and away went Mario to lose at play every franc of the money the generous count had given him "for the poor lad."

That was the beginning of a new and charming life for Tino, and for two months he was a busy and a happy boy, with only a homesick fit now and then when Mario was out of temper, or Luigi put more than his fair share of work upon his shoulders. The parlor concerts went well, and the little nightingale was soon a favorite toy in many salons. Night after night Tino sang and played, was petted and praised, and then trotted home to dream feverishly of new delights; for this exciting life was fast spoiling the simple lad who used to be so merry and busy at Valrose. The more he had, the more he wanted, and soon grew discontented, jealous, and peevish. He had cause to complain of some things; for none of the money earned ever came to him, and when he plucked up courage to ask for his promised share, Mario told him he only earned his food and clothes as yet. Then Tino rebelled, and got a beating, which made him outwardly as meek as a lamb, but inwardly a very resentful, unhappy boy, and spoiled all his pleasure in music and success.

He was neglected all day and left to do what he liked till needed at night, so he amused himself by lounging about the hotel or wandering on the beach to watch the fishermen cast their nets. Lazy Luigi kept him doing errands when he could; but for hours the boy saw neither master nor man, and wondered where they were. At last he found out, and his dream of fame and fortune ended in smoke.

Christmas week was a gay one for everybody, and Tino thought good times had come again; for he sang at several childrens' fêtes, received some pretty gifts from the kind Alborghettis, and even Mario was amiable enough to give him a golden napoleon after a run of good luck at the cards. Eager to show his people that he was getting on, Tino begged Antoine, the friendly waiter who had already written one letter to Stella for him, to write another, and send by a friend going that way a little parcel containing the money for Mariuccia, a fine Roman sash for Stella, and many affectionate messages to all his old friends.

It was well he had that little satisfaction, for it was his last chance to send good news or exult over his grand success. Troubles came with the new year; and in one week our poor little jay found himself stripped of all his borrowed plumes, and left a very forlorn bird indeed.

Trotting about late at night in silk stockings, and getting wet more than once in the winter rains, gave Tino a bad cold. No one cared for it; and he was soon as hoarse as a crow. His master forced him to sing several times in spite of the pain he suffered, and when at the last concert he broke down completely, Mario swore at him for "a useless brat," and began to talk of going to Milan to find a new set of singers and patrons. Had Tino been older, he would have discovered some time sooner that Signor Mario was losing favor in Nice, as he seldom paid a bill, and led a very gay, extravagant life. But, boylike, Tino saw only his own small troubles, and suspected nothing when Luigi one day packed up the velvet suit and took it away "to be repaired," he said. It *was* shabby, and Tino, lying on the sofa with a headache and sharp cough, was glad no one ordered him to go with it, for the Tramontana was blowing, and he longed for old Mariuccia's herb tea and Stella's cosseting, being quite ill by this time.

That night as he lay awake in his closet coughing, feverish and restless, he heard his master and Luigi moving about till very late, evidently packing for Paris or Milan, and Tino wondered if he would like either place better than Nice, and wished they were not so far from Valrose. In the midst of his meditations he fell asleep, and when he woke, it was morning. He hurried up and went out to see what the order of the day was to be, rather pleased at the idea of travelling about the world.

To his surprise no breakfast appeared; the room was in confusion, every sign of Mario had vanished but empty bottles and a long hotel bill lying unpaid upon the table. Before Tino could collect his wits, Antoine came flying in to say with wild gesticulations and much French wrath that "the rascal Mario had gone in the night, leaving immense debts behind him, and the landlord in an apoplexy of rage."

Poor Tino was so dismayed he could only sit and let the storm pelt about his ears; for not only did the waiter appear, but the chambermaid, the coachman, and at last the indignant host himself, all scolding at once as they rummaged the rooms, questioned the bewildered boy, and wrung their hands over the escape of these dishonest wretches.

"You also, little beast, have grown fat upon my good fare! and who is to pay me for all you have eaten, not to mention the fine bed, the washing, the candles, and the coaches you have had? Ah, great heavens! what is to become of us when such things occur?" and the poor landlord tore his hair with one hand while he shook his other fist at Tino.

"Dear sir, take all I have; it is only an old guitar, and a few clothes. Not a centime do I own; but I will work for you. I can clean saucepans and run errands. Speak for me, Antoine; you are my only friend now."

The lad looked so honest and ill and pathetic, as he spoke with his poor

hoarse voice, and looked beseechingly about him, that Antoine's kind heart was melted, and he advised the boy to slip away home as soon as possible, and so escape all further violence and trouble. He slipped two francs into Tino's empty pocket, and as soon as the room was cleared, helped him tie up the few old clothes that remained. The host carried off the guitar as the only thing he could seize, so Tino had less to take away than he brought, when Antoine led him out by the back way, with a good sandwich of bread and meat for his breakfast, and bade him go to the square and try to beg a ride to Valrose on some of the carriages often going thither on the way to Genoa.

With many thanks Tino left the great hotel, feeling too miserable to care much what became of him, for all his fine dreams were spoiled like the basket of china the man kicked over in the "Arabian Nights," while dreaming he was a king. How could he go home, sick, poor, and forsaken, after all the grand tales he had lately told in his letter? How they would laugh at him, the men and girls at the factory! How Mariuccia would wag her old head and say, "Ecco! is it not as I foretold?" Even Stella would weep over him and be sorry to see her dear boy in such a sad plight, yet what could he do? His voice was gone and his guitar, or he might sing about the streets, as Mario described his doing at Genoa, and so earn his daily bread till something turned up. Now he was quite helpless, and much against his will, he went to see if any chance of getting home appeared.

The day was showery, and no party was setting off for the famous drive along the Cornice road. Tino was glad of it, and went to lie on a bench at the café where he had often been with Luigi. His head ached, and his cough left him no peace, so he spent some of his money in syrup and water to quell the trouble, and with the rest paid for a good dinner and supper.

He told his sad tale to the cook, and was allowed to sleep in the kitchen after scrubbing saucepans to pay for it. But no one wanted him; and in the morning, after a cup of coffee and a roll he found himself cast upon the world again. He would not beg, and as dinner time approached, hunger reminded him of a humble friend whom he had forgotten in his own days of plenty.

He loved to stroll along the beach, and read the names on the boats drawn up there, for all were the names of saints; and it was almost as good as going to church to read the long list of Saint Brunos, Saint Francises, and Saint Ursulas. Among the fishermen was one who had always a kind word for the lad, who enjoyed a sail or a chat with Marco whenever nothing better turned up to amuse his leisure hours. Now in his trouble he remembered him, and went to the beach to ask help, for he felt ill as well as sad and hungry.

Yes, there sat the good fellow eating the bread and macaroni his little daughter had brought for his dinner, and a smile welcomed poor Tino as he sat down beside this only friend to tell his story.

Marco growled in his black beard and shook his knife with an awful frown when he heard how the lad had been deserted. Then he smiled, patted Tino's back, thrust the copper basin of food into one hand and a big lump of the brown-bread into the other, inviting him to eat in such a cordial way that the poor meal tasted better than the dainty fare at the hotel.

A draught of red wine from the gourd cheered Tino up, as did the good and kind words, and when Marco bade him go home with little Manuela to the good wife, he gladly went, feeling that he must lie down somewhere, his head was so giddy and the pain in the breast so sharp.

Buxom Teresa received him kindly, put him straight to bed in her own boy's little room, laid a cool cloth on his hot head, a warm one on his aching chest, and left him to sleep, much comforted by her motherly care. It was well the good soul befriended him, for he needed help sorely, and would have fared ill if those humble folk had not taken him in.

For a week or two he lay in Beppo's bed burning with fever, and when he could sit up again was too feeble to do anything but smile gratefully and try to help Manuela mend nets. Marco would hear of no thanks, saying, "Good deeds bring good luck. Behold my haul of fish each day thou hast been here, poverino! I am well paid, and Saint Peter will bless my boat for thy sake."

Tino was very happy in the little dark, shabby house that smelt of onions, fish, and tar, was full of brown children, and the constant clack of Teresa's lively tongue as she gossiped with her neighbors, or fried polenta for the hungry mouths that never seemed filled.

But the time came when Tino could go about, and then he begged for work, anxious to be independent and earn a little so that in the spring he could go home without empty pockets.

"I have taken thought for thee, my son, and work warm and easy is ready if thou wilt do it. My friend Tommaso Neri, makes the good macaroni near by. He needs a boy to mind the fire and see to the donkey who grinds below there. Food, shelter, and such wages as thou art able to earn, he will give thee. Shall it be?"

Tino gratefully accepted, and with hearty embraces all round went off one day to see his new place. It was in the old part of Nice, a narrow, dirty street, a little shop with one window full of the cheaper sorts of this favorite food of all Italians, and behind the shop a room where an old woman sat spinning while two little boys played with pine cones and pretty bits of marble at her feet.

A fat jolly man, with a shining face and loud voice, greeted Marco and the lad, saying he "was worn to a thread with much work, since that bad imp of a donkey-boy had run away leaving the blessed macaroni to spoil, and poor Carmelita to perish for want of care. Come below at once, and behold the deso-

lation of the place."

With that he led the way to the cellar, where a small furnace-fire burned, and an old gray donkey went round and round, turning a wheel which set some unseen machinery in motion with a dismal creaking sound. Down through many holes in one part of the wooden floor overhead came long pipes of macaroni, hardening as they hung quivering in the hot air till stiff enough to be cut off in handfuls and laid to dry on wire trays over the furnace.

Tino had never seen the good macaroni made before, and was much interested in the process, though it was of the rudest kind. In a room upstairs a great vat of flour and water was kept stirring round and round and forced down to the place below by the creaking wheel which patient Carmelita turned all day. The cellar was dark but warm; and Tino felt that it would be comfortable there with the old donkey for a comrade, jolly Tommaso for a master, and enough to eat,–for it was evident the family lived well, so plump and shining were all the faces, so cheery the tempers of the old women and little lads.

There Marco left him, well satisfied that he had done his best for the poor boy; and there Tino lived for three months, busy, well fed, and contented, till spring sunshine made him long for the sweet air, the green fields, and dear faces at Valrose. Tommaso was lazy but kind, and if the day's work was done in time, let Tino out to see Marco's children or to run on the beach with little Jacopo and Seppi. The grandmother gave him plenty of rye bread, thin wine, and macaroni fried in oil; old Carmelita learned to love him and to lean her gray head on his shoulder with joyful waggings of her long ears as he caressed her, and each week increased the little hoard in an old shoe hidden behind a beam.

But it was a dull life for a boy who loved music, flowers, light, and freedom; and he soon grew tired of seeing only a procession of legs go by the low windows level with the street; the creak of the wheel was not half so welcome as the brisk rattle of the mill at home, and the fat little lads always climbing over him could not be so dear as sister Stella and pretty Annina, the wine-maker's daughter, at Valrose. Even the kind old woman who often saved an orange for him, and gave him a gay red cotton handkerchief on his birthday, was less to his taste than Mariuccia, who adored him in spite of her scolding and stern ways.

So he looked about for travellers going to Genoa; and one happy day as he returned from church, he saw, sitting under two red umbrellas before two easels beside the road, the two elderly ladies of the hotel. Both wore brown hats like mushrooms; both had gray curls bobbing in the wind; and both were painting away for dear life, trying to get a good sketch of the ruined gateway, where passion-flowers climbed, and roses nodded through the bars.

Tino stopped to look, as many another passer-by had done; and glancing up to see if he admired their work, the good ladies recognized their "Saint John," as

they called the pretty boy who had vanished before they could finish the pictures they had begun of him.

They were so glad to see him that he opened his heart to them, and found to his great joy that in a week they were to drive to Genoa, and would gladly take him along if he would sit to them meantime. Of course he agreed, and ran home to tell his master that he must go. Tommaso bewailed his loss, but would not keep him; and as Marco's son Beppo was willing to take his place till another lad could be found, Tino was free to sit in a sheepskin for the Misses Blair as often as they liked.

It was a very happy week; and when the long-desired day came at last, Tino was so gay he danced and sang till the dingy cellar seemed to be full of birds in high spirits. Poor Carmelita gratefully ate the cabbage he gave her as a farewell offering; the old woman found her box full of her favorite snuff; and each small boy grew more shiny than ever over a new toy presented by Tino. Tommaso wept as he held him in his fat arms, and gave him a bundle of half-baked macaroni as a reward for his faithful service, while Marco and all his family stood at the hotel door to see the carriage depart.

"Really quite like a wedding, with all those orange-flowers and roses," said Miss Priscilla, as Teresa and Manuela threw great bunches of flowers into their laps, and kissed their hands to the departing travellers.

Sitting proudly aloft, Tino waved his old hat to these good friends till he could see them no more, then having, with some difficulty, bestowed his long bundle from Tommaso, his basket of fish from Marco, his small parcel of clothes, and the immense bouquet the children had made for him, he gave himself up to the rapture of that lovely April day.

The kind ladies had given him a new suit of clothes like the old ones, and paid him well besides; so he felt quite content with the picturesque peasant garments he wore, having had enough of fine feathers, and gayly jingled the money in his pocket, though it was not the fortune he had foolishly hoped to make so easily. He was a wiser boy than the one who went over that road six months before, and decided that even if his voice did come back in time, he would be in no hurry to leave home till he was sure it was the wisest thing to do. He had some very serious thoughts and sensible plans in his young head, and for a time was silent and sober. But soon the delicious air, the lovely scenery, and the many questions of the ladies raised his spirits, and he chattered away till they stopped for dinner.

All that long bright day they drove along the wonderful road, and as night fell, saw Valrose lying green and peaceful in the valley as they paused on the hill-top to enjoy its beauty. Then they went slowly down to the Falcone, and the moment the luggage was taken in, rooms secured, and dinner ordered, Tino, who

had been quivering with impatience, said eagerly,–

"Dear signoras, now I go to my own people to embrace them; but in the morning we come to thank you for your great kindness to me."

Miss Priscilla opened her mouth to send some message; but Tino was off like an arrow, and never stopped till he burst into the little kitchen where Mariuccia sat shelling dry beans, and Stella was packing mandarinas in dainty baskets for market. Like an affectionate little bear did the boy fall upon and embrace the two astonished women; while Stella laughed and cried, and Mariuccia called on all the saints to behold how tall and fat and beautiful her angel had become, and to thank them for restoring him to their arms. The neighbors rushed in; and till late that night there was the sound of many voices in the stone cottage under the old fig-tree.

Tino's adventures were listened to with the deepest interest, and a very hearty welcome given him. All were impressed with the splendors he had seen, afflicted by his trials, and grateful for his return. No one laughed or reproached, but regarded him as a very remarkable fellow, and predicted that whether his voice came back or not, he was born for good luck and would prosper. So at last he got to bed in the old loft, and fell asleep with the same friendly moon looking in at him as it did before, only now it saw a quiet face, a very happy heart, and a contented boy, glad to be safe again under the humble roof that was his home.

Early next morning a little procession of three went to the Falcone bearing grateful offerings to the dear signoras who sat on the portico enjoying the balmy air that blew up from the acres of flowers below. First came Tino, bearing a great basket of the delicious little oranges which one never tastes in their perfection unless one eats them fresh from the tree; then Stella with two pretty boxes of perfume; and bringing up the rear, old Mariuccia with a blue jar of her best honey, which like all that of Valrose was famous.

The ladies were much delighted with these gifts, and promised to stop and see the givers of them on their return from Genoa, if they came that way. Tino took a grateful farewell of the good souls; Stella kissed their hands, with her dark eyes full of tender thanks, and Mariuccia begged the saints to have them in their special keeping by land and by sea, for their kindness to her boy.

An hour later, as the travellers drove down the steep road from the village, they were startled by a sudden shower of violets and roses which rained upon them from a high bank beside the path. Looking up, they saw Tino and his sister laughing, waving their hands, and tossing flowers as they called in their musical language,–

"A rivederla, signoras! Grazia, grazia!" till the carriage rolled round the corner looking as if it were Carnival-time, so full was it of fragrant violets and lovely roses.

”Nice creatures! how prettily they do things! I hope we *shall* see them again; and I wonder if the boy will ever be famous. Such a pity to lose that sweet voice of his!” said Miss Maria, the younger of the sisters, as they drove along in a nest of sweet and pretty gifts.

”I hope not, for he will be much safer and happier in this charming place than wandering about the world and getting into trouble as these singers always do. *I* hope he will be wise enough to be contented with the place in which his lot is cast,” answered Miss Priscilla, who knew the world and had a good old-fashioned love for home and all it gives us.

She was right; Tino *was* wise, and though his voice did come back in time, it was no longer wonderful; and he was contented to live on at Valrose, a busy, happy, humble gardener all his life, saying with a laugh when asked about his runaway adventures,–

”Ah, I have had enough of music and macaroni; I prefer my flowers and my freedom.”

[image]

”Fortunately aunty came down in time to see what was going on, and found Lu busily buttoning the waterproof.”–PAGE 152.

VI.

THE LITTLE RED PURSE.

Among the presents which Lu found on her tenth birthday was a pretty red plush purse with a steel clasp and chain, just like mamma’s, only much smaller. In it were ten bright new cents, that being the sum Lu received each week to spend as she liked. She enjoyed all her gifts very much; but this one seemed to please her even more than the French doll in blue silk, the pearl ring, or ”Alice in Wonderland,”–three things which she had wanted for a long time.

”It is *so* cunning, and the snap makes such a loud noise, and the chain is so nice on my arm, and the plush so red and soft, I can’t help loving my dear little purse. I shall spend all the money for candy, and eat it every bit myself, because it is my birthday, and I must celebrate it,” said Lu, as she hovered like a bee round

a honey-pot about the table where the gifts were spread.

Now she was in a great hurry to go out shopping, with the new purse proudly carried in her small fat hand. Aunty was soon ready, and away they went across the pleasant Park, where the pretty babies were enjoying the last warm days of autumn as they played among the fallen leaves.

"You will be ill if you eat ten cents' worth of candy to-day," said aunty.

"I 'll sprinkle it along through the day, and eat each kind seppyrut; then they won't intersturb me, I am sure," answered Lu, who still used funny words, and always got *interrupt* and *disturb* rather mixed.

Just then a poor man who had lost his legs came creeping along with a tray of little flower-pots to sell.

"Only five cents, miss. Help an unfortnit man, please, mum."

"Let me buy one for my baby-house. It would be sweet. Cora Pinky May would love to have that darling little rose in her best parlor," cried Lu, thinking of the fine new doll.

Aunty much preferred to help the poor man than to buy candy, so the flower-pot was soon bought, though the "red, red rose" was unlike any ever seen in a garden.

"Now I 'll have five cents for my treat, and no danger of being ill," said Lu, as they went on again.

But in a few moments a new beggar appeared, and Lu's tender heart would not let her pass the old woman without dropping two of her bright cents in the tin cup.

"Do come to the candy-place at once, or I never shall get any," begged Lu, as the red purse grew lighter and lighter every minute.

Three sticks of candy were all she could buy, but she felt that she could celebrate the birthday on that, and was ready to go home and begin at once.

As they went on to get some flowers to dress the cake at tea-time, Lu suddenly stopped short, lifted both hands, and cried out in a tone of despair,–

"My purse! my purse! I 've lost it. Oh, I 've lost it!"

"Left it in the store probably. Come and look for it," said aunty; and back they turned, just in time to meet a shabby little girl running after them with the precious thing in her hand.

"Ain't this yours? I thought you dropped it, and would hate to lose it," she said, smiling pleasantly.

"Oh, I should. It's spandy new, and I love it dearly. I 've got no more money to pay you, only this candy; do take a stick," and Lu presented the red barley sugar.

The little girl took it gladly, and ran off.

"Well, two sticks will do. I 'd rather lose every bit of it than my darling purse," said Lu, putting it carefully in her pocket.

"I love to give things away and make people happy," began Lu, but stopped to watch a dog who came up to her, wagging his tail as if he knew what a kind little girl she was, and wanted to be made happy. She put out her hand to pat him, quite forgetting the small parcel in it; but the dog snapped it up before she could save it.

"Oh, my last stick! I did n't mean to give it to him. You naughty dog, drop it this minute!" cried poor Lu.

But the beautiful pink cream candy was forever lost, and the ungrateful thief ran off, after a vain attempt to eat the flower-pot also. It was so funny that aunty laughed, and Lu joined her, after shaking her finger at the dog, who barked and frisked as if he felt that he had done a clever thing.

"Now *I* am quite satisfied, and you will have a pleasanter birthday for having made four people and a dog happy, instead of yourself sick with too many goodies. Charity is a nice sort of sweetie; and I hope you will buy that kind with your pocket-money now and then, my dear," said aunty, as they walked on again.

"Could I do much with ten cents a week?" asked Lu.

"Yes, indeed; you could buy a little book for lame Sammy, who loves to read, or a few flowers for my sick girl at the hospital, or a loaf of bread for some hungry person, or milk for a poor baby, or you could save up your money till Christmas, and get presents for children who otherwise would have none."

"Could I do all those things? I'd like to get presents best, and I will–I will!" cried Lu, charmed with the idea of playing Santa Claus. "I did n't think ten cents would be so useful. How long to Christmas, aunty?"

"About ten weeks. If you save all your pocket-money till then, you will have a dollar to spend."

"A truly dollar! How fine! But all that time I should n't have any candy. I don't think I could get along without *some*. Perhaps if I was *very* good some one would give me a bit now and then;" and Lu looked up with her most engaging smile and a twinkle in her eye.

"We will see about that. Perhaps 'some one' will give extra cents for work you may do, and leave you to decide which kind of sweeties you would buy."

"What can I do to earn money?" asked Lu.

"Well, you can dry and fold the paper every morning for grandpa. I will pay you a cent for that, because nurse is apt to forget it, and he likes to have it nicely ready for him after breakfast. Then you might run up and down for mamma, and hem some towels for me, and take care of Jip and the parrot. You will earn a good deal if you do your work regularly and well."

"I shall have dreadful trials going by the candy-shops and never buying any. I do long so to go in that I have to look away when you say No. I want to be good and help poor people, but I 'm afraid it will be too hard for me," sighed

Lu, foreseeing the temptations before her.

"We might begin to-day, and try the new plan for a while. If it is too hard, you can give it up; but I think you will soon like my way best, and have the merriest Christmas you ever knew with the money you save."

Lu walked thoughtfully home, and put the empty purse away, resolved to see how long she could hold out, and how much she could earn. Mamma smiled when she heard the plan, but at once engaged the little girl to do errands about the house at a cent a job, privately quite sure that her pretty express would soon stop running. Grandpapa was pleased to find his paper ready, and nodded and patted Lu's curly head when she told him about her Christmas plans. Mary, the maid, was glad to get rid of combing Jip and feeding Polly, and aunty made towel hemming pleasant by telling stories as the little needle-woman did two hems a day.

Every cent went into the red purse, which Lu hung on one of the gilt pegs of the easel in the parlor, for she thought it very ornamental, and hoped contributions might drop in occasionally. None did; but as every one paid her in bright cents, there was soon a fine display, and the little bag grew heavy with delightful rapidity.

Only once did Lu yield to temptation, and that was when two weeks of self-denial made her trials so great that she felt as if she really must reward herself, as no one else seemed to remember how much little girls loved candy.

One day she looked pale, and did not want any dinner, saying she felt sick. Mamma was away, so aunty put her on the bed and sat by her, feeling very anxious, as scarlet-fever was about. By and by Lu took her handkerchief out, and there, sticking to it, was a large brown cough-drop. Lu turned red, and hid her face, saying with a penitent sob, "I don't deserve to be cuddled. I 've been selfish and silly, and spent some of my money for candy. I had a little cold, and I thought cough-drops would do me good. I ate a good many, and they were bitter and made me sick, and I 'm glad of it."

Aunty wanted to laugh at the dear little sinner and her funny idea of choosing bitter candy as a sort of self-denial; but she comforted her kindly, and soon the invalid was skipping about again, declaring that she never would do so any more.

Next day something happened which helped her very much, and made it easier to like the new kind of sweeties better than the old. She was in the dining-room getting an apple for her lunch, when she saw a little girl come to the lower door to ask for cold food. The cook was busy, and sent her away, telling her begging was forbidden. Lu, peeping out, saw the little girl sit down on the steps to eat a cold potato as if she was very hungry, and while she ate she was trying to tie on a pair of very old boots some one had given her. It was a rainy day, and

she had only a shawl over her head; her hands were red with cold; her gown was a faded cotton one; and her big basket seemed to have very few scraps in it. So poor, so sad, and tired did she look, that Lu could not bear to see it, and she called out in her pitiful child's voice,–

"Come in and get warm, little girl. Don't mind old Sarah. I 'll give you something to eat, and lend you my rubber boots and waterproof to go home in."

The poor child gladly went to sit by the comfortable fire, while Lu with hospitable haste got crackers and cheese and cake and apples, and her own silver mug of milk, for her guest, forgetting, in her zeal, to ask leave. Fortunately aunty came down for her own lunch in time to see what was going on, and found Lu busily buttoning the waterproof, while the little girl surveyed her rubber boots and small umbrella with pride.

"I 'm only *lending* my things, and she will return them to-morrow, aunty. They are too small for me, and the umbrella is broken; and I 'd love to *give* them all to Lucy if I could. *She* has to go out in the rain to get food for her family, like a bird, and I don't."

"Birds don't need waterproofs and umbrellas," began aunty; and both children laughed at the idea of sparrows with such things, but looked a little anxious till aunty went on to say that Lucy could have these comforts, and to fill the basket with something better than cold potatoes, while she asked questions and heard the sad little story: how father was dead, and the baby sick, so mother could not work, and the boys had to pick up chips and cinders to burn, and Lucy begged food to eat. Lu listened with tears in her blue eyes, and a great deal of pity as well as admiration for poor little Lucy, who was only nine, yet had so many cares and troubles in her life. While aunty went to get some flannel for baby, Lu flew to her red purse and counted out ten cents from her store, feeling so rich, so glad to have it instead of an empty bonbon box, and a headache after a candy feast.

"Buy some nice fresh milk for little Totty, and tell her I sent it–all myself–with my love. Come again to-morrow, and I will tell mamma all about you, and you shall be my poor people, and I 'll help you if I can," she said, full of interest and good-will, for the sight of this child made her feel what poverty really was, and long to lighten it if she could.

Lucy was smiling when she went away, snug and dry in her comfortable clothes, with the full basket on her arm; and all that day Lu talked and thought about her "own poor people," and what she hoped to do for them. Mamma inquired, and finding them worthy of help, let her little girl send many comforts to the children, and learn how to be wisely charitable.

"I shall give *all* my money to my 'Lucy children' on Christmas," announced Lu, as that pleasant time drew near. "I know what they want, and though I can't

save money enough to give them half the things they need, maybe I can help a good deal, and really have a nice bundle to s'prise them with."

This idea took possession of little Lu, and she worked like a beaver in all sorts of funny ways to fill her purse by Christmas-time. One thing she did which amused her family very much, though they were obliged to stop it. Lu danced very prettily, and often had what she called ballets before she went to bed, when she tripped about the parlor like a fairy in the gay costumes aunty made for her. As the purse did not fill as fast as she hoped, Lu took it into her head one fine day to go round the square where she lived, with her tambourine, and dance as some of the girls with the hand-organ men did. So she dressed herself in her red skirt and black velvet jacket, and with a fur cap on her head and a blue cloak over her shoulders, slipped out into the quiet square, and going to the farther corner, began to dance and beat her tambourine on the sidewalk before a house where some little children lived.

As she expected, they soon came running to the window, and were charmed to see the pretty dancer whirling to and fro, with her ribbons flying and her tambourine bells ringing, till her breath was gone. Then she held up the instrument and nodded smilingly at them; and they threw down cents wrapped in paper, thinking her music much better than any the organ men made. Much encouraged, Lu went on from house to house, and was doing finely, when one of the ladies who looked out recognized the child, and asked her if her mother knew where she was. Lu had to say "No;" and the lady sent a maid to take her home at once.

That spoiled all the fun; and poor Lu did not hear the last of her prank for a long time. But she had made forty-two cents, and felt comforted when she added that handsome sum to her store. As if to console her for this disappointment, after that day several bright ten-cent pieces got into the red purse in a most mysterious manner. Lu asked every one in the house, and all declared that they did not do it. Grandpa could not get out of his chair without help, and nurse said she never took the purse to him; so of course it could not be he who slipped in those welcome bits of silver. Lu asked him; but he was very deaf that day, and did not seem to understand her at all.

"It must be fairies," she said, pondering over the puzzle, as she counted her treasure and packed it away, for now the little red purse was full. "Aunty says there are no fairies; but I like to think so. Perhaps angels fly around at Christmas-time as they did long ago, and love to help poor people, and put those beautiful bright things here to show that they are pleased with me." She liked that fancy, and aunty agreed that some good spirit must have done it, and was sure they would find out the secret some time.

Lucy came regularly; and Lu always tried to see her, and so learned what

she and Totty and Joe and Jimmy wanted, but never dreamed of receiving Christmas morning. It did both little girls much good, for poor Lucy was comforted by the kindness of these friends, and Lu learned about far harder trials than the want of sugarplums. The day before Christmas she went on a grand shopping expedition with aunty, for the purse now held three dollars and seven cents. She had spent some of it for trifles for her "Lucy children," and had not earned as much as she once hoped, various fits of idleness and other more amusing but less profitable work having lessened her wages. But she had enough, thanks to the good spirit, to get toys and books and candy for her family, and went joyfully away Christmas Eve to carry her little basket of gifts, accompanied by aunty with a larger store of comforts for the grateful mother.

When they got back, Lu entertained her mother with an account of the delight of the children, who never had such a Christmas before.

"They could n't wait till morning, and I could n't either, and we opened the bundles right away; and they *screamed*, mamma, and jumped for joy and ate everything and hugged me. And the mother cried, she was so pleased; and the boys can go to school all neat now, and so could Lucy, only she has to take care of Totty while her mother goes to work. Oh, it was lovely! I felt just like Santa Claus, only he does n't stay to see people enjoy their things, and I did."

Here Lu stopped for breath, and when she got it, had a fine ballet as the only way to work off her excitement at the success of her "s'prise." It was a trial to go to bed, but she went at last, and dreamed that her "Lucy children" all had wings, and were flying round her bed with tambourines full of heavenly bonbons, which they showered down upon her; while aunty in an immense nightcap stood by clapping her hands and saying, "Eat all you like, dear; this sort won't hurt you."

Morning came very soon; and she popped up her head to see a long knobby stocking hanging from the mantel-piece. Out of bed skipped the little white figure, and back again, while cries of joy were heard as the treasures appeared one by one. There was a tableful beside the stocking, and Lu was so busy looking at them that she was late to breakfast. But aunty waited for her, and they went down together some time after the bell rang.

"Let me peep and see if grandpa has found the silk handkerchief and spectacle-case I made for him," whispered Lu, as they passed the parlor door, which stood half open, leaving a wide crack for the blue eyes to spy through.

The old gentleman sat in his easy-chair as usual, waiting while nurse got his breakfast; but what was he doing with his long staff? Lu watched eagerly, and to her great surprise saw him lean forward, and with the hook at the end take the little red purse off the easel, open it, and slip in a small white parcel, then hang it on the gilt peg again, put away the cane, and sit rubbing his hands and laughing to himself at the success of his little trick, quite sure that this was a safe time to

play it. Lu was about to cry out, and rush in, but aunty whispered, "Don't spoil his fun yet. Go and see what is in the purse, then thank him in the way he likes best."

So Lu skipped into the parlor, trying to look very innocent, and ran to open the dear red purse, as she often did, eager to see if the good fairy had added to the charity fund.

"Why, here 's a great gold medal, and some queer, shaky writing on the paper. Please see what it is," said Lu, very loud, hoping grandpa would hear her this time, for his face was hidden behind the newspaper he pretended to read.

"For Lu's poor's purse, from Santa Claus," read aunty, glad that at last the kind old fairy was discovered and ready for his reward.

Lu had never seen a twenty-dollar gold-piece before; but she could not stop to find out whether the shining medal was money or a locket, and ran to grandpa, crying as she pulled away the paper and threw her arms about his neck,–

"I 've found you out, I 've found you out, my dear old Santa Claus! Merry Christmas, grandpa, and lots of thanks and kisses!"

It was pretty to see the rosy cheek against the wrinkled one, the golden and the silver heads close together, as the old man and the little girl kissed and laughed, and both talked at once for a few minutes.

"Tell me all about it, you sly grandpa. What made you think of doing it that way, and not let any one know?" cried Lu, as the old gentleman stopped to rest after a kindly "cuddle," as Lu called these caresses.

"Well, dear, I liked to see you trying to do good with your little pennies, and I wanted to help. I 'm a feeble old man, tied to my chair and of no use now; but I like a bit of fun, and love to feel that it is not quite too late to make some one happy."

"Why, grandpa, you do heaps of good, and make many, many people happy," said Lu, with another hug. "Mamma told me all about the hospital for little children you built, and the money you gave to the poor soldiers in the war, and ever so many more good things you 've done. I won't have you say you are of no use now. We want you to love and take care of; and we could n't do without you, could we, aunty?"

Aunty sat on the arm of the chair with her arm round the old man's shoulder, and her only answer was a kiss. But it was enough, and grandpa went on quite cheerfully, as he held two plump hands in his own, and watched the blooming face that looked up at him so eagerly:

"When I was younger, I loved money, and wanted a great deal. I cared for nothing else, and worked hard to get it, and did get it after years of worry. But it cost me my health, and then I saw how foolish I had been, for all my money could not buy me any strength or pleasure and very little comfort. I could not

take it with me when I died, and did not know what to do with it, because there was so much. So I tried to see if giving it away would not amuse me, and make me feel better about having wasted my life instead of using it wisely. The more I gave away the better I felt; and now I'm quite jolly, though I'm only a helpless old baby just fit to play jokes and love little girls. You have begun early at this pretty game of give-away, my dear, and aunty will see that you keep it up; so that when you are old you will have much treasure in the other world where the blessings of the poor are more precious than gold and silver."

Nobody spoke for a minute as the feeble old voice stopped; and the sunshine fell on the white head like a blessing. Then Lu said very soberly, as she turned the great coin in her hand, and saw the letters that told its worth,–

"What shall I do with all this money? I never had so much, and I 'd like to spend it in some very good and pleasant way. Can you think of something, aunty, so I can begin at once to be like grandpa?"

"How would you like to pay two dollars a month, so that Totty can go to the Sunnyside Nursery, and be taken care of every day while Lucy goes to school? Then she will be safe and happy, and Lucy be learning, as she longs to do, and the mother free to work," said aunty, glad to have this dear child early learn to help those less blessed than herself.

"Could I? How splendid it would be to pay for a real live baby all myself! How long would my money do it?" said Lu, charmed with the idea of a living dolly to care for.

"All winter, and provide clothes besides. You can make them yourself, and go and see Totty, and call her your baby. This will be a sweet charity for you; and to-day is a good day to begin it, for this is the birthday of the Divine Child, who was born in a poorer place even than Lucy's sister. In His name pity and help this baby, and be sure He will bless you for it."

Lu looked up at the fine picture of the Good Shepherd hanging over the sofa with holly-leaves glistening round it, and felt as if she too in her humble way was about to take a helpless little lamb in her arms and comfort it. Her childish face was very sweet and sober as she said softly,–

"Yes, I will spend my Christmas money so; for, aunty, I do think your sort of sweetie is better than mine, and making people happy a much wiser way to spend my pennies than in buying the nicest candy in the world."

Little Lu remembered that morning long after the dear old grandfather was gone, and kept her Christmas promise so well that very soon a larger purse was needed for charity money, which she used so wisely and so happily. But all her life in one corner of her desk lay carefully folded up, with the bit of paper inside, the little red purse.

[image]

Chapter VI tailpiece

[image]

"Sophie came and sat beside her while she dried her curly hair."
PAGE 178.

VII.
SOPHIE'S SECRET.

„ class:: center medium

I.

A party of young girls, in their gay bathing-dresses, were sitting on the beach waiting for the tide to rise a little higher before they enjoyed the daily frolic which they called "mermaiding."

"I wish we could have a clam-bake; but we have n't any clams, and don't know how to cook them if we had. It's such a pity all the boys have gone off on that stupid fishing excursion," said one girl, in a yellow-and-black striped suit which made her look like a wasp.

"What is a clam-bake? I do not know that kind of fête," asked a pretty brown-eyed girl, with an accent that betrayed the foreigner.

The girls laughed at such sad ignorance, and Sophie colored, wishing she had not spoken.

"Poor thing! she has never tasted a clam. What *should* we do if we went to Switzerland?" said the wasp, who loved to tease.

"We should give you the best we had, and not laugh at your ignorance, if you did not know all our dishes. In *my* country, we have politeness, though not the clam-bake," answered Sophie, with a flash of the brown eyes which warned naughty Di to desist.

"We might row to the light-house, and have a picnic supper. Our mammas will let us do that alone," suggested Dora from the roof of the bath-house, where

she perched like a flamingo.

"That's a good idea," cried Fanny, a slender brown girl who sat dabbling her feet in the water, with her hair streaming in the wind. "Sophie should see that, and get some of the shells she likes so much."

"You are kind to think of me. I shall be glad to have a necklace of the pretty things, as a souvenir of this so charming place and my good friend," answered Sophie, with a grateful look at Fanny, whose many attentions had won the stranger's heart.

"Those boys have n't left us a single boat, so we must dive off the rocks, and that is n't half so nice," said Di, to change the subject, being ashamed of her rudeness.

"A boat is just coming round the Point; perhaps we can hire that, and have some fun," cried Dora, from her perch. "There is only a girl in it; I 'll hail her when she is near enough."

Sophie looked about her to see where the *hail* was coming from; but the sky was clear, and she waited to see what new meaning this word might have, not daring to ask for fear of another laugh.

While the girls watched the boat float around the farther horn of the crescent-shaped beach, we shall have time to say a few words about our little heroine.

She was a sixteen-year-old Swiss girl, on a visit to some American friends, and had come to the seaside for a month with one of them who was an invalid. This left Sophie to the tender mercies of the young people; and they gladly welcomed the pretty creature, with her fine manners, foreign ways, and many accomplishments. But she had a quick temper, a funny little accent, and dressed so very plainly that the girls could not resist criticising and teasing her in a way that seemed very ill-bred and unkind to the new-comer.

Their free and easy ways astonished her, their curious language bewildered her; and their ignorance of many things she had been taught made her wonder at the American education she had heard so much praised. All had studied French and German; yet few read or spoke either tongue correctly, or understood her easily when she tried to talk to them. Their music did not amount to much, and in the games they played, their want of useful information amazed Sophie. One did not know the signs of the zodiac; another could only say of cotton that "it was stuff that grew down South;" and a third was not sure whether a frog was an animal or a reptile, while the handwriting and spelling displayed on these occasions left much to be desired. Yet all were fifteen or sixteen, and would soon leave school "finished," as they expressed it, but not *furnished*, as they should have been, with a solid, sensible education. Dress was an all-absorbing topic, sweetmeats their delight; and in confidential moments sweethearts were

discussed with great freedom. Fathers were conveniences, mothers comforters, brothers plagues, and sisters ornaments or playthings according to their ages. They were not hard-hearted girls, only frivolous, idle, and fond of fun; and poor little Sophie amused them immensely till they learned to admire, love, and respect her.

Coming straight from Paris, they expected to find that her trunks contained the latest fashions for demoiselles, and begged to see her dresses with girlish interest. But when Sophie obligingly showed a few simple, but pretty and appropriate gowns and hats, they exclaimed with one voice,–

"Why, you dress like a little girl! Don't you have ruffles and lace on your dresses; and silks and high-heeled boots and long gloves and bustles and corsets, and things like ours?"

"I *am* a little girl," laughed Sophie, hardly understanding their dismay. "What should I do with fine toilets at school? My sisters go to balls in silk and lace; but I–not yet."

"How queer! Is your father poor?" asked Di, with Yankee bluntness.

"We have enough," answered Sophie, slightly knitting her dark brows.

"How many servants do you keep?"

"But five, now that the little ones are grown up."

"Have you a piano?" continued undaunted Di, while the others affected to be looking at the books and pictures strewn about by the hasty unpacking.

"We have two pianos, four violins, three flutes, and an organ. We love music, and all play, from papa to little Franz."

"My gracious, how swell! You must live in a big house to hold all that and eight brothers and sisters."

"We are not peasants; we do not live in a hut. *Voilà*, this is my home." And Sophie laid before them a fine photograph of a large and elegant house on lovely Lake Geneva.

It was droll to see the change in the faces of the girls as they looked, admired, and slyly nudged one another, enjoying saucy Di's astonishment, for she had stoutly insisted that the Swiss girl was a poor relation.

Sophie meanwhile was folding up her plain piqué and muslin frocks, with a glimmer of mirthful satisfaction in her eyes, and a tender pride in the work of loving hands now far away.

Kind Fanny saw a little quiver of the lips as she smoothed the blue cornflowers in the best hat, and put her arm around Sophie, whispering,–

"Never mind, dear, they don't mean to be rude; it's only our Yankee way of asking questions. I like *all* your things, and that hat is perfectly lovely."

"Indeed, yes! Dear mamma arranged it for me. I was thinking of her and longing for my morning kiss."

"Do you do that every day?" asked Fanny, forgetting herself in her sympathetic interest.

"Surely, yes. Papa and mamma sit always on the sofa, and we all have the hand-shake and the embrace each day before our morning coffee. I do not see that here," answered Sophie, who sorely missed the affectionate respect foreign children give their parents.

"Have n't time," said Fanny, smiling too, at the idea of American parents sitting still for five minutes in the busiest part of the busy day to kiss their sons and daughters.

"It is what you call old-fashioned, but a sweet fashion to me; and since I have not the dear warm cheeks to kiss, I embrace my pictures often. See, I have them all." And Sophie unfolded a Russia-leather case, displaying with pride a long row of handsome brothers and sisters with the parents in the midst.

More exclamations from the girls, and increased interest in "Wilhelmina Tell," as they christened the loyal Swiss maiden, who was now accepted as a companion, and soon became a favorite with old and young.

They could not resist teasing her, however,–her mistakes were so amusing, her little flashes of temper so dramatic, and her tongue so quick to give a sharp or witty answer when the new language did not perplex her. But Fanny always took her part, and helped her in many ways. Now they sat together on the rock, a pretty pair of mermaids with wind-tossed hair, wave-washed feet, and eyes fixed on the approaching boat.

The girl who sat in it was a great contrast to the gay creatures grouped so picturesquely on the shore, for the old straw hat shaded a very anxious face, the brown calico gown covered a heart full of hopes and fears, and the boat that drifted so slowly with the incoming tide carried Tilly Reed like a young Columbus toward the new world she longed for, believed in, and was resolved to discover.

It was a weather-beaten little boat, yet very pretty; for a pile of nets lay at one end, a creel of red lobsters at the other, and all between stood baskets of berries and water-lilies, purple marsh rosemary and orange butterfly-weed, shells and great smooth stones such as artists like to paint little sea-views on. A tame gull perched on the prow; and the morning sunshine glittered from the blue water to the bluer sky.

"Oh, how pretty! Come on, please, and sell us some lilies," cried Dora, and roused Tilly from her waking dream.

Pushing back her hat, she saw the girls beckoning, felt that the critical moment had come, and catching up her oars, rowed bravely on, though her cheeks reddened and her heart beat, for this venture was her last hope, and on its success depended the desire of her life. As the boat approached, the watchers forgot its cargo to look with surprise and pleasure at its rower, for she was not the rough

country lass they expected to see, but a really splendid girl of fifteen, tall, broad-shouldered, bright-eyed, and blooming, with a certain shy dignity of her own and a very sweet smile, as she nodded and pulled in with strong, steady strokes. Before they could offer help, she had risen, planted an oar in the water, and leaping to the shore, pulled her boat high up on the beach, offering her wares with wistful eyes and a very expressive wave of both brown hands.

"Everything is for sale, if you 'll buy," said she.

Charmed with the novelty of this little adventure, the girls, after scampering to the bathing-houses for purses and portemonnaies, crowded around the boat like butterflies about a thistle, all eager to buy, and to discover who this bonny fisher-maiden might be.

"Oh, see these beauties!" "A dozen lilies for me!" "All the yellow flowers for me, they'll be so becoming at the dance to-night!" "Ow! that lob bites awfully!" "Where do you come from?" "Why have we never seen you before?"

These were some of the exclamations and questions showered upon Tilly, as she filled little birch-bark panniers with berries, dealt out flowers, or dispensed handfuls of shells. Her eyes shone, her cheeks glowed, and her heart danced in her bosom; for this was a better beginning than she had dared to hope for, and as the dimes tinkled into the tin pail she used for her till, it was the sweetest music she had ever heard. This hearty welcome banished her shyness; and in these eager, girlish customers she found it easy to confide.

"I 'm from the light-house. You have never seen me because I never came before, except with fish for the hotel. But I mean to come every day, if folks will buy my things, for I want to make some money, and this is the only way in which I can do it."

Sophie glanced at the old hat and worn shoes of the speaker, and dropping a bright half-dollar into the pail, said in her pretty way:

"For me all these lovely shells. I will make necklaces of them for my people at home as souvenirs of this charming place. If you will bring me more, I shall be much grateful to you."

"Oh, thank you! I 'll bring heaps; I know where to find beauties in places where other folks can't go. Please take these; you paid too much for the shells;" and quick to feel the kindness of the stranger, Tilly put into her hands a little bark canoe heaped with red raspberries.

Not to be outdone by the foreigner, the other girls emptied their purses and Tilly's boat also of all but the lobsters, which were ordered for the hotel.

"Is that jolly bird for sale?" asked Di, as the last berry vanished, pointing to the gull who was swimming near them while the chatter went on.

"If you can catch him," laughed Tilly, whose spirits were now the gayest of the party.

The girls dashed into the water, and with shrieks of merriment swam away to capture the gull, who paddled off as if he enjoyed the fun as much as they.

Leaving them to splash vainly to and fro, Tilly swung the creel to her shoulder and went off to leave her lobsters, longing to dance and sing to the music of the silver clinking in her pocket.

When she came back, the bird was far out of reach and the girls diving from her boat, which they had launched without leave. Too happy to care what happened now, Tilly threw herself down on the warm sand to plan a new and still finer cargo for next day.

Sophie came and sat beside her while she dried her curly hair, and in five minutes her sympathetic face and sweet ways had won Tilly to tell all her hopes and cares and dreams.

"I want schooling, and I mean to have it. I 've got no folks of my own; and uncle has married again, so he does n't need me now. If I only had a little money, I could go to school somewhere, and take care of myself. Last summer I worked at the hotel, but I did n't make much, and had to have good clothes, and that took my wages pretty much. Sewing is slow work, and baby-tending leaves me no time to study; so I 've kept on at home picking berries and doing what I could to pick up enough to buy books. Aunt thinks I 'm a fool; but uncle, he says, 'Go ahead, girl, and see what you can do.' And I mean to show him!"

Tilly's brown hand came down on the sand with a resolute thump; and her clear young eyes looked bravely out across the wide sea, as if far away in the blue distance she saw her hope happily fulfilled.

Sophie's eyes shone approval, for she understood this love of independence, and had come to America because she longed for new scenes and greater freedom than her native land could give her. Education is a large word, and both girls felt that desire for self-improvement that comes to all energetic natures. Sophie had laid a good foundation, but still desired more; while Tilly was just climbing up the first steep slope which rises to the heights few attain, yet all may strive for.

"That is beautiful! You will do it! I am glad to help you if I may. See, I have many books; will you take some of them? Come to my room to-morrow and take what will best please you. We will say nothing of it, and it will make me a truly great pleasure."

As Sophie spoke, her little white hand touched the strong, sunburned one that turned to meet and grasp hers with grateful warmth, while Tilly's face betrayed the hunger that possessed her, for it looked as a starving girl's would look when offered a generous meal.

"I *will* come. Thank you so much! I don't know anything, but just blunder along and do the best I can. I got so discouraged I was real desperate, and thought I 'd have one try, and see if I could n't earn enough to get books to study this

winter. Folks buy berries at the cottages; so I just added flowers and shells, and I 'm going to bring my boxes of butterflies, birds' eggs, and seaweeds. I 've got lots of such things; and people seem to like spending money down here. I often wish I had a little of what they throw away."

Tilly paused with a sigh, then laughed as an impatient movement caused a silver clink; and slapping her pocket, she added gayly,–

"I won't blame 'em if they 'll only throw their money in here."

Sophie's hand went involuntarily toward her own pocket, where lay a plump purse, for papa was generous, and simple Sophie had few wants. But something in the intelligent face opposite made her hesitate to offer as a gift what she felt sure Tilly would refuse, preferring to earn her education if she could.

"Come often, then, and let me exchange these stupid bills for the lovely things you bring. We will come this afternoon to see you if we may, and I shall like the butterflies. I try to catch them; but people tell me I am too old to run, so I have not many."

Proposed in this way, Tilly fell into the little trap, and presently rowed away with all her might to set her possessions in order, and put her precious earnings in a safe place. The mermaids clung about the boat as long as they dared, making a pretty tableau for the artists on the rocks, then swam to shore, more than ever eager for the picnic on Light-house Island.

They went, and had a merry time; while Tilly did the honors and showed them a room full of treasures gathered from earth, air, and water, for she led a lonely life, and found friends among the fishes, made playmates of the birds, and studied rocks and flowers, clouds and waves, when books were wanting.

The girls bought gulls' wings for their hats, queer and lovely shells, eggs and insects, seaweeds and carved wood, and for their small brothers, birch baskets and toy ships, made by Uncle Hiram, who had been a sailor.

When Tilly had sold nearly everything she possessed (for Fanny and Sophie bought whatever the others declined), she made a fire of drift-wood on the rocks, cooked fish for supper, and kept them till moonrise, telling sea stories or singing old songs, as if she could not do enough for these good fairies who had come to her when life looked hardest and the future very dark. Then she rowed them home, and promising to bring loads of fruit and flowers every day, went back along a shining road, to find a great bundle of books in her dismantled room, and to fall asleep with wet eyelashes and a happy heart.

„ class:: center medium

II.

For a month Tilly went daily to the Point with a cargo of pretty merchandise, for her patrons increased; and soon the ladies engaged her berries, the boys ordered boats enough to supply a navy, the children clamored for shells, and the girls depended on her for bouquets and garlands for the dances that ended every summer day. Uncle Hiram's fish was in demand when such a comely saleswoman offered it; so he let Tilly have her way, glad to see the old tobacco-pouch in which she kept her cash fill fast with well-earned money.

She really began to feel that her dream was coming true, and she would be able to go to the town and study in some great school, eking out her little fund with light work. The other girls soon lost their interest in her, but Sophie never did; and many a book went to the island in the empty baskets, many a helpful word was said over the lilies or wild honeysuckle Sophie loved to wear, and many a lesson was given in the bare room in the light-house tower which no one knew about but the gulls and the sea-winds sweeping by the little window where the two heads leaned together over one page.

"You will do it, Tilly, I am very sure. Such a will and such a memory will make a way for you; and one day I shall see you teaching as you wish. Keep the brave heart, and all will be well with you," said Sophie, when the grand breaking-up came in September, and the girls were parting down behind the deserted bath-houses.

"Oh, Miss Sophie, what should I have done without you? Don't think I have n't seen and known all the kind things you have said and done for me. I 'll never forget 'em; and I do hope I 'll be able to thank you some day," cried grateful Tilly, with tears in her clear eyes that seldom wept over her own troubles.

"I am thanked if you do well. Adieu; write to me, and remember always that I am your friend."

Then they kissed with girlish warmth, and Tilly rowed away to the lonely island; while Sophie lingered on the shore, her handkerchief fluttering in the wind, till the boat vanished and the waves had washed away their footprints on the sand.

„ class:: center medium

III.

December snow was falling fast, and the wintry wind whistled through the streets; but it was warm and cosey in the luxurious parlor where Di and Do were sitting making Christmas presents, and planning what they would wear at the party Fanny was to give on Christmas Eve.

"If I can get mamma to buy me a new dress, I shall have something yellow. It is always becoming to brunettes, and I 'm so tired of red," said Di, giving a last touch to the lace that trimmed a blue satin *sachet* for Fanny.

"That will be lovely. I shall have pink, with roses of the same color. Under muslin it is perfectly sweet." And Dora eyed the sunflower she was embroidering as if she already saw the new toilet before her.

"Fan always wears blue, so we shall make a nice contrast. She is coming over to show me about finishing off my banner-screen; and I asked Sophie to come with her. I want to know what *she* is going to wear," said Di, taking a little sniff at the violet-scented bag.

"That old white cashmere. Just think! I asked her why she did n't get a new one, and she laughed and said she could n't afford it. Fan told me Sophie's father sent her a hundred dollars not long ago, yet she has n't got a thing that we know of. I do think she 's mean."

"She bought a great bundle of books. I was there when the parcel came, and I peeped while she was out of the room, because she put it away in a great hurry. I 'm afraid she *is* mean, for she never buys a bit of candy, and she wears shabby boots and gloves, and she has made over her old hat instead of having that lovely one with the pheasant's breast in it."

"She's very queer; but I can't help liking her, she's so pretty and bright and obliging. I 'd give anything if I could speak three languages and play as she does."

"So would I. It seems so elegant to be able to talk to foreigners. Papa had some Frenchmen to dinner the other day, and they were so pleased to find they need n't speak English to Sophie. I could n't get on at all; and I was so mortified when papa said all the money he had spent on my languages was thrown away."

"I would n't mind. It's so much easier to learn those things abroad, she would be a goose if she did n't speak French better than we do. There's Fan! she looks as if something had happened. I hope no one is ill and the party spoiled."

As Dora spoke, both girls looked out to see Fanny shaking the snow from her seal-skin sack on the doorstep; then Do hastened to meet her, while Di hid the *sachet*, and was hard at work on an old-gold sofa cushion when the new-comer entered.

"What's the matter? Where's Sophie?" exclaimed the girls together, as Fan threw off her wraps and sat down with a tragic sigh.

"She will be along in a few minutes. I 'm disappointed in her! I would n't have believed it if I had n't seen them. Promise not to breathe a word to a living

soul, and I 'll tell you something dreadful," began Fanny, in a tone that caused her friends to drop their work and draw their chairs nearer, as they solemnly vowed eternal silence.

"I 've seen Sophie's Christmas presents,–all but mine; and they are just nothing at all! She has n't bought a thing, not even ribbons, lace, or silk, to make up prettily as we do. Only a painted shell for one, an acorn emery for another, her ivory fan with a new tassel for a third, and I suspect one of those nice handkerchiefs embroidered by the nuns for me, or her silver filigree necklace. I saw the box in the drawer with the other things. She's knit woollen cuffs and tippets for the children, and got some eight-cent calico gowns for the servants. I don't know how people do things in Switzerland, but I do know that if *I* had a hundred dollars in my pocket, I would be more generous than that!"

As Fanny paused, out of breath, Di and Do groaned in sympathy, for this was indeed a sad state of things; because the girls had a code that Christmas being the season for gifts, extravagance would be forgiven then as at no other time.

"I have a lovely smelling-bottle for her; but I 've a great mind not to give it now," cried Di, feeling defrauded of the bracelet she had plainly hinted she would like.

"I shall heap coals of fire on her head by giving her *that*;" and Dora displayed a very useless but very pretty apron of muslin, lace, and carnation ribbon.

"It is n't the worth of the things. I don't care for that so much as I do for being disappointed in her; and I have been lately in more ways than one," said Fanny, listlessly taking up the screen she was to finish. "She used to tell me everything, and now she does n't. I 'm sure she has some sort of a secret; and I do think *I* ought to know it. I found her smiling over a letter one day; and she whisked it into her pocket and never said a word about it. I always stood by her, and I do feel hurt."

"I should think you might! It's real naughty of her, and I shall tell her so! Perhaps she 'll confide in you then, and you can just give *me* a hint; I always liked Sophie, and never thought of not giving *my* present," said Dora, persuasively, for both girls were now dying with curiosity to know the secret.

"I 'll have it out of her, without any dodging or bribing. I 'm not afraid of any one, and I shall ask her straight out, no matter how much she scowls at me," said dauntless Di, with a threatening nod.

"There she is! Let us see you do it now!" cried Fanny, as the bell rang, and a clear voice was heard a moment later asking if Mademoiselle was in.

"You shall!" and Di looked ready for any audacity.

"I 'll wager a box of candy that you don't find out a thing," whispered Do.

"Done!" answered Di, and then turned to meet Sophie, who came in looking

as fresh as an Alpine rose with the wintry wind.

"You dear thing! we were just talking of you. Sit here and get warm, and let us show you our gifts. We are almost done, but it seems as if it got to be a harder job each Christmas. Don't you find it so?"

"But no; I think it the most charming work of all the year," answered Sophie, greeting her friend, and putting her well-worn boots toward the fire to dry.

"Perhaps you don't make as much of Christmas as we do, or give such expensive presents. That would make a great difference, you know," said Di, as she lifted a cloth from the table where her own generous store of gifts was set forth.

"I had a piano last year, a set of jewels, and many pretty trifles from all at home. Here is one;" and pulling the fine gold chain hidden under her frills, Sophie showed a locket set thick with pearls, containing a picture of her mother.

"It must be so nice to be rich, and able to make such fine presents. I 've got something for you; but I shall be ashamed of it after I see your gift to me, I 'm afraid."

Fan and Dora were working as if their bread depended on it, while Di, with a naughty twinkle in her eye, affected to be rearranging her pretty table as she talked.

"Do not fear that; my gifts this year are very simple ones. I did not know your custom, and now it is too late. My comfort is that you need nothing, and having so much, you will not care for my–what you call–coming short."

Was it the fire that made Sophie's face look so hot, and a cold that gave a husky sort of tone to her usually clear voice? A curious expression came into her face as her eyes roved from the table to the gay trifles in her friend's hands; and she opened her lips as if to add something impulsively. But nothing came, and for a moment she looked straight out at the storm as if she had forgotten where she was.

"'Shortcoming' is the proper way to speak it But never mind that, and tell me why you say 'too late'?" asked Di, bent on winning her wager.

"Christmas comes in three days, and I have no time," began Sophie.

"But with money one can buy plenty of lovely things in one day," said Di.

"No, it is better to put a little love and hard work into what we give to friends, I have done that with my trifles, and another year I shall be more ready."

There was an uncomfortable pause, for Sophie did not speak with her usual frankness, but looked both proud and ashamed, and seemed anxious to change the subject, as she began to admire Dora's work, which had made very little progress during the last fifteen minutes.

Fanny glanced at Di with a smile that made the other toss her head and return to the charge with renewed vigor.

"Sophie, will you do me a favor?"

"With much pleasure."

"Do has promised me a whole box of French bonbons, and if you will answer three questions, you shall have it."

"*Allons*," said Sophie, smiling.

"Haven't you a secret?" asked Di, gravely.

"Yes."

"Will you tell us?"

"No."

Di paused before she asked her last question, and Fan and Dora waited breathlessly, while Sophie knit her brows and looked uneasy.

"Why not?"

"Because I do not wish to tell it."

"Will you tell if we guess?"

"Try."

"You are engaged."

At this absurd suggestion Sophie laughed gayly, and shook her curly head.

"Do you think we are betrothed at sixteen in my country?"

"I *know* that is an engagement ring,–you made such a time about it when you lost it in the water, and cried for joy when Tilly dived and found it."

"Ah, yes, I was truly glad. Dear Tilly, never do I forget that kindness!" and Sophie kissed the little pearl ring in her impulsive way, while her eyes sparkled and the frown vanished.

"I *know* a sweetheart gave it," insisted Di, sure now she had found a clew to the secret.

"He did," and Sophie hung her head in a sentimental way that made the three girls crowd nearer with faces full of interest.

"Do tell us all about it, dear. It's so interesting to hear love-stories. What is his name?" cried Dora.

"Hermann," simpered Sophie, drooping still more, while her lips trembled with suppressed emotion of some sort.

"How lovely!" sighed Fanny, who was very romantic.

"Tell on, do! Is he handsome?"

"To me the finest man in all the world," confessed Sophie, as she hid her face.

"And you love him?"

"I adore him!" and Sophie clasped her hands so dramatically that the girls were a little startled, yet charmed at this discovery.

"Have you his picture?" asked Di, feeling that she had won her wager now.

"Yes," and pulling out the locket again, Sophie showed in the other side the

face of a fine old gentleman who looked very like herself.

"It's your father!" exclaimed Fanny, rolling her blue eyes excitedly. "You are a humbug!" cried Dora. "Then you fibbed about the ring," said Di, crossly.

"Never! It is mamma's betrothal ring; but her finger grew too plump, and when I left home she gave the ring to me as a charm to keep me safe. Ah, ha! I have my little joke as well as you, and the laugh is for me this time." And falling back among the sofa cushions, Sophie enjoyed it as only a gay girl could. Do and Fanny joined her; but Di was much disgusted, and vowed she *would* discover the secret and keep all the bonbons to herself.

"You are most welcome; but I will not tell until I like, and then to Fanny first. She will not have ridicule for what I do, but say it is well, and be glad with me. Come now and work. I will plait these ribbons, or paint a wild rose on this pretty fan. It is too plain now. Will you that I do it, dear Di?"

The kind tone and the prospect of such an ornament to her gift appeased Di somewhat; but the mirthful malice in Sophie's eyes made the other more than ever determined to be even with her by and by.

Christmas Eve came, and found Di still in the dark, which fact nettled her sadly, for Sophie tormented her and amused the other girls by pretended confidences and dark hints at the mystery which might never, never be disclosed.

Fan had determined to have an unusually jolly party; so she invited only her chosen friends, and opened the festivities with a Christmas tree, as the prettiest way of exchanging gifts and providing jokes for the evening in the shape of delusive bottles, animals full of candy, and every sort of musical instrument to be used in an impromptu concert afterward. The presents to one another were done up in secure parcels, so that they might burst upon the public eye in all their freshness. Di was very curious to know what Fan was going to give her,– for Fanny was a generous creature and loved to give. Di was a little jealous of her love for Sophie, and could n't rest till she discovered which was to get the finer gift.

So she went early and slipped into the room where the tree stood, to peep and pick a bit, as well as to hang up a few trifles of her own. She guessed several things by feeling the parcels; but one excited her curiosity intensely, and she could not resist turning it about and pulling up one corner of the lid. It was a flat box, prettily ornamented with sea-weeds like red lace, and tied with scarlet ribbons. A tantalizing glimpse of jeweller's cotton, gold clasps, and something rose-colored conquered Di's last scruples; and she was just about to untie the ribbons when she heard Fanny's voice, and had only time to replace the box, pick up a paper that had fallen out of it, and fly up the back stairs to the dressing-room, where she found Sophie and Dora surveying each other as girls always do before they go down.

"You look like a daisy," cried Di, admiring Dora with great interest, because she felt ashamed of her prying, and the stolen note in her pocket.

"And you like a dandelion," returned Do, falling back a step to get a good view of Di's gold-colored dress and black velvet bows.

"Sophie is a lily of the valley, all in green and white," added Fanny, coming in with her own blue skirts waving in the breeze.

"It does me very well. Little girls do not need grand toilets, and I am fine enough for a 'peasant,'" laughed Sophie, as she settled the fresh ribbons on her simple white cashmere and the holly wreath in her brown hair, but secretly longing for the fine dress she might have had.

"Why didn't you wear your silver necklace? It would be lovely on your pretty neck," said Di, longing to know if she had given the trinket away.

But Sophie was not to be caught, and said with a contented smile, "I do not care for ornaments unless some one I love gives me them. I had red roses for my *bouquet de corsage*; but the poor Madame Page was so *triste*, I left them on her table to remember her of me. It seemed so heartless to go and dance while she had only pain; but she wished it."

"Dear little Sophie, how good you are!" and warm-hearted Fan kissed the blooming face that needed no roses to make it sweet and gay.

Half an hour later, twenty girls and boys were dancing round the brilliant tree. Then its boughs were stripped. Every one seemed contented; even Sophie's little gifts gave pleasure, because with each went a merry or affectionate verse, which made great fun on being read aloud. She was quite loaded with pretty things, and had no words to express her gratitude and pleasure.

"Ah, you are all so good to me! and I have nothing beautiful for you. I receive much and give little, but I cannot help it! Wait a little and I will redeem myself," she said to Fanny, with eyes full of tears, and a lap heaped with gay and useful things.

"Never mind that now; but look at this, for here's still another offering of friendship, and a very charming one, to judge by the outside," answered Fan, bringing the white box with the sea-weed ornaments.

Sophie opened it, and cries of admiration followed, for lying on the soft cotton was a lovely set of coral. Rosy pink branches, highly polished and fastened with gold clasps, formed necklace, bracelets, and a spray for the bosom. No note or card appeared, and the girls crowded round to admire and wonder who could have sent so valuable a gift.

"Can't you guess, Sophie?" cried Dora, longing to own the pretty things.

"I should believe I knew, but it is too costly. How came the parcel, Fan? I think you must know all," and Sophie turned the box about, searching vainly for a name.

"An expressman left it, and Jane took off the wet paper and put it on my table with the other things. Here's the wrapper; do you know that writing?" and Fan offered the brown paper which she had kept.

"No; and the label is all mud, so I cannot see the place. Ah, well, I shall discover some day, but I should like to thank this generous friend at once. See now, how fine I am! I do myself the honor to wear them at once."

Smiling with girlish delight at her pretty ornaments, Sophie clasped the bracelets on her round arms, the necklace about her white throat, and set the rosy spray in the lace on her bosom. Then she took a little dance down the room and found herself before Di, who was looking at her with an expression of naughty satisfaction on her face.

"Don't you wish you knew who sent them?"

"Indeed, yes;" and Sophie paused abruptly.

"Well, *I* know, and *I* won't tell till I like. It's my turn to have a secret; and I mean to keep it."

"But it is not right," began Sophie, with indignation.

"Tell me yours, and I 'll tell mine," said Di, teasingly.

"I will not! You have no right to touch my gifts, and I am sure you have done it, else how know you who sends this fine *cadeau*?" cried Sophie, with the flash Di liked to see.

Here Fanny interposed, "If you have any note or card belonging to Sophie, give it up at once. She shall not be tormented. Out with it, Di. I see your hand in your pocket, and I 'm sure you have been in mischief."

"Take your old letter, then. I know what's in it; and if I can't keep my secret for fun, Sophie shall not have hers. That Tilly sent the coral, and Sophie spent her hundred dollars in books and clothes for that queer girl, who'd better stay among her lobsters than try to be a lady," cried Di, bent on telling all she knew, while Sophie was reading her letter eagerly.

"Is it true?" asked Dora, for the four girls were in a corner together, and the rest of the company busy pulling crackers.

"Just like her! I thought it was that; but she would n't tell. Tell us now, Sophie, for *I* think it was truly sweet and beautiful to help that poor girl, and let us say hard things of you," cried Fanny, as her friend looked up with a face and a heart too full of happiness to help overflowing into words.

"Yes; I will tell you now. It was foolish, perhaps; but I did not want to be praised, and I loved to help that good Tilly. You know she worked all summer and made a little sum. So glad, so proud she was, and planned to study that she might go to school this winter. Well, in October the uncle fell very ill, and Tilly gave all her money for the doctors. The uncle had been kind to her, she did not forget; she was glad to help, and told no one but me. Then I said, 'What better

can I do with my father's gift than give it to the dear creature, and let her lose no time?' I do it; she will not at first, but I write and say, 'It must be,' and she submits. She is made neat with some little dresses, and she goes at last, to be so happy and do so well that I am proud of her. Is not that better than fine toilets and rich gifts to those who need nothing? Truly, yes! yet I confess it cost me pain to give up my plans for Christmas, and to seem selfish or ungrateful. Forgive me that."

"Yes, indeed, you dear generous thing!" cried Fan and Dora, touched by the truth.

"But how came Tilly to send you such a splendid present?" asked Di. "Should n't think you 'd like her to spend your money in such things."

"She did not. A sea-captain, a friend of the uncle, gave her these lovely ornaments, and she sends them to me with a letter that is more precious than all the coral in the sea. I cannot read it; but of all my gifts *this* is the dearest and the best!"

Sophie had spoken eagerly, and her face, her voice, her gestures, made the little story eloquent; but with the last words she clasped the letter to her bosom as if it well repaid her for all the sacrifices she had made. They might seem small to others, but she was sensitive and proud, anxious to be loved in the strange country, and fond of giving, so it cost her many tears to seem mean and thoughtless, to go poorly dressed, and be thought hardly of by those she wished to please. She did not like to tell of her own generosity, because it seemed like boasting; and she was not sure that it had been wise to give so much. Therefore, she waited to see if Tilly was worthy of the trust reposed in her; and she now found a balm for many wounds in the loving letter that came with the beautiful and unexpected gift.

Di listened with hot cheeks, and when Sophie paused, she whispered regretfully,–

"Forgive me, I was wrong! I 'll keep your gift all my life to remember you by, for you are the best and dearest girl I know."

Then with a hasty kiss she ran away, carrying with great care the white shell on which Sophie had painted a dainty little picture of the mermaids waiting for the pretty boat that brought good fortune to poor Tilly, and this lesson to those who were hereafter her faithful friends.

[image]

Chapter VII tailpiece

[image]

"Everything is quite clean; I am sure of that, for I washed the sheets and coverlet myself not long ago."–PAGE 207.

VIII.

DOLLY'S BEDSTEAD.

"Aunt Pen, where is Ariadne to sleep, please? I wanted to bring her cradle, but mamma said it would take up so much room I could not."

And Alice looked about her for a resting-place for her dolly as anxiously as if Ariadne had been a live baby.

"Can't she lie on the sofa?" asked Aunt Pen, with that sad want of interest in such important matters which grown-up people so often show.

"No, indeed! Some one would sit down on her, of course; and I won't have my darling smashed. You would n't like it yourself, aunty, and I 'm surprised at your proposing such a thing!" cried Alice, clasping her babe with a face full of maternal indignation.

"I beg your pardon! I really forgot that danger. I 'm not so used to infants as you are, and that accounts for it. Now I think of it, there's a little bedstead up garret, and you can have that. You will find it done up in a paper in the great blue chest where all our old toys are kept."

Appeased by Aunt Pen's apology, Alice trotted to the attic, found the bedstead, and came trotting back with a disappointed look on her face.

"It is such a funny, old-fashioned thing I don't know that Ariadne will consent to lie in it. Anyway, I must air the feather-bed and pillows first, or she will get cold. I wish I could wash the sheets too, they are so yellow; but there is no time now," said the little girl, bustling round as she spoke, and laying the little bed-furniture out on the rug.

"Everything is quite clean, my dear; I am sure of that, for I washed the sheets and coverlet myself not long ago, because I found a nest of little mice there the last time I looked," answered Aunt Pen, with her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the small bedstead.

"I guess you used to be fond of it when you were a little girl; and that's why you keep it so nicely now, isn't it?" asked Alice, as she dusted the carved posts and patted the canvas sacking.

"Yes, there's quite a little romance about that bed; and I love it so that I

never can give it away, but keep it mended up and in order for the sake of old times and poor Val," said Aunt Pen, smiling and sighing in the same breath.

"Oh, tell about it! I do like to hear stories, and so does Ariadne!" cried Alice, hastily opening dolly's eyes, that she might express her interest in the only way permitted her.

"Well, dear, I 'll tell you this true tale of long ago; and while you listen you can be making a new blanket for the bed. Mrs. Mouse nibbled holes in the other one, and her babies made a mess of it, so I burned it up. Here is a nice little square of flannel, and there are blue, red, and green worsteds for you to work round the edges with."

"Now that is just splendid! I love to work with crewels, and I 'll put little quirls and things in the corners. I can do it all myself, so tell away, please, aunty." And Alice settled herself with great satisfaction, while Ariadne sat bolt upright in her own armchair and stared at Aunt Pen in a way that would have been very embarrassing if her round blue eyes had had a particle of expression in them.

"When I was about ten years old, it was the joy of my heart to go every Saturday afternoon to see my nurse, Betsey Brown. She no longer lived out, but was married to a pilot, and had a home of her own down in what we used to call 'the watery part' of the city. A funny little house, so close to the wharves that when one looked out there were masts going to and fro over the house-tops, and from the upper windows I could see the blue ocean.

"Betsey had a boy with club feet, and a brother who was deformed; but Bobby was my pet playmate, and Valentine my best friend. My chief pleasure was in seeing him work at his turning-lathe, for he was very ingenious, and made all sorts of useful and pretty things.

"But the best thing he did was to cure the lame feet of his little nephew. In those days there were few doctors who attended to such troubles, and they were very expensive; so poor Bobby had gone hobbling about ever since he was born with his little feet turned in.

"Uncle Val could sympathize with him; and though he knew there was no cure for his own crooked back, he did his best to help the boy. He made a very simple apparatus for straightening the crippled feet (just two wooden splints, with wooden screws to loosen or tighten the pressure), and with patience, hope, and faith, he worked over the child till the feet were right, and Bobby could run and play like other children."

"Oh, Aunt Pen, was n't that lovely? And did he really do it all himself? How clever he must have been!" cried Alice, puckering the new blanket in the pleasant interest of the moment.

"He was very clever for a lad of eighteen. But that was not all he did. Bobby's cure was a long one, and I only saw the happy end of it; yet I remember

how we all rejoiced, and how proud Betsey was of her brother. My father wrote an account of it for some medical journal, and it was much talked about in our little circle; so much, indeed, that an aunt of ours who had a lame boy came to see Val and talked it all over with him.

"Val was much pleased, and offered to try and cure her son if she would let the boy come and live with him; for it needed great skill and constant care to work the screws just right, and tend the poor little feet gently.

"Aunt Dolly said no at once to that plan; for how could she let her precious boy go and live in that little house down in the poor part of the city?

"There was no other way, however, for Val would not leave his sister and his beloved lathe, and was wise enough to see how impossible it would be to have his own way with the child in a house where every one obeyed his whims and petted him, as such afflicted children usually are petted.

"So Val stood firm, and for a time nothing was done.

"I was much interested in the affair, and every time I saw my cousin Gus I told him what nice times I had down there; how strong and lively Bobby was, and declared my firm belief that Val could cure every disease under the sun.

"These glowing accounts made Gus want to go, and when he set his heart on anything he always got it; so in the end Aunt Dolly consented, and Gus went to board in the little house, much to the wonder of some folks.

"The plan succeeded capitally, however, and Gus thrived like a dandelion in springtime; for simple food, plenty of air, no foolish indulgence, and the most faithful care, built up the little lad in a way that astonished and delighted us all.

"The feet improved slowly; and Val was sure that in time they would be all right, for everything helped on the good work.

"Dear me, what happy days I used to spend at Betsey's! Sometimes Isaac, the jolly, bluff pilot, would take us out in his boat; and then what rosy cheeks and good appetites we got! Sometimes we played in Val's shop, and watched him make pretty things or helped him in some easy job, for he liked to have us near him. And, oh, my heart, what delicious suppers Betsey used to get us in the front room, where all sorts of queer sea treasures were collected,–shells, coral, and seaweed; odd pictures of ships and fish, and old books full of sailor songs and thrilling tales of wrecks."

"I wish I had been there!" interrupted Alice. "Is the house all gone, aunty?"

"All gone, dear, and every one of that merry party but myself," answered Aunt Pen, with a sigh.

"Don't think about the sad part of it, but go on and tell about the bed, please," said Alice, feeling that it was about time this interesting piece of furniture appeared in the story.

"Well, that was made to comfort me when Gus went home, as he did after

staying two years. Yes, he went home with straight feet, the heartiest, happiest little lad I ever saw.

"I was heart-broken at losing my playmate, and mourned for him as bitterly as a child could, till Val comforted me, not only by the cunning bedstead for my doll, but by a hundred kindly words and acts, for which I never thanked him half enough.

"Aunt Dolly and my father were so grateful and pleased at Val's success with Gus that they helped him in a plan he had some years later, when he took a larger house in a better place, and with Betsey as nurse, opened a small hospital for the cure of deformed feet. It was an excellent plan; and all was going well, when poor Val wasted rapidly away, and died just as his work began to bring him money and some honor."

"That was very bad! But what became of Bobby and Gus?" asked Alice, who was not of an age to care much about the "sad part" of any story.

"Bob became a sea-captain, and was an excellent fellow till he went down with his ship in a storm after rescuing all his crew, even to the cabin-boy. I'm proud of Bob, and keep those two great pearly shells in memory of him, for he brought them to me after his first voyage."

Aunt Pen's eyes lit up, and her voice rose as she spoke with real pride and affection of honest Captain Brown, who to her was always little Bob.

"I like that, it was so brave and good; but I do wish he had been saved, for then I could have seen him. And maybe he would have brought me a big green parrot that could say funny things. What became of Gus?" asked Alice, after a moment spent in the delightful thought of owning a green parrot with a red tail.

"Ah, my dear, I wish I knew!" exclaimed Aunt Pen, so earnestly that Alice dropped her work, astonished at the change in that usually quiet face.

"Don't tell any more if you 'd rather not," said the little girl, feeling instinctively that she had touched some tender string.

But Aunt Pen only stroked her curly head and went on in a softer tone, with her eyes fixed upon a faded picture that had hung over her work-table ever since Alice could remember.

"I like to tell you, dear, because I want you to love the memory of this old friend of mine. Gus went to sea also, much against his mother's will, for the years spent in the little house near the wharf had given the boy a taste for salt water, and he could not overcome it, though he tried.

"He sailed with Captain Bob all round the world, and would have been with him on that last voyage if a sudden whim had not kept him ashore. More than this we don't know; and for seven years have had no tidings of him. The others give him up, feeling sure that he was lost in the wild hill-country of India, whither he went in search of adventures. I suppose they are right; but *I* cannot make it true,

and still hope to see the dear boy back, or at least to hear some news of him."

"Would n't he be rather an old boy now, Aunt Pen?" asked Alice, softly; for she wanted to chase away the load of pain with a smile if she could.

"Bless my heart, so he would! Forty, at least. Well, well, he never will seem old to me, though his hair should be gray when he comes home." And Aunt Pen did smile as her eyes went back to the faded picture with a tender look that made Alice say timidly, while she laid her blooming cheek against her aunt's hand,–

"Would you mind if I asked if it was Gus who gave you this pretty ring, and was your sweetheart once? Mamma told me you had one, and he was dead; so I must never ask why you did n't marry as she did."

"Yes, he gave me this, and was to come back in a year or two; but I have never seen him since, and never shall, I fear, till we all meet over the great sea at last."

There Aunt Pen broke down, and spreading her hands before her face, sat so still that Alice feared to stir.

Even her careless child's heart was full of pity now; and two great tears rolled down upon the little blanket, to lie sparkling like drops of dew in the heart of the very remarkable red rose she was working in the middle.

Then it was that Ariadne distinguished herself, and proved beyond a doubt that her blue china eyes were worth something. A large, brown, breezy-looking man had been peeping in from the door for several moments, and listening in the most improper manner. No one saw him but Ariadne, and how could she warn the others, poor thing, when she had n't a tongue in her head? Don't tell me that dolls have n't hearts somewhere in their sawdust bosoms! I know better; and I am firmly convinced that Ariadne's was full of sympathy for Aunt Pen; else why should she, a well-bred doll, suddenly and without the least apparent cause, slip out of her chair and fall upon her china nose with a loud whack?

Alice jumped up to catch her darling, and Aunt Pen lifted her head to see what was the matter, and the big brown man, giving his hat a toss, came into the room like a whirlwind!

Alice, Ariadne, bedstead, and blanket, were suddenly swept into a corner by some mysterious means, and lay there in a heap, while the two grown people fell into each other's arms, exclaiming,–

"Pen!"

"Gus!"

I don't know which stared the hardest at this dreadful proceeding, Alice or Ariadne, but I do know that every one was very happy afterward, and that the precious little bedstead was not smashed, for I have seen it with my own eyes.

[image]

Chapter VIII tailpiece

[image]

"Well, dear, this is the story."–PAGE 220.

IX.

TRUDEL'S SIEGE.

"Grandmother, what is this curious picture about?" said little Gertrude, or "Trudel," as they called her, looking up from the red book that lay on her knee, one Sunday morning, when she and the grandmother sat sadly together in the neat kitchen; for the father was very ill, and the poor mother seldom left him.

The old woman put on her round spectacles, which made her look as wise as an owl, and turned to answer the child, who had been as quiet as a mouse for a long time, looking at the strange pictures in the ancient book.

"Ah, my dear, that tells about a very famous and glorious thing that happened long ago at the siege of Leyden. You can read it for yourself some day."

"Please tell me now. Why are the houses half under water, and ships sailing among them, and people leaning over the walls of the city? And why is that boy waving his hands on the tower, where the men are running away in a great smoke?" asked Trudel, too curious to wait till she could read the long hard words on the yellow pages.

"Well, dear, this is the story: and you shall hear how brave men and women, and children too, were in those days. The cruel Spaniards came and besieged the city for many months; but the faithful people would not give up, though nearly starved to death. When all the bread and meat were gone and the gardens empty, they ate grass and herbs and horses, and even dogs and cats, trying to hold out till help came to them."

"Did little girls really eat their pussies? Oh, I 'd die before I would kill my dear Jan," cried Trudel, hugging the pretty kitten that purred in her lap.

"Yes, the children ate their pets. And so would you if it would save your father or mother from starving. *We* know what hunger is; but we won't eat Jan yet."

The old woman sighed as she glanced from the empty table to the hearth where no fire burned.

"*Did* help come in the ships?" asked the child, bending her face over the book to hide the tears that filled her eyes, for she was very hungry, and had had only a crust for breakfast.

"Our good Prince of Orange was trying to help them; but the Spaniards were all around the city and he had not men enough to fight them by land, so he sent carrier-doves with letters to tell the people that he was going to cut through the great dikes that kept the sea out, and let the water flow over the country so as to drive the enemy from his camp, for the city stood upon high ground, and would be safe. Then the ships, with food, could sail over the drowned land and save the brave people."

"Oh, I 'm glad! I 'm glad! These are the bad Spaniards running away, and these are poor people stretching out their hands for the bread. But what is the boy doing, in the funny tower where the wall has tumbled down?" cried Trudel, much excited.

"The smoke of burning houses rose between the city and the port so the people could not see that the Spaniards had run away; and they were afraid the ships could not get safely by. But a boy who was scrambling about as boys always are wherever there is danger, fire, and fighting, saw the enemy go, and ran to the deserted tower to shout and beckon to the ships to come on at once,–for the wind had changed and soon the tide would flow back and leave them stranded."

"Nice boy! I wish I had been there to see him and help the poor people," said Trudel, patting the funny little figure sticking out of the pepper-pot tower like a jack-in-the-box.

"If children keep their wits about them and are brave, they can always help in some way, my dear. We don't have such dreadful wars now; but the dear God knows we have troubles enough, and need all our courage and faith to be patient in times like these;" and the grandmother folded her thin hands with another sigh, as she thought of her poor son dying for want of a few comforts, after working long and faithfully for a hard master who never came to offer any help, though a very rich man.

"Did they eat the carrier-doves?" asked Trudel, still intent on the story.

"No, child; they fed and cared for them while they lived, and when they died, stuffed and set them up in the Staat Haus, so grateful were the brave burghers for the good news the dear birds brought."

"That is the best part of all. I like that story very much!" And Trudel turned the pages to find another, little dreaming what a carrier-dove she herself was soon to become.

Poor Hans Dort and his family were nearly as distressed as the besieged

people of Leyden, for poverty stood at the door, hunger and sickness were within, and no ship was anywhere seen coming to bring help. The father, who was a linen-weaver, could no longer work in the great factory; the mother, who was a lace-maker, had to leave her work to nurse him; and the old woman could earn only a trifle by her knitting, being lame and feeble. Little Trudel did what she could,–sold the stockings to get bread and medicine, picked up wood for the fire, gathered herbs for the poor soup, and ran errands for the market-women, who paid her with unsalable fruit, withered vegetables, and now and then a bit of meat.

But market-day came but once a week; and it was very hard to find food for the hungry mouths meantime. The Dorts were too proud to beg, so they suffered in silence, praying that help would come before it was too late to save the sick and old.

No other picture in the quaint book interested Trudel so much as that of the siege of Leyden; and she went back to it, thinking over the story till hunger made her look about for something to eat as eagerly as the poor starving burghers.

"Here, child, is a good crust. It is too hard for me. I kept it for you; it's the last except that bit for your mother," said the old woman, pulling a dry crust from her jacket with a smile; for though starving herself, the brave old soul thought only of her darling.

Trudel's little white teeth gnawed savagely at the hard bread, and Jan ate the crumbs as if he too needed food. As she saw him purring about her feet, there came into the child's head a sudden idea, born of the brave story and of the cares that made her old before her time.

"Poor Jan gets thinner and thinner every day. If we are to eat him, we must do it soon, or he will not be worth cooking," she said with a curious look on the face that used to be so round and rosy, and now was white, thin, and anxious.

"Bless the child! we won't eat the poor beast! but it would be kind to give him away to some one who could feed him well. Go now, dear, and get a jug of fresh water. The father will need it, and so will you, for that crust is a dry dinner for my darling."

As she spoke, the old woman held the little girl close for a minute; and Trudel clung to her silently, finding the help she needed for her sacrifice in the love and the example grandma gave her.

Then she ran away, with the brown jug in one hand, the pretty kitten on her arm, and courage in her little heart. It was a poor neighborhood where the weavers and lace-makers lived; but nearly every one had a good dinner on Sunday, and on her way to the fountain Trudel saw many well-spread tables, smelled the good soup in many kettles, and looked enviously at the plump children sitting quietly on the doorsteps in round caps and wooden shoes, waiting to be called in

to eat of the big loaves, the brown sausages, and the cabbage-soup smoking on the hearth.

When she came to the baker's house, her heart began to beat; and she hugged Jan so close it was well he was thin, or he would have mewed under the tender farewell squeezes his little mistress gave him. With a timid hand Trudel knocked, and then went in to find Vrow Hertz and her five boys and girls at table, with good roast meat and bread and cheese and beer before them.

"Oh, the dear cat! the pretty cat! Let me pat him! Hear him mew, and see his soft white coat," cried the children, before Trudel could speak, for they admired the snow-white kitten very much, and had often begged for it.

Trudel had made up her mind to give up to them at last her one treasure; but she wished to be paid for it, and was bound to tell her plan. Jan helped her, for smelling the meat, he leaped from her arms to the table and began to gnaw a bone on Dirck's plate, which so amused the young people that they did not hear Trudel say to their mother in a low voice, with red cheeks and beseeching eyes,–

"Dear Vrow Hertz, the father is very ill; the mother cannot work at her lace in the dark room; and grandma makes but little by knitting, though I help all I can. We have no food; can you give me a loaf of bread in exchange for Jan? I have nothing else to sell, and the children want him much."

Trudel's eyes were full and her lips trembled, as she ended with a look that went straight to stout Mother Hertz's kind heart, and told the whole sad story.

"Bless the dear child! Indeed, yes; a loaf and welcome; and see here, a good sausage also. Brenda, go fill the jug with milk. It is excellent for the sick man. As for the cat, let it stay a while and get fat, then we will see. It is a pretty beast and worth many loaves of bread; so come again, Trudel, and do not suffer hunger while I have much bread."

As the kind woman spoke, she had bustled about, and before Trudel could get her breath, a big loaf, a long sausage, and a jug of fresh milk were in her apron and hands, and a motherly kiss made the gifts all the easier to take. Returning it heartily, and telling the children to be kind to Jan, she hastened home to burst into the quiet room, crying joyfully,–

"See, grandmother, here is food,–all mine. I bought it! Come, come, and eat!"

"Now, dear Heaven, what do I see? Where did the blessed bread come from?" asked the old woman, hugging the big loaf, and eying the sausage with such hunger in her face that Trudel ran for the knife and cup, and held a draught of fresh milk to her grandmother's lips before she could answer a single question.

"Stay, child, let us give thanks before we eat. Never was food more welcome or hearts more grateful;" and folding her hands, the pious old woman blessed the meal that seemed to fall from heaven on that bare table. Then Trudel cut

the crusty slice for herself, a large soft one for grandmother, with a good bit of sausage, and refilled the cup. Another portion and cup went upstairs to mother, whom she found asleep, with the father's hot hand in hers. So leaving the surprise for her waking, Trudel crept down to eat her own dinner, as hungry as a little wolf, amusing herself with making the old woman guess where and how she got this fine feast.

"This is our siege, grandmother; and we are eating Jan," she said at last, with the merriest laugh she had given for weeks.

"Eating Jan?" cried the old woman, staring at the sausage, as if for a moment she feared the kitten had been turned into that welcome shape by some miracle. Still laughing, Trudel told her story, and was well rewarded for her childish sacrifice by the look in grandmother's face as she said with a tender kiss,–

"Thou art a carrier-dove, my darling, coming home with good news and comfort under thy wing. God bless thee, my brave little heart, and grant that our siege be not a long one before help comes to us!"

Such a happy feast! and for dessert more kisses and praises for Trudel when the mother came down to hear the story and to tell how eagerly father had drank the fresh milk and gone to sleep again. Trudel was very well pleased with her bargain; but at night she missed Jan's soft purr for her lullaby, and cried herself to sleep, grieving for her lost pet, being only a child, after all, though trying to be a brave little woman for the sake of those she loved.

The big loaf and sausage took them nicely through the next day; but by Tuesday only crusts remained, and sorrel-soup, slightly flavored with the last scrap of sausage, was all they had to eat.

On Wednesday morning, Trudel had plaited her long yellow braids with care, smoothed down her one blue skirt, and put on her little black silk cap, making ready for the day's work. She was weak and hungry, but showed a bright face as she took her old basket and said,–

"Now I am off to market, grandmother, to sell the hose and get medicine and milk for father. I shall try to pick up something for dinner. The good neighbors often let me run errands for them, and give me a kuchen, a bit of cheese, or a taste of their nice coffee. I will bring you something, and come as soon as I can."

The old woman nodded and smiled, as she scoured the empty kettle till it shone, and watched the little figure trudge away with the big empty basket, and, she knew, with a still emptier little stomach. "Coffee!" sighed the grandmother; "one sip of the blessed drink would put life into me. When shall I ever taste it again?" and the poor soul sat down to her knitting with hands that trembled from weakness.

The Platz was a busy and a noisy scene when Trudel arrived,–for the thrifty Dutchwomen were early afoot; and stalls, carts, baskets, and cans were already

arranged to make the most attractive display of fruit, vegetables, fish, cheese, butter, eggs, milk, and poultry, and the small wares country people came to buy.

Nodding and smiling, Trudel made her way through the bustle to the booth where old Vrow Schmidt bought and sold the blue woollen hose that adorn the stout legs of young and old.

"Good-morning, child! I am glad to see thee and thy well-knit stockings, for I have orders for three pairs, and promised thy grandmother's, they are always so excellent," said the rosy-faced woman, as Trudel approached.

"I have but one pair. We had no money to buy more yarn. Father is so ill mother cannot work; and medicines cost a deal," said the child, with her large hungry eyes fixed on the breakfast the old woman was about to eat, first having made ready for the business of the day.

"See, then, I shall give thee the yarn and wait for the hose; I can trust thee, and shall ask a good price for the good work. Thou too wilt have the fever, I 'm afraid!–so pale and thin, poor child! Here, drink from my cup, and take a bite of bread and cheese. The morning air makes one hungry."

Trudel eagerly accepted the "sup" and the "bite," and felt new strength flow into her as the warm draught and good brown bread went down her throat.

"So many thanks! I had no breakfast. I came to see if I could get any errands here to-day, for I want to earn a bit if I can," she said with a sigh of satisfaction, as she slipped half of her generous slice and a good bit of cheese into her basket, regretting that the coffee could not be shared also.

As if to answer her wish, a loud cry from fat Mother Kinkle, the fish-wife, rose at that moment, for a thievish cur had run off with a fish from her stall, while she gossiped with a neighbor.

Down went Trudel's basket, and away went Trudel's wooden shoes clattering over the stones while she raced after the dog, dodging in and out among the stalls till she cornered the thief under Gretchen Horn's milk-cart; for at sight of the big dog who drew the four copper-cans, the cur lost heart and dropped the fish and ran away.

"Well done!" said buxom Gretchen, when Trudel caught up the rescued treasure a good deal the worse for the dog's teeth and the dust it had been dragged through.

All the market-women laughed as the little girl came back proudly bearing the fish, for the race had amused them. But Mother Kinkle said with a sigh, when she saw the damage done her property,–

"It is spoiled; no one will buy that torn, dirty thing. Throw it on the muck-pile, child; your trouble was in vain, though I thank you for it."

"Give it to me, please, if you don't want it. We can eat it, and would be glad of it at home," cried Trudel, hugging the slippery fish with joy, for she saw

a dinner in it, and felt that her run was well paid.

"Take it, then, and be off; I see Vrow von Decken's cook coming, and you are in the way," answered the old woman, who was not a very amiable person, as every one knew.

"That's a fine reward to make a child for running the breath out of her body for you," said Dame Troost, the handsome farm-wife who sat close by among her fruit and vegetables, as fresh as her cabbages, and as rosy as her cherries.

"Better it, then, and give her a feast fit for a burgomaster. *You* can afford it," growled Mother Kinkle, turning her back on the other woman in a huff.

"That I will, for very shame at such meanness! Here, child, take these for thy fish-stew, and these for thy little self," said the kind soul, throwing half a dozen potatoes and onions into the basket, and handing Trudel a cabbage-leaf full of cherries.

A happy girl was our little house-wife on her way home, when the milk and medicine and loaf of bread were bought; and a comfortable dinner was quickly cooked and gratefully eaten in Dort's poor house that day.

"Surely the saints must help you, child, and open people's hearts to our need; for you come back each day with food for us,–like the ravens to the people in the wilderness," said the grandmother when they sat at table.

"If they do, it is because you pray to them so heartily, mother. But I think the sweet ways and thin face of my Trudel do much to win kindness, and the good God makes her our little house-mother, while I must sit idle," answered Vrow Dort; and she filled the child's platter again that she, at least, might have enough.

"I like it!" cried Trudel, munching an onion with her bread, while her eyes shone and a pretty color came into her cheeks. "I feel so old and brave now, so glad to help; and things happen, and I keep thinking what I will do next to get food. It's like the birds out yonder in the hedge, trying to feed their little ones. I fly up and down, pick and scratch, get a bit here and a bit there, and then my dear *old* birds have food to eat."

It really was very much as Trudel said, for her small wits were getting very sharp with these new cares; she lay awake that night trying to plan how she should provide the next day's food for her family.

"Where now, thou dear little mother-bird?" asked the "Grossmutter" next morning, when the child had washed the last dish, and was setting away the remains of the loaf.

"To Gretti Jansen's, to see if she wants me to water her linen, as I used to do for play. She is lame, and it tires her to go to the spring so often. She will like me to help her, I hope; and I shall ask her for some food to pay me. Oh, I am very bold now! Soon will I beg if no other way offers." And Trudel shook her yellow

head resolutely, and went to settle the stool at grandmother's feet, and to draw the curtain so that it would shield the old eyes from the summer sun.

"Heaven grant it never comes to that! It would be very hard to bear, yet perhaps we must if no help arrives. The doctor's bill, the rent, the good food thy father will soon need, will take far more than we can earn; and what will become of us, the saints only know!" answered the old woman, knitting briskly in spite of her sad forebodings.

"*I* will do it all! I don't know how, but I shall try; and, as you often say, 'Have faith and hold up thy hands; God will fill them.'"

Then Trudel went away to her work, with a stout heart under her little blue bodice; and all that summer day she trudged to and fro along the webs of linen spread in the green meadow, watering them as fast as they dried, knitting busily under a tree during the intervals.

Old Gretti was glad to have her, and at noon called her in to share the milk-soup, with cherries and herrings in it, and a pot of coffee,–as well as Dutch cheese, and bread full of coriander-seed. Though this was a feast to Trudel, one bowl of soup and a bit of bread was all she ate; then, with a face that was not half as "bold" as she tried to make it, she asked if she might run home and take the coffee to grandmother, who longed for and needed it so much.

"Yes, indeed; there, let me fill that pewter jug with a good hot mess for the old lady, and take this also. I have little to give, but I remember how good she was to me in the winter, when my poor legs were so bad, and no one else thought of me," said grateful Gretti, mixing more coffee, and tucking a bit of fresh butter into half a loaf of bread with a crusty end to cover the hole.

Away ran Trudel; and when grandmother saw the "blessed coffee," as she called it, she could only sip and sigh for comfort and content, so glad was the poor old soul to taste her favorite drink again. The mother smelled it, and came down to take her share, while Trudel skipped away to go on watering the linen till sunset with a happy heart, saying to herself while she trotted and splashed,–

"This day is well over, and I have kept my word. Now what *can* I do to-morrow? Gretti does n't want me; there is no market; I must not beg yet, and I cannot finish the hose so soon.

"I know! I 'll get water-cresses, and sell them from door to door. They are fresh now, and people like them. Ah, thou dear duck, thank thee for reminding me of them," she cried, as she watched a mother-duck lead her brood along the brook's edge, picking and dabbling among the weeds to show them where to feed.

Early next morning Trudel took her basket and went away to the meadows that lay just out of the town, where the rich folk had their summer houses, and fish-ponds, and gardens. These gardens were gay now with tulips, the delight of

Dutch people; for they know best how to cultivate them, and often make fortunes out of the splendid and costly flowers.

When Trudel had looked long and carefully for cresses, and found very few, she sat down to rest, weary and disappointed, on a green bank from which she could overlook a fine garden all ablaze with tulips. She admired them heartily, longed to have a bed of them her own, and feasted her childish eyes on the brilliant colors till they were dazzled, for the long beds of purple and yellow, red and white blossoms were splendid to see, and in the midst of all a mound of dragon-tulips rose like a queen's throne, scarlet, green, and gold all mingled on the ruffled leaves that waved in the wind.

Suddenly it seemed as if one of the great flowers had blown over the wall and was hopping along the path in a very curious way! In a minute, however, she saw that it was a gay parrot that had escaped, and would have flown away if its clipped wings and a broken chain on one leg had not kept it down.

Trudel laughed to see the bird scuttle along, jabbering to itself, and looking very mischievous and naughty as it ran away. She was just thinking she ought to stop it, when the garden-gate opened, and a pretty little boy came out, calling anxiously,–

"Prince! Prince! Come back, you bad bird! I never will let you off your perch again, sly rascal!"

"I will get him;" and Trudel ran down the bank after the runaway, for the lad was small and leaned upon a little crutch.

"Be careful! He will bite!" called the boy.

"I 'm not afraid," answered Trudel; and she stepped on the chain, which brought the "Prince of Orange" to a very undignified and sudden halt. But when she tried to catch him up by his legs, the sharp black beak gave a nip and held tightly to her arm. It hurt her much, but she did not let go, and carried her captive back to its master, who thanked her, and begged her to come in and chain up the bad bird, for he was evidently rather afraid of it.

Glad to see more of the splendid garden, Trudel did what he asked, and with a good deal of fluttering, scolding, and pecking, the Prince was again settled on his perch.

"Your arm is bleeding! Let me tie it up for you; and here is my cake to pay you for helping me. Mamma would have been very angry if Prince had been lost," said the boy, as he wet his little handkerchief in a tank of water near by, and tied up Trudel's arm.

The tank was surrounded by pots of tulips; and on a rustic seat lay the lad's hat and a delicious large kuchen, covered with comfits and sugar. The hungry girl accepted it gladly, but only nibbled at it, remembering those at home. The boy thought she did not like it, and being a generous little fellow and very grateful

for her help, he looked about for something else to give her. Seeing her eyes fixed admiringly on a pretty red jar that held a dragon-tulip just ready to bloom, he said pleasantly,–

"Would you like this also? All these are mine, and I can do as I like with them. Will you have it?"

"Oh, yes, with thanks! It is *so* beautiful! I longed for one, but never thought to get it," cried Trudel, receiving the pot with delight.

Then she hastened toward home to show her prize, only stopping to sell her little bunches of cresses for a few groschen, with which she bought a loaf and three herrings to eat with it. The cake and the flower gave quite the air of a feast to the poor meal, but Trudel and the two women enjoyed it all, for the doctor said that the father was better, and now needed only good meat and wine to grow strong and well again.

How to get these costly things no one knew, but trusted they would come, and all fell to work with lighter hearts. The mother sat again at her lace-work, for now a ray of light could be allowed to fall on her pillow and bobbins by the window of the sick-room. The old woman's fingers flew as she knit at one long blue stocking; and Trudel's little hands tugged away at the other, while she cheered her dull task by looking fondly at her dear tulip unfolding in the sun.

She began to knit next day as soon as the breakfast of dry bread and water was done; but she took her work to the doorstep and thought busily as the needles clicked, for where *could* she get money enough for meat and wine? The pretty pot stood beside her, and the tulip showed its gay leaves now, just ready to bloom. She was very proud of it, and smiled and nodded gayly when a neighbor said in passing, "A fine flower you have there."

Soon she forgot it, however, so hard was her little brain at work, and for a long time she sat with her eyes fixed on her busy hands so intently that she neither heard steps approaching, nor saw a maid and a little girl looking over the low fence at her. Suddenly some words in a strange language made her look up. The child was pointing at the tulip and talking fast in English to the maid, who shook her head and tried to lead her on.

She was a pretty little creature, all in white with a gay hat, curly locks, and a great doll in one arm, while the other held a box of bonbons. Trudel smiled when she saw the doll; and as if the friendly look decided her, the little girl ran up to the door, pointed to the flower, and asked a question in the queer tongue which Trudel could not understand. The maid followed, and said in Dutch, "Fräulein Maud wishes the flower. Will you give it to her, child?"

"Oh, no, no! I love it. I will keep it, for now Jan is gone, it is all I have!" answered Trudel, taking the pot in her lap to guard her one treasure.

The child frowned, chattered eagerly, and offered the box of sweets, as if

used to having her wishes gratified at once. But Trudel shook her head, for much as she loved "sugar-drops," she loved the splendid flower better, like a true little Dutchwoman.

Then Miss Maud offered the doll, bent on having her own way. Trudel hesitated a moment, for the fine lady doll in pink silk, with a feather in her hat, and tiny shoes on her feet, was very tempting to her childish soul. But she felt that so dainty a thing was not for her, and her old wooden darling, with the staring eyes and broken nose, was dearer to her than the delicate stranger could ever be. So she smiled to soothe the disappointed child, but shook her head again.

At that, the English lassie lost her temper, stamped her foot, scolded, and began to cry, ordering the maid to take the flower and come away at once.

"She *will* have it; and she must not cry. Here, child, will you sell it for this?" said the maid, pulling a handful of groschen out of her deep pocket, sure that Trudel would yield now.

But the little house-mother's quick eye saw that the whole handful would not buy the meat and wine, much as it looked, and for the third time she shook her yellow head. There was a longing look in her face, however; and the shrewd maid saw it, guessed that money would win the day, and diving again into her apron-pocket, brought out a silver gulden and held it up.

"For this, then, little miser? It is more than the silly flower is worth; but the young fräulein must have all she wants, so take it and let us be done with the crying."

A struggle went on in Trudel's mind; and for a moment she did not speak. She longed to keep her dear tulip, her one joy, and it seemed so hard to let it go before she had even seen it blossom once; but then the money would do much, and her loving little heart yearned to give poor father all he needed. Just then her mother's voice came down from the open window, softly singing an old hymn to lull the sick man to sleep. That settled the matter for the dutiful daughter; tears rose to her eyes, and she found it very hard to say with a farewell caress of the blue and yellow pot as she gave it up,–

"You may have it; but it *is* worth more than a gulden, for it is a dragon-tulip, the finest we have. Could you give a little more? my father is very sick, and we are very poor."

The stout maid had a kind heart under her white muslin neckerchief; and while Miss Maud seized the flower, good Marta put another gulden into Trudel's hand before she hastened after her charge, who made off with her booty, as if fearing to lose it.

Trudel watched the child with the half-opened tulip nodding over her shoulder, as though it sadly said "good-by" to its former mistress, till her dim eyes could see no longer. Then she covered her face with her apron and sobbed

very quietly, lest grandmother should hear and be troubled. But Trudel was a brave child, and soon the tears stopped, the blue eyes looked gladly at the money in her hand, and presently, when the fresh wind had cooled her cheeks, she went in to show her treasure and cheer up the anxious hearts with her good news.

She made light of the loss of her flower, and still knitting, went briskly off to get the meat and wine for father, and if the money held out, some coffee for grandmother, some eggs and white rolls for mother, who was weak and worn with her long nursing.

"Surely, the dear God does help me," thought the pious little maid, while she trudged back with her parcels, quite cheery again, though no pretty kitten ran to meet her, and no gay tulip stood full-blown in the noonday sun.

Still more happy was she over her small sacrifices when she saw her father sip a little of the good broth grandmother made with such care, and saw the color come into the pale cheeks of the dear mother after she had taken the eggs and fine bread, with a cup of coffee to strengthen and refresh her.

"We have enough for to-day, and for father to-morrow; but on Sunday we must fast as well as pray, unless the hose be done and paid for in time," said the old woman next morning, surveying their small store of food with an anxious eye.

"I will work hard, and go to Vrow Schmidt's the minute we are done. But now I must run and get wood, else the broth will not be ready," answered Trudel, clattering on her wooden shoes in a great hurry.

"If all else fails, I too shall make my sacrifice as well as you, my heart's darling. I cannot knit as I once did, and if we are not done, or Vrow Schmidt be away, I will sell my ring and so feed the flock till Monday," said the grandmother, lifting up one thin old hand, where shone the wedding-ring she had worn so many years.

"Ah, no,–not that! It was so sad to see your gold beads go, and mother's ear-rings and father's coat and Jan and my lovely flower! We will not sell the dear old ring. I will find a way. Something will happen, as before; so wait a little, and trust to me," cried Trudel, with her arms about the grandmother, and such a resolute nod that the rusty little black cap fell over her nose and extinguished her.

She laughed as she righted it, and went singing away, as if not a care lay heavy on her young heart. But when she came to the long dike which kept the waters of the lake from overflowing the fields below, she walked slowly to rest her tired legs, and to refresh her eyes with the blue sheet of water on one side and the still bluer flax-fields on the other,–for they were in full bloom, and the delicate flowers danced like fairies in the wind.

It was a lonely place, but Trudel liked it, and went on toward the wood,

turning the heel of her stocking while she walked,–pausing now and then to look over at the sluice-gates which stood here and there ready to let off the water when autumn rains made the lake rise, or in the spring when the flax-fields were overflowed before the seed was sown. At the last of these she paused to gather a bunch of yellow stone-crop growing from a niche in the strong wall which, with earth and beams, made the dike. As she stooped, the sound of voices in the arch below came up to her distinctly. Few people came that way except little girls, like herself, to gather fagots in the wood, or truant lads to fish in the pond. Thinking the hidden speakers must be some of these boys, she knelt down behind the shrubs that grew along the banks, and listened with a smile on her lips to hear what mischief the naughty fellows were planning. But the smile soon changed to a look of terror; and she crouched low behind the bushes to catch all that was said in the echoing arch below.

"How did I think of the thing? Why, that is the best part of the joke! Mein Herr von Vost put it into my head himself," said a man's gruff voice, in answer to some question. "This is the way it was: I sat at the window of the beer-house, and Von Vost met the burgomaster close by and said, 'My friend, I hear that the lower sluice-gate needs looking to. Please see to it speedily, for an overflow now would ruin my flax-fields, and cause many of my looms to stand still next winter.' 'So! It shall be looked to next week. Such a misfortune shall not befall you, my good neighbor,' said the burgomaster; and they parted. 'Ah, ha!' thinks I to myself, 'here we have a fine way to revenge ourselves on Master von Vost, who turned us off and leaves us to starve. We have but to see that the old gate gives way *between* now and *Monday*, and that hard man will suffer in the only place where he *can* feel,–his pocket.'"

Here the gruff voice broke into a low laugh, and another man said slowly,–

"A good plan; but is there no danger of being found out, Peit Stensen?"

"Not a chance of it! See here, Deitrich, a quiet blow or two, at night when none can hear it, will break away these rotten boards and let the water in. The rest–it will do itself; and by morning those great fields will be many feet under water, and Von Vost's crop ruined. Yes, we *will* stop his looms for him, and other men besides you and I and Niklas Haas will stand idle with starving children round them. Come, will you lend a hand? Niklas is away looking for work, and Hans Dort is sick, or they might be glad to help us."

"Hans would never do it. He is sober, and so good a weaver he will never want work when he is well. I *will* be with you, Peit; but swear not to tell it, whatever happens, for you and I have bad names now, and it would go hard with us."

"I 'll swear anything; but have no fear. We will not only be revenged on the master, but get the job of repairing; since men are scarce and the need will be

great when the flood is discovered. See, then, how fine a plan it is! and meet me here at twelve to-night with a shovel and pick. Mine are already hidden in the wood yonder. Now, come and see where we must strike, and then slip home the other way; we must not be seen here by any one."

There the voices stopped, and steps were heard going deeper into the arch. Trudel, pale with fear, rose to her feet, slipped off her sabots, and ran away along the dike like a startled rabbit, never pausing till she was safely round the corner and out of sight. Then she took breath, and tried to think what to do first. It was of no use to go home and tell the story there. Father was too ill to hear it or to help; and if she told the neighbors, the secret would soon be known everywhere and might bring danger on them all. No, she must go at once to Mein Herr von Vost and tell him alone, begging him to let no one know what she had heard, but to prevent the mischief the men threatened, as if by accident. Then all would be safe, and the pretty flax-fields kept from drowning. It was a long way to the "master's," as he was called, because he owned the linen factories, where all day many looms jangled, and many men and women worked busily to fill his warehouses and ships with piles of the fine white cloth, famous all the world over.

But forgetting the wood, father's broth, granny's coffee, and even the knitting which she still held, Trudel went as fast as she could toward the country-house, where Mein Herr von Vost would probably be at his breakfast.

She was faint now with hunger and heat, for the day grew hot, and the anxiety she felt made her heart flutter while she hurried along the dusty road till she came to the pretty house in its gay garden, where some children were playing. Anxious not to be seen, Trudel slipped up the steps, and in at the open window of a room where she saw the master and his wife sitting at table. Both looked surprised to see a shabby, breathless little girl enter in that curious fashion; but something in her face told them that she came on an important errand, and putting down his cup, the gentleman said quickly,–

"Well, girl, what is it?"

In a few words Trudel told her story, adding with a beseeching gesture, "Dear sir, please do not tell that I betrayed bad Peit and Deitrich. They know father, and may do him some harm if they discover that I told you this. We are so poor, so unhappy now, we cannot bear any more;" and quite overcome with the troubles that filled her little heart, and the fatigue and the hunger that weakened her little body, Trudel dropped down at Von Vost's feet as if she were dead.

When she came to herself, she was lying on a velvet sofa and the sweet-faced lady was holding wine to her lips, while Mein Herr von Vost marched up and down the room with his flowered dressing-gown waving behind him, and a frown on his brow. Trudel sat up and said she was quite well; but the little white

face and the hungry eyes that wandered to the breakfast-table, told the truth, and the good frau had a plate of food and a cup of warm milk before her in a moment.

"Eat, my poor child, and rest a little, while the master considers what is best to be done, and how to reward the brave little messenger who came so far to save his property," said the motherly lady, fanning Trudel, who ate heartily, hardly knowing what she ate, except that it was very delicious after so much bread and water.

In a few moments Herr von Vost paused before the sofa and said kindly, though his eyes were stern and his face looked hard,–

"See, then, thus shall I arrange the affair, and all will be well. I will myself go to see the old gate, as if made anxious lest the burgomaster should forget his promise. I find it in a dangerous state, and at once set my men at work. The rascals are disappointed of both revenge and wages, and I can soon take care of them in other ways, for they are drunken fellows, and are easily clapped into prison and kept safely there till ready to work and to stop plotting mischief. No one shall know your part in it, my girl; but I do not forget it. Tell your father his loom waits for him. Meanwhile, here is something to help while he must be idle."

Trudel's plate nearly fell out of her hands as a great gold-piece dropped into her lap; and she could only stammer her thanks with tears of joy, and a mouth full of bread and butter.

"He is a kind man, but a busy one, and people call him 'hard.' You will not find him so hereafter, for he never forgets a favor, nor do I. Eat well, dear child, and wait till you are rested. I will get a basket of comforts for the sick man. Who else needs help at home?"

So kindly did Frau von Vost look and speak that Trudel told all her sad tale freely, for the master had gone at once to see to the dike, after a nod and a pat on the child's head, which made her quite sure that he was not as hard as people said.

When she had opened her heart to the friendly lady, Trudel was left to rest a few moments, and lay luxuriously on the yellow sofa staring at the handsome things about her, and eating pretzels till Frau von Vost returned with the promised basket, out of which peeped the neck of a wine-bottle, the legs of a chicken, glimpses of grapes, and many neat parcels of good things.

"My servant goes to market and will carry this for you till you are near home. Go, little Trudel; and God bless you for saving us from a great misfortune!" said the lady; and she kissed the happy child and led her to the back door, where stood the little cart with an old man to drive the fat horse, and many baskets to be filled in town.

Such a lovely drive our Trudel had that day! no queen in a splendid chariot ever felt prouder, for all her cares were gone, gold was in her pocket, food at her

feet, and friends secured to make times easier for all. No need to tell how joyfully she was welcomed at home, nor what praises she received when her secret was confided to mother and grandmother, nor what a feast was spread in the poor house that day,–for patience, courage, and trust in God had won the battle, the enemy had fled, and Trudel's hard siege was over.

[image]

Chapter IX tailpiece

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