MISS BILLY

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MARIAN · K · HURD

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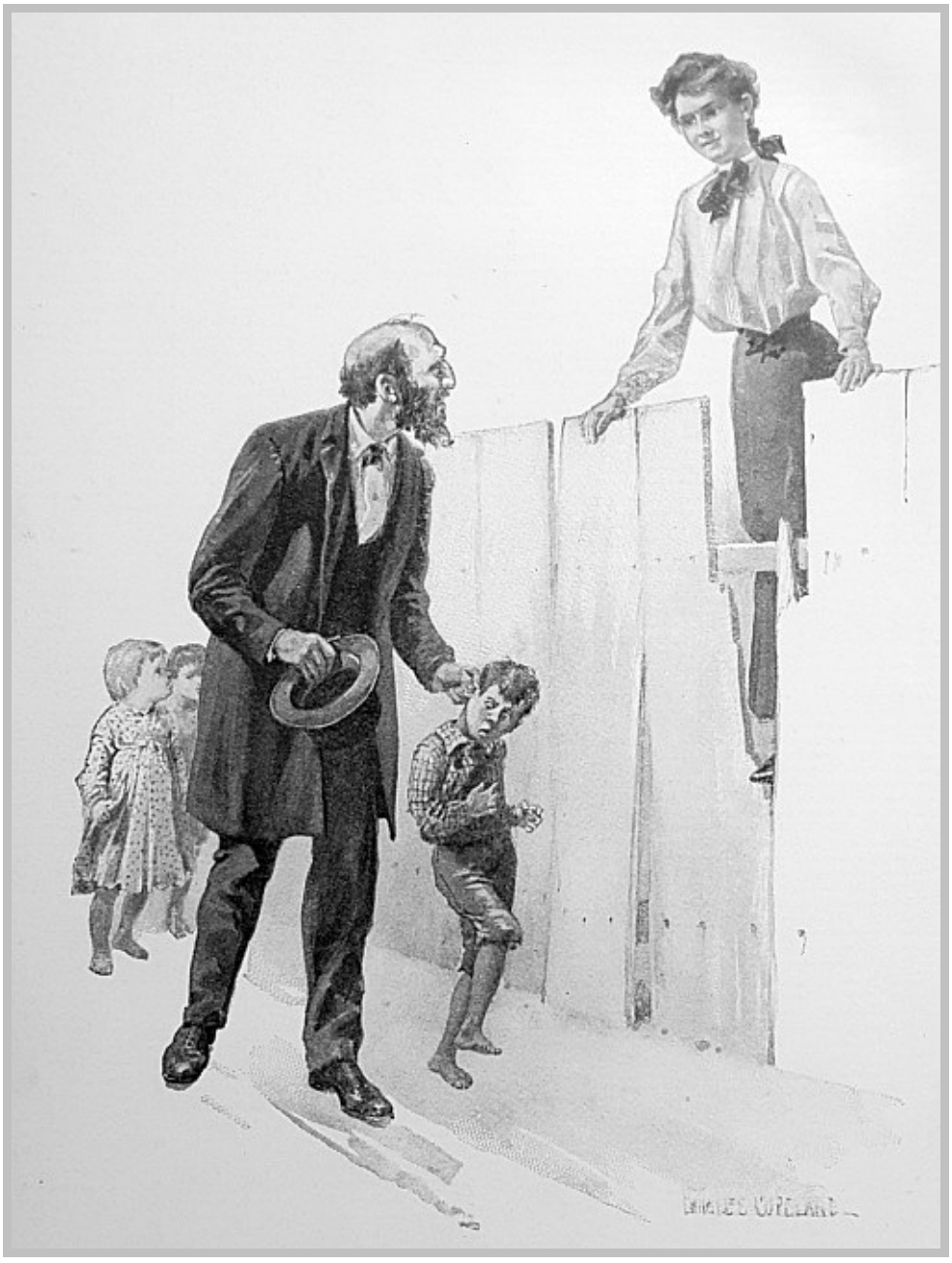
CONTENTS



“That wasn’t the way it happened,” said a clear voice above them.
(*See page 66*.)

MISS BILLY

A NEIGHBORHOOD
STORY

By EDITH KEELEY STOKELY
And MARIAN KENT HURD

ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES COPELAND

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CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

MISS BILLY

CHAPTER I

No. 12 CHERRY STREET

"The house looked wretched and woe-begone:
Its desolate windows wept
With a dew that forever dripped and crept
From the moss-grown eaves: and ever anon
Some idle wind, with a passing slap,
Made rickety shutter or shingle flap."

MARCH had gone out like a roaring lion, and April had slipped demurely in, armed with a pot of green paint and a scrubbing brush. There was not much to paint in Cherry Street. A few sparse blades of grass, tenacious of life, clung here and there to curbstone and dooryard; but there was plenty to scrub, and the Spring maid fell to with a will.

In consequence, on this Saturday morning, the water rushed down the gutters in torrents, while at the same time the small denizens of Cherry Street were lifted into the seventh heaven of delight by the sun's showing his jolly face through the clouds and inviting them out to wade. To make their happiness, if possible, more complete, a pine-wood wagon, creaking and groaning under its heavy weight, had turned the corner by Coffey's saloon and was coming up the street. The small Cherryites paused in blissful anticipation to watch its progress, while miniature Niagara cataracts hissed and foamed about their bare legs.

History repeats itself, and they argued with reason that when the driver should reach the end of the block and find it a blind: a street with no outlet, he would be covered with confusion and beat his horses and swear horribly in trying to turn around.

So, as the creaking wagon drew nearer, the youthful Cherryites fled ecstatically through the cold waters for the parquet seats on the curbstone nearest the stage, and waited breathlessly for the rising of the curtain.

But it was decreed that the Pine Wood Dramatic Company was to play to empty seats after all, for round the corner by Coffey's loomed a star of greater magnitude. It was Mr. Schultzsky, landlord and taxpayer of all Cherry Street, with his humped shoulders and rusty silk hat, his raw-boned grey nag and a vehicle popularly known as a "rattle-trap." Not that Mr. Schultzsky was an unusual sight in Cherry Street. Indeed, he dwelt therein, together with a strange little niece for housekeeper, who had come from some far-off heathen land; but rent day, always an interesting event, on this occasion held an added charm from the fact that Tommy Casey had made it known to all whom it might concern that his mother intended on this day to utter such truths to Mr. Schultzsky as would make him tremble on his throne. Therefore, almost before the iron-grey nag had come to a full stop, the bare-legged Cherryites, precipitately deserting the Pine Wood Drama, were gathered in a circle before Mrs. Casey's door awaiting with fearsome ecstasy the promised crack of doom.

The Casey house, in the early history of the city, had been a proud brick mansion of eight rooms, with green blinds, and flower beds outlined in serrated points of red brick. But the street had risen above the level of the yard, leaving the old house like a tombstone on a sunken grave. The old-fashioned porches

were dust-coloured and worm-eaten, the fences fallen away, and the broken window panes and missing slats of the blinds gave it a peculiarly sightless and toothless appearance. Like a faithful friend, the old house shared the fallen fortunes of its early owner, for Mr. Schultzsky had bought it, as he had come into possession of nearly all his real estate, at a tax title sale. Now, as he tied his horse and Tommy Casey heralded his approach, Mrs. Casey with the baby tucked in the curve of one arm turned the bread in the oven, slammed the oven door, whisked the dust off a chair, and waited.

Presently the fickle April sunshine that poured in a broad band through the kitchen door was shadowed, and the landlord stood at the threshold. He did not wish Mrs. Casey a polite good-morning: this was not Mr. Schultzsky's way. Instead, he gave a characteristic little grunt, and opening an overfed pocket book, produced from among others of its kind a monthly rent bill, and extended it without further ceremony.

Mrs. Casey laid the baby in its cradle, brought her knuckles to her hips, and invoking the spirit of a long line of oppression-hating ancestors to her aid, opened the battle.

"Mr. Schultzsky," she began, her soft Irish half-brogue giving no sign of the trembling within, "whin we moved here a year ago, there was promises ye made us that ye've not kep'. The roof is l'akin' worse than it did then,—the overfillin' of a tub in a bad rain,—an' me wit' my man a coachman out late o' nights, havin' to get up out o' me bed wit' the lightnin' flashin' an' lave me wailin' baby to pull a tub up the ladder undher the roof! The windays are out, six of thim,—not that we done it, mind you,—the floors are broke,—an' of the whole eight rooms, foive of thim are not fit for a dacint fam'ly to live in, wit' the paint all gone an' the paper smoky an' palin' off. The front gate was gone before we ever came here, an' now the fince posts has rotted off an' the fince is down. Here is Spring clanin' on me, an' what can I do wit' a place like this? Fifteen dollars a month, Mr. Schultzsky, we're payin' ye, an' the money waitin' for ye as reg'lar as the month comes around. But now what I have say to ye is this: we'll move the week out onless ye paper an' paint the five rooms,"—Mrs. Casey counted the items off on her fingers,—"put in a new kitchen floor, fix the six windays, patch the roof, set up the fince, an' put a bit o' paint on the porches. It's not that our place is any worse than the others in Cherry Street, but the Caseys bein' good pay, an' knowin' it, is goin' to have things a bit different, that's all."

Mr. Schultzsky considered. He took off his silk hat, carefully wiped his forehead with a red cotton handkerchief, and replaced the antiquated head-covering. He shuffled his rusty boots and thrust his hands down into the pockets of his shining coat to gain time. His small black eyes glittered craftily as he mentally added, subtracted, and struck off the fraction of a per cent. Then he made his decision, but he said not a word. He took from the recesses of his capacious coat-tails a red card, some tacks and a small hammer. Without another look at Mrs. Casey, and with as little regard for the group of awe-stricken children, he passed around the house to the front door and tacked up the sign.

Number 12 Cherry Street was for rent.

CHAPTER II

MISS BILLY

“A girl who has so many wilful ways
She would have caused Job’s patience to forsake him,
Yet is so rich in all that's girlhood’s praise,
Did Job himself upon her goodness gaze,
A little better she would surely make him.”

MISS Billy was an early riser. She opened her eyes to the sunshine and pure morning air as naturally as a flower. So it came about that at six o'clock of a May morning she was skipping downstairs before any other member of the family had stirred, with a quick springing step that was peculiarly her own. Miss Billy's sprightly locomotion was a constant source of amusement to her family, and of mortification to Miss Billy herself. "It is my misfortune, not my fault," she was wont to say when her brother Theodore described her gait as "galumphing," and her sister Beatrice pleaded with her to study physical culture; "and it's like struggling against Fate to attempt to walk with discretion. I suppose it is merely an 'evening-up' of things, and that Providence gave it to me to offset my lovely disposition."

But upon this Spring morning Miss Billy's unfortunate step did not seem to be weighing upon her mind. The glow and thrill of the golden day opening before her sent the warm blood coursing quickly through her veins, and the world seemed made for youth and beauty and happiness. Miss Billy sang softly to herself as she opened the side door and stepped out into the garden.

"The garden" was a small shady spot on the north side of the tall city house. It was not a promising place for flowers, but Miss Billy's love for growing things was great, and by dint of much urging and encouragement on her part, a few spring flowers eked out a precarious existence in the barren soil. Above the flower plot was an open bedroom window. Miss Billy's eyes twinkled wickedly, and her soft song changed into the whistled notes of a schoolboy's call. There was a sound as of two bare feet coming down with a thud in the room above her, and in a moment a tall form in gay scarlet pajamas, with a towsled head atop, appeared at the window.

"That you, Tom?" whispered a sleepy voice.

Miss Billy looked up from the flowers. The violets themselves were not more demure than her own face.

"Oh, hello, Ted!" she said; "Tom's not here."

"Well, who is?"

"No one but me."

"But I heard some one whistle."

"That was me too," said Miss Billy frankly and ungrammatically.

"Well, I must say that your joke—I suppose you intended it for a joke—is extremely crude," replied her

brother crossly.

"You said last night that I couldn't get you out of bed," jeered Miss Billy. "Beside, I wanted you to see the sun rise. I have seen two myself, this morning."

"Well you may now have the pleasure of seeing one go back to bed," said Theodore. He left the window abruptly, and Miss Billy heard him thump his pillow impatiently as she turned again to the garden.

"Ted never has much sense of humour at six o'clock in the morning," she said, passing her loving hands under the tender green leaves. "Six blossoms! These are the most modest violets I ever saw in my life. They're afraid to show their heads above the ground. At this rate it won't take me long to prepare my floral creation for the breakfast table."

There was still no sign of life about the house when she came back with the flowers, and Miss Billy wondered, as she put the purple blossoms in a clear green glass bowl, what she should do next.

"I might practise half an hour," she said to herself, looking in at the piano as she stood in the hall door,—

> "'Practicing's good for a good little girl,
> It makes her nose straight and it makes her hair curl,'

"—but my hair is too curly now, and if my nose was straight, people would expect more of me. Beside, I hate to waste this lovely morning on scaly exercises. I believe I'll write a letter to Margaret. I feel in the right mood to talk to her."

The same peculiar quick-step carried Miss Billy to her desk, where, dipping a battered-looking pen into the ink, she began:—

"1902 ASHURST PLACE.

"*Dearly Beloved*:

"I suppose you're just going to bed over in Cologne, with your hair done up in those funny little curl papers of yours. Or don't they wear curl papers in 'furrin' countries? What kind of a place is Cologne, anyway? Do they make Lundborg's Extract there, and *are* the exports 'grain, grapes and beet sugar,' as the geography used to say?

"Over here in America I am waiting for Maggie to arise and prepare our frugal repast, which, from sundry soaked articles I saw last night, I suspect will mainly consist of fish-balls. Maggie feels that she has not lived in vain when she succeeds in getting Theodore to refuse codfish-balls. It is the only article of food that he does not fall upon with fork and glee.

"Speaking of balls, I went to one last night, only to look on, however. Beatrice's dancing class gave one of their monthly parties, and I was one of the smaller fry (notice the connection between fry and codfish-balls) whom they deigned to invite. Those pale-drab Blanchard girls were conducting the services—(it's well that father doesn't inspect my correspondence)—so it's a wonder that I 'got in' at all, for they detest me. I might add that the tender sentiment is entirely reciprocated on my part! I wore my old grey crêpe, and looked superbly magnificent, as of course you know, Peggy dear. Tom Furnis, who was there, also occupying a modest and retiring seat in the rear, mentioned to me during the evening that as soon as you came home we would have a dancing class of our own. So you see how everything hangs on your return.

"Nothing has happened at 'Miss Peabody's Select School for Young Ladies' since you left except that I have received numerous invitations to select little functions in the office, and a choice assortment of demerit marks, and carried home the following report last month:

'Miss Lee's immediate improvement in deportment is earnestly desired by

'Her instructor and sincere friend,

'Loutilda Amesbury Peabody.'

"I did rather dread to take it home, for my report last month was not exactly suggestive of propriety and discretion, and I hate to have my people disappointed in me. But when I showed it to father he said, 'Some improvement this month, I see, little daughter.' Wasn't that just like him?

"Myrtle Blanchard has organised a new school club. It is composed of the Select Six, who devote themselves to French conversation and marshmallows once a week, and call themselves the Salon. Not to be outdone, Madge Freer and I have started a rival organisation for ping-pong and fun. We call ourselves the Saloon. We'll have to change the name, though, as soon as Miss Loutilda discovers its existence. Can't you imagine her horror!

"Your description of your Paris gowns did not make me at all envious, my dear. For Miss Edwards has been making me three new dresses and revising several old editions. I have a new brown suit, a scarlet foulard, and a fearful and wonderful creation of purple lawn embroidered with pale yellow celery leaves, which I shall wear to every church supper this year. And I shall come to the station to meet you next September arrayed like Solomon in all his glory, in all three of the gowns, in order that you may be properly impressed, and not outshine me in splendour.

"I am afraid you won't find, in this frivolous and dressy letter, the things you most want to know. As usual, my pen has run to nonsense. But if you were looking for food for reflection and nourishment of the soul, you would have come to father for it, instead of me. Sometimes, Peggy dear, I am ashamed of my aimless, careless existence of eating, sleeping and skylarking, as Theodore would say. There are moments of temporary aberration in my life when I wish I could help some one else. If I were like you, now, who carry sweetness and serenity with you, I wouldn't mourn, but alas, I am only

"Your unregenerate but loyal friend,

"MISS BILLY.

"P.S.

"My suspicions about the codfish were well founded. A strong and influential odour of breakfast has pushed the door open for me, and I know it is time for me to descend into the lower regions. Good-by, dear."

Miss Billy laid down her pen with a sigh of relief, and wiped her ink-stained fingers. She had just lighted her little candle and produced a stick of wax to seal the letter, when a deafening noise filled the hall below. At the foot of the stairs stood her brother Theodore, armed with a Chinese gong, upon which he was performing with great vigour. His boyish tenor rang out clearly:

"Arise, arise, ye maiden fair,
Golden eyes and azure hair,
Hear your loved one's plaintive calls,
Come to me and codfish-balls.

"Breakfast waits, Miss Billy. Did you go back to bed again?"

The family had assembled at breakfast when the younger daughter entered the dining room, smiling over Theodore's improvised poetry. "Mother looks more sober than usual," she thought, as she drew the sweet face to her own.

"Morning, motherie."

"Good-morning, little daughter. You left your footprints behind you. The violets are lovely."

There was an unsealed letter at Miss Billy's plate, and similar envelopes for Beatrice and Theodore. Miss Billy opened hers first. It ran:

"You are requested to be present at a family meeting to be held in the study this morning at eight o'clock. Important matters to be discussed. By order of

"FATHER."

The letters excited no comment. They were an every-day occurrence in the Lee family. If Theodore's unruly tongue caused mischief, or his love of a joke was carried too far, a delicate reminder at his plate was sure to call attention to the fact. If Beatrice stopped for a moment to exchange compliments with her old enemy, Personal Vanity, or did she pursue an uneven tenor of fault-finding for a time, a letter was the means of bringing her to order. But upon Miss Billy,—energetic, wideawake Miss Billy,—who was always doing things, and doing them hard, the missives descended like flocks of white doves. These letters did not all contain censure. Some of them were so full of praise as to make their owner blush with an embarrassment of happiness, but one could never be sure beforehand of the contents.

Theodore was already in the study when Miss Billy entered. He was stretched out on the floor with two sofa pillows under his head and four under his feet.

"Something's up," he remarked sagely.

"Yes," assented Miss Billy, "and that something had better come down. Take the pillows from under your feet, Ted."

"Well, I hope the bank hasn't gone busted, or father's colt been killed, or anything happened to our government bonds, or Maggie given warning, or Beatrice plighted her troth to a peanut man. Billy, what a savage you are! What are pillows for, I'd like to know. I should think you'd be afraid to treat me as you do. Some day the worm will turn, and when a belted earl comes to seek your hand I'll expose your tyranny."

"Theodore," said Miss Billy, standing very tall and straight, and with a serious expression on her usually merry face,—"stop joking and listen. Something *is* up, really. I've been waiting for it to come out for a month. Of course I don't know exactly what it is, but I have my suspicions, and every time I have looked at mother's sober face I have felt guilty to be happy. Now Ted, if what I think turns out to be true, I have some plans to propose, and you must stand by me in them."

"What do you mean?" asked Theodore, with a boy's disgust for mystery. "You're talking in parables, Miss Billy."

"I mean that I'm sure father's lost some money," answered his sister hurriedly. "I haven't time to explain now; the whole family will be here in a minute. But when the rest come in, I want you to say exactly

what I say, and uphold me in every way."

"Well, I like that," gasped Theodore, raising himself on one elbow. "Say exactly what you say! What do you intend to say, and why should I play follow-my-leader? No ma'am, I sign no paper before reading it."

"But you must," insisted Miss Billy hurriedly. "You'll understand why later. You've got to pull with me. I know how Beatrice will act, and I'll need an ally the minute her tears begin to flow. I depend upon you to stand by me, as you always do. Come Ted, promise. Quick, they're coming."

"Your blandishments have the usual telling effect," groaned Theodore. "I promise,—I suppose I've got to. But you're responsible for all the evil that may come from my yielding to temptation." He collapsed among the pillows, and had just succeeded in covering his tall form with a slumber robe when the rest of the family entered.

CHAPTER III

WAYS AND MEANS

"And a chorus arose from the judicial bench,
Our learned decision is this,—to retrench."

THE minister's study was furnished with an eye to comfort rather than beauty. And yet there was something better than mere artistic loveliness in the long room, lined with book shelves, and with every evidence of use in the well worn couch, the comfortable easy chairs, and the desk piled with papers. Mrs. Lee's mending basket stood on the table, Beatrice's burnt-wood outfit was on the low shelf, Theodore's ping-pong table occupied one corner, and the windows were full of Miss Billy's plants. The room was the heart of the house. Here the poor and the sick of the minister's people came for help in their trouble. Here the children came for advice and encouragement in their childish griefs and hopes. Here the forlorn were cheered, and the sinful comforted; and here reigned the abiding spirit of the home.

Between the two south windows, in the post of honour in the room, hung the sermon board. It was a small slate blackboard, which had been glorified quite beyond its usual educational purposes. Bittersweet branches garlanded its sides, and hung their scarlet berries over its edges, and Miss Billy's best ivy stood on a bracket beneath. The board was an institution in the household. Here one was sure to find a bit of helpful verse, a timely quotation or an inspiring text, for all of the minister's sermons were not delivered from the pulpit. To-day it bore a longer message than usual,—Miss Billy's face grew soft as she read:

"To be honest, to be kind; to earn a little, and to spend less; to make upon the whole a family happier by his presence; to renounce where that shall be necessary and not to be embittered; to keep a few friends, but these without capitulation, above all, on the same grim conditions, to keep friends with himself—here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude and delicacy."

"Father is that man if one lives," she thought tenderly. "And mother is brave, too, but they will need help,—both of them."

"The meeting will come to order," said Mr. Lee, the lines of his face smoothing themselves out, as they always did when he looked at his assembled family.

"Whom can he mean?" asked Theodore innocently, stretching out his long legs in front of Beatrice.

"He means you," said Beatrice sharply. "Do get up, Theodore. You are so awkward-looking, there on the floor."

"Why is Beatrice like this meeting?" murmured Theodore, disentangling his legs from the afghan. "Because she has come to order. Sweet sister, in you a magnificent slave driver was ruined! Thus I fly to obey thy mandate."

Miss Billy gazed at him with meaning eyebrows as he established another cozy nest with robe and pillows on the broad couch. "I do hope he won't act up," she thought anxiously, settling herself in a position of attention.

"Our business is a little unpleasant this morning," began Mr. Lee with a poor little imitation of a smile that did not deceive at least one member of the party. "Mother and I had decided to keep it from you as long as possible, but later developments have made it necessary to—to——"

"It is right that we should know the unpleasant things as well as the pleasant," put in Miss Billy stoutly. "We are not children. Beatrice is eighteen, and Theodore and I shall be sixteen next June."

"There are disasters much worse than losing money," went on Mr. Lee. "Still I find myself perplexed and worried over financial troubles, and I feel that I need the sound judgment of every member of the family. Through the dishonesty of managing officers we have lost $15,000 which was invested in the Eastern Building and Loan Association. The loss cuts off from this source an annual income of $900, which of course we would not feel very keenly so long as my present salary continued. But yesterday I received a letter from the church trustees, worded as delicately and graciously as possible, but regretting that heavy indebtedness obliges them to reduce the pastor's salary $500 a year, for at least two years. This leaves us $1400 a year poorer than we have been before."

"Let me go to work," begged Theodore. "I'd like to."

"We thought of that," said Mrs. Lee with an approving glance at her son; "but it is not the most practical way when we consider the future. You must finish school first, Theodore."

Beatrice had been applying her handkerchief to her eyes in a ladylike manner. "Can't you do something to those horrid men?" she inquired pathetically. "Sue them, or have them arrested, or something?"

"Perhaps the law may reach them," said Mr. Lee, "but I have my doubts about the results. I fear there is little to recover. I think our wisest policy is to forget what is gone, and to conform to the situation as quickly as possible. Miss Billy, we haven't heard from you."

"Hurry up, Miss Billy. You may never be *invited* to talk again in the whole course of your existence," said her irrepressible brother.

Miss Billy roused from a brown study. "We are living in a large house—sixty dollars a month," she suggested.

"We couldn't live in a smaller one," put in Beatrice tearfully.

"Oh, yes we could," returned Miss Billy, with a glance at Theodore.

"Of course we could," echoed Theodore firmly.

"There can be a reduction made in the matter of servants," said Mrs. Lee. "We are paying Maggie fifteen dollars and Charlotte twelve. I have talked with Maggie already. She will stay with us for twelve, and we can let Charlotte go."

Beatrice looked more woe-begone than before, but Miss Billy's face showed no disappointment. "I think that is the very best thing to do under the circumstances," she said decidedly. "The servant girl problem is solved."

"On the contrary, it has just begun," said Beatrice with a rueful glance at her pretty hands.

"Miss Peabody will have to lose the brightest star in her galaxy. She draws too heavily upon our modest income. I shall join Ted at the High School," went on Miss Billy bravely.

"Are you sure that is wise?" asked Mrs. Lee. "Private school has been one of my pet extravagances. I should like to keep you with your old schoolmates as long as possible, for it will make a great change in your life to leave them."

"But think of the saving in expense," urged Miss Billy.

Beatrice gave a little shudder. "I hate to think of your going to that dirty, noisy place—filled with Germans and germs——"

"And Polish and poles, and Russians and rushes——" put in Theodore.

"The course is certainly good, and the instructors excellent," said the minister. "If Miss Billy could be reconciled to the public schools for a year, I think we could manage college for her later." There was a wistfulness in his tones that touched Miss Billy's tender heart.

"Of course I could," she said stoutly. "I'd rather go, daddy dear."

"As to the matter of houses," went on Mr. Lee, "I am afraid that we shall have to leave our present home. Your mother and I spent yesterday in looking at vacant houses. Just now there seem to be few unoccupied, but we finally found one that we thought might do."

"Where is it?" inquired Beatrice.

"In the lower part of the town," answered Mr. Lee. "It is not in an aristocratic neighbourhood, but it seems as though it might be quite comfortable, after a few repairs are made, and the rent is ridiculously low. The house in Number 12 Cherry Street."

"Cherry Street!" cried Beatrice, involuntarily clapping her palms over her eyes. "Oh, papa, how *can* you. We *can't* live in Cherry Street."

"Oh, yes we can," said Miss Billy promptly.

"Yes we can," chimed in Theodore.

"What kind of a house is it?" asked Miss Billy, in a practical and business-like tone.

Mr. Lee looked puzzled. "Well, I know it's small," he said, "and I have an indistinct remembrance of brown paint. Ask your mother; I fear I haven't much memory for details. Perhaps if I had I should have watched my investment a little closer," he added sadly.

"The house is small, and is brown too—in spots," said Mrs. Lee. "It has four rooms downstairs and four bedrooms above. There is no water or gas in the house, which is of course a great inconvenience; and the place is in shabby condition; but the landlord has promised to make the necessary repairs and to paint the house for us."

"He probably realises what it will mean to Cherry Street in a social way, to have us for tenants," said Beatrice.

"You bet he does," said Theodore. "In his mind's eye he can probably see Cherry Street ablaze with light and aglow with colour. He can see number twelve filled with diamond tiaras and cut glass pianos and freezers full of ice cream, to signify that a function is on. He can see the Caseys and the Raffertys and the Rosenbaums riding by in their coupés and splendour to attend the house warming given by the

minister. Thus will 'sassiety' be brought into Cherry Street by the new tenants."

"Is there a yard?" asked Miss Billy diplomatically, for Beatrice was flushing angrily under her brother's ridicule. "Yes, there is a large yard," said Mrs. Lee. "The sod is almost worn off, but a little grass seed and care will work wonders there."

"Good!" exclaimed Miss Billy. "Then perhaps, sometime in the dim and misty future I may have a garden of my own. I would be willing to move for that alone."

"And I can raise vegetables and keep chickens," said Theodore.

"And rise at daybreak to plough and harrow, and to feed and water your stock," slyly added Miss Billy.

"Yes, my dear," retorted Theodore with true brotherly inflection, "and without the aid of an alarm clock either. When I hear a combination of an avalanche and an ice wagon going downstairs I shall say to myself: 'Time to get up. There goes Miss Billy.'"

"How about the furniture?" inquired Miss Billy, ignoring her brother's thrust. "It seems to me that what now abundantly fills fourteen rooms will overflow in eight. I have a hazy recollection of a philosophical principle about two objects not being able to occupy the same place at the same time. How shall we manage to get our great-grandmother's colossal bed into an eight by ten bedroom? Can you put allopathic furniture into a homœopathic house, mother mine?"

"That is another thing to be considered," said Mrs. Lee. "Of course we shall not be able to take all of our furniture. I think we must plan to move only what is most necessary——"

"The bath tub and the Bible," interrupted Theodore.

"Yes," said his mother, smiling in spite of herself at the boy's merry way of treating a serious subject. "And the books for your father, and the piano for Beatrice——"

"And the couch for Theodore," suggested Miss Billy.

"And the watering pot for Miss Billy," retorted Theodore.

"And the sewing machine for me," went on Mrs. Lee, "and the range for Maggie, and the pictures and other comforts for us all. We must make Number 12 Cherry Street into a home as soon as possible. We shall store the rest, not sell it, for I feel sure that we shall need it all some day."

Miss Billy slid down on to the floor between her mother and father, and patted a hand of each. "Don't look so solemncholy," she said fondly; "moving isn't the worst thing in the world. We have been so comfortable all our lives that we don't know what it is to deprive ourselves of anything. And perhaps it will be a good lesson for us all—at least for Beatrice and Ted and me. Beside, I must confess that I already begin to feel a yearning to take possession of my new home. I believe that I shall like Number 12 Cherry Street."

Mrs. Lee smiled dubiously. "It is not a very pleasant house," she said. "And we shall not live as comfortably as we have been living since you can remember. You must not raise your hopes so high that a fall will hurt them. There are many things about the new life that will be hard and uncomfortable and distasteful, and we shall long for our pretty home and our old neighbours many, many times. But we are all together, and we have health and hope, which surely ought to bring happiness. And home is always home, no matter where the house is."

"But what will become of our friends?" said Beatrice, in a suspiciously teary tone. "None of them will come to visit us on Cherry Street."

"Let them stay away then," advised Miss Billy.

"By all means let them stay away," echoed Theodore airily.

"But they won't stay away," said Mrs. Lee, putting her arm tenderly about her elder daughter. "The ones we love best will find us, dear, even at Number 12 Cherry Street."

Miss Billy turned to the sermon board.

"... To renounce where that shall be necessary and not to be embittered...." Her eyes went from her mother's sweet smile to her father's serene face.

"They don't *need* any help," she decided.

C H A P T E R I V

NEW NEIGHBOURS

“Now she’s cast off her bonny shoon
Made o’ gilded leather,
And she’s put on her Hieland brogues
To skip amang the heather:
And she’s cast off her bonny goon
Made o’ the silk and satin,
And she’s put on a tartan plaid
To row amang the bracken.”

MARIE JEAN HENNESY was making her morning toilet. The sun was five hours high, but for this Marie Jean cared nothing at all. She finished tying a row of white rags in her hair that gave her a peculiarly spiked and bristling appearance, and then buttoned her velveteen waist here and there, leaving a button over at the top and bringing a mateless buttonhole out at the bottom.

Marie Jean's room was in a state of disorder that suggested its owner had participated in late festivities the night before. A pair of soiled white slippers were flung under the bed, together with a pair of down-trodden shoes which Marie Jean, on her knees, was even now seeking. A white gown that had lost much of its pristine purity was thrown over a chair, while belts, ribbons, soap, corset-strings, fans, handkerchiefs, powder-puffs and stockings occupied conspicuous positions on the furniture or on the floor. Every drawer had its mouth shut tight on a large mouthful of its possessions,—and the dresser top was so filled with combs, brushes, perfumery, thread, safety pins, matches, hair-pins and bottles, that the only wonder was it could hold it all.

But the rapt expression of Marie Jean Hennesy's face betokened that her thoughts were far away from the mean subject of household disorder. She was studying the programme of the ball of the night before, at which she had danced every number. To be sure, her slippers had hurt her, and she had endured an uncomfortable pinch in the waist, but murmurs of admiration on every side had told her she "looked lovely." She hummed a bit of a waltz tune and glanced coquettishly in the mirror as the remembrance of her conquests flowed warmly back to her: then discovering that by the morning light she was looking sallow, she rescued the jar of Maiden's Blush from under the bureau and deftly applied it to her cheeks.

That Marie Jean's breakfast waited, no one with a nose could deny. The smoky fat of much fried bacon festooned the air in graceful clouds, alluring the tardy maid kitchenward. It swung riotously in the folds of the parlour curtains and luxuriated on the best plush parlour chairs, while the essence of boiled coffee stalked boldly upstairs, calling loudly, "Come down, Marie Jean,—we've waited for hours."

In the kitchen there were evidences that Mrs. Hennesy had been scrubbing. A pail of scrubbing water stood on the floor, and the brush and soap lay beside. A sharp boundary line, also, divided the clean from the unclean. But the floor was quite dry, and Mrs. Hennesy's apron was nearly dry, and she was so absorbed in looking out of the window at the people that were moving in next door that she did not hear Marie Jean enter the kitchen. When she became aware of her presence she gave an apologetic little cough, and bustled about the stove serving the delayed breakfast.

"If I'd knowed ye was up, Mary Jane," she said deprecatingly, "I'd've fixed somethin' else fer yer breakfast. I've been kapin' this since sivin o'clock an' it's near noon now. What kind of a time was there at the dance last night? I tried to kape awake till ye come in, but I was that tired wit' the ironin' I dropped off in spite of mesilf. Did ye enjoy yerself?"

"Oh, fairly well," drawled Marie Jean, toying languidly with her cup and spoon: there was a wrinkle

between the eyes, and a haughty uplifting of the chin that warned Mrs. Hennesy that as ever after a ball, Marie Jean was cross, and she hastened to change the subject to impersonal topics.

"The new folks is movin' in next door," she volunteered: "they must have been doin' a lot of repairs. The painters an' paper hangers has just got their ladders an' things moved out, an' the carpets is bein' nailed down now: they've kep' the racket up since sivin o'clock this mornin'. Sure now, I do be missin' Mrs. Casey more an' more ivery day,—a-comin' in an' out wit' a pail, or the coal hod, or the potatay peelin's, an' always stoppin' to spake neighbourly like, over the fince. It's hard to see new folks movin' in."

"What manner of people are they?" inquired Marie Jean, leaning languidly back in her chair.

"Oh, they seem good enough folks," returned Mrs. Hennesy, "but they'll niver be what Mrs. Casey was,—that frindly an' obligin' she was that she'd lind the head off her shoulders. The man looks like wan of thim Protestant praists,—an' the woman's young lookin', all but her white hair. There's two girls about yer age, Mary Jane, an' a boy, besides a hired girl. They've got good furniture,—nothin' so good as our plush parlour set, though,—an' I don't much care for the colour of their carpets. Still, I guess they'll be good neighbours enough."

Marie Jean pushed back her breakfast and stepped over to the window. The scene that met her eyes was an animated one. Workmen were lifting furniture and household goods out of a heavy moving van and hurrying them into the house. A tall gentlemen in a silk hat was beating a rug in the back yard. A stout-armed maid was suspended out of an upper story window with pail, brushes and fluttering rags, engaged in cleaning the glass. A tall broad-shouldered youth in a baggy pair of overalls was digging out the rotten fenceposts: and last of all, a girl in a gingham dress, a girl with flushed face and wavy hair tucked up under an old hat, was energetically raking the yard and gathering the dirt into little piles.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Marie Jean Hennesy. Then she added haughtily, "I shall not call upon them."

CHAPTER V

A LOAD OF DIRT

> “Nor knowest thou what argument
> Thy life to thy neighbour’s creed hath lent.”

IT was Saturday morning and a great hammering was going on in the Hennesy yard. Whenever the hammering ceased for a moment, a boyish whistle took its place. It was a cheerful whistle and an infectious one. The minister in his study was working up his sermon for Sunday morning. It was called "The Simple Life," but it was growing all too complex and knotty, and the minister leaned back in his chair with relaxed muscles and contemplated his work with a troubled air. The whistle burst into song and floated in through the window with the sunshine:

> "Ev'ry Sunday, down to her home we go,—
> All the girls and all the boys they love her so:
> Always jolly,—heart that is true, I know,—
> She's the sunshine of Paradise Al-ley."

The minister sat straight again and dipped his pen in the ink. Life was so simple after all. "Love ye one another and keep my commandments." The sermon smoothed itself out and flowed evenly along to the tune of "Paradise Alley."

Miss Billy was on the side of the house stirring the virgin soil with an axe preparatory to putting in her pansies. Theodore came jauntily out of the door, his hat and shoes well brushed and shaking out a clean handkerchief.

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Billy reproachfully, "I thought you were going to help me to-day."

"Would that I could!" said Theodore, waving the handkerchief gracefully at her. "But Mistress Billy, gaze upon my shoes."

"I see they are your patent leathers. I should think you would wear your others Saturday."

"That's the beginning of the story," said Theodore, lowering his voice confidentially. "These are my all,—and hush, Billy,—these are busted. I've got exactly nineteen cents in the world, but I've recorded a vow to buy my own clothes and schoolbooks, hereafter. I'll not ask father for another cent of money. Therefore I go hence to seek a job."

"Well, go on then, and good luck to you," said Miss Billy, taking up the axe again. "But this soil—" and she made a savage chop at the ground with each word, "—is—just—all—stones—and—clay."

As Theodore departed, the hammering in the Hennesy yard waned and the melody lifted again.

> "When Maguire's little lad had the fever so bad
> That no one would dare to go near him,
> This maiden so brave said, 'Perhaps I can save,
> At least I can comfort and cheer him.'"

Miss Billy's face brightened, and throwing down the axe she went to the fence and stood looking over at

the panorama which unfolded itself.

The Hennesy house, in years past, had evidently done duty as a store. It was a dilapidated old brick building, set crookedly on its lot, with two disproportionately large front windows in the lower half, and a big deep-set front door. Above the second story the house terminated abruptly in a flat tin roof without ornamentation of any kind. In the rear of the lot there were a barn, a wagon shed, and a chicken house, all shedding various coats and colours of whitewash, and all in the last stages of disrepair. Scattered promiscuously about the yard were broken wagon wheels, wood-racks, chickens, pine wood, and old tin cans,—while a lame horse, a boy, a leaning pump, a dilapidated clothes-reel and two wobbly puppies further graced the scene. Grass, flower or shrub there was none,—but there was mud,—plenty of it; mud wet and mud dried. And the deep ruts in the ground, together with the broken wheels lying around, and the strong barny smell pervading the place, gave testimony that Mr. Hennesy followed "teaming" for a living.

The hammering was beginning again when Miss Billy spoke:

"What are you making?" she asked pleasantly.

John Thomas Hennesy looked up. As to turned up nose and freckles, he much resembled Marie Jean, but his mouth was firmer. He gave Miss Billy a long penetrating stare, and the colour did not begin to creep into his cheeks until after he had dropped his head.

"I'm fixin' a new kennel fer my dog," he said shamefacedly.

"Goodness!" thought Miss Billy, "he's older than I thought. He must be at least fifteen." Then she went on aloud, "I wonder if it is a white bulldog with a black spot on its back?"

"Yes,—that's her," answered the boy, looking up with quick interest.

"Then she's been calling on me a week steadily, for bones," declared Miss Billy gaily. "I'm so glad to know her."

John Thomas took up his hammer again and began to search irresolutely through his nail box at his side, but Miss Billy stood her ground with her arms behind her and her chin resting on the top of the fence.

"He's wishing I would go," she thought, "but I am not going. I shall stand right here until I get courage enough to ask him to come over and help me with the pansy bed. But it's awkward,—awfully awkward. I can't think of a thing to say."

"I liked your dog the moment I saw her," she went on: "I owned one like her three years ago."

John Thomas, having found his nail, hesitated no longer, but began to drive it into the frame with ringing strokes. Miss Billy waited until the hammering subsided.

"A friend of father's gave her to me when she was a little bow-legged puppy. She was a beautiful dog, white, with nice burnt sienna spots, and a lovely disposition. I named her Serena on account of that disposition. But she had the funniest looking tail, with three queer kind of corkscrews in it." (Miss Billy illustrated with a whirl of her forefinger that was entirely lost upon John Thomas.)

"But I didn't care,—I loved Serena, if her tail did go in a corkscrew. But one summer my cousin, who was studying medicine, came to visit us, and Serena's tail seemed to bother him an awful lot. He kept making remarks about it all the time, and said it had been broken and ought to come off. So at last I

consented."

John Thomas had picked out another nail, but now for the first time began to display interest in the story, and looked up from his work as Miss Billy went on:

"We gave her chloroform: I held the sponge myself while my cousin performed the operation. It didn't hurt her at all, and she really seemed handsomer without the tail, but a sorry sequel followed. I went to Philadelphia soon after, and while I was there my uncle took me to a dog show. I never before saw so many beautiful dogs and among them was one almost exactly like my Serena, and with three twists in her tail."

"'You have a dog just like mine,' I said to the man who owned her.

"'Has your dog a tail like this?' he asked.

"I told him 'yes,' and was just going on to explain to him how I had had it operated upon when he interrupted me. 'Then it was a good breed,' he said. 'That tail is the mark of a fine dog. Each curl in the tail adds fifteen dollars to the value of the animal.'"

Miss Billy's eyes looked solemnly down into John Thomas's widely distended orbs: "Think of it!" she said: "Forty-five dollars cut off at one fell swoop! I can assure you my cousin has never heard the last of it."

"Where's the dog now?"

"Dead. Run over by a street car. I cried for months. I don't expect to ever own another like Serena."

John Thomas drew a long breath, and turning to his box began a search for a leather hinge.

Miss Billy felt herself distinctly dismissed, but she still held on to the fence.

"I want to ask you,—" she began again,—"what I can do about a flower bed that's just all stones. I'm trying to dig it, you know."

"Take the stones out," said John Thomas laconically.

"But there wouldn't be anything left! It's *all* stones!"

"Maybe it's just a fillin', an' there's good dirt underneath," suggested the boy.

"Won't you please step over and look at it?" entreated Miss Billy: so John Thomas, with open reluctance, laid down his hammer and nails, and climbed as awkwardly as possible over the fence.

"If it's fillin' it goes awful deep," he decided, after a quarter of an hour of hard work. "Nothin' can't grow in here."

"But I must have some flowers!" wailed Miss Billy, in despair. "Why, that was one reason that I wanted to come and live on Cherry Street,—because there was a big yard here, you know."

John Thomas was regarding the rocky flower bed musingly. "I'll tell you what I can do," he said at last. "There's more than a foot of this out already,—an' I'll go down to where my father has got some teams hauling dirt from a cellar they're digging, an' I'll bring you a load, if you'd like it. It's good black dirt."

"John Thomas Hennesy!" exclaimed Miss Billy, clasping her hands in ecstasy: "A load,—*a whole load*,—of black dirt?"

"Why sure," said John Thomas, reddening with pleasure. "They're just dumping it into an old quarry."

"A whole load of black dirt!" said Miss Billy, musingly. "I'll have pansies, and sweet-peas, and geraniums, and I'll sow grass seed on the bad places in the yard. John Thomas Hennesy, you're a prize!"

That evening, as the Lee family assembled around the tea-table, the minister said cheerily, "I had a peculiar thing to be thankful for to-day. It was the song and whistle of a light-hearted boy. It helped me with my sermon."

"I have to be thankful for a daughter who took the cake baking off my hands and helped me with the mending," said Mrs. Lee, smiling over at Beatrice.

"I am thankful for John Thomas Hennesy and black dirt!" declared Miss Billy fervently.

"And I," wound up Theodore proudly, "for getting a steady Saturday job, taking care of Brown's soda fountain, at a dollar a day!"

CHAPTER VI

NEXT DOOR

“Of course I’m interested in my neighbour: Why shouldn’t I be? That fence between us only whets my appetite.”

AT the same hour the Hennesy family were having six o'clock dinner in the kitchen. Mrs. Hennesy, Marie Jean and John Thomas were already seated at the table, but Mr. Hennesy still stood with his head enveloped in the roller towel at the kitchen sink.

"An' ye say her name is Billy, John Thomas?" inquired Mrs. Hennesy, serving the corned beef and cabbage with a liberal hand. "Sure now, it must be a mistake. Maybe it's Milly ye're afther hearin' thim call her. Sure an' Billy's no girl's name at all."

"It's Billy," persisted John Thomas, between mouthfuls of cabbage. "Her real name is Wilhelmina, but it was so long and hard they've called her Miss Billy ever since she was a little girl. The Miss is always in front of it though. That makes it feminoine."

"Saints have mercy!" ejaculated Mrs. Hennesy. "Wilhelmina! It must be Indian! Mary Jane, you ought to be thankful for your own name, that you ought, afther hearin' this wan."

"An' not be thryin' to copy afther thim Frinch quanes that got their heads cut off fer their impidence," put in Mr. Hennesy, emerging from the towel with every hair on end, and seating himself at the table with the scant ceremony of rolling down his shirt sleeves.

Marie Jean gave her little head a toss, which was lost upon Mr. Hennesy as he helped himself to a piece of corned beef from the platter. "Was she glad to get the dirt, John Thomas?" he inquired good-naturedly.

"Glad!" said John Thomas. "Well, she was that tickled you'd 'a' thought it was gold. She tuk me into the house to make lemonade, an' then upstairs to show me her brother's room. My, yo' ought to see it, Mary Jane."

"I s'pose it's just grand," said Marie Jean condescendingly.

"It's all right," replied John Thomas, "an' yo' bet I wisht I had one just like it. There ain't no carpets ner tidies ner fixins. The floor is painted kind o' red, an' the walls are red with all kinds of posters stuck 'round. An' there's a border at the top made out of sheet music with pictures on. My, it's great. Right in the middle of the room there's a punchin' bag strung,—an' he's got dumb bells, an' boxin' gloves, an' there's a case of all kinds of money, some big name she called it, but it means, anyway, collectin' coins. He uses two hair brushes at a time, without any handles to 'em, an' there's a brush fer his teeth, an' a brush fer his hands, an' one fer his nails, an' a thing to polish his nails, an' two brushes fer his shoes, an' one fer his hat, an' another fer his clo'es."

Mr. Hennesy's jaw had dropped lower and lower during this recital. Now he closed his mouth with an effort and looked fixedly at his son.

"John Thomas," he said warningly, "you kape away from that loonytick. Moind me, they're thryin' to take up his moind wid brushes an' punchin' bags, but this kind is cunnin' as foxes, an' there'll be mischief in the end. Moind now, what I say."

"Why, pa," expostulated Marie Jean, with a giggle, "he ain't out of his mind."

"He is," insisted Mr. Hennesy stoutly. "Av coorse he is. Wid a brush fer his hands, an' a brush fer his nails, an' another fer his teeth, an' two widout handles fer his hair, an' wan fer his clo'es an' two fer his shoes an' another fer his hat! Av coorse he is, an' there takin' up his moind wid brushes. Moind what I say."

"Don't expose yer iggerence, Mr. Hennesy," put in his wife good-naturedly. "People uses all thim brushes nowadays."

"Well thin, if he ain't crazy, what kind of work does he be doin' to nade all thim brushes to kape clean,—can ye answer me thot, Mrs. Hennesy?"

John Thomas gracefully turned the conversation. "She give me this," he said, putting his hand in his pocket and extracting something wrapped in tissue paper. "She said she had two others an' had been thinkin' of puttin' this one in the box fer the sufferin' savages, an' would I take it just to remember how we worked together over the flower bed. So then I tuk it."

"What do it be for?" inquired Mr. Hennesy, eyeing the strange object with suspicion.

"It's a nail file, to grind off yer finger nails,—if they grow long enough," answered John Thomas, regarding his own broken nails meditatively. "It's silver, too," he added.

Mr. Hennesy sniffed. "I'll not be borryin' it," he observed. "I'm not nadin' a file to kape me own nails short. The rocks I do be handlin' iv'ry day, John Thomas, seems to be all that's required."

Marie Jean's silvery laugh tinkled on the air as John Thomas returned the file to his pocket and passed his plate for more cabbage.

"Miss Billy's all right, anyhow," he went on, addressing his conversation to Marie Jean, for the laugh rankled. "She ain't ashamed if her name is Wilhelmina, or even Miss Billy: an' she don't have no big bushy frizzes coverin' up her ears, an' she don't wear feathers in her hat. She told me so herself."

Marie Jean's laugh tinkled again, and she rose from the table. She did not offer to help her mother wash the dishes, but swept into the hall and took her hat down from the rack, preparatory to going down town. It was a large black hat, heavy with buckles and plumes. She adjusted it coquettishly on her head so that one plume hung directly over her eyes, and took down her gloves.

The vision that gazed back at her from the hall glass was certainly an entrancing one, but Marie Jean lingered for an experiment. She lifted the heavy hair off her ears, tucked it up out of sight, and holding back the waving plumes, gazed again. Then with a shrug of her shoulders, she let hair and plumes fall, and swept out of the house.

On the other side of Number 12 Cherry Street Mrs. Canary was seated on the doorstep with the Baby

and the Other Baby in her lap.

It had been a hard day for Mrs. Canary, for there had been an unusual amount of deferred mending and cleaning as a grand round up for the Sabbath. But now that the supper was over, she felt at liberty to draw her first breath in the cool Spring air, while her oldest daughter, Holly Belle, assisted by Ginevra, commonly known as "Jinny," cleared away the remains of the evening meal.

On the sidewalk in front of the house, Launcelot and Fridoline were quarrelling over a catapult, while little Mike, sitting on the gate post, was adding his shrill voice to the general tumult. Mrs. Canary, who was a great lover of romance and revelled in the lurid pages of the *Hearthside Companion* and kindred publications was responsible for the high-sounding names of her children from Holly Belle to Fridoline. When little Mike had arrived on the scene, however, Policeman Canary had put his foot down on the cherished proposition to name the boy Lorenzo.

"You've done yer duty by all the rest of 'em," he said, "an' you've named 'em a-plenty. Their own father has to call 'em 'say' when he speaks to 'em. This one'll be Mike." And Mike he was.

Owing to this difference of opinion between the heads of the household, the two latest arrivals were still known as the "Baby," and the "Other Baby." But Mrs. Canary, in spite of her romantic tendencies and slip-shod ways, was a loving wife and mother, and had done her easy-going best to make her husband and children comfortable. Years of poverty and toil and trouble had not destroyed the zest of living for her, nor altered her naturally sweet disposition.

Mrs. Canary hushed the two babies upon her breast, and rocked slowly back and forth, making an improvised cradle of her body.

Night came late in Cherry Street during the month of May, but the dusk of the evening already enveloped the tiny porch. The night wind blew in coldly across the lake. But Mrs. Canary, oblivious to the chill in the air and the growing darkness, continued to read aloud, in her eager absorption, from a folded paper held above the children:

"'Two gleam-ing eyes looked out from the thick-et upon the moonlit path, where the beautiful Lady Gab-ri-ell-e paced to and fro with her lover. The moonlight shone full upon her robe of shimmering satin, thickly en-crusted with pearls, and sparkled in the diamonds that looped her fair tresses. Lionel Mont-fort bent ten-der-ly over her. Burning love was written in every line of his handsome face, and all thoughts of future en-grand-dise-ment were forgotten for the nonce. "Darling," he murmured, "I have found my affinity, and nothing shall come between us. Let my Lady mother rave,—nothing now shall per-suade me to marry the countess."

"'At this juncture there ap-peared upon the Lady Gab-ri-ell-e's beautiful face a look of hor-ror that her lover never for-got. "Treachery!" she cried, and pointed to the thicket. Her lover's eyes followed her out-stretched finger,—but too late. A burst of flame leaped from the thicket, two terri-bul shrieks rang out on the night air——'"

So intent upon the fate of the Lady Gabrielle was she, that she did not hear, above the noise of the dish washing and the quarrelling children, a genuine shriek that did ring out upon the night air. It was not until little Mike pulled her gown with an excited exclamation, that she came back to the world of reality.

"What's that you say?" she said.

Mike repeated his remark:

"Launkelot hitted a man wiv his catter pole."

Mrs. Canary beamed with pride. "Launkelot always was a accurate shot," she said fondly.

At that moment the young marksman appeared at the gate. He was shrieking at the top of his healthy young lungs, and was being hurried along the ground by means of a strong arm which had united itself with his ear. At the other end of the arm was a tall, fierce old man, carrying a muddy top-hat in one hand, and hurrying his victim along with the other. The rest of the hastily summoned Canary flock brought up the rear of the procession.

Mrs. Canary laid the two babies behind the door where they could not be stepped upon in the melee, and faced the enemy boldly.

"What's the matter here?" she inquired fiercely. "Let go that boy. What's he done, I want to know?"

"I will haf' the law on him already!" said the old man. His face was fairly purple with rage and his voice shook so that the words were hardly intelligible.

"Leave go of him!" commanded Mrs. Canary, with spirit. Then her voice changed as she recognised the man before her. "Oh," she said, in a milder tone, "it's you, is it? Launkelot didn't go to hurt ye, I'm sure. Leave go the boy, an' let him tell about it."

The old man seemed not to hear her mollifying words.

"He hung on to my buggy," he said, in angry tones, "unt when I tell him to 'get off,' he answer me back. I lick him behind mit my whip, unt he shoot me in the headt mit his snap gun——"

"That wasn't the way it happened," said a clear voice above them.

The excited little group glanced up quickly. A young girl stood looking over the fence,—a girl in a white gown, with soft hair that shone like copper in the lamplight.

"Excuse me for interrupting," she said, "but I couldn't help hearing your conversation, and I want to tell you the whole story. I saw you drive past, and the robe was hanging out of your buggy. This little boy,—his name is Launcelot, isn't it?—ran out to put it in. You called to him not to hang on, and he answered that he was only putting in your robe for you. Without stopping to listen, you struck him with your whip. It was a mean and cruel thing to do. Then he did shoot at you with his catapult, but you can't blame him for that! I should have done it myself if you had struck me."

The old man stood gazing uneasily from one to the other during this recital. He loosened his grasp of the boy with a muttered growl.

"Why didn't you talk louder then?" he said to the astonished Launcelot.

An embarrassed silence fell upon the little group. The old man seemed dazed by the unexpected turn affairs had taken. He stared off into space, and shifted his weight from one foot to the other without finding further words. Then he cast a hurried glance at the girl standing above him, and shuffled off into the growing darkness.

Mrs. Canary caught the young sharpshooter to her breast.

"Ma's little hero-ine," she said fondly. "That's what ye get fer doin' good to that old sarpint. But you was

cleared all right, wasn't ye? Thank the lady, Launkelot."

"Launkelot" dug his bare foot into the floor, and murmured a few words that might be interpreted as an expression of gratitude.

"He is thankful, though bashful at the present moment," explained Mrs. Canary gratefully. "He ain't usened to havin' young ladies in white dresses, with hair of tarnished gold, springin' out of the dark like flamin' seruphims to defend him."

"Oh, I happened to be sitting on this side of the shelf, and I couldn't help hearing what was said," answered the girl merrily.

"The shelf, is it?" asked Mrs. Canary, looking puzzled.

The girl laughed. "The piazza,—the porch, I mean. We call it the shelf over here, because it's only about wide enough to set a pan of milk on. We're your new neighbours, you know."

"Well, it's glad I am to meet you," said Mrs. Canary heartily. "Fridoline, be sure the babies' fingers ain't in that crack when you lean against that door. We're glad to make your acquaintance and thankful fer your defence of us: ain't we, Launkelot? You see I couldn't rise in defence of my own innercent blood as swift as usual—I was that surprised at finding out who it was he had hitten. It was bold of you to talk that way to his face,—the old villain!"

"Why, whom do you mean?" asked Miss Billy.

"That was Mr. Schultzsky, the landlord," said Mrs. Canary.

CHAPTER VII

TRIALS

"Oh, how full of briars is this working day world."

MISS BILLY had broken her shoe-string. There was not another in the house and the clock pointed half past eight of a school morning.

"If you're ready," said Theodore, putting his head in the door, "I'll walk to school with you. I have something to tell you."

"I'm not ready, and don't expect to be," said Miss Billy crossly, giving the lace a pull and breaking it again. "There now, it can never be tied. I shan't go to school at all this morning, so there!"

Beatrice was shaking the pillows at the open window. "Why Wilhelmina Lee!" she exclaimed,—"what a temper! How do you ever expect to get through the world if the breaking of a shoe-string upsets you?"

"Oh, it's all very well for you to moralise," retorted Miss Billy, trying to repair the offending lacing, "you who have nothing to do but stay at home and play lady, or do a little dusting. Look at me,—going to school every day, taking two music lessons a week, 'way back in my Latin, and those geraniums are not set out yet and it's going to rain this morning. It's enough to make any one wish to die."

"We've no time for a funeral this morning," said Mrs. Lee, bustling cheerily into the room. "Beatrice, I shall have to ask you to wash the breakfast dishes. Maggie's toothache is worse, and she is getting ready to go to the dentist. I promised her that I would make the pudding and put the bread into the pans."

"Dear me," scolded Beatrice; "I was just going to sweep my room. I can't put it off. Maggie has toothache rather too frequently, I think, and dishwater just ruins my hands!"

"Well, of all the howling dervishes this morning!" said Theodore in the hall. "Miss Billy, come along if you're ready, and there'll be one less."

The minister stood in the doorway. He held Miss Billy long enough to rub a finger gently over the pucker between her eyes.

"It's a brand new day, daughter," he said lovingly. "It's not fair to handicap it at the start with a frown."

"I have troubles of my own," said Theodore gloomily, as they jogged off to school together. "I've worked three Saturdays at Brown's, beside Decoration day, and though I haven't drawn a cent of the money, there is only forty cents coming to me."

Miss Billy stopped short, and her books fell to the ground.

"I'd like to know what kind of arithmetic you call that!" she said, staring.

"It's an example in profit and loss, and mainly loss," said Theodore grimly. "Don't breathe it, Sis,—but treats have done it."

"Treats!" echoed Miss Billy. "You don't mean to say you have spent three dollars and sixty cents in treats, in that length of time!"

"It's awful when you come to look it squarely in the face," acknowledged Theodore. "But the girls come in,—and they expect it,—and what is a fellow to do?"

"It's horrid of them, anyhow! And I'll cut their acquaintance,—every one of them,—when I find out who they are!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Theodore haughtily. "I'll fight my own battles, if you please."

"Three dollars and sixty cents! If I had it in plants!" upbraided Miss Billy.

"Three dollars and sixty cents! If I had it in shoes!" mourned Theodore.

The wrinkles disappeared from between Miss Billy's eyes and she laughed outright. "It's funny, anyhow," she declared. "And you're in an awful position. I don't see how you are going to wriggle out of it now. The girls have such confidence in you by this time,—and Brown's sodas are the best in town, if they do come high."

Theodore whistled through his closed teeth. "Laugh away, Miss Billy. Add every grain of discomfort you can. But I'll wriggle out of it sooner than you think. The one thing that worries me is the fear that I'll have to put my hand down into father's pocket for my new shoes—for that's what it amounts to. Of course I can pay him back in a few weeks, but I hate to ask him for it just now."

"I'll lend you my Christmas gold piece,—I'd love to, Ted."

"Well, I should say not. I haven't come to the place yet where I borrow from girls. And these shoes will be sandals before I borrow from father, either. But you're a good fellow, Miss Billy."

Miss Billy's face beamed, and she gave her brother's arm an affectionate squeeze as they parted at the school door. "Every dark cloud has a silver lining," she whispered comfortingly.

"I wish my pocket had," responded Theodore gloomily. "Good-bye. Look out you don't flunk in your Latin to-day."

The rain that had threatened all day held off, and Miss Billy hurried home at four o'clock to plant her geraniums. Beatrice, looking very cool and pretty in a blue dimity gown, stopped her in the hall and drew her into the dining room.

"I'm glad you've come," she whispered. "The Blanchard girls are in the parlour making a farewell call before leaving for Europe. I want you to go in and entertain them while I get the Apollinaris water out of the refrigerator for a pine-apple frappé. Be nice and polite, dear, and shake hands with them. And do be careful what you say. Don't tell them how many rooms there are in the house, or how much rent we pay, or hint at economy in any way. Run along now,—there's a good sister."

"I can't," objected Miss Billy. "I don't like those Blanchard girls, and I have to set my plants out."

"Oh, please," begged Beatrice. "You must. They'll see everything if they are left so long alone. Tuck

your hair-pins in and hurry along,—there's a dear."

Very reluctantly Miss Billy made her way to the parlour. There was a rustle of silk skirts as the Blanchard girls rose to greet her. "How do you do?" said Miss Billy, in her best manner, making her voice and outstretched hand as cordial as possible.

"So glad to find you in," drawled Miss Maude, with a shade of condescension in her manner. "We rode miles trying to find the place,—we had forgotten your address, you know,—and when we did find it,—what do you suppose?—it is the strangest coincidence,—why, Casey, our coachman, don't you know, moved out of this very house in April."

"Well now, maybe that wasn't malice," thought Miss Billy hotly. "But I promised Beatrice, so I'll go right on making myself amiable." "Yes?" she said aloud coolly. "Mrs. Canary has told me a great deal about the Caseys, but of course I never thought of connecting them with your John Casey. Indeed we've been so busy getting settled—that sounds like coffee grounds, doesn't it?—and we've had so many of our friends dropping in on us daily, that we haven't had time to think at all."

"Have you heard," lisped Miss Blanche, "that the Van Courtlands are intending to join their daughter in Cologne, next month? We did so wish we might sail with them, but Mr. Van Courtland thought we had better not defer our plans, as his time was so uncertain. Have they called lately?"

"Well, I can't truthfully say they called, for Mrs. Van Courtland brought a gingham apron with her when she came and helped mother arrange the silver and china, and Mr. Van Courtland spaded half my flower-beds for me. He used to be a farmer, you know, before he was a banker."

The young ladies of fashion exchanged glances of surprise. When Miss Maude spoke again there was trace of warmth in her manner.

"You are quite cosily situated here; are you at all lonesome for the old home in Ashurst Place?"

"Well," said Miss Billy frankly, "I miss the bath-tub most awfully," and the next moment could have bitten out her tongue. "That's the first glaring indiscretion," she thought despairingly, "and there'll be more if Beatrice doesn't hurry with that frappé."

Miss Blanche smiled encouragingly. "Do you know," she confided, "father thinks it was a great mistake, your moving here. He says he thinks your father's position as rector of St. John's demanded an entirely different course. Father says there are at least a dozen men in the church that would have tided your affairs over. But ministers are seldom good business men, and I suppose your father is no exception to the rule. How does your dear mother bear up under it?"

"Under what?" asked Miss Billy. "You mean moving to Cherry Street? Oh, mother is brave. She's like the young lady of Norway:

> "Who casually sat in a doorway:
> When the door squeezed her flat
> She exclaimed 'What of that?'
> This courageous young lady of Norway.

"Beside, Miss Blanche, you are labouring under a delusion. I assure you we enjoy our new home in Cherry Street."

"Oh, it's very pleasant," conceded Miss Blanche hastily. "By the way, what has become of that lovely

little *étagère* of yours? I missed it the moment I stepped into the room."

Miss Billy threw patience and prudence to the winds. "It's stored in a storing-room," she declared. "The last time I saw it, there was a bird-cage and a foot-stool on top of it. We had to pack a good deal of our furniture. We haven't fourteen rooms now, you understand."

"Good-afternoon, ladies," said a voice in the doorway. It was Theodore, looking very mischievous. "I'm sorry I can't shake hands with you,—but I've been giving a hand in the erection of the conservatory on the south side—a fad of Miss Billy's."

Miss Billy gasped. A conservatory! He must mean the glass sash he had been fitting over the pansy bed!

"We've been at no end of trouble and expense since we moved here," went on Theodore. "You see it is the first 'place' we have really had. There's one hundred and fifty feet of ground here. Beatrice has planned for a sort of Southern California verandah from which she can serve afternoon teas, and mother wants the lawn wired with electricity for social purposes."

"How delightful," murmured the guests, looking a bit uncertain, while Miss Billy sat rigidly upright, trying in vain to catch Theodore's eye. Certainly, her mother had said that at the breakfast table, but it had been a joke, nothing more.

"I have a leaning toward an up-to-date stable and riding ponies, myself," went on Theodore airily, and looking at Miss Billy now as if to say: "No word of untruth in that!" "Still, there's the college grind to consider,—I shall be qualified next year, you know,—and a fellow gets precious little time for recreation."

"Are you—ah—still at Brown's drug store?" interpolated Miss Maude, looking mystified. "Sister Myrtle has spoken of seeing you there. The child thinks so much of you."

"And of ice-cream sodas," thought Theodore grimly. "Yes," he said aloud, "Mr. Brown wanted me to help him out on Saturdays for a little while. He's in the church, you know. But I shall give it up when vacation comes."

Beatrice was entering with a dainty tray. "You'll pardon the delay, won't you?" she said sweetly, as she offered the sparkling glasses. "You'll have some, Miss Billy?"

"No, I thank you," said Miss Billy, with heightened colour and a hasty manner. "If you will excuse me I'll see to my geraniums. Good-afternoon."

"And I," said Theodore, "shall betake myself to the bathroom to remove the unseemly signs of toil. I'll take my frappé with me, Bea,—may I? Good-bye, girls. Write me from gay Paree when you reach there," and Theodore followed Miss Billy into the dining room.

"Well?" he asked interrogatively, as he seated himself on a corner of the table to sip his frappé.

"It's far from well, Theodore Lee," snapped Miss Billy reproachfully, undecided as to whether to laugh or cry. "You told awful, unmitigated falsehoods! You know you did!"

“I have a leaning toward an up-to-date stable and riding ponies, myself.”

"My dear sister, I only enlarged upon truthful topics in a brilliant and society-like way. Beside, I had to hand them back the small change. I never in my life heard such stilted, patronising talk as they were giving you. And when they jumped on father,—well, that decided it. Good land, Sis,—what's the matter with this frappé!"

"Don't drink it if you don't like it," said Miss Billy, refusing to be friendly.

"Like it! Why it's awful! It tastes like spruce gum and carbolic acid and chloroform all mixed up. Smell it, Miss Billy."

"When you were little, mother used to wash your mouth with soap when you told falsehoods. It is probably some hazy recollection of that which is perverting your taste."

Theodore was taking another cautious sip. "It's a little like sauerkraut, but it has the effervescence of soda water. It's the most curious stuff I ever tasted."

Miss Billy unbent sufficiently to put her nose to the glass.

"Why, it smells like yeast," she said wonderingly.

"*That's* what it is," said Theodore, snapping his fingers triumphantly. "I knew it wasn't chloroform or carbolic, but I couldn't just name it. It's yeast!"

"But what can yeast be doing in the frappé?" questioned Miss Billy unbelievingly. Then as a sudden light broke upon her, she exclaimed, "Oh, Ted,—Beatrice must have gotten the yeast bottle instead of the Apollinaris water!—and for the Blanchard girls of all others! They are in there trying to drink it now. What shall we do?"

"Nothing," said Theodore decidedly,—"they've drank it by this time. You watch how they will 'rise' to go. 'Sweets to the sweet,'—likewise yeast to the yeasty. Dear girls,—how airily their feet will spurn the pave. And it will do Miss Blanche good! She's as flat as an oatmeal cracker."

"Theodore, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" Miss Billy was almost crying now. "Think of father when he hears all this,—and Beatrice's feelings,—and the awful remarks they will make about us——"

"If you are looking for your handkerchief, you're sitting on it," said Theodore soberly. "Don't cry, Billy. I am going to father now and make a clean breast of the whole affair. There's no use staying to console Beatrice about the yeast. She'll have fifty sporadic spasms!"—and he strode from the room.

"Oh, dear,—this has been a day of nothing but troubles," sighed Miss Billy, wiping her eyes,—"and I lost my temper the very first thing over a shoe-lace, and everything has gone crooked ever since. Poor Beatrice,—she tries to be so nice and ladylike,—and I know she will never get over this,—*never*!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE STORY OF HORATIUS

“They held a council, standing
Before the river gate.
Short time was there, ye well may guess
For musing or debate.
Out spake the council roundly
‘The bridge must straight go down,
For since Janiculum is lost,
Naught else can save the town.’”

THE sun had risen early to get a good start, and at nine o'clock was shining down with relentless fury on Cherry Street. Theodore was wont to declare that the rain was wetter and the dew damper and the sun hotter on this street than in any other portion of the inhabited globe; and it was certainly true that the rows of small houses, unprotected by trees or awnings, did look unusually torrid in the broad glare of light.

In the Lee house the shutters were closed and the green shades drawn down, but the heat seemed to radiate from the painted door, on the south porch, where a small red-headed boy was trying to ring the door bell. It was a long reach for the little arms, and after raising himself so high upon his tiptoes that he nearly lost his balance, he gave up the attempt, and thumped lustily upon the panel. There was no response. He waited a moment, his small bare feet squirming about uneasily upon the hot floor, and then rapped a second time and a third. At the last knock another small red-roofed boy appeared over the top of the board fence that separated the Canary yard from the Lee home.

"Try it again," advised the owner of Red Head Number Two.

"I have tried it lots of agains."

"But ye ain't makin' no noise. Mis' Lee might be deef. Kick 'er a little."

"Ain't got no shoes on," protested the little messenger.

He had just raised his hand for a final rap when the door was opened, and Mrs. Lee appeared upon the threshold.

"Good-morning, Fridoline," she said pleasantly.

Fridoline delivered himself of his message speedily: "Ma's got an indisposhun and says please will you come over to wunst."

"What is the matter with your mother?" inquired Mrs. Lee, puzzled by the queer statement.

"She's got rigours," responded Red Head Number One.

"And her stummick's upset," added Red Head Number Two, across the fence.

Mrs. Lee was already untying her apron. "Tell her I'll be over there right away," she said, as she left the door to explain her absence to Beatrice.

Miss Billy, coming in from an errand some time afterward, stopped short at the sight of Holly Belle, who, with tear-stained cheeks and red eyes, was emptying ashes into the street.

"Why what's the matter, Holly Belle?" she asked.

"Ma's sick," said Holly Belle, rubbing her sleeve across her eyes.

"Very sick?"

"I dunno. I guess she's pretty bad. She had highstericks this morning at dawn, but she wouldn't let me call your mother until she was sure by the smell of the coffee that you'd had your breakfast. I don't know what's the matter with her. I gave her all the kinds of medicine we had in the house, and there ain't none of 'em that seemed to do her a mite of good. Your ma's here now, and she seems to be a little better. But you know I heard the death tick in the wall, and I'm scaret to death." And the tears rose again.

"What's a death tick?" inquired Miss Billy, putting her arm reassuringly about the sorrowing little girl.

"It's a bug in the wall that always ticks when people are goin' to—to die," sobbed Holly Belle.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Miss Billy. "You don't believe that nonsense, do you? I can't think your mother is as sick as that, anyway. Is the doctor there?"

Holly Belle shook her head.

"Well then!" said Miss Billy triumphantly. "Mother would have had him there long ago if your mother was dangerously ill. She'll probably be all right in a day or two. Now cheer up, Holly Belle, and tell me what there is that I can do for you."

A loud shriek from the back of the house answered the question.

"It's the children," said Holly Belle. "They've been going on that way for an hour steady. I could make 'em behave, if it wasn't for Launkelot. But he's got up a new game, an' of course they're all bound to see it through."

"May I borrow them for a while?" asked Miss Billy.

Holly Belle gave a visible sigh of relief. "I sh'd say you can," she responded heartily.

There was no difficulty in finding the children, for a great hubbub in the back yard indicated that the small Canarys were having a decidedly hilarious and enlivening time during their mother's enforced retirement. Miss Billy went around the walk to the back of the Lee house, and surveyed her charges over the fence.

The back yard in the Canary premises had been partitioned off into little squares by means of a boot-heel which had grooved the hard dirt. In the first square sat Ginevra

> "With raven ringlets unconfined,
> And blowing madly in the wind."

Her face and arms and bare legs were adorned with fantastic designs in coloured chalk; and a frayed rope, attached by means of a safety-pin to the hem of her dress, gave unmistakable evidence of a tail. She was waving her arms violently, and giving vent to wild, unearthly screams. Fridoline, in the next compartment, had wound his fat body with coils of rope, which he was painstakingly chewing. Tightly wedged into a dishpan in the third square, sat "Mixy" Murphy, in an airy costume of shirt and drawers; while Mike, the Baby, and the Other Baby were crawling about the ground in an abandonment of delight.

Miss Billy waited for a lull in the proceedings. When it came she made haste to ask:

"What in the world is all this?"

Launcelot, who was strutting through the enclosure, armed with a whip, took it upon himself to reply:

"We're havin' a street carnival," he explained. "Fridoline is playin' he's Bosco the Snake Eater, Jinny's Minnie the Wild Girl, an' Mixy is the High Diver. You have to pay five pins to see him dive from the fence to the tank. The Kids is camels, an' I'm boss o' the hull outfit. Frid, jest show Miss Billy how much rope you can swaller without gettin' black in the face."

Miss Billy hastened to prevent the heroic exhibition.

"Oh, no," she said, "you needn't mind, Friddie. I've got something else for you to do. Wouldn't you all like to come over and see me this morning?"

The Street Carnival Company gave vent to a wild yell of delight.

"Well, pick up your things first," cautioned Miss Billy, "and then come quietly so you won't disturb your mother. I'll be waiting for you."

"Picking up the things" was accomplished with neatness and dispatch, and five little Canarys, two Murphys, and Leo and Pius Coffee, picked up on the way, were seated in the shade of the Lee woodshed in solemn and somewhat embarrassed silence when Miss Billy appeared to welcome her guests. Her arms were full of scarlet and white reeds, a big basket swung from one arm, and a mysterious-looking cloth bag from the other. She glanced around the augmented group with such surprise that Launcelot felt called upon to explain.

"I brung 'em along," he said, with a lordly motion of his hand toward the unexpected guests. "If you was goin' to give us something to eat, an' there ain't enough to go round, they kin go home."

"Launkelot!" exclaimed Jinny.

"The Levis wanted to come, too," said Fridoline. "Their mother's goin' to the sin an' God."

"Goosey!" jeered Launcelot. "Sin an' God! He means synagogue. That's one on you, Frid."

Fridoline, moved to tears by his brother's taunts, set up such a wrathful outcry that Miss Billy began to fear for her reputation as a hostess.

"Never mind, Friddie," she said consolingly. "You may go and invite the Levi children to come now, if you want to. Hurry up, and we'll have something nice planned for you when you get back." Miss Billy deposited her burden on the ground. "I'm going to let you all help with my work," she said,—"every one of you, from Ginevra down to the Baby. These long strips are for baskets, and I'm going to show you how to make them for yourselves. The big basket is for a pattern, and the bag is full of flower seeds for the little ones to sort out, and take home for gardens of their own."

The guests fell upon the work with great alacrity.

"Wait a minute," protested Miss Billy. "We're not ready yet. We must always wash our hands before we begin to work."

This announcement dampened the ardour of the children.

"Them as sorts seeds don't need to wash, do they?" asked Fridoline.

"I choose to sort seeds!" came in a chorus from the smaller guests.

"Oh, yes, they do," responded Miss Billy decidedly. "Why not, Friddie?"

"Dirt makes seeds grow," argued Fridoline.

"Not till they're in the ground," returned the hostess. "We'll all go up to the back porch to wash. I've got some cool water up there."

A thorough and painstaking scrubbing took place on the back porch, for Jinny, who was appointed Inspector of Persons, performed her duties with impartial vigour and energy. Her delight in the toilet soap was extreme, and she modestly requested a bit of it "to take home for a sample."

Beatrice and Maggie watched the proceedings with disgust, and the children themselves did not look upon the occasion as one of unalloyed pleasure; but Miss Billy was resolute, and the entire throng were at least clean down to their necks and up to their wrists when they took their places on the grass.

Fridoline surveyed his hands gloomily. "If I'd 'a' known I had ter wash I wouldn't have came," he said.

"Friddie!" exclaimed Ginevra reproachfully.

"Fridoline doesn't think that's a very nice way to treat company," laughed Miss Billy. "He's like Horatius.

> "'And see,' he cried, 'the welcome,
> Fair guests, that waits you here!'"

"What's Hurashus?" asked Ginevra shyly.

"Oh, he's a man in a story," responded Miss Billy. "The man who fought so bravely."

Launcelot pricked up his ears at the word "fought." "Who did he fight? Tell us about him," he commanded.

"Yes, please do," begged Ginevra.

"As soon as I get your work started for you," promised Miss Billy.

Her nimble fingers wove the bright reeds in and out for a few minutes. The children gathered near; Ginevra settled The Baby on her lap, and pulled the Other Baby close to her side. Then slowly and carefully, as if to find words suitable for her childish audience, Miss Billy began:

"It happened many years ago when Rome was the biggest and the finest and the richest city in the world, that there was a brave soldier and gallant knight named Lars Porsena."

"Two of 'em?" questioned Fridoline.

"No, only one. Lars Porsena was the soldier and the knight too. And because he was angry at one of the Romans he decided to lead a great army against them. You know what an army is?"

"Hoh! I sh'd say so! Soldiers!" replied Launcelot.

"I know *you* do," said Miss Billy, "but I thought the other children might not know."

"I'll explain it to 'em," said Launcelot loftily. "Kids, you remember Buffalo Bill's men that was to the

Shooting Park?"

The little Canarys loudly proclaimed the excellence of their memory.

"Well, them's soldiers," said Launcelot. "Go on, Miss Billy."

"So he gathered his troops from everywhere—north and south and east and west—till he had a great big army. There were ten thousand horsemen, and twenty thousand men on foot. And with music playing and banners flying and the sunlight glittering on their spears, they set off towards Rome with Lars Porsena at the head."

"Just like Buff'lo Bill," said Fridoline.

"Sh," admonished Ginevra.

"Sh, yourself," retorted Fridoline defiantly.

"In the meantime the Romans knew they were coming, and they went down by the river gate to talk it over. The Tiber river flowed by the city, and there was a big bridge——"

"How bid?" inquired little Mike.

"I don't know how big, but it was very large indeed," went on Miss Billy, "so that the enemy had to cross it before they could get into the city. And there they waited until a messenger came flying up the hill to tell them that Lars Porsena and his great army were very near. They looked over to the west, and they saw the great cloud of dust coming up from the road."

"What was they goin' to do?" asked Jinny.

"Why bust into the city an' kill the Romans," answered Launcelot. "Go on, Miss Billy."

"And the Romans knew that they would kill them all if they once got across the bridge," continued the historian. "And they hurriedly talked about what it was best to do. And then one of them had a plan. He was a wonderfully brave and noble man, and he wasn't afraid of anything."

"Bet he'd been scaret of a hyena," said the oldest Levi boy.

"He was not afraid of anything. And this was his plan. He told the Romans that he would get two other men and alone they would cross the bridge and meet the enemy on the other side. This is what he said:

> "'Hew down the bridge, sir consul,
> With all the speed ye may;
> I, with two more to help me
> Will hold the foe in bay,—
> In yon straight path a thousand
> May well be stopped by three.
> Now who will stand on either hand
> And keep the bridge with me?'"

"Did they talk in po'try?" inquired Ginevra with awe.

"Sometimes," said Miss Billy. "And two other brave men volunteered to go with him. The three crossed the bridge together, and boldly faced the army on the other side." The little Canarys showed signs of restlessness, and the young Murphys yawned, so Miss Billy went on hastily. "Of course there was a terrible battle there. Every time a man set foot on the bridge Horatius or one of his companions would

rush upon him and slay him."

"How? With a spearer?" inquired Aaron Levi with interest.

The story teller nodded. "Till seven men lay dead, and Horatius himself was wounded in the shoulder. The big army stood still. Their chief was killed, and no soldier dared to move. Meanwhile the Romans had been at work at the bridge with their axes, and it hung over the river just ready to fall. The three men knew they must get back before it dropped. They started, but the great bridge cracked, and went down with a crash like thunder. Two of the men had time to get over safely, but Horatius was too late. He had darted back, and stood all alone on the bank of the river, with the enemy before him, and the broad river behind him. And then what do you think he did?"

"Speared 'em some more," suggested Aaron Levi.

"Died fer his country," quavered Ginevra.

"Waded home," said Fridoline.

"No, the water was too deep. He sheathed his sword, and faint and weary though he was, plunged into the raging flood."

"Gee!" ejaculated Launcelot.

"The water was very high, his armour was heavy, and his wound pained him severely; but he kept on. The blood ran down upon his hands, and he sank again and again; but he still swam on till not only the Romans, but the great army on the other bank cheered him and prayed for him.

"And when he finally clambered out upon the shore, weary and weak and worn, they shouted and clapped their hands for very joy." The ringing words came involuntarily to Miss Billy's lips:

> "'And still his name sounds stirring
> Unto the men of Rome,
> As the trumpet-blast that cries to them
> To charge the Volscian home;
> And wives still pray to Juno
> For boys with hearts as bold
> As his who kept the bridge so well
> In the brave days of old.'"

"And the big army didn't ever get in?" asked Frank Murphy.

"No, never."

"What did they do to Horashuss?" inquired Launcelot.

"Oh, they gave him a lot of land, for his own, and they set up a great statue of him."

"I seen statutes already," said Abraham Levi.

"You did not," said his brother Aaron.

"I did too. I seen 'em in the summitery."

"He means the grave yard," explained Ginevra. "Aaron, stop hitting your little brother."

"He's a-swipin' my seeds," complained Aaron.

"Well, stop it, both of you," said Launcelot decidedly, "or Miss Billy'll give you a bat in the eye."

The threat had the desired effect. Both of the little Levis subsided suddenly.

"You may take the seeds home and plant them yourselves," said Miss Billy. "There are nasturtiums and petunias to put into a bed and morning glories and flowering beans to train over porches. We'll all have gardens of our own."

"You've got a pretty yard," said Ginevra wistfully.

"It's getting green," responded Miss Billy. "The grass seed is all coming up over the bare spots. Now if you had a green lawn extending to ours, and that shabby old fence between us was down——"

"Why don't you pull it down?" inquired Launcelot.

"I know Mr. Schultzsky would never let me," said Miss Billy. "I wouldn't dare ask him. But it's so old and rotten that some day it will just fall down itself, and then we'll have a barberry hedge there, and the yard will begin to look like something."

"What's a berbarry haige?" inquired Launcelot.

"A nice little row of bushes trimmed evenly, so that it makes a low fence," explained Miss Billy. "Listen, children, some one is calling."

Mrs. Lee, who had come around the walk, smiled down at the little group on the grass, whose full hands and happy faces bore testimony of a pleasant morning. "Your mother will be all right in a day or two," she said, "and Holly Belle wants you to come home for dinner."

The children rose with reluctance.

"Kin we come again?" asked Ginevra wistfully, as she gathered her little charges.

"Of course you can," said Miss Billy. "I'd love to have you here, if you like to come. How would you like to spend two hours with me every Saturday morning?"

"What 'ud we do?" inquired Launcelot.

"Oh, lots of pleasant things: We can sew and read, and play games, and sing. I can find enough for you to do, never fear."

"How much do we have to pay?" inquired Aaron Levi cautiously.

"Not a cent," laughed Miss Billy. "The only price is clean hands and face. We'll meet out here in the yard, and I'll raise children as well as flowers. You'll be my child garden, you see. Come at nine next Saturday, and we'll have another good time."

The children filed happily around the corner of the house, all talking at the same time, but their voices lowered as they passed out of vision. They held a whispered conversation as they passed the rickety fence, Launcelot expressing some iconoclastic sentiments in a husky undertone. They were still whispering as they entered the Canary yard, and edged mysteriously along the side of the house between the porch and the fence.

"It'll be just like playing Horashuss," urged Launcelot.

"But what would Miss Billy think?" asked Ginevra doubtfully.

"You heard what she said. She'd think it was brave!" said Launcelot in his most lordly tones.

"But s'pose some one would see?" quavered Ginevra.

"Aw pshaw! They ain't no one a-goin' to see. And if they do, what then? Go in if you're afraid."

Ginevra hesitated.

"Miss Billy'd like it," went on the tempter. His sister flung prudence to the winds. "I'll help," she said.

Holly Belle's voice rang out impatiently a second time:

"Child-run, din-ner."

"We'll be there in a minute," called Launcelot impatiently. "Now hurry up, kids. Take a-hold, here. No, not so near together. Now, I'm going to count. When I say three, you all pull like the dickens, and then run, lickety split. Get out of the way there, Mike."

The children grasped the rotten palings.

"One—two—three," counted Launcelot.

The little army gave a mighty tug. The rotten wood splintered, split, yielded; the fence fell with a crash, and a sorry mass of decayed boards covered the yard.

The children waited to see no more, but rushed about the house as though old Mr. Schultzsky himself was in their wake.

Launcelot and Ginevra turned at the basement steps to help little Mike, who had fallen upon his face in the stampede. From his place of vantage Launcelot glanced around to see if they were being pursued. There was no one in sight, and all was still.

"Now," said Launcelot boldly, "Miss Billy can have her berbarry haige."

CHAPTER IX

BEATRICE

"And he who wins the fight with Self
Has won the bravest battle."

GOOD-BYE, Miss Billy."

"Good-bye, Beatitude. You're a dear to help me off in this way. I won't forget it in a hurry."

"All rightie. See that you don't."

"And Bea, don't vex your soul over that mending basket. It's only one stitch in nine that saves time, you know."

"I won't, but you'd better make haste; you'll miss the boat."

"A miss wouldn't be as good as a mile then, would it? Good-bye, again. Yes, mother, I *have* a handkerchief. Also a corkscrew for the olives. Also my rubbers. Good-bye, everybody."

Miss Billy was going to a picnic, and in her usual way. The whole house had been in an uproar since six o'clock. There had been a hurried dressing, a hurried breakfast, and a hurried packing of lunch; and it was not until the blue linen suit disappeared around the corner that a lull fell over the home, and the household paused to take breath.

There were still the remains of the preparations for lunch to be cleared away, the study to be made clean, and the disorder which was left in Miss Billy's wake to be remedied. Her sister's work added to her own took Beatrice longer than usual, and it was ten o'clock before she came languidly into the garden with the mending basket under her arm. She tumbled out a large bundle of ragged stockings, and set to work.

It was hot and deserted on Cherry Street. Even in the shade, where Beatrice sat, the air was sultry and close, and the garden seat warm to the touch. The children seemed to have melted away from sidewalk and gutter. The absence of Miss Billy and Theodore had left the place unnaturally dull and forlorn, and the incessant tick-tick of the little creatures in the grass was the only sound that broke the stillness.

Beatrice's thoughts flew with her needle. Last year at this time the whole family were at Gordon's Lake for the season. And it had been such a gay summer. A summer of boating and dancing; of driving and golfing, of pretty clothes, and new friends and good times. A summer of long, jolly, merry days, and of long, cool, restful nights. A summer that seemed made for the merriment that only ended when the last good-byes were said.

And now everybody else was going away; the Seabrookes, and the Van Courtlands and even the Blanchards; and they were to be left at home. It was all right for the rest of the family; Theodore hated "resorts," and Miss Billy never seemed to care for anything so long as she had her beloved books and flowers and children. "But I care," thought Beatrice bitterly, "more than I ever thought I should care for

anything."

It was easy enough to be good when one was happy, when good friends and pleasant times and pretty clothes were one's birthright; but when poverty and hard work was one's portion, when one's clothes were shabby and when one lived on Cherry Street——! A hot tear baptised Theodore's gay striped sock, and Beatrice, forgetful of her age and dignity, put her head down on the garden seat, and like little Cinderella, "let the tears have their way."

The stout, rosy-faced man who came up the front walk and rang the door bell did not look like a fairy godmother, but the most beneficent fairies go about disguised. Beatrice was so busy wiping her eyes that she did not notice his arrival, and as she went bravely back to work she little guessed the surprise that was in store for her. Not even the glad note in her mother's voice when she called her into the house made her suspicious.

The rosy-faced man was leaning up against the door of the study, smiling benignantly at Mr. and Mrs. Lee. He beamed even more delightedly as Beatrice entered.

Mrs. Lee scarcely waited for their greeting. Her eyes shone as she put her hand on her daughter's shoulder, and her voice was very happy as she said:

"Guess, dearie, what Mr. Van Courtland has come for. He wants you to go abroad next week."

The self-possessed Beatrice lost her dignity. She grew rosy with delight and gasped speechlessly for a moment before she ejaculated brokenly:

"Me? To go abroad? Oh, mother!"

That "oh, mother!" settled the matter, Mrs. Lee decided at once that she must go.

"It will not be a very long trip," explained Mr. Van Courtland. "We did not intend to start until later, but that bugbear 'business' stands like a fence between me and the rest of the world. Be thankful, Lee, that you are not a banker. Mrs. Van Courtland and I shall sail on the 16th, land seven days later, and go immediately to Cologne for Margaret. We hope to be in Germany long enough for the Rhine trip, but shall probably sail for home immediately afterwards. We planned to borrow Miss Billy to take with us, but Mrs. Van Courtland says that the sea breezes will be just the thing for Beatrice's pale cheeks. She ought to see you this minute, young lady. You're anything but pale and wan now."

Beatrice did not even notice the compliment. Her brain was moving faster than Mr. Van Courtland's words. Europe, sea breezes, the Rhine! To leave the heat and dust of the city, the shabbiness and noise of Cherry Street, for the enchanting country across the sea. It seemed like a glorious dream of white-capped waves and cool breezes, from which one must wake up to the swarming Canarys and the loud-voiced Hennesys on Cherry Street.

"And if she goes, she goes as our guest. Mrs. Van Courtland dreads the trip, and I confess a lingering longing for a young piece of humanity when I am aboard ship. As for our own Margie,—why she will jump out of her beloved Germany with joy when she sees a glimpse of her home friend. We will consider it a great favour if you'll lend us your girl for a while."

The matter was hurriedly decided. Mrs. Lee looked over at her husband with a quick glance that showed how much motherly love and anxiety for her daughter was at stake. The minister answered with a nod and a smile that seemed to say, "We must manage it."

Mr. Van Courtland departed satisfied, and Beatrice returned to the garden seat to dreamily wind the darning cotton into a snarl, and whisper joyfully to herself, "I am going abroad."

There was a family council after supper that night. Beatrice had rather dreaded to tell Miss Billy the glorious news, feeling that the trip was originally planned for the younger sister, but Miss Billy sternly frowned upon her sister's reticence.

"The idea!" she said scornfully, "of thinking that I should be so mean and small about a thing like this. You would have been delighted if this trip had come to me,"—Beatrice made a small mental reservation —"and it belongs to you anyway. You need it more than I do."

If she felt any disappointment she failed to show it either in action or word, but went on making extravagant plans, and most elaborate suggestions for the trip. She offered to lend Beatrice anything and everything she possessed, from her cut glass vase to her ice cream freezer, and the last thing the elder sister heard that night was a recipe for sea sickness and an idea for making over a travelling suit out of Miss Billy's brown gown.

It was daybreak when Beatrice awoke. The house was very still and quiet, and the light morning breeze blew aside the white curtains at the windows. Beatrice raised herself on one elbow and looked out at the little glimpse of water visible between the high roofs. The sun was rising, away out on the breast of the lake, and each little ruffled wave was touched with a crest of gold.

Beatrice was not often affected by her surroundings, but just now, in the light of her new happiness, the day seemed symbolic of her life, and the sun that gilded the grey waves like the pleasant plan that had made her sombre life glad. Yesterday's grief seemed very far away, and to-day's joy was very near and dear. She clasped her hands, and whispered earnestly: "Help me to deserve it, Lord." The sounds of the two whispered voices which came from the next room did not disturb her, and she lay dreamily happy in her own thoughts, until the sound of her own name aroused her. It was her father's voice that said:

"Well, Beatrice needs it. We must manage it some way."

The girl turned her head, and listened intently as he continued:

"How much money is it going to cost us?"

Mrs. Lee's estimate was not discernible, but her husband's reply betrayed its tenor:

"I wish a hundred dollars came as easily to me now as it did six months ago."

"I don't see how we can do it for any less," said Mrs. Lee. "Bea's wardrobe is scanty, and she will require more clothes than she needs when she is at home. Beside, she will have to have money for incidentals. Mr. Van Courtland is very generous, but we don't want to impose on him, or embarrass Beatrice."

"Oh, no, she can't get along with any less. Still, it will be a little hard to spare just now. I feel our poverty most when it touches the children."

"It *is* a good deal, but I think it's worth the sacrifice. Beatrice has looked white and worn lately, and we can't afford to let her be sick."

"I hadn't noticed it," said Mr. Lee anxiously. "Do you think she's not well?"

"It's heart sickness as much as anything else. Bea has never seemed happy since we moved onto Cherry Street. She misses the old home and the old friends. She was not so easily reconciled as Wilhelmina and Theodore."

"Then I think more than ever that we must manage it. I shall not regret the effort if she comes back physically improved. After that I'll trust the mental and moral indisposition to take care of themselves. Bea is not naturally pessimistic."

"But I don't see exactly how we are to arrange it. We are living so near to our income just now; and I don't know how to economise more closely than I have been doing."

Mr. Lee made a suggestion that Beatrice did not hear, to which his wife replied decidedly:

"No, dear man, you can't get along without that. A minister can't afford to go shabby. We'll find some other way of saving. I can let Maggie go home for a month or two. Beatrice's going away will make the family smaller, and I'm sure Wilhelmina and I could do the housework."

"No indeed." The minister's voice was most emphatic. "That would be extravagant economy. You would be sick in a month. I can spare the money, I'm sure, but I shall have to give up a cherished plan to do it. I hoped to be able to rent a horse and buggy for you two days a week this summer. You don't get enough of out of doors, and it tires you so to walk."

There was a glad little note in Mrs. Lee's reply that went straight to Bea's heart.

"Oh, if that is all!" she exclaimed. "Why John, I'd rather never drive again than to have Beatrice miss this opportunity. It will mean so much to her. Beside, dear, do you think I would enjoy driving around in state while my husband was shabby?"

"No, it doesn't sound like you," said Mr. Lee. "Still, I would like to do it for you," he added wistfully.

"Well, dear, don't say a word to spoil Beatrice's pleasure. She seemed so glad to go! And I think we all would be willing to sacrifice ourselves a little for her sake."

The conversation ended there. The father and mother went back to sleep, and the eavesdropper returned to her pillow with wet eyes. Her soul, as well as her body, was wide awake, and perhaps for the first time in her life, Beatrice realised the beauty and divineness of self sacrifice. In the light of the whispered conversation the melancholy of the day before seemed petty and unworthy, and the girl who sternly choked back the tears of disappointment was not the girl who had wept in the garden. Nobody ever knew of the struggle which took place in the little white bed, nor was any the wiser for the puddle of tears that made a miniature lake in the pillow; but Beatrice was victor in the battle with herself.

As the clock struck five, a slim little figure in white crept silently out of bed, and tiptoed over to the desk, that Miss Billy should not be wakened. A stranger would not have appreciated the depth of the struggle; but to Beatrice it was the tragedy of a lifetime, and there was real heroism in the letter which read:

"DEAR, DEAR MR. VAN COURTLAND:

"I hope you won't think I am silly to change my mind so suddenly, after all the arrangements were made yesterday, but I have decided that I must not go. I know that you won't misunderstand my motive, because you know how much I long to go, and how grateful I am to you both for inviting me.

"Father and mother both are willing that I should go, but I know that my trip would mean a big sacrifice on their part, which I am not willing to accept. You and Mrs. Van Courtland have always been so kind to me that I am sure you will understand what I mean, and help me to do what is right.

"I can never tell you how grateful I am to both of you.

"Lovingly yours,

"BEATRICE LEE."

CHAPTER X

A BROKEN SIDEWALK

"Does he study the wants of his own dominion?
Or doesn't he care for public opinion
A JOT?
The Akond of Swat."

MISS BILLY entered the study with an agitated whirl of ribbons and hair. Her hat was off, her face flushed, and every curl stood on end.

"What do you think I have discovered?" she said in indignant tones.

Beatrice looked up calmly from her mother's chair. Mr. and Mrs. Lee were spending the day away from home, and the elder daughter responded to the question with a little air of authority that was particularly exasperating to Miss Billy in her present mood:

"If you had asked what you had *lost* I should know," she said coolly. "Your temper has evidently gone astray."

"I know I'm foolish to blaze up so suddenly," admitted Miss Billy; "but it's the injustice of the thing that made me hot. Mrs. Canary has just been telling me how much rent the Caseys paid for this house."

"How much was it?" inquired Beatrice. "Less than we are paying?"

"Fifteen dollars instead of twenty," said Miss Billy indignantly. "But of course I wouldn't say a word about it if old Mr. Schultzsky had made the repairs he promised. He hasn't lived up to his agreement at all. We paid for having the house painted; father furnished the screens; Theodore mended the gate, and I propped up the back fence, myself. That window upstairs is still broken, and when Ted reminded him of it he grunted and remarked that the cold weather was over. The doorbell is out of order, the step is broken, and that walk in front of the house is a disgrace to the world. The whole tottering skeleton of a house will fall in a heap some day. If we pay twenty dollars a month for rent, as we agreed, he is going to do the things he agreed to."

"How are you going to bring this law of equality about?" inquired Theodore.

Miss Billy hesitated. The conferences with the landlord in the past had not met with any visible amount of success. Still there were forces which had not as yet been brought to bear. Miss Billy decided quickly, as was her custom.

"What he needs is some one to tell him a few unvarnished truths," she said energetically. "Father is too easy to deal with him, and mother is too ladylike. I'm going to interview him myself."

"Billy the Bold!" exclaimed Theodore. "My heart swells with pride at your courage. Where and when is the interview to take place?"

"I don't know," said Miss Billy dubiously. "I don't believe he has an office, and I hate to go inside that

mouldy old shell across the street. I have my suspicions about his living there, anyway. He looks as though he slept in that old buggy of his."

"You might advertise and arrange a meeting that way," suggested Theodore. "'Sprightly maiden of sixteen wishes to meet a scholarly and refined gentleman of sixty-five. Object, new sidewalk, and what may follow.'"

"I've half a mind to tackle him to-day," said Miss Billy musingly. "The rent is due, and I might soften the blow with a generous bill. I believe I'll try it. Give me the rent money, Theodore. I'll get a promise out of him, or die in the attempt!"

"Do you mean to say you're going to pay him the rent yourself, and express your sentiments then?" asked Theodore.

"Yes, I do," returned Miss Billy stoutly.

"What shall you say to him?" asked Beatrice, with a note of admiration in her usually even voice, for Miss Billy never looked prettier than when she stood in her face-the-world attitude, with eyes big and earnest and face aglow.

"She will arm herself with the butcher-knife and the rent money," jeered Theodore, "and meet him at the door. And, withering him beneath her stern and forbidding glance, she will say: 'Move at the peril of your life. Mend the doorbell, put in the glass and fix the front walk before you speak a word. Stand and deliver.' And he will remark, like Riley's tree-toad, 'Don't shoot, I'll come down'; and ask, yea, beseech her to permit him to go for his tack hammer."

"Well, we need the improvements badly enough," said Beatrice, "but I don't think you'd better try it, Wilhelmina. It seems so bold,—somehow. Besides, you won't get anything out of him."

"Just you wait and see," said Miss Billy confidently.

It was about an hour later that Mr. Schultzsky's thin horse stopped at the gate, and Mr. Schultzsky himself shuffled up the narrow walk to the front door.

"Here comes your victim, Sisterling," announced Theodore cheerfully. "Do you feel that you need me for a witness, or to preserve the dignity of the occasion?"

Billy took off her sweeping-cap, and slowly adjusted the safety pins at the back of her shirt-waist.

"Just let him wait a while," she said. "That'll show him that the bell is out of order." But in spite of her savage words she met him at the door smilingly.

"Good-morning, Mr. Schultzsky," she said cordially. "Will you come in?"

For answer Mr. Schultzsky held out his monthly account.

"Oh, the rent bill!" responded Miss Billy. "You're like the stork, Mr. Schultzsky, that always comes around with a big bill. But I want to talk with you a few minutes. Won't you come in?"

The landlord ignored the feeble joke, and gave a stolid grunt, which Miss Billy interpreted as a refusal. "Well," she said, sitting down on the doorstep, "if you won't come in I suppose I can talk to you here. Mr. Schultzsky, perhaps you noticed that our doorbell is broken."

The old man made no reply, and Miss Billy went on:

"The window upstairs has never been mended——"

Mr. Schultzsky shuffled his feet uneasily, but gave no other sign of having heard her speech.

"And our front walk is so broken that it will be the death of somebody some day," continued Miss Billy. She paused for a response, but none came.

"When we came in here you promised to put the house in good repair for us," said the girl desperately, "but you have not kept your word. Everything that is new about the premises *we* have added. Theodore put up the fence, and has been puttering around the place ever since we moved in; the bill for painting and papering the house was sent to father (I never should have paid it if I had been in his place), although you promised to have it done. The whole house is shaky on its legs, and weak in its joints, and yet we are paying you big rent for it. I found out to-day that you are charging us five dollars a month more than you did the last tenants."

Did Miss Billy imagine it, or was there a gleam of avaricious triumph in the half-closed eyes? "You are not dealing fairly with us!" she exclaimed wrathfully. Then, in a more amiable tone, she added: "We *want* to be good tenants, you know; but aren't you going to make any of your promises good?"

Mr. Schultzsky took out his dingy bandanna and mopped his forehead. He made neither apology nor protest. "The rent is due," he said. Miss Billy's cheeks glowed as she meekly handed out the bills. "Maybe they'll make him more responsive," she thought to herself.

The landlord folded them, put them carefully into a huge wallet, and placing the rent account against the side of the house, receipted the paper in a queer cramped hand. Then thrusting it into her mechanical grasp, he turned, and without another word, shuffled off down the walk.

He hesitated at the gate and turned. "Good-morning, ma'am," he said. Then climbing into the rattle-trap, he drove rapidly away. Miss Billy, left alone on the doorstep, was torn by conflicting emotions. Angry as she was, she could not fail to see the humour in her ignominious defeat. And she was not the only one who was amused. The screen in Theodore's window came down with a bang, and a boyish voice chanted:

"B was once a little Bear,
Beary, wary, hairy, beary,
Taky cary, little bear."

Miss Billy at once retorted:

"G was once a little goose,
Goosy, moosy, boosey, goosey,
Waddly-woosy, little goose,"

and added, "Did you hear our conversation?"

"*Our* conversation! I heard *yours*. Is Mr. Schultzsky going to fix the premises, or did he raise the rent?"

"The old icicle!" scolded Miss Billy. "I couldn't get a word of satisfaction out of him. When he skewered me with those sharp eyes of his I couldn't talk."

"His glances would be in good demand in this family," remarked Theodore. "I'm glad you got slammed, myself. You were so all-fired smart about making an impression on him. I suppose you thought that when you had an axe to grind he'd run at your bidding with the cheerful expression of the lion on the Norway coat-of-arms. You've got your come-up-ance, Miss Billy."

His sister deigned no reply.

"What are you going to do about the sidewalk?" inquired her tormentor.

"Fix it myself," said Miss Billy haughtily.

"I'd like to see you do it," said Theodore. "It will be the second thing you've made a failure of on this bright and beautiful holiday."

"Wait and see," said Miss Billy, with determination in her step. She made her way to the pile of packing boxes in the cellar. "They won't make very good lumber," she said to herself, "but they're all I can get without sacrificing my own modest and retiring income. Beside, I suppose they will be easier to work with than heavy planking would be." It took time and strength to knock the boxes to pieces, and measure the boards; but Miss Billy was a born carpenter, and Ted's parting words added impetus to the task. An hour later, Beatrice, attracted by the noise of hammering in front of the house, looked out of the window. Down on her knees on the front walk was Miss Billy. She had on a chemistry apron made of gorgeous striped ticking, which was much stained by chemicals used in the school laboratory. A hideous garden hat was perched rakishly on her head, and a pair of Theodore's old gloves protected her hands. Her face was flushed, and her hair towsled; but two of the rotten planks in the walk had already been replaced by clean new ones, and the young carpenter was nailing down a third with great energy. Five of the Canarys and a varied assortment of Murphys and Levis were grouped around the spot, making a most appreciative audience.

Beatrice waited to see no more. She threw on a hat, and rushed to the fence.

"Wilhelmina Lee!" she exclaimed angrily.

Miss Billy raised a moist and somewhat grimy face.

"What are you doing?" inquired Her sister.

"Mending the walk," answered Miss Billy, articulating with some difficulty, for her mouth was full of nails.

"Well I should think you'd be ashamed," said Beatrice with spirit.

"I regret to say that I am a trifle ashamed," said Billy, removing the nails. "I have a miserable kind of false pride that fills me with dread lest any one of the Blanchard type see me doing honest labour. That's why I put this apron on,—for a disguise, you know."

"You needn't worry about concealing your identity," responded Beatrice angrily. "Nobody in the world but you would come out in full view of the public to make an exhibition of herself."

Miss Billy turned to her childish audience. "The public don't seem to be shocked," she said.

"If mother were home——" began Beatrice.

"Well, she isn't," responded Miss Billy coolly, "and I'm hoping to finish this walk before she gets back. You'd better go in, Bea. The chips may hit you."

> "Although through life she'd stride and stalk,
> She put some boards in father's walk,"

chanted Theodore, looking over the fence; "Goodness, Miss Billy, have you done this much yourself? You are not only a model of industry, but a talented carpenter. I suppose now I'll have to acknowledge my defeat, and come and finish the job."

"You certainly will *not* have to finish the job," retorted Miss Billy, "although I shall be glad to hear your humble apology."

"Don't you want any help?"

"No," returned his sister stoutly.

"I'm sorry," said Theodore, hanging his coat on the fence, "for I'll have to work 'agin your will.' It isn't that I distrust your ability, Miss Billy, but I should hate to have the neighbours say 'Look at that poor Lee girl laying a walk to save her brother's white and shapely hands.'"

Miss Billy heaved a sigh of relief. "I have to confess that I shall be glad of your help," she said. "I know now what it means to go 'agin the grain.' Every one of those boards grew in that way."

"Sit on the curbstone and boss the job," commanded Theodore, "while your talented brother performs on the saw for a while. Miss Billy, in spite of all that flumpy motion of yours, I am still proud of you. You haven't much in the way of gait, but you have lots of grit."

The last visitor was John Thomas, who was returning from the grocery. He stopped at the sight of Theodore, who was driving nails and fitting boards, and sending Miss Billy into gales of laughter with his droll remarks.

"Would you be likin' help?" inquired John Thomas timidly.

"No, no, indeed," responded Theodore promptly. "Shall I let your ruthless hand have any share in this matchless work of art? Perish the thought! Why, John Thomas, this walk is my masterpiece, the work that shall live after me. Behold in me the Michael Angelo of sidewalks. After my death people will gaze

upon this construction with tears and pride, and my monument will bear flattering mention of my prowess."

> "Although his gift was mainly talk,
> He put some boards in father's walk,"

said Miss Billy, with a sly twinkle.

"That's too good to be impromptu," accused Theodore. "You made that up in the privacy of your apartments, and have been waiting for the chance to spring it on me. Now you observe what sisters' taunts are, John Thomas."

"I know already," said John Thomas. "That darn Mary Jane——"

"Tut, tut, John Thomas," interceded Miss Billy. "Marie Jean is not as bad as she is painted."

"Or powdered," added John Thomas with a sardonic grin.

"How's that for a highly coloured statement, Miss Billy?" asked Theodore impudently.

Miss Billy tried to look severe, but the dimples would show in spite of her efforts. John Thomas gazed at her merry face admiringly. "I wisht you was my sister," he said. "You can make fun over people, without making fun *of* 'em. Mary Jane is the most provoking—say, don't you want me to help you, honest?"

"Not now," said Theodore. "We have to go back to school this afternoon, and there are no more planks left, anyway. I'll tell you what you *can* do, John Thomas. If you'll help me finish this, next week, I'll turn in afterwards, and help you mend the broken planks in yours."

"All right," assented John Thomas, not unwillingly.

"We'll show old Abraham Schultzsky-czaravitch that we don't need his help," continued Ted; "and the people on Cherry Street how sidewalks ought to look. What shall I do with those decrepit places near the gate? There isn't another board in sight."

"Dear me," said Miss Billy. "We should have begun at the other end of the walk, where the planks are in the worst condition. Some one will be sure to go through those two old boards, and break a leg or two before next week."

"Maybe it'll be old Moneybags himself," suggested Theodore cheerfully.

"I hope it will," said Miss Billy.

CHAPTER XI

WEEDS

"Witch-grass and nettle and rag-weed grope,—
Paupers that eat the earth's riches out,—
Nightshade and henbane are lurking about,
Like demons that enter in
When a soul has run waste to sin."

JUNE, departing, had scattered her wealth of floral treasures wide over the land, and Cherry Street, lowliest child of her adoption, had not been forgotten. Under the wholesome influence of trowel, watering-can, and good black soil Miss Billy's garden had grown apace, and now burst into such a riotous excess of bloom as brought the small Cherryites to the fence in groups of silent adoration. Beds of scarlet geraniums glowed like the heart of rubies on the green lawn. Sweet peas were opening their pretty eyes and peeping over into Mr. Hennesy's yard. June roses, white, pink, and blood red, swung on their stems breathing incense night and day, while on the side of the house bloomed the pansy bed, hundreds of pretty faces of many colours and marvellous size. Over the back fence nasturtiums were opening their golden hearts, and a group of tall hollyhocks stood boldly disputing right of way with the arms of the Hennesy clothes reel.

Mrs. Hennesy had been sweeping, and now she stood in the upstairs window looking down at the floral display in her neighbour's yard.

"It do be lookin' loike a park, Mary Jane," she commented at last. "Mrs. Casey was a good neighbour an' its mesilf that'll niver be over missin' her,—but she niver had things lookin' loike that. An' it's that girl —'Miss Billy,' as they call her,—that's done it all."

Marie Jean, who had condescended to the menial task of setting her bureau drawers to rights, turned her head slightly. "Well," she commented indifferently, "if she wants to waste her time on an old garden I suppose it's nobody's business but her own."

Mrs. Hennesy discreetly waived the argument. "I think I'll be goin' over there to see thim this afthernoon, Mary Jane. They're that noice an' frindly it ain't roight for us not to be goin' near thim. Miss Billy has axed me twice to have you come over. It ain't neighbourly, Mary Jane,—that's what it ain't."

"Well, go on if you want to," said Marie Jean, beginning to hum a tune to show the matter was too trifling for further consideration; but she broke off to add, "wear your bead cape and your lace bonnet if you do go."

Mrs. Hennesy's face took on a look of despair. "Well now, Mary Jane," she began, "it's just a neighbour, an' a clane apron——"

"You must wear your bead cape and your lace bonnet," reiterated Marie Jean, with spirit. "And be sure you go to the front door. You must go decently, or not at all."

Mrs. Hennesy departed from the room, and presently went down the stairs in all the glory of her best dress, augmented by the bead cape and the lace bonnet. Marie Jean secretly surveyed her through the

crack of the door, and returned to her task somewhat mollified. "I guess they won't find anything to laugh at in that bead cape," she said, with a toss of her head.

Mrs. Hennesy passed out through the kitchen door, but returned again. She drew off her black silk mitts, stepped to the stairs to see if by any chance Marie Jean was listening, and tiptoed back to the kitchen cupboard. She looked uncertainly into the coffee can which was quite full, then into the tea caddie which was half full, and finally shook the sugar box, which responded roundly. "Well, I'll borry some tea, annyway," she whispered, and taking a cup, secreted it carefully under the bead cape. Thus fortified, she passed around to the front gate, and, thankful that Marie Jean's point of vision could no longer command her actions, hurried around by way of the pansy bed to her neighbour's side entrance and rapped at the door.

Mrs. Lee responded to the summons. "Why, it is Mrs. Hennesy," she said cordially, extending a hand to welcome her neighbour. "Do come in. It is cooler here in the dining room than in any other place in the house at this time of the day, so we'll sit right here. Beatrice, won't you take Mrs. Hennesy's cape and bonnet?"

"Well, now, I can't stay a minute," protested Mrs. Hennesy, in her soft Irish brogue. "I must be goin' back to start supper fer Mr. Hennesy, fer he gets no dinner these days but the bite he takes wid him in a pail. An' I only stepped over to see if I c'ud borry a drawin' of tea fer his supper. Me an' Mary Jane has been that busy all day we c'udn't get to the store."

The cup was filled with the desired "drawing of tea," and stood in readiness on the table, but as the minutes sped, Mrs. Hennesy, warm and perspiring, but loyal for Marie Jean's sake to the bead cape, began to feel more at ease. Mrs. Lee was not like Mrs. Casey, it was true, and could never fill her place,—but she would make a good neighbour,—and the girls were as pretty as pictures with their contrasting styles of beauty and pretty dresses.

Of course, they were not to be compared with Mary Jane. Mary Jane was—well, more dressed-up like and stylish, than these Lee girls. But they were nice and kind, and treated their mother like a queen. Mrs. Hennesy wished Mary Jane might be there to see it.

"Sure an' Mary Jane will be in to see you wan of these days, soon," said Mrs. Hennesy as she rose to terminate her call. "It's bashful she is, or else jealous, wid John Thomas soundin' Miss Billy's praises all day long. It's 'Miss Billy says this,' an' 'Miss Billy does that,' an' he thinks Mary Jane can't hould a candle to Miss Billy,—an' that's the thruth of it."

"And I think John Thomas is a jewel," declared Miss Billy warmly. "I wouldn't have a flower now if it wasn't for him. Do come out and look at them, Mrs. Hennesy,—and carry a bouquet to your daughter from me."

"Well now,—if them ain't lovely," declared Mrs. Hennesy, as Miss Billy began culling with a generous hand. "An' thim ould fashioned hollyhocks, as sassy as you plaze. Another summer an' I'll be havin' some fer mesilf."

"You may have slips and seeds from all my plants," responded Miss Billy generously, "and John Thomas could easily bring the dirt."

Mrs. Hennesy shook her head doubtfully. "It's wades I'd be after raisin'," she protested. "Sure an' flowers don't be growin' fer ivery wan loike they do fer you."

"Weeds!" Miss Billy took up the words dolefully. "Mrs. Hennesy, weeds are making my existence miserable. Look at my hands from keeping the weeds down. But it's no use,—look there!" She pointed as she spoke, up and down Cherry Street, and Mrs. Hennesy's following glance took in a long vista of rank vegetation flanking every sidewalk and dooryard, weeds great and small, broad and feathery, tall and diminutive, flaunting their rank growth in the hot sunshine.

"Well, thim's not all yours," said Mrs. Hennesy consolingly. "There's none in your yard, so ye needn't care."

"Oh, but I see them, and I hate them so!" said Miss Billy despairingly. "And the seeds are beginning to blow over here. The plantain and dandelions are killing my new grass already."

"Well, wheriver there's good, there's bad," said Mrs. Hennesy philosophically: "An' if the good stopped tryin' an' quit what w'ud become of the world, I'd loike to know? Hould fast to yer flowers, Miss Billy, an' remimber whereiver wan of thim grows a weed can't," with which comforting advice the kind-hearted Mrs. Hennesy, holding fast to Marie Jean's bouquet and the borrowed cup of tea, took her departure.

The setting of the sun brought relief to Cherry Street. Every tiny porch held its household group, and the clear moonlight and cool breeze brought recompense for the glare and toil of the day. By degrees the noisy laughter and outcries of children waned and ceased, the murmured talk of their elders died away, and the street was wrapped in slumber.

It was then Miss Billy came softly from her room, clad in a flowing wrapper. She listened longest at Theodore's door, till, satisfied by his heavy breathing that he slept, she descended the stairs and stepped out into the moonlight.

Mingled with the perfume of her roses came the rank breath of the weeds, bringing malarial poisons to the sleepers of Cherry Street. Mrs. Hennesy's words came uppermost in her mind. "Wherever there's good, there's bad,—and if the good stopped trying, what would become of the world?" "Well, I'm going to help all I can, and I'm going to commence on Mr. Schultzsky's premises." She caught up a sickle, crossed the sidewalk jubilantly, and bumped into another pale wraith, sickle in hand, who straightened himself suddenly from the O'Brien weeds.

"John Thomas Hennesy!" she exclaimed. "How you frightened me! What are you doing out here at this time of night?"

John Thomas wiped the honest drops of toil from his brow and regarded her sickle suspiciously. "I'm cutting weeds. I've cut our own and now I'm cutting Canary's. What are you going to do, I'd like to know?"

"I'm going to cut Mr. Schultzsky's," said Miss Billy, in a gay stage whisper. "No,—not a word, John Thomas,—I want the satisfaction of laying those weeds low myself."

"Well if she ain't a reg'lar brick!" said John Thomas admiringly, as the swish of her sickle came across the street to his ears. "Catch Mary Jane taking a sickle in her lily white hand to——"

The rest of his sentence was lost in the sound of his own sickle as it played dexterously among the O'Brien weeds.

There were other ears than John Thomas's on which fell the swish of Miss Billy's keen blade that night.

Two eyes peered down from an open window of the Schultzsky house on a girl kneeling in the very dooryard. A girl who might have been mistaken for a saving angel with the moonlight on her wavy hair and flowing gown. A girl who attacked the weeds in a very fury of resentment, and scattered their rank growth in every direction. The eyes peered and peered, and then withdrew,—but gave no sign.

It was ten o'clock the next morning when Miss Billy came sleepily down to her breakfast. Theodore met her with suspicion lurking in his eye, but sang carelessly:

> “The lark is up to meet the sun,—
> The bee is on the wing:
> The ant its labours has begun——

"Say Sis, who cut all those weeds last night?"

"Theodore," said Miss Billy pathetically, with a nervous sense of aching muscles, and a weariness on which his raillery grated, "is there any breakfast?"

"There is," said Theodore; "I couldn't half eat mine, I was so excited. I've been bursting to tell you the news for two hours. Guess, Sis, what's happened?"

"What?" said Miss Billy, looking apprehensive. That it was something portentous she knew from Theodore's manner.

"Mr. Schultzskyczarovitch fell through the rotten planks of our sidewalk this morning at eight o'clock, and broke his leg, even as you wished."

"Oh," said Miss Billy faintly, and then for no reason at all collapsed in a little heap to the carpet.

CHAPTER XII

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

"Will you please to go away?
That is all I have to say."

MRS. CANARY was, literally speaking, behind the times. The weekly edition of that romantic sheet, the *Household Times*, had just arrived, and the mistress of the house had been unable to resist the temptation to "lose herself" in its crackling folds for a few minutes. It was Sunday morning, and the Sabbath to the Canary family meant the dressing of five children for attendance at a house of worship. There was a strong odour of soap and sanctity about the little home, but the mother was reading aloud, totally oblivious to the noise and confusion surrounding her:

"Si-lunce reigned in the great hall as the Duke faced his quack-ing vik-tum. The res-o-lute blood of his dough-ty ancest-ers shone in his deep eyes. 'I little expect-ed this of you, Phil-lup,' he said at last. The cring-ing slave fell abjeck-ly at his feet, without a word. The calm un-im-passioned voice per-ceeded. 'Fate has played you a sorry trick,' it said.

"The man gru-vel-ing at his feet made no reply, but the Duke's keen eye caught the gleam of a shining blade. 'Traitor, Mis-cre-ant,' he hissed, 'would you play me false in my own hall?' and he fell upon the fiendish form."

From the Duke's hall to the Canary kitchen was only a step. In the latter place the long-suffering Holly Belle was having a discussion with Fridoline as to the merits of church-going for the rising generation. Fridoline was determined of chin, and fiery of disposition, and at the early age of seven had conceived a violent aversion to the ritual of faith, and the proper observance of the Sabbath. The following patient monologue floated through the half-closed door:

"Oh, yes you will, Fridoline. Every one goes to Sunday School.... Here's the blacking all ready for you.... No, you can't wash first. What's the use of getting clean and then gauming yourself all up agin?... Black the *heels* of the shoes. Yes, they do show, too.... No, Friddie dear, please don't put on that clean collar until you wash your neck. Let me help you wash.... Well, I won't, if you don't want me to, but you are never pertic'ler about the edges, you know you ain't.... Stop brushing Mike's hair with that blacking brush!... Friddie, I'll tell Ma!... No, your neck ain't clean, an' your ears are a sight. Let me take that rag a minute. No, I won't get your coat collar wet.... Don't work your face that way, Friddie; it can't be as stiff as that.... Well, don't *open* your mouth, *then* you won't taste it.... Stop hitting my elbow.... Fridoline Canary!... I hate to tell on you, but if you don't stop I will.... Ma, make Friddie stop!"

Mrs. Canary, putting her forefinger between the pages of the Duke's history, came to the doorway and looked in,—the picture of grieved amazement.

"Why, Fridoline," she exclaimed. "Why do you hurt that loving sister of yours? Elbows is tender in ladies. Holly Belle, I wouldn't be too pertic'ler about the edges. He was washed good last Wednesday."

"Sh'd say I was," growled Fridoline, looking vengefully at his sister. "They's no need of making me as

wet as wash-day agin. Holly Belle's too doggoned clean."

"Ye look as shiny as a new mirror," said his mother proudly. "There's nothing like Ivory soap for bringing out all there is in a man. You look every inch a policeman's son. Now your uncle Weatherby, who holds a government position at Washington, D.C.——"

"Do I have to go to Sunday School, ma?" whined Fridoline.

"Don't interrupt, Friddie dear," said his mother mildly. "You put me all out of mind of what I was goin' to say. Certainly you do have to go to Sabbath School. I ain't goin' to have it said that I ever let circumstances interfere with religion."

"I hate Sunday School," complained Fridoline; "I don't get no good going."

"Oh, yes you do, son," encouraged his mother. "You learn lots. Didn't you get promoted from primary to secondary less'n a month ago?"

"Yes," growled the boy, "en the only difference is that ye put a nickel in the collection instead of a cent. I'm goin' to be changed back agin."

"No, ye ain't," said his mother decidedly. "You get that church down on ye, and ye'll miss the Sunday School picnic. But I'll tell ye what ye can do, Friddie. After the picnic ye can all make a change and go to Mr. Lee's church. The Weatherbys have always been Baptists, but out of compliment to Mr. Lee I'm willin' to let you change. He's been so nice and neighbourly that I think he's deserved it. We won't say nothing about it, and some fine day we'll surprise him by five shinin' faces increasing his aujence."

The idea of a picnic and a surprise facilitated the dressing, and a half hour more saw the departure of the five Canarys in all the splendour of cleanliness and handed-down clothes. Mrs. Canary, standing in the doorway, viewed them with pride.

"Now mind yerselves," was her parting instruction. "Ye look like a little herd of white doves, and see that ye act so. Holly Belle, don't forget to lend Mikey your handkerchief when necessary. And conduct yerselves right during divine services."

"There goes Miss Billy," she added to herself, as her own little brood rounded the corner. "As chipper as a sparrer, an' a-carryin' something to the needy, I should judge by that Haverland chiny dish in her hand. Land o' love! She's turnin' into old man's Schultzsky's!"

A pudgy little maiden in a large rocking chair sat swinging back and forth upon Mr. Schultzsky's dilapidated porch as Miss Billy approached. The stolid Bohemian face was neutralised by the effect of two blonde pig-tails, which were braided so tightly as to give her a scared and hunted expression. She looked more frightened than ever as the visitor ascended the rickety steps.

"Good-morning!" said Miss Billy.

The little girl stopped the motion of the chair and stared at the newcomer.

"This is a nice place to sit."

The little girl's eyes grew rounder, but she made no reply.

"Does Mr. Schultzsky live here?" went on Miss Billy.

The child caught the familiar name, and nodded.

"Is he in bed?"

"Ja ne rozumim," said the little maid.

"Do you suppose he would see me?"

"Ja ne rozumim."

"Goodness!" said Miss Billy to herself. "This is worse than taking the census. I wonder what language the child is talking. I'm sure it's not German or French or Latin or Greek. I might try her on hog-latin. I never saw a child who couldn't understand that. May—I—see—Mr.—Schultzsky?" she persisted in the loud and emphatic way that one always uses with a foreigner.

The little girl stared at her in a frightened way.

"Mr. Schultzsky? In?" asked Miss Billy desperately.

The child looked about her with a hunted and terrified expression. Then she rose from her rocking chair, and backed hastily down the steps, keeping a safe distance between herself and the caller. "Ja ne rozumim," she gasped, and disappeared around the house. Miss Billy turned to the door. She looked about for a bell, but finding none, rapped upon the unpainted panel. There was no answer. A second knock only brought an echo which reverberated through the shell of the house.

She hesitated a moment, and then stepping timidly inside, found herself in a tiny box of a hallway which seemed to extend from the front door to the back. Two doors opened into the hall and Miss Billy paused irresolutely at one. A sound of heavy breathing came from within, and she knocked lightly.

"Come in," growled the voice of Mr. Schultzsky, and Miss Billy entered. The inside of the house proved even more uninviting than the outside. The room was small and low, with broken plastering, and soiled hemp carpet on the floor. The only window was closed, and the ragged green shade drawn tightly down. A musty odour, as of ancient food and air, pervaded everything.

On a narrow bed in the corner lay Mr. Schultzsky with a ragged blanket drawn up over his head to exclude even the faint light. Over the foot board dangled three flat irons at the end of a rope—an improvised weight for the injured leg. Miss Billy caught her breath at the sight.

Mr. Schultzsky evidently heard the sigh. He threw his arms out uneasily, but his head remained in eclipse. His muffled voice came from beneath the blanket:

"Chvatej, Johanna, Ja mam hlat."

Miss Billy started to speak, but Mr. Schultzsky interrupted.

"Get me something to eat. Quick," he ordered.

The first sentence was unintelligible to Miss Billy, but the command was clear. A wild plan of propitiating the old man seized her. She turned to the hall without a word.

The small room adjoining was evidently the kitchen, for a rusty stove stood at one side, and a few shabby dishes were ranged in a cupboard on the other. A half loaf of bread, a piece of salt pork, and a cup partially filled with tea stood on a shelf. There was no other food in sight. The fire had burned low, but Miss Billy poked the coals together and added some fuel.

"Ne davej vec nes jeden," called a muffled voice from the next room.

"He's probably advising me to save on fuel," thought Miss Billy, little guessing how nearly she had arrived at the truth.

She filled the tea-kettle, set it over the blaze, cut a slice of bread, and found a fork. The soup, which she had brought with her, she poured into a tin pan and set on the stove to re-heat. Then she looked about for serving utensils. There was no tray or napkin to be seen, but she covered the bread board with the fringed doily that had accompanied the soup.

As she stepped lightly about her work her spirits rose higher than they had since the news of the landlord's accident. She hugged to herself the grim retribution she was receiving as she scorched her face, as well as the bread, over the coals.

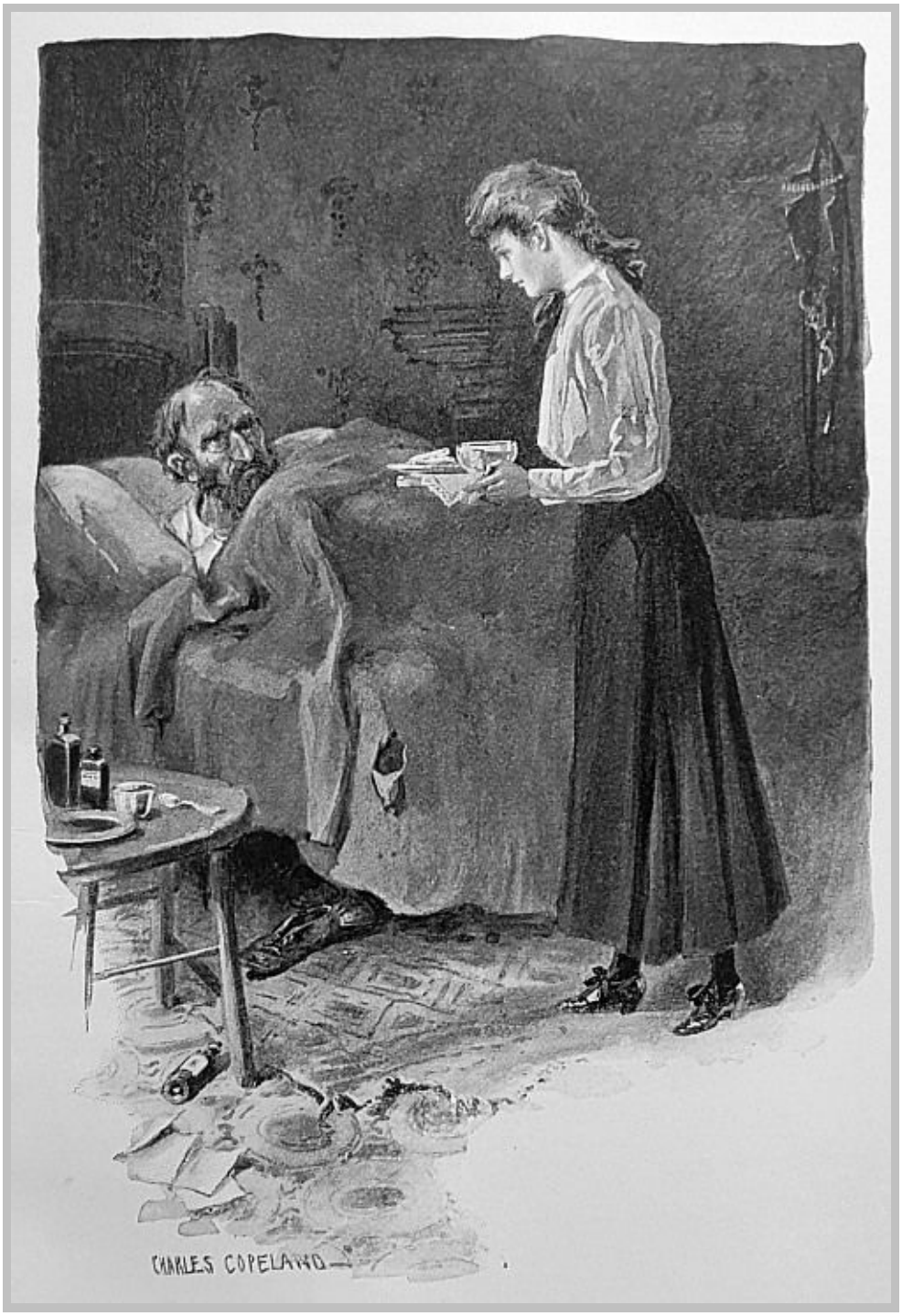
"I can forgive myself, if he forgives me," she thought.

There was no butter or milk in the cupboard, and the tableware seemed to be in all stages of decrepitude. The Haviland bowl looked most incongruous in company with the cracked cups and plates on the tray, but Miss Billy was forced to be content. She covered the stove, and turned the drafts in a way she felt sure Mr. Schultzsky would approve, and then, leaving the improvised tray on the shelf, with fear and trembling approached the door of the bedroom. The old man seemed to be asleep. Fearful of disturbing him, Miss Billy stood hesitating in the doorway. Then she cautiously opened the window, and pulled up the shade a few inches. The light showed a dirty room in a great state of disorder. On a chair beside the bed was an array of bottles, dishes, and the remains of a meal. Old clothes were strewn about the floor, dust lay in great rolls everywhere, and the cobwebs under the bed had only been disturbed by the motley pile of shoes and clothing which was thrust underneath. A broken harness was suspended from a hook on one side of the room, and on the opposite wall, crooked and high, hung the picture of a beautiful woman.

Miss Billy went quietly to work to remedy things. She hung up the clothes that littered the place, and arranged the medicine bottles. Just as she was debating with herself as to the advisability of rousing the invalid, the old man moved painfully. "Are you coming, Johanna? Hurry up," he called from beneath the bed clothes. Miss Billy made haste to obey. She brought the tray from the kitchen, and quietly approached the bedside. Mr. Schultzsky lifted the blanket from his face. He looked greyer and older than ever, his hair was matted and towsled, and in the dim light he was a ghostly and forbidding object. Even bold Miss Billy's hands shook as she helped to raise him, and prop him a few inches higher with a pillow. As she took up the tray again the old man glanced at her for the first time. Instead of the stolid Bohemian face he had been expecting to see, Miss Billy's sunny grey eyes, more tender and earnest than usual, looked down into his stony grey ones.

There was a moment's silence in the room. Then Mr. Schultzsky spoke:

"Who are you?" he said.



“Who are you?” he said.

"Don't you know?" answered the girl. "I'm Miss Billy—Wilhelmina Lee—the girl at No. 12. I came to see if there was anything I could do for you."

"Huh," growled the man. The syllable seemed to be forced through his set teeth.

Miss Billy, trembling inwardly, went on bravely with her recital:—"Don't you remember? You fell on our sidewalk. It was that day when you wouldn't do anything about the repairs, and I went out to try to mend it myself. And oh, Mr. Schultzsky, I said I hoped you'd fall through the rotten planks! I was only half in earnest, you know, but you *did* come along and fall. And I feel as though it were my fault. I'm so sorry—so very sorry." Her voice faltered. The old man looked at her unwinkingly.

"Go away," he said.

"But you'll let me help you," entreated the girl, bringing the chair nearer to the side of the bed.

"Go away," repeated the old man.

"I can't go away and leave you in this condition," pleaded Miss Billy, bent on restitution.

Mr. Schultzsky tried to raise himself from the pillow, but fell back with a groan. He regarded her vindictively, and his face was more sinister than ever as he repeated savagely—"Go away! Go away!"

Miss Billy set down the tray on the chair and withdrew quickly. The burning tears filled her eyes as she felt her way along to the gate. "He was cruel," she said bitterly to herself. "I didn't deserve it." A calmer mood took possession of her before she reached the door of her home. "Well, he didn't strike me," she said stoutly. "And I know I did my duty. But I shan't try to make friends with him again, and I shall never never let Ted hear of this."

But her brother's quick wits had already anticipated and made ready for her home coming. As she flung off her hat, and threw herself into the big chair in the study, the sermon board thrust a black and white message before her eyes. It had been empty when she left the house. Now it bore a rude sketch of a nondescript animal, a cross between a bear and a wolf, arrayed in a huge night cap. An unmistakable Little Red Riding Hood stood at the side of the beast. And below was scrawled in Theodore's hand:

> Some bears have got two legs,
> And some have got more;
> Be lessons right severe,
> If they've two legs or four!

CHAPTER XIII

HARD LINES

“Though losses, and crosses,
Be lessons right severe—,
There’s wit there, ye’ll get there,
Ye’ll find nae other where.”

BROWN'S sodas are the best in town, if they do come high,—and the girls know it," Miss Billy had jeered a few weeks before. Theodore repeated the words now with a wholly sober grimace, as he scrambled into his clothes at half past six of an early July morning. Vacation had brought him a permanent position in the drug store, at four dollars a week, but the skeleton still walked. It was not a very hideous skeleton, to be sure,—just a half dozen or so of remarkably round and robust young misses,—but it had a prodigious appetite for the confection known as ice-cream soda, and it never happened to have any money of its own.

Theodore, red in the face from the growing heat and his hurried exertions, frowningly continued his unpleasant reflections.

"There are two or three of those girls that have treated me contemptibly of late,—probably because I no longer live in a fourteen-room house. That Myrtle Blanchard is a notable example. She scarcely takes the trouble to see me on the street, but she manages to get around to the soda fountain every day, either alone, or with the crowd of girls."

He was lacing his shoes now, and another side of the subject presented itself.

"These are the shoes I vowed to buy with my own earnings, or go without. Father bought them. I've learned to crow before my tail feathers have grown enough to tell whether I'm going to be a Brahma rooster or a Bantam hen. Well, I'm through cackling now: anyway, till I get rid of those girls, and save some money. Then I'll have something to cackle over."

He swung down to breakfast, taking time to eat only his "bale of hay"—the shredded wheat biscuit the faithful Maggie put before him,—and hurried off to work. At the gate he encountered John Thomas Hennesy, going his way, with a broken bridle in his hand.

"Mornin'," said John Thomas cheerfully.

"Good-morning," returned Theodore. "Going my way? Then you'll have to keep up with my stride. I'm late this morning."

"Workin' at Brown's steady now, ain't yer?" inquired John Thomas, with friendly curiosity. "Much in it?"

"Four dollars a week as a starter," said Theodore, firmly pressing the skeleton back into its closet. "It's easy work, and they are beginning to give me a little collecting and bookkeeping of late."

John Thomas gave his companion a covert stare that took in the neat blue serge suit and immaculate tie,

the jaunty straw hat and well-polished shoes. He noted that Theodore's eyes were grey like Miss Billy's, and his teeth were white. Then he shoved his own stubby hands into his pockets, and lapsed into silence. Grudgingly to himself he admitted that Theodore was a "swell." He had soft hands, and clean finger nails, and white teeth. He polished his shoes every day, wore stand-up collars through the hot weather, and liked easy jobs.

John Thomas's chin squared itself into the bulldog pattern of his father's, and his hands shut tight in his pockets.

There was Miss Billy now. She and Theodore were as alike in looks as two peas. But Miss Billy was no swell. Her teeth and nails were awful clean, too,—but then, she was a girl,—and *she* liked work. She'd do anything,—even if she had clean hands, and finger nails, and——

John Thomas was measuring the length of his stubby legs with Theodore's long swinging stride. "Driving team for your father, this vacation, aren't you?" inquired Theodore, in turn. "Pretty hot in the sun, isn't it?"

"It's hot,—yes," admitted John Thomas, the bulldog chin slowly melting under the friendly glance of the grey eyes,—"but its good pay,—a dollar a day, and the day's work over at six o'clock."

Theodore repressed a whistle. "Why, you'll save money, John Thomas, if the job lasts all summer."

"It'll last all summer, all right, and longer too. Father's got more work than he can attend to. He's bought another team and he's going to hire another man to drive it. I worked for father all last summer, and I've got sixty dollars saved in the bank now. I'll make it a hundred before school commences in September."

It was Theodore, now, whose critical glance took in John Thomas,—a sturdy square-set figure, with baggy trousers and rusty shoes, the true Hennesy freckles and turned-up nose,—offset by keen blue eyes and the resolute chin. "He's a man!" thought Theodore. "He's neither afraid or ashamed of honest work,—and he saves his money, too. I wonder what he'd do in my place now, if he had a crowd of girls to treat every day with his hard earnings?"

But it was difficult to imagine the figure at his side presiding at a soda fountain, and handing out refreshment to a bevy of young beauties, so Theodore gave it up with a sigh. John Thomas, unpleasantly aware of the scrutiny, bore it unflinchingly, but his chin squared itself again, and he thought, "He's a tenderfoot, that's what he is. He never had dirty hands in his life. I guess he's wonderin' who my tailor is."

When Theodore reached the store he changed his coat for a linen one, dusted the counters, lifted the ice into the soda fountain, and gave all the glasses and spoons an extra polish. The recollection of John Thomas lingered with him, together with the sixty dollars in the bank which would be one hundred by September. "I'm in a false position," he thought angrily. "I'm making those girls believe I have all the money I want, and other people believe I'm an industrious and deserving young man. I'd change jobs with John Thomas Hennesy in a hurry if I could."

The day was very warm, and by nine o'clock the soda water trade was brisk. Myrtle Blanchard was one of the early callers. She was a miss of fashion, like her older sisters, and aptly imitated their mincing ways.

"Oh, isn't it just too dreadfully warm?" she gasped, fanning herself with her lace handkerchief and sinking onto one of the stools. "I really couldn't have gone another step without resting, if I had been

paid for it."

"It's hot," acquiesced Theodore, preparing a glass of orange phosphate for another customer. "Mr. Brown," he called over to the proprietor, who was sitting at the desk, "do you want me to collect that bill I was told to call for this morning?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Brown, "you'd better go right away. We've had to wait long enough for that money. Frank, you take Theodore's place at the fountain."

Miss Myrtle's face assumed a look of hauteur. She was not accustomed to being pushed aside, even for business. But she hastened to say, "Oh, I am so warm! I believe I'll have a cherry phosphate. I came away without my purse this morning, but please don't charge such a small amount to papa."

Theodore prepared the phosphate and placed it before her. His eyes took on the steady, level expression that Miss Billy's habitually wore, but his voice was cool and bland as he said aloud, "Frank, please make a charge against Miss Myrtle Blanchard,—one phosphate, ten cents."

The other customers gazed in astonishment at this unheard of publicity in entering a charge. Miss Myrtle turned from pink to crimson, and slowly back to pink,—but she philosophically concluded to drink her phosphate and think the matter out afterward. Theodore, meantime, had taken his hat, and getting the bill and some change from Mr. Brown, left the store.

"The mean thing!" inwardly raged Miss Myrtle. "He meant that for a snub,—I know he did. And he never so much as glanced at me as he went out. Just wait! I'll get even with him."

Out in the hot sunshine Theodore's other conscience was accusing him. "It's a mean thing to use a girl that way! But if it has to be done, I'm glad Myrtle Blanchard got it first. Yet it's all my own fault! If I hadn't treated them at the first, they wouldn't have come to expect it. But I feel as mean as a cur that's stolen another cur's bone."

A walk of half a mile brought Theodore to a handsome house in a fashionable street. He ascended the steps, touched the bell, and heard a voice on the inside distinctly say, "If that's that boy from Brown's, Nora, tell him I'm not at home."

The door opened and a maid in a white cap glibly repeated the message: "Mrs. Thorpe isn't at home this morning. Won't you call again?"

"She expects me this morning," said Theodore, firmly,—"so with your permission, I'll wait." As he spoke, he entered and seated himself in the reception hall.

"She may not be home to luncheon," faltered the maid. "If you could——"

"My time is my own," interrupted Theodore. "Mrs. Thorpe expected me, so I'll wait."

There was a rustle of skirts above, and a whispered consultation. In fifteen minutes' time Mrs. Thorpe descended the stairs, looking cool and beautiful in a pale blue silken wrapper.

"The maid was quite mistaken," she asserted sweetly. "I was taking a little rest, and she thought I had gone out. Oh, yes,—you have that bill. How troublesome for you to have had the long walk for so small an amount! Fifteen dollars, is it? Please receipt the bill. And you have change there! May I trouble you to change this five-dollar bill for me, as well?"

Theodore tucked the fifteen dollars, three crisp notes, into his pocket, with satisfaction, and receipted the bill for the silken lady. Then he counted out to her five dollars in change, and taking his hat, bowed himself out. He was flushed with pride at having outwitted the notorious Mrs. Thorpe. The other clerks at the store had tried innumerable times to collect this bill. He hurried over the hot pavements toward the store, the success of this undertaking driving Myrtle Blanchard and the other girls, for the time, from his mind.

Mr. Brown was still at the desk when he reached the store. He handed in the three bills with conscious triumph. "And the five dollars in change, I gave you?" suggested Mr. Brown pleasantly.

"Oh, I exchanged that for——" he stopped suddenly, with a startled air. He had given Mrs. Thorpe the five dollars in silver, but she had given him no bill in return. He remembered now, distinctly. He was perfectly sure.

"You may have lost it," corrected Mr. Brown gravely. "You must be careful not to attribute its loss to Mrs. Thorpe. She is one of our wealthiest customers. However, you may go back and inquire."

Mrs. Thorpe rustled down at Theodore's second summons. Certainly, she had given him the bill! He had probably lost it on the street. Then she rustled upstairs again, and Nora, the maid, showed him out.

The brick buildings that radiated the heat, and the dusty streets with their clanging cars, swam before his tired and angry eyes. "A woman that would lie, might steal," he reflected fiercely. "Mrs. Thorpe has that five-dollar bill, together with the change I gave her, in her purse!"

He took his way back, in helpless anger and misery, to the store, and reported once more at the desk.

"No," said Mr. Brown. "I didn't think Mrs. Thorpe had it. You must be extremely careful what you say. You have either carelessly lost it, or——"

"Or what?" demanded Theodore angrily.

Mr. Brown flushed in return. "I have noticed since you have been in my employ," he said coldly, "that you have extravagant habits, as well as extravagant friends. It is the shortest road to dishonesty, although I make no accusations. Of course you will make this loss good. Is there any money coming to you?"

"Very little. What was coming to me I drew Saturday night," said Theodore, the colour all gone from his face. "Mr. Brown, you are doing me an injustice. I *was* extremely careless. It is right that I should return the money because of that carelessness. But I am honest, and I have been taught to be truthful. I beg you to believe me when I say that the money is, knowingly or unknowingly, with Mrs. Thorpe. I distinctly remember that she did not give me the bill."

Mr. Brown's voice was like ice: "I do not wish to have any more discussion of the matter. The money will be charged to your father until you repay its loss. You may go to dinner."

Mr. Hennesy and John Thomas, seated on a little hillock of dirt, were eating their dinner from a bountifully filled dinner pail, when a noontide visitor strode in upon them. The horses looked mildly up from their improvised feed boxes upon Theodore, who, reckless of the polished shoes and blue serge suit, seated himself upon another hillock in their midst.

"Mr. Hennesy," he said, coming straight to the point, "have you hired a man yet, to drive that new team

you've bought?"

"Well," said Mr. Hennesy warily, and confining his gaze to a generous crescent his teeth had described in a quarter of an apple pie, "there's a red-headed man that's been afther the job, an' there's another that's as bald as an acorn——"

"If you'll give it to me," broke in Theodore, "I'll do my best to please you, and I'll work cheaper than a man. I have handled horses before. Try me for a week, Mr. Hennesy, and if I don't give satisfaction you needn't pay me a cent, and there will be no hard feeling."

Mr. Hennesy's first shock of surprise expanded slowly into a grin. John Thomas's eyes were like saucers.

"Why-ee—" gurgled Mr. Hennesy, "ye'd burn the shkin all off av yer nose, an' tan yer neck, an' blishter yer han's so yer own mother wouldn't be afther knowin' ye. Ye couldn't niver——"

"Come now, Mr. Hennesy," said Theodore, rising abruptly, "if I look like a fool, I assure you I'm not one. Will you give me the chance?"

Mr. Hennesy's grin vanished, and his chin squared.

"Thot I will!" he said, extending his hand cordially. "Ye can go to work in the mornin'. But moind me,—ye'll do yer full dhuty, or ye'll git fired!"

Theodore was gone, as suddenly as he had come, and John Thomas still sat, the picture of helpless surprise.

"Well—I'll—be blowed!" he ejaculated, at last. "I wouldn't have thought it of him. He looked too good to spoil his hands. Somethin' must have gone wrong at the drug store."

"Which same ye'll not be mintionin' to him, John Thomas," said Mr. Hennesy, with the true instincts of a gentleman.

"As if I would!" returned John Thomas scornfully.

Dinner was over, and Miss Billy was out weeding the pansy bed when her brother reached home. The long walk from the outskirts of the town where Mr. Hennesy was working, and the noontide heat of the day, had failed to bring the colour back to his pale face. He seemed to have grown taller, and older, in a single morning. Miss Billy, looking up from her flowers, instantly read the trouble in his face, and sprang to her feet.

"Wilhelmina," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder and looking down into her face (it was the first time in his life he had called her that), "I've got to borrow your Christmas gold piece. I never thought I'd come down so low, but,—well, I have! I'm in trouble, and I've got to have it to square myself."

"Is that all?" cried Miss Billy, brightening. "It can't be a very great trouble that that paltry gold piece can drive away. And I'm so glad to let you have it, Ted."

"No,—that's not all," went on Theodore, in a hard voice. "Mr. Brown thinks I'm a sneak, if not a thief!—and I've quit my job. Don't tell father and mother,—not yet, I mean."

"Theodore!" There was anguish in Miss Billy's tones that brought the tears for the first time to

Theodore's eyes.

"But I've hired out to Mr. Hennesy to drive a team, and start to work in the morning."

"Brother, you *can't* do that!" Miss Billy, in spite of herself, was crying now.

"Do you remember," said Theodore, "we were reading the other day that a man is as great—not as his father's money, or his grandfather's name, but as the force within himself? Miss Billy, I have force enough to drive Mr. Hennesy's team, and stick to it! Inasmuch as that, I am a man."

Miss Billy looked up, overawed. Laziness, heedlessness, vanity, had dropped away as a mantle, and from the steady grey eyes looked the serious spirit of a man.

Like a rainbow of promise, Miss Billy smiled through her tears. "Theodore Lee," she said, wiping the last drop off her nose, "Theodore Lee, I'm proud of you!"

CHAPTER XIV

TWO LETTERS

“Princess, to you the western breeze
Bears many a ship and heavy laden;
What is the best we send in these?
A free and frank young Yankee maiden.”

"COLOGNE, GERMANY.

"*Dear Miss Billikins*:

"Prepare to clap your hands and chortle with joy! In six weeks and two days more I shall be at home with you! Perhaps I am a trifle conceited to think that you will be as delighted over the prospect as I am.

"Even my grief at leaving my beloved Germany is drowned in joy at the thought of being home again; and when I see papa and mamma's dear faces I shall be the happiest girl this side of the Atlantic. After all, there is no place like America, and no people like the Americans.

"In proof of which, I can a tale unfold—a tale, Miss Billy, which will make your blood stand on end and your hair run cold in your veins. I have had an adventure that brought the tears of shame and contrition to my eyes, and which will bring the tears of sympathy to yours. Get out your largest and most absorbent handkerchief and prepare to listen.

"It rained yesterday,—not one of the mild English drizzles, but a regular American downpour that lasted all day. About four o'clock I put my music aside and went downstairs, with the intention of taking a stroll, or more literally, a swim. Frau Henich held up her hands in holy horror at the sight of my costume, which was a combination of bathing suit and bicycle skirt.

"Will the bold Fräulein venture out in such wetness?

"The bold Fräulein would.

"Did she not fear the dampness?

"The Fräulein adored dampness.

"Was there no message that could be sent?

"The Fräulein had no message. She was going out for her pleasure.

"Frau Henich looked at me in pity and amazement. Generally she considers me erratic, but on occasions of this sort she knows I am unbalanced. As I closed the door I could feel that she was still wondering in which branch of my family insanity was rampant. Now there is a certain tiny store in Cologne which I intend to buy out some day. It is a most fascinating place, with the windows full of gay knit garters, and hideous pictures of the saints, and dried herrings, and with funny little reward-of-merit-cards and work-boxes tucked away in dark corners.

"Of course none of these things are exactly in my line, but the mistress of the house sells a delicious little German cake that is my especial delight. Whenever my music lessons go badly or I fail to get a letter from home, I comfort myself with a bag of these little 'pfeffernes.'

"On this rainy day the shop was even more inviting than usual. It was brightly lighted with three candles, a big pussy cat was purring on the mat, and there was an odour of hot gingerbread in the air.

My long walk had made me hungry, and I recklessly ordered two dozen cakes, a square of the frosted gingerbread, and a little pail of sauerkraut which tasted and smelled very German indeed. It was dark outside, so I didn't stay to practise my German on the rosy-faced woman behind the counter, but took my bundles hurriedly. I paddled out, leaving a long stream of green water in my wake—(the colour in my green umbrella has 'run' as you predicted)—and faced the storm.

"The long narrow street was deserted, and I sprinted along making good time, though my feet were soaking wet and I could feel the water gurgle in my shoes at every step. As I started across a muddy street within two blocks of Frau Henich's, a sudden gust of wind blew my umbrella inside out. I righted it by facing about and holding it against the wind. Then clutching my bundles a little tighter, and still treading determinedly backwards, I bumped forcibly into a man who was coming towards me. The result was what might have been expected. We sat down in the street. The gingerbread went into his lap, the cakes fell about me like stars from a rocket, and from what I could see in the dusk the kraut seemed to be equally divided between us. We both sat perfectly still for a moment. Then six feet of masculinity arose from the mud, with the sound of a suction pump, and approached me, with the air of a count. 'Are you hurt, Fräulein?' he inquired, in irreproachable German that made me green with envy. I felt of myself in the cleanest places and decided that I was not. He helped me up with difficulty, for the mud had a strong attraction for me, too, and I feebly began to collect my thoughts, and my cakes, and to look about for my umbrella.

"By this time my companion in misery had a beautiful un-German-like apology ready for me, and proposed that we move on, and repair damages by the street lamp. I replied, in very bad German, that my boarding-place was just around the corner, and that I would prefer to remove the signs of our collision at home. He graciously acceded to my humble request, and crossed the street with me, holding the remains of my umbrella over my head. When we reached the lamp I could fully appreciate the humour of the situation. The aristocratic chest of the Count was plastered with white frosting, his hat was caved in, and his noble face was covered with spatters of mud. My skirt dripped mud and water at each step, my hands were gloved with honest German soil, and my hair fell over my face in degraded little stringlets. We both fairly reeked with kraut. But the Count, courteously oblivious to our picturesque and barbaric appearance, walked by my side, with that skeleton of an umbrella gallantly protecting the remains of my Knox hat, and discoursing cheerfully upon the vagaries of the German climate. Naturally my answers were not so teeming with wisdom as usual, for I was fairly overcome with suppressed emotion and mud. Beside, I am awfully stupid about languages, and all the German I have learned since I have been here would rattle if it were shaken about in a peanut shell. If he had asked me about the lamb of the daughter of the gardener, or the pink frock of my sister's child, I could have conversed fluently; but as it was I maintained a dignified silence and let him think that I was a modest little German Mädchen.

"His good manners lasted the whole two blocks, and he handed me in at Frau Henich's door with the air of King Cophetua, though I did think I caught a twinkle of fun in his eyes as he said 'Gute Nacht, Fräulein. Es ist immer der Amerikaner der die deutschen Länder bekommt.'

"Fräulein Henich has much to say of the gracious Herr, who came to my rescue so nobly. It seems after all that he is no count, just an American student, as she expresses it touring Germany,—'but so amiable in manner, so hard in the working, and so good to the children.' He boards across the street with her good friend Frau Heller, and I have often seen a young man, answering to his description, frolicking with the six flaxen-headed Heller cherubs. But, to me he will always be known as the Count. My introduction to him is also my farewell, for he leaves to-morrow—whither I know not—and alas, I shall

see him no more! Still, he has served his purpose in furnishing me with many a recent chuckle, and material for what otherwise would have been a most stupid letter to you. Musical students never have any brains left for letters, and nothing to write about. Maybe I won't have enough things to *tell* you about, my dear, in six weeks and two days more!

"Lots of love from

"PEGGY."

Miss Billy laid down the closely written sheets of foreign paper, and drew a long sigh of pleasure. Six weeks more!

Perhaps no one knew just what the end of the six weeks meant to Miss Billy. Even the cheeriest and happiest of us all have our dark days, and the fact that our friends do not suspect them, makes the days none the less hard to bear. Miss Billy's interest in her new surroundings, and her bravery in her changed circumstances had not prevented many a heart-ache and longing for the old life. Girls are merciless aristocrats, and many of Miss Billy's old friends had wounded her with careless speeches, or rude actions, since the old life had ended. The covert sneers, the uplifted eyebrows, the small snubs that so often crushed Beatrice in these days of stern economy, had touched Miss Billy's sensitive soul; and though she was brave enough to rise above them, they were not easy to bear.

But after Margaret came,—dear loyal Peggy, so leal and true—whom changed circumstances only made nearer and dearer,—Miss Billy felt that she could face the world and "the girls" with courage, as well as independence, and she yearned for her friend with all the strength of her young soul.

And on the heels of this joyful letter came another delightful surprise. It was an overture of peace, and the carrier dove was Aaron Levi. The olive branch he bore was a message to the effect that "ol' man Schultzsky" wanted to see Miss Billy "to wunst." "What can he want of me?" thought the girl, hurrying out of the door in a state of high excitement. "It must be that he wants something done; if that's the case, perhaps he's not so awfully mad at me, after all."

She crossed the street, and went quickly up to Mr. Schultzsky's door. The little Bohemian maid, who was rocking on the front porch, rose up uncertainly and fled around the house at her approach. Miss Billy entered without the ceremony of rapping, and made her way to the room in which she had found Mr. Schultzsky before.

In appearance it was the same dark mildewed room of two weeks before, with the harness on the wall, and the picture of the beautiful woman hanging crookedly near the ceiling. In the half gloom she saw the old man still stretched on the hard bed with the weight of flatirons attached to his foot. His face in its gauntness and pallor showed the suffering he had endured; but the sunken eyes were bright, and he displayed his eagerness in the gesture with which he motioned her to the chair by his side.

"I vant you to write a letter," he began in a weak voice. "It comes to me in the night if I haf no one to do for me I vill not soon get vell. Johanna is a child. She can speak not the English; she can order not the food. She can do nothing but rock herself in the chair and cry. Open the drawer in the table, and take the paper and ink. It is to my niece's oldest child—the letter."

Not without trembling, because of her proximity to the strange old man, Miss Billy obeyed.

"I am ready, Mr. Schultzsky," she announced.

The old man fell to pondering.

"To Frances Lindsay, my niece's child," he began at last. "I am in much trouble that my leg is broke and I cannot mofe. It is such warm weather, and such pain, I cannot get well unless you come by me.

"I will pay it when you come, which you should do right away.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"ABRAHAM SCHULTZSKY."

"Is that all?" asked Miss Billy, as the dictation ceased.

"Yes," said the old man wearily. "The street number is on a piece of paper in the drawer. That's right." He closed his eyes, but turned slightly as Miss Billy rose to go, and held out his hand. "You are a smart girl," he said. "I thank you for what you haf done for me."

Miss Billy gave his hand a little squeeze in her excitement. "I've been so sorry, Mr. Schultzsky," she said softly. "Can you ever, ever forgive me?"

"It is nodding," responded Mr. Schultzsky shortly. "Goot-day."

Miss Billy, thus dismissed, sped home as one whose feet were shod with wings.

"All is forgiven,
Blest be my soul,"

she hummed to herself as she made her way to the mail box. "I'm as happy as a lark. Margaret's coming home, and Mr. Schultzsky has forgiven me. It's too much good luck for one day." She smiled happily as she dropped into the box the letter addressed to

"Miss Frances Lindsay,
"886 East Forty-fifth Street,
"New York."

CHAPTER XV

“FRANCES”

“There were three ladies in a hall,—
With a heigh-ho and a lily gay:
There came a lord among them all,—
As the primrose spreads so sweetly.”

IT was hot, very hot, in Cherry Street. Miss Billy's garden bloomed as Paradise, but up and down the alley household garbage bubbled and boiled in the sun. The sweet peas on the fence were a marvellous cloud of pink, violet, crimson, purple and white. They rioted over the Hennesy pickets, and spread their fairy wings as if to descend on the other side;—but across the street Mr. Schultzsky's weeds flaunted in all the rank arrogance of a second crop.

Miss Billy was disheartened, but not defeated. "Of course I can't accomplish it all by myself," she thought, "and John Thomas is too tired at night to help and Theodore is working, too. But every child in the street that can handle a hoe shall be enlisted in the cause if I can accomplish it."

She went over to Mrs. Canary's to talk the matter over, and found Holly Belle in a kitchen that easily registered 110 degrees. Mrs. Canary was in bed with one of her "attacks," the twins, unwashed and sticky, were playing with a basket of potatoes on the floor: Ginevra, the little sister, was grumblingly washing the breakfast dishes, while Holly Belle, with signs of recent tears around her eyelashes, was binding up a badly burned arm.

"You see, there's bread-baking to-day," she said, as Miss Billy's deft fingers bound up the burn, "and maw's sick, and paw goes onto his beat at noon, and must have his dinner, and the twins are restless with the heat, and won't stay satisfied five minutes at a time with anything. The boys are off somewhere, and no good to anybody, and my own head aches so I can't hardly see. It aches all the time, now, anyway."

"I should think it would," said Miss Billy sympathetically. "Can't you let that fire go out? It's simply unbearable in here."

"No," said Holly Belle, "the bread's in the oven, an' there's pork an' cabbage cooking. I've got to get the potatoes peeled right away, or dinner'll be late."

Miss Billy reached for a kitchen apron that hung on a nail. "Well, I'll bathe the babies," she said: "I think that will make them feel better. Then I'll sweep up for you, and help with the dinner."

"You're awful good," said Holly Belle simply. Her eyes looked heavy, and her shoulders had a pathetic droop. "Jinny, if yer through with the dishpan, give it to Miss Billy to wash the twins in, and then go down to the store and fetch a pound of butter."

Miss Billy bathed the babies in a tiny pantry, away from the scorching blast of the cook stove, and clad them in clean, dark calico slips. Ginevra came with the butter, and was despatched with the twins in their carriage to the shady north side of the Lee house. Order slowly evolved from chaos. The kitchen

was swept, the pantry put to rights, and Miss Billy, crimson in the face, and with her collar quite wilted, was preparing to set the table.

"Don't you think—Holly Belle," she suggested, "that it might be better to move the table into the other room? It's much cooler in there."

"We never have," answered Holly Belle dubiously. "We've always eat in the kitchen."

"Well, we'll try it this time, anyway,—and if your mother objects we'll not do it again. It's so hot in here, Holly Belle, it's positively dangerous! And as you can't take the stove out, it seems as though you would have to take yourselves out, that's all."

"I've been thinking," she went on, as she went back and forth from the table to the pantry, "that instead of having the children in the neighbourhood spend every Saturday morning with me, as they have been doing, I shall have them come every morning for two hours. That would help you, wouldn't it, Holly Belle? And I can just as well do it through the vacation. You could send the babies before nine, and I'd bathe them and be ready for the rest at nine o'clock.

"This child-garden, Holly Belle, is going to resolve itself into an Improvement Club. Every member who is old enough must pledge himself to one half-hour's service a day in keeping clean his own yard and alley, and the street in front of his house. The weeds must be kept down, the cesspools disinfected, and the garbage disposed of. Then another half hour might be pledged to household duties,—such as washing and wiping dishes, bringing in wood, carrying water, and making beds. They'll all subscribe to the conditions, I know, for the sake of sharing in the pleasures of the child-garden."

"Launkelot and Fridoline couldn't never wash and wipe dishes," said Holly Belle hopelessly. "They'd break them all up."

"Indeed they can, if they try," returned Miss Billy stoutly. "My brother Theodore can wash and wipe dishes as deftly as a girl,—and he could do it at their age, too."

"'Twould be an awful help," mused Holly Belle, "and our yard an' alley is a sight to behold, but I ain't got no time to clean it."

"Of course you haven't. But you are doing noble work in this kitchen every day,—and taking care of those babies beside. It's noble work, Holly Belle."

Holly Belle's lips quivered, and her tears fell. "I ain't like other girls," she sobbed. "I used to go to bed of nights an' dream I had a piano an' could play on it. An' when I'd wake up I'd be so disappointed it seemed to me I couldn't stand it. An' I used to go on hopin' and hopin' that I'd get one, an' learn, but I know it's too late now. I'm growin' on fourteen, already."

Miss Billy, taking in all the pathos of the starved little life, found no words to reply. "But the thing that hurts worst," went on Holly Belle, wiping her tears on her apron, "is that I can't go to school. I had to stop when Mikey was a baby, and then just as I got started again the twins came, and I guess I'll never go back. The teacher came to see maw, an' told her how quick I learned,—but it didn't do no good, an' I'll have to stay right here in this kitchen all the rest of my life."

Miss Billy crossed over to the drooping little figure, and put her arm about her. "Keep hoping, Holly Belle," she counselled: "Keep hoping, and keep on trying. I'm sure it will all come out right. I have a solemn conviction that when one wishes hard enough for a thing, it comes to pass. And so I am sure the

school days will come again, and the piano and the lessons, too."

Holly Belle dried her tears. "You've made me feel almost sure of it, too," she said, with a smile. "I'm thankful for the help you've been to me with the work, Miss Billy,—and I'll send the children over in the morning."

It was that evening that Theodore, freshly arrayed in the glory of blue serge and starched linen, drew Miss Billy into a secluded corner. His neck, even as Mr. Hennesy had predicted, was burned to a deep red, and the blisters on his hands were hardening into calloused spots,—but there was no self pity in his manner as he handed his sister a five dollar gold piece.

"My first week's pay," he announced, proudly: "and thank you very much for the accommodation."

"Oh, I'd rather not take it now, Ted," demurred Miss Billy. "Wait until you've earned more."

"No indeed," said Theodore proudly. "Next week I shall pay father for my shoes, and after that, every cent of my money goes into the bank. Take it now, or never, Miss Billy."

"Well, I'll take it if I must, but I don't want to," grumbled his sister. "Say Ted, Beatrice and I are going over to call on Mr. Schultzsky's niece, Frances Lindsay, this evening. Mother saw her trunk arrive to-day, and thought we ought to. Won't you go with us?"

"No, I thank you," said Theodore. "To tell the truth, I've soured on the society of ladies. But if she's handsome, and wealthy, and under thirty, I may relent and call upon her some other evening."

"For my part, I think the idea of our going over there is ridiculous," scolded Beatrice. "I wouldn't, if mother didn't insist upon it. It's more than likely she can speak only Bohemian, as that other little niece does, and will run and hide upon our arrival."

"Well, we'll go, anyway," said Miss Billy. "Mother is right. The girl will feel very strange and lonely in that old house, and if she can't speak English we can at least shake hands and then sit and smile at her."

They took their way across the street, Beatrice very dainty in her white dress with a rose low in her hair, —Miss Billy in a black dress skirt and white shirt-waist, with a severely masculine collar and tie. The front door stood ajar, and after tapping several times Miss Billy ushered herself in. "It's the only way," she declared, in reply to Beatrice's horrified exclamation. "Mr. Schultzsky *can't* let us in, that little Bohemian girl *won't* let us in, and under the circumstances, I suppose the new niece can't make up her mind what to do."

There was the sound of a well-modulated masculine voice reading in Mr. Schultzsky's room. Miss Billy tapped gently, and the door was opened by a young man. In one swift glance she knew he was tall, with dark eyes and a ruddy skin, and wore glasses.

"I beg your pardon," she faltered. "We have called to inquire for Mr. Schultzsky, and to call upon his niece, Miss Frances Lindsay."

In the next instant, too, she was sure the young man was well bred. He gave Beatrice a chair, and turned on the student lamp without manifesting any embarrassment, while Miss Billy crossed to the old man's

bedside, and extended her hand.

"I hope you are better, Mr. Schultzsky," she said. "Sister Beatrice and I have come to call upon——" For some undefined reason the words died away, and she stood with glowing cheeks and paralysed tongue.

"Sit down," said Mr. Schultzsky, pointing to a chair at the bedside. The young man was regarding Miss Billy with open humour shining in his dark eyes.

"I feel already acquainted with you, Miss Lee," he said, "as a good friend of my uncle's, and as a young lady who insists upon spelling my name 'ces.' *I* am Francis Lindsay!"

He was looking at Beatrice now, whose face was the picture of shocked propriety and haughtiness. Miss Billy's wits returned.

"It would be very funny," she thought, "if Bea didn't take it so tragically. But he is not at all to blame. He has tact, and is kind. *I* am the stupid one." Then she introduced Beatrice with a mischievous ring in her voice. "My sister Beatrice,—*Mr.* Francis Lindsay."

Mr. Schultzsky was feebly wagging his head and chuckling. "She iss a smart girl," he said,—"but she wass fooled dot time."

With a person less polished, the situation might have been deeply embarrassing,—but Mr. Schultzsky's great-nephew conversed entertainingly, with his arm resting easily on the table. He spoke of his native city of New York, of existing social relations, of his uncle's illness. He addressed his remarks to Miss Billy, but he glanced often at Beatrice, who sat cold and silent across the room.

"I trust you will give me permission to return the call," he said pleasantly, as at the end of ten minutes they rose to go. "I assure you I know what it is to be lonely, though I am not a girl."

"Do come," said Miss Billy cordially,—but Beatrice remained silent.

"Now with your usual propensity for doing stupid things, you have drawn us into a fine entanglement," scolded Beatrice, as they reached the sidewalk. "I never heard of anything so arrogant in my life as his asking if he might return the call. And it was not your place to give him permission, either. You quite forget you are my younger sister."

"I think him extremely courteous and high-bred," returned Miss Billy with spirit, "and his asking to call upon us was a delicate and kind thing to do, under the circumstances. But don't let us quarrel about him, Bea. How old do you suppose he is? I think he can't be over twenty-one,—but his grave manners make him appear older."

"I have no suppositions whatever upon such a subject," said Beatrice loftily.

"But at least, you cannot deny he is a gentleman?"

Beatrice raised her pretty eyebrows. "Into that I shall not inquire. It is enough for me that he is a relative of Mr. Schultzsky's."

CHAPTER XVI

THE CHILD GARDEN

"As I went up Pippin Hill
Pippin Hill was dirty."

NO, I will not," said Beatrice decidedly.

"But the children will be so disappointed. They will have their reports all ready, and there will be almost no one here to hear them. Neither mother nor father can be present. And the little ones are so fond of you."

Even this mixture of pathos and diplomacy failed to touch Bea's flinty heart. "I don't wish to be here," she replied.

"But you said last night you would."

"That was before I knew you were going to invite every Tom, Dick and Harry in the neighbourhood."

Miss Billy was roused immediately. "I suppose by that you mean Mr. Francis Lindsay," she said with spirit; "I invited him here on purpose. I want to be especially nice to him just because you were so mean and sniffy to him the night of our call. That was my blunder, and you needn't empty the vials of your wrath on him. He was as gentlemanly and pleasant as he could be, and did his very best to make us forget that we were two girls calling upon a boy. Besides, he is interested in this kind of work—he told me so himself. And the children all adore him,—and mother said I might."

The speaker paused, breathless.

"It is none of my affair whom you choose to invite to the house," said Beatrice coldly. "But I prefer not to see him."

"All right, don't, then," retorted Miss Billy wrathfully. "I'll ask Marie Jean, instead. She'll be glad to come, I guess. But I don't understand you at all, Bea. It isn't like you to be so petty and small."

Beatrice walked away without another word, and Miss Billy marched defiantly to the Hennesy fence, and vaulted lightly over. It was wicked of Miss Billy, for she knew that this tomboyish expression of independence would be most irritating to Beatrice.

Marie Jean Hennesy, sitting with her embroidery on the back porch, looked amazed at the breathless apparition which appeared over the fence.

"You're the very one I wanted to see," said Miss Billy. "The Street Improvement Club is going to meet in our yard this morning, and the children are going to read reports of what they have accomplished. I'm sure you'd be interested, and I do wish you'd come and hear them."

Marie Jean was not so enthusiastic. "I don't know," she said doubtfully. "I was intending to finish this work to-day."

"I do wish you'd come," urged Miss Billy. "There will be no one there besides the children, except Mr. Lindsay,—the young man staying at Mr. Schultzsky's. I think you'd enjoy it."

Marie Jean folded her linen slowly. "Maybe I'll come," she decided, "if I can get my dress changed in time."

"Don't stop to fix up," cautioned Miss Billy. "Come as soon as you can."

"You'd betther be makin' haste, Mary Jane," called Mrs. Hennesy from the foot of the stairs ten minutes later. "I seen the children go trapesing into Miss Billy's a minute ago, an' I guess maybe they're waitin' on you."

Marie Jean deigned no reply. She tipped her mirror at a more satisfactory angle, as she applied Mde. Juneau's Bloom of Youth to her freckled nose, and gave a sigh of satisfaction at the result. Then she surveyed the vision before her with a pleased smile. A dream in blue smiled back at her from the glass,—a dream in a striking costume of brilliant blue foulard, with pointed neck and elbow sleeves. A faded blue hat was perched sideways upon the heavy reddish hair, and a pair of long silk mitts in another shade of blue completed the attire.

Marie Jean pursed up her lips to produce an elongated dimple in one cheek. "If I could only remember to do that every once in a while!" she said to herself. From the hush that pervaded the hall below Marie Jean suspected that her mother, with her nose pressed tightly against the window pane, was assuring herself as to the condition of affairs in the next yard. Her suspicions were confirmed by the call that followed:

"Young Mr. Lindsay has came now, Mary Jane. He's all in white, close, hat, shoes an' all. Sure ol' man Schultzsky'll be worryin' about his laundry bills. They're all a sittin' round on the grass with him an' Miss Billy. You'd best make haste."

This had the desired effect. There was a hurried moving about in the room upstairs, and two minutes later the daughter of the family appeared, fluffing her frizzes to their widest extent, and giving a final hitch to her openwork stockings.

"Whose sun shade is that yer afther carryin'?" asked the mother.

"It's one I borrowed from Lily Corcoran to match my suit," answered Marie Jean cautiously. "Don't be lettin' the neighbours know about it, either."

Mrs. Hennesy withered beneath the reproof. "Of course I'll not spake of it," she said. "It was a slipsy of the tongue, Mary Jane."

Her daughter accepted the apology in the spirit in which it was given, for her time was too limited for haughtiness. "All right," she said condescendingly, as she hurried down the walk.

There was a commotion in the Lee yard as the vision in blue appeared around the corner of the house. Marie Jean in her usual clothes was not to be lightly regarded, but in this new and startling costume the effect was electrifying to the spectators. Little Aaron Levi, who was holding the floor, became suddenly affected with stage fright, and the small Canarys stared open mouthed. Fridoline alone arose to the emergency and inquired in a loud and interested tone, "Hallo, Mary Jane. Where'd you get that hat?"

Miss Billy hurried forward to greet her guest.

"We were afraid you were not coming," she said cordially, "so we went on with our reports. Won't you sit down." She cast a rueful look at the gay costume. "I'm afraid you won't dare to sit on the grass with the rest of us. Let's begin over again, Aaron."

Marie Jean took the garden chair that Francis offered and smiled sweetly at him, not forgetting to exhibit the elongated dimple; Miss Billy settled back on the grass; and Aaron Levi took up his half-finished sentence.

It was the first meeting of the Civic Improvement Department of the Child Garden. The Street Improvement Club, as they had chosen to call themselves, had been successfully organised and valiantly living up to their motto of "Be clean and keep clean." The life of a missionary is never easy, and Cherry Street had made it particularly hard for the little band of workers who fought so bravely against the dirt, disorder and disease in their surroundings. It would have been hopeless to try to interest the older people, but the children were all enthusiastic little citizens, and their interest in the work had won over many of the fathers and mothers who had opposed the idea of cleanliness as "putting on airs." Already the street had begun to show improvement, and the reports of the children plainly told under what difficulties some of the sturdy members had worked.

Aaron Levi, with a long sheet of soiled foolscap, which effectually concealed a large portion of his anatomy, read the first report in loud and distinct tones:

"As I belong to the Street Cleaning Club I would like to tell a thing or more what happened last week. I told Joe to pick up some paper which was lying in the street. If he wouldn't pick it up I would. I was just going to see what he says, so finally, he wasn't going to pick it up, and he said he wasn't going to pick dirty papers up from the streets, and that wasn't even all, he also littered the streets. He also stated that there was not a law passed forbidding people to throw papers on the street.

"The place where I live, which is not large, there is very seldom a piece of paper or anything else. Hoping that other places may be in the same condition. This can be easily done if people and children help together.

"Yours truly,

"AARON LEVI."

"Very good," said Miss Billy heartily, as Aaron, flushed with emotion and heat, took his place on the grass. "Aaron, I'm proud of you. If we all do work of that kind there won't be need for our club always. Ginevra, have you something to read to us?"

Ginevra twisted her apron about in her small brown hands.

"I didn't write mine," she murmured faintly. "It's only about an orange peel, anyway."

"Can't you tell us, then?" encouraged Miss Billy.

"There was a man goin' up Cherry Street last night, an' he was eatin' a orange, an' droppin' the peelin' right on the sidewalk. An' I said to him 'Mister, please don't drop those on the walk.' And he didn't pay no attention to me, an' so I walked along behind him an' just picked them up myself."

Ginevra's patient little story was most touching, and Miss Billy and Francis exchanged quick glances of sympathy. Marie Jean settled the folds of her gown, and smiled. "How perfectly lovely," she remarked

to no one in particular.

"Isn't it interesting?" asked Miss Billy proudly. "Frank Murphy, you come next. What have you done?"

Frank's report was brief and to the point. "There was a dead rat out in the street. It was big and smelt awful. I poked it with a stick, but it was so smelly I couldn't take it in my hands. So I brought the cat out and she et it up."

The fastidious sense of Marie Jean was much offended by the story, but she bravely accepted the custom of the Romans, and only indicated her disgust by a slight elevation of the nose, as Frank's successor was announced, and Launcelot, in a high state of excitement and a huge red necktie, took the floor.

"Our slop barrel was running over. And ma wanted to give some of it to Hennesy's chickens, and I wouldn't let her because it ud make Hennesy's yard look worse than ever. And she said it was the slop collector's fault and that Cherry Street was always neglekted. And I said I'll see to it. And I went to see the slop gentleman at the city hall and told him about the slop running over, and the germs that were just flying round loose inside, and I spoke fierce and he said he'd 'tend to it. And I said he'd better and he said he would and he did. An' we've smelled nice ever since.

"And Johanna who lives with old man Schultzsky threw tin cans into the street, and we kids waited till night an' then stuck them all along on the pickets to his fence, an' she don't do it any more. An' I asked ma not to wash me and Mike in the same water, and she said all right if I'd carry in fresh water and I did.

"An' there was a grocery boy dropped a egg on our walk, and I made him clean it up.

"An' I got two kids to sign our pledge, and they'll come to every meetin' where there's going to be grub."

Launcelot's recital was followed by a chorus of admiration. Francis' face was hidden, but his shaking shoulders showed his emotion, and Miss Billy's eyes danced as she patted the small workman upon the shoulder, exclaiming, "Bravo, Launcelot! You're our Master Constable."

"Now me," begged little Mike.

"Are even the babes in arms mustered into service?" asked Francis.

"To be sure they are," responded the hostess. "Mike is one of our best workers. Tell us about it, dear."

"A boy camed and shaked our new 'ittle twee. An' I said 'No, no, boy,' and he wunned away. And Fwiddie helped me make a fence wound it," lisped the little lad.

Even Marie Jean was delighted with the childish recital, and she joined enthusiastically in the applause which followed. Little Mike buried his face in his sister's lap, and only glanced out shyly when Friddie began his report.

"I'm using my ecspress wagon to clean up the streets with," he began. "I go out early every morning, and Aaron Levi helps me. We pick up all the trash in the street an' pile it in my wagon, and sometimes there's two loads of it. We sell it to Mr. Hennesy for fillin' holes with. He gives us a cent a load. We bought nine cents worth of taffy on a stick last week, an' we're goin' to save up to buy a patrol wagon."

One by one the other reports followed. Lena Engel had burned a pile of rubbish in the alley; Moses Levi had gathered all the old rags on the street and sold them to the ragman; Mary O'Shea had planted grass

seed in her yard; Pius Coffee had cut down "eight stacks of weeds"; the little Moriaritys had "filled up a sink hole" on their premises; Jacob Kohn had stopped putting ashes in the street; and two of the larger boys had placed a box on the corner, for the disposal of rubbish. Even the tiniest children had their small stories to tell, and Miss Billy glowed with pride as the last member of the Street Cleaning Brigade was heard from.

"Isn't that splendid?" she said, with face aglow, as she turned to her two older guests. "Just think what it will mean to Cherry Street to have citizens of this kind growing up on it!"

Francis had risen from his place on the grass, and was facing the small audience. "May I give my report?" he asked, his brown eyes twinkling mischievously through his sedate glasses.

Miss Billy's pleased face was consent enough.

"You all know how long I have lived on Cherry Street," began Francis; "just long enough to be greatly interested in your work, and yet not long enough to accomplish much. During that time I have had two sidewalks repaired, a new one laid, and some curbing reset. I have taken down three fences. I have cleared my uncle's yard of weeds, and we are beginning repairs on his house. I don't know what one's qualifications must be to belong to your club, but I should like to join,—here and now."

The members of the Street Improvement Club cheered with enthusiasm at this delightful addition to their number. But there was a greater surprise in store for them.

"And so would I," said Marie Jean unexpectedly.

Whether it was Francis' example, or the reports of the little ones, that had inspired the action, it would be hard to say; but the cause of Marie Jean's conversion was not inquired.

The pledge was brought out, and amid vociferous applause the names of Marie Jean Hennesy and Francis Wilde Lindsay were added to the roll.

"The feast of reason and the flow of soul has come to an end," announced Miss Billy, as she collected the written reports, and laid them in a neat pile on the grass. "But our mundane bodies are yet to be fed. On yonder porch there sits a jug, and in the jug there is some beer—only root, however. Launcelot, if I pour the drink which cheers but not inebriates, will you pass the cakes?"

"Yes-um," replied the boy with alacrity.

Marie Jean's face was expressive of a little disappointment as Francis rose from the grass and followed Miss Billy and Launcelot to the porch.

"I wonder if I can help her," she said to Ginevra.

Ginevra's unchildish eyes turned upon the speaker. "She don't need no help," she said slowly. "Mr. Francis needn't 'a' gone. He just went 'cause he likes her company-ship."

The children had finished their root beer, and noisily rounded the corner of the house; and Marie Jean had reluctantly departed with repeated assurances of her aid in the future, when Miss Billy and Francis sat down in the deserted yard.

"It has been a great success," he said. "I cannot thank you enough for permitting me to enjoy the morning with you. It's a fine work, Miss Lee."

The girl looked up brightly. "It was interesting," she admitted. "The little ones have worked so faithfully and well. I am proud of them all. But there is so much yet to accomplish. I think Cherry Street has been effectually aroused, and we can depend on the children to keep it awake. But it will take so much money to do what we wish, and our hands are practically empty."

Francis was silent for a few moments. "Are there no ways of raising money?" he said finally. "Seems to me there's energy enough in this club to earn some."

"We're going to do that," said Miss Billy. "We are planning a lawn fête now. The mothers are all going to help us, and the children have been working like Trojans. It will be held in our yard, and we shall demand your attendance, and maybe your services. Everybody on the street will be roped in to help. Of course we will raise some money in this way, but there are so many things to spend it for. It won't go half way round."

Francis pondered.

"Why don't you try for the Hanson prize?" he asked finally.

"What *is* the Hanson prize?"

"Why, haven't you heard? The papers are full of it to-day. Peter Hanson, the New York florist, offers a prize of one hundred dollars to be voted to improvements on any city street which makes the greatest change for the better during this year. The money is to be awarded about December 25, and the judges are to decide from photographs,—the 'before and after taking' style, you know."

Miss Billy's eyes sparkled.

"I wish we could," she exclaimed.

"Well, why can't you? Look what fine work you've done in short time. Think what you can accomplish in almost four months. You won't have to do much to make a great improvement here, for every little thing will show. I'll bring out my camera, and we'll take our first picture to-morrow morning. Then we'll go to work together."

"Will you help me?" asked Miss Billy delightedly.

"To be sure I will. Am I not the agent on Cherry Street, and will not every improvement benefit my uncle's property? It's all a matter of business, you see. You'll let me help you, won't you?" He held out his hand questioningly. The brown eyes looked into the grey ones steadily and earnestly. Miss Billy put her hand into his with a grateful look that spoke volumes.

"I shall be glad of help," she said simply.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAWN SOCIAL

“Never was seen such a motley crowd,—
Never was seen such a merry throng.
Never was laughter so long and loud:
Never so merry the jest and song.”

CHERRY STREET will be ablaze with light and aglow with colour," Theodore had mocked some months before. "Number 12 will be filled with diamond tiaras, and cut glass pianos, and freezers full of ice cream, to signify that a function is on!" And the spirit of his prophecy was being fulfilled.

Miss Billy, herself, had tied eighteen campaign torches to the front pickets. Now, as the twilight closed in, like tiny watchfires they sent their welcoming gleams up and down Cherry Street to the faithful. And the faithful, one hundred fifty strong, headed by Mr. Hennesy, in a wonderful dress coat of the fashion of '69, and brought up in the rear by Mr. Schultzsky, on two stout oaken crutches, partly for Miss Billy's sake, and partly for the sake of the clean street, marched to the Street Improvement Club's first lawn social.

Long vistas of Chinese lanterns in red and blue and yellow swung gaily over the lawn in double rows. Francis had furnished these. John Thomas Hennesy had brought two locomotive headlights, and these, stationed on the side where Miss Billy hoped her "berbarry haidge" might sometime be, shot their rays across the yard straight into the faces of the astonished hollyhocks, and beyond, to where Mr. Hennesy's shirt flapped, wraith-like, on the Hennesy clothes-reel. The house, thrown wide open, radiated with light and hospitality. Children, comporting themselves with a dignity befitting the occasion, were everywhere. And still the people, in twos or threes, or sometimes shyly alone, with mysterious bundles under their arms warranted to contain ten cents' worth of household merchandise, which they should presently mix up and buy again, kept coming steadily through the front gate.

Miss Billy, radiant in a pink gown, with pink sash ribbons fluttering at her waist, and her eyes shining like stars, squeezed John Thomas's arm in a little ecstasy of excitement as he knelt in the grass, putting the rapidly accumulating packages into clothes baskets.

"It is going to be a success," she predicted joyously. "It seems as though the people would never stop coming, and when we've sold every one of these packages at ten cents each, Cherry Street Improvement Club will have at least fifteen dollars in its treasury. John Thomas, I'm the happiest girl in the world to-night!"

"And the prettiest,"—said John Thomas admiringly, sitting back in the grass, and taking in her appearance critically, from the pink bow on the top of her head to the toe of her black slipper.

"Now, that isn't like you," said Miss Billy reprovingly. "Usually you don't pay compliments, because you are too truthful; but you haven't seen Beatrice. She's in shimmery white, with a heavenly thing thrown over her head. And oh, John Thomas, the dearest, sweetest, handsomest girl in the world, with the darkest eyes and the waviest hair, will be here presently. It is Margaret Van Courtland. She's just home from Germany, and she is coming to the social to-night."

"Well, you suit me all right," said John Thomas, returning to his packages with a determined air. Then he added sullenly, "I'd be feelin' all right, too, to-night, if it wasn't for that darn Francis Lindsay."

Miss Billy gasped in astonishment. "Why, what in the world has Francis been doing to you?"

"Nothin'," said John Thomas, with a noncommittal air.

"But you said you didn't like him," persisted Miss Billy, in bewilderment.

"Do you?"

"Why, of course I do! I think he's elegant, and—and gentlemanly, and handsome, and everything! I don't see what you can have against him."

John Thomas made no reply, but went stubbornly on putting the packages into the clothes baskets, and Miss Billy sat flat on the grass to think the matter over.

"Now you are the second one," she went on, "that has an unreasonable grudge against Francis. There is Beatrice,—she treats him horridly. To-day when we were getting things ready, if she had to hand him a nail, she'd draw up her lips and give it to him as if he were a cat. It's horrid of Bea,—and I've had to take her to task about it more than once. And do you know, in spite of it all, I believe Francis likes her immensely."

"He seems to like other girls immensely, too," said John Thomas, from the depths of the basket.

"Oh, but not like that!" said Miss Billy with conviction. "When she is out of the room, he watches for her return,—and when she is in the room, though he talks to me, he looks at *her*. But you must never—never breathe it, John Thomas. Beatrice would faint at the very idea, and she'd never forgive me! It must be a dead secret between you and me."

"Is this straight goods you're giving me?" demanded John Thomas, rising to his full height and gazing down at Miss Billy, seated on the grass.

"Why, I've never had any love affairs of my own. I never had anybody look hard at me, or take snubs cheerfully, or anything of that kind, you know. But as I said before, it's my conviction it is true."

"Well," said John Thomas, going down on his knees before the baskets again, "if it *is* true,—if it is Miss Beatrice he fancies, why, then, he won't find no rival in me."

"Miss Billy, where are you?" called Beatrice, around the corner of the house. "Margaret is here, and looking everywhere for you."

Miss Billy hurried away, and in another moment, in the full glare of a headlight, had her arms around the neck of a tall handsome girl, who was returning the salutation with interest.

"Billy!" remonstrated the newcomer laughingly. "You have a hug like a bear! You've spoiled my hair and crushed my attire. And I am in one of my best dresses, too, I'll give you to understand! I've brought six of the girls along with me, and we've pledged ourselves to put a dollar each in the box, and help make the thing go."

"Oh, but it's good to see you again," breathed Miss Billy. "My cup runneth over! I have a thousand things to say to you. Where shall I commence first?"

"Defer it till to-morrow," counselled Margaret. "We shall visit all day. Your time to-night belongs to the lawn fête, not to me,—and I am here to help you. Introduce me instantly to your Marie Jean Hennesy, and to your lady of letters with the six children, and I want to see every flower in the child garden, and Theodore,—oh, but first of all, let me meet your remarkable Francis Lindsay. Billy, your letters have

taken on a suspicious tone of late!"

They locked arms in schoolgirl fashion, and came upon Marie Jean, who was presiding over a lemonade table. Miss Billy introduced them, and the two types of girlhood, one representing fashion in Cherry Street, the other the gentle blood of Ashurst Place, gazed intently at each other.

Marie Jean was gotten up in a style known as "regardless." She wore a sweeping black lace dress covered with spangles, that might have graced a coronation ceremony. The sleeves terminated at the elbows in two large puffs of blue satin, and her wrists tinkled with bracelets and bangles. Her hair was bushed in heavy frizzes over her ears, and in the untidy waves piled high on the top of her head gleamed a crescent of Rhine stones.

Marie Jean was gotten up in a style known as “regardless.”

"My, she's plain!" was Marie Jean's mental ejaculation as she looked at the girl before her. Margaret's pretty dark hair was parted evenly in the middle, and plaited into heavy Dutch braids about her shapely head. Her dress was a yellow embroidered mull, with simple sash ribbons of the same colour. Had it not been for two slender rings that flashed upon the finger of one hand, Marie Jean might not have thought her worthy of passing consideration. But as the girls talked on in a friendly fashion, she gleaned from Miss Billy's remarks that Margaret was a student of music and the modern languages:—that she pursued her studies in Europe:—that she would return in the Spring:—and Marie Jean could no longer doubt

that she was the "real thing." Moreover, she was pretty,—undeniably pretty,—with dark eyes, and white even teeth. Marie Jean wondered if "he" might not fancy this stranger, and for the first time in her life, she considered her own personal attractions with misgivings.

A rush of lemonade trade separated the girls, and Miss Billy and Margaret, wending their way on, came upon Francis, lifting over the back fence a load of belated chairs, borrowed from the church.

"I'll call Moses Levi to do this,—you've worked enough to-day," ordered Miss Billy. "Beside, I want to introduce you to my very dearest friend, Margaret Van Courtland."

As Francis flecked the dust from his clothes and came forward, a ray of the headlight fell directly upon Margaret's face. "I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Van Courtland before," he said, without a moment's hesitation.

"I beg your pardon," said Margaret uncertainly,—"I cannot remember——" Then as the light fell upon his tall form, handsome face, and dark, grave eyes, she gave a little gasp, and floundered helplessly in a sea of words. "Why,—I had no idea!—of course, we met in Cologne,—that is, we both fell in the mud! —Miss Billy, this is the *Count*!"

On a lawn seat, in the flare of the campaign torches, Mr. Hennesy, a glass of lemonade in hand, held forth to a bevy of Miss Van Courtland's fashionable friends on the superiority of masculine intellect as compared to that of woman.

"Sure an' phwat if a man cut off th' top av his coat, an' sewed it onto th' lig av his pants, to thrail in th' mud afther 'im? Sure an' wudn't ye be afther thinkin' he was crazy? Answer me thot, now?"

"Why, of course we would," answered the girls in a breath. "But then, Mr. Hennesy, we don't——"

"Wait now," said Mr. Hennesy, holding up one finger triumphantly. "Be aisy a bit. There's one p'int scored fer th' masculoine moind! Now thin,—phwat if I sh'ud be afther comin' here to-noight wid a feather shtuck up in me hair, or a gould buttherfly hoverin' over me forehead, th' same as ye have? Wudn't ye be afther thinkin' me brain no heavier than me head-dress? Answer me thot, now."

"It certainly would look funny," admitted the girls laughingly.

"There's two p'ints scored fer th' masculoine moind!" counted off Mr. Hennesy. "An' now,—if besides havin' a feather or a buttherfly in me head, I'd be daubin' me face wid red paint——"

"Oh, but we don't do that!" protested the girls in chorus.

"Some ladies does," said Mr. Hennesy sententiously. "Thot's three p'ints in favour of the masculoine moind!"

On the sofa, in the corner of the parlour, Beatrice had found Mr. Schultzsky, looking very pale and tired.

"I haf been looking for my nephew," said the old man. "I think we should go home."

"Oh, Mr. Lindsay is surrounded by admiring young ladies," answered Beatrice. "It would be a pity to spoil his good time. Beside, you must wait and have a mystery package. They are selling at ten cents each, and every one is warranted."

She brought from the kitchen a cup of tea and a slice of cake, and settled the tray cozily on the old man's knees. "They don't seem to need me in the garden, so I shall stay with you," she said. "May I sing for you?"

She seated herself at the piano, and hesitated a moment, wondering what style of song the old man might like. "Something old-fashioned, anyhow," she decided, and began in a sweet contralto voice "The Pilgrim."

"I'm a pilgrim, and I'm a stranger,
I can tarry, I can tarry but a night:
To that country where I am going,
My Redeemer, my Redeemer is the light.
There is no sorrow,—nor any sighing,
Nor any tears there,—nor any dying:
I'm a pilgrim, and I'm a stranger,
I can tarry, I can tarry but a night."

There was the sound of a crutch on the floor, and Beatrice was amazed to find Mr. Schultzsky standing at her side, wiping his eyes on his red cotton handkerchief.

"My wife wass young like you," he said brokenly, "and she sang the same song. It wass a long time ago. She lifed only three months."

"I am sorry, Mr. Schultzsky," was all Beatrice found to say. She thought of the picture of the beautiful lady, hung crooked and high on the wall, opposite the old harness. "Perhaps grief and loneliness have made him what he is," she thought pityingly. "Miss Billy is right. There is a tender side to everybody, if we can only find it."

Outside on a platform improvised from an over-turned tub Policeman Canary was selling off the packages with neatness and despatch. Mr. Hennesy disported a pair of ladies' side combs in his hair. Mrs. Hennesy had a mouse-trap. Margaret Van Courtland became the happy possessor of a pound of dried codfish, Francis had a pair of red mittens, three sizes too small. Miss Billy drew a fire shovel, John Thomas got a mouth organ, and Mrs. Canary revelled in a dream book. Theodore was going round with an ornamental and very sticky candy heart that one of the children had contributed, begging every one to accept it,—and finally traded it to Marie Jean Hennesy for a bottle of catsup.

"We'll open ours together," said Beatrice, coming back to Mr. Schultzsky in the parlour.

Inside the wrappings in Mr. Schultzsky's hand lay a dainty thing, tied in tissue paper and blue ribbon. "Oh, it's what Margaret Van Courtland brought," exclaimed Beatrice. It was a lady's handkerchief, sheer and fine, edged about with a delicate lace. It lay in the old man's palm, yielding up a faint perfume and he gazed at it without speaking.

"And I," said Beatrice brightly, "have a package of smoking tobacco! Now that will be handy next Spring to pack away my furs."

The children grew sleepy, and the torches burned out, before the guests departed. Every one was in holiday humour. Every one voted it a success, and begged Miss Billy to set an early date for another. Miss Billy, tired but elated, counted the money in the tin box. "Twenty-five dollars!" she announced

jubilantly. "With that amount the Improvement Club shall work wonders. There is a five-dollar bill here. I wonder if anybody could have contributed that amount?"

"Mr. Schultzsky put that in,—that is, he gave it to me to put in for him," answered Beatrice quietly.

"Now what do you suppose can have come over the spirit of the old fellow's dream?" said Theodore. "Maybe he's enamoured of you, Bea."

"No, I think not," said Beatrice soberly. "I believe it was the stirring of a tender memory. He talked to me to-night of a girl wife, who died."

"Well, it has been a night of nights, and I am not surprised at anything," said Miss Billy. "To think that Francis should prove to be the Count, and Margaret and her set should go wild over him! Did you know, Beatrice, that he is a Princeton graduate;—and has had a year at Heidelberg, beside?"

Beatrice yawned. "Is there any more to do to-night?" she said. "I'm very sleepy."

CHAPTER XVIII

MARGARET LENDS ASSISTANCE

“Though whatsoever ills betide,
I’ll stand for ever by your side,
And naught shall you and me divide
Because you are my friend.”

THE only nice thing about your going away is your coming home again," said Miss Billy to Margaret.

The two girls were seated side by side on the floor in Margaret's room, which bore a startling resemblance to a fancy bazaar. The bed was filled with airy masses of silk and gauze, the divan covered with ribbons and gloves and shoes, and the floor strewn with a varied assortment of hats, perfumery flasks, filigree silver and handkerchiefs. Margaret's last trunk had arrived from abroad, and the two girls were spending the morning at that mysterious and delightful task known to all womankind as "unpacking."

"It's the next best thing to going away myself," continued Miss Billy, "to have you go; and come home with so much of the foreign atmosphere about you. Your sentences fairly ooze Rhine water, and foreign castles, and pretzels."

"Am I as bad as that?" laughed Margaret. "You remember Edward Eggleston's woman, whose topic of conversation was always, 'when I was to Bosting.' Do I give the impression of having been to Bosting?"

"Certainly you do," accused Miss Billy. "You've talked of nothing else since your return. Of course I might confess that I've egged you on a little,—a very little,—for politeness' sake. Oh, Peggy dear, it does seem so inexpressibly adorable to have you here again!"

"In order that you may tell me I talk too much," laughed Margaret again. "Never mind, Miss Billy. Your turn will come in a few moments, and I know from your eager and glittering eye that you have much to tell yourself. Here is the box I was looking for. I put the little things I got for you when I was abroad all together so that I could have the fun of seeing you open them."

"The little things" filled a long pasteboard box, with a queer foreign picture on the label. Margaret tossed it over on her friend's lap. Inside were a number of bundles and packages, two long tubes of pasteboard, and several smaller boxes. Miss Billy's lips trembled with a smile in which tenderness as well as joy was mingled.

"I can't tell you——" she began.

"Open them quick," commanded Margaret. "I want to see if they're right. Everything in the box was chosen especially for you."

Miss Billy obediently untied the packages. Margaret's words were true. Everything in the box had been chosen with a loving care that made the gifts still sweeter. There was a flame-coloured shawl of soft clinging crêpe, a gay Roman sash, a string of pale pink corals, four pairs of gloves in various shades of tan, a small gauze fan with ivory sticks, some carved wooden animals from the Black Forest, a set of

crystals in purple and white, and best of all—two large photographs of famous paintings—the little Angel of the Lute, and the boy St. John.

"Mother has something else for you," said Margaret, delighted at the evident success of her gifts. "She found three long pongee coats for you and Beatrice and me. They are just alike except for the trimming, and she thought it would be fun for us to have them alike."

Miss Billy glanced down at the heap of treasures in her lap to hide the grateful tears in her eyes. "I don't know how to thank you," she began unsteadily.

"Oh, pshaw," returned Margaret. "You'd better compose some grateful resolutions, in nine or ten whereases, which will express your emotions. I don't remember that I ever wept tears of thankfulness over the things you brought me from Chinatown when you went West. I merely received them as what was due me by all the laws of right and justice. That yellow shawl will make you look like a dream, Billy. I thought of your browny-coppery hair when I bought it."

"It isn't the *things* that I'm grateful for," began Miss Billy smiling through her tears. "It's just that you're home again, I guess. You don't know how much I've missed you, Peggy. You know, dear, it makes lots of difference in the number of friends one has, if one moves from Ashurst Place to Cherry Street."

"Why?" asked Margaret innocently.

"That's just what I knew you'd say," exclaimed Miss Billy. "A thing like that would never occur to you. But it does occur to the majority of people."

"Do you mean to say that your old friends have treated you differently since you—you moved?" demanded Margaret indignantly.

"Yes, I do mean that," responded Miss Billy. There was a moment's hesitation before she added proudly, "Of course, Margaret, I don't feel that it has made any difference with *me*. Only I have to admit to you that it does make a big difference with others."

"With whom, for instance?" questioned Margaret. "The Blanchards and their ilk? I thought so. Wilhelmina Lee, you don't dare to tell me that the Blanchard tribe *can* hurt you?"

There was a world of comfort in Margaret's loyal voice, and Miss Billy was forced to smile at her vehemence.

"I should be ashamed of you if I thought they could," went on Margaret. "They are such a punk lot—if you'll excuse my English. We met Mrs. Blanchard and the girls in Germany, and they were kind enough to offer us their escort through Europe. Mrs. Blanchard is a regular Old Woman of the Sea, and we were afraid we would either have to commit suicide or murder to get rid of her. She attached herself to mamma, and always called her 'my dear,' before strangers. She introduced papa as 'the Honourable Mr. Van Courtland'—you can imagine how furious that made my respected parent! And as for me, in a burst of affection, one day, she assured me that any one who had seen me six years ago would never have thought I 'would turn out so well!'"

The imitation of Mrs. Blanchard's caressing tones was perfect.

"She also told us the news of our friends," continued Margaret. "Of course I asked about you, the first thing; and she responded that you were interesting yourself in settlement work. It was such a laudable

and praiseworthy undertaking, but she understood that it was apt to be dirty; and—now don't be mad—Miss Billy—a little unmaidenly, for a young girl. Naturally my ire rose, and I replied that I thought it was the loveliest thing that a girl could do; that I had heard about what you had accomplished on Cherry Street, and that the moment I got home I was going to help,—if I wasn't too stupid. You don't mind my telling you all this, do you, Billy?"

Margaret's guest was surveying her with shining eyes and eager expression. She did not seem to hear the last question. "Oh, will you? Will you?" she demanded delightedly. "Oh, Peggy, you can help so much if you will."

Margaret threw aside the masses of chiffon she had been folding, and faced Miss Billy with straightforward eyes. "How?" she asked. Miss Billy hesitated. There was help needed in so many places. Then the pathetic face of Holly Belle rose before her. She thought of the worn little hands that thumped imaginary times on every piece of furniture in the house, of the sad little voice that spent its sweetness in lullabies, and of the starved little soul that was pining for the melody that had been utterly left out of her life. She remembered the unchildish expression of longing for a piano, and she told Holly Belle's sorry little story in a way that was very touching. Margaret's eyes grew tender, and her voice was very sweet as she said simply:

"I am more than ever glad of my music now. I shall love to help her. And she shall practice on my piano, too. Tell me all you have been doing on Cherry Street," said Margaret, as Miss Billy ratified the agreement with a grateful look that spoke volumes.

"Not very much," said Miss Billy modestly. "In fact, I haven't attempted much. 'Settlement work,' as our friend Mrs. Blanchard so genteelly put it, is not in my line. When I first went to live on the street I had great ideas of Improvement and Progress, with a big I and P. There was such grand opportunity for both. I had in my mind's eye a view of Cherry Street, shining with cleanliness and beauty; the neighbourhood united by a community of interests, and the thoroughfare famed far and wide as a model avenue. Now if I can get the Canarys to deposit their garbage in a barrel instead of the gutter, can induce the Levi children and the little Hogans to stop fighting at least one night out of the week, and can tell the street car conductor to let me off near Cherry Street without having him say, 'Where's that, lady?' I shall be satisfied."

"But what about the Child Garden and the Civic Improvement Club? Mr. Lindsay—I shall never cease to call him the Count to my own soul—says that you have already lured him into the work, and are going to give him a gymnasium class to manage as soon as cold weather begins. And that willowy lady at the lawn fête who assured me that she was 'the mother of a numerous prodigy, and naturally restricted to her home circle——'"

"That was Mrs. Canary——"

"Told me that you were the inspiring genii of the place, and that you had everybody on the street under the charm of your dainty thumb."

"She ought to see my hands after this unpacking seance," put in Miss Billy.

"Don't interrupt, I'm not through yet. And Miss Marie Jean Hennesy assured me that since Mr. Lindsay came you had 'waked up to the needs of the street.' But the best is yet to come. Marie Jean's father, the old philosopher who appeared in the frock coat of the vintage of '69—complimented you up to the skies. He said that it was well that there was only one o' Miss Billy, or the street 'ud be baked with the

sunshine she made."

Miss Billy had sunk back against the bed, overpowered by the assault of praises.

"'I was never so bethumped with words,'" she quoted. "I'm not accustomed to such flattery."

"Well, don't be so painfully modest, then. There's no sense in concealing things from me, Miss Billy. Other people will tell me if you don't. Papa and mamma wrote me the whole history of your triumphs two months ago,—the people on Cherry Street openly dote and gloat over you, and as for '*Miss* Francis Lindsay'—if it were any one else but you I should be devoured with jealousy!"

"Mr. Lindsay has been of great help to me," said Miss Billy simply. Her face was very happy. Up to the present time she had felt that the work had been its own reward, but it was very sweet to have it appreciated by others.

"He *is* a nice fellow," said Margaret. "Simple and manly, I mean, and without the conceit that usually goes with those boys of brain and brawn, who have led their class and been captain of the college football team. Of course, Miss Billy, I'm perfectly willing that he should help you with your civic improvement work, but don't ever fail to remember that I saw him first!"

"I won't forget," laughed Miss Billy. "But you must take care, Margaret. Marie Jean, according to Mrs. Canary, has a 'manner that's tinged with romantickism towards Mr. Francis.' However, as long as he is willing to help me in the Cherry Street work, I suppose you will permit me to use him. A boy can do more than a girl in many ways, and since Theodore has gone to work I often feel the need of a masculine hand."

"I suppose he comes in handily in chastising the Canary birds? How you must miss Ted during the whole day? You have always been together so much."

"I do miss him," responded Miss Billy soberly. Ted's hard lot had not yet ceased to leave a sore spot in his sister's heart. "Still I do admire him for sticking to his work."

"Do you know that he has changed much in the last six months?" inquired Margaret. "Of course he has grown much taller, but that isn't all. He seems so much older and more sedate. He laughs and jokes, but the old happy-go-lucky boy is gone. The change is delightful, but I do confess I miss the old teasing Ted."

Miss Billy looked a little anxious. "Yes, I know it," she said. "I have noticed it myself recently, and I've worried over it a little."

> "Never let yourself be worried,
> Or hurried, or flurried,"

sang Margaret.

"I'm not worrying or flurrying," retorted Miss Billy. "And as for hurrying"—she held up the new gloves as she spoke—

> "Time kid and I were home
> Half an hour ago.

"If I dared I should put on my new beads, my scarf, my sash and my crêpe shawl, and, carrying my new fan in my neatly gloved hands, should go home arrayed in all my glory; but I know I should die of pride

before I reached my humble doorstep. So I shall wrap them up tightly, and say 'fine feathers do not make fine birds' over and over all my way home. Oh, Peggoty, I never dreamed that I should actually own a string of coral beads myself!"

"I wish you could stay to luncheon," sighed Margaret. "However, I'm coming for you with the cart this afternoon, and after we drive we'll come here for dinner. You'll have to, you see, in order to try on the coat before mother."

"Don't offer any inducements," said Miss Billy. "I shall continue to live with you from now on. Tie your German flag to the window as a signal when you don't want to see me. I shall come here for music, for companionship, for comfort, for help, and for advice. In short, Margaret, you'll be sorry, before the autumn begins, that you are such an 'eddicated person.' I may possibly have mentioned this fact to you before, but I *am* glad, glad, glad that you are at home again."

CHAPTER XIX

PERSONAL PLEASURE

"How sad, and bad, and mad it was!
But then how it was sweet!"

SCHOOL commences Monday," groaned Theodore dismally, from his favourite position on the couch. "How I am to modulate my tones to Virgil's verse after shouting at Mr. Hennesy's mules for two months, I can't see. As for a geometrical theorem, I haven't a single lucid idea on the subject. It's been a great summer, come to look back on it."

"Dear me," said Miss Billy, throwing down the book she was reading,—"I don't see how I am going to break loose from everything and go back to school. The Canary birdlings will be just as dirty and ill-cared for as ever,—and little Mike, and Isaac Levi, and a half dozen others are too young for the public kindergarten. Then there's the Street Improvement Club, and the mothers' meetings,—why, I don't see what I am to do."

Beatrice looked up from the lunch cloth she was hemstitching for a church fair. "If you can trust the smaller children to me," she said timidly, "I think I can take care of them. I was talking to Mrs. Canary to-day. I told her she could send the twins and Mikey over every morning for two hours, as usual. She seemed so relieved and happy over it, and promised that Holly Belle should go to school."

"Oh," cried Miss Billy, with shining eyes, "it's lovely of you, Bea, and Holly Belle will be wild with delight. But those babies are the slipp'riest things when they're wet!"

"I shall not drop them," said Beatrice firmly. "I shall think of Holly Belle all the time, and that her chances depend upon my success. All the rest of the little brood shall have as conscientious care as I can give them for two hours every day,—but I don't expect it to be easy for me, as it is for you."

"Oh, they'll love you, Bea," said Miss Billy enthusiastically. "You don't know what dear little things they are, especially just after they've been washed. Well, *that's* settled, then. Margaret will be glad to relieve you at any time, I know,—and she will continue to look after Holly Belle's music, too. The way the child takes to it is simply wonderful. Francis, of course, will continue at the head of the Street Improvement Club."

"Five long days between this and school, and nothing to do!" murmured Theodore luxuriously from the couch. "I shall drive no mules,—I shall instruct no growing intellects. Fads may continue to lead Miss Billy round by the nose, up to the very last minute,—but I shall do nothing at all!"

"It has been a busy summer," said Mrs. Lee, with a half arrested sigh.

"Is it good news, papa?" asked Beatrice of her father, who in the soft glow of the study lamp had been perusing the illegibly scrawled sheets of a special delivery letter.

"It is more!" said the minister impressively. "It is a vindication of human nature under the worst circumstances. Nearly twenty years ago a young fellow came to me for assistance. He had been in a

hospital with a fever, and had neither money, work or friends. He wanted to go out West, where he thought he might be able to find employment. I drew him out about his past life, and found he knew what it was to sleep in a haystack and be lodged in a jail: but I lent him twenty-five dollars——"

"And he has died a millionaire and bequeathed you a fortune," wound up Theodore dramatically, sitting upright.

"No," said the minister, smiling, "those things happen only in books. What the fellow has really done is to return me the amount I lent him, with a half-manly sort of a letter showing he has cherished a sense of gratitude all these years. That is much more than I expected."

"Conscience money!" groaned Beatrice. "I suppose it will go to the poor."

"Let us hope to the deserving poor, like me!" observed Theodore, dismally echoing the groan, and collapsing on the couch again.

"Or like father," said Miss Billy severely. "It would buy him lots of things he needs."

The minister sat tapping his glasses with smiling introspection. "When I was a lad," he said slowly, "I desired with all my heart and soul a certain steam toy. It was rather a clever contrivance, and of course, was expensive. But I wanted it more than I've wanted anything since. Sometimes I dream I am a boy again, and always I see standing in the black shadow of disappointment that steam toy."

"And father's going to buy it now," said Theodore breathlessly.

"No," said the minister, shaking his head: "It's too late! that's the worst of it. But that was a distinct disappointment in my life that no amount of reasoning could reason me out of."

"It makes me think of an incident of my own childhood," said Mrs. Lee. "When I was about five years old, I attended my first party, given by a neighbour's child. All I can remember is that a black-eyed lady with dark curly hair passed a platter of tarts, and with an indistinct idea that it was a well-bred thing to do, I said, 'No, thank you,—I don't eat tarts.' Then I sat with welling eyes watching the other little guests eat theirs. It was a very real grief. I cried for that tart in the loneliness of many nights,—and I haven't forgotten it in thirty years."

"It is my belief that every one has ungratified whims," said the minister. "Some are grown-up whims, but none the less whimsical. I propose that we use this money for the gratification of purely personal pleasure. There will be five dollars for each of us. We'll have one glorious day of vacation,—with the world before us, and five dollars for spending money!"

"I know what I should like to buy with mine," said Beatrice, "but I know you would all think it silly."

"And I've had an ungratified whim for years!" said Miss Billy, rising and overthrowing a pile of books in her excitement. "But you'll call it preposterous when you find out what it is!"

"Now watch her bring home a bear cub with a silver chain round its neck, and want me to build it a little pagoda to live in," said Theodore disdainfully. "But I know what I am going to do. I shall be the Count of Monte Cristo for one day only. Remember the date,—September the first,—to-morrow!"

"But it does seem a little wasteful," began Mrs. Lee, smiling in spite of herself at the exuberance of spirit in the air, "especially when——"

The minister interrupted, a mischievous ring in his voice. "I beg to remind you, Mrs. Lee, that 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.' We intend to have a lark. To relieve your mind let me add that I myself shall go on an eminently respectable lark,—one that shall not estrange me from my flock, for instance. We intend for one day to divide our ages by two, and no remainder. You shall be one of us, or forfeit your money. Though poor in pocket, we shall be rich in experiences. Do you agree?"

There was much bustling commotion at Number 12 Cherry Street the next morning. "I've sent word to the children not to come to-day," said Miss Billy, putting on her hat and tucking her rain coat under her arm. "Poor little things,—they'll be disappointed. Well,—good-bye, Bea,—I shall not see you again till night."

"Now do be careful, Wilhelmina," warned Beatrice. "Don't buy anything you don't want, or make yourself conspicuous in any way, or——"

"Why," said Miss Billy, "I am going to gratify a heretofore ungratified whim. There are no conditions whatever. I have divided my age by two, the world is before me, and I have five dollars for spending money. Well, good-bye again; take care of yourself, dear," and Miss Billy sailed off down the street.

Theodore went next. He was attired in his very best clothes, and presented a fashionable appearance in a fearfully high collar and a white tie. Then the minister departed. Beatrice could hear him say to her mother in the hall, "I haven't had such delightful chills of anticipation since I took part in cane rushes at college twenty-five years ago. And I haven't the slightest idea what I'm going to do, either!"

Next Beatrice heard the door close after her mother's retreating form. She peeped out of the window and noted she carried a shopping bag. "The dear," she said. "She will buy us all stockings or gloves, and declare it was a purely personal whim. But it won't be keeping to the contract if she does!"

It was quite ten o'clock when Beatrice left the house. She was dressed in her best street gown, with dainty hat and gloves to match. As she closed the door behind her, Francis Lindsay was just coming out of his uncle's gate. He lifted his hat to her, and then crossed the street. "I hope Miss Billy isn't ill?" he inquired, with a shade of constraint in his manner. "I've heard, you see, of the child garden being discontinued to-day."

"No, she is not ill," answered Beatrice, feeling with embarrassment the colour creeping into her cheeks. "If I could only get over this silly habit of blushing every time a stranger speaks to me," she thought angrily,—and then blushed more furiously than ever.

There was nothing to do but walk along, and Francis, who evidently also was on his way down town, walked with her. He talked pleasantly, but Beatrice's replies were sadly disconnected.

"He noticed me blush," she kept thinking hotly. "No doubt he is conceited enough to attribute it to his own personal charms!"

She welcomed the first store as an avenue of escape, and bade him good-morning. "He has just spoiled my day," she thought, as she tossed over silk stockings and lace handkerchiefs in a flurry. "I'm always making myself ridiculous!"

But the zest of shopping came back to her, and she visited store after store, looking at pretty, dainty, feminine things, feeling her money always safe in her pocket, and knowing exactly what she should be weak enough to buy in the end. But it was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon, and she was feeling tired and a little dishevelled and very hungry, before she came to the Mecca of her wanderings.

It was a fashionable shoe-store, and in the very centre of the show window hung a fascinating pair of little red satin slippers, with Louis Quinze heels. Beatrice shut her eyes and grappled with temptation. "I haven't a thing that's suitable to go with them," she argued to herself. "In fact, I believe they would be out of place anywhere but in a French dressing room. But they are so sweet and dainty with their beautiful little gilt heels——"

She opened the door and went in. The place was filled with customers, but a bustling salesman came forward and smiled into Beatrice's pretty flushed face. Yes, certainly, he would take them out of the show window. They were the only pair in stock,—a sample pair. He tried one of the satin slippers on Beatrice's dainty foot, and stepped back to admire the effect. "They are a perfect fit," he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Beatrice. They pinched her toes a little, but she would not wear them often. "Five dollars, did you say?" Then she should have to wait for the silk hose to match. She had hoped they would not be more than four. She pondered a moment, and then decided aloud, "I'll take them."

The salesman hurried away to put them in their box, and Beatrice, looking around for the first time, encountered the keen glance of a pair of dark eyes at the opposite counter. It was Francis Lindsay.

There was one dismayed moment,—then she hastily averted her glance without bowing in recognition. "He has watched me buy those silly slippers," she thought, growing red and white by turns. "He has stood there watching me admire myself in them. His eyes were full of unutterable things. Oh, I just—hate him!"

She glanced into the long mirror opposite, and it reflected back a figure from which all the morning daintiness had fled. Her boots were dusty, her gloves gaping at the fingers. The jaunty hat was awry;—her face was flushed, and burned with fatigue and heat.

The salesman returned with the package, and Beatrice gave him the five-dollar bill. She hastily left the store, and, still with averted eyes, bumped into the very person she was seeking to avoid.

"I beg your pardon," he said, raising his hat. "It was my awkwardness. I stopped to raise my umbrella. You see it rains a little." Then noticing that she carried no umbrella, and that she was looking very tired, he asked kindly, "Are you going home?"

"I think I am ready for home," answered Beatrice, trying to keep the tears out of her voice. "I've been down town since ten o'clock——" She stopped suddenly, the absurdity of the statement coupled with the single package of which he had relieved her, appealing to her with full force.

"But you've had luncheon?"

"I am not at all hungry," declared Beatrice perversely. She was very near to tears, and she felt that another question on his part might precipitate them.

"This is the very time to have you taste the German cake they call 'puffer,' and which can be had only in this shop," said Francis,—and almost before she knew it he had led the way into a caterer's, and a neat little maid was taking an order for iced chocolate and the German sweet-bread.

"What would father say?" she thought despairingly. "What will Miss Billy say? What shall I say to myself, to-morrow?" But for the present she was strangely content to sit in restful retirement opposite this grave dark-eyed young fellow, Mr. Schultzsky's grand-nephew, and satisfy her hunger with the iced chocolate and delicious German cake.

She was telling him the history of the day.

Strangely, too, in a few moments she was telling him the history of the day, and Francis was laughing heartily. "That accounts for the oddity of Miss Billy's actions," he declared. "I saw her riding on the top of an empty omnibus, clad in the sombre disguise of a raincoat. But she evidently didn't care if I knew her, for she waved her hand to me from her elevated perch."

Beatrice was too tired to be horrified. "I knew she would do something dreadful," she said, "but I, certainly, shall offer no criticism."

It was a tired little family group that gathered in the minister's study that night.

"I had no idea," said Theodore, from the couch, "that it used a fellow up so to have a gay time. I took dinner at the 'Alhambra,' ordering the best the place afforded, only cutting out the wines. That cost me

two dollars, and I tipped the waiter with a quarter. Then I took a cab to the horse show, and took in the matinee on the way back. It cost me a dollar for a seat in the parquet. I didn't have enough money left for supper, so I ate two mince pies at a restaurant and I've got a nickel left."

"Well," said Miss Billy, "it comes easier to tell my story since I've heard Theodore's. I've always had the greatest desire to ride on the top of an omnibus and look at things from that point of view. I knew for appearance's sake I couldn't trundle back and forth from the trains, so I hired a whole omnibus for myself, with a driver, to take me out into the country. It was grand! It seemed as though the whole world was unrolled before me! It gave me a feeling of being some great bird flying through the air——"

"A wild goose, for instance!" put in Theodore disgustedly.

"Well I'm not an ostrich, anyhow, to eat all a hotel affords and two mince pies on top of it!" retorted Miss Billy, with spirit. "That omnibus ride cost me four dollars, but it was worth it. Then I bought a box of chocolates and came home."

"Now I suppose it's my turn," said the minister. "The first thing I saw when I left the house this morning was a load of watermelons. They were unusually fine melons, and the boy offered me the whole wagon load dirt cheap."

"Father!" broke in Miss Billy tragically, "what can I do with the rinds of a wagon load of watermelons, to say nothing of the seeds? We couldn't clean it up in weeks!"

"I had an idea your mother pickled the rinds," said the minister mildly.

"Consider pickling a wagon load of watermelon rinds," groaned Beatrice. "Beside, papa, we don't pickle the shell!"

"Cease your lamentations," said Theodore, with a wave of his hand. "I see in this the nucleus of a great business enterprise, that shall live, flourish and spread,—and shall be known in the future as the 'Lee Pickle Works.' I shall be president, father can be buyer, and Miss Billy and Bea can do the pickling."

"Well," went on the minister, "I'm glad now I didn't buy the melons,—but it was certainly a temptation, they were such fine ones. The next thing I seemed to fancy was a buggy robe,—just five dollars,—so warm, and handsome, too, in the brown and gold colours your mother likes. But I happened to remember we didn't have a buggy, so I gave that up."

"This seems to be all about the things father didn't buy," said Theodore astutely. "He's giving us mild shocks, so we can bear the climax of what he did buy."

"I assure you I ran the gamut of temptations," said the minister. "At two o'clock I had about decided on a bull terrier pup. At three I was discussing the merits of a newfangled washing machine. But I finally ended it all by wandering into a fashionable photograph gallery and sitting for a picture, in the latest style. It will not be finished till next week, though."

There was great clapping of hands as this recital was finished. "Motherie next," called Miss Billy.

"I have no story to relate," protested Mrs. Lee. "Knowing exactly what I wanted, I went straight and bought it. Five dollars' worth of pots, kettles and pans. I haven't had any new kitchen utensils since our tenth wedding anniversary, and Maggie and I were at our wits' end with leaky vessels."

"You broke the contract!" said Theodore, pointing an accusing finger. "Kitchen utensils cannot be

classed as a personal whim."

"Indeed they can! You will think so when you see them!" returned his mother laughingly. "They are of every shape, size and description. At first I thought of buying you all pretty silver pins, and having the date inscribed as a memento of a day of experiences. But thinking you might not consider that fair, I took the pans."

"Last but not least," announced Theodore oratorically, "Beatrice will tell us the experiences that befell a beautiful damsel in search of a personal whim."

Beatrice coloured slightly, but did not raise her eyes from her hemstitching.

"There is very little to tell, and it is very foolish. I've fancied a pair of satin slippers in Frothingham's show window for a long time. Such gay little things, with the dearest heels,—so I went and bought them."

"Oh," said Miss Billy disappointedly, "is that all? Didn't you meet with any experiences quite unlike other days,—see new people, and get other views? Didn't anything new come into your life?"

Beatrice bent her head lower over her work. "No," she answered, "nothing new."

CHAPTER XX

FAIR SKIES

“Cæsar himself could never say
He got two victories in one day.”

DO you know, Ted," said Miss Billy, as they took their way to school together one morning in late September, "this air makes me feel like cutting civilisation entirely and taking to the wide prairies, where I can stick feathers in my hair, ride a bare-backed pony, and never hear another dreary platitude of Pope or Dryden's nor bother my head about the difference between the hieroglyphic and the hierotic characters on the Egyptian obelisks."

"Well, I wouldn't be surprised at anything you might do," said Theodore, "and I know it would be done exhaustively. But what's the matter with school? I thought you liked it."

"Oh, it's not school, altogether. It's everything. It's life,—civilised life,—with all its little petty trials and meannesses. Now here is Miss Peabody's school that we have to pass,—the hall of the select and the home of the cultured,—an Eden from which I have been driven, to judge from the manner of some of the girls when I go by. Of course, I could go round the other way, but I just won't! I march past with my head up and my colours flying,—they give me the iciest bows,—I return them a mere sweep of my eyelashes,—and the thing is over for the day. But it rankles and hurts, and makes me miserable in spite of myself."

"I have been enduring that sort of thing for two months," said Theodore. "I am becoming cheerfully resigned to it. Whenever I meet those girls in a crowd together, they have an interesting letter to bend their heads over, or something of that kind, and at the very last moment one or two will look up and give me a half-frightened bow, and I raise my hat with dignity to Miss Peabody's cupola, or some other equally lofty object, and walk on. Of course, I understand Myrtle Blanchard is at the bottom of it all. She's paying back an old score."

Miss Peabody's Select Seminary for Young Ladies, which they were approaching, was a handsome building in grey stone, with an imposing iron fence, and a square of well-kept lawn strewn with garden seats, on which "the select" were even now gathered. Miss Myrtle Blanchard was there, and as she saw Miss Billy and Theodore coming, she rose, in company with two other of the most popular girls, and advanced to the gate.

"You don't suppose they are meaning to speak to us," gasped Miss Billy in amazement. "Why, those three girls have been the ringleaders of the whole thing!"

Evidently the young ladies did mean to speak to them. They advanced with outstretched hands, and Miss Myrtle hooked on to Miss Billy's arm, while the other two engaged Theodore.

"Why in the world don't you ever come to see me," said Miss Myrtle, with an expostulatory little shake. "But there,—I know the reason. You are so carried away with Cherry Street that you haven't a thought for old friends! Oh, I know all about it, Miss Billy.—You needn't deny it! I've heard all about your Improvement Club, and the social you gave, and everything. Maude and Blanche wrote in their last London letter that slumming was more fashionable than ever, there."

"Yes?" said Miss Billy, looking meaningly at Theodore,—but Miss Myrtle was not to be so lightly shaken off.

"Margaret Van Courtland tells me she is a member of your Club,—and that elegant young college man,

Mr. Lindsay, too, that the girls are raving over. Why didn't you let me know about it this summer? I've been just aching to help somebody. I want you to put my name down right away for membership. Maude and Blanche will want to join when they come, I know. They'll love to belong to anything Margaret Van Courtland is connected with. They just adore her,—and they'll enjoy slumming."

"It isn't slumming," said Miss Billy, with repressed indignation. "It's just a little neighbourhood affair, and we are all on perfectly equal terms."

"Call it what you will, only let me belong! Remember now,—you've promised!" And with a final squeeze to the imprisoned arm, and a brilliant smile for Theodore, Miss Myrtle and her companions happily retraced their steps to the sacred confines of the Seminary.

"Hold me up till my shattered nerves are restored," murmured Theodore. "They almost ate me up!"

"Miss Myrtle has an axe to grind, but she shall not grind it on my grindstone," said Miss Billy resolutely. "She has a misty idea that I've become fashionable and quite the thing, and that she's not in it. She called our Improvement work 'slumming,' and wants to join our club. Imagine her condescending to Mr. Hennesy, or Marie Jean, or Mr. Schultzsky, or in short, any of them! And yet, Theodore, I'm such a miserably weak character, I couldn't help being glad I had on my real lace collar when she was talking to me."

"Well," said Theodore, "the tables have at last turned,—and strangely enough, through our friends in Cherry Street. You wakened, as it were, to find yourself famous, Miss Billy."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Billy. "I gave her distinctly to understand that every member of the Improvement Club was a friend of mine,—but of course she is too shallow to understand it. Still, our relations with many of the girls will be less strained now, because of her friendliness, and that is something to be thankful for."

The Blanchard trap stood at the door of the High School that afternoon, when school was dismissed. Miss Myrtle herself, in a natty green coat with a scarlet collar, and a red Tam o' Shanter, sat high on the box with the reins in her hands.

"I have come for you both, to drive," she smiled. "This is our new trap. Don't you admire the red paint and the shining wheels? I know, now we have it, I shall bore you with attentions, but I don't expect to take 'no' for an answer."

"Ted," murmured Miss Billy, "I shall have to feed you to the lions. Providentially, here is Margaret with her cart to take me."

"I refuse to be fed," said Theodore firmly. "I've got to go up town and order some things for mother. Get into the trap yourself,—and I'll go with Margaret."

So Miss Billy was obliged to climb into the seat beside Miss Myrtle, while Theodore, winding his long legs into the cart, took the reins from Margaret's hand and with a sharp click to Patsy was off without a backward glance.

Margaret laughed. "Ted, you grow more like Billy every day. You have the same way of waving the American flag, and reading the Declaration of Independence, and having your rights. Now, don't go on disliking Myrtle. For one thing, it's too much trouble. If you think of her at all, think of her kindly, and, with a little practice, life will be a summer sea."

"No, sir!" said Theodore, flecking a fly off Patsy's back with the whip. "When people stand on my corns, I propose to let them know it. I found out who my friends were when I drove Mr. Hennesy's mules. It was perfectly honourable work, you know, but not elegant. A fellow's better off without fine-feather friends. He has the courage, then, to be what he is,—and stands a better chance of amounting to something."

"Well, I dare say you are right," said Margaret, "and if you are not,—it would be impossible to make either you or Billy over, so what's the use of arguing? Here is Brown's drug store. Will you step out and give them this bottle, Ted? It will take some time to put up the prescription, so tell them they may deliver it."

Theodore's face changed. He was on the point of saying, "I don't go to Brown's,"—but he would a little rather Margaret should not know that story. After all, why should he not go? It certainly would not improve Mr. Brown's opinion of his character if he avoided the place. He gave the reins into Margaret's hand, took the bottle and disappeared into the store.

There were two or three customers being waited upon,—the clerks were in their usual places,—Mr. Brown was at the desk. He took the bottle to the prescription clerk. "When it is ready, send it up to Mr. Van Courtland's," he said, and was turning away when Mr. Brown called him.

"I have a letter here for you," he said, fumbling among the papers on his desk, "that I had just written and was about to send. Yes,—this is it,—merely asking you to call at the store." He opened the money drawer, took out five dollars, and shoved it toward Theodore. "Mrs. Thorpe found that bill a few days after you were there. It had slipped under the lining of her purse. She has been away all summer, so she only had an opportunity of returning it to me a day or two ago."

Mr. Brown was returning to his books, and Theodore took the bill with heightened colour. "I hope, sir," he said, "that this entirely establishes my honesty in your mind?"

"I never doubted it," said Mr. Brown. "You took the affair a little too hard. Remember, you discharged yourself. If you should want your job back again next Spring, I'll try to let you have it. I don't think you will ever lose another bill."

"Thank you, sir," said Theodore, and passed out. He sprang into the cart beside Margaret, and gave the astonished Patsy a vigourous slap with the lines.

"Why, what's the matter?" said Margaret. "Your eyes are as shiny, and your cheeks as red——"

"I don't mind telling you the story now," said Theodore. "I went into that store wearing convict's stripes, figuratively speaking, and I've come out without 'em. My character is cleared, but I've a notion it will take some time for my shaved hair and my self-respect to grow again."

CHAPTER XXI

HALLOWE’EN

“Never since the world began
Has been such repartee;
And never till the next begins
Will greater things be done by man
Than this same company.”

I ’M going to have a party to-night," announced Theodore, coming into the study on a morning in late October. Mrs. Lee and the two girls looked up from their work in astonishment. "To-night!" they said in chorus.

"I think it's about my turn to 'entertain,'" went on Ted in a mock aggrieved tone. "Father opened the house to the Guild last week, mother had the Mothers' Meeting here yesterday, Beatrice has company all the time, and I'm still picking peanut shells, left from Miss Billy's Lawn Fête, out of the grass. Don't you think that I deserve a 'function' to-night?"

"It seems to me that your arrangements are being made rather late in the day," laughed Mrs. Lee. "One usually plans for a party a day or two beforehand."

"Not for this kind of an entertainment," explained Theodore. "This is a sudden inspiration of mine—planned 'on the spur of the instant,' as Mrs. Canary would say. If you'll let me use the gasoline range to-night, that's all I'll ask. I'm going to give a pancake party."

"What's a pancake party?" inquired Miss Billy.

"Hist!" returned Theodore mysteriously. "'Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ascalon,' is my motto. The ghosts and the witches walk abroad to-night, and we shall fitly celebrate. So much you shall know and no more. Miss Billy, if you offer to make me a rarebit in your chafing dish to-night, I shall courteously accept; and mother, a bottle of stuffed olives, three bunches of radishes and a fruit cake would be delicate attentions on your part."

"Whom are you going to invite?" asked Beatrice.

"Oh, Margaret, of course, and Lindsay, and our friend John Thomas, and I suppose Mary Jane."

"But that won't make enough men to go around."

"Oh, you and Mary Jane can divide Mr. Lindsay," said Ted carelessly. "He's big enough to make two."

Beatrice left the room, and Ted went to his father's desk, where he laboured painfully over the following poetical effusion:

"Theodore Lee would like to see you at his home on Friday. Please come at eight, and do not wait to make yourself too tidy. For spells and tricks are apt to fix your clothes in sad condition; and folks, I ween, on Hallowe'en are not on exhibition."

Beatrice, coming downstairs at eight o'clock that evening, to assist in receiving the guests, found Miss Billy seated on the hearth rug, while Ted bedecked her hair with an artistic arrangement of feathers pulled out of the duster.

The elder sister looked disturbed. "Goodness!" she said. "Don't let Ted do that. I hope you're not intending to wear those things."

"Why not?" said Miss Billy carelessly. "The feather duster's moulting, anyway."

"It isn't the duster I'm thinking of. It's you. Why *will* you be so ridiculous before visitors?"

"Oh, pshaw," exclaimed Miss Billy impatiently. "I'm doing it for fun. The 'visitors' are only girls and boys."

"Mr. Lindsay is twenty-four," replied Beatrice with dignity, "and I am not a child."

"Oh, ho!" jeered Ted, "you're both Methusalehs! Lindsay's got more sense than most people of his age. He's more like sixteen than twenty-four."

Miss Billy had already removed the towering plumes.

> "I love my darling sister so
> That I would much for her forego,"

she chanted. "There goes the door bell. Ted, you're the footman?"

"By all the powers above!" exclaimed Ted, as he swung open the door in mock ceremony. "Mr. Francis Lindsay, in a full suit of evening clothes! Such splendour! I'm glad now I blacked my shoes. Miss Billy, don't you wish you'd braved Bea's jeers and worn your ostrich tips?"

> "To the horror of all who were present that day
> He uprose in full evening dress,
> And with senseless grimaces endeavoured to say
> What his tongue could no longer express,"

quoted Francis. "Am I or am I not to come in? Good-evening, Miss Billy, good-evening, Miss Lee."

Beatrice looked critically at the tall figure bending over her sister's hand. In his evening clothes Mr. Schultzsky's grand-nephew was a fine looking man, she owned to herself, and her voice was unusually cordial as she added her greeting to Miss Billy's.

At the stroke of eight Margaret appeared, and John Thomas soon followed, in a high state of collar and excitement. "Mary Jane wasn't ready to come with me," he announced cheerfully. "She was prinking before the glass when I went by her room, and she said she couldn't fix her hair. She'll be along."

His prediction was verified by a faint jingle of the door bell. A moment later Marie Jean's shrill voice was heard in the hall. "Oh, thank you, Mr. Theodore, don't mention it, please. I'm *so* sorry to have kept you waiting. Where shall I lay my cloak?" The little group, gathered round the first fall fire, fell apart to permit the entrance of the last guest.

It was Marie Jean, but transformed. She wore the trailing silk skirt, and a bodice of showy pink taffeta, but the heavy frizzes were gone. Her hair was parted as smoothly and evenly as Margaret's own, and the

German braids lent new character to her face. She glanced in some surprise at Beatrice's simple grey-blue gown, and surveyed Miss Billy's scarlet waist with disapproval. The plain elegance of Margaret's tailor suit utterly escaped her, but her eyes brightened as she beheld Francis' pearl studs. "He's got a genuine swallow tail," she said to herself. "I'm glad I dressed up."

"Come into the kitchen," announced the host, leading the way to the rear of the house. "This is the scene of our operations. Lindsay, how we are to manage such elegance as yours and Miss Marie Jean's, I don't see. You'll have to be aproned, each one of you." He handed Marie Jean and Margaret long gingham aprons, and then to the amusement of all proceeded to array Francis' six foot length in one of Bea's daintiest and most be-ruffled pinafores.

"The gasoline stove is for the fudge, which you, John Thomas, will find already mixed, in the pantry," continued Ted. "The range is ready for the pancakes, which you, Francis, are to bake during your leisure moments this evening. In the meantime, we will try what fate has in store for us."

There was a little thrill of expectation as Miss Billy and Theodore appeared, bearing a tub partly full of water, with a number of rosy cheeked apples floating on the surface. "Dive for your fate," commanded Ted. "The red apples are for the girls, the yellow ones for the boys. Your intended's name you'll find within." There was a dashing and splashing after the little buoys of fate, and even Beatrice and Marie Jean lost their dignity as the apples slipped time after time from the inviting crunch of their teeth. Margaret secured the first—a big red apple labelled "The Count," John Thomas drew "Miss Billy," and Ted made a wry face as he read "Myrtle Blanchard" on the yellow Baldwin that floated in his clutch.

"Let's try the next test before we go to cooking," said Miss Billy, producing a tray which held seven miniature ships. Each was made of the half of an English walnut shell, and held an inch of wax taper in its tiny hold.

"Choose your colour," directed the hostess, "and launch your ship on the sea of life. If the light burns steadily till the wax is all melted, and the boat rides the waves safely, you are assured a long and happy life. If two boats come together and continue to sail about side by side their owners will pass much of their life together. Two boats in collision means a quarrel. A boat that touches frequently at the sides of the tub predicts many short voyages for the owner, but a bold vessel that goes to the other side promises a life of adventure and travel. All aboard!"

One by one the small crafts were launched on the sea, and the owners hung over the tub awaiting the result with eagerness.

Margaret's capsized early in the course. Francis' and Marie Jean's crept along side by side, Theodore's and John Thomas' collided, and Miss Billy's travelled independently and speedily across the tub despite the sly efforts of Ted to turn its course. There was much teasing and laughing before the boats dropped their anchors. Theodore, who carried the tub to the kitchen, returned with a small iron vessel, a long-handled spoon, and a cup of water.

"This is the truest test of fate," he announced. "The melted lead dropped into the water will foretell every man's destiny with neatness and despatch. Strike, while the iron—and lead—is hot. Your turn first, 'oh rare pale Margaret.'"

The group left the fudge to the mercy of the fire and surrounded Theodore. The lead dropped into the cup of water, and Ted peeped cautiously into the bottom. "The fates speak truly," he announced solemnly. "It's a cabbage—thrown at your first concert, I suppose. Miss Marie Jean, the next spoonful is

for you. Here it is, but I'll be switched if I know *what* it is."

John Thomas peered over his shoulder. "It's a hand glass," he announced.

"So it is," assented Ted. "I suppose you'll be a professional beauty like Mme. de Staël or Maxine Elliott. You may take the lead for a memento. Beatrice, step up to the front. Hail, all hail, you have won—a man,—a nice big fellow with a football."

"That must be you, Francis," said John Thomas, looking up at the tall athlete at his side.

Beatrice looked annoyed, and Francis' usually calm face reddened suddenly. Miss Billy's quick wits detected confusion in the air, and she stepped forward hastily. "Now me," she said.

Theodore dropped a spoonful of lead in the water, and it sank with a heavy thump.

"The man with a hoe! Or perhaps it's Mr. Schultzsky with his crutch instead," announced Ted. "This is for you, John Thomas—a nice round dollar. That means that one of these days you'll have money instead of lead to put in the fire.... Now Mr. Lindsay, leave your griddle and behold."

"A lead maiden!" said Margaret, as the metal hardened into a graceful shape in the bottom of the cup. "A bride, I declare! See her bouquet."

"Last but not least," announced Ted cheerfully, "is the fate of Mr. Theodore Somers Lee, one of the most charming and delightful members of our little circle. He deserves the best that the gods can provide. What have we here? A book! I bet it's a Bible. I have always had a secret longing for the life of a missionary. There's a cry from Macedonia, and I shall turn out immediately."

"It's more likely to be a bed than a Bible," announced Miss Billy witheringly. "Then you'll turn in, not out."

"Why is a boy pigeon-toed at night?" improvised Theodore. "Because he turns in."

There was a chorus of groans in reply. "That is the way we roast chestnuts on Hallowe'en," said Francis wickedly.

"Isn't it time to put on the pancakes?" said John Thomas. "The fudge is almost done."

"That's my work," said Francis. "Miss Billy, did you say there was a ring in the batter? What is it for?"

Miss Billy had brought out a bag of chestnuts, and was placing them in a long row on the top of the stove.

"The one who gets the ring is to be married first," she said. "But we'll try the chestnut charm before the cakes are ready,—if you can stand the smoke."

"What is the test?" asked Margaret.

"Name the two nuts," explained Ted, "one for yourself and one for 'your steady.' If they roast quietly and gently your affair will be long and tranquil; if they burst or fly apart, there will be troubles in the family."

The circle of young people gathered closer, and watched the little emblems of friendship. The fire crackled and burned brighter, and a silence fell upon the room. One by one the chestnuts popped and

flew off, until only the two named by Miss Billy were left. They burned quietly side by side until Francis pushed them, fully roasted, into the owner's lap.

"You are the happy one," he said. "For whom were they named?"

"I shall never tell," declared Miss Billy.

Four great stacks of smoking cakes were carried into the dining room, where Miss Billy's chafing dish was already burning. Mrs. Lee had evidently lent her assistance, for added to Theodore's menu was a large plate of sandwiches and a pitcher of hot chocolate.

The hungry people gathered around the table; and the brown pancakes, covered with butter and smothered in maple syrup, received much commendation. While they were at the table the doorbell rang. Mrs. Lee, who had answered the bell, came into the dining room with a large basket in her hand, and a puzzled expression on her face.

"There was no one at the door," she said. "Only this basket. It has your name on it, Wilhelmina."

Miss Billy lifted the cover and peered in. "What on earth!" she began. She lifted out a curious little package labelled "Miss Margaret Van Courtland." "This is evidently for you," she said as she peered in again. "But there are a whole lot of others. One for each of us." She distributed the parcels to the party, while Margaret dubiously opened the square bundle that had been handed to her.

A small pasteboard box labelled "Burke's Peerage" was exposed to view. The following poem accompanied it:

"A maiden named Peggy Van C——
Sailed far from New York State and me!
And she played the pianner,
And won prize and banner,
In ev'ry conservato-ree.

"But my honest American name
She spurned to my sorrow and shame,
For she said 'I shan't marry
With Tom, Dick and Harry,
I'm looking for much higher game.

"'With my excellent banking account
To royalty's height I may mount.'
She ran into her fate,
But discovered too late
He was called in Burke's book—no (a) count."

"Congratulations, Ted," said Margaret. "I recognise your dainty touch in this."

Ted looked innocent.

"Why should all blame and anger dread
Fall straight upon my luckless head?"

he murmured. "John Thomas, I see you drew a prize. What is it?"

John Thomas had been examining his parcel, and his face was very red. He held up two scarlet hearts impaled on a long tin arrow.

"I don't want to read the po'try," he said bashfully.

"Oh, yes," begged Miss Billy. "Go on, John Thomas. What do *you* care? It's all in fun."

The boy unfolded the paper obediently.

"He lives next door to Billy Lee,
He smiles at her incessantly,
His name they say is Hennes-sy,
And John.

"He little knows her temper bad,
He's never seen her when she's mad.
Misguided youth! His lot is sad,——
Poor John."

"Nonsense," said Miss Billy. "Your sentiments are as bad as your poetry, Ted. What's yours, Bea?"

Beatrice had a pair of huge scarlet carpet slippers, ornamented with a large bow of ribbon. Theodore read the verses:

"A pair of red slippers hung high in a shop,
Sing hey for the slippers so red!
And a maid passed that way and I saw the maid stop,
'I'll buy me the slippers,' she said.

"The pair of red slippers came down from the shelf,
Sing hey for the slippers so small!
And the maiden remarked, undertone, to herself,
'They'll look awful swell at a ball.'

"The pair of red slippers were jaunty and low,
Sing hey for the slippers so gay!
'But I don't want buckles, I wanted a bow,'
I heard the maid woefully say.

"The pair of red slippers were wrapped up and tied,
Sing hey for the pocketbook low!
And a youth who was near sauntered home at her side,
So the maid got the slippers and beau."

Marie Jean unwrapped her package with an expectant expression. A large beet, cut in half, and carefully stuck together with toothpicks surrounded the following verse:

"There's a secret in my heart, Sweet Marie,
A tale I would impart, love, to thee.
Every lad in Cherry Street
Kneels in ardour at thy feet,
You've a face that can't be beet, Sweet Marie."

"I never heard such wretched puns," declared Margaret. "There's one consolation,—there *can't* be anything worse than that. What's yours, Mr. Francis?"

Francis bowed gallantly to Miss Billy. "Ladies first," he said.

A small green watering pot was unrolled from a newspaper, and several verses tumbled out.

"Mistress Billy,
Pray don't be chilly!
How does your garden grow?
With beautiful posies
And lilies and roses,
And sunflowers all in a row.

"Mistress Billy
I must rhyme—willy nilly,—
How does your garden grow?
With small smiling faces
All found in their places
And little ones all in a row.

"Mistress Billy,
Don't think me silly
Thus does your garden grow,
With hard work and duty
And sweetness and beauty,
And faith, hope, and love in a row."

Miss Billy's voice shook a little as she finished reading, and there was something suspiciously shiny in her eyes as she glanced at her brother. But Ted was looking serenely the other way.

Francis' package held a fat pocketbook labelled:

"Sing a song of sixpence.
Pocketful of mon.,
Rent day Francis has it all,
Cherry Street has none.
Never mind! His praises loud
Cherry Street doth sing—
Francis may not be a count,
But he is a king."

"Goodness!" said the reader, "I don't know whether I dare eat another cake after that. I'm already bursting with *pride*; Miss Billy, won't you share this with me?" He held out the last pancake on the plate invitingly. Miss Billy's knife divided it evenly and a slender circlet tinkled out on the dish.

"The ring!" said Marie Jean. "You'll have to draw lots."

"Or else share your fate," suggested Margaret.

"Now me," said Ted in a tone of mock anticipation. "You haven't seen my souvenir yet." He unrolled a box of French bonbons, and passed it around the table, as he read:

"There was a young person named Ted.
'I'll write some fine doggerel,' he said.
But his verse read aloud
In the midst of the crowd
Was all pronounced mongrel instead."

"And that's the truest one of all," said Margaret.

CHAPTER XXII

WAITING

"The strange white solitude of peace
That settles over all."

IF it was anybody else but Miss Billy," sighed Mrs. Canary.

Mrs. Hennesy pulled her shawl down over her swollen eyes, and made no reply.

"I've just been in there, an' her fever's higher. She just raved an' tossed all night," went on Mrs. Canary.

"I was on me way there, now," said Mrs. Hennesy,—"but I guess I'll not go in, afther hearing how she is. Folks around a sick house is only a clutter."

"I know it,—but I can't hardly keep away. Seems as if I *must* do something fer that poor lamb, after all the times she's helped me, takin' care of the childurn an' all. She's just worked herself to death tryin' to keep Cherry Street clean, an' all this summer, that's what she has,—an' no pertic'lar thanks fer it, neither."

"I guess it's not all work that's done it," said Mrs. Hennesy significantly. "It's that ould ciss-pool between us and the Lee's that's been p'isoning her. The wondher is we're not all dead. And afther all the times we've spoke about it to old man Schultzsky, too. Well, I hope he'll mate his reward in the nixt wurld, if he don't in this."

"Do you know, they say he feels awful bad about it. Just walks 'round like a hen on a hot griddle. Don't ask fer no news of her, but just can't settle down easy anywhere. I should think he *would* be *prosterated* with grief! An' he wouldn't be the only one! Everybody on the street feels the same way. Her sickness has just cast a shadder over everything. I never seen the beat of it."

Mrs. Hennesy's broad Irish face grew almost beautiful in its tenderness. "I feel like she was wan av me own," she said softly. "No wan, not even the dear child herself, knows what she has done for us! John Thomas hasn't spoke a word about the house for a wake. Miss Billy has done wondhers for that bye. If you could see him workin' over his lessons, an' tidyin' up the yard, an' trainin' up the few bits of vines he's planted! An' Mary Jane, she didn't like her at first, but sure her heart is broke now. As for Mr. Hennesy and mesilf,—well, there's no way to tell how we feel about it."

"I guess we're all mournin' together," said Mrs. Canary. "Mr. Canary wouldn't tech fish fer dinner,—Holly Belle is all stuffed up with tears, an' Friddie hangs round their door till I just expect Mis' Lee'll throw water on him to git red of him. The children are all a-prayin' for her ev'ry night, an' if God kin resest their innercent pleadin' it's more'n I could do."

"It's Cherry Street that's nadin' her more than Hivin does," said Mrs. Hennesy.

"I guess it does!" exclaimed Mrs. Canary fervently. "We can't do without her. The children just fairly adore her image, the big boys and girls all love her, and the fathers and mothers need her the most of all.

If she'd never done a thing fer us but to show that pretty smile of hers, an' let us see her eyes shine, an' hear her sweet voice, we'd miss her enough: but rememberin' all she *has* done——" Words failed the good woman, and her sentence ended abruptly.

"I suppose there's not a thing a person could do to help," said Mrs. Hennesy.

"Not a thing. The house is full of flowers, and things to eat. They've got a nurse that looks like striped stick candy, an' two doctors, an' more offers of help than they know what to do with. There ain't a thing *we* can do but watch—an' pray. An' if the Lord sees fit to call her Home——"

But Mrs. Hennesy, drawing the shawl again over her eyes, turned away.

The mist of Indian summer lay like a veil over Cherry Street. Out in the garden Miss Billy's flowers were still blooming. The vines were breaking into crisp little tendrils about her window, the La France rose bush was heavy with buds, and the grass was as green and tender as when her feet had last pressed it. Miss Billy's friend, the bulldog, slept serenely on the Lee porch, and her canary trilled softly in the autumn sunshine.

Life seemed to have vanished from the street itself. Down near the Levi house two wooden saw-horses and a plank had been placed across the road to block all traffic, and Policeman Canary paced back and forth to ward off intruders. Grocery boys and butcher lads came and went on foot, and the children who played in the back yards were hushed and subdued by watchful parents "for Miss Billy's sake." Silence reigned everywhere, and the chirping of the twittering sparrows, that *could* not be hushed, was the only sound that broke the stillness.

Upstairs, in the little green room, where the only movement was the stirring of the thin curtains in the soft wind, lay the girl herself. The active feet were quiet, the busy hands were folded and the dancing eyes were closed. There was nothing about the passive figure that was like Miss Billy. Even the mass of copper-brown hair had been cut away. But this death-like stupor was less terrifying than the intervals of raging fever in which Miss Billy laughed, sang and talked, and lived over and over again her girlish trials and hopes and fears.

"It's such hard work," she would say, tossing restlessly from side to side in the little bed. "Such hard work! Mr. Schultzsky, it's a lie, I tell you. He didn't hit your horse, I saw it all! It's a lie, I tell you. I didn't mean to hurt you! It's my fault, though, not Ted's!... Oh, Ted, you didn't need to step on my grass seed. Why won't you let things grow? It's so hot, so hot, here. Beatrice, you needn't be so mean! He's a friend of mine. Why won't you be kind to him? Please do, please do. He's helped me so."

Then the busy brain would go back to the old life:

"Myrtle Blanchard called us poor. I don't want to be poor. I hate it. I hate Cherry Street! I hate heat! I'm *so* tired!"

It was when the fever was at its height that the family first guessed the depth of Miss Billy's feeling, for in her delirium she talked wildly of wanting to go back "home," away from Cherry Street, to where everything was "quiet and clean." She longed for Margaret's home-coming, and begged piteously that the Blanchards might not "come in." And then the wild look would disappear, and she would drop back

on the pillow with the same old pathetic cry: "I'm so tired. *So* tired."

So day after day passed. Delirium, restlessness, pain and weakness filled Miss Billy's waking hours, and the only peace came when she sank into a deep stupor, which was almost as fearful to the watchers. The work of the Improvement Club had been abandoned. Ted applied himself industriously to school, and Beatrice found her only comfort in doing housework that gave her no time to think, and left her so physically tired at night that sleep came, after all. Mrs. Van Courtland almost lived at the house, and Margaret, Francis and John Thomas came daily, to hear the reports and bring comfort and help. The members of the Child Garden hung about the gate, begging for news, Mrs. Hennesy waylaid the doctor each morning, and Mrs. Levi sent Moses to the door with a new dainty every day. The life on Cherry Street seemed to centre about the one small room in the old-fashioned house, and the whole street waited and hoped while the autumn sped, and Miss Billy grew no better.

It was after one of the worst days that Beatrice crept out of the room, with her heart full, and her eyes overflowing with tears. She felt her way blindly downstairs, and almost bumped into Francis, who was standing in the dark hall.

"I didn't ring," he said. "How *is* the little girl?"

Beatrice sat down on the stairs, and grasped the railing tightly as though its dumb wood could offer her some help and support.

"Worse," she said.

Francis' face looked his sympathy.

"*How* is she worse?" he asked.

"She's been raving for two hours. Dr. Lane has sent for Dr. Howitt. Her temperature has never been so high."

"Is she in great—danger?"

Beatrice nodded. "They don't say so, but——" Her voice failed her.

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Not a thing. The nurse is there, and mother and father don't leave her for an instant. She doesn't even need me. If there was anything to be done,—but to sit and wait is so awful!—I'm going down now to make a cup of tea for mother. She looks like a ghost."

"And so do you, poor little girl." He laid his strong brown hand over the small white one on the railing. Beatrice sat still for a moment, and then, laying her head on her arm, cried her heart out.

"I can't give her up," she sobbed wildly. "I can't! I can't! I never knew before what she was to me. And all this summer when she has been toiling away over her children and the weeds and the street, I have sat and criticised, and discouraged her. I have been so selfish, so small and so mean! Oh, I don't deserve to have Miss Billy, but if she lives, I'll love God all my life. I can't spare her now."

Francis laid his hand softly upon the bowed golden head, and waited until the paroxysm of sobs had passed.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am," he said gently. "I love Miss Billy, too, you know. But there is nothing for us to do but wait and—hope. I shan't give up yet. Come down with me and let me make you the tea. You need it as much as your mother."

The night came down softly on Cherry Street. The shadows deepened and the silver crescent of the new moon appeared in the sky. Dr. Howitt arrived and went immediately to the sick room. The nurse passed through the hall with a glass of wine. Supper was announced, and was cleared away untasted. Beatrice and Theodore sat silently in the study. At nine o'clock the nurse came down the stairs again.

"Mrs. Lee says for you both to go to bed. She will call you if there's the slightest change. If you can get any sleep, so much the better. And Mr. Theodore, there's a boy out in the yard."

Beatrice obediently followed the nurse upstairs, and Ted went quietly out of the door. A dark figure could be dimly seen striding up and down in the faint light cast from Miss Billy's room. Theodore rounded the porch, and stopped the shadowy form in its march. It was John Thomas.

"How is she?" he whispered.

Ted shook his head despairingly, without a word.

"You'd better go to bed," said John Thomas.

"So had you," returned Ted.

"I can't sleep," exclaimed the figure.

Ted turned stiffly. "Neither can I," he said. His feet seemed to tangle in the wet grass as he walked toward the house again.

"So long," said John Thomas hoarsely.

"So long," returned Theodore.

A restless sleep had just fallen on Theodore when there was a light rap on the door. "Come," said the nurse. "There is a change. Your mother has sent for you. As quiet as possible, please." The boy flung on his bath robe, and hurried into the hall. Beatrice had just come out from her room. The sister and brother clasped hands and went on together.

In Miss Billy's room the light had been turned very low. Dr. Howitt had gone. The family doctor stood near the window. Mr. Lee sat by the bedside with a look upon his worn face that the children had never seen. His wife was on her knees, with one of the pale hands clasped in her own, as though the mother's grasp would hold the child in spite of Death. A soft grey shadow seemed to have fallen over Miss Billy's face, and she lay in deep stupor.

The little group gathered around the bed, and waited. The minutes slowly passed, Miss Billy's small clock ticking them off with an intensity that was almost painful.

The grey light began to grow in the eastern window, and a soft breeze blew in from the lake. The glimmer of the lamp paled as the room grew lighter. Afar off a dog barked, and one of Mr. Hennesy's

roosters heralded the coming of the new day. The first glow of red light had appeared in the sky, when Miss Billy moved slightly in the bed.

"Mother," she whispered. Then she opened her eyes wide, with a hint of the old-time smile. "Has the morning come?" she asked. "I've had bad dreams."

CHAPTER XXIII

CONCLUSION

“Against the whiteness of the wall
Be living verdure seen,—
Sweet summer memories to recall,
And keep your Christmas green.”

ALL through the long hot summer months Miss Billy had been doing what she could for Cherry Street. Now Cherry Street was doing what it could for Miss Billy.

"Grass, is it, she'd be afther loikin' to see, whin she gits up?" said Mr. Hennesy. "Sure an' we're ploughin' good sod undher iv'ry day av our lives,—loads av it. John Thomas, see that ye bring home a wagon load of it 'ach noight, an' O'il be doin' the same."

John Thomas brought the sod, and the street fell to with a will. Dusk fell earlier than in the summer, but there was still time left after the day's labour was over and the supper cleared away. The children dug and raked the hard soil, and the men rolled the velvety sod into strips of green parking bordering the sidewalks, and spread it into green lawns in their own dooryards. The enthusiasm spread like a fever. Aaron Levi's father brought home a can of paint, and began experimentally to turn his shabby brown house into a white house with green blinds. The street beheld, and hurried to do likewise, scarcely waiting for Francis' assurance that every cent of expense should be taken off the rent. Every house was freshly painted,—and because the underlying thought was of Miss Billy, and because they thought she would like it so, they painted uniformly white, with green blinds.

Besides all this, down the middle of the street a score of men, day after day, threw up the rocky soil into long mounds, and at last the sewer pipe that was to connect with every dwelling, was laid, with all Cherry Street looking into the hole, as if it had been the dedication of a church. No more cesspools and typhoid fever for Cherry Street! It had been too near to losing Miss Billy. But Mr. Schultzsky would have made the concession for none other.

The Street Improvement Club, cast at first into the depths of despair at their brave little captain's grave illness, and raised now to heights of enthusiasm by her convalescence, were everywhere! Chewing gum wrappers were voted a nuisance: Paper bags were frowned upon: Banana skins were not to be tolerated: Tomato cans were a crime! Everywhere over the street presided a new goddess,—the Goddess of Cleanliness,—while the girl who had wrought the change lay in the little green room, being slowly nursed back to life.

It was after the Improvement Club, under the advice of Francis, had taken the proceeds of the lawn social from the little tin box, and invested it in young shade trees, that proudly skirted the sidewalks twenty feet apart, that Francis snapped his final picture from the head of the street. After it was developed he compared it to that other taken on the August morning. The results appeared to satisfy him. "They are an object lesson," he said, "fit to point a moral or adorn a tale," and he mailed them in a big official looking envelope to "Peter Hanson, Florist,—New York,—Prize Street Competition."

It was this very day, too, that Miss Billy was placed in an easy chair, and taken to the window for the first time since her illness. "Oh, it's such a green world, motherie mine; such a beautiful, sunny, green world, that it hurts my eyes. And—why—but everything wasn't all green like that when I went to bed. What can have happened!"

"That is enough for to-day," said the nurse authoritatively, and Miss Billy was put back to bed. But she had caught a glimpse of Mr. Schultzsky's house, and it was painted white!—Of the little Bohemian maid

swinging placidly to and fro in the rocking chair on an immaculate little white porch!—Of a stretch of restful green grass, where before had been weeds!—and right in the middle of the front yard had bloomed a huge tub of scarlet geraniums! ("She will like to see that," Francis had said,—and through the long beautiful fall which stretched into December, he had placed a covering over the flowers every night to protect them from possible frosts.) Miss Billy had seen, and two hectic spots of excitement burned on her cheeks.

"Cherry Street is remodelled, inside and out," said Mrs. Lee gently. "Francis has made Mr. Schultzsky see the expense of it in the light of a sound business proposition, and the rest of it has been done by the people themselves, for love of you. But there, little daughter,—it's nothing to cry about!"

"I'm not crying," said Miss Billy valiantly, the big tears chasing each other down her cheeks. "Don't you see that I'm laughing, and happy, and thankful? Oh, it is so nice to come back to this dear, beautiful world!"

There were informal receptions held in the little green room as she grew daily stronger. Marie Jean, still with the trailing dresses, but with the heavy frizzes forever gone,—John Thomas, freckled of face and worshipful, alert to Miss Billy's slightest wish,—Mr. Hennesy, brimful of cheer and whimsical philosophy,—Mrs. Hennesy, overflowing with kindness and neighbourly apologies,—Mr. Schultzsky, stoical, yet changed,—Holly Belle, who whispered with shy blushes that beside her finger exercises Miss Margaret had given her a "piece," with variations: and every day Margaret and Francis, and the members of the Improvement Club, who sat about and gazed at Miss Billy restored to them and were thankful.

It was the eighteenth of December when the first snow came sifting down. It covered the green lawns, and wrapped the young shade trees, and whitened the roofs of the little white houses. And not till then did Cherry Street remember that summer was gone and Christmas was near.

"We'll have a Christmas tree big enough for everybody," said Theodore. "John Thomas and I will go out and buy the largest we can find, and set it up in the parlour."

"Oh, it will be fine," said Margaret, clapping her hands. "Let us get at it right away."

The Christmas tree was brought, a noble fir,—and set up in the corner of the parlour amidst much bustle and confusion and laughter. John Thomas popped the corn, Miss Billy threaded it in whitened strings, Francis tacked up the evergreen boughs and holly, while Beatrice assisted,—a pretty picture with the heavy foliage held high above her head, and her sleeves falling away from her white arms. Margaret, in the kitchen, was aiding Maggie in making the cherished Christmas "pfeffernes," and as the little German cakes baked, the sweet spicy smell filled the air.

Theodore, on a stepladder, was hanging the mistletoe. "It smells Christmassy already," he announced hungrily. "Why doesn't Margaret make a bushel of those things? I could eat all she has there at one bite. Marie Jean, just hand me up a bit of that red ribbon, will you?"

Marie Jean's long arm stretched up the ladder, and Theodore leaned down. There was a resounding smack, and Marie Jean, with a scream of agitation, tripped over a rug and fell headlong into the arms of the Christmas tree.

"Land o' love!" she ejaculated, extricating herself from the branches. "Theodore Lee, I've a mind to slap you."

"The mistletoe hung in the castle hall,
The holly branch shone on the old oak wall,"

recited Theodore, putting as much feeling as he could into it without swallowing the tacks in his mouth. "Marie Jean, I expect to slay my thousands under this thing. But if you'd like to slap me, you can come again and try it."

"No, thanks," said Marie Jean, settling her ruffled plumage with dignity.

"Now," went on the irrepressible Theodore, "if good Kris Kringle will only hang a wig on the Christmas tree for Miss Billy,—nothing expensive or rich, of course, like her own hair was—but——"

Involuntarily Miss Billy's hands flew up to her shorn locks, but John Thomas came sturdily to the defence.

"Miss Billy's a heap prettier with her hair short like that, and curling all over her head in little rings. She wasn't half so pretty when it was long."

"John Thomas," said Theodore, with a pitying stare, "it's my opinion that you would think Miss Billy handsome if she was as bald as a Chinese mandarin. It's a prominent symptom of the disease."

John Thomas returned abruptly to his popcorn, and Miss Billy, in the absence of anything better, and with a flash of the old time fire in her eyes, threw a handful of popcorn at the tormentor.

"Perhaps you would like to sample these cakes," said Margaret, standing floury and smiling in the doorway, with a plate in her hand. "Francis, it is less than six months ago that you and I sat in the mud of a side street in Cologne, while a rain of these lovely little cakes fell about our devoted heads. I little thought I should be making some for you at Christmas time."

"We cannot foretell the future," said Theodore solemnly. "Next Christmas—who knows?—we may all be in 'der faderland,' honourable attachees of the household of the Count and Countess Lindsay. Miss Billy can be 'lady in waiting,' and hold up your sky-blue green pink train, Margaret,—and John Thomas can be Buttons at the front door——"

"The last five months have certainly been an unexpected and pleasant experience for me," interrupted Francis. "But play time is over. I shall be off for New York Saturday."

"To stay—forever?" appealed Miss Billy piteously. "Oh, Francis,—I can't spare you."

There were tears in her eyes, and he took the small white hand between his own brown palms.

"Not forever, Miss Billy," he said gently. "I hope to come back again,—many times; and some of the goodness, and brightness, and helpfulness of Cherry Street shall always be with me, wherever I am."

"And I," said Margaret, with a little sigh, "shall return to Cologne next month; I, too, shall miss Cherry Street, but nothing shall sadden me now that Billy is well."

"I have a lump in my throat as I dwell upon the inevitableness of human destiny," said Theodore. "But honestly, Lindsay, we shall miss you. As for you, Margaret,

"Maid of *Col*-ogne, ere we part,
Give, O give me back my heart."

"You gave it to Marie Jean the night of the lawn social," rejoined Margaret promptly. "I didn't want it,

you know,—it was so warm and sticky."

"And I didn't know what to do with it, so I ate it," said Marie Jean, with a giggle. "I remember it was flavoured with peppermint."

"Cannibal!" murmured Theodore,—and lapsed into injured silence.

Beatrice and Francis had returned to the holly wreaths. "We shall be sorry to have you go," she said, her eyes on the branches in her lap. "What you said about Cherry Street made me want to cry. I, certainly, in the past, have not been a part of the goodness and brightness and helpfulness. Before you go, let me tell you I am sorry for everything."

"And I am glad." He took from her lap as he spoke a bit of the holly and broke it in two. "Keep this," he said, "and I shall keep the other half, 'sweet summer memories to recall,'—till I come again."

Christmas eve fell softly upon Cherry Street wrapped in its snowy mantle, with a pale silver moon like a crescent of promise, shining low down in the west.

"When I saw it last," said Holly Belle, "it was over my left shoulder, and I thought Miss Billy was goin' to die."

"An' I heard the death tick in the wall," said Mrs. Canary, "an' dreampt of white horses three nights hand runnin'. I never knew the signs to fail before."

"Signs can't hurt Miss Billy," said Holly Belle with conviction, as she hastened the little Canarys into their holiday attire. "She don't believe in 'em—nor dream books, nor nothin'. An' I ain't a-goin' to after this, neither."

"Holly Belle," said Mrs. Canary impressively, "the night yer grandfather died I was a sittin' there by the window——"

"I don't care," broke in Holly Belle stoutly: ("Fridoline, hold up yer chin! How can I fasten yer necktie when yer leanin' it down like that!)—I don't care fer all the old signs in the world. Miss Billy don't believe in 'em, an' I ain't a-goin' to, neither."

In the Hennesy home, Mr. Hennesy had brought out the ancient coat, and was struggling into one of John Thomas's collars. It was fastened at last, and Mr. Hennesy regarded his appearance in the glass with interest. "All Oi do be nadin'," he commented, "is a check rein from the top av me head to me shoulder blades, to make me be lookin' loike a four-year-old colt. John Thomas, wan av these days whin ye go to bite off a bit av tough mate, ye'll hit on wan av these aidges an' cut yer jugglery vein. Moind now, what O'im sayin'."

“All Oi do be nadin’” ... “is a check rein from the top av me head to me shoulder blades.”

At Number 12 Cherry Street there was warmth and light and glow. Out in the kitchen the smiling Maggie presided over two boilers of coffee and a table full of iced cakes and confections. As the guests began to arrive the folding doors between the minister's study and the parlour were thrown open, and the Christmas tree, glowing with coloured balls and wax tapers, stood revealed. The Street Improvement Club, to a man, greeted the glittering spectacle with delight, but the ecstasy of some of the younger members became suddenly extinguished in their mothers' skirts at the sudden appearance of an exceedingly corpulent Saint Nicholas in the parlour door.

"Ladies and Gentlemen,—Members of the Street Improvement Club and Fellow Citizens:" began the jolly Saint, keeping his whiskers applied with one hand, and gesticulating gracefully with the other;

—"Owing to a stringency in the money market, this tree is mostly made up of tarlatan bags containing nuts, candy and popcorn, with verses of excellent poetry thrown in. You will observe that the greater share of the gifts seem to be for the children, and for young ladies between the ages of sixteen and twenty,—but there are a few trinkets for all, and plenty of good will beside."

Here the good Saint paused, and was obliged to hold on his whiskers with both hands, and he viewed the facial contortions of Ikey Levi, who wanted to cry and was afraid the Saint might not like it.

"I find here, attached to one of the most prominent branches," went on Saint Nicholas, "a charming female savage in a short skirt and a feather head-dress. It is marked 'for Marie Jean Hennesy, from Theodore L—.' It also bears this inscription:

"This tender maid of dusky shade,
Eats lovers' hearts,—beware!
She'll take them raw, like cabbage slaw,
Or overdone or rare.

"Will Miss Hennesy step up to receive her gift? I regret that Mr. Theodore cannot be with us this evening to receive his thanks in person.

"Here also, is a beautiful toy omnibus, from the same benevolent source, with a pair of spirited horses attached, and a handsome driver atop. It is marked 'Miss Billy,' and the following tender verse accompanies it:

"A maiden once reasoned her thus—
'I think I shall hire a whole bus:'
She rode on the top, and the people did stop
And declared that it couldn't be wuss!

"I regret that I do not find a snuff box on the boughs for Herr Lindsay. In its absence I shall beg him to accept the trifling gift of this tin trumpet, that he may be able to blow his own horn when he is far away, and Cherry Street can no longer blow it for him. Is Mr. Lindsay present?"

The gifts were being rapidly distributed, and the jolly Saint's charming speeches could no longer be heard above the happy talk and laughter. Holly Belle hugged a leather music roll and a copy of "Five Little Peppers" to her breast, Ikey Levi played the long roll on a red drum, Pius Coffey made his toilet before the wee-est of pocket mirrors, with the wee-est of pocket combs, and Beatrice held a single long-stemmed American Beauty rose in her hand, when Saint Nicholas rapped loudly for order.

"I find here, on the very topmost bough," he announced, "a blue envelope addressed to Miss Wilhelmina Lee, President of Cherry Street Improvement Club. Open it and read it aloud, Miss Billy."

Miss Billy cut the sealed edge, and a slip of blue paper fluttered to the floor. Then with surprise, delight, excitement and wavering distrust in her tones, she read aloud the following letter:

"NEW YORK, *December 22, 19—*.

"MISS WILHELMINA LEE,
"*President Improvement Club,*
"*Cherry Street, J—— City.*

"DEAR MADAM:—

"We herewith enclose you our check for one hundred dollars, as agreed by us in our prize offer of

August last. The pictures you sent easily won the prize for marked street improvement, although there were many competitors. Wishing you all success in your work,

"We are

"Very respectfully,

"PETER HANSON & CO.,
"Florists, New York."

"Is it a joke?" said Miss Billy, looking at Saint Nicholas as if she didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

But the good Saint, holding his whiskers in his hand in the excitement of the moment, had stooped to the floor for the bit of blue paper, and was examining it closely in the glow of the tree.

"It's genuine, all right," he answered. "It's Peter Hanson's check for one hundred dollars on the First National Bank of New York."

"It came this afternoon," said Francis smilingly,—"and knowing what it might be, I received it and put it on the tree for you. I took the last snap shot and sent it away while you were ill, Miss Billy."

A prolonged, mighty, deafening cheer went up from the assembled throats of the Improvement Club,—a glorified cheer,—a cheer of triumph, pride, and growing strength, with cat-calls innumerable tacked on to the end. The astonished Maggie, entering the door with a tray piled high with plates and napkins, was brushed lightly aside by Mr. Hennesy.

"Clare the middle av the room," he shouted in stentorian tones: "I'm a-goin' to cut a pigeon wing."

"Three cheers for Miss Billy," proposed Francis.

"And now a tiger for Francis," returned Miss Billy, and the hubbub, but just ended, rose again.

"An' another fer the frinds av the Club," said Mr. Hennesy, shaking hands right and left with everybody.

Saint Nicholas, with his whiskers readjusted, rapped once more for order. "Let me suggest, my friends," he said, "that we give one last lusty cheer for Cherry Street. One, two, three—*Now*!"

THE END

Illustrated by C.D. Williams. 12mo, dark red cloth,
portrait cover, rough edges, gilt top, $1.50

THIS distinguished author gives us a most fascinating picture of Virginia's golden age, her fair sons and daughters, beautiful, picturesque homes, and the luxurious, bountiful life of the old-school gentleman. Dorothy South has been described in these characteristic words by Frank R. Stockton: "Learned, lovely; musical, lovely; loving, lovely; so goes Dorothy through the book, and sad would be the fate of poor Arthur Brent, and all of us, if she could be stolen out of it." This is a typically pretty story, clear and sweet and pure as the Southern sky.

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Louisville Courier Journal: "A fine story of adventure, teeming with life and aglow with color."

Cleveland World: "There is action, plot, and fire. Love and valor and loyalty

play a part that enhances one's respect for human nature."

Baltimore Sun: "The story is full of movement. It is replete with adventure. It is saturated with love."

Lothrop Publishing Company—Boston

The Master of Warlock

By GEORGE CARY EGGLESTON, Author of "Dorothy South," "A Carolina Cavalier." Six Illustrations by C.D. Williams. 12mo. Dark red cloth, illustrated cover, gilt top, rough edges. Price, $1.50 each.

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presented."

A Carolina Cavalier

A STIRRING TALE OF WAR AND ADVENTURE

Philadelphia Home Advocate says:

"As a love story, 'A Carolina Cavalier' is sweet and true; but as a patriotic novel, it is grand and inspiring. We have seldom found a stronger and simpler appeal to our manhood and love of country."

Lothrop Publishing Company—Boston

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY OF

The SPENDERS

By HARRY LEON WILSON, Author of "The Lions of the Lord." Red silk cloth, rough edges, picture cover. Six illustrations by Rose Cecil O'Neill. Size, 5¼ by 7¾. Postpaid, $1.50. 55th Thousand.

HARRY THURSTON PECK, in the *New York American*, says: "The very best two books written by Americans during the past year have been 'The Spenders,' by Harry Leon Wilson, and 'The Pit,' by Frank Norris."

MARK TWAIN writes to the author: "It cost me my day yesterday. You owe me $400. But never mind, I forgive you for the book's sake."

LOUISVILLE COURIER-JOURNAL says: "If there is such a thing as the

American novel of a new method, this is one. Absolutely to be enjoyed is it from the first page to the last, founded on the elemental truth that 'the man is the strongest who, Ancæan-like, stands with his feet upon the earth.' It is the strong tale of three generations, and told in the romances of the grandson and granddaughter of the original rugged pioneer of the Western country, Peter Bines."

THE BOOKMAN says: "Uncle Peter is a well-drawn, interesting, picturesque, and, above all, a genuine American product.... The dénouement is one that would be well worth reading for, even if the body of the book were dull."

BROOKLYN DAILY EAGLE says: "It is coruscating in wit, daring in love, and biting in its palpable caricature of many well-known persons in New York society; but it is so very much more than a clever society novel making the bid of audacity for ephemeral craze."

CHICAGO RECORD-HERALD says: "Very few novels of the day have the sterling strength, the force, and the roomy outlook of Harry Leon Wilson's 'The Spenders.' Every page of it is virile, and, what is more, it combines true insight into men with a strong humor."

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comedy of the Mormon development adequately set forth. Nothing fresher or more vital has been produced by a native novelist.

The Spenders

By HARRY LEON WILSON

55th Thousand

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