

FINLEY MARTHA

MILDRED KEITH

Martha Finley
Mildred Keith

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Martha Finley Mildred Keith

ELSIE DINSMORE.

"She is pretty to walk with,
And witty to talk with,
And pleasant, too, to think on."

— *Brennoralt*

PREFACE

The Keith family were relatives of Horace Dinsmore, and as my readers will observe, the date of this story is some seven years earlier than that of the first Elsie book.

The journey, and that most *sickly* season, which I have attempted to describe, were events in my own early childhood. The latter still dwells in my memory as a dreadful dream.

Our family – a large one – were all down with the fever except my aged grandmother and a little sister of six or seven, and "help could not be had for love or money."

My father, who was a physician, kept up and made his rounds among his town and country patients for days after the fever had attacked him, but was at length compelled to take his bed, and I well remember lying there beside him while the neighbors flocked into the room to consult him about their sick ones at home.

That region of country is now, I believe, as healthy as almost any other part of our favored land. Such a season, it was said, had never been known before, and there has been none like it since.

M. F.

Chapter First

"Weep not that the world changes – did it keep
A stable, changeless course, 'twere cause to weep."

– *Bryant.*

A spring morning in 183-; winter's icy breath exchanged for gentle breezes; a faint tinge of yellow green on the woods but now so brown and bare; violets and anemones showing their pretty modest faces by the roadside; hill and valley clothed with verdure, rivulets dancing and singing, the river rolling onward in majestic gladness; apple, peach and cherry trees in bloom; birds building their nests; men and women busied here and there in field or garden, and over all

"The uncertain glory of an April day."

The sun now shining out warm and bright from a cloudless sky, now veiling his face while a sudden shower of rain sends the busy workers hurrying to the nearest shelter.

The air is full of pleasant rural sounds – the chirp of insects, the twittering of birds, the crowing of cocks – now near at hand, now far away, mellowed by the distance; and in the streets of the pretty village of Lansdale, down yonder in the valley, there is the cheerful hum of busy life; of buying and selling, of tearing down and building up; neighbors chatting on doorsteps or over the garden fence, boys whistling and hallooing to their mates, children conning their tasks, and mothers crooning to their babes.

Out of the side door of a substantial brick house standing far back from the street, in the midst of a garden where the grass is of a velvety green spangled with violets, and snowballs and lilacs are bursting into bloom, steps a slight girlish figure.

The face half hidden under a broad brimmed garden hat, is not regularly beautiful, but there is a great deal of character in it; the mouth is both firm and sweet, the lips are full and red, the eyes are large, dark and lustrous, and the complexion rich with the hues of health.

She sends a quick glance from side to side, clasps her hands together with a gesture as of sudden pain, paces rapidly to and fro for a moment, seemingly striving after self-control, then turning into a path that leads across the garden to the hedge that separates it from another, hastens down it, opens the gate and passing through looks about as if in search of some one.

But there is no one there, and the girl trips gracefully onward to the house, a pretty cottage with vine-covered porches.

The parlor windows were open and within a little lady of middle age, quaintly attired in a chintz gown very short and scant, and made after a pattern peculiarly her own, was busied with brush and duster.

Catching sight of the young girl as she stepped upon the porch, she called to her in a remarkably sweet-toned voice,

"In here, dearie! Just step through the window. I'm glad to see you." The windows opening to the floor, it was an easy matter to obey, and the girl did so; then stood silent, her lips quivering, her eyes full.

"My child, what is it?" cried the older lady, dropping her duster to take the girl's hand and draw her to a seat upon the sofa, "is – is any one ill?"

"No, no; not that, Aunt Wealthy!" and the girl swallowed down her tears and spoke with a determined effort to be calm. "But something has happened and mother delegated me to bring you the news.

"You know father has been talking for some time of leaving Lansdale, and this morning, at breakfast, he told us – us children, I mean – he and mother had talked it over last night, and I don't believe she slept much for thinking of it – that he had fully made up his mind to move out to Indiana. And we're to go just as soon as we can get ready.

"There, now you know it all!" finishing with a burst of tears in spite of herself.

For a moment her listener was dumb with surprise; but it was not in Wealthy Stanhope's nature to witness distress without an effort to comfort and relieve.

To lose the society of this family who were her nearest and dearest relatives, would be a great grief to her. The mother, Marcia Keith, the orphan child of a sister, committed to her care in early infancy and trained up by her to a lovely and useful womanhood, was as a daughter to her – her boys and girls as grandchildren to be loved and petted and rejoiced over after the custom of fond grandparents. What a lonely old age for her without them!

That was her first thought, the next how to assuage the sorrow of the weeping girl at her side.

"There, there, Mildred, dear," she said, softly stroking and patting the hand she held, "perhaps you will find it not so bad after all, there must be a bright side to the picture that we shall discover if we look for it determinately. There will be new scenes, perhaps some adventures on the journey."

"Yes, auntie, very likely; and I've often wished I could have some adventures!" Mildred answered, dashing away her tears with a rather hysterical little laugh.

"You're not going to school to-day?"

"No, auntie, no more school for me: that's the hard part of it, for I do so want a good education."

"Well, dear, you shall have books, and your father and mother – both educated people – will help you; and who knows but you may in the end distance your mates here? The knowledge we gain by our own efforts, out of school, is often the most serviceable."

The girl's face brightened.

"If I don't turn out something worth while it shall not be for want of trying," she said, her cheek flushing, her eyes sparkling.

Then starting up. "I must hurry home; for mother and I are going to work with might and main at the spring sewing; and then at the tearing up and packing. Aunt Wealthy, I'm glad I'm old enough to be a help; there are so many younger ones, you know."

"Yes, Milly, and you are a great help and comfort to your mother."

"If – if I could only learn her patience; but the children are dreadfully trying – with their untidy ways, their mischief and noise. They nearly distract me at times and before I know it I've given somebody a shake or a slap, or if not that, a very uncomplimentary piece of my mind," she added half laughing, half sighing.

Then with a hasty good-bye she tripped away, her aunt calling after her, "Tell your mother I'll be in after a while."

Miss Stanhope sat where the girl had left her, the usually busy hands folded in her lap her gaze fixed meditatively on the carpet. Presently she lifted her head with a deep drawn sigh, her eye passed slowly about the room resting lovingly now upon this familiar object, now upon that.

"I don't think they would sell for much," she said, musingly: "the carpet has been in wear for thirty odd years and the colors have faded a good deal: the chairs and tables are older still and so are the pictures on the walls, that sampler my grandmother worked when she was a young girl – which was many years ago; and these chair-cushions too" – rising and going from one to another, giving to each in turn a little loving shake and pat – "she embroidered and filled with her own feathers; and so I value them more than their weight in gold. Marcia, I think, values them also, but – to a stranger,

I suppose they would all seem old, dingy and worthless, though to me they are real treasures. I've a sincere affection for them.

"But what is that to my love for Marcia and her children! what indeed!"

She hastily picked up duster and brush, gave a finishing touch here and there, drew down the blinds and left the room.

A few moments later she might have been seen in bonnet and shawl and armed with a large cotton umbrella, issuing from her front gate and walking briskly toward the business part of the town.

It was nearly two hours before she returned, with a step a trifle less brisk, and arms filled with brown paper parcels.

She passed her own gate and stopped at Mr. Keith's.

Mildred ran to open it.

"Why, auntie, how you are loaded! Give me your bundles."

"Yes, child, carry them in to your mother. I've been to every store in town; such beautiful remnants! couldn't help buying! make up pretty for the children; afraid there's none big enough for you, dear. Am all out of breath with walking."

"Yes; it's too bad; don't say anything more till you've rested," said the girl, leading the way into the pleasant family room, hastily laying the packages on the table, and drawing forward a large cushioned rocking chair.

"There, sit down, auntie, and let me take your things."

"Aunt Wealthy! come at last! we've been wondering what kept you," said a handsome, matronly, but still youthful looking lady, with a babe in her arms, coming in at that moment. "And you've been out shopping? I hope you were not caught in any of the showers?"

"No; I managed to dodge them; sandwiching my walks in between. So you're going to leave Lansdale, Marcia?"

"Yes, auntie; and you; that's the worst of it."

The cheery voice faltered over the last words, and the bright eyes grew dim.

"Not so fast, Marcia; who says that I'm to be left behind?"

"Aunt Wealthy! do you mean it? is it possible you could think of such a sacrifice?" cried Mrs. Keith, starting up and nearly dropping her babe in her intense, joyful surprise.

"As what?" queried the aunt between a smile and a tear. "Marcia, I can't give up my home, as you very well know; but I have found a tenant for it (the minister and his wife who are perfectly delighted to get it; for it's their only chance for going to housekeeping; and they'll be sure to take good care of my furniture and other belongings), and rented it just as it stands, for a year; and I'm going with you to Hoosier land.

"It'll be quite an importation of Buckeyes, won't it? All coming in one lot."

And the good affectionate old soul finished with a laugh, jumped up from her chair and stretching out her arms to three little ones who had come running in while she was speaking, caught them to her bosom, kissed and cried over them, asking, "Are you glad, Cyril? are you glad, Don? and Fan, too? are you glad that auntie is going with you?"

There was a chorus of shouts of delight; there were huggings and kissings, asking and answering of questions; and then things quieted down a little and the children went back to their play, Cyril remarking, as he shut the door,

"Now I shan't cry when we go; 'cause all my friends and colations is goin' along."

"Now to business," said Aunt Wealthy attacking the parcels. "I'm going to help you, Marcia, in getting your tribe ready for their exodus out of this land of plenty into that western wilderness. Here are two or three dress patterns apiece for the little girls. These stuff ones are for them to travel in, and I think they had better be made long necked and high sleeved. Don't you?"

Mrs. Keith looked up with a slightly puzzled expression; then a light breaking over her face, for she was used to her aunt's transpositions – "I don't know," she answered dubiously, "wouldn't it make

them look a little old-womanish? Low necks and short sleeves are prettier for children, I think; and they're used to it. Summer's coming on, too, and we must expect warm weather."

"What route shall you take?"

"Up the Ohio and Erie Canal and round Michigan by the lakes."

"It will be cool on the water."

"Yes, that's true; and I'll take your advice."

"That's right; they'll be less likely to catch cold from any little exposure, and their necks and arms will be protected from the sun. Now, if you'll tear off a skirt, I'll get to work. I brought thimble and scissors along."

Those were not the days of sewing machines, and though garments were made in much simpler style then than now, the sewing for such a family as the Keiths was no small task.

It would take some weeks of very diligent work by three or four pairs of hands to accomplish what the mother deemed necessary in the way of preparing their wardrobe for the contemplated journey.

Under the instruction of her mother and aunt, Mildred had already become as accomplished a needlewoman as either of them. A seamstress had been engaged to assist but could not be had for a few days; so plans and prospects could be talked over freely as the three sat and worked together, Baby Annis asleep in her cradle or playing contentedly on the carpet at her mother's feet.

Chapter Second

"The mother, in her office, holds the key
Of the soul; and she it is who stamps the coin
Of character, and makes the being who would be a savage,
But for her gentle cares, a Christian man."

– *Old Play.*

The striking of the town clock, the ringing of bells, the blowing of whistles and "the schoolboy's glad shout" announced the noontide hour.

A sound of coming footsteps, of gay, young voices, an opening of doors, letting in fresh breezes from without, and with them two bright, blooming, merry little girls and a lad between them and Mildred in age, in whose great black eyes lurked a world of fun and mischief.

"Softly, softly, children!" the mother said looking up with a smile as they came dancing and prancing in. "Rupert, are you not old enough to begin to act in a rather more gentlemanly way?"

"Yes, mother, I beg your pardon. Yours too, Aunt Wealthy, I didn't know till this moment that you were here."

"Mother, he's always teasing," complained the younger of the girls, "he says we'll have to live in wigwams like the Indians and perhaps grow to be as black and ugly as they are."

"But they're not black, Ada," exclaimed the other, "my g'ography calls 'em red men."

"Well, that's 'most worse, I'd as lief be black as red."

"If you're careful to wear your sunbonnets when you go out, you won't grow to be either," remarked Mildred, while Mrs. Keith said with a look of mild reproof,

"Rupert, my son, was it quite truthful to tell your sisters such things?"

"I was only making fun," he answered, trying to turn it off with a laugh, but blushing as he spoke.

"Innocent fun I never object to, but sport is too dearly bought at the sacrifice of truth.

"My boy," she added with energy, "one should go to the stake rather than tell a falsehood; though it were no more than to say that two and two do not make four."

"Mother, I believe you would!" he said, gazing with loving admiration into her earnest face. "I've never known you to swerve a hair's breadth from the truth in any way," and coming close to her side and speaking almost in a whisper, "I mean to try to be worthy of you in the future."

She looked at him with glistening eyes, and dropping her work took his hands in hers for a moment.

The others were not listening; Zillah and Ada had caught sight of the new dresses, were admiring them and asking eager questions of their aunt and sister.

"My boy," Mrs. Keith said in moved tones, "I would rather be the mother of a poor hard working man of whom it could be said that he had always been perfectly honest and true, than of one who had amassed his millions and attained to the highest worldly honors by fraud or questionable deeds or words. Remember that all your life."

"Mother, I will; I have my father's example to help me as well as yours," the lad replied with a proud glance at the noble, kindly, intellectual face of a gentleman who came in at that instant with Fan in his arms and the two little boys gamboling about him.

"Ah, Aunt Wealthy, good morning!" he said in a cheery tone, sitting down beside her, putting Fan on one knee, and lifting the babe, who was laughing and crowing with delight at sight of him, to the other. "I suppose you have heard the news?"

"That you are going to Indiana, Stuart! Yes. You are not contented to let well enough alone?"

"Can't consider it well enough to be barely making the two ends meet while a growing family must be constantly increasing my expenses."

"How is this removal to help you? It will cost a good deal."

"Nothing venture, nothing have.' I'm going to a new country where land is cheap. I shall invest something in that and hope to see it increase largely in value as the town grows."

"Then lawyers are not so plenty there but that some more will be needed as people move in, and I hope by being on the spot in good season, to secure extensive practice."

"It will cost the sundering of some very tender ties," he continued, his face growing grave almost to sadness, "but we are willing to bear that for our children's sake. Is it not so; wife?" and he turned to her with a smile that spoke volumes of love and confidence.

"Yes indeed, Stuart," she answered with cheerful heartiness. "I shouldn't have hesitated for a moment if I had been quite sure it would be the best thing for them; but, as you know, I'm afraid we can not give them as good an education there as we might here. However we have now decided to go, and I can only hope for the best."

"And do you know," she went on with a smile directed to the corner where Miss Stanhope sat, "that since you left us this morning something has happened that takes away more than half the pain of the thought of leaving Lansdale?"

"No; what may that be?"

"Oh, I know!" shouted Cyril, turning a somersault on the carpet. "Aunt Wealthy's goin' along! Aunt Wealthy's goin' along!"

And then such raptures of delight as were indulged in by those who had not heard the news before!

These were interrupted by a summons to the dinner-table; but when the blessing had been asked and the plates filled, the talk went on again, though in a somewhat more subdued fashion.

"Is there absolutely no danger from the Indians, Stuart?" asked Miss Stanhope.

"None whatever; most of the tribes have been removed to the far west; all but one, I think, and that will probably be taken soon."

"What tribe is it? the Wottapottamies?"

"Pottawottamies; yes."

"Father, will we have to live in wigwams and dress in skins?" asked Ada, anxiously.

"No; we'll have a house; if it is only a log-cabin, and we'll carry plenty of clothes along."

"P'raps dey might det losted on the way," suggested Fan.

"Well, pussy, I think we'll find some stores out there; and if everything else fails we can always fall back on deerskins."

Lansdale was but a small town; everybody in it knew the Keiths or knew of them, and by the next day after their removal had been decided upon, everybody knew that.

Many regrets were expressed and there were some offers of assistance with their preparations; but these were declined with thanks: "with Aunt Wealthy's good help, and that of the seamstress already engaged," Mrs. Keith said "she and Mildred would be able to do all that was necessary."

They were very busy cutting, fitting and sewing, day after day, from morning to night with occasional interruptions from the little ones who were too young to go to school but old enough to roam over house and grounds; and being adventurous spirits, full of life and energy, were constantly getting into mischief, thus furnishing, gratis, a change of works to mother and eldest sister, who, spite of a hearty affection for the young rogues, was often sorely tried by their pranks.

"Have you any cord, Mrs. Keith?" asked the seamstress, one morning.

"Yes," turning to her work-basket. "Why, what has become of it? I had two or three pieces here. And that paper of needles has disappeared! Mildred did you –"

"The children were here half an hour ago, mother, and I remember seeing Donald peeping into your basket."

"Run out and see what they have done with them."

Going into the hall, Mildred stood a moment listening for some sound to tell her where the children were. Little voices were prattling in the garden near at hand. Stepping to the door she saw the two boys seated on the grass busied with a kite Rupert had made for them.

"What are you doing?" she asked, going nearer.

"Makin' a longer tail."

"Where did you get that piece of string?"

No answer; only a guilty look on the two chubby faces.

"Oh, I know! it's some cord you took from mother's work-basket. And now it's wanted; but you've spoilt it entirely; why did you cut and knot it so?"

"Why," said Cyril, "you see Don was my crazy man and I had to tie him; and then I had to cut the string to get it off, 'cause I couldn't untie the knots."

"Oh, you mischievous fellows. Another time don't you take things without leave. Did you take a paper of needles too?"

"No, we didn't; maybe Fan did."

Mildred went in search of Fan, and found her digging and planting in her little garden, the empty needle paper lying near.

"Fan," said Mildred, picking it up, "What have you done with the needles that were in this?"

"Sowed 'em in dis bed; and when dey drows up we'll have lots an' lots for mother an' you."

"You silly, provoking little puss! needles don't grow. Show me where you put them."

"Tan't dey's all round and round in de gwond."

Mildred took up a bit of stick and poked about in the fresh earth for a minute or two, then remarking to herself that it was as bootless as hunting in a haystack, went into the house with the report of the hapless fate of the missing articles.

The boys were there before her, penitently exhibiting the ruined cord and promising to do so no more.

"We didn't fink, mother," pleaded Don, looking up in her face with such a droll mixture of fun and entreaty in his roguish blue eyes, that she could not refrain from giving him a kiss and a smile as she answered, "Ah, my boys must learn to think and not take mother's things without leave. Now run away to your plays and try to be good children."

"Mother, I do think you're a little too easy with them," Mildred said in a slightly vexed tone.

"Perhaps; but if I make a mistake, is it not far better to do so on the side of mercy than of severity?"

"I suppose so; I shouldn't like to see them whipped."

Then laughingly she told the story of Fan's doings, and as needles and cord must be replaced, put on her bonnet and sallied forth upon the errand.

Mildred as one of the prettiest, most accomplished, graceful, and fascinating young ladies of the place, and belonging to one of the first families, was a good deal admired, and never lacked attention at a party, picnic or any sort of gathering of the young people of the town.

As she left the store where she had made her purchases, Spencer Hall crossed the street and joined her.

He was the only son of the wealthiest man in the place and, because of his great expectations, looked upon by most of the young girls and their mammas as a desirable match.

Mildred, however, was of a different opinion, knowing him to be idle, purse-proud, vain and conceited.

She therefore returned his greeting rather coldly; heartily wishing that he had not happened to see her, or that something would occur to rid her at once of his undesirable company.

Greatly amazed would the young exquisite have been could he have read her thoughts; for he had no doubt that she felt highly gratified and honored by his notice. Was he not arrayed in broadcloth

suit, silk hat and immaculate kids, while she wore calico, cotton gloves and the simplest of straw bonnets? And could not his father buy hers out ten times over?

His manner was gracious and patronizing as he remarked – sauntering along by her side, "Why, Miss Mildred, can it be true that you are going to leave us? I don't see what Lansdale will do without you."

"It is quite true that we are going, Mr. Hall," she answered, with a slight curl of the lip; "and I suppose my father and mother will be missed; but I can not think that my loss will in any way affect the prosperity of the town or the happiness of the people."

"Some people's it certainly will," he said, with increased graciousness, exerting himself slightly to keep pace with her, as she quickened her steps to a very rapid walk. "We don't want to lose you; might it not be possible to persuade you to remain among us?"

"Certainly not; unless my parents should change their plans and decide to stay. Of which there is not the least probability."

"Do you know that you are walking very fast, Miss Mildred?" he said, laughing. "Do let us slacken our pace a little, for who knows when we may have the pleasure of walking together again."

"You must excuse me; I am in great haste. But there is not the slightest necessity for your exerting yourself to keep pace with me. It is broad daylight and I know the way."

"Now don't be sarcastic, my dear young lady. I'd be willing at any time to make a far greater exertion for the pleasure of your society; but if we move so rapidly it will shorten our interview considerably."

"I have already explained that I am in haste; there is much to be done in the few weeks before we leave," the girl answered coldly, pressing on with accelerated speed.

"Haven't time even for a word with an old friend, eh? Then good-morning, Miss Keith," and turning about in disgust, he sauntered leisurely along in another direction while she sped on her way as before.

"Is it possible! what does the girl mean!" he ejaculated the next minute, as on turning his head to look after her, he perceived that Mildred had actually stopped upon the sidewalk – stopped to speak to a mutual acquaintance, a lad a year or two younger than himself, who was working his own way in the world, getting an education by the hardest and helping a widowed, invalid mother.

For Frank Osborne Mildred had the highest respect, though she looked upon him as a mere boy and was wholly unconscious that to him she was the embodiment of every virtue and grace; that her words, looks and smiles were treasured up in his very heart of hearts; nor did she dream how unhesitatingly he would have laid down his life to save hers had it been in danger. It was only a boy's passion, but it was deep and strong.

The news of the intended removal of the Keiths to what, in those days, seemed a far distant region, had been a great shock to him; but with the hopefulness of youth he consoled himself with the resolve to follow and seek her out – when in the course of years he should earn fame and fortune – though she should be carried to the ends of the earth.

His eye brightened and his cheek flushed, as on turning a corner, he came suddenly upon her in her rapid walk, and she stopped and held out her hand in friendly greeting.

He took it almost reverentially.

"How d'ye do, Frank? and how is your mother to-day?" she was saying, her bright eyes looking straight into his.

"Better, thank you, Miss Mildred. And you are well? and oh, can it be true that you are all going so far away?" he asked with a wistful, longing look.

"Yes; to the land of the Hoosiers, wild Indians and wolves," she said gayly. "Don't you envy me?"

"I envy those that go with you," he answered, sighing. "You won't forget old friends, Miss Mildred?"

"No; no, indeed, Frank," she said, heartily. "But good-bye. I must hurry home," and with a nod and smile she tripped away; to the satisfaction of Hall who had jealously watched the whole interview.

He was glad it had been no longer, though he could not avoid the unpleasant consciousness that more favor had been shown to "that pauper" than to himself, the prospective heir to a comfortable fortune.

Chapter Third

"Lessons so dear, so fraught with holy truth
As those her mother's faith shed on her youth."

"Now," said Mildred, taking up her sewing again, "I must work fast to make up for lost time, for I've set my heart on finishing this dress of Ada's to-day."

The words had scarcely left her lips when there came a loud crash and scream from the hall, followed by a sound of tumbling and rolling.

Up sprang mother, aunt and sister, scattering scissors, thimbles and work, and rushed toward the scene of commotion.

They found the stairs, and Fan, who sat weeping half way up, drenched with water; while at the foot were scattered fragments of a large pitcher, Cyril lying among them half stunned and with the blood streaming from a cut in his head; Don gazing down upon him from the landing and adding his mite to the confusion by screaming, "Oh! oh! oh! he's deaded! he's deaded!"

"No, he ain't," said Cyril, slowly getting on his feet. "Mother, I didn't mean to. Please don't let Milly scold us young ones. Oh, stop this quick!" putting his hand to his head.

"Yes, sonny, as soon as possible," said Mrs. Keith, taking his head in her hands and holding the lips of the wound together. "A basin of cold water, Milly, quick! and aunt, there is sticking plaster in the work-table drawer. Hush Don; don't cry any more, Fan; Cyril isn't much hurt and mother will soon make it all right."

Her orders were promptly obeyed, the wound skillfully dressed, Fan's wet clothes changed, and then inquiry was made as to how it had all happened.

"Why – why," said Cyril, "you see Fan wanted to wash her hands; 'cause she'd been diggin' in her garden and dey was all dirty, and dere wasn't any water in the pitcher and we brung it down and got it full and I was carryin' it up and my foot tripped and I fell down with it and knocked Fan over cause she was behind me. And I couldn't help it. Could I, Don?"

"No, you touldna help it," assented Don. "And Fan touldn't too."

"And he's dot a bad hurt on his head," put in Fan pityingly.

"Yes, he's punished enough, I think," said the mother, caressing him; "his intentions seem to have been good; but next time you want water, dears, come and tell mother or sister Milly."

"There, the morning's gone," said Mildred, as bells and whistles began their usual announcement; "a full hour of it wasted, too, by the pranks of those children. I hope they've finished up the business for to-day!"

Vain hope! inactivity was impossible to those restless spirits: their surplus energy must be worked off in some way.

They had not been heard from for two hours and Mrs. Keith had just remarked that she feared it must be some mischief that was keeping them so quiet, when shrieks and wails from three infantile voices, coming from the second story, appealed strongly to the compassion of their relatives in the sitting-room.

The call for help was responded to as promptly as on the previous occasion. Mother, aunt, and sister flew to the rescue and on entering the room whence the sounds proceeded, found Fan locked in the wardrobe and the two boys seated in the lower drawer of the bureau which their weight had caused to tip so far forward that they could not get out without assistance. A chair standing so near as to prevent the bureau from falling entirely to the floor, had probably saved them from a serious accident; but there they were, bent nearly double, legs dangling, vociferous screams issuing from their throats.

It was the work of a moment for the laughing mother and aunt to lift up the bureau and release the two rogues, while Mildred sprang to the wardrobe, unlocked it and took the sobbing Fan in her arms.

"You poor dear, who fastened you in there?"

"Cyril did. He said I stealed and must go to jail. And – and I was 'f'aid it would des tumble over; it shaked so when I tried to det out."

"The naughty boy!" cried Mildred, flashing an indignant glance at him as he and Don crept from the drawer, straightened themselves and stood up looking very much abashed and ill at ease.

"Mother, I do think Cyril ought to be punished."

"I didn't hurt her," he muttered, hanging his head; "and I was goin' to let her out 'fore long. And we didn't mean to tumble the bureau over. Did we Don?"

"No; it dus went yight over its ownse'f," chimed in the little brother. "Pease, mamma we's doin to be dood boys now."

"You might have been very much hurt if the chair had not been where it was," she said, composing her features and speaking with becoming gravity, "I am very thankful for your escape, and you must never do such things again. Especially never lock each other into a wardrobe or closet," she added sitting down, drawing Fan to her side and caressing her tenderly, while Miss Stanhope and Mildred restored the contents of the bureau drawers, which the boys had unceremoniously tossed upon the carpet.

"Why, mother?" queried the self-constituted jailor.

"Because it is very dangerous. Your little sister might have been frightened into a fit or have died for want of air to breathe."

Cyril's eyes dilated, then filled with tears as he seemed to see the little sister he loved so dearly lying before him white and cold and dead.

"I won't ever, ever do it again," he said tremulously.

"No, you must be Fan's big brave brother that she can trust to take care of her and shield her from harm. I don't believe my Cyril would be such a mean coward as to hurt a little girl or anything smaller or weaker than himself, except for that naughty 'didn't think!'"

"But I didn't hurt her, mother."

"Yes, my son, you hurt her feelings very much."

He considered a moment. "Yes, I s'pose that's so," he said slowly, "Fan, I'll tell you; I'm real sorry; and you may be jailor now and lock me up in that wardrobe."

"No, no! there must be no more such doings," quickly interposed mamma.

"Dess I wouldn't do such sing!" said Fan, wiping away her tears with her chubby little hand.

"What a room!" said Mildred, shutting the last bureau drawer and turning to look about her; "every chair out of place and turned on its side, the bed all tumbled and bits of paper scattered over the carpet."

"Pick them up, children, and try to keep out of mischief for the rest of the day. I must go back to my sewing," Mrs. Keith said, following her aunt, who had already left the room.

Mildred staid behind to assist in setting it to rights.

"You naughty children! really I could almost enjoy spanking you all round," she exclaimed directly, as she came upon the fragments of a delicate china vase belonging to herself, and a valued letter from a friend torn into bits.

"Milly," said Cyril solemnly, "s'pose we should get deaded some day; wouldn't you be sorry?"

"Suppose I should get deaded," she retorted, "wouldn't you be sorry for spoiling my pretty things?"

She was ashamed of her outburst nevertheless, and the child's words haunted her all the afternoon.

It was evening; two candles burned on the sitting-room table, and beside it sat Mildred and her mother still busily plying their needles.

The rest of the family were in bed and Miss Stanhope and the seamstress had gone to their own homes hours ago.

"My child, put up your work for to-night," said Mrs. Keith; "You are looking weary and depressed; and no wonder, for you have had a hard day."

"A busy day, mother; but not so hard as yours, because I have had a walk in the fresh air while you have been stitch, stitching from early morning till now. And if you don't forbid it I shall sit up and work as long as you do. I consider it one of the eldest daughter's privileges to share her mother's burdens."

"My dear girl! you are a comfort to me! I thank God for you every day," the mother said, looking at her with dewy eyes and a beautiful smile, "but because you are young and growing, you need more rest and sleep than I do. So go, daughter, and never mind leaving me."

"Mayn't I stay a little longer," pleaded the girl, "I want one of our nice confidential talks. O mother, I am so disgusted with myself! I was very angry with Cyril and Don to-day when I found they'd broken that vase I valued so because you gave it to me as a birthday present; and it was so pretty too – and torn up that sweet letter dear Miss Grey wrote me just before she died."

"Indeed! I didn't know they had done such damage and I am very sorry for your loss, dear!"

"Yes, mother, I knew you would be; my loss of temper, though, was worse than all. I do wish I knew how you contrive always to be so patient."

"I'm afraid it's very often all on the outside," the mother answered with a slight smile. "But I find it a great help in bearing patiently with the little every day worries, to think of them as sent, or permitted, by my best Friend – One who never makes a mistake – for my growth in grace; for you know we grow strong by resistance."

"Well, mother, I am constantly resolving that I will not give way to my temper, and yet I keep on doing so; and I grow so discouraged and so disgusted with myself. What shall I do?"

"My child, watch and pray. Our sufficiency is of God. He is our strength. And do not look at yourself; try to forget self altogether in 'looking unto Jesus;' get your mind and heart full of his lovely image, so full that there will be no room in it for aught else; and thus shall you grow into His likeness."

Mildred's eyes shone as she looked up into her mother's earnest face.

"I am sure that must be the way," she said, low and feelingly, "and I will try it; for I do long to be like Him, mother; for He is indeed to me, 'the chiefest among ten thousand and the one altogether lovely!'"

"Oh, how good He is to me!" ejaculated the mother, glad tears shining in her eyes: "that you might learn thus to know and love Him has been the burden of my prayer for you – for each of my dear children – since they first saw the light."

They worked on in silence for some minutes, then Mildred seeing a smile playing about her mother's lips, asked what was the thought that provoked it.

"A reminiscence of some of your infantile pranks," her mother answered laughing. "You should be forbearing with your little brother and sisters for you were fully as mischievous as they are."

"Before you could walk I caught you one day seated in the middle of the table set for tea, your hand in the sugar bowl, your mouth full and your face well besmeared."

"You were a great climber and it was difficult to keep anything out of your way; and as soon as Rupert could creep he followed you into danger and mischief; pulling things about, breaking, tearing, cutting, climbing fences and trees, and even getting out of windows on to roofs."

"Besides, you had a perfect mania for tasting everything that could possibly be eaten or drunk – soap, candles, camphor, lye, medicines whatever you could lay your hands on – till I was in constant fear for your lives."

"You poor, dear mother, what a time you must have had with us!" exclaimed the girl. "We can never hope to repay you for your patient love and care."

"My child, I have always felt that my darlings paid for their trouble as they went along; their love has always been so sweet to me," Mrs. Keith answered, cheerily. "And I can not tell you how much I enjoy the sweet society and confidence of my eldest daughter – the knowledge that she has no secrets from me."

"I have not, indeed," Mildred said, heartily, "as why should I? knowing as I do that my mother is my best and wisest, as well as dearest earthly friend."

Then recalling the events of the morning she gave a laughing account of her interview with Spencer Hall.

"If I could contemplate the possibility of leaving you behind it would certainly not be in his care," her mother said, joining in her merriment, "and I am glad you have sense enough not to fancy him."

"Truly I do not in the least; though many of the girls consider him a great catch because of his father's wealth," said Mildred. "But really I don't believe he meant anything, and I felt like showing him that I understood that very well and resented his trifling; and wouldn't have been much better pleased if he had been in earnest."

Chapter Fourth

"And, like some low and mournful spell,
To whisper but one word – farewell."

– *Park Benjamin.*

One sweet June morning an expectant group gathered in the shade of the vine-wreathed porch of Miss Stanhope's pretty cottage. It consisted of that good lady herself Mr. and Mrs. Keith and their eight children, all attired in neat traveling costume, and awaiting the coming of the stage coach which was to carry them the first step of their journey – to the nearest town situate on the Ohio and Erie Canal.

Mr. and Mrs. Park, the new occupants of the cottage, were there too, and a few old neighbors and friends who had run in for a last good-bye.

Mrs. Keith and Mildred turned now and then, a tearful lingering look upon their deserted home and this other which was equally familiar, almost equally dear; Miss Stanhope seemed to have some ado to control her feelings of sadness and anxiety for the future; but Mr. Keith was in fine spirits in which the children evidently shared very largely.

Eager to be off, they moved restlessly about asking again and again, "When will the stage come?" and kept sending out reconnoitering parties to see if there were any signs of its approach.

At length they espied it and announced the fact with joyful exclamations as its four prancing steeds came sweeping around the corner and, swaying and rolling, it dashed up to the gate.

The driver drew rein, the guard sprang from his lofty perch, threw open the door and let down the steps.

There were hurried embraces and farewells, a hasty stowing away of bags, bundles, and passengers large and small, in the inside, and of more bulky baggage in the boot of the coach, the steps were replaced, the door slammed to, and amid waving of handkerchiefs and a chorus of good-byes and good wishes, the "toot, toot!" of the guard's horn, the crack of the coachman's whip, they swept away down the street, looking, in all probability, their last upon many a well known object, many a friendly face, nodding and smiling to them from door or window.

Frank Osborne, at work in his mother's garden, dropped his hoe to lift his hat and bow as the stage passed, and to gaze after it with a longing, lingering look.

Spencer Hall, standing, cigar in mouth, on the steps of his father's mansion, did likewise.

But Mildred had turned her head away, purposely, and did not see him.

Never before had Lansdale put on so inviting an appearance, or the surrounding country looked so lovely as to-day, while they rolled onward through the valley and over the hills now clothed in all the rich verdure of early summer and basking in the brilliant sunlight occasionally mellowed and subdued by the flitting shadow of some soft, white, fleecy like cloud floating in the deep azure of the sky.

A few hours' drive took our travellers to the town where they were to exchange the stage for the canal boat, the packet Pauline. She lay at the wharf, and having dined comfortably at a hotel near by, they went on board, taking with them the luggage brought by the stage.

Their household goods had been dispatched on the same route some days before.

Here they were in quarters only less confined than those of the stage, the Pauline's cabin being so narrow that when the table was to be set for a meal, most of the passengers had to go on deck to be out of the way.

All along the side of the cabin ran a cushioned seat; used for that purpose in the daytime and as a lower berth at night; other shelf-like berths being then set up over it; all so narrow that the occupant could scarcely turn upon his couch; and the upper ones so close to the ceiling that it required some

care to avoid striking the head against it in getting in or out. Also there was an unpleasant dampness about the bedding.

In the cool of the evening or when the sun was clouded, the deck was the favorite place of resort; but there a constant lookout for bridges must be kept, and to escape them it was sometimes necessary to throw one's self flat upon the deck; not the most pleasant of alternatives.

The progress of these packets was so slow too, that it took nearly a week to reach Cleveland from the point where our friends embarked.

But this mode of travel had its compensations. One was the almost absolute safety; another the ease with which the voyager could step ashore when the boat was in a lock and refresh himself with a brisk walk along the tow-path; boarding her again when the next lock was reached.

This was done daily by some of the Keith family, even the very little ones being sometimes allowed the treat when the weather and walking were fine and the distance was not too great.

Passengers were constantly getting off and on at the locks and the towns along the route, and often the boat was crowded. It was so the first night that our friends spent on board; babies cried, older children fretted and some grown people indulged in loud complaints of scant and uncomfortable accommodations; altogether the cabin was a scene of confusion and the young Keiths felt very forlorn.

But mother, aunt and older sister were very patient, soothed, comforted, and at length succeeded in getting them all to sleep.

Then Aunt Wealthy, saying that she felt disposed to lie down and rest beside the children, persuaded Mrs. Keith and Mildred to go upon deck for an hour to enjoy the moonlight and the pleasant evening breeze with Mr. Keith and Rupert, who had been there ever since supper.

Mr. Keith helped his wife and daughter up the short flight of steps that led from the stern to the deck, and found them seats on some of their own trunks.

There were a number of other passengers sitting about or pacing to and fro; among the former a burly German who sat flat on the deck at the stern end of the boat, his long legs dangling over the edge, his elbow on his knee and his bearded chin in his hand, gazing out idly over the moonlight landscape, while wreaths of smoke from a pipe in his mouth, curled slowly up from his lips.

The Pauline glided onward with easy pleasant motion; all had grown quiet in the cabin below and the song of the bullfrogs, the dull thud of the horses' hoofs and the gentle rush of the water against the sides of the boat, were the only sounds that broke the stillness.

"How nice it is here!" exclaimed Mildred, "the breeze is so refreshing, the moonlight so bewitching!"

"Yes, the country is looking beautiful," said her mother, "and one gets a good view of it here; but I feel somewhat apprehensive in regard to the bridges. We must be on the watch for them and dodge in time."

"We will," said her husband; "though we may pretty safely trust to the steersman; it is his duty to be on the lookout and give timely warning."

"Well, we're facing in the right direction to see them," remarked Rupert, "but that Dutchman back there is not. I s'pose he's safe enough, though, with the man at the helm to sing out as we near them."

With that they fell into talk on other topics, and thought no more of the smoker.

"Bridge!" sang out the steersman, and down went every head except that of the German, who sat and smoked on unmoved.

"Bridge!" The cry was repeated in louder, more emphatic tones.

"Yah, pridge, pridge!" responded the German straightening up a little, nodding his head assentingly, but not looking round.

"Bridge!" sang out the steersman for the third time, "bridge, you stupid lout! dodge or" —

But the boat was already sweeping under, and the bridge taking the German across his shoulders threw him with sudden violence to the platform below, whence he rolled over into the canal, uttering a half stifled cry for help as the water closed over him.

But he rose again instantly panting and spluttering, and striking out vigorously for the boat; he presently succeeded in laying hold of the edge of the platform, and, the steersman lending him a helping hand, clambered on board, crestfallen and dripping, while the crowd on deck, seeing him safe, indulged in a hearty laugh at his expense.

"I loss mein bipe," he said ruefully, shrugging his shoulders and shaking the water from his clothes.

"Well, you got a free bath in exchange and may be thankful you didn't lose your life," remarked the steersman with a grin. "Next time I call out bridge I guess you'll duck your head like the rest."

The rain had been falling heavily all night, but the sun shone brightly, and the clouds were flying before a high wind that blew fresh and cool from Lake Erie as the Pauline glided quietly into Cleveland.

"What a beautiful city!" exclaimed the young Keiths as they stepped ashore. "Do let us walk to the hotel, father, if it is not too far."

"Just as Aunt Wealthy and your mother say," he replied, taking the baby from his wife. "I am told it is but a short distance, Marcia; I will have our heavy baggage carried directly to the steamer which leaves this afternoon; and Rupert and the girls can take charge of the satchels and small packages."

The ladies decided in favor of the walk as affording agreeable exercise and enabling them to see the city to better advantage than if cooped up in hack or omnibus, and no one regretted their choice: they found the wide streets so clean, the breeze so refreshing and exhilarating, and enjoyed so very much gazing upon the tall, elegant looking houses and the pretty things displayed in the windows of the large, handsome stores.

After a good dinner at the hotel, Mr. Keith, his wife and older children, went out for another stroll about the city; Miss Stanhope, who insisted that she had had exercise enough, and preferred to stay where she was, taking charge of the little ones in their absence.

On the return of the pedestrians the whole party went on board the steamer which was to convey them across the lake to Detroit. It was a fine boat, the cabin large and handsome; staterooms on each side furnished with berths of far more comfortable size than those of the canal packets.

The table here was better, too, both in its appointments and the quality of the food, and was set in a lower saloon, reached from the upper one by a flight of broad winding stairs.

The children were delighted with the change and wanted to be on the guards all afternoon, watching the play of the great stern wheel, admiring the rainbows in the clouds of spray it sent up, looking out over the wide waste of waters, at the islands and an occasional passing boat, or racing back and forth.

Mildred and Rupert were given charge of the three little ones and found great vigilance necessary to prevent Cyril and Don from putting themselves in peril of their lives. Mildred was more than once sorely tempted to shake the young rogues who gave her no peace; but, remembering and acting upon her mother's advice, was able to restrain herself and treat them with uniform gentleness.

She felt rewarded when, as she was putting them to bed, her mother being busy with the babe, Don threw his arms impulsively round her neck and kissing her again and again, said "I loves you, Milly; you so dood to us naughty chillens."

"That she is!" assented Cyril, heartily, "an' I wish I didn't be so bad."

"Well, try again to-morrow to be ever so good," Mildred answered, tucking them in and leaving them with a good-night kiss.

She helped her sisters with their preparations for the night, then was rewarded with a delightful evening spent with the older members of the family in the open air, looking out upon the beautiful

wide expanse of waters, now starlit and anon illumined by the silvery rays of the moon as she rose apparently from the distant eastern edge of the lake and slowly ascended the azure vault of the heavens, now shining resplendently and again veiling her fair face for a moment with a thin floating cloud.

The next morning the steamer lay at anchor in Detroit harbor and our friends left her for a hotel in what was then the principal street of the city. Here, too, they walked out to view the land, and passing the stores and public buildings, found well-shaded streets and handsome residences with pretty door-yards in front.

Mr. Keith gave his children their choice of passing around the lakes in a steamer or in the sloop Queen Charlotte. They chose the latter and the next morning the family and their luggage were transferred to her decks.

The ladies pointed out the articles they wished carried to their staterooms and followed in the wake of the bearers.

There was less of show here than on the steamer they had left, but comfort and convenience had not been overlooked, and though Mildred's face clouded a little, it brightened again in a moment as she noted the cheerful content in those of her mother and aunt.

They hurried on deck again where Rupert had been left in charge of the younger children, to watch the vessel getting under way.

They were lying close to a steamer on whose other side was a second sloop in quite as close proximity. All seemed hurry and bustle on board the three.

"I don't see how we are to start," observed Mildred, glancing up at the sails which hung almost motionless on the masts, "for there's scarcely a breath of wind."

"Don't you see that they're lashing us and the Milwaukee yonder fast to the steamboat, one on each side?" said Rupert. "She's to tow both till the wind gets up."

"Oh, is that the way? she'll have hard work to do it, I should think."

"She won't growl any way."

"No, I suppose not. Which is the captain, Ru.?"

"That nice jolly looking chap over yonder, that's giving orders in such a loud peremptory tone, is Captain Wells, master of the ship; that blue eyed, brown haired, rosy cheeked stripling standing near is his son, Edward Wells; and they're both English; so don't remind them that this vessel was taken from the British in the last war."

"Of course not, unless they say something mean or exasperating about Washington or America."

"In that case I give you leave to twit 'em as hard as you like."

"Who was that nice looking man that helped us on board? I thought father or somebody called him captain."

"So he is, Captain Jones; but acting as first mate here. That lady, talking to mother and Aunt Wealthy, is his wife. They're both Yankees; so you can relieve your mind occasionally on the subject of the ship, by a little private exultation with them."

"Do you notice the contrast between those two faces? – mother's and Mrs. Jones'; hers so dark, mother's so beautifully fair and rosy."

"Who could help noticing it? Rupert, I do think our mother has just the loveliest face in the world!"

"Ditto!" he said, gazing at her with a world of filial love, pride and chivalric admiration in his handsome eyes.

"I say what's the use? you may just as well set still where you hare," growled a voice near at hand.

The young people turned involuntarily at the sound, and perceived that the speaker was a burly, red-faced young Englishman; the one so politely and kindly addressed, a little meek-eyed woman of the same nationality, with a chalky complexion, and washed out appearance generally, who, as they afterward learned, and suspected at the time, was the wife of his bosom.

"What a bear!" exclaimed Rupert in an aside to his sister, and drawing her away as he spoke. "See, we're beginning to move. Let's go over to the other side where we can have a better view."

"I presume that's what she wanted to do," remarked Mildred, glancing back at the meek-eyed woman. "And why shouldn't he have let her?"

"Why, indeed, except that he's a cowardly bully."

"How do you know?"

"Because that's the only kind of man that would speak so to a decent woman."

Chapter Fifth

"Hark! to the hurried question of despair:
'Where is my child?' and echo answers 'where?'"

— *Byron.*

"How did you learn all you've been telling me, Ru.?" asked Mildred as they stood side by side watching with interest the Queen Charlotte and her consorts slowly clearing the harbor. "Oh, easily enough; young Wells and I got into talk while you and the others were down in the cabin; I asked questions and he answered 'em. Ah, here he comes," he added looking round, "I'll introduce him for he's a nice fellow, I'm sure, and it's a good thing to have a friend at court; in other words to be in favor with the reigning powers; *i. e.* the captain and his nearest of kin. My sister, Miss Mildred Keith, Mr. Wells."

"Happy to make your acquaintance, Miss," said the young sailor, gallantly, lifting his hat and bowing low. "Hope you'll enjoy your voyage on the Queen Charlotte. Shall be most happy to do all I can to make the trip pleasant to you."

"Thank you kindly."

He began at once by finding comfortable seats for them where they were sheltered from the sun, and had a good view of the Canada and Michigan shores; and being acquainted with the localities, and their history, and possessed of a ready command of language, he added much to the interest of the scene by the information he imparted; sometimes unsolicited, at others in answer to questions.

When they had passed through Detroit river and so far out into Lake St. Clair that little could be seen but water and sky, he offered to show them over the vessel.

They gladly accepted, enjoyed the tour, and when it was over rejoined the rest of their party just as the cabin passengers were summoned to the supper table.

Mildred was seated between Rupert and Edward Wells; opposite them sat Mr. and Mrs. Sims, the bullying Englishman and his meek-eyed wife, and a bachelor gentleman of pleasing countenance and manners, whom Captain Wells addressed as Mr. Carr. Next them were Captain and Mrs. Jones. There were many more passengers of both sexes, several nationalities, and a variety of ages from infants in arms, up to hoary headed grandparents, but with most of them our story has little or nothing to do.

The two captains, the wife of the one and the son of the other, were polite and genial, the fare was excellent, and every one present seemed disposed to contentment and good humor except Mr. Sims, who turned up his nose at the food, snubbed his wife and scowled at his opposite neighbors; perchance reading too plainly in the frank, youthful countenances their disapproval of him.

Mildred so compassionated the long-suffering wife that, in the course of the evening, seeing her sitting by herself and looking sad and lonely, she drew near and opened a conversation.

Mrs. Sims responded readily.

"Do sit down, Miss," she said, making room for Mildred by her side, "I'm so glad to 'ave some one to speak to, for I gets hawful 'omesick at times."

"Ah, that must be a very trying feeling," Mildred said compassionately. "I know nothing of it myself; for I've never been away from home or mother for a week at a time."

"Well, Miss, you're fortunate."

"Have you been long in the country?"

"It's barely six months, Miss, since I left me father's 'ouse in London. We kept an 'otel there; an' that's 'ow I came to know Mr. Sims; he takin' lodgin' with us while up to London about some business 'e 'ad with the lawyers."

"And are your own family all still in England?"

"Yes, Miss; hevery one; I left 'em all – father, mother, brothers and sisters – for 'im," she answered with a tremble in her voice and wiping her eyes furtively.

"What a shame he should treat you as he does!" was the indignant exclamation that rose to Mildred's lips, but she checked herself in time, and changed it for, "Then I think he ought to be very good to you."

"I 'ope we'll be 'appy, Miss, when we're settled down in a 'ome of our own," remarked the little woman with a half stifled patient sigh. "And indeed it's not 'alf so bad as I expected; I've been hastonished, at finding so many white women in America. I thought when I landed in New York I'd be the honly white woman there. I s'posed all the rest would be Injuns or niggers."

"Indeed! how relieved you must have been on discovering your mistake," remarked Mildred demurely, while her eyes twinkled with suppressed fun.

"That I was, Miss, as you may well believe; it quite reconciled me to the country."

The sun rose brightly the next morning and the young Keiths were early on deck, romping and racing about, full of the vivacity and mirth usually incident to extreme youth and perfect health.

They were well watched over by their father, Mildred and Rupert, or there is no knowing what wild and dangerous pranks might have been indulged in by Cyril and Don.

The former actually proposed a flying leap from the deck of the Queen Charlotte to that of the steamer and was not at all pleased by the decided veto put upon it by his father.

"I think you might let a fellow try, papa," he grumbled, "it would be such fun and I know I could do it."

"No, you couldna," said Don, peeping over the ship's side, "it's a big, big place."

"Come over to the other side of the deck, and stay there," said Mr. Keith, leading them away.

Rupert followed holding Fan by the hand. "What was that? what were they throwing in?" he asked, stopping suddenly at a sound as of a heavy body plunging into the water, while at the same instant a startled cry came from the deck of the Milwaukee.

"A man overboard!"

"A man overboard!" the fearful cry was taken up and repeated on all sides amid the rush of many feet and the quick, sharp imperative words of command.

Almost instantly a boat was lowered and strong arms were pulling with swift, vigorous strokes for the spot, already left far behind, where the splash of the falling body had been heard, and keen eyes were eagerly searching the waste of waters; the crews and passengers of the three vessels crowding the decks and following their movements in breathless anxiety and suspense.

They pulled backward and forward, calling out to the drowning one that help was near.

"Ah, yonder he is at last!" cries a woman's voice in exultant tones; "there he is with his head above water, for I see his hat."

"And they see him too, and are pulling toward him with all their might!"

"Ah, they're up with him! they have him now! hurrah!" and a wild cheer rose from hundreds of throats.

But it died away in a groan.

"It was his hat – only his hat, poor fellow. And they've given it up and are coming back without him!" sighs the woman who had been the first to raise the alarm.

Every face wears a look of sadness for the few moments of silent waiting as the rowers slowly return.

They gain the deck of the Milwaukee; one of them – a lad of nineteen or twenty, a rough, hardy sailor – comes forward with a subdued manner – in strange contrast to his accustomed rude hilarity – lips white and quivering, tears in his manly eyes.

"Mother, mother," he says, low and huskily, drawing near this woman with tottering steps, "don't – don't take it too hard. I – I couldn't bear to see you. I did my best; we all did; but we couldn't find him; and here's his hat. It – it was little Billy."

"My boy! mine! my little one!" she shrieked, and fell fainting into the arms of her elder son.

There was not a dry eye among the spectators, and as the sad story spread to the other vessels many a tremulous tone and falling tear attested the pity and sympathy of those who told the tale and those who listened to it.

"But how did it happen?" queried one and another; and the answer was, "He was jumping back and forth from one vessel to another, and fell in between the Milwaukee and the steamer; and it is conjectured that he must have been struck by the wheel, as he did not come up again."

"And it might have been one of ours," sobbed Mrs. Keith, clasping her babe to her breast, while her eye glanced from one to another of her darlings. "Ah, how frightened I was when I heard the cry. I don't know how I got up the cabin steps! for I thought it was perhaps –"

Tears choked her utterance; tears of mingled gratitude for herself and sorrow for the bereaved mother.

"Yes, it might have been you, Cyril or Don; and think how poor mother's heart would have been broken, and mine too," Mr. Keith added, sitting down and taking one on each knee. "Now do you want to try jumping across like that boy did?"

They shook their heads, gazing up into his face with awe-struck countenances.

The sad event of the morning seemed to have exerted a subduing influence upon all the passengers; it was a very quiet day on board.

The calm continued throughout the day but a breeze sprang up in the night and the vessels parted company.

By daylight the breeze had stiffened into a wind that made the lake very rough; the ship tossed about on the waves with a motion by no means agreeable to the land lubbers in her cabin and steerage; everything not made fast to floor or walls went dashing and rolling from side to side of stateroom or saloon; few of the passengers cared to breakfast, and those who made the attempt had to do so under serious difficulties – table and floor being both inclined planes, sloping now in one direction now in another.

They passed a miserable day, confined to the cabin, for the rain was falling heavily and the great waves would now and then sweep across the deck.

Still the captain assured them the storm was not a bad one and they were in no danger.

By the next day it had abated so that they could seek the outer air, going about without experiencing much difficulty in preserving the centre of gravity; and nearly every one had so far recovered from the deathly sea-sickness as to be able to appear at meals.

Life on shipboard which had seemed quite dreadful during the long hours of the storm, became very tolerable again.

The older people promenaded the deck or sat there with book or work, or merely chatting and looking out upon the restless waters, while the children amused themselves with their plays or in running about exploring every nook and cranny and making acquaintance with the sailors who seemed to enjoy their innocent prattle and merry ways.

All the Keiths had suffered from sea-sickness and Mildred was among the last to recover; it was not until towards sunset of the second day that she could be induced to leave her berth and allow her father to assist her up the cabin stairs to the deck.

Here a couch had been prepared for her and the loving hands of mother and aunt busied themselves in making her comfortable. Brothers and sisters gathered rejoicingly around. Mrs. Jones brought a glass of lemonade, Mrs. Sims offered smelling salts, some one else a fan, and presently the two captains and young Wells came up to offer their congratulations on her recovery.

Then Cyril and Don led up and introduced Mr. Carr, the bachelor gentleman with whom they had already formed a firm friendship.

"He's a real nice man, Milly," said Cyril; "knows lots of stories and games and things, and – "

"An' p'ays wis boys," put in Don, "and tan do every fing."

"Yes, he's weal dood," chimed in Fan, "and I likes him."

"Thank you, my little maid," said the gentleman, laughing and stroking her curls. "Now if you could only get your sister to look at me through your spectacles."

"Why, I hasn't dot any 'pectacles!" exclaimed the child, opening her eyes very wide. "Maybe papa buy me some when I dets an old lady. Den I lets Milly 'ook froo."

"That's my good, generous little sister," Mildred said, laughing, "and if I'm so fortunate as to get glasses first, you shall borrow them whenever you wish."

"Now go to your plays, dears, and let sister rest till she feels better," said their mother.

"Please tum wis us, Mr. Tarr," said Don, tugging at that gentleman's coat.

"Don, Don, you must not – "

"Ah, don't reprove him," interposed the gentleman, lifting the child to his shoulder and prancing away with him, while the little fellow shouted with laughter and delight.

"Isn't he a nice man?" cried Zillah and Ada, looking after him, "we all like him ever so much."

"Yes," assented the mother, "but I am very much afraid my children impose upon his good nature."

"Don't let that trouble you, Mrs. Keith; he is surely able to take care of himself. Besides it's quite evident that he enjoys their society as much as they do his," said Edward Wells, taking a seat near Mildred's couch, where he remained chatting in a lively strain with her and the other ladies until it was time for them to retire to the cabin.

Fair weather and favorable winds made the remaining days of the voyage a pleasure till one bright June morning they entered the Straits of Mackinaw and reaching the island of the same name, anchored in front of its fort.

The captain, informing his passengers that the ship would lie there for a day or two, good-naturedly offered to take ashore any or all who would like to go.

Nearly everybody eagerly accepted. The boats put off from the ship, each with a full complement of passengers, whom they landed just under the white walls of the fortress, situate on a bluff one hundred and fifty feet high.

Passing up a flight of stone steps they entered the parade ground. It was smooth, hard and clean as a well swept floor. They walked across and about it, viewing the officers' quarters (on the outside) and the barracks of the men, walked along by the wall, noting how it commanded the harbor and the village of Mackinaw, with its great guns, beside each of which lay a pile of black balls heaped up in pyramidal form.

Then they visited the town, saw some Indians and bought curious little bark baskets ornamented with porcupine quills, blue, red and white, and filled with maple sugar; moccasins, too, made of soft skins and heavily trimmed with bead work, all manufactured by the Indians.

The young Keiths were made happy with a pair of moccasins apiece from their father, bark baskets from their mother and aunt, and unlimited maple sugar from their friend Mr. Carr.

They returned to the ship tired but full of content.

They were as usual early on deck the next morning, a little before the rising of the sun, for they "liked to see him come up out of the water."

"How very still it is! hardly a breath of air stirring," Mildred was saying to her father as Edward Wells drew near the little group, all standing together looking eagerly for the first glimpse of the sun's bright face.

"Yes, we are becalmed," said Mr. Keith.

"And very possibly may be detained here for several days in consequence," added Edward, greeting them with a cheerful good-morning. "In that case we will have an opportunity to explore the island. May I have the pleasure of being your guide in so doing?"

"Do you mean all of us?" queried Cyril.

"Yes, my man; if you will all go?" answered the sailor lad; but the glance of his eye seemed to extend the invitation to Mildred in particular.

"O father, can we? can we?" chorused the children.

"We will see," he said. "Now watch or you'll miss the sight we left our beds so early for."

The matter was under discussion at the breakfast table and afterward, and it was decided that all might go ashore, but that the walk under contemplation was too long for the little ones.

Ada Keith was the youngest of that family who was permitted to go; but others joined them and Edward found himself at the head of quite a party of explorers.

Ada came back looking heated, weary and troubled. "O mother," she cried, with tears in her eyes, "we saw a cave where some Frenchmen were hiding from the Indians and got smoked to death; the Indians did it by building a fire at the cave's mouth, because they couldn't get at them to kill them some other way. Oh, I'm so afraid of the savages; do persuade father to take us all back to Ohio again!"

The mother soothed and comforted the frightened child with caresses and assurances of the present peaceable disposition of the Indians, and at length succeeded in so far banishing her fears that she was willing to proceed upon her journey.

However, the calm continuing, nearly a week passed and many excursions had been made to the island before they could quit its harbor.

At length one day directly after dinner, a favorable wind having sprung up, the good ship weighed anchor and pursuing her westward course passed out of the straits into Lake Michigan.

All night she flew before the wind and when our friends awoke the following morning she rode safely at anchor in the harbor of Chicago.

Though a large city now, it was then a town of less than five thousand inhabitants.

This was the port of the Queen Charlotte and her passengers must be landed, her cargo discharged.

It was with feelings of regret on both sides that her officers and the Keiths parted; Edward Wells taking an opportunity to say in an undertone to Mildred that he hoped they would sometime meet again.

St. Joseph, on the opposite side of the lake, was the next port whither the Keiths were bound. A much smaller vessel carried them across.

They had a rough passage, wind and rain compelling them to keep closely housed in a little confined cabin, and were glad to reach the town of St. Joseph; though they found it but a dreary spot, no grass, no trees, the hotel a large, barn-like, two story building, with the hot summer sun streaming in through its windows without hindrance from curtain or blind; for the rain ceased about the time of their arrival and the sun shone out with fervid heat during the two or three days that they were detained there, resting the Sabbath day and awaiting the arrival of their household goods before ascending the St. Joseph river, on which Pleasant Plains, their final destination, was situated.

There were no railroads in that part of the country then, nor for many years after; I think there was no stage route between the two places; there were no steamers on the river; the best they could do was to take a keel-boat.

The rain had ceased and the sun shone brightly on the rippling, dancing waters of the lake and river, on the little town and the green fields and forests of the adjacent country, as they went on board the keel-boat Mary Ann, and set out upon this the last stage of their long journey.

The boatmen toiled at their oars and the Mary Ann moved slowly on against the current, slowly enough to give our travelers abundance of time to take in the beauties of the scenery; which they, the older ones at least, did not fail to do.

Much of it was unbroken forest, but they passed sometimes a solitary clearing with its lonely log cabin, sometimes a little village. The river flowed swiftly along, clear and sparkling, between banks now low, now high, green to the water's edge.

The sun was nearing the western horizon as, at last, the boat was run in close to shore and made fast, with the announcement, "Here we are, strangers; this here's the town of Pleasant Plains."

Chapter Sixth

"Nor need we power or splendor,
Wide hall or lordly dome;
The good, the true, the tender,
These form the wealth of home."

— *Mrs. Hale.*

Pleasant Plains considered itself quite a town. It stood high above the river on two plains, the upper familiarly known as the "Bluff." It was laid out in very wide, straight streets, crossing each other at right angles; there were perhaps two hundred dwelling houses, principally frame, but with a goodly proportion of log cabins and a respectable sprinkling of brick buildings.

The county seat, it had its court-house and jail; there were some half dozen stores where almost everything could be had, from dress goods to butter and eggs, and from a plowshare to a fine cambric needle; two taverns, as many blacksmith, shoemaker, and carpenter shops, a flouring mill and a bakery.

Also two churches belonging to different denominations; both frame structures, of extremely plain and unpretentious architecture, with bare walls, uncurtained windows, rough, uncarpeted floors, and rude hard benches in lieu of pews.

No thought of architectural beauty or even of comfort and convenience, beyond that of mere protection from the weather, seemed to have entered the minds of any of the builders here; the houses were mere shells; with no cupboards or closets or the slightest attempt at ornamentation.

Nor was their unsightliness concealed by vines, trees, or shrubbery; almost every one of the beautiful monarchs of the forest once adorning the locality had been ruthlessly felled, and a stump here and there was all that was left to tell of their former existence.

As the keel of the Mary Ann grated on the gravelly shore, a tall figure in rough farmer attire came springing down the bank, calling out in tones of unfeigned joy, "Hello, Keith! Come at last — wife, children, and all; eh? I'm glad to see ye! Never was more delighted in my life."

And the speaker catching Mr. Keith's hand in his shook it with hearty good will, then treating the rest of the party in like manner, as with his and Mr. Keith's assistance, each in turn stepped from the boat.

Mr. George Ward was an old client and friend of Mr. Keith's, who had been long urging this removal.

"I declare I wish I lived in town for a few days now," he went on, "but we're three mile out on the prairie, as you know, Keith. I have my team here, though, and if you like to pile into the wagon, all of you, I'll take you home with me, as it is."

The hospitable invitation was declined with thanks.

"There are quite too many of us, Mr. Ward," Mrs. Keith said, smilingly, "and we want to get into a house of our own just as soon as possible."

"Ah yes, so your husband wrote me; and I've been looking round for you. But the best that's to be had will seem a poor place to you, Mrs. Keith, after what you've left behind in Lansdale."

"I suppose so, but of course we must expect to put up with many inconveniences and probably some hardships even, for the first few years," she answered, cheerfully.

"I'm afraid that's so, but I hope you'll find yourselves paid for it in the long run. Now shall I take you to the Union Hotel? You can't, of course, get into your own house to-night."

"Here, let me carry you, bub," picking up Cyril, "the soil's real sandy here and makes heavy walking."

"If, as I presume from your recommendation of it, it is your best house of entertainment," Mr. Keith said, in reply to the question.

"Yes, sir, there's only one other, and it's a very poor affair," returned Mr. Ward, leading the way.

Mrs. Prior, the landlady, a pleasant-faced, middle-aged woman, with kind, motherly manners, met them at the door with a welcome nearly as hearty as that of their old time friend.

"I'm glad to see you," she said, bustling about to wait upon them, "We've plenty o' room here in town for the right sort o' folks, and glad to get 'em."

She had taken them into her parlor, the only one the house afforded.

The furniture was plain – a rag carpet, green paper blinds, a table with a rod and black cover, windsor chairs, two of them rocking chairs with chintz-covered cushions, the rest straight-backed and hard; on the high wooden mantel shelf an old-fashioned looking-glass, a few shells and two brass candlesticks; these last bright as scouring could make them.

"I'm afraid it must seem but a poor place to you, ladies," she continued, pushing forward a rocking chair for each. "And you're dreadful tired, ain't you? with your long journey. Do sit down and rest yourselves."

"You are very kind, and everything looks very nice indeed," Mrs. Keith answered, looking up at her with a pleased smile as she accepted the offered seat, and began untying her baby's bonnet strings.

"Indeed, I, for one, didn't expect to find half as good accommodations out in these western wilds," remarked Aunt Wealthy, glancing round the room. "I thought you had no floors to your carpets."

"No floors? oh yes; rather rough to be sure; – carpenters here don't make the best of work; and I think sometimes I could a'most plane a board better myself – but to get the carpets is the rub; we mostly make 'em ourselves and the weavin's often done so poor that they don't last no time hardly. Soil's sandy, you see, and it cuts the carpets right out."

"They say this country's hard on women and oxen," put in Mr. Ward, "and I'm afraid it's pretty true."

"Now don't be frightening them first thing, Mr. Ward," laughed the landlady. "Come, take off your things and the children's, ladies, and make yourselves to home. Here, just let me lay 'em in here," she went on, opening an inner door and revealing a bed covered with a patch-work quilt.

"You can have this room if you like, Mrs. Keith; I s'pose you'd prefer a downstairs one with the baby and t'other little ones? There is a trundle bed underneath that'll do for them.

"And the rest of you can take the two rooms right over these. They're all ready and you can go right up to 'em whenever you like. Is there anything more I can do for you now?"

The query was answered in the negative.

"Then I'll just excuse myself," she said; "for I must go and see to the supper; can't trust girls here."

She passed out through another door, leaving it ajar.

"That's the dining-room, I know, Fan, 'cause I see two big tables set," whispered Cyril peeping in, "and there's not a bit of carpet on the floor. Guess they're cleanin' house."

"Well, wife, I'll have to leave you for a little, I must see to the landing of our goods," said Mr. Keith, taking his hat. "Will you go along, Ward?"

"And let us go up and look at our rooms, girls," said Mildred to her sisters. "Mayn't we, mother?"

"Yes, go and make yourselves neat for the supper table."

They came back reporting bare floors everywhere, of boards none too well planed either, but everything scrupulously clean.

"Then we may well be content," said their mother. The gentlemen returned and the guests were presently summoned, by the ringing of a bell on top of the house, to the supper table, which they found furnished with abundance of good, wholesome well-cooked food.

And they were really able to make a very comfortable meal, despite the presence of deli ware, two-pronged steel forks, and the absence of napkins.

"What about the goods, Stuart?" asked Mrs. Keith on their return to the parlor.

"I have had them carted directly to the house; that is, I believe the men are at it now."

"The house?"

"The one Ward spoke of. I have taken it. It was Hobson's choice, my dear, or you should have seen it first."

"Can I see it now?"

"Why, yes, if you choose; it won't be dark yet for an hour. If you and Aunt Wealthy will put on your bonnets, I'll take you round."

"Ada and me, too, father?" cried Zillah eagerly.

"And Fan and Don and me?" chorused Cyril.

"You couldn't think of going without your eldest son;" said Rupert, looking about for his hat.

Mrs. Keith turned an inquiring eye upon her husband.

"Is it far?"

"No; even Fan can easily walk it. Let them come. You, too, Mildred," taking the babe from her arms. "I'll carry baby."

"We'll make quite a procession," laughed the young girl. "Won't the people stare?"

"What if they do? who of us cares?"

"Not I!" cried Rupert, stepping back from the doorway with a commanding wave of the hand, "Procession will please move forward Mr. Keith and wife taking the lead, Miss Stanhope and Miss Keith next in order, Zilly and Ada following close upon their heels, the three inseparables after them, while Marshal Rupert brings up the rear to see that all are in line."

Everybody laughed at this sally while they promptly fell into line as directed, passed out upon the sidewalk and pursued their way through the quiet streets.

People did stare to be sure, from open doors and windows, some asking, "Who are they?" others answering "New comers and they've got a big family to support."

Some remarked that they were nice looking people; while others shook their heads wisely, or dubiously, and said they "expected they were real stuck up folks; – dressed so dreadful fine."

However, the subjects of these charitable comments did not overhear, and therefore were not disturbed by them.

"Do you see that yellow frame yonder, wife?" Mr. Keith asked as they turned a corner.

"With the gable-end to the street and two doors in it, one above and one below?"

"The same."

"It looks like a warehouse."

"That's what it was originally intended for; but finding it not available for that purpose, the owner offered it for rent."

"And is it the one you have rented?"

"Yes; a poor place to take you to, my dear but, as I told you, it was Hobson's choice."

"Then we'll make the best of it and be thankful."

"What a horrid old thing!" remarked Mildred in an undertone, heard only by Aunt Wealthy.

"We'll hope to find the inside an improvement on the out," was the cheerful rejoinder.

"It has need to be, I should say!" cried the girl as they drew near. "Just see! it fronts on two streets and there's not a bit of a space separating it from either; doors open right out on to a sand bank."

"That's what was made by digging the cellar," said Rupert.

"There's a big yard at the side and behind," said Zillah.

"Something green in it, too," added Ada, whose sight was imperfect.

"Nothing but a crop of ugly weeds," said Mildred, ready to cry as memory brought vividly before her the home they had left with its large garden carpeted with green grass, adorned with shrubbery and filled with the bloom of summer flowers.

The June roses must be out now and the woodbine – the air sweet with their delicious perfume – and they who had planted and tended them, so far away in this desolate looking spot.

"Not a tree, a shrub, a flower or a blade of grass!" she went on, sighing as she spoke.

"Never mind, we'll have lots of them next year, if I plant every one myself," said Rupert.

The last load of their household goods had just been brought up from the river, the men were carrying in the heavy boxes and setting them down upon the floor of the front room. The door stood wide open and they all walked in.

"Not a bit of a hall!" exclaimed Mildred, "not a cupboard or closet; nothing but four bare walls and two windows each side of the front door."

"Yes, the floor and ceilings," corrected Rupert.

"And another door on the other side," said Ada, running and opening it.

"Not a mantelpiece to set anything on, nor any chimney at all! How on earth are we going to keep warm in the winter time?" Mildred went on, ignoring the remarks of her younger brother and sister.

"With a stove, Miss; pipes run up through the floor into the room above; there's a flue there," said one of the men, wiping the perspiration from his forehead with the sleeve of his checked shirt.

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