

MARY ELLA WALLER

A DAUGHTER OF THE
RICH

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I

MOLASSES TEA

"Good-night, Martie," called a sweet voice down the stairway.

"Good-night, Rose dear; I thought you were asleep."

"Good-night, Martie," duetted the twins, in the shrillest of treble and falsetto.

"Good-night, you rogues; go to sleep; you 'll wake baby."

"Dood-night, mummy," chirped a little voice from the adjoining room.

There was a shout of laughter from the twins.

"Shut up," growled March from the attic over the kitchen. "Good-night, mother." His growl ended in a squeak, for March was at that interesting period of his life indicated by a change of voice. At the sound, a prolonged snicker from somewhere was answered by a corresponding giggle from another-where.

"Now, children," said Mrs. Blossom, speaking up the stairway, "do be quiet, or baby will be wide awake."

"Tum tiss me, mummy," piped the little voice a second time, with no sound of sleep in it.

"Yes, darling, I 'll come;" as she turned to go into the bedroom adjoining the kitchen, there was the sound of a jump overhead, a patter of bare feet, a squabble on the stairs, and Budd and Cherry, the irrepressible ten-year-old twins, tumbled into the room.

"I 'll haul those kids back to bed for you, mother," shouted March, and flung himself out of bed to join the fray, while Rose was not behindhand in making her appearance.

Mrs. Blossom came in with little May in her arms, and that was the signal for a wholesale kissing-party in which May was hostess.

"Children, children, you 'll smother me!" laughed their mother. "Here, sit down on the rug and warm your toes,—coming over those bare stairs this cold night!" And down they sat, Rose and March, Budd and Cherry and little May, in thick white and red flannel night-dresses and gray flannel pajamas.

Budd coughed consumptively, and Cherry followed suit. March shivered and shook like a small earthquake, and Rose looked up laughingly at her mother.

"We know what that means, don't we, Martie," she said. "Shall I help?"

"No, no, dear,—in your bare feet!"

Mrs. Blossom took a lamp from the shelf over the fireplace, and, leaving the five with their fifty toes turned and wriggling before the cheering warmth of the blazing hickory logs, disappeared in the pantry.

"Oh, bully," said Budd, rubbing his flannel pajamas just over his stomach; "I wish 't was a cold night every day, then we could have molasses tea all the time, don't you, Cherry?"

"Mm," said Cherry, too full of the anticipated treat for articulate speech.

"There 's nothing like it to warm up your insides," said March; "mother 's a brick to let us get up for it. She would n't, you know, if father were at home."

"My tummy's told," piped May, frantically patting her chest in imitation of Budd, and all the children shouted to see the wee four-year-old maiden trying to manufacture a shiver in the glow of the cheerful fire.

Mrs. Blossom had never told her recipe for her "hot molasses tea;" but it had been famed in the family for more than a generation. She had it from her mother. The treat was always reserved for

a bitterly cold night, and the good things in it of which one had a taste—molasses, white sugar, lemon-peel, butter, peppermint, boiled raisins, and mysterious unknowns—were compounded with hot water into a palate-tickling beverage.

When Mrs. Blossom reappeared, with a kettle sending forth a small cloud of fragrant steam in one hand and a tray filled with tin cups in the other, the delighted "Ohs" and "Ahs" repaid her for all her extra work at the close of a busy, weary day.

Budd rolled over on the rug in his ecstasy, and Cherry was about to roll on top of him, when March interfered, and order was restored.

As they sat there on the big, braided square of woollen rag-carpet, sipping and ohing and ahing with supreme satisfaction, Mrs. Blossom broached the subject of valentines.

"It's the first of February, children, and time to begin to make valentines. You 're not going to forget the Doctor *this* year, are you?"

"No, indeed, Martie," said Rose. "He deserves the prettiest we can make. I 've been thinking about it, and I 'm going to make him a shaving-case, heart-shaped, with birch-bark covers, and if March will decorate it for me, I think it will be lovely; will you, March?"

"Course I will; the Doctor 's a brick. I 'll tell you what, Martie, I can pen and ink some of those spruces and birches that the Doctor was so fond of last summer; how 'll that do?"

"Just the thing," said his mother; "I know it will please him. What are you thinking, Cherry?" for the "other half" of Budd was gazing dreamily into the fire, forgetting her tea in her reverie.

"Fudge!" said Cherry, shortly. March and Rose laughed.

"Keep still making fun of Cherry," said Budd, ruffling at the sound; and to emphasize his admonishing words, he dug his sharp elbow so suddenly into March's ribs that some hot molasses tea flew from the cup which his brother had just put to his mouth and spattered on his bare feet.

March deliberately set down his tin cup on the hearth near the fire beside his brother's, and turned upon Budd.

Budd tried to dodge, but had no room. In a trice, March had his arms around him, and was hugging him in a bear-like embrace. "Say you 're sorry!" he demanded.

"Au-ow!"

"Say you 're sorry!" he roared at him, hugging harder.

"Au-ow-ee-ow!"

"Quick, or I 'll squeeze you some more!"

Budd was squirming and twisting like an eel.

"O-ee-wau-au-*Au!*"

"There," said March, releasing him and setting him down with a thump on the rug; "I 'll teach you to poke me in the ribs that way and scald my feet.—You 're game, though, old fellow," he added patronizingly, as he heard a suspicious sniff from Cherry. "You and Cherry make a whole team any day."

Cherry's sniff changed to a smile, for March did not condescend to praise either of them very often.

"Well," she said meditatively, "I suppose it did sound funny to say that, but I was thinking that if Budd would make me a little heart-shaped box of birch-bark, I 'd make some maple-sugar fudge,—you know, Martie, the kind with butternuts in it,—and that could be my valentine for the Doctor."

"Why, that's a bright idea, Cherry," said Mrs. Blossom; and, "Bully for you, Cherry," said Budd; "we'll begin to-morrow and crack the butternuts."

"What will May do?" asked Mrs. Blossom, lifting the little girl, who was already showing signs of being overcome with molasses tea and sleep. May nestled in her mother's arms, leaned her head, running over with golden curls, on her mother's breast, and murmured drowsily,—

"Ittle tooties–tut with mummy's heart-tutter–tutter–tooties–tut–" The blue-veined eyelids closed over the lovely eyes; and Mrs. Blossom, holding up her finger to hush the children's mirth at May's inspired utterance, carried her back into the bedroom.

One after another the children crept noiselessly upstairs, with a whispered, "Good-night, Martie," and in ten minutes Mary Blossom knew they were all in the land of dreams.

II

MRS. BLOSSOM'S VALENTINE

It was a bitter night. Mrs. Blossom refilled the kitchen stove, and threw on more hickory in the fireplace in anticipation of her husband's late return from the village. She drew her little work-table nearer to the blaze, and sat down to her sewing. Then she sighed, and, as she bent over the large willow basket filled with stockings to be darned and clothes to be mended, a tear rolled down her cheek and plashed on the edge.

There was so much she wanted to do for her children—and so little with which to do it! There was March, an artist to his finger-tips, who longed to be an architect; and Rose, lovely in her young girlhood and giving promise of a lovelier womanhood, who was willing to work her way through one of the lesser colleges, if only she could be prepared for entrance. Mary Blossom saw no prospect of being able to do anything for either of them.

And the father! He must be spared first, if he were to be their future bread-winner. Mary Blossom could never forget that day, a year ago this very month, when her husband was brought home on a stretcher, hurt, as they thought, unto death, by a tree falling the wrong way in the woods where he was directing the choppers.

What a year it had been! All they had saved had gone to pay for the extra help hired to carry on the farm and finish the log-cutting. A surgeon had come from the nearest city to give his verdict in the case and help if he could.

The farm was mortgaged to enable them to pay the heavy bills incident to months of sickness and medical attendance; still the father lay helpless, and Mary Blossom's faith and courage were put to their severest test, when both doctor and surgeon pronounced the case hopeless. He might live for years, they said, but useless, so far as his limbs were concerned.

This was in June; and then it was that Mary Blossom, leaving Rose in charge of her father and the children, left her home, and walked bareheaded rapidly up the slope behind the house, across the upland pastures and over into the woodlands, from which they had hoped to derive a sufficient income to provide not only for their necessities, but for their children's education and the comforts of life.

Deep into the heart of them she made her way; and there, in the green silence, broken only by the note of a thrush and the stirring of June leafage above and about her, she knelt and poured out her sorrow-filled heart before God, and cast upon Him the intolerable burden that had rested so long upon her soul.

The shadows were lengthening when at last she turned homewards. Cherry and Budd met her in the pasture, for Rose had grown anxious and sent them to find her.

"Why, where have you been, Martie?" exclaimed the twins. "We were so frightened about you, because you didn't come home."

"You need n't have been; I've been talking with a Friend." And more than that she never said. The children's curiosity was roused, but when they told Rose and asked her what mother meant, Rose's eyes filled with tears, and she kept silence; for she alone knew with Whom her mother had talked that June afternoon.

"Run ahead, Budd, and tell Malachi to harness up Bess. I want him to take a letter down to the village so that it may go on the night mail." Budd flew rather than ran; for there was a look in his mother's face that he had never seen before, and it awed him.

That night a letter went to Doctor Heath, a famous nerve specialist of New York City. It was a letter from Mary Blossom, his old-time friend and schoolmate in the academy at Barton's River. In it she asked him if he would give her his advice in this case, saying she could not accept the decision of the physician and surgeon unless it should be confirmed by him.

"I cannot pay you now," she wrote, "but it was borne in upon me this afternoon to write to you, although you may have forgotten me in these many years, and I have no claim of present friendship, even, upon your time and service; but I must heed the inner command to appeal to you, whatever you may think of me,—if I disobeyed that, I should be disobeying God's voice in my life,"—and signed herself, "Yours in childhood's remembrance."

The next day a telegram was brought up from the village; and the day after the Doctor himself followed it.

It was an anxious week; but the wonderful skill conquered. The pressure on a certain nerve was removed, and for the last six months Benjamin Blossom had been slowly but surely coming back to his old-time health and strength. But again this winter the extra help had been necessary, and it had taxed all Mary Blossom's ingenuity to make both ends meet; for there was the interest on the mortgage to be paid every six months, and the ready money had to go for that.

In the midst of her thoughts, her recollections and plans, she caught the sound of sleigh-bells. The tall clock was just striking ten. Smoothing every line of care and banishing all look of sadness from her face, she met her husband with a cheery smile and a, "I 'm so glad you 've got home, Ben; it's just twenty below, and the molasses tea is ready for you and Chi."

"Chi!" called Mr. Blossom towards the barn.

"Whoa!" shouted a voice that sounded frosty in spite of itself. "Whoa, Bess!"

"Come into the kitchen before you turn in; there's some hot molasses tea waiting for us."

"Be there in a minute," he shouted back, and Bess pranced into the barn.

"Oh, Mary, this is good," said Mr. Blossom, as he slipped out of his buffalo-robe coat and into his warm house-jacket, dropped his boots outside in the shed, and put on his carpet-slippers that had been waiting for him on the hearth.

"It is home, Ben," said his wife, bringing out clean tin cups from the pantry, and putting them to warm beside the kettle on the hearth.

"Yes, with you in it, Mary," he said with the smile that had won him his true-love eighteen years before.

"Come in, Chi," he called towards the shed, whence came sounds as if some one were dancing a double-shuffle in snow-boots.

"'Fraid I 'll thaw 'n' make a puddle on the hearth, Mis' Blossom. I 'm as stiff as an icicle: guess I 'll take my tea perpendic'lar; I ain't fit to sit down."

"Sit down, sit down, Chi," said Mrs. Blossom. "You 'll enjoy the tea more; and give yourself a thorough heating before you go to bed. I 've put the soapstone in it," she added.

"Well, you beat all, Mis' Blossom; just as if you did n't find enough to do for yourself, you go to work 'n' make work." He broke off suddenly, "George Washin'ton!" he exclaimed, "most forgot to give you this letter that come on to-night's mail."

He handed Mrs. Blossom the letter, which, with some difficulty, owing to his stiffened fingers, he extracted from the depths of the tail-pocket of his old overcoat. Then he helped himself to a brimming cup of the tea, and apparently swallowed its contents without once taking breath.

"Why, it's from Doctor Heath!" exclaimed Mrs. Blossom, recognizing the handwriting. "Is it a valentine, I wonder?" she said, feigning to laugh, for her heart sank within her, fearing it might be the bill,—and yet, and yet, the Doctor had said—she got no further with these thoughts, so intent was she on the contents of the letter.

Chi, with an eye to prolonging his stay till he should know the why and wherefore of a letter from the great Doctor at this season of the year, took another cup of the tea.

"Ben, oh, Ben!" cried Mrs. Blossom, in a faint, glad voice; and therewith, to her husband's amazement, she handed him the letter, put both arms around his neck, and, dropping her head on his shoulder, sobbed as if her heart would break.

Chi softly put down his half-emptied cup and tiptoed with creaking boots from the room.

"Can't stand that, nohow," he muttered to himself in the shed; and, forgetting to light his lantern, he felt his way up the backstairs to his lodging in the room overhead, blinded by some suspicious drops of water in his eyes, which he cursed for frost melting from his bushy eyebrows.

"Oh, Ben, think of it!" she cried, when her husband had soothed and calmed her. "Twenty-five dollars a week; that makes a little more than twelve hundred a year. Why, we can pay off all the mortgage and be free from that nightmare."

For answer her husband drew her closer to him, and late into the night they sat before the dying fire, talking and planning for the future.

"Children," she said at breakfast next morning, and her voice sounded so bright and cheery that the room seemed full of sunshine, although the sky was a hard, cold gray, "I've had one valentine already; it came last night from the Doctor."

Chi listened with all his ears.

"Mother!" burst from the children, "where is it?" "Show it to us." "Why did n't you tell us before breakfast?"

"I can't show it to you yet; it's a live one."

"A live one!" chorussed the children.

"You 're fooling us, mother," said March.

"Do I look as if I were?" replied his mother.

And March was obliged to confess that she had never looked more in earnest.

Rose left her seat and stole to her father's side. "What does it mean, pater?" she whispered.

"Ask your mother," was all the satisfaction she received, and walked, crestfallen, back to her chair; for when had her father refused her anything?

"When will you tell us, anyway?" said Budd, a little gruffly. He hated a secret.

"I can't tell you that either," said his mother, "and I don't know that I shall tell you until the very last, if you ask in that voice."

Budd screwed his mouth into a smile, and, unbeknown to the rest of the family, reached under the cloth for his mother's hand. He sat next to her, and that had been his way of saying "Forgive me," ever since he was a tiny boy.

He had a squeeze in return and felt happier.

"I say, let's guess," said Cherry. "If I don't do something, I shall burst."

"You express my feelings perfectly, Cherry," said March, gravely, and the guessing began.

"A St. Bernard puppy?" said Budd, who coveted one.

"A Shetland pony," said Cherry.

"The Doctor's coming up here, himself." That was Rose's guess.

"T ain't likely," growled Budd.

"A tunning 'ittle baby," chirped May.

March failed to think of any live thing the Doctor was likely to send unless it might be a Wyandotte blood-rooster, such as he and the Doctor had talked about last summer.

"You 're all cold, cold as ice," laughed their mother, using the words of the game she had so often played with them when they were younger.

"Oh, mother!" they protested. They were almost indignant.

Chi rose and left the table. "Beats me," he muttered, as he took down his axe from a beam in the woodshed. "What in thunder can it be? I ain't goin' to ask questions, but I 'll ferret it out,—by George Washin'ton;" and that was Chi's most solemn oath.

III

A CURIOUS CASE

"What is it, dear?"

"Bothered—bothered."

"A case?"

"Yes, and I must get it off my mind this evening."

The Doctor set down his after-dinner coffee untasted on the library table, and rose with a half sigh from his easy chair before the blazing wood-fire. His heavy eyebrows were drawn together into a straight line over the bridge of his nose, and that, his wife knew full well, was an ominous sign.

"Must you go to-night? It's such a fearful storm; just hear it!"

"Yes, I must; just to get it off my mind. I sha'n't be gone long, and I 'll tell you all about it when I get home." The Doctor stooped and kissed the detaining hand that his wife had laid lovingly on his arm; then, turning to the telephone, he bespoke a cab.

As the vehicle made its way up Fifth Avenue in the teeth of a February, northeast gale that drove the sleet rattling against the windows, Doctor Heath settled back farther into his corner, growling to himself, "I wish some people would let me manage their affairs for them; it would show their common sense to let me show them some of mine."

A few blocks north of the park entrance, the cab turned east into a side street, and stopped at Number 4.

"Mr. Clyde in, Wilkins?" asked the Doctor of the colored butler, who opened the door.

"Yes, sah; jes' up from dinner, sah, to see Miss Hazel."

"Tell him I want to see him in the library."

"Yes, sah." He took the Doctor's cloak and hat, hesitating a moment before leaving, then turning, said: "'Scuse me, sah, but Miss Hazel ain't more discomposed?"

"No, no, Wilkins; Miss Hazel is doing fairly well."

"Thank you, sah;" and Wilkins ducked his head and sprang upstairs.

"Why, Dick," said Mr. Clyde, as he entered the library hurriedly, "what's wrong?"

"The world in general, Johnny, and your world in particular, old fellow."

"Is Hazel worse?" The father's anxiety could be heard in the tone with which he put the question.

"I 'm not satisfied, John, and I 'm bothered."

When Doctor Heath called his friend "John," Mr. Clyde knew that the very soul of him was heavily burdened. The two had been chums at Yale: the one a rich man's son; the other a country doctor's one boy, to whom had been bequeathed only a name honored in every county of his native state, a good constitution, and an ambition to follow his father's profession. The boy had become one of the leading physicians of the great city in which he made his home; his friend one of the most sought-after men in the whirling gayeties of the great metropolis. As he stood on the hearth with his back to the mantel waiting for the physician's next word, he was typical of the best culture of the city, and the Doctor looked up into the fine face with a deep affection visible in his eyes.

"Going out, as usual, John?"

"Only to the Pearsells' reception. Don't keep me waiting, old fellow; speak up."

"How the deuce am I to make things plain to you, John? Here, draw up your chair a little nearer mine, as you used in college when you knew I had a four A.M. lecture awaiting you, after one of your larks."

The two men helped themselves to cigars; and the Doctor, resting his head on the back of the chair, slowly let forth the smoke in curling rings, and watched them dissolve and disperse.

"Come, Dick, go ahead; I can stand it if you can."

"Well, then, I 've done all I can for Hazel, and shall have to give up the case unless you do all you can for her."

Now the Doctor had not intended to make his statement in such a blunt fashion, and he could not blame Mr. Clyde for the touch of resentment that was so quick to show in his answer.

"I did n't suppose you went back on your patients in this way, Richard; much less on a friend. I have done everything I can for Hazel. If there is anything I've omitted, just tell me, and I 'll try to make it good."

The Doctor nodded penitently. "I know, John, I 've said it badly; and I don't know but that I shall make it worse by saying you 've done too much."

"Too much! That is not possible. Did n't you order last year's trip to Florida and the summer yachting cruise?"

Doctor Heath groaned. "I'm getting in deeper and deeper, John; you can't understand, because you are you; born and bred as you are— Look here, John, did it ever occur to you that Hazel is a little hot-house plant that needs hardening?"

"No, Richard."

"Well, she is; she needs hardening to make her any kind of a woman physically and, and—" The Doctor stopped short. There were some things of which he rarely spoke.

"My Hazel needs hardening!" exclaimed the amazed father. "Why, Richard, have n't you impressed upon me again and again that she needs the greatest care?"

The Doctor groaned again and smote his friend solidly on the knee.

"Oh, you poor rich—you poor rich! 'Eyes have ye, and ye see not; ears have ye, and hear not.' John, the girl must go away from you, who over-indulge her, from this home-nest of luxury, from this private-school business and dancing-class dissipation, from her young-grown-up lunch-parties and matinée-parties, from her violin lessons and her indoor gymnastics—curse them!"

This was a great deal for the usually self-contained physician, and Mr. Clyde stared at him, but half comprehending.

"Go away? Do you mean, Richard, that she must leave me?"

"Yes, I mean just that."

"Well,"—it was a long-drawn, thinking "well,"—"I will ask my sister to take her this summer. She returns from Egypt soon and has just written me she intends to open her place, 'The Wyndes,' in June."

Again the Doctor groaned: "And kill her with golf and picnics and coaching among all those fashionable butterflies! Now, hear to me, John," he laid his hand on his friend's shoulder, "send her away into the country, that is country,—something, by the way, which you know precious little about. Let me find her a place up among those life-giving Green Hills, and do you do without her for one year. Let me prescribe for her there; and I 'll guarantee she returns to you hale and hearty. Trust her to me, John; you 'll thank me in the end. I can do no more for her here."

"Do you mean, Richard, to put her away into real country conditions?"

"Yes, just that; into a farmer's family, if possible,—and I know I can make it possible,—and let her be as one of them, work, play, go barefoot, eat, sleep, be merry—in fact, be what the Lord intended her to be; and you 'll find out that is something very different from what she is, if only you 'll hear to me."

The Doctor was pacing the room in his earnestness. He was not accustomed to beg thus to be allowed to prescribe for his patients. His one word was law, and he was not required to explain his motives.

Mr. Clyde's eyes followed him; then he broke the prolonged silence.

"Richard, you have asked me the one thing to which her mother would never have consented. How, then, can I?"

"Think it over, John, and let me know."

The two men clasped hands.

"Let me take you along in my cab to the reception; it's inhuman to take out your horses on such a night."

"Thank you, no; I think I 'll give it up; I 'm not in the mood for it. Good-night, old fellow."

"Good-night, Johnny."

The next morning, at breakfast, the Doctor took up a note that lay beside his plate, and after reading it beamed joyously while he stirred his coffee vigorously without drinking it. When, finally, he looked up, his wife elevated her eyebrows over the top of the coffee urn, and the Doctor laughed.

"To be sure, wifie, read the note." And this is what she read:—

DEAR RICHARD,—I 've had a hard night, trying to look at things from your point of view and see my own duty towards Hazel. Things have grown rather misty, looking both backwards and forwards, and I have concluded I can't do better than to take you at your word,—trust her to you, and accept the guarantee of her return to me with her physical condition such as it should be.

This decision will, as you well know, raise a storm of protest among the relations. The whole swarm will be about my ears in less than no time. Stand by me. The whole responsibility rests upon you,—and tell Hazel; I 'm too much of a coward. This is a confession, but you will understand. Let me know the details of your plans so soon as possible. I have never been able to give you such a proof of friendship. Have you ever asked another man for such? I mistrust you, old fellow.

Yours,
JOHN.

IV A LITTLE MILLIONAIRE

"Gabrielle."

"Oui, mademoiselle Hazel," came in shrill yet muffled tones from the depths of the dressing-room closet.

"Bring me my white silk kimono."

"Oui, mademoiselle."

The order, in French, was given in a weak and slightly fretful voice that issued from the bed at the farther end of a large room from which the dressing-room opened. The apartment was, in truth, what Doctor Heath had called it, "a nest of luxury."

It was a bitter Saint Valentine's Day which succeeded the Doctor's evening visit. The wood-fire, blazing cheerily in the ample fireplace, sent its warmth and light far out into the room, flashing red reflections in the curiously twisted bars of the brass bedstead. At the left of the fireplace stood a small round tea-table, and upon it a little silver tea-kettle on a standard of the same metal. Dainty cups and saucers of egg-shell china were grouped about it; a miniature silver tray held a sugar-dish and a cream-pot and a half-dozen gold-lined souvenir spoons.

On the richly carved mantel stood an exquisite plate-glass clock, the chimes of which were just striking nine, and, keeping it company to right and left, were two dainty figures of a shepherd and shepherdess in Dresden china. The remaining mantel space was filled with tiny figures in bisque,—a dachshund, a cat and kittens, a porcelain box, heart-shaped, the top covered with china forget-me-nots, a silver drinking-cup, a small oval portrait on ivory of a beautiful young woman, framed in richly chased gold, the inner rim set round with pearls. A blue pitcher of Cloisonné and a tray of filigree silver heaped with dainty cotillion favors stood on one end; on the other, a crystal vase filled with white tulips.

Soft blue and white Japanese rugs lay upon the polished floor; delicate blue and white draperies hung at the windows. Dressing-case and writing-desk of white curled maple were each laden with articles for the toilet and for writing, in solid silver, engraved with the monogram H.C. A couch, upholstered in blue and white Japanese silk, stood at the right of the fireplace, and all about the room were dainty wicker chairs enamelled in white, and cushioned to match the hangings.

The bed was canopied in pale blue covered with white net and edged with lace, and the coverlet was of silk of the same delicate color, embroidered with white violets and edged like the canopy, only with a deeper frill of lace. The occupant of this couch, fit for a princess royal, was the little mistress of all she surveyed, as well as the mansion of which the room formed a small part; and a woebegone-looking little girl she was, who called again, and this time impatiently:—

"Gabrielle, hurry, do."

"Oui, oui, mademoiselle Hazel;" and Gabrielle tripped across the room with the white kimono in one hand and fresh towels in the other. She had just slipped it upon Hazel when there was a knock at the door. Gabrielle opened it, and Wilkins asked in a voice intended to be low, but which proved only husky:—

"Nuss say she mus' jes' speak wif Marse Clyde 'fo' she come up, an' wan's to know if Miss Hazel will haf her breffus now or wait till she come up herse'f."

Before Gabrielle could answer, Hazel called out, "You may bring it up now, Wilkins; and has the postman come yet?"

Wilkins' broad smile sounded in his voice, as it came out of its huskiness.

"Yes, Miss Hazel, ben jes' 'fo' I come up. I ain't seen no hearts, but dey's thicker 'n spatter by de feel, an' a heap o' boxes by 'spress!"

"Oh, bring them up quick, Wilkins, and tell papa to be sure and come up directly after breakfast."

"Yes, for sho', Miss Hazel," said Wilkins, delighted to have a word with the little daughter of her whom he had carried in his arms thirty-two years ago up and down the jasmine-covered porch of an old New Orleans mansion.

In a few minutes, he reappeared with two large silver trays, on one of which was the tempting breakfast of Hamburg grapes, a dropped egg, a slice of golden-brown toast, half of a squab broiled to the melting-point, and a cup of cocoa. On the other were boxes large and small, and white envelopes of all sizes.

Gabrielle cut the string and opened the boxes, while Hazel looked on, pleased to be remembered, but finding nothing unusual in the display; for Christmas and Easter and birthdays and parties brought just about the same collection, minus "the hearts," which Wilkins had felt through the covers. The only fun, after all, was in the guessing.

Just then Mr. Clyde entered.

"Oh, papa! I 'm so glad you have come; it's no fun guessing alone." She put up her peaked, sallow little face for the good-morning kiss; and her father, with the thought of his last night's struggle, took the face in both hands and kissed brow and mouth with unusual tenderness.

"Why, papa!" she exclaimed, "that kiss is my best valentine; you never kissed me that way before."

"Well, it's time I began, Birdie; let's see what you have for nonsense here. What's this—from Cambridge?"

"Oh, that's Jack, I 'm sure; he always sends me violets; but what is that in the middle of the bunch?" With a smile she drew out a tiny vignette of her Harvard Sophomore cousin. It was framed in a little gold heart, and on a slip of paper was written, "For thee, I 'm all 'art."

"Jack 's a gay deceiver," laughed her father; "he 's all "art' for a good many girls, big and little. What's this?—and this?"

One after another he took out the contents of envelopes and boxes,—candy hearts by the pound in silver bonbon boxes, silk hearts, paper hearts, a flower heart of real roses ("That's from you, Papa Clyde!" she exclaimed, and her father did not deny the pleasant accusation), hollow gilt hearts stuffed with sentiments, a silver chatelaine heart for change, and last, but not least, an enormous envelope, a foot square, containing a white paper heart all written over with "sentiments" from the girls in her class at school.

"Come now, Birdie," said her father, after the last one had been opened and guessed over, "eat your breakfast, or nurse will scold us both for putting play before business."

"I don't think I want any, papa," said Hazel, languidly, for, after all, the valentines had proved to be almost too much excitement for the little girl, who was just recovering from weeks of slow fever; "and, Gabrielle, take the flowers away, they make my head ache,—and the other things, too," she added, turning her head wearily on the pillow.

"But you must eat, Hazel dear," said her father, gently but firmly; and therewith he took a grape and squeezed the pulp between her lips. Hazel laughed,—a faint sound.

"Why, papa, if you feed me that way, I shall be a real Birdie. Yes," she nodded, "that's good; I 'll take another;" and her father proceeded to feed her slowly, now coaxing, now urging, then commanding, till a few grapes and a half egg were disposed of.

"There, now, I won't play tyrant any longer," he said, "for your real tyrant of a doctor is coming soon, and I must be out of the way."

"Are you going to be at home for luncheon to-day, papa?"

"No, dear, I 've promised to go out to Tuxedo with the Masons, but I shall be at home before dinner, just to look in upon you. I dine with the Pearsells afterwards. Good-bye." A kiss,—two, three

of them; and the merry, handsome young father, still but thirty-seven, had gone, and with him much of the brightness of Hazel's day.

But she was used to this. Ever since she could remember anything, she had been petted and kissed and—left with her nurse, her governess, or a French maid.

Her young mother, a Southern belle, lived more out of her home than in it, with the round of gayeties in the winter months interrupted and continued by winter house-parties at Lenox, a yachting cruise in the Mediterranean, an early spring-flitting to the mountains of North Carolina, and the later household moving to Newport.

In all these migrations Hazel accompanied her parents; in fact, was moved about as so much goods and chattels, from New York to the Berkshires, from the Berkshires to Malta, from Malta to the Great Smokies, from the mountains to the sea; her appurtenances, the governess and French maid, went with her; and the routine of her home in New York, the study, the promenade, the all-alone breakfasts and dinners went on with the regularity of clockwork, whether on the yacht, in the mountains, or in the villa on the Cliff.

So now, although she wished her father would stay and entertain her, it never occurred to her to tell him so; and likewise it never occurred to the father that his child needed or wished him to stay. Nor had it ever occurred to the young mother that she was not doing her whole duty by her child; for she never omitted to go upstairs and kiss her little daughter good-night, whether the child was awake or asleep, before going out to dinner, theatre, or reception.

She died when Hazel was nine, and it was a lovely memory of "mamma" that Hazel cherished: a vision of loveliness in trailing white silk, or velvet, or lace,—her mother always wore white, it was her Southern inheritance,—with a single dark-red rose among the folds of Venetian point of the berth; always a gleam of white neck and arms banded with flashing, many-faceted diamonds, or roped with pearls; always a sense of delicious white warmth and fragrance, as the vision bent over her and pressed a light kiss upon her cheek. And if, in her bliss, she opened her sleepy eyes, she looked always into laughing brown depths, and putting up her hand caressed shining masses of brown hair.

But it was always a good-night vision. In the morning mamma did not breakfast until ten, and Hazel was off to the little private school at half-past nine. At noon mamma was either out at lunch or giving a lunch-party; and in the afternoon there was the promenade in the Park with the governess, and sometimes, as a treat, a drive with mamma on her round of calls, when Hazel and the maid sat among the furs in the carriage. Then Hazel played at being grown up, and longed for the time when she could wear a reception dress like mamma's, of white broadcloth and sable, and trip up the steps of the various houses, and trip down again with a bevy of young girls laughing and chatting so merrily.

All that had ceased when Hazel was nine, and the young father had made her mistress in her mother's place. It was such a great house! and there were so many servants! and the housekeeper was so strict! and it was so queer to sit at the round table in the big dining-room and try to look at papa over the silver *épergne* in the centre!

When she was eleven, she entered one of the large private schools which many of her little mates attended. Soon it came to be the "girls of our set" with Hazel; and then there followed music-lessons, and violin-lessons, and riding-lessons, and dancing-class, and riding-days in the Park, and lunch-parties with the girls, and theatre-matinée-parties, and concerts at Carnegie Hall, and birthday parties, and sales-school and drawing-room affairs—and Lenten sewing-classes; until gradually her little society life had become an epitome of her mother's, and when she began to shoot up like a bean-sprout, lose her round face and the delicate pink from her cheeks, uncles and aunt and cousin and friends whispered of her mother's frail constitution, and that it was time to take heed.

Then it was that the physician, who had helped to bring her into the world, was summoned hastily to prevent her early departure from it. This was the "curious case" that so bothered him; and this pale, languid girl of thirteen in the blue-canopied bed was the one he intended to transplant into another soil.

A short, sharp tap announced his arrival. The nurse opened the door.

"Good-morning, little girl—ah, ah! Saint Valentine's Day? I had forgotten it; all those came this morning?" he said cheerily, pointing to a table on which Gabrielle had placed all the remembrances but the flowers.

"Yes, Doctor Heath; but my best valentine, you know, is papa, and after him, you."

"Hm, flatterer!" growled the Doctor, feeling her pulse. "Pretty good, pretty good. Think we can get you up for half a day. What do you say, nurse?"

"I think it will do her good, Doctor Heath; she has no appetite yet, and a little exercise might help her to it."

"No appetite?" The two eyebrows drew together in a straight line over the bridge of his nose, and, from under them, a pair of keen eyes looked at Hazel.

"Well, I've planned something that will give you a splendid one, Hazel,—the best kind of a tonic—

"Oh, I don't want to take any more tonics. I am so sick of them," said Hazel, in a despairing tone, for although she adored the Doctor, she despised his medicines.

"You won't get sick of this tonic so soon, I'll warrant," he said, unbending his brows and letting the full twinkle of his fine eyes shine forth,—“at least not after you are used to it. I won't say but that it may cause a certain kind of sickness at first; in fact, I'm sure of it."

"Oh, will it nauseate me?" cried Hazel, dreading to suffer any more.

"No, no, it won't do that, but—"

"But what *do* you mean, Doctor Heath? Are you joking?"

"Never was more in earnest in my life," replied the Doctor, rubbing his hands in glee, much to Hazel's amazement. "Hazel," he turned abruptly to her, "papa is a splendid fellow; did you know that?"

Hazel laughed aloud, a real girl's laugh,—Doctor Heath was so queer at times.

"Have you just found that out?" she retorted.

"No, you witch,—don't be impertinent to your elders,—I have n't; but really he is, take it all in all, just about the most common-sense fellow in New York City."

"What has he done now, that you are praising him so?"

"Just heard to me, my dear, and agreed to do just as I want him to," said the Doctor, demurely.

"Why," laughed Hazel, "that's just when I think he is a most splendid fellow, when he does just what I want him to. Is n't it funny you and I think just alike!" And she gave his hand a malicious little pat. The Doctor caught the five slender digits and held them fast.

"Now we're agreed that you have the most splendid, common-sense father in the world, I want you to prove to me that your father has the most splendid, common-sense daughter in it, as well."

Again Hazel laughed. She was used to her friend's ways.

"That means that you want me to take that old, new tonic of yours."

"Yes, just that," said the Doctor, emphatically; "and now, as you don't appear to care to hear about it, I'm going to make a long call and tell you its entire history."

"Have you brought it with you?" asked Hazel, somewhat mystified.

"No, I can't carry around with me in a cab five children, a hundred acres of pine woods, a whole mountain-top, and a few Jersey cows."

"What *do* you mean? You *are* joking."

Then the physician clasped the thin hand a little more closely and told her of the country plan.

At first, Hazel failed to comprehend it. She gazed at the speaker with large, serious eyes, as if she half-feared he had taken leave of his senses.

"Did papa know it this morning?" was her first question.

"Yes, my dear."

"Then that is why he kissed me the way he did," she said thoughtfully. "But," her lip quivered, "I sha'n't have him to kiss me up there, and—and—oh, dear!" A wail went up from the canopied bed that made the Doctor turn sick at heart, and even the nurse hurried away into the dressing-room.

Somehow Doctor Heath could not exhort Hazel, as he had her father, to use common-sense. He preferred to use diplomacy.

"You see, Hazel, a year won't be so very long, and it will give your hair time to grow; and perhaps you would not mind wearing a cap for a time up there, while if you were here you certainly would not care about going to dancing-school or parties in that rig; now would you?"

Hazel sniffed and looked for her handkerchief. As she failed to find it, the Doctor applied his own huge square of linen to the dripping, reddened eyes, and tenderly stroked the smooth-shaven head.

Hazel had her vanities like all girls, and her long dark braids had been one of them. After the fever, she had been shorn of what scanty locks had been left to her, and many a time she had wondered what the girls would say when they saw her. After all, the new plan might be endured, for the sake of the hair and her looks.

She sniffed again, and this time a good many tears were drawn up into her nose. The Doctor, taking no notice of the subsiding flood, proceeded,—

"My patients always look so comical when the fuzz is coming out. It's like chicken-down all over the head—"

"Fuzz!" exclaimed Hazel, with a dismayed, wide-eyed look; "must I have fuzz for hair?"

"Why, of course, for about five months," was the Doctor's matter-of-fact reply. "Then," he continued, apparently unheeding the look of relief that crept over Hazel's face, "you are apt to have the hair come out curly."

"Oh!"

"Yes, and it really grows very fast—that is," he said, resorting to wile, "if any one is strong and well; but if the general health is not good, why—hem!—the hair is n't apt to grow!"

"Goodness! I don't want to be bald all my life!"

"No, I thought not, and for that very reason it did seem the best thing for you to get into the country where you can get well and strong as fast as ever you can."

"Shall I have to eat my breakfast and dinner alone up there?" was her next question.

Doctor Heath laughed. "What! With all those five children! You will never want for company, I can assure you of that. And now I'll be off; as it's Saint Valentine's Day, which I had forgotten, I'll wager I have five valentines from those very children waiting for me at home."

"Will you show them to me, if you have?"

"To be sure I will. Now sit up for half a day, and get yourself strong enough to let me take you up there by the middle of March."

"Oh, are you going to take me? What fun! Are they friends of yours?" she added timidly.

"Every one," said the Doctor, emphatically. He turned at the door. "You have n't said yet whether you will honor me with your company up there."

"I suppose I must," she said, with something between a sigh and a laugh. "But I don't know what Gabrielle will do; she'll be so homesick."

"Gabrielle!" cried the Doctor, in a voice loud with amazement; "you don't think you are going to take Gabrielle with you, do you?"

Before Hazel had time to recover from her astonishment, Gabrielle, hearing her name called so loudly, came tripping into the room.

"Oui, oui, monsieur le docteur;" and Doctor Heath beat a hasty retreat to avoid further misunderstandings.

In the afternoon, Hazel received a box by messenger, with, "Please return by bearer," on the wrapper. On opening it, she found the Doctor's valentines with the following sentiments appropriately attached.

I

By Rose-pose made, by March adorned,
'T is not a Heart that one should scorn:
For use each day, the whole year through,
Where find a Valentine so true?

II

Cherry Blossom made this fudge
(Buddie made the box).
Eat it soon, or you will judge,
She made it all of rocks.

III

Baby May has made this cookie;
Mother baked it—but, by hookey!
I can't find another rhyme
To match with this your valentine.

Your loving Valentines,
ROSE, MARCH, "BUDD AND CHERRY," MAY BLOSSOM.
(We're one.)
MOUNT HUNGER, February 14, 1896.

V TRANSPLANTED

It was the middle of April, yet the drifts still blocked the ravines, and great patches of snow lay scattered thickly on the northern and eastern slopes of the mountains.

Not a bud had thought of swelling; not a fern dared to raise its downy ball above the sodden leaves. Day after day a keen wind from the north chased dark clouds across a watery blue sky, and now and then a solitary crow flapped disconsolately over the upland pastures and into the woods.

But in the farmhouse on the mountain, every Blossom was a-quiver with excitement, for the "live Valentine" was to arrive that day.

According to what Doctor Heath had written first, Mrs. Blossom had expected Hazel to come the middle of March. She had told the children about it a week before that date, and ever since, wild and varied and continuous had been the speculations concerning the new member of the family.

Both father and mother were much amused at the different ways in which each one accepted the fact, and commented upon it. At the same time they were slightly anxious as to the outcome of such a combination.

"They 'll work it out for themselves, Mary," said Mr. Blossom, when his wife was expressing her fears on account of the attitude of March and Cherry.

"I hope with all my heart they will, without friction or unpleasantness for the poor child," replied his wife, thoughtfully, for March's looks and words returned to her, and they foreboded trouble.

Her husband smiled. "Perhaps the 'poor child' will have her ways of looking at things up here, which may cause a pretty hard rub now and then for our children. But let them take it; it will do them good, and show us what stuff is in them for the future."

Mrs. Blossom tried to think so, but March's words on that afternoon she had told the children came back to her.

They were dumb at first through sheer surprise. Then Rose spoke, flinging aside her Virgil she had been studying by the failing light at the window.

"Oh, mother! we 've been so happy—just by ourselves."

"Will you be less happy, Rose, in trying to make some one else share our happiness?"

Rose said nothing, but leaned her forehead against the pane, and the tears trickled adown it and froze halfway.

Mrs. Blossom proceeded, in the silence that followed, to tell them something of Hazel's life. Then Budd spoke up like a man.

"I 'm awful sorry for her; she 's a little brick to be willing to come away from her father and live with folks she don't know. I 'd be a darned coward about leaving my Popsey."

There was no tablecloth handy to hide the squeeze he wanted to give his mother's hand, and Mrs. Blossom, knowing how he hated any public demonstration of affection, reserved her approving kiss for the dark and bedtime. But she looked at him in a way that sent Budd whistling, "I won't play in your back-yard," over to the kitchen stove, where he stared inanely at his own reflection in the polished pipe.

For the first time in her life, Cherry did not echo her twin's sentiment. She was already insanely jealous of the new-comer who seemed to claim so much of her mother's sympathy and affection. And she was n't even here! What would it be when she was here for good and all?

At this miserable thought, and all that it appeared to involve, Cherry began to cry.

Now to see Cherry Blossom cry generally afforded great fun for the whole family; for there never was a girl of ten who could cry in quite such a unique manner as this same round-faced, pug-

nosed, brown-eyed Cherry, whose red hair curled as tightly as corkscrews all over her head, and bobbed and danced and quivered and shook with every motion and emotion.

First, her nose grew very red at the tip; then, her small mouth screwed itself around by her left ear; gradually, her round face wrinkled till it resembled a withered crabapple; and finally, if one listened intently and watched closely, one could hear small sniffs and see two infinitesimal drops of water issue from the nearly closed and wrinkled eyes.

But to-day no one noticed, and Cherry sat down in her mother's lap, and mumbled out her woe between sniffs.

"I can't help it if Budd does want her; *I* don't, Martie. Budd will play with her, and you 'll kiss her just as you do us, and it won't be comfy any more."

"That does not sound like mother's Cherry Blossom," said Mrs. Blossom, smiling in spite of herself. "I think I 'll tell you all why it comes to mother and father as a blessing."

Then Mrs. Blossom told them of the mortgage on the farm; how it had been made necessary, and what it meant, and how it was her duty to accept what had been sent to her as a means of paying it off.

Rose came over from the window. "Oh, why did n't you tell us before, Martie," she cried, sobbing outright this time, "and let us help you to earn something towards it during all this dreadful year? To think you have been bearing all this, and just going about the same, smiling and cheer—oh, dear!" Rose sat down on the hearth-rug at her mother's feet, and her sobs mingled with Cherry's sniffs.

March, who had listened thus far in silence, rose from the settle where he had flung himself in disgust, and, going over to his mother, stood straight and tall before her. His gray eyes flashed.

"I 've been a fool, mother, not to see it all before this. You ought to have told *me*. I 'm your eldest son, and come next after father in 'home things.'" And with this assertion he made a mighty resolve, then and there to put away boyish things and be more of a man. His mother, looking at him, felt the change, and tears of thankfulness filled her eyes.

"What could you do, children? You were too young to have your lives burdened with work."

"I 'd have found something to do, mother, if you had only told me. About the girl—" he hesitated—"of course I 'll look at it from the money side, but it 'll never be the same after she comes—never!" And with that he went off into the barn.

His mother sighed, for March was looking at the matter in the very way which, to her, was abhorrent.

"Don't sigh so, Martie," cried Rose; "I 'll take back what I said, and do everything I can to help you by making it pleasant for her. Budd has made me ashamed of myself."

"That's my own daughter Rose," said Mrs. Blossom, leaning over to kiss her parting, for Cherry was awkwardly in the way.

"Did you hear Rose, Cherry?" whispered her mother.

"Ye-es," sniffed Cherry.

"And won't you try to help mother, and make Hazel happy?"

"N-o," said Cherry, still obdurate.

"Very well; then I must depend on Rose and Budd and little May," replied her mother, putting her down from her knee. By which Cherry knew she was out of favor, and, not having Budd to flee to for sympathy, ran blindly out into the woodshed and straight into Chi, who was bringing in two twelve-quart milk pails filled to overflowing with their creamy contents.

"Hi there! Cherry Bounce! Steady, steady—without you want to mop up this woodshed."

"O Chi! I 'm just as miser'ble; a new little girl's coming to live with us always, and we 'll have no more good times."

"That's queer," said Chi, balancing the pails deftly as Cherry fluttered about, rather uncertain as to where she should betake herself in the cold. "I should think it would be the more, the merrier. When's she comin'?"

"This very month," said Cherry, opening her eyes a little wider, and forgetting to sniff in her delight at telling some news. "She 's a rich little girl, but very poor, too, mother says, and she's been sick and is coming here to get well. I suppose she 's lost all her flesh while she 's been sick, like Aunt Tryphosa; don't you? That's why she 's so poor."

"Hm!—rich 'n' poor too; that's bad for children," said Chi, soberly.

"Why?" asked Cherry, surprised into drying her small tears and forgetting to sniff.

"Coz 't is. You see, all you children are rich 'n' poor too; so she 'll keep you comp'ny, as she 's poor where you 're rich as Croesus, 'n' you 're poor as Job's turkey where she's rich."

"Why, what do you mean, Chi?"

"You wait awhile, 'n' you 'll find out." And with that, Cherry had to be content.

As the woodshed was too cold to be long comfortably mournful in,—Cherry decided to go inside and set the table for tea, wondering, meanwhile, what Chi meant. Ordinarily she would have gone straight to her mother to find out; but just to-night Cherry felt there was an abyss separating them, and she hated the very thought of the newcomer having caused this break between her adored Martie and herself before having stepped foot in the house.

But Hazel's arrival had been delayed a whole month: first, on account of the unusually cold weather of March, and then on account of the Doctor's pressing engagements. To-night, however, this long waiting was to be at an end.

Mr. Blossom had harnessed Bess and Bob into the two-seated wagon, and driven down three miles for them to the "Mill Settlement;" and there he was to meet the stage from Barton's River, the nearest railway station.

As the time approached for the light of the lantern on the wagon to glimmer on the lower mountain road, which ran in view of the house, the excitement of Budd and Cherry grew intense. March intended to be indifferent, yet tolerant, but even he went twice to the door to listen. As for Rose, she was thinking almost more of Doctor Heath, with whom she was a great favorite, than of the coming guest. Chi had done up the chores early with March's help, and sat whistling and whittling in the shed door with his eye on the lower road.

"They 're coming; they 're coming!" screamed the twins, making a wild dash for the woodshed, that they might have the first glimpse as the wagon drove up to the kitchen porch.

"Chi, they 're coming!" they shrieked in his ear, as they flew past him.

"Well, I ain't deaf, if they are," said Chi, gathering himself together, and going out to help unload.

"Chi, how are you?" said the Doctor, in a hearty tone, grasping the horny hand held out to him.

"First-rate, 'n' glad to see you back on the Mountain."

"Here, lend a hand, will you? and take out a Little somebody who has to be handled rather gently for a week or two."

"I ain't much used to handlin' chiny," he replied, "but I 'll be careful."

He reached up his long arms and, gently as a woman, lifted Hazel out of the wagon on to the porch.

By this time, Budd had found his bearings and had the Doctor by the hand.

"Halloo, Budd! here you are handy. Just take Hazel's bag, and run into the house with her; she must n't stand a minute in this keen air."

Budd's heart was going pretty fast, but he faced the music.

"Come along, Hazel; we 've been waiting a month to see you."

"And I've been waiting longer than that to see you, Budd." The gentle voice made Budd her vassal forever after.

"Here, Martie, here's Hazel!" he shouted quite unnecessarily, for his mother had come to the door to welcome her guests. Cherry, hearing the shout, disappeared in the pantry, and was invisible until called to supper.

In the confusion of glad welcome that followed, Hazel was conscious of stepping into a large, warm, lighted room, of some one's arms about her, and of a loving voice, saying:

"Come in, dear; you must be so tired with your long journey and this cold ride;" and then a kiss that made her half forget the lonely, strange feeling she had had during the stage and wagon ride, despite the doctor's cheerfulness and care of her.

Then some one untied her brown velvet hood and loosened her long sealskin coat.

"Let me take off your things," said Rose.

Hazel looked up and into the loveliest face she ever remembered to have seen.

"I 'm Rose, and this is May. May, this is the valentine Martie told us of."

"I tiss 'oo," said May, winningly, and held up her rosy bud of a face to Hazel. Hazel stooped to give her, not one, but a half-dozen kisses. There was no resisting such a little blossom.

May put up her hand and stroked the little silk skull-cap.

"What 'oo wear tap for?"

"Sh! baby," said Rose, horrified, putting her hand on May's mouth.

"Oh, don't do that," said Hazel, "I 'm so used to it now; I don't mind what people say or think. But I did at first."

May's lip began to quiver and roll over; Hazel sat down on the settle, and, drawing May up beside her, said gently:—

"There, there, little May Blossom, don't you cry, and I 'll tell you all about it. It's because I have n't any hair. I lost it all when I was sick so long. Sometime I 'll show you how funny my head looks, all covered with fuzz. Doctor Heath says it's like a little chicken's." And May was comforted and won once and for all to the Valentine, who gave her the tiny chatelaine watch to play with.

Budd had been hanging about to get the first glimpse of Hazel by lamplight, and now rushed off to the barn and Chi to give vent to his feelings.

"I say, Chi, where are you?"

"In the harness room," replied Chi. "What do you want?" as he appeared.

"I say, Chi, she 's a peach. She is n't a bit stuck up, as March said she would be."

"Good-lookin'?" queried Chi.

"N-o," said Budd, hesitating, "n-o, but I think she will be when she gets some hair."

"Ain't got any hair!" exclaimed Chi. "How does that happen?"

"She said she 'd been sick an' lost it all, an' 't was like chicken fuzz."

"Said that, did she?" exclaimed Chi, laughing; then, with the sudden change from gayety to absolute solemnity that was peculiar to him, he said:—

"She 's no fool, I can tell you that, Budd; 'n' I 'll bet my last red cent she 'll come out an A Number 1 beauty; 'n' March Blossom had better hold his tongue till he cuts all his wisdom teeth." And with that Chi went into the shed room to "wash up."

What a supper that was! And what a room in which to eat it!

But for the Doctor's cheery voice, Hazel, as she sat in a corner of the settle, might have thought herself in another world, so unaccustomed were her city-bred eyes to all that was going on before her. The room itself was so queer, and, in a way new to her, delightful.

The farmhouse was an old one, strong of beam and solid of foundation. It had been divided at first according to the fashion of the other century in which it was built. But as his family increased, Mr. Blossom found the need of a large, general living-room. It was then that he took down the wall between the front square room and the kitchen, and threw them into one. It was this arrangement that made the apartment unique.

At one end was the huge fireplace that was originally in the front room. At the left of the fireplace was the jog into which the front door opened, formerly the little entry.

This was the sitting-room end of the low forty-foot-long apartment; and it showed to Hazel the fireplace, the old-fashioned crane, with the hickory back-log glowing warm welcome, the long red-

cushioned settle, a set of shelves filled with books, a little round work-table, Mrs. Blossom's special property, a large round table of cherry that had turned richly red with age, and wooden armchairs and rockers, with patchwork cushions.

The middle portion served for dining-room. In it were the family table of hard pine, the wooden chairs, and Mrs. Blossom's grandmother's tall pine dresser.

At the kitchen end, next the woodshed, were the sink, the stove, the kitchen shelves for pots and pans, and the kitchen table with its bread-trough and pie-board, all of which Rose kept scoured white with soap and sand.

This living-room, sitting-room, dining-room, and kitchen in one had six windows facing south and east. Every window had brackets for plants; for this evening Rose had turned the blossom-side inwards to the room, and the walls glowed and gleamed with the velvety crimson of gloxinias, the red of fuchsias, the pink and white and scarlet of geraniums, the cream of wax-plant and begonia. Upon all this radiance of color, the lamplight shone and the fire flashed its crimson shadows. The kettle sang on the stove, and the delicious odor of baked potatoes came from the open oven.

"Why, March!" said the Doctor, coming down from the spare room at the call for supper, "waiting for an introduction? I did n't know you stood on ceremony in this fashion. Allow me," he said with mock gravity to Hazel, and presented March in due form.

Hazel greeted him exactly as she would have greeted a new boy at dancing-school. "Little Miss Finicky," was March's scornful thought of her, as he bowed rather awkwardly and thrust his hands into his pockets, racking his brains for something to say.

"What a handsome boy! As handsome as Jack," was Hazel's first impression; then, missing the cordiality with which the other members of the family had welcomed her, she said in thought, "I 'm sure he does not want me here by the way he acts; I think he 's horrid."

Doctor Heath sat down by Hazel. "I 'm not going to let you sit down to tea with all these mischiefs, little girl, not to-night, for you can't eat baked potatoes and the other good things after that long journey, so I 'll ask Rose to give you a bite right here on the settle."

"I 'll speak to Rose," said March, glad to get away.

"Thank you," said the Doctor, looking after him with a puzzled expression in his keen eyes. Just then Mr. Blossom and Chi came in, and the whole family sat down at the table.

"Why, where 's Cherry?" exclaimed the Doctor.

"Budd, where 's Cherry?" said his father.

"I promised her I would n't tell where she hides till she was twelve, an' now she 's ten, an' she 's been so mean about Haz—

"Budd," said his father, sternly, "answer me directly."

"She 's under the pantry shelf behind the meal-chest," said Budd, meekly.

There was a shout of laughter that caused Cherry to crawl out pretty quickly and open the pantry door,—for it was hard to hear the fun and not be in it.

"Come, Cherry," said her mother, still laughing, and Cherry slipped into her seat beside Doctor Heath with a murmured, "How do you do?" and her face bent so low over her plate that nothing was visible to Hazel but a round head running over with tight red curls that bobbed and trembled in a peculiarly funny way.

"Well, Cherry," said the Doctor, trying to speak gravely, with only the red tip of a nose in view, "you seem to be rather low in your mind. I shall have to prescribe for you. Chi, suppose you drive me down to the Settlement to-morrow morning, and on the way to the train I will send up a cure-all for low spirits. I 've something for March, too. I think he needs it." He drew his eyebrows together over the bridge of his nose and cast a sharp glance at the boy, who felt the doctor had read him.

"That means you 've got something for us," said Budd, bluntly.

"Guess Budd's hit the nail on the head this time," said Chi. "Should n't wonder if 't was some pretty lively stuff."

"You 're right there, Chi," replied the Doctor, laughing. "There 's plenty of good strong bark in it—"

Thereupon there was a shout of joy from Budd which brought Cherry's head into position at once.

"I know, I know, it's a St. Bernard puppy!"

"Oh—ee," squealed Cherry, in her delight, and forthwith put her arm through the Doctor's and squeezed it hard against her ribs.

"Guess there's a good deal of crow-foot in the other, ain't there?" said Chi, with a wink at March, who deliberately left his seat after saying, "Excuse me" most gravely to his mother, and turned a somersault in the kitchen end just to relieve his feelings. Then, with his hands in his pockets, he went up to Doctor Heath, his usually clear, pale face flushing with excitement.

"Do you mean, Doctor Heath, you 're going to give me a full-blooded Wyandotte cock?" he demanded.

"That is just what I mean, March," replied the Doctor, with great gravity, "and twelve full-blooded wives are at this moment looking in vain for a roost beside their lord and master in the express office down at Barton's River."

"Oh, glory!" cried March, wringing the Doctor's hand with both his, and then going off to execute another somersault. "You 've done it now!"

"Done what, March?" asked Doctor Heath, really touched by the boy's grateful enthusiasm.

"Made my fortune," he replied, dropping into his seat again, breathless with excitement; and to the Doctor's amazement he saw tears, actual tears, gather in the boy's eyes, before he looked down in his plate and busied himself with his baked potato.

Hazel saw them too. "What a strange boy," she thought, "and how different this is from eating my dinner all alone!" Then she slipped up to the Doctor's side with her small tray containing nothing but empty dishes, for the keen air and the sight of so many others eating and enjoying themselves had given her a good appetite.

"Are you satisfied with me *now*?" she said, presenting her tray.

"I should think so," he exclaimed. "Two glasses of milk, two slices of toasted brown bread, one piece of sponge cake, and a baked apple with cream! I 've gone out of business with you; my last 'tonic' is going to work well,—don't you think so?"

"I 'm sure it is," she said quietly, but there was such a depth of meaning in the sweet voice and the few words that the Doctor threw his arm around her as they rose from the table, and kept her beside him until bedtime.

At nine o'clock, Mrs. Blossom helped her to undress, and then, saying she would come back soon, left her alone in the little bedroom off the kitchen.

Hazel looked about her in amazement. This was her little room! A small single bed, looking like a snow drift, so white and feathery and high was it; one window curtained with a square of starched white cotton cloth that drew over the panes by means of a white cord on which it was run at the top; a tiny wash-stand with an old-fashioned bowl and pitcher of green and white stone-ware, and over it an old-fashioned gilt mirror; a small splint-bottomed chair and large braided rug of red woollen rags. That was all, except in one corner, where some cleats had been nailed to the ceiling and a clothes-press made by hanging from them full curtains of white cloth.

For the first time in her life, Hazel unpacked her own travelling-bag and took out the silver toilet articles with the pretty monogram. But where should she put them? No bureau, no dressing-case, no bath-room!—For a few minutes Hazel felt bewildered, then, laughing, she put them back again into her bag, and, leaving her candle in the tin candlestick on the wash-stand, she gave one leap into the middle of the high feather-bed.

Just then Mrs. Blossom returned from saying good-night to her own children. She tucked Hazel in snugly, and to the young girl's surprise, knelt by the bed saying, "Let us repeat the Lord's Prayer

together, dear;" and together they said it, Hazel fearing almost the sound of her own voice. When they had finished, Mary Blossom, still kneeling, asked that Father to bless the coming of this one of His little ones into their home, and asked it in such a loving, trustful way, that Hazel's arm stole out from the coverlet and around Mrs. Blossom's neck; her head, soft and silky as a new-born baby's, cuddled to her shoulder: and when Mrs. Blossom kissed her good-night, she said suddenly, but half-timidly, "Do you say *this* with Rose every night?"

"Yes, dear, every night."

"And how old is Rose?"

"She will be seventeen next August."

"Do you with Budd and Cherry, too?"

"Yes, with all my children, even March and May."

"March!" exclaimed Hazel.

"Why not?" laughed his mother. "I 'm sure he needs it, as you 'll find out; now good-night, and don't get up to our early breakfast to-morrow, for the Doctor goes on the first morning train, and you 're not quite strong enough yet to do just as we do. Good-night again."

"Good-night," said Hazel, thinking she could never have enough of this kind of putting to bed.

Meanwhile March and Budd, in their bedroom over the "long-room," were discussing in half-whispers Wyandotte cocks, St. Bernard puppies, and the new-comer, for they were too excited to sleep.

Just behind March's bed, near the head, there was a large knot in the boards of the flooring, which for four years had served him many a good turn, when Budd and Cherry were planning, below in the kitchen, how they could play tricks upon him. March had carefully removed the knot, and with his eye, or ear, at the hole, he had been able, entirely to the mystification of the twins, to overthrow their conspiracies and defeat their flank movements. When his espionage was over, he replaced the knot, and no one in the household was the wiser for his private detective service.

To-day, late in the afternoon, he had taken out the knot, intending to have a view of the new arrival, unbeknown to the rest of the household; but so interested had he become in the general welcome and in the anticipation of the Doctor's gifts, that he had forgotten both to look through the hole and to replace the knot.

Hazel, too, could not sleep at first. It was all so strange, and yet she was so happy. Her thoughts were in New York, and she was already planning for a visit from her father, when suddenly she remembered that she had left the little chatelaine watch he had given her on her last birthday, lying on the settle where May had been playing with it. She must wind it regularly, that was her father's stipulation when he gave it to her. She sprang out of bed, tiptoed to the door, listened; all was still, but not wholly dark. The embers beneath the ashes in the fireplace sent a dull glow into the room. Softly she stole out; found her watch, then, half-way to her own door, stopped, startled by a voice issuing apparently from the rafters overhead. It was March, who, forgetting his open knot-hole, turned over towards the wall with a prolonged yawn and said, evidently in answer to Budd:—

"Oh, go to sleep; don't talk about her. I think she 's a perfect guy."

VI MALACHI

It was a month after the eventful day for the Blossoms, and Saturday morning. Rose, with her sleeves rolled up above her elbows, was kneading bread and singing, as she worked:—

"Oh, a king would have loved and left thee,
And away thy sweet love cast:
But I am thine
Whilst the stars shall shine,—
To the—last—"

Just here, she gave the round mass of dough a toss up to the ceiling and caught it deftly on her right fist as it came down, finishing her octave with high C, while again the bread spun aloft and dropped in safety on her left fist—"to the last!"

Then she proceeded with her kneading and singing:—

"I told thee when love was hopeless;
But now he is wild and sings—
That the stars above [up went the bread again]—
Shine ever on Love—"

A peal of merry laughter close behind her made her jump, and the bread came down kerchunk into the kneading trough.

"Gracious, Hazel! how you frightened me! I thought you were off with Budd and Cherry."

"So I was; but they wanted me to come in and tell you there is to be a secret meeting of the N.B.B.O.O. Society in the usual place. They said you would know where it is."

"Of course I do; do you?"

"No, they would n't tell. They said it is against the rules to allow any one in who hasn't been initiated. They said they 'd initiate me, if I wanted to join."

"Well, do you want to?"

"Of course I do, if you belong," said Hazel, eagerly.

"Tell them I 'll be out after I 've put the bread to rise and cleared up; but be sure and tell them not to do anything till I come."

"Yes," cried Hazel, joyfully, skipping through the woodshed and encountering Chi with a bag of seed-beans.

"Where you goin', Lady-bird?" (This was Chi's name for her from the first day.) "Seems to me you 're gettin' over the ground pretty fast."

"The Buds" (for so Hazel had nicknamed the children) "are going to have a meeting somewhere of the N.B.B.O.O. Society, and I'm to be initiated, Chi. What does that mean?"

"Initiated, hey? Into a secret society? Well, that depends.—Sometimes it means being tossed sky-high in a blanket, and then again you 're dropped lower than the bottomless pit; and you can't most always tell beforehand which way you 're goin'."

Hazel's face fairly lost the rich color she had gained in the past month. This was more than she had bargained for.

"Oh, Chi! They would n't do such things to me!" she exclaimed in dismay.

"Well, no—I don't know as they 'd carry it that far; but those children mean mischief every time."

"But they would n't hurt me, Chi. They would n't be as mean as that; besides, Rose wouldn't let them."

"Well, I don't know as she would. But children are children, and Rose ain't grown any wings yet."

"Was Rose initiated?" was Hazel's next rather anxious question.

"Yes, she was," said Chi, taking up a handful of beans and letting them run through his fingers into the open bag.

"How do you know, Chi?"

"Coz I initiated her myself."

"You, Chi? Why, do you belong?"

"First member of the N.B.B.O.O. Society."

"Well, that's funny. Who initiated you?"

Chi set down the bag of beans, and for a moment shook with laughter; then, growing perfectly sober, he said solemnly:—

"I initiated myself. But they was all on hand when I did it."

"What did you do, Chi?"

"Just hear her!" said Chi to himself, but aloud, he said, "I 'll tell you this much, if it is a secret society. They try 'n' see what stuff you 're made of."

"Sugar and spice
And all that's nice,
That's what little girls are made of,"

Hazel interrupted, singing merrily.

"There was n't much 'sugar 'n' spice' in that Rose Blossom when she put me to the test. You ain't heard a screech-owl yet; but when you do, you'll come running home to find out whose bein' killed in the woods."

Hazel looked at him half in fear, but Chi went on stolidly:—

"'N' those children told me I 'd got to go up into the woods at twelve o'clock at night, when the screech-owls was yellin' bloody murder, to show I wasn't scairt of nothin'; 'n' I went."

"Oh, Chi, was n't it awful?"

"Kinder scarey; but they gave me the dinner horn 'n' told me to blow a blast on that when I was up there, so they 'd hear, 'n' know I was *clear* into the woods; for they was all on hand watchin' from the back attic window—what they could in a pitch-black night—to see if I 'd back down."

"And you did n't, Chi?" said Hazel, eagerly.

"You bet I did n't, 'n' I brought home an old screecher just to prove I was game."

"How did you catch him, Chi?"

Chi clapped his hands on his knees, and shook with laughter; then he grew perfectly sober:—

"I took a dark lantern along with me, just to kind of feel my way in the woods—but the children did n't know about that—'n' when an old screecher gave a blood-curdlin' yell, just as near my right ear as the engine down on the track when you 're standin' at the depot at Barton's River,—just then I turned on the light full tilt, and the feller sat right still on the branch, kind of dazed like, 'n' I took him just as easy as I 'd take a hen off the roost after dark, 'n' brought him home. 'N' just as I was goin' up into the attic in the dark, the shed stairs' way, 'n' the children was all listenin' at the top in the dark, the dummed bird gave such a screech that the children all tumbled over one another tryin' to get back to their beds, 'n' such screamin' 'n' hollerin' you never heard—the bird was n't in it."

Again Chi laughed at the recollection, and Hazel joined him.

"Did they make you do anything more, Chi?"

"By George Washin'ton! I should think they did," said Chi, soberly. "That last was March's idea, but Rose went him one more."

"What could Rose think of worse than that?" demanded Hazel.

"Well, she did. She blindfolded my eyes 'n' took me by the hand, 'n' turned me round 'n' round till I was most dizzy; 'n' then she gave me a rope, 'n' she took one end of it 'n' made me take the other, 'n' kept leadin' me 'n' leadin' me, 'n' the children all caperin' round me, screamin' 'n' laughin'. Pretty soon—I calculated I 'd walked about a quarter of a mile—the rope grew slack; all of a sudden the laughin' 'n' screamin' stopped, 'n' I—walked right off the bank into the big pool down under the pines, ker—splash! 'n' the children, after they 'd got me in, was so scairt for fear I 'd lose my breath—I could n't drown coz there was n't more than five feet of water in it—that they hauled on the rope with all their might, 'n' pulled me out; 'n' I let 'em pull," said Chi, grimly.

"I hope they were satisfied after that," said Hazel, soberly.

"They appeared to be," said Chi, contentedly, "for they said I should be president, coz I was so brave. But there 's other things harder to do than that."

"What are they, Chi?"

"You 've got to keep the by-laws."

"What are those?"

"Rules of the Society. One of 'em 's, you must n't be afraid to tell the truth. 'N' another is, you must be scairt to tell a lie."

Hazel grew scarlet at her own thoughts.

"Another is, to help other folks all you can; 'n' the fourth 'n' last is, that no boy or girl as lives in this great, free country of ours ought to be a coward."

Hazel drew a long breath.

"Those must be hard to keep."

"Well, they ain't always easy, that's a fact; but they re mighty good to live by," he added, picking up the bean-bag. "I lived with Ben Blossom's father when I was a little chap as chore boy, 'n' he gave me my schoolin' 'n' clothes; 'n' I 've lived with his son ever since he was married, 'n' he's been the best friend a man could have, 'n' I 've always got along with him in peace and lovin'-kindness; 'n' those four by-laws his father wrote on my boyhood; 'n' by those four by-laws I 've kept my manhood; 'n' so I think it 'll do anybody good to join the Society."

"Well," said Hazel, stoutly, "I 'll show them I 'm not afraid of some things, if I did run away from the turkey-gobbler."

"That's right," said Chi, heartily, "'n' more than that—betwixt you 'n' me—you 've no cause to be scairt *whatever* they do; now mark my words, *whatever they do*," repeated Chi, emphatically.

"I don't care what they do so long as you 're there, Chi," said Hazel, looking up into his weather-roughened, deeply-lined face with such utter trust in her great eyes that Chi caught up the bag over his shoulder and hurried out to the barn, muttering to himself:—

"George Washin'ton! How she manages to creep into the softest corner of a man's heart, I don't know; I expect it's those great eyes of hers, 'n' that voice just like a brook winnerin' 'n' gurglin' over its stones in August.—Guess there's luck come to this house with Lady-bird!" And he went about his work.

VII

THE N.B.B.O.O. SOCIETY

"Now, Hazel, we 're ready," said Rose, after the dinner dishes had been washed and the children's time was their own. Hazel submitted meekly to the blindfolding process.

She had tried in vain to find out something of what the children intended to do, but they were too clever for her to gain the smallest hint as to the initiation. March had been busy in the ice-house, and Cherry had been ironing the aprons for the family,—that was her Saturday morning duty. Budd and the St. Bernard puppy were off with Chi in the fields.

Rose led her through the woodshed and out of doors—Hazel knew that by the rush of soft air that met her face—and away, somewhither. At last she was helped to climb a ladder; Chi's hand grasped hers, and she felt the flooring under her feet. Then she was left without support of any kind, not daring to move with Chi's story in her thoughts.

"Guess we 'll have the roll-call first," said Chi, solemnly. There was not a sound to be heard except now and then a rush of wings and the twitter of swallows.

"Molly Stark."

"Here," said Rose.

"Markis de Lafayette."

"Here," from March.

"Marthy Washin'ton."

"Present," said Cherry, forgetting she was not in school. Budd snickered, and the president called him to order.

"Fine of two cents for snickerin' in meetin'." Budd looked sober.

"Ethan Allen."

"Here," said Budd, in a subdued voice.

"Old Put,—Here," said Chi, addressing and answering himself. "Now, Markis, read the by-laws."

"Number One.—We pledge ourselves not to be afraid to tell the truth."

"Number Two.—We pledge ourselves to be afraid to tell a lie."

"Number Three.—We pledge ourselves to try to help others whenever we can, wherever we can, however we can, as long as ever we can."

"Number Four.—We, as American boys and girls, pledge ourselves never to play the coward nor to disgrace our country."

"Molly Stark, unfurl the flag," said Chi.

Hazel heard a rustle as Rose unrolled the banner of soft red, white, and blue cambric.

"Put Old Glory round the candidate's shoulders," commanded the president, and Hazel felt the soft folds being draped about her.

"There now, Lady-bird, you 're dressed as pretty as you 're ever goin' to be; it don't make a mite of difference whether you 're the Empress of Rooshy, or just plain every-day folks; 'n' now you 've got that rig on, we 're ready to give you the hand of fellowship. Markis, you have the floor."

"What name does the candidate wish to be known by?" asked March, with due gravity; then, forgetting his role, he added, "You must take the name of some woman who has been just as brave as she could be."

Hazel, feeling the folds of the flag about her, suddenly recalled her favorite poem of Whittier's.

"Barbara Frietchie," she said promptly and firmly.

The various members shouted and cheered themselves hoarse before order was restored.

"What'd I tell you, Budd?" said Chi, triumphantly; then there was another shout, for Chi had broken the rules in speaking thus.

"Two cents' fine!" shouted Budd, "for speaking out of order in meeting."

"Sho! I forgot," said Chi, humbly; "well, proceed."

"Do you, Barbara Frietchie, pledge yourself to try to keep these by-laws?"

"Yes," said Hazel, but rather tremulously.

"Well, then, we 'll put you to the test. Molly Stark will extend the first hand of fellowship to Barbara Frietchie—No, hold out your hand, Hazel; way out—don't you draw it back that way!"

"I did n't," retorted Hazel.

"Yes, you did, I saw you!"

"You didn't, either."

"I did."

"You did n't."

"I did, too."

"He did n't, did he, Chi?" said Hazel, furious at this charge of apparent timidity.

"I don't believe you drew it back even if March does think he saw you," said Chi, pouring oil both ways on the troubled waters; "n' I never thought 't was just the thing for a boy to tell a girl she was a coward before she'd proved to be one—specially if he belongs to this Society."

The Marquis de Lafayette hung his head at this rebuke; but in the action his cocked hat of black and gilt paper lurched forward and drew off with it his white cotton-wool wig. Budd and Cherry, forgetting all rules, fines, and sense of propriety, rolled over and over at the sight; Rose sat down shaking with laughter, and even Chi lost his dignity.

"I wish you would let me *see*, or do something," said Hazel, plaintively, when she could make herself heard.

"'T ain't fair to keep Hazel waiting so," declared Budd, and the president called the meeting to order again.

"Put out your hand, Hazel," said Rose. "Now shake."

Hazel grasped a hand, cold, deathly cold, and clammy. The chill of the rigid fingers sent a corresponding shiver down the length of her backbone, and the goose-flesh rose all over her arms and legs. She thought she must shriek; but she recalled Chi's words, set her teeth hard, and shook the awful thing with what strength she had, never uttering a sound.

"Bully for you, Hazel! I knew you 'd show lots of pluck," cried Budd.

"Got grit every time," said Chi, proudly. "Now let's have the other test and get down to business. Guess all three of you 'll have to have a finger in this pie. Hurry up, Marthy Washin'ton!" Cherry scuttled down the ladder, and in a few minutes labored, panting, up again.

"What did you bring two for?" demanded Budd.

"'Cause March said 't would balance me better on the ladder," replied Cherry, innocently. At which explanation Chi laughed immoderately, much to Cherry's discomfiture.

"Now, Hazel, roll up your sleeve and hold out your bare arm," said the Marquis. Hazel obeyed, wondering what would come next.

"Here, Budd, you hold it; all ready, Cherry?"

"Ye-es—wait a minute; now it's all right."

"This we call burning in the Society's brand,—N.B.B.O.O.;" the voice of the Marquis was solemn, befitting the occasion.

Hazel drew her breath sharply, uncertain whether to cry out or not. There was a sharp sting across her arm, as if a hot curling-iron had been drawn quickly across it; then a sound of sizzling flesh, and the odor of broiled beefsteak rose up just under her nostrils.

There was a diabolical thud of falling flat-irons; Rose tore the bandage from Hazel's eyes, and the bewildered candidate for membership, when her eyes grew somewhat wonted to the dim light, found herself in a corner of the loft in the barn, with the elegant figure of the Marquis in cocked hat, white wig, yellow vest, blue coat, and yellow knee-breeches dancing frantically around

her; Ethan Allen in white woollen shirt, red yarn suspenders, and red, white, and blue striped trousers, turning back-hand somersaults on the hay; Chi standing at salute with his great-great-grandfather's Revolutionary musket, his old straw hat decorated with a tricolor cockade, and Cherry in a white cotton-wool wig, a dark calico dress of her mother's and a white neckerchief, flat on the floor beside two six-pound flat-irons.

A piece of raw beef on a tin pan, some bits of ice, and a kid glove stuffed with ice and sawdust, lay scattered about. They told the tale of the initiation.

"Three cheers for Barbara Frietchie!" shouted Budd, as he came right side up. The barn rang with them.

"Now we 'll give the right hand of true fellowship," said Chi, rapping with the butt of his musket for order.

Rose gave Hazel's hand a squeeze. "I 'm so glad you 're to be one of us," she said heartily; and Hazel squeezed back.

March came forward, bowed low, and said, "I apologize for my distrust of your pluck," and held out his hand with a look in the flashing gray eyes that was not one of mockery; indeed, he looked glad, but never a word of welcome did he speak.

"I could flog that proud feller," muttered Chi to himself.

Hazel hesitated a moment, then put out her hand a little reluctantly. March caught the gesture and her look.

"Oh, you 're not obliged to," he said haughtily, and turned on his heel. But Hazel put her hand on his arm.

"I 'm afraid we are both breaking some of the by-laws, March. I do want to shake hands, but I was thinking just then that you did n't mean the apology—not really and truly; and if you did mean it, there was something else you needed to apologize for more than that!"

March flushed to the roots of his hair. Then his boy's honor came to the rescue.

"I do want to now, Hazel—and forgive and forget, won't you?" he said, with the winning smile he inherited from his father, but which he kept for rare occasions.

Hazel put her hand in his, and felt that this had been worth waiting for. She knew that at last March had taken her in.

Budd gripped with all his might, Cherry shook with two fingers, and Chi's great hand closed over hers as tenderly as a woman's would have done.

This was Hazel's initiation into the Nobody's Business But Our Own Society. It was the second meeting of the year.

"Now, March, I 'll make you chairman and ask you to state the business of this meetin', as you 've called it. Must be mighty important?"

"It is," replied March, gravely, all the fun dying out of his face. "You remember, all of you,—don't you?—what mother told us that night she said Hazel was coming?"

"Yes," chorussed the children.

"Well, I 've been thinking and thinking ever since how I could help—"

"So 've I, March," interrupted Rose.

"And I have, too," said Budd.

"What's all this mean?" said Chi, somewhat astonished, for he had not known why the meeting had been called.

"Why, you see, Chi, we never knew till then that the farm had been mortgaged on account of father's sickness, and that it had been so awful hard for mother all this year—"

Chi cleared his throat.

"—And we want to do something to help earn. If we could earn just our own clothes and books and enough to pay for our schooling, it would be something."

"Guess 't would," said Chi, clearing his throat again. "Kind of workin' out the third by-law, ain't you?"

"Trying to," answered March, with such sincerity in his voice that Chi's throat troubled him for full a minute. "And what I want to find out, without mother's knowing it, or father either, is how we can earn enough for those things. If anybody 's got anything to say, just speak up."

"What you goin' to do with those Wyandottes?"

"I knew you 'd ask that, Chi. I 'm going to raise a fine breed and sell the eggs at a dollar and a half for thirteen; but I can't get any chicken-money till next fall, and no egg-money till next spring, and I want to begin now."

"Hm—" said Chi, taking off his straw hat and slowly scratching his head. "Well," he said after a pause in which all were thinking and no one talking, "why don't all of you go to work raisin' chickens for next Thanksgivin'?"

"By cracky!" said Budd, "we could raise three or four hundred, an' fat 'em up, an' make a pile, easy as nothing."

"I don't know about it's bein' so easy; but children have the time to tend 'em, and I don't see why it won't work, seein' it's a good time of year."

"But where 'll we get the hens to set, Chi?" said March.

"Oh, there 's enough of 'em settin' round now on the bare boards," Chi replied.

"Can I raise some, too?" asked Hazel, rather timidly.

"Don't know what there is to hinder," said Chi, with a slow smile.

"And can I buy some hens for my very own?"

"Why, of course you can; just say the word, 'n' you 'n' I 'll go settin'-hen hunting within a day or so."

"Oh, what fun!" cried Hazel, clapping her hands. "But I want some that will sit and lay too, Chi; then I can sell the eggs."

There was a shout of laughter, at which Hazel felt hurt.

"There now, Lady-bird, we won't laugh at your city ways of lookin' at things any more. The hens ain't quite so accommodatin' as that, but we 'll get some good setters first, 'n' then see about the layin' afterwards."

"But, Chi, it will take such a lot of corn to fatten them. We don't want to ask father for anything."

"That's right, Rose. Be independent as long as you can; I thought of that, too. Now, there 's a whole acre on the south slope I ploughed this spring,—nice, hot land, just right for corn-raisin'; 'n' if you children 'll drop 'n' cover, I 'll help you with the hoein' 'n' cuttin' 'n' huskin'; 'n' you 'll have your corn for nothin'."

"Good for you, Chi; we 'll do it, won't we?" cried March.

"You bet," said Budd.

"I can pick berries," said Rose, "and we can always sell them at the Inn, or at Barton's River."

"Yes, and we can begin in June," said Cherry; "the pastures are just red with the wild strawberries, you know, Rose."

"It's an awful sight of work to pick 'em," said Budd, rather dubiously.

"Well, you can't get your money without workin', Budd; 'n' work don't mean 'take it easy.'"

"I 'm sure we can get twenty-five cents a quart for them right in the village. I 've heard folks say they make the best preserve you can get, and you can't buy them for love nor money," said Rose. "Mother makes beautiful ones."

"Was n't that what we had last Sunday night when the minister was here to tea?" asked Hazel.

"Yes," said Rose.

"I never tasted any strawberries like them at home, and the housekeeper buys lots of jams and jellies in the fall." Hazel thought hard for a minute. Suddenly she jumped to her feet, clapped her hands, and spun round and round like a top, crying out, "I have it! I have it!"

The N.B.B.O.O. Society was amazed to see the new member perform in this lively manner, for Hazel had been rather quiet during the first month. Now she caught up her skirts with a dainty tilt, and danced the Highland Fling just to let her spirits out through her feet. Up and down the floor of the loft she charged, hands over her head, hands swinging her skirts, light as a fairy, bending, swaying, and bowing, till, with a big "cheese," she sat down almost breathless by Chi. Was this Hazel? The members of the N.B.B.O.O. looked at one another in amazement, and March's eyes flashed again, as they had done once before during the afternoon.

"Now all listen to me," she said, as if, after a month of silence, she had found her tongue. "I 've an idea, and when I have one, papa says it's worth listening to,—which is n't often, I 'm sure. We 'll pick the strawberries, and get Mrs. Blossom to show Rose how to do them up; and I 'll write to papa and Doctor Heath's wife and to our housekeeper and Cousin Jack, and see if they don't want some of those delicious preserves that they can't get in the city. I 'll find out from Mrs. Scott—that's the housekeeper—how much she pays for a jar in New York, and then we 'll charge a little more for ours because the strawberries are a little rarer. Are n't there any other kinds of berries that grow around here?"

"Guess you 'd better stop 'n' take breath, Lady-bird; there 's a mighty lot of plannin' in all that. What 'd I tell you, Budd?" Chi asked again.

Budd looked at Hazel in boyish admiration, but said nothing.

"I think that's splendid, Hazel," said Rose, "if they'll only want them."

"I know they will; but are there any other berries?"

"Berries! I should think so; raspberries and blackberries by the bushel on the Mountain, and they say they 're the best anywhere round here," said March.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Cherry, "I wish we could go to work right now."

"Well, so you can," said Chi, "only you can't go berryin' just yet. You can begin to drop that corn this very afternoon: better be inside the ground pretty soon, with all those four hundred chickens waitin' to join the Thanksgivin' procession."

"Oh, Chi, you 're making fun of us," laughed Rose.

"Don't you believe it, Rose-rose; never was more in earnest in my life. Come along, 'n' I 'll show you."

VIII

A LIVELY CORRESPONDENCE

It was a trial of patience to have to wait twenty-one days before the first of the "four hundred" could be expected to appear.

"You 'll have to be kind of careful 'bout steppin' round in the dark, Mis' Blossom, 'n' you, too, Ben," said Chi, "for you 'll find a settin' hen most anywheres nowadays."

Mrs. Blossom laughed. "Oh, Chi, what dear children they are, even if they aren't quite perfect."

"Can't be beat," replied Chi, earnestly. "Look at them now, will you?"

Mrs. Blossom stepped out on the porch, and looked over to the south slope and the corn-patch. "What if her father were to see her now!" She laughed again, both at her thoughts and the sight.

"'T would give him kind of a shock at first," Chi chuckled, "but he 'd get over it as soon as he 'd seen that face."

"It is wonderful how she has improved. I shouldn't be surprised if he came up here soon to see Hazel."

"Well, he 'll find somethin' worth lookin' at. See there, now!"

The girls had been making scarecrows to protect the young corn, stuffing old shirts and trousers with hay and straw, while March and Budd had been getting ready the cross-tree frames. In dropping and covering the corn that Saturday afternoon after the initiation, the girls had found their skirts and petticoats not only in the way as they bent over their work, but greatly soiled by contact with the soft, damp loam. So they had begged to wear overalls of blue denim like Chi's and the boys'. The request had been gladly granted. "It will save no end of washing," said Mrs. Blossom, and forthwith made up three pairs on the machine.

The girls found it great fun. They tucked in their petticoats and buttoned down their shoulder-straps with right good will. Then Mr. Blossom presented them with broad, coarse straw hats, such as he and Chi used, and with these on their heads they rushed off to the corn-patch. There now they were,—five good-looking boys with hands joined, dancing and capering around a scarecrow, that looked like a gentleman tramp gone entirely to seed, and singing at the top of their voices Budd's favorite, "I won't play in your back yard."

At that very hour, when the gentleman scarecrow of the corn-patch was looking amiably, although slightly squint-eyed, out from under his tattered straw hat (for March had drawn rude features on the white cloth bag stuffed with cotton-wool which served for a head, and on it Rose had sewed skeins of brown yarn to imitate hair) at the antics of the five pairs of blue overalls, Mr. Clyde, having finished his nine o'clock breakfast, asked for the mail.

"Yes, Marse John" (so Wilkins always called Mr. Clyde when they were alone), "'spect dere 's one from Miss Hazel by de feel an' de smell."

Mr. Clyde smiled. "How can you tell by the 'feel and the smell,' Wilkins?"

"Case it's bunchy lake in de middle, an' de vi'lets can't hide dere bref."

"Well, we 'll see," said Mr. Clyde, willing to indulge his faithful servant's childish curiosity. Wilkins busied himself quietly about the breakfast-room.

As Mr. Clyde opened the envelope, the crushed blue and white violets fell out. Suddenly he burst into such a hearty laugh that Wilkins had hard work to suppress a sympathetic chuckle.

"I shall have to carry this letter over to the Doctor, Wilkins," he said, still laughing. "I shall be in time to find him a few minutes alone before office hours." He rose from the table.

Wilkins followed him out to give his coat a last touch with the brush; he was fearful Mr. Clyde might leave without revealing anything of the contents of the letter from his beloved Miss Hazel.

"Sense me, Marse John," he said in desperation, as Mr. Clyde went towards the front door, "but Miss Hazel ain't no wusser case yo' goin' to de Doctah's?"

"Oh, Wilkins, I forgot; you want to know how Miss Hazel is. She is doing finely; as happy as a bird, and sends her love to you in a postscript. I think I 'll run up and see her soon."

Wilkins ducked and beamed. "'Pears lake dis yere house ain't de same place wif de little missus gone."

"You 're right, Wilkins," said Mr. Clyde, earnestly. "I shall not open the Newport cottage this year; it would be too lonesome without her."

"Well, Dick," he said gayly, as he entered the Doctor's office, "I shall hold you responsible for some of the lives of the 'Four Hundred.' Here, read this letter."

MOUNT HUNGER, MILL SETTLEMENT, BARTON'S
RIVER, VERMONT, May 19, 1896.

DEAREST PAPA,—Good-morning! I am answering your long letter a little sooner than I expected to, because I want you to do something for me in a business way; that's the way March says it must be.

I don't know how to begin to tell you, but I 've joined the N.B.B.O.O. Society and one of the by-laws is that we must help others all we can and just as much as we can. I wish you'd been at the initiashun. (I don't know about that spelling, and I 'm in a hurry, or I 'd ask.) I had the hand of fellowship from a supposed corpse's hand first, and then I was branded on the arm. And afterwards they all took me in, and now we 're raising four hundred chickens to help others; I 'll tell you all about it when you come. Chi, that's the hired man, but he is really our friend, took me sitting-hen hunting day before yesterday, for I am to own some myself; and we drove all over the hills to the farmhouses and found and bought twelve, or rather Chi did, for I had to borrow the money of him, as I felt so bad when I kissed you good-bye that I forgot to tell you my quarterly allowance was all gone, and I know you won't like my borrowing of Chi, for you have said so many times never to owe anybody and I've always tried to pay for everything except when I had to borrow of Gabrielle, or Mrs. Scott, when I forgot my purse.

But truly the hens were in such an awful hurry to sit, that it did seem too bad to keep them waiting even three days till I could get some money from you; and then, too, we 've all of us, March and Rose and Budd and Cherry and me, bet on which hen would get the first chicken, and that chicken is going to be a prize chicken and especially fatted, and of course, if I waited for the money to come from you, I could n't stand a chance of coming out ahead in our four hundred chicken race, so I borrowed of Chi. The hens came to just \$4 and eighty cents. I'll pay you back when I earn it, and don't you think it would have been a pity to lose the chance for the prize chicken just for that borrow?

Please send the money by return mail. I 've other letters to write, so please excuse my not paragraphing and so little punctuation, but I 've so much to do and this must go at once.

Your loving and devoted daughter,
HAZEL CLYDE.

P.S. The hens are sitting around everywhere. Give my love to Wilkins. H.C.

The Doctor shouted; then he stepped to the dining-room door and called, "Wifie, come here and bring that letter."

Mrs. Heath came in smiling, with a letter in her hand, which, after cordially greeting Mr. Clyde, she read to him,—an amazed and outwitted father.

MOUNT HUNGER, MILL SETTLEMENT, BARTON'S
RIVER, VERMONT, May 19, 1896.

MY DEAR MRS. HEATH,—Please thank my dear Doctor Heath for the note he sent me two weeks ago. I ought to write to him instead of to you, for I don't owe you a letter (your last one was

so sweet I answered it right off), but he never allows his patients strawberry preserve and jam, so it would be no use to ask his help just now, as this is pure business, March says.

We are trying to help others, and the strawberries—wild ones—are as thick as spatter—going to be—all over the pastures, and we 're going to pick quarts and quarts, and Rose is going to preserve them, and then we 're going to sell them.

Do you think of anybody who would like some of this preserve? If you do, will you kindly let me know by return mail?

I can't tell just the price, and March says that is a great drawback in real business, and this *is* real—but it will not be more than \$1 and twenty-five cents a quart. They will be fine for luncheon. I never tasted any half so good at home.

My dear love to the Doctor and a large share for yourself from

Your loving friend,
HAZEL CLYDE.

P.S. Rose says it is n't fair for people to order without knowing the quality, so we 've done up a little of Mrs. Blossom's in some Homeepatic (I don't know where that "h" ought to come in) pellet bottles, and will send you a half-dozen "for samples," March says, to send to any one to taste you think would like to order. H.C.

"The cure is working famously," said Doctor Heath, rubbing his hands in glee.

"Well," said Mr. Clyde, laughing, "I may as well make the best of it; but I can't help wondering whether the wholesale grocers in town have been asked to place orders with Mount Hunger, or the Washington Market dealers for prospective chickens! There 's your office-bell; I won't keep you longer, but if this 'special case' of yours should develop any new symptoms, just let me know."

"I 'll keep you informed," rejoined the Doctor. "Better run up there pretty soon, Johnny," he called after him.

"I think it's high time, Dick. Good-bye."

At that very moment, a symptom of another sort was developing in Z– Hall, Number 9, at Harvard.

Jack Sherrill and his chum were discussing the last evening's Club theatricals. "I saw that pretty Maude Seaton in the third or fourth row, Jack; did she come on for that,—which, of course, means you?"

"Wish I might think so," said Jack, half in earnest, half in jest, pulling slowly at his corn-cob pipe.

"By Omar Khayyam, Jack! you don't mean to say you 're hit, at last!"

"Hit,—yes; but it's only a flesh-wound at present,—nothing dangerous about it."

"She 's got the style, though, and the pull. I know a half-dozen of the fellows got dropped on to-night's cotillion."

"Kept it for me," said Jack, quietly.

"No, really, though—" and his chum fell to thinking rather seriously for him.

Just then came the morning's mail,—notes, letters, special delivery stamps, all the social accessories a popular Harvard man knows so well. Jack looked over his carelessly,—invitations to dinner, to theatre parties, "private views," golf parties, etc. He pushed them aside, showing little interest. He, like his Cousin Hazel, was used to it.

The morning's mail was an old story, for Sherrill was worth a fortune in his own right, as several hundred mothers and daughters in New York and Boston and Philadelphia knew full well.

Moreover, if he had not had a penny in prospect, Jack Sherrill would have attracted by his own manly qualities and his exceptionally good looks. His riches, to which he had been born, had not as yet wholly spoiled him, but they cheated him of that ambition that makes the best of young manhood, and Life was out of tune at times—how and why, he did not know, and there was no one to tell him.

He had rather hoped for a note from Maude Seaton, thanking him, in her own charming way, for the flowers he had sent her on her arrival from New York the day before. True, she had worn some in her corsage, but, for all Jack knew, they might have been another man's; for Maude Seaton was never known to have less than four or five strings to her bow. It was just this uncertainty about her that attracted Jack.

"Hello! Here 's a letter for you by mistake in my pile," said his chum.

"Why, this is from my little Cousin Hazel, who is rustivating just now somewhere in the Green Mountains." Jack opened it hastily and read,—

MOUNT HUNGER, MILL SETTLEMENT, BARTON'S
RIVER, VERMONT, May 19, 1896.

DEAREST COUSIN JACK,—It is perfectly lovely up here, and I 've been inishiated into a Secret Society like your Dicky Club, and one of the by-laws is to help others all we can and wherever we can and as long as ever we can, and so I 've thought of that nice little spread you gave last year after the foot-ball game, and how nice the table looked and what good things you had, but I don't remember any strawberry jam or preserves, do you?

We 're hatching four hundred chickens to help others,—I mean we have set 40 sitting hens on 520 eggs, not all the 40 on the five hundred and twenty at once, you know; but, I mean, each one of the 40 hens are sitting on 13 eggs apiece, and March says we must expect to lose 120 eggs—I mean, chickens,—as the hens are very careless and sit sideways—I 've seen them myself—and so an extra egg is apt to get chilly, and the chickens can't stand any chilliness, March says. But Chi, that's my new friend, says some eggs have a double yolk, and maybe, there 'll be some twins to make up for the loss.

Anyway, we want 400 chickens to sell about Thanksgiving time, and, of course, we can't get any money till that time. So now I 've got back to your spread again and the preserves, and while we 're waiting for the chickens, we are going to make preserves—*dee-licious* ones! I mean we are going to pick them and Rose is going to preserve them. We 've decided to ask \$1 and a quarter a quart for them; Rose—that's Rose Blossom—says it is dear, but if you could see my Rose-pose, as Chi calls her, you 'd think it cheap just to eat them if she made them. She 's perfectly lovely—prettier than any of the New York girls, and when she kneads bread and does up the dishes, she sings like a bird, something about love. I'll write it down for you, sometime. *I 'm* in love with her.

Please ask your college friends if they don't want some jam and wild strawberry preserves. If they do, March says they had better order soon, as I've written to New York to see about some other orders.

Yours devotedly,
HAZEL.

P.S. I 've sent you a sample of the strawberry preserve in a homeepahtic pellet bottle, to taste; Rose says it is n't fair to ask people to buy without their knowing what they buy. I saw that Miss Seaton just before I came away; she came to call on me and brought some flowers. She said I looked like you—which was an awful whopper because I had my head shaved, as you know; I asked her if she had heard from you, and she said she had. She is n't half as lovely as Rose-pose. H.C.

IX THE PRIZE CHICKEN

There was wild excitement, as well as consternation, in the farmhouse on the Mountain.

On the next day but one after Hazel had sent her letters, Chi had brought up from the Mill Settlement a telegram which had come on the stage from Barton's. It was addressed to, "Hazel Clyde, Mill Settlement, Barton's River, Vermont," and ran thus:—

CAMBRIDGE, May 20, 1 P.M.

Hope to get in our order ahead of New York time. Seventeen dozen of each kind. Letter follows.

JACK.

"Seventeen dozen!" screamed Rose, on hearing the telegram.

"Seventeen dozen of *each kind!*" cried Budd.

"Oh, quick, March, do see what it comes to!" said Hazel.

Then such an arithmetical hubbub broke loose as had never been heard before on the Mountain.

"Seventeen times twelve," said Rose,—*"let me see; seven times two are fourteen, one to carry—do keep still, March!"* But March went on with:—

"Twelve times four are forty-eight—seventeen times forty-eight, hm—seven times eight are fifty-six, five to carry—Shut up, Budd; I can't hear myself think." But Budd gave no heed, and continued his computation.

"Four times seventeen are—four times seven are twenty-eight, two to carry; four times one are four and two are—I say, you 've put me all out!" shouted Budd, and, putting his fingers in his ears, he retired to a corner. Rose continued to mumble with her eyes shut to concentrate her mind upon her problem, threatening Cherry impatiently when she interrupted with her peculiar solution, which she had just thought out:—

"If one quart cost one dollar and twenty-five cents, twelve quarts will cost twelve times one dollar and twenty-five cents, which is, er—twelve times one are twelve; twelve times twenty-five! Oh, gracious, that's awful! What's twelve times twenty-five, March?"

"Shut up," growled March; "you 've put me all off the track."

"Me, too," said Rose, in an aggrieved tone.

Mrs. Blossom had been listening from the bedroom, and now came in, suppressing her desire to smile at the reddened and perplexed faces. "Here 's a pencil, March, suppose you figure it out on paper."

A sigh of relief was audible throughout the room, as March sat down to work out the result. "Eight hundred and sixteen quarts at one dollar twenty-five a quart," said March to himself; then, with a bound that shook the long-room, he shouted, "One thousand and twenty dollars!" and therewith broke forth into singing:—

"Glory, glory, halleluia!
Glory, glory, halleluia!
Glory, glory, halleluia,
For the N.B.B.O.O.!"

The rest joined in the singing with such goodwill that the noise brought in Chi from the barn. When he was told the reason for the rejoicing, he looked thoughtful, then sober, then troubled.

"What's the matter, Chi? Cheer up! You have n't got to pick them," said March.

"T ain't that; but I hate to throw cold water on any such countin'-your-chickens-'fore-they 're-hatched business," said Chi.

"T is n't chickens; it's preserves, Chi," laughed Rose.

"I know that, too," said Chi, gravely. "But suppose you do a little figuring on the hind-side of the blackboard."

"What *do* you mean, Chi?" asked Hazel.

"Well, I 'll figure, 'n' see what you think about it. Seventeen dozen times four, how much, March?"

"Eight hundred and sixteen."

"Hm! eight hundred and sixteen glass jars at twelve and a half cents apiece—let me see: eight into eight once; eight into one no times 'n' one over. There now, your jars 'll cost you just one hundred and two dollars."

There was a universal groan.

"N' that ain't all. Sugar 's up to six cents a pound, 'n' to keep preserves as they ought to be kept takes about a pound to a quart. Hm, eight hundred 'n' sixteen pounds of sugar at six cents a pound—move up my point 'n' multiply by six—forty-eight dollars 'n' ninety-six cents; added to the other—"

"Oh, don't, Chi!" groaned one and all.

"It spoils everything," said Rose, actually ready to cry with disappointment.

"Well, Molly Stark, you 've got to look forwards and backwards before you *promise* to do things," said Chi, serenely; and Rose, hearing the Molly Stark, knew just what Chi meant.

She went straight up to him, and, laying both hands on his shoulders, looked up smiling into his face. "I 'll be brave, Chi; we 'll make it work somehow," she said gently; and Chi was not ashamed to take one of the little hands and rub it softly against his unshaven cheek.

"That's my Rose-pose," he said. "Now, don't let's cross the bridges till we get to them; let's wait till we hear from New York."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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