

DODGE MARY MAPES

DONALD AND DOROTHY

Mary Dodge

Donald and Dorothy

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Mary Mapes Dodge

Donald and Dorothy

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH NONE OF THE CHARACTERS APPEAR

HE door of the study was closed, and only Nero was to be seen. He, poor dog, stood in the wide hall gazing wistfully at the knob, and pricking up his ears whenever sounds of movement in the room aroused his hope of being admitted. Suddenly he gave a yelp of delight. Somebody surely was approaching the door. The steps – they were a man's – halted. There was a soft, rolling sound, as if the master's chair were being drawn to the table; next, a rustling of paper; a deep-voiced moan; the rapid scratching of a quill pen; then silence – silence – and poor Nero again stood at half-mast.

Any ordinary dog would have barked, or pawed impatiently at the door. But Nero was not an ordinary dog. He knew that something unusual was going on, something with which even he, the protector and pet of the household, the frisky Master of Ceremonies, must not interfere. But when the bell-pull within the room clicked sharply, and a faint tinkle came up from below, he flew eagerly to the head of the basement stairs, and wagged his bushy tail with a steady, vigorous stroke, as though it were the crank of some unseen machine which slowly and surely would draw Liddy, the housemaid, up the stairway.

The bell rang again. The machine put on more steam. Still no Liddy. Could she be out? Nero ran back to take an agonized glance at the motionless knob, leaped frantically to the stairs again – and, at that moment, the study-door opened. There was a heavy tread; the ecstatic Nero rushed in between a pair of dignified legs moving toward the great hall door; he spun wildly about for an instant, and then, with a deep sigh of satisfaction, settled down on the rug before the study fire. For there was not a soul in the room.

CHAPTER II.

FOURTEEN YEARS AFTERWARD

The house is there still; so is Nero, now an honored old dog frisky only in his memories. But old as he is in teeth and muscle, he is hardly past middle-age in the wag of his still bushy tail, and is as young as ever in happy devotion to his master. Liddy, too, is down stairs, promoted, but busy as in the days gone by; and the voice of that very bell tinkled but an hour ago.

Here is the same study; some one within, and the door closed. Opposite, on the other side of the wide hall, is the parlor, its windows looking across piazza, sloping lawn, road-way, and field, straight out to the sparkling lake beyond. Back of the parlor is a sunny sitting-room, its bay-window framing a pleasant view of flower-garden, apple-orchard, and grape-arbor – a few straggling bunches clinging to the almost leafless November vines. And within, throughout the house indeed, floats a sunny-shady combination of out-door air, with a faint, delightful odor of open wood-fires. What a quiet, homelike, beautiful place it is!

Let us look into the sitting-room.

A boy, with his back toward the door, mounted upon the end of a big sofa, his bended knee tightly held between his arms, his head thrust forward earnestly, – altogether, from the rear view, looking like a remarkable torso with a modern jacket on, – that's Donald. Near him, on the sofa, a glowing face with bright brown hair waving back from it, the chin held in two brownish little hands, and beneath that a mass of dark red merino, revealing in a meandering, drapery way that its wearer is half-kneeling, half-sitting, – that's Dorothy.

I am obliged to confess it, these two inelegant objects on a very elegant piece of furniture are the hero and heroine of my story.

Do not imagine, however, that Donald and Dorothy could not, if they chose to do so, stand before you comely and fair as any girl and boy in the land. It is merely by accident that we catch this first glimpse of them. They have been on that sofa in just those positions for at least five minutes, and, from present appearances, they intend to remain so until further notice.

Dorothy is speaking, and Donald is – not exactly listening, but waiting for his turn to put in a word, thus forming what may be called a lull in the conversation; for up to this point both have been speaking together.

"It's too much for anything, so it is! I'm going to ask Liddy about it, that's what I'm going to do; for she was almost ready to tell me the other day, when Jack came in and made her mad."

"Don't you do it!" Donald's tone is severe, but still affectionate and confidential. "Don't you do it. It's the wrong way, I tell you. What did she get mad at?"

"Oh, nothing. Jack called her 'mess-mate' or something, and she flared up. But, I tell you, I'm just going to ask her right out what makes him act so."

"Nonsense," said Donald. "It's only his sailor-ways; and besides – "

"No, no. I don't mean Jack. I mean Uncle. I do believe he hates me!"

"Oh, Dorry! Dorry!"

"Well, he doesn't love me any more, anyhow! I know he's good and all that, and I love him just as much as you do, Don, every bit, so you needn't be so dreadfully astonished all in a minute. I love Uncle George as much as anybody in the world does, but that is no reason why, whenever Aunt Kate is mentioned, he – "

"Yes, it is, Dot. You ought to wait."

"I *have* waited – why, Don" (and her manner grows tearful and tragic), "I've waited nearly thirteen years!"

Here Don gives a quick, suddenly suppressed laugh, and asks her, "why she didn't say fourteen," and Dorothy tells him sharply that "he needn't talk – they're pretty even on that score" (which is true enough), and that she really has been "longing and dying to know ever since she was a little, little bit of a girl, and who wouldn't?"

Poor Dorothy! She will "long to know" for many a day yet. And so will the good gentleman who now sits gazing at the fire in the study across the wide hall, his feet on the very rug upon which Nero settled himself on that eventful November day, exactly fourteen years ago.

And so will good, kind Lydia, the housekeeper, and so will Jack, the sailor-coachman, at whom she is always "flaring up," as Dorothy says.

CHAPTER III. WHICH PARTLY EXPLAINS ITSELF

Dorothy Reed was of a somewhat livelier temperament than Donald, and that, as she often could not but feel, gave her an advantage. Also, she was ahead of him in history, botany, and rhetoric. Donald, though full of boyish spirit, was steadier, more self-possessed than Dorothy, and in algebra and physical geography he "left her nowhere," as the young lady herself would tersely confess when in a very good humor. But never were brother and sister better friends. "She's first-rate," Don would say, confidentially, to some boon companion, "not a bit like a girl, you know, – more like – well, no, there's nothing tomboyish about her, but she's spirited and never gets tired or sickish like other girls." And many a time Dorothy had declared to some choice confidential friend of the twining-arms sort, that Donald was "perfectly splendid! nicer than all the boys she ever had seen, put together."

On one point they were fully united, and that was in their love for Uncle George, though of late it seemed that he was constantly making rough weather for them.

This expression, "rough weather," is not original, but is borrowed from Sailor Jack, whom you soon shall know nearly as well as the two D's did.

And "the two D's" is not original either. That is Liddy's. She called Donald and Dorothy "the two D's" for brevity's sake, when they were not present, just as she often spoke of the master of the house, in his absence, as "Mr. G." There was no thought of disrespect in this. It was a way that had come upon her after she had learned her alphabet in middle life, and had stopped just at the point of knowing or guessing the first letter of a word or a name. Farther than that into the paths of learning, Liddy's patience had failed to carry her. But the use of initials she felt was one of the short cuts that education afforded. Besides, the good soul knew secrets which, without her master's permission, nothing would induce her to reveal. So, to speak of "Mr. G." or "the D's," had a confidential air of mystery about it that in some way was a great relief to her.

Mr. George was known by his lady friends as "a confirmed bachelor, but a most excellent man," the "but" implying that every well-to-do gentleman ought to marry, and "the excellent man" referring to the fact that ever since the children had been brought to him, fourteen years before, two helpless little babies, he had given them more than a father's care. He was nearly fifty years of age, a tall, "iron-gray" gentleman, with the courtliest of manners and the warmest of hearts; yet he was, as Liddy described him to her cousins, the Crumps, "an unexpected kind o' person, Mr. G. was. Just when you made up your mind he was very stiff and dignified, his face would light up into such a beautiful glow! And then, when you thought how nice, and hearty, and sociable he was, he would look so grave out of his eyes, and get so straight in the back that he seemed like a king in an ermine robe."

When Liddy had compared a man to "a king in an ermine robe," she had expressed her utmost pitch of admiration. She had heard this expression long ago in a camp-meeting discourse, and it seemed to her almost too grand a phrase for human use, unless one were speaking of Mr. George.

And a king Mr. George was, in some ways; a king who ruled himself, and whose subjects – Mr. George's traits of character – were loyal to their sovereign. Yet on one point he did deserve to be otherwise compared. All difficulties that were under his power to control he would bravely meet; but when anything troubled him which he could not remedy, – in fact, on occasions when he was perplexed, worried, or unable to decide promptly upon a course of action, – he often was a changed being. Quick as a flash the beautiful, genial glow would vanish, the kingly ermine would drop off, and he could be likened only to one of the little silver owls that we see upon dinner-tables, quite grand and proper in bearing, but very peppery within, and liable to scatter the pepper freely when suddenly upset.

Poor Dorry! It had been her sad experience to call forth this catastrophe very often of late, and in the most unexpected ways. Sometimes a mere gesture, even the tone of her voice, seemed to annoy her uncle. On one occasion, while he was pleasantly explaining some public matter to Donald and herself, she laid her hand gently upon the back of his, by way of expressing her interest in the conversation, and his excited "Why did you do that?" made the poor girl jump from him in terror.

Lydia, who was softly brushing the fireplace at that moment, saw it all, and saw, too, how quickly he recovered himself and spoke kindly to the child. But she muttered under her breath, as she went slowly down to the basement, —

"Poor Mr. G's gettin' worse of late, he is. I don't see as he ever will feel settled now. It's amazin' puzzlin', it is."

Yes, it was puzzling. And nobody better understood and pitied the kingly soul's perplexity than the good woman. Even Jack, the coachman, though he knew a good deal, had but a faint idea of what the poor gentleman suffered.

On the day when we saw Donald and Dorothy perched on the sofa, Mr. Reed had been remarkably changeful, and they had been puzzled and grieved by his manner toward Dorothy. He had been kind and irritable by turns, and finally, for some unaccountable reason, had sharply requested her to leave him, to "go away for mercy's sake," and then she had been recalled on some slight pretext, and treated with extra kindness, only to be wounded the next moment by a look from her uncle that, as she afterward declared, "made her feel as if she had struck him."

Donald, full of sympathy for Dorry, yet refusing to blame Uncle George without a fuller understanding of the matter, had followed his sister into the parlor, and there they had tried in vain to solve the mystery. For a mystery there evidently was. Dot was sure of it; and Donald, failing to banish this "foolish notion," as he called it, from Dot's mind, had ended by secretly sharing it, and reluctantly admitting to himself that Uncle George, kind, good Uncle George, really had not, of late, been very kind and good to Dorry.

"He hasn't been *ugly*," thought Donald to himself, while Dorothy sat there, eagerly watching her brother's countenance, — "Uncle couldn't be that. But he seems to love her one minute, and be half afraid of her the next — no, not exactly afraid of her, but afraid of his own thoughts. Something troubles him. I wonder what in the world it is! May be —"

"Well?" exclaimed Dorry, impatiently, at last.

"Well," repeated Don, in a different tone, "the fact is, it *is* trying for you, Dorry, and I can't make it out."

Meanwhile Lydia, down stairs, was working herself into what she called "a state" on this very matter. "It isn't Christian," she thought to herself, "though if ever a man was a true, good Christian, Mr. G. is; but he's amazin' odd. The fact is, he doesn't know his own mind in this business from one day to the next, and he thinks, Jack and I are stone blind — Mercy! If here don't come those precious children!"

Surely enough, the precious children were on their way down the kitchen stairs. They did not go into that cheerful, well-scrubbed apartment, however, but trudged directly into the adjoining room, in which Liddy, guarded by the faithful old dog, Nero, was now seated, peeling apples. It had been fitted up for Lydia years before when, from a simple housemaid, she was "promoted," as she said, "to have eyes to things and watch over the D's."

"You may think it strange," she had said, grandly, that very morning, to Jack, looking around at the well-polished, old-fashioned furniture, and the still bright three-ply carpet, "that I should have my sitting-room down here, and my sleeping apartment up stairs, but so it is. The servants need watching more than the children, as you know, Mr. Jack, and I've had to have eyes to things ever since the D's first came. Master Donald says I ought to call it 'having an eye,' but sakes! what would one eye be in a house like this? No, it's eyes I want, both eyes, and more too, with the precious D's wild as young hawks, and Mr. G. as he is of late, and the way things are."

Lydia looked up when Donald and Dorothy entered, with a "Sakes! You've not been fretting again, Miss Dorry?"

"No – not exactly fretting, Liddy; that is, not very much. We just came down to – to – Give me an apple?"

"Steady! St-e-a-dy!" cried Liddy, as after her hearty "help yourselves," the brother and sister made a simultaneous dash at the pan on her ample lap, playfully contesting for the largest. "One would think you were starving."

"So we are, Liddy," said Dorothy, biting her apple as she spoke; "we are starving for a story."

"Yes!" echoed Donald, "a story. We're bound to have it!"

"Hum!" muttered Liddy, much flattered. "Do you know your lessons?"

"Per-fectly!" answered the D's, in one breath. "We studied them right after Dr. Lane left."

"Well," began Liddy, casting a furtive look at the old mahogany clock on the mantel; "which story do you want? You've heard 'em all a score of times."

"Oh, not that kind," said Dorothy, playfully motioning to her brother, for you see by this time she was quite cheerful again. "We want a certain par-tic-ular story, don't we, Don?"

Instead of replying, Don took Dorry's outstretched hand with nonsensical grace, and so dancing to the fireplace together, in a sort of burlesque minuet, they brought back with them two little mahogany and hair-cloth foot-benches, placing them at Lydia's feet.

Ignoring the fact that these well-worn seats were absurdly low and small, the D's settled themselves upon them as comfortably as in the days gone by, when the benches had been of exactly the right size for them; and at the risk of upsetting the apples, pan and all, they leaned toward Liddy with an expressive "Now!"

All this had been accomplished so quickly, that Liddy would have been quite taken by surprise had she not been used to their ways.

"Bless your bright eyes!" she laughed, uneasily looking from one beaming face to the other; "you take one's breath away with your quick motions. And now what certain, special, wonderful kind of a story do you want?"

"Why, *you* know. Tell us all about it, Lydia," spoke Dorothy, sobered in an instant.

"Sakes! Not again? Well, where shall I begin?"

"Oh, at the very beginning," answered Donald; and Dorothy's eager, expressive nod said the same thing.

"Well," began Lydia, "about fourteen years ago – "

"No, no, not there, please, but 'way, away back as far as you can remember; farther back than you ever told us before."

"Well," and Lydia proceeded to select a fresh apple and peel it slowly and deliberately; "well, I was once a young chit of a girl, and I came to this house to live with your Aunt Kate. She wasn't any aunt then, not a bit of it, but a sweet, pretty, perky, lady-girl as ever was; and she had" (here Liddy looked sad, and uttered a low "Dear, dear! how strange it seems!") – "she had two splendid brothers, Mr. George Reed and Mr. Wolcott Reed (your papa, you know). Oh, she was the sweetest young lady you ever set eyes on! Well, they all lived here in this very house, – your grandpa and grandma had gone to the better world a few years before, – and Master G. was sort of head of the family, you see, as the oldest son ought to be."

Donald unconsciously sat more erect on his bench, and thrust his feet farther forward on the carpet.

"Yes, Master G. was the head," Liddy went on, "but you wouldn't have known it, they were all so united and loving-like. Miss Kate, though kind of quick, was just too sweet and good for anything, – 'the light of the house,' as the young master called her, and – "

"Oh, I do love so much to hear about Aunt Kate!" exclaimed Dorothy, her color brightening as she drew her bench up still closer to Liddy. Both of the apples were eaten by this time, and the D's had forgotten to ask for more. "Do we look like her?"

Here Donald and Dorothy turned and gazed full in Lydia's face, waiting for the answer.

"Well, yes – and no, too. You've her shining dark hair, Master Donald, and her way of steppin' firm, but there isn't a single feature like her. And it's so with you, Miss Dorry, not a feature just right for the likeness; still you've a something, somehow – somewhere – and yet I can't place it; it's what I call a vanishin' likeness."

At this the two D's lost their eager look, and burst into a hearty laugh.

"Hello, old Vanisher!" said Donald, making a sudden dive at Dorothy.

"Hello, old Stiff-legs!" retorted Dorothy, laughing and pushing him away.

Here old Nero roused himself, and growled a low, rumbling, distant growl, as if protesting against some unwelcome intruder.

"There, children, that's sufficient!" said Liddy, with dignity. "Don't get tussling. It isn't gentleman-and-lady-like. Now see how you've tumbled your sister's hair, Master Donald, and Mr. G.'s so particular. Hear Nero, too! Sakes! it seems sometimes like a voice from the dead to hear him go that way when we're talking of old times."

"Be still, old fellow!" cried Donald, playfully. "Don't you see Liddy's talking to us? Well, we look like our mamma, any way, – don't we, Liddy?"

"That picture of your mamma in your room, Master Donald," replied Lydia, "has certainly a good deal of your look, but I can't say from my own knowledge that it ever was a good likeness. It was sent over afterward, you know, and your mamma never was here except once, and then it so happened I was off to camp-meeting with Cousin Crump. Your papa used to go to see the young lady down at her home in New York, and after the wedding they went to Niagara Falls, and after that to Europe. Seems to me this going out of your own country's a bad business for young couples who ought to settle down and begin life." (Here Nero stood up, and his growl grew more decided.) "Well, as I was saying – Mercy on us! If there isn't that man again!"

The last part of Lydia's sentence, almost drowned by Nero's barking, was addressed to the empty window; at least it was empty when the D's turned toward it.

"Who? where?" shouted Dorothy. But Donald sprang up from the bench, and, followed by the noisy old Nero, ran out of the room, across the basement-hall, and through the back-door, before Lydia had time to reply.

"Who was it, Liddy?" asked Dorry, still looking toward the empty window, while Nero came sauntering back as though the matter that had lured him forth had not been worth the trouble of following up.

"Oh, no one, dearie," said Lydia, with assumed carelessness; "that is, no one in particular. It's just a man. Well, as I was saying, your Aunt Kate wasn't only the light of the house, she was the heart of the house, too, the very heart. It was dreary enough after she went off to England, poor darling."

"Yes, yes, go on," urged Dorry, earnestly, at the same time wondering at her brother's hasty departure. "Go on, Liddy, that's a dear. I can repeat it all to Donald, you know."

"There isn't any more, Miss Dorry. That's the end of the first part of the story. You know the second well enough, poor child, and sad enough it is."

"Yes," said Dorry, in a low tone, "but tell me the rest of the beginning."

"Why, what *do* you mean, Miss Dorry? There's nothing else to tell, – that is, nothing that I got ear of. I suppose there were letters and so on; in fact, I *know* there were, for many a time I brought Mr. George's mail in to him. *That* day, I took the letters and papers to Mr. G. in the library, – poor, lonely gentleman he looked! – and then I went down to my kitchen fire (I was in the housework then), and some minutes after, when I'd been putting on coal and poking it up bright, it kind o' struck me that the master's bell had been ringing. Up I hurried, but when I reached the library, he was gone

out, and no one was there but Nero (yes, *you*, old doggie!), lying before the fire, as if he owned the house. And that's the end of the first part, so far as I know."

"Yes," persisted Dorothy; "but I want to hear more about what happened before that. I know about our poor papa dying abroad, and about the wreck, and how our mamma and –"

She could not go on. Often she could speak of all this without crying; but the poor girl had been strained and excited all the afternoon, and now, added to the sorrow that surged through her heart at the sudden thought of the parents whom she could not even remember, came the certainty that again she was to be disappointed. It was evident, from Lydia's resolute though kindly face, that she did not mean to tell any more of the first half of the story.

The good woman smoothed Dorothy's soft hair gently, and spoke soothingly to her, begging her to be a good girl and not cry, and to remember what a bright, happy little miss she was, and what a beautiful home she had, and how young folk ought always to be laughing and skipping about, and —

"Liddy!" said Donald, suddenly appearing at the door. "Uncle wishes to see you."

Lydia, flushing, set down the pan, and, hurriedly smoothing her apron, walked out of the room.

"Uncle called me from the window – that's why I stayed," explained Donald, "and he told me to bid Jack hitch the horses to the big carriage. We're to get ready for a drive. And then he asked me where you were, and when I told him, he said: 'Send Lydia here, at once.'"

"Was Uncle very angry, Donald?" asked Dorry, wiping her eyes.

"Oh, no. At first he seemed sorry, and I think he got up the drive just to give you pleasure, Dorry. He wanted to see me about something, and then he asked more about our visit to Liddy's room, and I told him she was only telling us a true story about him and our father, and – and that's when he sent me for Liddy, before I could say another word. Don't cry any more, Dot, – please don't. Go put on your things, and we'll have a gay old drive with Uncle. I'll not take the pony this time."

"Oh, do!" coaxed Dorry, faintly, for in her heart she meant, "Oh, don't!" It was good in Donald, she knew, to be willing to give up his pony-ride, and take a seat in the stately carriage instead of cantering alongside, and she disliked to rob him of the pleasure. But to-day her heart was lonely; Uncle had been "queer," and life looked so dark to her in consequence, that to have Donald on the same seat with her would be a great comfort.

"No," said Don. "Some day, soon, you and I will take our ponies, and go off together for a good run; but to-day I'd rather go with you in the carriage, Dot," – and that settled it.

She ran to put on her hat and bright warm woollen wrap, for it was early November, and beginning to be chilly. The carriage rolled to the door; Uncle George, grave but kind, met her, handed her in as though she were a little duchess, and then said: —

"Now, Dorothy, who shall go with us, to-day? Cora Danby or Josie? You may call for any one you choose."

"Oh, may I, Uncle? Thank you! Then we'll invite Josie, please."

Her troubles were forgotten; Uncle smiling; Donald beside her, and Josephine Manning going with them; the afternoon bright and glowing. Things were not so bad, after all.

"Drive to Mr. Manning's, John," said Mr. Reed, as Jack, closing the carriage-door, climbed up to the box in a way that reminded one of a sailor's starting to mount a ship's rigging.

"Ay, ay, Capt'n," said Jack, and they were off.

CHAPTER IV. THE DRIVE

Josie Manning was not at home, when the carriage stopped at her door; and so the party decided to drive on without company.

It was a beautiful autumnal day, and the modest little lakeside village, which, in deference to its shy ways, we shall call Nestletown, did its best to show its appreciation of the weather. Its windows lighted up brilliantly in the slanting sunlight, and its two spires, Baptist and Methodist, reaching up through the yellow foliage, piously rivalled each other in raising their shining points to the sky. The roads were remarkably fine at that time; yet it seemed that almost the only persons who, on this special afternoon, cared to drive out and enjoy them were our friends in the open carriage.

The fine old equipage rolled along at first without a sound beyond the whirl of its wheels and the regular quadruple beat of the horses' hoofs; and everything appeared to be very placid and quiet. But how many interests were represented, and how different they were!

First, the horses: while vaguely wishing Jack would loosen his hold, and that the hard iron something in their mouths would snap in two and relieve them, they were enjoying their own speed, taking in great draughts of fine air, keeping their eyes open and their ears ready for any startling thing that might leap from the rustling bushes along the drive, or from the shadows of the road-side trees, and longing in an elegant, well-fed way for the plentiful supper that awaited them at home. Next was the group of little belated insects that, tempted by the glittering sunlight, happened to go along, alighting now on the carriage, now on Jack, and now on the horses. Not being horseflies, they were not even noticed by the span, – yet they had business of their own, whatever it could have been so late in the season, and were briskly attending to it. Next, there was Jack, – good sailor Jack, – sitting upright, soberly dressed in snug-fitting clothes, and a high black stove-pipe hat, when at heart he longed to wear his tarpaulin and move about on his sea-legs again. His only consolation was to feel the carriage roll and pitch over the few uneven places along the road, to pull at his "tiller-ropes," as he called the reins, and "guide the craft as trim" as he could. Honest Jack, though a coachman now (for reasons which you shall know before long), was a sailor at heart, and followed his old ways as far as his present situation would allow. At this very moment he was wondering at his own weakness "in turning himself into a miserable land-lubber, all for love of the capt'n and the two little middies." Meantime, Donald was divided between random boy-thoughts on one side, and a real manly interest in Dorothy, whose lot seemed to him decidedly less pleasant than his own. Dorry was quietly enjoying the change from keen grief to its absence, and a sense of security in being so near Uncle and Donald. And the uncle – what shall I say of him? Shall I describe only the stately form, the iron-gray hair, the kindly face brightened by the yellow afternoon light? – or shall I tell you of the lately happy, but now anxious, troubled man, who within a few days had been made to feel it possible that the dearest thing he had on earth might soon be his no longer.

"Oh, Uncle," said Dorry, suddenly, "I forgot to tell you something!"

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Mr. George, in playful astonishment, a quick smile rising to his lips, and his eyes full of pleasant inquiry. "What did my little maid forget to tell me?"

"Why, about the man on the croquet-ground. I was practising a roquet-shot, and before I knew it, he was close by me, a great, tall, lanky man, calling me 'Sis' and – "

"The rascal!" exclaimed Uncle George, growing red and angry in a moment. "And what business had you to – "

"I didn't, Uncle, I didn't. I'm too old to be called 'Sis,' and he acted just as if I ought to know him, and be real pleasant. I wouldn't have a word to say to him, but just turned around and ran to look for Donald. Didn't I, Don?"

"Yes," said Donald, but before he said it he had scowled, and nodded to his uncle, slyly as he thought, but his sister's eyes were keen.

"I declare, it's too bad!" broke forth Dorry, impetuously. "Everybody gets mad at me for nothing, and makes signs and everything!" and with this incoherent speech Dorry began to pout – yes, actually to pout, the brave, good Dorry, who usually was sunny and glad, "the light of the house," as her Aunt Kate had been before her! Donald stared at her in astonishment.

At this moment, one of the horses received a cut which he certainly did not deserve, but otherwise all was quiet on the coachman's box. No one looking up at that placid, well-dressed back would have dreamed of the South-Sea tempest raging under the well-padded and double-buttoned coat.

"Dorothy," said her uncle, with a strange trembling in his voice, "try to control yourself. I do not blame you, my child. John, you may drive toward home."

Poor Dorry stifled her rising sobs as well as she could, and, sitting upright, drew as far from her uncle as the width of the seat would allow. But after a while, sending a sidelong glance in his direction, she edged slowly back again, and timidly leaned her head upon his shoulder. In a moment his arm was about her, and she looked up saucily, with eyes sparkling through her tears.

"April weather to-day, isn't it, Don?" said Uncle. Don laughed. The uncle laughed, though not so cheerily as Don, and even Jack chuckled softly to himself to think that "all was well again abaft."

"Spoiled child!" said Uncle George, patting her gently. But his heart was full of a wild terror, and he reproached himself for many things, chief among which was that he had made it possible for the idolized little girl beside him to know a moment's sorrow.

"I must be more watchful after this," he said to himself, "and more even-tempered. I have acted like a brute to-day; what wonder the little maid is upset. But that rascal! I shall have to warn the children, though it's an ugly business. Donald," said he aloud, and with gentle dignity, "come into the library after supper, both you and Dorothy."

"Yes, sir," said Donald, respectfully.

And as the dear home-road came in sight, the horses quickened their already brisk pace, the party leaned back luxuriously and gave themselves up to enjoyment of the clear air, the changing roadside, and the glories of the western sky, now ablaze with the setting sun.

No one excepting Jack saw a tall, lank figure disappearing among the shrubbery as the carriage rumbled down the avenue that led to the house.

"Look to wind'ard, Capt'n!" whispered Jack, mysteriously, to Mr. George, while Donald was gallantly assisting Dorothy from the carriage; "there's mischief in the air."

"What now, John?" asked Mr. George, rather patronizingly.

"A queer craft's just hove to, sir, in the evergreen bushes as we came in," mumbled Jack, almost under his breath, while pretending to screw the handle of his whip.

Mr. George scowled. "Is he there now?"

"Can't say, sir."

"Very well; I will soon find out." And Mr. George, with a pleasant but decisive, "Run in, youngsters," as Liddy opened the wide hall-door, walked briskly down the carriage-drive.

When the door closed, he turned into the shrubbery.

CHAPTER V. SUPPER-TIME

"Oh, if gentlemen only knew the nature of muffins!"

Poor Liddy! Her trig black dress and jaunty muslin cap seemed to mock her perturbed feelings, as she hovered between the kitchen and the hall door. Donald and Dorothy, neatly brushed, – cool and pink of cheek, and very crisp in the matter of neck-ties, – stood at one window of the supper-room. The flaxen-haired waitress, in a bright blue calico gown and white apron, watched, tray in hand, at the other. A small wood-fire, just lighted, was waking into life on the hearth. Old Nero was dozing upon the rug, with one eye open. And all – to say nothing of the muffins – were waiting for Mr. George, whom the D's had not seen since their return from the drive, half an hour before.

When that gentleman came in he stepped briskly to his seat at the table, and, though he did not speak, his manner seemed to say: "Everything is all right. I merely came in a little late. Now for supper!" But Nero, rising slowly from the warm rug, slipped under the table, rubbed himself sympathetically against his master's legs, and finally settled down at his feet, quite contented to serve as a foot-stool for Donald and Dorothy, who soon were seated one on each side of the table, while Lydia, carefully settling her gown, took her place at the large tea-tray.

Mr. George, as the good housekeeper soon saw to her satisfaction, did appreciate the nature of muffins.

So did Donald and Dorothy.

CHAPTER VI.

A FAMILY CONFERENCE

After supper, Uncle George, Donald, and Dorothy went into the library, where they found the soft light of a shaded lamp and another cheerful fire, – so cheerful, that Mr. George let down the windows at the top, and the two D's were glad to go and sit on the sofa at the cooler end of the spacious room.

"Liddy is determined that we shall not freeze before the winter sets in," remarked Mr. George, hardly knowing how to begin the conversation. He was not the first good man who has found himself embarrassed in the presence of frank young listeners waiting to hear him speak and sure to weigh and remember everything he may say.

The children smiled solemnly.

Thus began an interview which, in some respects, changed the lives of Donald and Dorothy.

"Liddy is a good, faithful soul," said Uncle George. "She has been with us, you know, ever since you were babies."

"And before too," put in Dorry, knowingly.

"Yes, before too," assented Mr. George. "Some years before."

Nero, lazing by the fire, snapped at an imaginary fly, at which the D's, glad of a chance to relieve themselves, and feeling that the interview was one of grave importance, indulged in a smothered laugh.

"And Nero, poor faithful old dog, you knew us!" continued Mr. George, changing to a more cheerful tone, while Nero's tail contentedly beat time to the remark (for the good creature knew well enough that Mr. George was speaking of him); "he was hardly a year old then, the friskiest, handsomest fellow you ever saw, and brave as a lion."

"Did he know Aunt Kate?" asked the audacious Dorothy.

Donald looked frightened; Uncle George coughed; and just as Dorothy, wretchedly uncomfortable, made up her mind that it was too cruel for anything, never to be able to speak of your own aunty without raising a storm, Mr. George came out of the bright light and seated himself on the sofa between the D's with an arm around each. Dorry, puzzled but almost happy, drew as close as she could, but still sat upright; and Donald, manly boy that he was, felt a dignified satisfaction in his uncle's embrace, and met him with a frank, questioning look. It was the work of an instant. Dorry's startling inquiry still sounded on the firelit air.

"Donald," said Uncle, without replying to Dorry's question. "Let me see. You are now fourteen years old?"

"Fourteen and ten days, – nearly half a month over fourteen," said Dorothy, promptly. "Aren't we, Donald? I'm so glad!"

Donald nodded, and Uncle placidly asked why she was glad.

"Because twins can't boss – I mean domineer – each other. If Don was the least bit older than me – I – me, it wouldn't be half so nice as starting fair and square."

Here she gave a satisfied little cough, and to her great surprise felt her uncle's arm immediately withdrawn.

"Stop your nonsense, Dorothy," said he, almost sternly, "and don't interrupt."

"Now Uncle's afraid again," thought Donald, but he felt so sorry for his sister that he said, in a tone of dignified respect: "Dorry didn't mean to be rude, Uncle."

"No, no. Certainly not," said that very puzzling individual, suddenly resuming his former position, and drawing the little lady toward him. "Where were we? Oh, yes! Fourteen years and ten days, is it?"

"Yes, sir, right to a minute," replied Donald, laughing.

"Well, there is no hurry, I am glad to say. I have been thinking of late, Donald, that a little boarding-school experience is a good thing for a boy."

Dorothy started; but she had resolved rather sullenly that people would have to wait a long while before they should hear another word from her.

"Yes, sir," assented Donald, quickly. It would be glorious to go, he thought, and actually be a boarding-school boy, belonging to a crack base-ball club, a debating society, perhaps even a secret society; to get boxes of fruit and cake from home, and share them with his room-mates; maybe have a fight or two, for a fellow must hold his own, you know; – but then how strange it would be to live without Dorry! Oh, if she only were a boy!

"I'd come home on Thanksgiving and Christmas?" asked Don, following up a rather lonesome feeling.

"Oh, yes! but you're not off yet, my boy. The fact is, I did think seriously of sending you this autumn, and I even looked up a few good places, intending to make a selection. But there's no special hurry. This boarding-school business has its uncomfortable side. It breaks up a household, and makes little sisters lonesome. Doesn't it, Dorry?"

Dorry *couldn't* speak now, though she tried, and Mr. George considerably went on: "Besides, there's another, a very good reason, why we should wait awhile. You are needed here, Donald, just now."

"Needed here?" thought Dorry. "I should say so!" Uncle might as well remark that the sunshine, or the sky, or the air was needed here as to say that Don was needed. A big tear gathered under her lashes – "Besides, she was no more his little sister than he was her little brother. They were just even halves of each other – so now." And the tear went back.

Meantime, Uncle's remarks flowed slowly on, like a deep stream passing between two banks – one with its sunny leaves and blossoms all astir in the breeze, the other bending, casting its image in the stream, and so going on with it in a closer companionship.

"You are needed here, Donald; but, as I said before, there is plenty of time. And though I shall bear this boarding-school matter in mind, I cannot well spare you just now. I shall require, perhaps, some vigilance on your part, and coolheadedness, – not that anything very serious is likely to occur; in fact, there is no reason why it should – but a brother naturally guards his sister even when no danger threatens."

"Certainly," said Don.

"Humph!" thought Dorothy, "I don't want to be guarded, thank you." But, for all that, she felt proud that Uncle should speak of her in this way to Donald. Probably he was going to mention fire, and remind them of the invariable rule that they must not, on any account, carry matches into the barn, or light a bonfire anywhere without express permission. Meanwhile, Donald watched his uncle's face, following every word.

"There is really nothing to be apprehended," continued Uncle George, with some hesitation; "but it is important that you – that Dorothy – I should say – well, my children, perhaps you have observed – indeed, you spoke to-day, Dorothy, of having seen something of a person who has been about here several times of late."

"Oh, yes, Uncle," responded Dorry.

But Donald waited to hear more. He had talked previously with his uncle about this same person, whom he had seen more than once lounging about the grounds.

"Well," said Mr. George, slowly, "this man, 'long and lank,' as Dorry truly described him, is not a very dangerous man, – at least, we'll believe he is not, – but he is one whom I wish you both to avoid. His company will do you no good."

"Wouldn't it be better, Uncle," suggested Dorry, now eager to help matters, "for Jack to order him off the place whenever he comes on?"

"Well, no," said Uncle George. "After all, he may not come again. But if he should, I wish you to have as little to do with him as possible."

"We could set Nero on him. Nero can't bite, but he'd scare him pretty well," insisted Dorry, with animation. "The idea of his calling me 'Sis!' the great, horrid, long –"

"There, there; that will do," said Mr. George. "All you need do is to remember what I say. Do not fear this man. Above all, do not let him imagine that you fear him. But avoid him. Keep within the gates for the present."

"O-h, Uncle!" exclaimed Dorry, in consternation, while even Donald broke forth with a plaintive "*Both* of us, Uncle?"

"Yes, both of you, – for a few days at least, or until I direct to the contrary. And while out of doors, keep together."

"We'll do that anyway," replied Dorry, half saucily.

"The man," continued Mr. George, "probably will not trouble either of you. He is a ne'er-do-weel, whom I knew as a boy, but we lost sight of him long ago. I suspect he has been steadily going down for years."

"I can't see wh –," began the irrepressible Dorry; but she was met by a firm, "You need not see, nor try to see. Only remember what I have told you, and say nothing to any one about it. Now we may talk of other things. Oh, by the way, there was one pretty good reason for thinking of making a change in schooling. Dr. Lane is going to leave us."

"Dr. Lane going to leave!" echoed Donald, in regretful surprise.

"Good! No more old algebra!" exclaimed Dorry, at the same time clapping her hand to her mouth. Her vivid imagination had instantly pictured relief and a grand holiday. But second thoughts made her feel vexed with herself, especially when her uncle resumed:

"Yes, the good man told me yesterday that his cough grows steadily worse, and his physician has ordered him to go south for the winter. He says he must start as soon as I can find a tutor to take his place."

"Oh, don't let him wait a day, Uncle," exclaimed Dorry, earnestly, – "please don't, if going south will cure him. We've noticed his cough, haven't we, Don? We can study our lessons by ourselves, and say them to each other."

Some boys would have smiled knowingly at this somewhat suspicious outburst, but Donald knew Dorothy too well for that. She was thoroughly sincere and full of sympathy for the kind, painstaking man who, notwithstanding one or two peculiarities which she and her brother could not help observing, was really a good teacher. For more than a year, omitting only July and August, and Saturday holidays, he had been coming to Lakewood every week-day to instruct the two young Reeds in what he called the rudiments of learning. There were two visiting teachers besides Dr. Lane, – the music-master, Mr. Penton, and Mademoiselle Jouvin, the French teacher. These came only twice a week, and on different days, but Dr. Lane and they managed to keep the D's very busy. Mr. Reed had preferred that his nephew and niece should receive their early education at home; and so Donald and Dorothy thus far knew nothing of school life.

What could be the matter with Uncle George? Again Dorothy's look and tone – especially her sudden expression of kindness for her tutor – evidently had given her uncle pain. He looked down at her for an instant with a piteous and (as Donald again thought) an almost frightened expression; then quickly recovering himself, went on to tell Donald that Dorry was right. It would be best to release Dr. Lane at once, and take the chances of obtaining a new teacher. In fact, he would see the doctor the very next morning, if they would let him know when the lesson-hours were over.

"Uncle!"

"Well, sir, what is it?"

"Did you go to boarding-school, when you were a boy?"

"Oh, yes! but I was older than you are now."

"Did Aunt Kate?" asked Dorry.

"There, there; that will do," was the reply. Uncle George frequently had to say, "There, there; that will do," to Dorry.

"Well," she insisted timidly, and almost in a whisper, "I *have* to ask about her, because you wasn't a girl," – Donald, reaching behind Mr. George, tried to pull her sleeve to check the careless grammar, but her soul had risen above such things, – "you wasn't a girl, – and I don't expect to go to a boys' boarding-school. Oh, Uncle, I don't, I really don't mean to be naughty, but it's so hard, so awfully hard, to be a girl without any mother! And when I ask about her or Aunt Kate, you always – yes, Uncle, you really do! – you *always* get mad. Oh, no, I don't mean to say that; but it makes you feel so dreadfully sorry, that you don't know how it sounds to me! You actually don't, Uncle. If I only could remember Mamma! But, of course, I can't; and then that picture that came to us from England looks so – so very – "

"It's lovely!" exclaimed Donald, almost indignantly.

"Yes, it's handsome, but I know Mamma wouldn't look that way now. It's so pale and stiff. May be it's the big lace collar, – and even Liddy can't tell me whether it was a good likeness or not. But Aunt Kate's picture in the parlor is so different. I think it's because it was painted when she was a little girl. Oh, it's so sweet and natural, I want to climb up and kiss it! I really do, Uncle. That's why I want to talk about her, and why I love her so very much. You wouldn't speak cross to her, Uncle, if she came to life and tried to talk to you about *us*. No, I think you'd – Oh, Uncle, Uncle! What *is* the matter? What makes you look so at me!"

Before Dorry fairly knew what had happened, Donald was at his uncle's feet, looking up at him in great distress, and Uncle George was sobbing! Only for an instant. His face was hidden in his hands, and when he lifted it, he again had control of himself, and Dorry almost felt that she had been mistaken. She never had seen her uncle cry, or dreamed that he *could* cry; and now, as she stood with her arms clasped about his neck, crying because he had cried, she could only think, with an awed feeling, of his tenderness, his goodness, and inwardly blame herself for being "the hatefullest, foolishlest girl in all the world." Glancing at Donald, sure of his sympathy, she whispered, "I'm sorry, Uncle, if I did wrong. I'll try never, never to be so – so – " She was going to say "so wicked again," but the words would not come. She knew that she had not been wicked, and yet she could not at first hit upon the right term. Just as it flashed upon her to say "impetuous," and not to care a fig if Donald *did* secretly laugh at her using so grand an expression, Mr. George said, gently, but with much seriousness:

"You need not reproach yourself, my child. I can see very clearly just what you wish to say. Don and I can rough it together, but you, poor darling," stroking her hair softly, "need just what we cannot give you, – a woman's, a mother's tenderness."

"Oh, yes, you do! Yes, you do, Uncle!" cried Dorothy, in sudden generosity.

"And it is only natural, my little maid, that you should long – as Donald must, too – to hear more of the mother whom I scarcely knew, whom, in fact, I saw only a few times. Wolcott, I should say, your Papa, and she sailed for Europe soon after their marriage, and from that day we never – "

He checked himself, and Dorry took advantage of the pause to say, timidly:

"But it wasn't so with Aunt Kate. You knew *her*, Uncle, all her life. Wasn't she sweet, and lovely, and – "

"Yes, yes! Sweet, lovely, everything that was noble and good, dear. You cannot love her too well."

"And Papa," spoke up Donald, sturdily, "he was perfect. You've often told us so, – a true, upright, Christian gentleman." The boy knew this phrase by heart. He had so often heard his uncle use it, in speaking of the lost brother, that it seemed almost like a part of his father's name. "And Mamma we *know* was good, Dorry. Liddy says every one liked her ever so much. Uncle George says so too. Only, how can he talk to us about our mother if he hardly knew her? She didn't ever live in this house. She lived in New York; and that made a great difference – don't you see?"

"Yes," admitted Dorry, only half satisfied; "but you *would* have known her, Uncle George, – yes, known Mamma, and Aunt, and our Uncle Robertson [they had never learned to call that uncle by his first name] – we would have known them all – no, not all, not poor dear Papa, because he never lived to set sail from England, but all the rest, even our dear little cousin, Delia, – oh, wouldn't she be sweet, if we had her now to love and take care of! We should all have known each other ever so well – of course we should – if the ship had landed safe."

"Yes, my darlings, if the ship had not gone down, all would have been very, very different. There would have been a happy household indeed. We should have had more joy than I dare to think of."

"But we have each other now, Uncle," said Dorothy, soothingly and yet with spirit. "It can't be so very miserable and dreadful with you and Donald and me left!"

"Bless you, my little comforter! – No. God be praised, we still have a great deal to be thankful for."

"Yes, and there are Liddy and Jack, and dear old Nero," said Donald, partly because he wished to add his mite toward this more cheerful view of things, but mainly because he felt choked, and it would be as well to say something, if only to prove to himself that he was not giving way to unmanly emotion.

"Oh, yes – Jack!" added Dorry. "If it were not for Jack where should we twins be, I'd like to know!"

Said in an ordinary tone of voice, this would have sounded rather flippant, but Dorry uttered the words with true solemnity.

"I think of that often," said Donald, in the same spirit. "It seems so wonderful, too, that we didn't get drowned, or at least die of exposure, and –"

Dorothy interrupted him with an animated "Yes, indeed! Such little teeny bits of babies!"

"It does seem like a miracle," Uncle George said.

"But Jack," continued Donald, warmly, "was such a wonderful swimmer."

"Yes, and wonderful catcher!" said Dorothy. "Just think how he caught us – Ugh! It makes me shiver to think of being tossed in the air over those black, raging waves. We must have looked like little bundles flying from the ship. Wasn't Jack just *wonderful*, to hold on to us as he did, and work so hard looking for – for the others, too. Mercy! if we only get our feet wet now, Liddy seems to think it's all over with us, – and yet, look what we stood then! Little mites of babies, soaked to the skin, out in an open boat on the ocean all that terrible time."

"Much we cared for that," was Don's comment. "Probably we laughed, or played pat-a-cake, or –"

"Played pat-a-cake!" interrupted Dorry, with intense scorn of Donald's ignorance of baby ways – "babies only six weeks old playing pat-a-cake! I guess not. It's most likely we kicked and screamed like anything; isn't it, Uncle?"

Uncle nodded, with a strange mixture of gravity and amusement, and Donald added, earnestly:

"Whether we cried or not, Jack was a trump. A real hero, wasn't he, Uncle? I can see him now – catching us; then, when the other boat capsized, chucking us into the arms of some one in our boat, and plunging into the sea to save all he could, but able to get back alone, after all." (The children had talked about the shipwreck so often that they felt as if they remembered the awful scene.) "He was nearly dead by that time, you know."

"Yes, and nearly dead or not, if he hadn't come back," chirped Dorothy, who was growing tired of the tragic side of Donald's picture, – "if he hadn't come back to take charge of us, and take us on board the big ship –"

"The *Cumberland*," said Don.

"Yes, the *Cumberland*, or whatever she was called; if the *Cumberland* had not come along the next day, and Jack hadn't climbed on board with us, and wrapped us in blankets, and fed us and so on, it wouldn't have been quite so gay!"

Now, nothing could have been in worse taste than the conclusion of this speech, and Dorothy knew it; but she had spoken in pure defiance of solemnity. There had been quite enough of that for one evening.

Uncle George, dazed, troubled, and yet in some vague way inexpressibly comforted, was quietly looking first at one speaker, then at the other, when Liddy opened the door with a significant, "Mr. Reed, sir, did you ring?"

Oh, that artful Liddy! Uncle read "bed-time" in her countenance. It was his edict that half-past nine should be the hour; and the D's knew that their fate was sealed.

"Good-night, Uncle!" said Donald, kissing his uncle in good, hearty fashion.

"Good-night, Uncle!" said Dorothy, clinging to his neck just an instant longer than usual.

"Good-night, my blessings!" said Uncle George, reluctantly. And as he closed the library door behind them, Nero, shut up in Liddy's room, was barking furiously.

Two more orderly, well-behaved young persons never left an apartment. But I must tell the truth: when they were fairly in the hall, Donald started to go up stairs on the outside, holding on to the balusters, and Dorry ran to the front door, in spite of Liddy's remonstrances, with a frisky, "Oh, do let me have just one breath of fresh air!"

She came back instantly, rushed past Lydia, who was slowly puffing her way up the stairs, met Donald at the first landing (he had condescended by this time to leap over to the regulation side of the balusters), and whispered:

"Upon my sacred word, I saw him! He's out there standing at the front steps!"

"Uncle ought to know it!" exclaimed Donald, turning to run down again.

But he stopped on the next step, for Mr. George came out from the library, opened the front door, and disappeared.

The two D's stole from their rooms, after Liddy bade them good-night, and sat on the top stair, whispering.

"Why did you open your window just now, Donald?"

"Why, because I wanted to look out, of course."

"Now, Don, I know better. You coughed, just to let Uncle know that you were around, if there should be any trouble. You know you did."

"Well, what if I did?" admitted Donald, unwillingly. "Hark!" and he sprang up, ready for action. "No, he's back. It's Uncle. I say, Dorry, it will come hard on us to stay on this side of the hedge, like sheep. I wonder how long it will last."

"Goodness knows! But he didn't say we couldn't go to the Danbys'. I suppose that's because we can get there by going round the back way."

"I suppose so," assented Donald. "So long as we keep off the public road, it's all right."

"How queer!"

"Yes, it *is* queer," said Donald. "However, Uncle knows best."

"Dear me, how good we are, all of a sudden!" laughed Dorry; but she kissed Donald soberly for good-night, and after going to bed lay awake for at least fifteen minutes, – a great while for her, – thinking over the events of the day and evening.

CHAPTER VII. THE DANBYS

Who were the Danbys?

They were the Reeds' nearest neighbors, and no two households could be more different. In the first place, the Reeds were a small family of three, with four servants; the Danbys were a large family of twelve, with no servants. The Reeds had a spacious country mansion, rich old furniture, pretty row-boats, fine horses, carriages, and abundant wealth; the Danbys had a little house, poor old furniture, one cow, five pigs, one home-made scow, one wheelbarrow, and no money, excepting the very moderate income earned by the father of the family and his eldest boy. There the great contrast ended. The Danbys were thoroughly respectable, worthy and cleanly; the parents, kind and loving souls, could read and write, and the children were happy, obedient and respectful. To be sure, it would have been very hard for the best schoolmaster of the county to parse some of Mrs. Danby's fluent sentences, or to read at a glance Mr. Danby's remarkable penmanship. But that same learned instructor would have delighted in the cleverness of the sons and daughters, had he been so fortunate as to direct their studies. True, the poor little Danbys had enjoyed but a scant and broken schooling; but they were sharp little things, and native wit served them whenever reading, writing, and arithmetic failed. Indeed, the very fact of their intercourse with Donald and Dorothy had done much for their language and deportment. Yet each individual, from the big brother Ben down to the latest baby, had his or her own peculiar character and style, which not twenty Dons and Dorothys could alter.

It was not very difficult, after all, to remember the names of the young Danbys; for Mr. Danby, being a methodical man, had insisted on their being named in alphabetical order and that they each should have two names, so as to give them their choice in after life. Therefore, the first was Amanda Arabella, – at the present stage of our story, a girl of seventeen, with poetical gifts of her own; the second was Benjamin Buster, aged fifteen; the third, Charity Cora, dark-eyed, thoughtful, nearly thirteen, and, the neighbors declared, never seen without a baby in her arms; the fourth, Daniel David, a robust young person of eleven; the fifth, Ella Elizabeth, red-haired, and just half-past nine, as she said; next came Francis Ferdinand, or "Fandy," as he was called for short, who, though only eight, was a very important member of the family; next, Gregory George, who was six. And here the stock of double names seems to have given out; for after Master Gregory came plain little Helen, aged four; Isabella, a wee toddler "going on three;" and last of all, little Jamie, "the sweetest, cunningest little baby that ever lived." So now you have them all: Amanda Arabella, Benjamin Buster, Charity Cora, Daniel David, Ella Elizabeth, Francis Ferdinand, Gregory George, Helen, Isabella, and roly-poly Jamie. If you cannot quite remember all the children, who can blame you? Even Mrs. Danby herself, with the alphabet to help her, always had to name them upon her fingers, allowing a child to a finger, and giving Elizabeth and Fandy the thumbs.

The stars of the family, in Donald's and Dorothy's estimation, were Benjamin Buster, who had seen the world already, had enjoyed adventures and hair-breadth escapes, and was now at home for the first time in four years; Charity Cora, whose eager, dark eyes told their own story of patient aspiration; and little Fandy. Mr. Danby was proud of all his children, though perhaps proudest of Baby Jamie because there was no knowing what the child might come to; but Mrs. Danby looked with absolute reverence upon her eldest – Amanda Arabella. "Such a mind as that girl has, Mr. Danby," she would say to her husband, "it isn't for us to comprehend. She might have come just so out of a book, Amanda might." And Mr. Danby would nod a pleased and puzzled assent, vaguely wondering how long he could manage to hold his high parental state over so gifted a creature.

Amanda Arabella's strong points were poetry and sentiment. To be sure, she scrubbed the floor and washed the dishes, but she did these menial duties "with her head in the clouds," as she herself

had confessed to her mother. Her soul was above it, and as soon as she could, she intended to "go somewhere and perfect herself." This idea of going somewhere to perfect herself was one which she had entertained in secret for some time, though she had not the slightest idea of where she could go, and in just what way she was to be perfected. She only knew that, at present, housework and the nine brothers and sisters were quite as much as she could attend to, excepting at odd moments when "the poetry fit was on her," as her mother expressed it – "and then wild horses couldn't stop her!"

"I can't deny, Mr. Reed," said that proud mother to her kind neighbor, – who, on the morning after the interview with Donald and Dorothy in his study, had halted at Mrs. Danby's whitewashed gate, to wish her a stately "Good-morning, madam!" and to ask after her family, – "I can't deny, and be honest, that I'm uncommon blest in my children, though the Lord has seen fit to give us more than a extra lot of 'em. They're peart and sound as heart could wish, and so knowin'! Why," she continued, lowering her voice and drawing closer to the gate, "there's my Fandy now, only eight years old, can preach 'most like a parson! It'd rise your hair with surprise to hear him. An' Ben, my oldest boy, has had such adventures, an' haps an' mishaps, as ought to be writ out in a biogrophy. An' there's Amanda Arabella, my daughter – well, if I only could set down the workin's o' my brain as that girl can, I'd do! She has got a most uncommon lively brain. Why, the other day – but all this time you're standin', Mr. Reed. Won't you walk in, sir? Well, certainly, sir, it ain't to be 'xpected you *could* take time goin' by so, as you are – Well, my 'Mandy, sir, only the other day was a-comin' out into the shed with a pan o' dish-water, and she sees a rainbow. 'Ma!' says she, a-callin' me, 'take this 'ere dish-water!' and before I knowed it, she was a writin' down with her lead-pencil the beautifullest ideas that ever was, – all about that rainbow. In the evening, when her Pa come, I just up and showed it to him, an' he says, says he, 'Them's the grandest thoughts I ever see put to paper!'"

"Ah!" said Mr. Reed, with an expression of hearty interest and amusement on his honest face, yet evidently ready to take advantage of the first opportunity to go on his way.

"Yes, indeed," promptly assented Mrs. Danby, "and she ain't all. Our children, if I *do* say it, seem to have more brains than they've a fair right to – bein' poor folks' children, as you may say. It don't tire 'em one bit to learn: their Pa says every study they tackle gets the worst of it, – they use it up, so to speak. I dreamed th' other night I see the four English branches, 'rithmetic, writin', readin', and hist'ry, standin' exhausted, waiting for them children to get through with them. But I see you're shifting yourself, sir, for going, and I ought to be ashamed to detain you this way clacking about my own flesh and blood. I've been poorly lately, I didn't tell you, Mr. Reed" (looking at him plaintively).

"No; indeed, I'm very sorry to hear it," said Mr. Reed, sympathetically. "Nothing serious, I hope?"

"Oh, no. One o' my billerous attacks; the spine o' my back seemed to give out somehow, and I was dreadful bad for a couple o' days. But my Thomas an' the children – bless their hearts! – got me up again. *You're* looking well, Mr. Reed. Good-morning, sir – good-morning! – (Sakes! he went off so sudden I forgot)."

And thus exclaiming to herself, the dear old talker went back into the house.

"Forgot what, Ma?" asked Amanda, who stood in the doorway trying to think of a rhyme for olives.

"Why, to tell Mr. Reed about that queer kind of a man, who's just engaged to lodge with us. I don't feel like trustin' him somehow, and yet it isn't for plain folks to be refusing a real boarder who wants a plain family-table, and don't put on any airs. I told him," she continued, going farther into the house, and raising her voice as she increased the distance between herself and Amanda, "that if ours wasn't a family table (with ten children setting 'round it, includin' the baby, and Mr. Danby at the head), I didn't know what was. But he's to come back in an hour or two. Where in the world to tuck him is the question. Anyhow, you'd better go up, dear, and ready brother's room for him. Ben's got two rabbit-skins tacked outside the window which'll have to come down. Ben'll have to go

in with Dan and Fandy to sleep. – Mercy! Here come the twins, 'cross-lots! – an' Fandy a preachin' there in the pump-shed!"

True enough, the twins were coming around by the back way. They approached softly, and made a motion of warning to Mrs. Danby, as they drew nearer, for they could hear Fandy Danby's voice, and wished to enjoy the fun. Mrs. Danby, smiling and nodding, pointed to a place where they could stand unobserved and hear the sermon.

It was the hour for the afternoon "cleaning-up." Eight of the little Danbys, including Charity with Baby Jamie in her arms, had assembled to wash their hands and faces at the battered green pump under the shed, where, on a long, low bench, were two yellow earthenware basins, and a saucer containing a few fragments of brown soap, while on the wall hung a roller-towel that already was on very familiar terms with Danby faces and hands. The general toilet had been rather a noisy one, owing partly to the baby objecting to having soap in its eyes, and partly to the fact that too many required the services of the Danby roller at the same instant, to say nothing of Miss Helen insisting upon slapping the water in a most unladylike way, and so splashing Master Gregory.

This combination having brought matters to a crisis, Fandy had been inspired to mount a small step-ladder, and, with many original gestures, address the crowd in the following fashion: —

"Chil'ren! I'm ashamed of you! I don't know when I've been so – so umpressed with the badness of this family. How often, my hearers, do you 'spect me to stop my dressing to extort you! I didn't mean to preach no more sermons this week, but you do behave so awful bad, I must.

"Now, first, don't you know speakin' saucy is a sin? *Don't* you know it? It makes us hateful, an' it makes us cross, an' it makes people tell Ma. It ain't right for Chrisshen chil'ren to do such things. It don't never say in our Bible-lesson that folks can call peoples 'mean uglies' just for wantin' the roller. An' it don't say that a good Chrisshen child can say 'Pshaw for you!' for havin' not to make quite so much noise, which you, my beloved 'Gory, said just now to Charity.

"Now, we must be good an' perlite, if we want to do right and have things Chrissmas, an' if we want to be loved on earth and in heaven. (No, sir, that ain't talkin' big, and I *do* know what I mean, too.) I say, we must be perlite. We mussent get mad unless we can't help it. It's natural for big folks to rub our noses the wrong way when they wash our faces, an' to comb hair hard – they're born so. An' all we can do is to be patient, an' wait till we get big an' have chil'ren of our own.

"But what I say – what I mean, what I – what I – (Now you, Gregory, give Helen back her dolly right away, or I'll come down to you!) – what I mean is, that we all ought to be good and perlite. It's wicked to be saucy. We ought to be able to stand one another. An' nudgin' is wicked, an' shovin' is wicked, an' makin' faces ain't the way to do. No more ain't bullyin', nor mockin', nor any of those things. I go in for bein' pleasant and kind, an' havin' fun fair; only, my beloved hearers, I can't do it all alone. If we'd all be good Chrisshen chil'ren, things would go better, an' there wouldn't be such a racket.

"Can't you cleanse your sinful hearts, my hearers? – cleanse 'em, anyhow, enough to behave? Can't you? (Stop your answerin', David; it puts me out, and, besides, you oughtn't to say that. You ought to say 'I'll try.') I notice you ain't none of you real quiet and peaceful, unless I'm preachin', or you're eatin' something good. I also can see two people lookin' through the crack, which I think they'd better come in, as I wouldn't mind it. Now I can't extort you no more this time."

To Fandy's great disgust, the audience applauded the conclusion of his sermon, and were about to become more uproarious than ever, when the sudden appearance of Donald and Dorothy put them upon their good behavior.

"Is Ben here?" asked Donald, after the usual "How-d'ye-do's" were over, and as Fandy was taking a hasty turn at the roller-towel.

"Don't know," said Fandy; "he was mendin' a trap, over there," – pointing to an enclosed corner close by the house, that had been roughly boarded over and fitted up with bench and table by Master Ben, so as to make a sort of workshop.

They all went over, accompanied by Charity Cora, and were received in Ben's usual style, which consisted in simply ceasing to whistle aloud, though he still held his lips in whistling position while he proceeded with his work.

They watched him in silence for a moment (the young Danbys, at least, knowing that they would be firmly, but not unkindly, ordered off, if they interfered with the business in hand), and then, to their relief, Ben drove in the last nail and laid down the hammer.

"What's that for? – to catch yab-bits?" asked Gregory George, nicknamed 'Gory by his brothers, for the fun of the thing, he was so fair-haired and gentle.

"No; it's to catch little boys," answered Ben, whereat 'Gory grinned, and looked at Don and Dorry to see if they were foolish enough to believe it.

"Well, why don't you act perlite to your comp'ny?" asked Fandy, much shocked at Ben's unconscious want of ceremony.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Ben. "Hallo, Donald!"

Dorry was softly talking to Cora, and at the same time coaxing the baby from its sister's arms.

"Hallo yourself!" was Donald's quick response to Ben. "Did you have any luck last night?"

"Yes, two! Got the skins out drying. Beauties! I say, Donald, can you spare me your gun again, if you're not going to use it Thanksgiving Day?"

"Certainly," answered Don; "you can have it, and welcome. Tyler and I are going to fire at a mark in the afternoon, with Uncle and the girls. But we'll use the rifle for that."

"What girls?" asked Charity Cora, eagerly, hoping, from Donald's plural way of putting it, that she and Ella Elizabeth possibly were to have a share in the sport; whereat Daniel David, guessing her thoughts, answered for Donald, with a cutting, "Why, Queen Victoria and the royal princess, to be sure. Who else could it be?"

Cora made no reply, but, feeling rather ashamed, rubbed her arms (a habit of hers whenever the baby for the moment happened to be out of them), and looked at Donald.

"Josie Manning and Ed Tyler are coming over after dinner," said Donald.

"I should think they'd rather come to dinner," spoke up Ella Elizabeth, with hungry eyes. "Turkeys and things – Oh, my! Punkin pie!"

This called forth two exclamations in a breath:

Dan. David: "Punkin pie! Oh, my! We're getting poetical. Call 'Mandy, quick. Punkin pie – sky high."

Fandy: "Don't be so unproper. It's pumpkun pie. Dorothy said so. And, besides, we ought to let the comp'ny do the talking."

"Humph! By this time, we've made them forget what they were talkin' about."

"Not I, Charity," laughed Donald, turning to the latest speaker. "In the first place, Josie and Ed didn't feel like leaving home on Thanksgiving Day till after dinner, and we two fellows are going to teach Josie and Dorry to shoot straight. And" (now addressing Ben, who by this time was wedging the handle of a hammer) "as for the gun, Ben, you're always welcome to it, so long as you return it in as good order as you did last time. You cleaned it better than I do."

"I found the rags," said Helen, slyly, – "ever so many. Didn't I, Ben?"

Ben nodded at her, and Helen, made happy for the whole day, ran off hugging a broken dolly in exact imitation of Charity and Baby Jamie; meanwhile her big brother, pleased at Don's compliments, remarked, "It's a prime gun, and never fails."

"Never fails *you*, Ben, you may as well say. It often fails me, never mind how carefully I aim."

"That's just it, Donald," said Ben. "There's no good in aiming so particular."

"Well, what's a fellow to do?" replied Donald. "You must take aim, and by the time you get a bird well sighted, he's gone."

"Sight? I never sight," said Ben. "I just fire ahead."

"You don't mean to say you shoot a bird without aiming at him?"

"Oh, well, I aim, of course; but I don't look through the sight, or any such nonsense."

"I don't understand," said Donald, doubtfully.

"Don't you? Why, it's just this: if the bird's flying he'll go ahead, won't he? Well, you fire ahead and meet him, – that's the whole of it. You know how an Indian shoots an arrow. He doesn't look along the line of the arrow for ten minutes, like a city archer; he decides, in a flash, what he's going to do, and lets fly. Practice is the thing. Now, when you're after a wild duck, you can aim exactly at him and he's safe as a turnip; but see a strip of water ahead betwixt the muzzle of your gun and him, and he's a gone bird, if you fire straight. You have to allow for diving – but practice is the thing. Learn by missing."

"Oh, that's good!" shouted Daniel David; "'learn by missing.' I'm going to try that plan in school after this. Don't you say so, Fandy?"

"No, I don't," said the inflexible Fandy, while he gazed in great admiration at the two big boys.

At this point, the mother appeared at the door with an empty pail in each hand, and before she had time to call, David and Fandy rushed toward her, seized the pails, and would have been off together for the well, if Mrs. Danby had not said, "Let David get the water, Fandy, and you bring me some light wood for boiling the kettle."

"You can't boil the kettle, Ma," called out one of the children. "You boil the water."

"No more you can't," assented Mrs. Danby, with an admiring laugh.

All this time, Dorry had been tossing the struggling baby, and finally winning it to smiles, though every fibre in its plump little body was squirming in the direction of Charity Cora. Meanwhile, that much-enduring sister had made several pungent remarks, in a low tone, to her visitor, concerning babies in general and Jamie in particular.

"Now you see how nice it is! He keeps up that wriggling all day. Now it's to come to me; but when I have him, it's wriggling for the chickens, and for Mother, and for everything. And if you set him down out-of-doors he sneezes; and if you set him down in the house he screams; and Ma calls out to know 'if I can't amuse that baby!' I tote him round from morning to night – so I do!"

Here the baby's struggles became so violent and noisy that Charity Cora savagely took him from Dorry; whereat he threw his plump little arms about his sister's neck with such a satisfied baby-sigh that she kissed him over and over, and looked in placid triumph at Dorothy, apparently forgetting that she ever had made the slightest complaint against him.

"Have you begun with your new teacher yet?" she asked, hugging Jamie, and looking radiantly at Dorothy.

"Oh, no!" answered Dorry. "How did you know Dr. Lane was going?"

"Ma heard it somewhere! My, don't I wish I had a teacher to come every day and put me through! I'm just dying to learn things. But something always interferes with my getting to school. There's so much to do in the house; and now that we're to have a boarder there'll be more to do than ever. It's nice to be useful, I s'pose, but I'm really as ignorant, Dorothy Reed, as a – as a baby" (this simile was suggested by little Jamie's busy efforts to pull off her linen collar); "why, do you know, I can't even –"

And here the girls sauntered off together to sit down on a tree-stump, and have a good long talk, if the baby would allow it.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

Just as Donald and Dorothy were about to end the outdoor visit to the Danbys described in our last chapter, Coachman Jack was seen in a neighboring field, trying to catch Mr. Reed's spirited mare, "Lady," that had been let out to have a run. He already had approached her without difficulty and slipped a bridle over her head, but she had started away from him, and he, feeling that she had been allowed playtime enough, was now bent on recapturing her.

Instantly a dozen Danby eyes were watching them with intense interest. Then Donald and Ben, not being able to resist the impulse, scampered over to join in the race, closely followed by Dan and Tandy. Gregory, too, would have gone, but Charity called him back.

It was a superb sight to see the spirited animal, one moment standing motionless at a safe distance from Jack, and the next, leaping about the field, mane and tail flying, and every action telling of a defiant enjoyment of freedom. Soon, two grazing horses in the same field caught her spirit; even Don's pony, at first looking soberly over a hedge in the adjoining lot, began frisking and capering about on his own account, dashing past an opening in the hedge as though it were as solid a barrier as the rest. Nor were Jack and the boys less frisky. Coaxing and shouting had failed, and now it was an open chase, in which, for a time, the mare certainly had the advantage. But what animal is proof against its appetite? Clever little Fandy had rushed to Mr. Reed's barn, and brought back in his hat a light lunch of oats for the mare, which he at once bore into her presence, shaking it temptingly, at the same time slowly backing away from her. The little midget and his hatful succeeded, where big man and boys had failed. The mare came cautiously up and was about to put her nose into the cap, when Jack's stealthy and sudden effort to seize the bridle made her start sidewise away from him. But here Donald leaped forward at the other side, and caught her before she had time to escape again.

Jack was too proud of Don's quickness to appear surprised; so, disregarding the hilarious shout of the Danby boys, he took the bridle from the young master with an off-hand air, and led the now gentle animal quietly towards the stable.

But Dorothy was there before him. Out of breath after her brisk run, she was panting and tugging at a dusty side-saddle hanging in the harness-room, when Jack and the mare drew near.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried, "help me to get this down! I mean to have some fun. I'm going to ride that mare back to the field!"

"Not you, Miss Dorry!" exclaimed Jack. "Take your own pony, an' your own saddle, an' it's a go; but this 'ere mare'd be on her beam ends with you in no time."

"Oh, no, she wouldn't, Jack! She knows me perfectly. Don't you, Lady? Oh, do, Jack! That's a good Jack. *Please* let me! Don's there, you know."

Dorry said this as if Don were a regiment. By this time, the side-saddle, yielding to her vigorous efforts, had clattered down from its peg, with a peculiar buckle-and-leathery noise of its own.

"Won't you, Jack? Ah, *won't* you?"

"No, miss, I won't!" said Jack, resolutely.

"Why, Jack, I've been on her before. Don't you know? There isn't a horse on the place that could throw me. Uncle said so. Don't you remember?"

"So he did!" said Jack, his eyes sparkling proudly. "The Capt'n said them very words. An'," glancing weakly at the mare, "she's standin' now like a skiff in a calm. Not a breath in her sails – "

"Oh, do —*do*, Jack!" coaxed Dorry, seizing her advantage, "quick! They're all in the lot yet. Here, put it on her!"

"I'm an old fool," muttered Jack to himself, as, hindered by Dorry's busy touches, he proceeded to saddle the subdued animal; "but I can't never refuse her nothin' – that's where it is. Easy now,

miss!" as Dorry, climbing up on the feed-box in laughing excitement, begged him to hurry and let her mount. "Easy now. There! You're on, high and dry. Here" (tugging at the girth), "let me tauten up a bit! Steady now! Don't try no capers with her, Miss Dorry, and come back in a minute. Get up, Lady! – get up!"

The mare left the stable so slowly and unwillingly, that Jack slapped her flank gently as she moved off.

Jog, jog went Lady out through the wide stable doorway, across the yard into the open field. Dorry, hastily arranging her skirts and settling herself comfortably upon the grand but dingy saddle (it had been Aunt Kate's in the days gone by), laughed to herself, thinking how astonished they all must be to see her riding Lady back to them. For a moment she playfully pretended to be unconscious of their gaze. Then she looked up.

Poor Dorry! Not a boy, not even Donald, had remained in the field! He and the little Danbys were listening to one of Ben's stories of adventure. Even the two horses and Don's pony were quietly nosing the dry grass in search of green tufts.

"I don't care," she murmured gayly, overcoming her disappointment. "I mean to have a ride, any way. Get up, Lady!"

Lady *did* get up. She shook her head, pricked up her ears, and started off at a beautiful canter across the fields.

"How lovely!" thought Dorry, especially pleased at that moment to see several figures coming toward her from the Danby yard; "it's just like flying!"

Whether Lady missed her master's firm grip upon the rein, or whether she guessed her rider's thought, and was inspired by the sudden shouts and hurrahs of the approaching boys, can never be known. Certain it is that by the next moment Dorry, on Lady's back, was flying in earnest, – flying at great speed round and round the field, but with never an idea of falling off. Her first feeling was that her uncle and Jack wouldn't be pleased if they knew the exact character of the ride. Next came a sense of triumph, because she felt that Don and the rest were seeing it all, and then a wild consciousness that her hat was off, her hair streaming to the wind, and that she was keeping her seat for dear life.

Lady's canter had become a run, and the run soon grew into a series of leaps. Still Dorry kept her seat. Young as she was, she was a fearless rider, and at first, as we have seen, rather enjoyed the prospect of a tussle with Lady. But as the speed increased, Dorry found herself growing deaf, dumb and blind in the breathless race. Still, if she could only hold on, all would be well; she certainly could not consent to be conquered before "those boys."

Lady seemed to go twenty feet in the air at every leap. There was no merry shouting now. The little boys stood pale and breathless. Ben, trying to hold Don back, was wondering what was to be done, and Charity was wringing her hands.

"Oh, oh! She'll be thrown!" cried the girls.

"Not a bit of it!" insisted Donald. "I've seen Dot on a horse before." But his looks betrayed his anxiety. "See! the mare's trying to throw her now! But she can't do it – she can't do it! Dot understands herself, I tell you, – Whoa-o! – Let me go!" and, breaking from Ben, he tore across the field, through the opening in the hedge, and was on his pony's back in a twinkling. How he did it, he never knew. He had heard Dorry scream, and somehow that scream made him and his pony one. Together, they flew over the field; with a steady, calm purpose, they cut across Lady's course, and soon were at her side. Donald's "Hold on, Dot!" was followed by his quick plunge toward the mare. It seemed that she certainly would ride over him, but he never faltered. Grasping his pony's mane with one hand, he clutched Lady's bridle with the other. The mare plunged, but the boy's grip was as firm as iron. Though almost dragged from his seat, he held on, and the more she struggled, the harder he tugged, – the pony bearing itself nobly, and quivering in eager sympathy with Donald's every movement. Jack and Ben were now tearing across the field, bent on rescue; but they were not needed. Don was master

of the situation. The mare, her frolic over, had yielded with superb grace, almost as if with a bow, and the pony was rubbing its nose against her steaming side.

"Good for you, Dot!" was Donald's first word. "You held on magnificently."

Dorothy stroked Lady's hot neck, and for a moment could not trust herself to look up. But when Jack half-pulled, half-lifted her from the saddle, and she felt the firm earth beneath her, she tottered and would have fallen, had not Donald, frightened at her white face, sprung to the ground just in time to support her.

"Shiver my timbers!" growled Jack, "if ever I let youngsters have their way again!" But his eyes shone with a strange mixture of self-reproach and satisfaction as he looked at Dorry.

"Oh, is she hurt?" cried Charity, who, having stumbled with the baby in her rush across the field, was gathering up the screaming little fellow, catching her balance, and scrambling onward at the same time – "Is she hurt?"

"Is she hurt?" echoed the others, pressing forward in breathless excitement.

"Not hurt at all," spoke up Donald, stoutly, as, still supporting his sister, he saw the color coming back to her cheek, – "not hurt one bit! It's only been a splendid ride for her, and a jolly scare for us; but it is high time we were in the house. All's right, Jack. Good-by, everybody! We'll skip along home, now."

CHAPTER IX. IN WHICH SOME WELL- MEANING GROWN FOLK APPEAR

McSwiver – better known as "Michael" by the Manning family, or, more descriptively, as "Mr. Manning's Mike," at the village store, but always as "old Mr. McSwiver," by our Liddy – was about to enjoy an evening out. This was a rare occurrence; for Mr. McSwiver, though he had advertised himself as having "no incumbrance," was by no means an ease-taking man. He united in his august person the duties of coachman, butler, waiter, useful man, and body-servant to Mr. Manning. Seeing him at early dawn, blacking his employer's boots, or, later, attending to the lighter duties of the coachhouse (he had a stable-boy to help him), one could never imagine the grandeur of that same useful individual when dressed in his best.

"A hall-door-and-waitin' suit brings out a man's fine points if he has any, so it does; and it's nowise surprisin' that parties callin' after nightfall should be secretly mistakin' me for the boss himself," thought Mr. McSwiver, critically regarding his well-scrubbed countenance in the hall mirror, before starting to make a formal call on his much-admired friend, Liddy.

Half an hour afterward he was stalking from Mr. Reed's garden-gate toward the village store, talking to himself, as usual, for lack of better company:

"Humph! Queen Victorior herself couldn't be more high and mighty! and all because her young lady's gone an' had a runaway on horseback! 'Is she kilt?' says I. 'Mercy, no,' says she; 'but I shall be special engaged all the ev'nin', Mr. McSwiver,' says she; and with that she fastens her eyes on me (mighty pooty ones they are, too!) a-noddin' good-by, till I was forced, like, to take meself off. Miss Josephine herself couldn't 'a' been grander to one of them young city swells at the 'cademy! Och, but it beat all!"

Meantime, Liddy had quite forgotten his sudden nipped-in-the-bud visit. Old Mr. McSwiver was well enough in his own way, and at a fitting time, for he knew her cousins the Crumps; but she could not think of society matters so soon after her darling Miss Dorry had been in danger.

"Did you ever know it turn out any other way?" said she confidentially to Donald, on that same evening, – after Dorothy, somewhat subdued by dreadful remarks on the subject of nervous shocks and internal injuries, had retired earlier than usual, – "now, did you, Master Donald? There Mr. G. had been taking extra precautions to keep her safe, and, under a merciful Providence, it was only by the skin of that dear child's teeth that she wasn't sent to a better world! And, do you know, Master Donald, there's been serious goings on here too?"

"Goings on? What *do* you mean, Liddy?"

"Why, that horrid man came – the very same that looked in at my sitting-room window – and Mr. George opened the door his own self, and spoke very severe to him, and 'I cannot see you to-night,' says he. 'Come on next Monday evening, at half-past nine, and not before.' I heard him say those very words."

Donald looked at her anxiously, but made no reply.

"There's no harm in my telling you," continued Liddy, softly, "because you and Mr. G. and me know about him."

"No, I don't, Liddy. I haven't heard half, and you know it!" was Donald's puzzled and indignant rejoinder. "This being let half-way into a secret doesn't suit me. If Uncle were not busy this evening, I'd go in and speak to him about that fellow at once."

"Oh, hush! please do," whispered Liddy, hurriedly. "Miss Dorry'll hear you. I only meant that you and I both know that he's been hanging about these parts for a week or more, and that his presence doesn't bode any good. Why, you noticed it before anybody else. Besides, I want her to sleep. The

darling child! She's feeling worse than she lets on, I'm afraid, though I rubbed her back with liniment to make sure. Please don't talk any more about things now. To-morrow I'll ask your uncle if – "

"No, you needn't, thank you, Liddy," interrupted Don, "I'll speak to him myself."

"Oh my! When?"

"I don't know. When I get ready," he replied, laughing in spite of himself at Lydia's hopeless way of putting the question. "It is sure to come soon. I've had pulls at this tangle from time to time without getting a fair hold of it. But I intend to straighten it out before long, or know the reason why."

"Sakes! What an air he has, to be sure!" thought Liddy, as Donald moved away. "The fact is, that boy's getting big. We older folks'll think of them as children to the end of our days; but it's true as sky and water. And it's even more so with Miss Dorry. Those twins are getting older, as sure as I live!"

Monday evening came, and with it the "long, lank man." He did not come before half-past nine; and then, to Lydia's great disappointment (for she had rather enjoyed the luxury of dreading this mysterious visit), he rang the door-bell like any other visitor, and asked, familiarly, for Mr. Reed.

"Mr. Reed is at home, sir," responded Liddy, in a tone of cold disapprobation.

"All right. You're the housekeeper, I s'pose?"

Trembling within, but outwardly calm, silent, and majestic, Liddy threw open the study-door, and saw Mr. Reed rise to receive his guest.

The good woman's sitting-room was directly under the study. Consequently, the continuous sound of voices overhead soon became somewhat exasperating. But she calmed herself with the thought that Mr. George knew his own business. It was evident that he had something very important to talk over with "that person;" and if, in her desire to know more, a wild thought of carrying in glasses and a pitcher of water *did* enter her head, it met with such a chilling reception from Liddy's better self that it was glad to creep away again.

This, then, was why Lydia, busily engaged at her little sewing-table, was right glad, late as it was, to see Mr. Jack's shining face and newly-combed locks appear at the sitting-room door.

"Hullo, messmate! My service to you," was that worthy's salutation.

"Good evening, sir," said Lydia, severely. "My name is Blum – Miss Lydia Blum, though you've known it these twelve years, and been told of it twenty times as often."

"Miss Blum, then, at your service," growled Jack, bowing very low, and still remaining near the door. "It struck me, Mistress Blum, that a chap from the fo'castle might drop into your pretty cabin for a friendly chat this fine evening."

"Yes, indeed, and welcome," responded the pacified Miss Blum. "Take a seat, Mr. Jack."

He always was "Mr. Jack," evenings, and she, "Miss Blum," each enjoying the other's society all the more because of the mutual conviction that he was no ordinary coachman, and she was far from being an every-day servant. Kassy, the red-cheeked housemaid, and Norah, the cook, felt this; and though treated kindly by both dignitaries, they accepted their position, knowing well that they were not important members of the family, as Jack and Lydia Blum felt themselves to be.

"Mr. Jack," spoke Lydia, suddenly, "do you know who is up stairs?"

"Ay, ay, ma'am."

"Did you come on that account?"

Here Jack looked knowing, and said she must not question the man on the look-out.

"Not that I've had even a hint of such a thing from the Capt'n;" added Jack, as his companion nodded approvingly; "but your good sailor looks to the scupper before the ship fills – which doesn't apply in partic'lar, but it has its meaning, nevertheless. Young parties turned in, yet?"

"Master Donald and Miss Dorothy have retired, Mr. Jack," corrected Miss Blum, loftily. "That is, I presume so. At any rate, they are in their rooms, bless them!"

"Bless 'em again!" echoed Mr. Jack, heartily, ignoring the reproof. "A smarter, smiler pair of beauties never came in my range on sea or land. There's Master Donald, now, with the spirit of a man-o'-war in his boy's hull. My, but he's a fine one! And yet so civil and biddable! Always full set

when there's fun in the air. Can't tell you, Mistress Blum, how I dote on that 'ere boy. Then there's Miss Dorothy, – the trimmest, neatest little craft I ever see. It seemed, t'other day, that the deck was slippin' from under me, when I see that child scudding 'round the lot on Lady's back. You couldn't 'a' told, at first, whether she was a-runnin' away with Lady, or Lady a-runnin' away with her. But didn't the skeer follow mighty quick! I tell you the wind blew four quarters to once fur a spell, but afore I could get there Master Donald had her. Whew! It was mirac'l'us! Never see such a boy – no, nor girl neither – as them two twins!"

"Nor I," said Liddy, fervently.

"And what babbies they were!" proceeded Jack. "I can see 'em now, as I first saw 'em after the wreck, – poor, thin, pinched mites, 'most sneezin' their little heads off. And then, when you took hold on 'em, Mistress Blum, with your tender care, night an' day, day an' night, always studyin' their babby natures so partic'lar and insistin' upon their havin' their grog from one tap – "

"Mr. Jack, I'm ashamed of you! How often I've requested you not to put it that way! Milk from one cow is a common-sense rule. Every one knows that babies brought up by hand must be treated just so particular. Well, they throve on it, didn't they?" – her eyes kindling.

"Throve, my hearty? – ahem; beg parding! Throve! Why, they just bounded! I never see anything like it! The brightest, liveliest little pair o' sea-gulls I ever set eyes on; an' grow? *Grow*, Miss Blum? Well, throw me to the sharks if ever I see anything grow like them babbies!"

"Didn't they!" exclaimed Miss Blum, so happy in recalling her success with the "dear, darling little D's" that she quite forgot to check Mr. Jack's inelegance "Ah, many a time I used to stand and wonder at them when I should have been workin'! It seemed to me as if they improved hourly. Why, do you know, Mr. Jack – "

A bell rang violently, as if some one were in trouble.

"It's the master!" cried Liddy, and as she sprang up the stairs, Jack followed her rapidly and lightly on tiptoe.

But it was not Mr. George at all. When Liddy hastily opened the library door, with a "Did you ring, sir?" and Mr. Reed responded with a surprised "No, thank you!" while the visitor coolly stared at her, the good woman ran up to the second story to inquire further, and Jack went down again, whistling softly to himself.

Lydia found Donald in tribulation. He had remained up to write a letter to a friend at boarding-school, and somehow had managed to upset his inkstand. His attempts to prevent serious damage had only increased the mischief. A pale but very large ink-stain stared up at him from the wet carpet.

"De-struction!" exclaimed Lydia, as, standing at the open door, she took in the situation at a glance. "If you'd only rubbed it with blotting-paper the instant it happened," she continued, kneeling upon the floor, and rubbing vigorously with a piece that she had snatched from the table, "there wouldn't have been a trace of it by this time. Sakes!" glancing at the fine towel which Donald had recklessly used, "if you haven't ruined *that* too! Well," she sighed, slowly rising with a hopeless air, "nothing but sour milk can help the carpet now, and I haven't a drop in the house!"

"Never mind," said Donald; "what's a little ink-stain? You can't expect a bachelor's apartment to look like a parlor. I'll fling the rug over the place – so!"

"Not now, Master Donald. Do wait till it dries!" cried Lydia, checking him in the act, and laughing at his bewildered look. She ran down stairs with a half-reproachful "My, what a boy!" – while Donald, carefully putting a little water into the inkstand, to make up for recent waste, went on with his letter, which, it happened, was all about affairs not immediately connected with this story.

CHAPTER X.

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"Hope the young folks are at home," remarked the "long, lank man," with an off-hand air of familiarity, comfortably settling himself in an arm-chair before the smouldering fire, and thrusting out his ungainly feet as far as possible. "Would be glad to make their acquaintance."

"My nephew and niece will not be down again this evening, sir," was the stiff reply.

"Ah? Hardly past nine, too. You hold to old-fashioned customs here, I perceive. 'Early to bed,' etcetera, etcetera. And yet they're no chickens. Let me see; I'm thirty-nine. According to my reckoning, they must carry about fourteen years apiece by this time. Dorothy looks it; but the boy seems younger, in spite of his big ways. Why not sit down, George?"

"Dorothy! – George!" echoed Mr. Reed's thought, indignantly. But with a stern resolve to be patient, he seated himself.

"Look here, George, as this is likely to be a long session, let's have a little more of a blaze here. I got chilled through, waiting for that door to open. Ah, that's something like!"

Meanwhile this cordial person, carefully selecting suitable pieces from the wood-basket on the hearth, and rearranging the fire, had seized the bellows and begun to blow vigorously, nearly shutting up his long figure, like a big clasp-knife, in the act.

"Excuse my making myself at home," he continued, jauntily poking a small log into place with the bellows, and then brushing his seedy trousers with his hand; "it was always my style. Most men that's been knocked about all their lives get shy and wary. But that's not Eben Slade. Well, when are you going to begin?"

"I am ready now, Mr. Slade."

"Pshaw! Don't Mr. Slade me. Call me Eben, plain Eben. Just as Kate did."

Mr. Reed's face flushed painfully.

"See here, George," the visitor went on, suddenly changing his sportive style to a manner that was designed to appear quite confidential and friendly, – "see here, I don't want to quarrel with you nor any other man. This here is just a chat between two almost relatives – sort of left-handed brothers, you know, and for my –"

"Slade!" exclaimed Mr. Reed, savagely, rising from his chair, but at once seating himself again, and speaking with forced calmness: "While I have allowed you this interview, I must request you to understand, now and for all time, as you have understood very plainly heretofore, that there can be no connection or implied relationship between us. For years we have been as strangers, and from this night must remain so!"

"Ex – actly!" assented Slade, cheerily – "the kind of strangers two chaps naturally would be, having the same sister – my sister by blood, yours by adoption."

Certainly this was a strong point with Mr. Slade, for he leaned forward and looked boldly into the other's face, as he finished the sentence.

"Yes," said Mr. Reed, with a solemn dignity, "precisely such strangers as the scape-grace brother of a noble girl must be to those who rescued this girl in her earliest childhood, sheltered her, taught her, honored and loved her as true brothers should, and to whom she clung with all a sister's fondness and loyalty."

"Pre – cisely!" observed Mr. Slade, with a mocking air of being deeply impressed. "Go on."

"You know the conditions under which you were adopted by Squire Hinsley, and Kate was adopted by my father, when you were left orphans, homeless, destitute –"

"Thank you. You are right. Quite destitute; I may say desperately destitute; though as I was six years of age at the time, and Kate but two, I have forgotten the painful particulars. Proceed."

"You know well," continued Mr. Reed, with quiet precision, "the agreement signed, sealed, and delivered, in the presence of witnesses, between my parents and John Hinsley on the one side, and your uncle and lawful guardian, Samuel Slade, on the other. The adoption was absolute. Kate was to have no legal claim on John Hinsley or his family; and you were to have none upon my father and his family. She was to be to my father, in all respects but birth, his own child, – his, Henry Reed's, to support and educate, sharing the fortune of his own children during his life, and receiving an equal share of his estate at his death; all of which was literally and faithfully fulfilled. And you were adopted by John Hinsley under similar conditions, excepting that they were, in fact, more favorable. He and his wife were childless, and rich in worldly goods; and they agreed to shelter and educate you – in fact, so long as you continued to obey and honor them, to treat you in all respects as their son and heir. You know the sequel. You had a pleasant home, tender care, and conscientious training; but, in spite of all, you were lazy, worthless, treacherous, – a source of constant grief and anxiety to the good pair who had hoped to find in you a son to comfort their old age – "

"Thank you, again!" exclaimed Eben Slade; "I always liked frankness."

"In time, and with good cause, they discarded you," continued Mr. Reed, without noticing the interruption, "and my father, for Kate's sake, did all in his power to win you to a decent life, but in vain. Later, in dire want and trouble, when even your worthless companions threw you off, you appealed to me, and I induced Mr. and Mrs. Hinsley to give you one more trial. But you fell into bad company again and ran away, deserting your adopted parents just when they were beginning to trust you. Your subsequent course I do not know, nor where you have been from that day to this. I only know that, although during your boyhood you were free to visit your sister, you never showed the slightest interest in her, nor seemed to care whether she were living or dead. Even when we brought you together, you were cold and selfish in your treatment of her, moved by a jealous bitterness which even her trustful love for you could not dispel. These are disagreeable truths, but I intend that we shall understand each other."

"So I see," muttered Eben.

"Meantime," continued Mr. Reed, in a different tone, and almost as if he were talking to himself and had forgotten the presence of his visitor, "Kate grew in sweetness, in truth and nobility of nature; grew into a strong, beautiful girlhood, honored by all, and idolized by her new parents and by her two brothers Wolcott and myself. Bearing our name from her infancy, and coming with us, soon after, into this new neighborhood as our only sister, her relationship never was questioned – "

Eben Slade had been listening in sullen patience, but now he asked, quickly:

"Do they, do the youngsters – "

"My brother's children?" asked Mr. Reed.

"Well, your brother's children, we'll say; do *they* know that she was adopted by their grandparents, that she was not their own flesh-and-blood aunt?"

"They think of her always as the beloved sister of their father and myself, as she virtually was," replied Mr. Reed. "From the first, the custom of our household was to consider her purely as one of the family; Kate herself would have resented any other view of the case. Therefore – "

"Therefore the children have been kept in the dark about it," exclaimed Eben Slade, exultingly, as though it were his turn now to utter plain truths.

"The question has never been raised by them. They were hardly more than six weeks old when they were brought to this house; and as they grew older, they learned to know of her and love her as their Aunt Kate. If ever they ask me the question direct, I shall answer it. Till then I shall consider Kate Reed – I should say Mrs. Kate Robertson – as my sister and their aunt."

"And I likewise shall continue to consider her as *my* sister, with your permission," remarked Eben, with a disagreeable laugh.

"Yes, and a true sister she would have been. The letters which she wrote you during your boyhood, and which you never answered, showed her interest in your welfare."

"If she had known enough to put money in them, now," sneered Eben Slade. "I was kept down in the closest way, and a little offering of that kind might – But that's neither here nor there, and I don't see the drift of all this talk. What *I* want to know – what in fact I came for, and what I intend to keep coming for, is to see her will."

"Her will?" asked Mr. Reed with surprise, and in an unconscious tone of relief, for he had feared a much more serious demand.

"Yes, now you've hit it! Her adopted parents were dead. She had inherited one-third of their estate. With such a fortune as that, she must have left a will. Where is it? I want to know what became of that money, and why you withheld –"

"Silence!" commanded Mr. Reed, sorely tempted to lay hands on the fellow, and thrust him from the house. "No insolence, sir!"

Just then Lydia opened the door, and as we already know, vanished as soon as she learned her presence had not been called for.

"What I want to know" – began Eben again, in a high key.

"Not so loud," said Mr. Reed, quietly.

His visitor's voice dropped, as, thrusting out his elbows and resting a hand on each arm of his chair, he started afresh:

"So Miss Kate Reed, as she called herself, and as you called her, never wrote me again after the old people died, eh?"

"Never" was uttered so significantly that his listener responded with a quick, "Well! what do you mean?"

"What do *you* mean?" echoed Slade with a darkening face. "Why didn't she ever write to me afterward?"

This was a bit of acting designed to mislead; for Kate *had* written again, and at that moment a yellow, worn letter, fourteen years old, was tucked snugly away in the visitor's pocket. And it was on the strength of this same letter that he hoped yet to obtain heavy favors from George Reed. Eben knew well enough what had become of the money, but, for some cunning reason of his own, chose for the present to plead ignorance.

"I will ask you a question in return," said Mr. Reed. "Why, if you took so keen an interest in your sister's fortune, did you not apply to me long ago for information?"

"Because," replied Eben Slade, boldly, "I had my reasons. I knew the money was safe; and I could bide my time."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Reed, "do you pretend to be ignorant of the fact that, two years after my sister Kate's marriage, she started with her husband and baby to return to America, absolutely penniless?"

"Then, how could they pay for their passage?" asked Eben; – but meeting Mr. Reed's eyes, he went on in an injured tone, "I know nothing but what you choose to tell me. True, you forgot to advertise for me to put in an appearance and hear of something to my advantage, but I supposed, very naturally, that coming here I should learn that Kate had left me a share of her fortune as a matter of course, and then I'd be able to go back and settle myself respectably in the far West. I may as well tell you I have a wife somewhere out there, and if I had means to buy up a splendid mining property which can be had now for a mere song, I'd just buy it clean and settle down to a steady life."

During this speech, Eben Slade's expression of face had become so very frank and innocent that Mr. Reed's conviction began to waver. He had felt sure that Slade remembered well enough having long ago written him two letters – one asking for information concerning Kate's property, the other bemoaning the fact that it was all lost, and appealing to him for money. But now it seemed evident that these documents, still in Mr. Reed's good keeping, had quite escaped his visitor's memory.

"I don't want to go to law about this thing," continued Slade, slowly, as if to demand closer attention, "especially as it would stir up your home affairs for the public benefit; and so, as I say, I

hope to settle things quietly. If I only had what ought to be coming to me, I wouldn't be here at all. It would be lonesome for my many friends in this favored spot, but I should be far away, making a man of myself, as they say in the books."

"What is all this to me?" said Mr. Reed, coldly. "You have had your answer concerning Mrs. Robertson's property. Have you any more questions to ask? It is getting late."

"Well, yes, a few. What about the wreck? No, let's hear from the date of the marriage." And Mr. Slade, inwardly surprised at Mr. Reed's patience, yet unable to forego the luxury of being as familiar and pert as possible, settled himself to listen to the story which Mr. Reed had permitted him to come and hear.

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