

WIGGIN KATE SMITH

POLLY OLIVER'S PROBLEM

Kate Wiggin
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Polly Oliver's Problem:

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Kate Douglas Smith Wiggin

Polly Oliver's Problem



Portrait of Mrs. Wiggin

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

It is an advantage for an author to have known many places and different sorts of people, though the most vivid impressions are commonly those received in childhood and youth. Mrs. Wiggin, as she is known in literature, was Kate Douglas Smith; she was born in Philadelphia, and spent her young womanhood in California, but when a very young child she removed to Hollis in the State of Maine, and since her maturity has usually made her summer home there; her earliest recollections thus belong to the place, and she draws inspiration for her character and scene painting very largely from this New England neighborhood.

Hollis is a quiet, secluded place, a picturesque but almost deserted village—if the few houses so widely scattered can be termed a village—located among the undulating hills that lie along the lower reaches of the Saco River. Here she plans to do almost all her actual writing—the story itself is begun long before—and she resorts to the place with pent-up energy.

A quaint old house of colonial date and style, set in the midst of extensive grounds and shaded by graceful old trees,—this is "Quillcote,"—the summer home of Mrs. Wiggin. Quillcote is typical of many old New England homesteads; with an environment that is very close to the heart of nature, it combines all that is most desirable and beautiful in genuine country life. The old manor house is located on a slightly elevation

commanding a varied view of the surrounding hills and fertile valleys; to the northwest are to be seen the foot-hills of Mt. Washington, and easterly a two hours' drive will bring one to Old Orchard Beach, and the broad, blue, delicious ocean whose breezes are generously wafted inland to Quillcote.

Mrs. Wiggin is thoroughly in love with this big rambling house, from garret to cellar. A genuine historic air seems to surround the entire place, lending an added charm, and there are many impressive characteristics of the house in its dignity of architecture, which seem to speak of a past century with volumes of history in reserve. A few steps from these ample grounds, on the opposite side of the road, is a pretty wooden cottage of moderate size and very attractive, the early home of Mrs. Wiggin. These scenes have inspired much of the local coloring of her stories of New England life and character. "Pleasant River" in *Timothy's Quest* is drawn from this locality, and in her latest book, *The Village Watch Tower*, many of her settings and descriptions are very close to existing conditions.

Her own room and literary workshop is on the second floor of the house; it is distinctively a study in white, and no place could be more ideal for creative work. It has the cheeriest outlook from four windows with a southern exposure, overlooking a broad grass plat studded with trees, where birds from early dawn hold merry carnival, and squirrels find perfect and unmolested freedom. A peep into this sanctum is a most convincing proof that she is a woman who dearly loves order, as every detail plainly

indicates, and it is also noticeable that any display of literary litter is most conspicuously absent.

Interesting souvenirs and gifts of infinite variety are scattered all over the room, on the wainscoting, mantel, and in every available niche; very many are from children and all are dainty tributes. A picture of an irresistibly droll child face, of the African type and infectiously full of mirth, is one of a great company of children who look at you from every side and angle of the room.

Dainty old pieces of china, rare bits of bric-a-brac, the very broad and old-time fireplaces filled with cut boughs of the spicy fir balsam, and various antique pieces of furniture lend to the inner atmosphere of Quillcote a fine artistic and colonial effect, while not a stone's throw away, at the foot of a precipitous bank, flows—in a very irregular channel—the picturesque Saco River.

In this summer home Mrs. Wiggin has the companionship of her mother, and her sister, Miss Nora Smith, herself a writer, which renders it easy to abandon herself wholly to her creative work; this coupled with the fact that she is practically in seclusion banishes even a thought of interruption.

And now, what was the beginning and the growth of the delightful literary faculty, which has already given birth to so many pleasant fancies and happy studies, especially of young life? A glimpse is given in the following playful letter and postscript from herself and her sister to a would-be biographer.

MY DEAR BOSWELL,—I have asked my family for some

incidents of my childhood, as you bade me,—soliciting any "anecdotes," "characteristics," or "early tendencies" that may have been, as you suggest, "foreshadowings" of later things.

I have been much chagrined at the result. My younger sister states that I was a nice, well-mannered, capable child, nothing more; and that I never did anything nor said anything in any way remarkable. She affirms that, so far from spending my childhood days in composition, her principal recollection of me is that of a practical stirring little person, clad in a linsey woolsey gown, eternally dragging a red and brown sled called "The Artful Dodger." She adds that when called upon to part with this sled, or commanded to stop sliding, I showed certain characteristics that may perhaps have been "foreshadowings," but that certainly were not engaging ones.

My mother was a good deal embarrassed when questioned, and finally confessed that I never said anything worthy of mention until I was quite "grown up;" a statement that is cheerfully corroborated by all the authorities consulted. . . . Do not seek, then, to pierce my happy obscurity. . . .

Believe me, dear Bozzy,
Sincerely your Johnson,
(K. D. W.)

Postscript by Johnson's Sister,—

The above report is substantially correct, though a few touches of local color were added which we see Johnson's modesty has moved her to omit.

My sister was certainly a capable little person at a tender age, concocting delectable milk toast, browning toothsome buckwheats, and generally making a very good Parent's Assistant. I have also visions of her toiling at patchwork and oversewing sheets like a nice old-fashioned little girl in a story book; and in connection with the linsey woolsey frock and the sled before mentioned, I see a blue and white hood with a mass of shining fair hair escaping below it, and a pair of very pink cheeks.

Further to illustrate her personality, I think no one much in her company at any age could have failed to note an exceedingly lively tongue and a general air of executive ability.

If I am to be truthful, I must say that I recall few indications of budding authorship, save an engrossing diary (kept for six months only), and a devotion to reading.

Her "literary passions" were the *Arabian Nights*, *Scottish Chiefs*, *Don Quixote*, *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, *Irving's Mahomet*, *Thackeray's Snobs*, *Undine*, and the *Martyrs of Spain*. These volumes, joined to an old green Shakespeare and a Plum Pudding edition of Dickens, were the chief of her diet.

But stay! while I am talking of literary tendencies, I do remember a certain prize essay entitled "Pictures in the Clouds,"—not so called because it *took* the prize, alas! but because it competed for it.

There is also a myth in the household (doubtless invented by my mother) that my sister learned her letters from the signs in

the street, and taught herself to read when scarcely out of long clothes. This may be cited as a bit of "corroborative detail," though personally I never believed in it.

Johnson's Sister,
N. A. S.

Like many who have won success in literature, her taste and aptitude showed themselves early. It would be unfair to take *Polly Oliver's Problem* as in any sense autobiographical, as regards a close following of facts, but it may be guessed to have some inner agreement with Mrs. Wiggin's history, for she herself when a girl of eighteen wrote a story, *Half a Dozen Housekeepers*, which was published in *St. Nicholas* in the numbers for November and December, 1878. She was living at the time in California, and more to the purpose even than this bright little story was the preparation she was making for her later successes in the near and affectionate study of children whom she was teaching. She studied the kindergarten methods for a year under Emma Marwedel, and after teaching for a year in Santa Barbara College, she was called upon to organize in San Francisco the first free kindergarten west of the Rocky Mountains. She was soon joined in this work by her sister; and the enthusiasm and good judgment shown by the two inspired others, and made the famous "Silver Street Kindergarten" not only a great object lesson on the Pacific Coast, but an inspiration to similar efforts in Japan, Australia, New Zealand, British Columbia, and the Hawaiian Islands.

This school was, and is at the present time, located in a densely

inhabited and poverty-ridden quarter of the city. It was largely among the very poor that Mrs. Wiggin's full time and wealth of energy were devoted, for kindergartening was never a fad with her as some may have imagined; always philanthropic in her tendencies, she was, and is, genuinely and enthusiastically in earnest in this work. It is interesting to know that on the wall of one apartment at the Silver Street Kindergarten hangs a life-like portrait of its founder, underneath which you may read these words:—

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

In this room was born the first free Kindergarten west of the Rocky Mountains. Let me have the happiness of looking down upon many successive groups of children sitting in these same seats.

We are told that the children love that room the best; it is pictured as a bright, cheery spot, where the children used to gather with "Miss Kate" in the bygone days. By the window there is a bird-cage; the tiny occupant bearing the historical name of "Patsy." Connected with this kindergarten is a training-school, organized by Mrs. Wiggin in 1880, and conducted by Miss Nora Smith for several years afterward. The two sisters in collaboration have added much valuable matter to kindergarten literature, notably the three volumes entitled *The Republic of Childhood*, *Children's Sights*, and *The Story Hour*.

On her marriage, Mrs. Wiggin gave up teaching, but continued to give two talks a week to the Training Class. She was also a constant visitor in the many kindergartens which had sprung up under the impulse of herself and her associates. She played with the children, sang to them, told them stories, and thus was all the while not only gathering material unconsciously, but practicing the art which she was to make her calling. The dozen years thus spent were her years of training, and, during this time she wrote and printed *The Story of Patsy*, merely to raise money for the kindergarten work. Three thousand copies were sold without the aid of a publisher, and the success was repeated when, not long after, *The Birds' Christmas Carol* appeared.

In 1888 Mrs. Wiggin removed to New York, and her friends urged her to come before the public with a regular issue of the last-named story. Houghton, Mifflin and Company at once brought out an edition, and the popularity which the book enjoyed in its first limited circle was now repeated on a very large scale. The reissue of *The Story of Patsy* followed at the hands of the same publishers, and they have continued to bring out the successive volumes of her writing.

It is not necessary to give a formal list of these books. Perhaps *The Birds' Christmas Carol*, which is so full of that sweet, tender pathos and wholesome humor which on one page moves us to tears, and the next sets us shaking with laughter, has been more widely enjoyed and read than her other stories, at least in America. It has been translated into Japanese, French, German,

and Swedish, and has been put in raised type for the use of the blind. Patsy is a composite sketch taken from kindergarten life. For *Timothy's Quest*, one of the brightest and most cleverly written of character sketches, the author feels an especially tender sentiment. The story of how the book took form is old, but will bear repeating; it originated from the casual remark of a little child who said, regarding a certain house, "I think they need some babies there." Mrs. Wiggin at once jotted down in her note-book "needing babies," and from this nucleus the charming story of "Timothy" was woven into its present form. It is said that Rudyard Kipling considers Polly Oliver one of the most delightful of all girl-heroines; and Mrs. Wiggin really hopes some day to see the "Hospital Story Hour" carried out in real life.

She owns a most interesting collection of her books in several languages. The illustrations of these are very unique, as most of them are made to correspond with the life of the country in which they are published. *Timothy's Quest* is a favorite in Denmark with its Danish text and illustrations. It has also found its way into Swedish, and has appeared in the Tauchnitz edition, as has also *A Cathedral Courtship*. Her latest book, *The Village Watch Tower*, is composed of several short stories full of the very breath and air of New England. They are studies of humble life, interesting oddities and local customs, and are written in her usual bright vein.

It was not long after her removal to the Atlantic coast that Mrs. Wiggin, now a widow and separated much of the year

from her special work in California, threw herself eagerly into the kindergarten movement in New York, and it was in this interest that she was drawn into the semi-public reading of her own stories. Her interpretation of them is full of exquisite taste and feeling, but she has declared most characteristically that she would rather write a story for the love of doing it, than be paid by the public for reading it; hence her readings have always been given purely for philanthropic purposes, especially for the introduction of kindergartens, a cause which she warmly advocates, and with which she has most generously identified herself.

I may say that there is an old meeting-house in Hollis in which she has been interested since her childhood. Each succeeding summer the whole countryside within a radius of many miles gathers there to hear her bright, sympathetic readings of her manuscript stories, sometimes before even her publishers have a peep at them. These occasions are rare events that are much talked over and planned for, as I learned soon after reaching that neighborhood. During the summer of 1895 she read one of her manuscript stories—*The Ride of the Midnight Cry* (now published in *The Village Watch Tower*)—to a group of elderly ladies in the neighborhood of Quillcote, who are deeply interested in all she writes. The story takes its title from an ancient stage-coach well known throughout that region in its day, and known only by the suggestive if not euphonious name of "The Midnight Cry."

Mrs. Wiggin possesses rare musical taste and ability, and

enthusiastically loves music as an art. It is simply a recreation and delight to her to compose and adapt whatever pleases her fancy to her own flow of harmony. She is the possessor of some very rare and interesting foreign instruments; among this collection is a Hawaiian guitar, the tiniest of stringed instruments, and also one of curious Portuguese workmanship.

In the early months of 1895 she was married to George C. Riggs, of New York, but she prefers to retain in literature the name with which she first won distinction. I will speak of her New York winter home only to say that it is the gathering-place of some of the most eminent authors and artists in the country. She goes abroad yearly, and Maine levies a heavy claim on her by right of home ties and affection, for the 'Pine Tree State' is proud to claim this gifted daughter, not only for her genius but her beauty of character and true womanliness.

Mrs. Wiggin's work is characterized by a delicious flow of humor, depth of pathos, and a delicate play of fancy. Her greatest charm as a writer is simplicity of style. It enables us to come in perfect touch with her characterizations, which are so full of human nature that, as some one has said, "we feel them made of good flesh and blood like ourselves, with whom we have something, be it ever so little, that keeps us from being alien one to another." Her keen but sympathetic penetration attains some of the happiest results in the wholesome realism of her child characters; her children become real to us, creep into our hearts, and we love them, and in sympathy with this sentiment

springs up a spontaneous reawakening of interest in the child-world about us.

EMMA SHERMAN ECHOLS

*"What you can do, or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it."*

GOETHE.

CHAPTER I.

A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

"I have determined only one thing definitely," said Polly Oliver; "and that is, the boarders must go. Oh, how charming that sounds! I 've been thinking it ever since I was old enough to think, but I never cast it in such an attractive, decisive form before. 'The Boarders Must Go!' To a California girl it is every bit as inspiring as 'The Chinese Must Go.' If I were n't obliged to set the boarders' table, I 'd work the motto on a banner this very minute, and march up and down the plaza with it, followed by a crowd of small boys with toy drums."

"The Chinese never did go," said Mrs. Oliver suggestively, from the sofa.

"Oh, that's a trifle; they had a treaty or something, and besides, there are so many of them, and they have such an object in staying."

"You can't turn people out of the house on a moment's warning."

"Certainly not. Give them twenty-four hours, if necessary. We can choose among several methods of getting rid of them. I can put up a placard with

BOARDERS, HO!

printed on it in large letters, and then assemble them in the banquet-hall and make them a speech."

"You would insult them," objected Mrs. Oliver feebly, "and they are perfectly innocent."

"Insult them? Oh, mamma, how unworthy of you! I shall speak to them firmly but very gently. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' I shall begin, 'you have done your best to make palatable the class of human beings to which you belong, but you have utterly failed, and you must go! Board, if you must, ladies and gentlemen, but not here! Sap, if you must, the foundations of somebody else's private paradise, but not ours. In the words of the Poe-et, "Take thy beaks from off our door."' Then it will be over, and they will go out."

"Slink out, I should say," murmured Polly's mother.

"Very well, slink out," replied Polly cheerfully. "I should like to see them slink, after they 've been rearing their crested heads round our table for generations; but I think you credit them with a sensitiveness they do not, and in the nature of things cannot, possess. There is something in the unnatural life which hardens both the boarder and those who board her. However, I don't insist on that method. Let us try bloodless eviction,—set them quietly out in the street with their trunks; or strategy,—put one of them in bed and hang out the smallpox flag. Oh, I can get rid of them

in a week, if I once set my mind on it."

"There is no doubt of that," said Mrs. Oliver meekly.

Polly's brain continued to teem with sinister ideas.

"I shall make Mr. Talbot's bed so that the clothes will come off at the foot every night. He will remonstrate. I shall tell him that he kicks them off, and intimate that his conscience troubles him, or he would never be so restless. He will glare. I shall promise to do better, yet the clothes will come off worse and worse, and at last, perfectly disheartened, he will go. I shall tell Mr. Greenwood at the breakfast-table, what I have been longing for months to tell him, that we can hear him snore, distinctly, through the partition. He will go. I shall put cold milk in Mrs. Caldwell's coffee every morning. I shall mean well, you know, but I shall forget. She will know that I mean well, and that it is only girlish absent-mindedness, but she will not endure it very long; she will go. And so, by the exercise of a little ingenuity, they will depart one by one, remarking that Mrs. Oliver's boarding-house is not what it used to be; that Pauline is growing a little 'slack.'"

"Polly!" and Mrs. Oliver half rose from the sofa, "I will not allow you to call this a boarding-house in that tone of voice."

"A boarding-house, as I take it," argued Polly, "is a house where the detestable human vipers known as boarders are 'taken in and done for.'"

"But we have always prided ourselves on having it exactly like a family," said her mother plaintively. "You know we have not omitted a single refinement of the daintiest home-life, no matter

at what cost of labor and thought."

"Certainly, that's the point,—and there you are, a sofa-invalid, and here am I with my disposition ruined for life; such a wreck in temper that I could blow up the boarders with dynamite and sleep peacefully after it."

"Now be reasonable, little daughter. Think how kind and grateful the boarders have been (at least almost always), how appreciative of everything we have done for them."

"Of course; it is n't every day they can secure an—an—elderly Juno like you to carve meat for them, or a—well, just for the sake of completing the figure of speech—a blooming Hebe like me (I 've always wondered why it was n't *Shebe*!) to dispense their tea and coffee; to say nothing of bromo for Mr. Talbot, cocoa for Mr. Greenwood, cambric tea for Mrs. Hastings, and hot water for the Darlings. I have to keep a schedule, and refer to it three times a day. This alone shows that boarders are n't my vocation."

A bit of conversation gives the clue to character so easily that Mrs. Oliver and her daughter need little more description. You can see the pretty, fragile mother resting among her pillows, and I need only tell you that her dress is always black, her smile patient, her eyes full of peace, and her hands never idle save in this one daily resting-hour prescribed by the determined Miss Polly, who mounts guard during the appointed time like a jailer who expects his prisoner to escape if he removes his eagle eye for an instant.

The aforesaid impetuous Miss Polly has also told you something of herself in this brief interview. She is evidently a

person who feels matters rather strongly, and who is wont to state them in the strongest terms she knows. Every word she utters shows you that, young as she looks, she is the real head of the family, and that her vigorous independence of thought and speech must be the result of more care and responsibility than ordinarily fall to the lot of a girl of sixteen.

Certain of her remarks must be taken with a grain of salt. Her assertion of willingness to blow up innocent boarders in their beds would seem, for instance, to indicate a vixenish and vindictive sort of temper quite unwarranted by the circumstances; but a glance at the girl herself contradicts the thought.

Item: A firm chin. She will take her own way if she can possibly get it; but *item*; a sweet, lovable mouth framed in dimples; a mouth that breaks into smiles at the slightest provocation, no matter how dreary the outlook; a mouth that quivers at the first tender word, and so the best of all correctives to the determined little chin below.

Item: A distinctly saucy nose; an aggressive, impertinent, spirited little nose, with a few freckles on it; a nose that probably leads its possessor into trouble occasionally.

Item: Two bright eyes, a trifle overproud and willful, perhaps, but candid and full of laughter.

Item: A head of brilliant, auburn hair; lively, independent, frisky hair, each glittering thread standing out by itself and asserting its own individuality; tempestuous hair that never "stays

put;" capricious hair that escapes hairpins and comes down unexpectedly; hoydenish hair that makes the meekest hats look daring.

For the rest, a firm, round figure, no angles, everything, including elbows, in curves; blooming cheeks and smooth-skinned, taper-fingered hands tanned a very honest brown,—the hands of a person who loves beauty.

Polly Oliver's love of beautiful things was a passion, and one that had little gratification; but luckily, though good music, pictures, china, furniture, and "purple and fine linen" were all conspicuous by their absence, she could feast without money and without price on the changeful loveliness of the Santa Ynez mountains, the sapphire tints of the placid Pacific, and the gorgeous splendor of the Californian wild-flowers, so that her sense of beauty never starved.

Her hand was visible in the modest sitting-room where she now sat with her mother; for it was pretty and homelike, although its simple decorations and furnishings had been brought together little by little during a period of two years; so that the first installments were all worn out, Polly was wont to remark plaintively, before the last additions made their appearance.

The straw matting had Japanese figures on it, while a number of rugs covered the worn places, and gave it an opulent look. The table-covers, curtains, and portières were of blue jean worked in outline embroidery, and Mrs. Oliver's couch had as many pillows as that of an oriental princess; for Polly's summers were

spent camping in a cañon, and she embroidered sofa-cushions and draperies with frenzy during these weeks of out-of-door life.

Upon the cottage piano was a blue Canton ginger-jar filled with branches of feathery bamboo that spread its lace-like foliage far and wide over the ceiling and walls, quite covering the large spot where the roof had leaked. Various stalks of tropical-looking palms, distributed artistically about, concealed the gaping wounds in the walls, inflicted by the Benton children, who had once occupied this same apartment. Mexican water-jars, bearing peacock feathers, screened Mr. Benton's two favorite places for scratching matches. The lounge was the sort of lounge that looks well only between two windows, but Polly was obliged to place it across the corner where she really needed the table, because in that position it shielded from the public view the enormous black spots on the wall where Reginald Benton had flung the ink-bottle at his angel sister Pansy Belle. Then there was an umbrella-lamp bestowed by a boarder whom Mrs. Oliver had nursed through typhoid fever; a banjo; plenty of books and magazines; and an open fireplace, with a great pitcher of yellow wild-flowers standing between the old-fashioned brass andirons.

Little Miss Oliver's attitude on the question of the boarders must stand quite without justification.

"It is a part of Polly," sighed her mother, "and must be borne with Christian fortitude."

Colonel Oliver had never fully recovered from a wound received in the last battle of the civil war, and when he was laid to

rest in a quiet New England churchyard, so much of Mrs. Oliver's heart was buried with him that it was difficult to take up the burden of life with any sort of courage. At last her delicate health prompted her to take the baby daughter, born after her husband's death, and go to southern California, where she invested her small property in a house in Santa Barbara. She could not add to her income by any occupation that kept her away from the baby; so the boarders followed as a matter of course (a house being suitable neither for food nor clothing), and a constantly changing family of pleasant people helped her to make both ends meet, and to educate the little daughter as she grew from babyhood into childhood.

Now, as Polly had grown up among the boarders, most of whom petted her, no one can account for her slightly ungrateful reception of their good-will; but it is certain that the first time she was old enough to be trusted at the table, she grew very red in the face, slipped down from her high chair, and took her bowl of bread and milk on to the porch. She was followed and gently reasoned with, but her only explanation was that she did n't "yike to eat wiv so many peoples." Persuasion bore no fruit, and for a long time Miss Polly ate in solitary grandeur. Indeed, the feeling increased rather than diminished, until the child grew old enough to realize her mother's burden, when with passionate and protecting love she put her strong young shoulders under the load and lifted her share, never so very prettily or gracefully,—it is no use trying to paint a halo round Polly's head,—but with a

proud courage and a sort of desperate resolve to be as good as she could, which was not very good, she would have told you.

She would come back from the beautiful home of her friend, Bell Winship, and look about on her own surroundings, never with scorn, or sense of bitterness,—she was too sensible and sweet-natured for that,—but with an inward rebellion against the existing state of things, and a secret determination to create a better one, if God would only give her power and opportunity. But this pent-up feeling only showed itself to her mother in bursts of impulsive nonsense, at which Mrs. Oliver first laughed and then sighed.

"Oh, for a little, little breakfast-table!" Polly would say, as she flung herself on her mother's couch, and punched the pillows desperately. "Oh, for a father to say 'Steak, Polly dear?' instead of my asking, 'Steakor Chop?' over and over every morning! Oh, for a lovely, grown-up, black-haired sister, who would have hundreds of lovers, and let me stay in the room when they called! Oh, for a tiny baby brother, fat and dimpled, who would crow, and spill milk on the tablecloth, and let me sit on the floor and pick up the things he threw down! But instead of that, a new, big, strange family, different people every six months, people who don't like each other, and have to be seated at opposite ends of the table; ladies whose lips tremble with disappointment if they don't get the second joint of the chicken, and gentlemen who are sulky if any one else gets the liver. Oh, mamma, I am sixteen now, and it will soon be time for me to begin taking care of you; but I warn

you, I shall never do it by means of the boarders!"

"Are you so weak and proud, little daughter, as to be ashamed because I have taken care of you these sixteen years 'by means of the boarders,' as you say?"

"No, no, mamma! Don't think so badly of me as that. That feeling was outgrown long ago. Do I not know that it is just as fine and honorable as anything else in the world, and do I not love and honor you with all my heart because you do it in so sweet and dignified a way that everybody respects you for it? But it is n't my vocation. I would like to do something different, something wider, something lovelier, if I knew how, and were ever good enough!"

"It is easy to 'dream noble things,' dear, but hard to do them 'all day long.' My own feeling is, if one reaches the results one is struggling for, and does one's work as well as it lies in one to do it, that keeping boarders is as good service as any other bit of the world's work. One is not always permitted to choose the beautiful or glorious task. Sometimes all one can do is to make the humble action fine by doing it 'as it is done in heaven.' Remember, 'they also serve who only stand and wait.'"

"Yes, mamma," said Polly meekly; "but," stretching out her young arms hopefully and longingly, "it must be that they also serve who stand and *dare*, and I 'm going to try that first,—then I 'll wait, if God wants me to."

"What if God wants you to wait first, little daughter?"

Polly hid her face in the sofa-cushions and did not answer.

CHAPTER II.

FORECASTING THE FUTURE

Two of Mrs. Oliver's sitting-room windows looked out on the fig-trees, and the third on a cosy piazza corner framed in passion-vines, where at the present moment stood a round table holding a crystal bowl of Gold of Ophir roses, a brown leather portfolio, and a dish of apricots. Against the table leaned an old Spanish guitar with a yellow ribbon round its neck, and across the corner hung a gorgeous hammock of Persian colored threads, with two or three pillows of canary-colored China silk in one end. A bamboo lounging-chair and a Shaker rocker completed the picture; and the passer-by could generally see Miss Anita Ferguson reclining in the one, and a young (but not Wise) man from the East in the other. It was not always the same young man any more than the decorations were always of the same color.

"That's another of my troubles," said Polly to her friend Margery Noble, pulling up the window-shade one afternoon and pointing to the now empty "cosy corner." "I don't mind Miss Ferguson's sitting there, though it used always to be screened off for my doll-house, and I love it dearly; but she pays to sit there, and she ought to do it; besides, she looks prettier there than any one else. Isn't it lovely? The other day she had pink oleanders in the bowl, the cushions turned the pink side up,—you see they

are canary and rose-color,—a pink muslin dress, and the guitar trimmed with a fringe of narrow pink ribbons. She was a dream, Margery! But she does n't sit there with her young men when I am at school, nor when I am helping Ah Foy in the dining-room, nor, of course, when we are at table. She sits there from four to six in the afternoon and in the evening, the only times I have with mamma in this room. We are obliged to keep the window closed, lest we should overhear the conversation. That is tiresome enough in warm weather. You see the other windows are shaded by the fig-trees, so here we sit, in Egyptian darkness, mamma and I, during most of the pleasant afternoons. And if anything ever came of it, we would n't mind, but nothing ever does. There have been so many young men,—I could n't begin to count them, but they have worn out the seats of four chairs,—and why does n't one of them take her away? Then we could have a nice, plain young lady who would sit quietly on the front steps with the old people, and who would n't want me to carry messages for her three times a day."

At the present moment, however, Miss Anita Ferguson, clad in a black habit, with a white rose in her buttonhole, and a neat black derby with a scarf of white *crêpe de chine* wound about it, had gone on the mesa for a horseback ride, so Polly and Margery had borrowed the cosy corner for a chat.

Margery was crocheting a baby's afghan, and Polly was almost obscured by a rumpled, yellow dress which lay in her lap.

"You observe my favorite yellow gown?" she asked.

"Yes, what have you done to it?"

"Gin Sing picked blackberries in the colander. I, supposing the said colander to be a pan with the usual bottom, took it in my lap and held it for an hour while I sorted the berries. Result: a hideous stain a foot and a half in diameter, to say nothing of the circumference. Mr. Greenwood suggested oxalic acid. I applied it, and removed both the stain and the dress in the following complete manner;" and Polly put her brilliant head through an immense circular hole in the front breadth of the skirt.

"It 's hopeless, is n't it? for of course a patch won't look well," said Margery.

"Hopeless? Not a bit. You see this pretty yellow and white striped lawn? I have made a long, narrow apron of it, and ruffled it all round. I pin it to my waist thus, and the hole is covered. But it looks like an apron, and how do I contrive to throw the public off the scent? I add a yoke and sash of the striped lawn, and people see simply a combination-dress. I do the designing, and my beloved little mother there will do the sewing; forgetting her precious Polly's carelessness in making the hole, and remembering only her cleverness in covering it."

"Capital!" said Margery; "it will be prettier than ever. Oh dear! that dress was new when we had our last lovely summer in the cañon. Shall we ever go again, all together, I wonder? Just think how we are all scattered,—the Winships traveling in Europe (I 'll read you Bell's last letter by and by); Geoffrey Strong studying at Leipsic; Jack Howard at Harvard, with Elsie and her

mother watching over him in Cambridge; Philip and I on the ranch as usual, and you here. We are so divided that it does n't seem possible that we can ever have a complete reunion, does it?"

"No," said Polly, looking dreamily at the humming-birds hovering over the honeysuckle; "and if we should, everything would be different. Bless dear old Bell's heart! What a lovely summer she must be having! I wonder what she will do."

"Do?" echoed Margery.

"Yes; it always seemed to me that Bell Winship would do something in the world; that she would never go along placidly like other girls, she has so many talents."

"Yes; but so long as they have plenty of money, Dr. and Mrs. Winship would probably never encourage her in doing anything."

"It would be all the better if she could do something because she loved it, and with no thought of earning a living by it. Is n't it odd that I who most need the talents should have fewer than any one of our dear little group? Bell can write, sing, dance, or do anything else, in fact; Elsie can play like an angel; you can draw; but it seems to me I can do nothing well enough to earn money by it; and that is precisely what I must do."

"You 've never had any special instruction, Polly dear, else you could sing as well as Bell, or play as well as Elsie."

"Well, I must soon decide. Mamma says next summer, when I am seventeen, she will try to spend a year in San Francisco and let me study regularly for some profession. The question is, what?—or whether to do something without study. I read in a magazine

the other day that there are now three hundred or three thousand, I can't remember which, vocations open to women. If it were even three hundred I could certainly choose one to my liking, and there would be two hundred and ninety-nine left over for the other girls. Mrs. Weeks is trying to raise silkworms. That would be rather nice, because the worms would be silent partners in the business and do most of the work."

"But you want something without any risks, you know," said Margery sagely. "You would have to buy ground for the silkworms, and set out the mulberries, and then a swarm of horrid insects might happen along and devour the plants before the worms began spinning."

"Competition is the life of trade," said Polly. "No, that is n't what I mean—'Nothing venture, nothing have,' that's it. Then how would hens do? Ever so many women raise hens."

"Hens have diseases, and they never lay very well when you have to sell the eggs. By the way, Clarence Jones, who sings in the choir,—you know, the man with the pink cheeks and corn-silk hair,—advertises in the 'Daily Press' for a 'live partner.' Now, there 's a chance on an established hen-ranch, if he does n't demand capital or experience."

"It's a better chance for Miss Ferguson. But she does n't like Mr. Jones, because when he comes to call, his coat-pockets are always bulging with brown paper packages of a hen-food that he has just invented. The other day, when he came to see her, she was out, and he handed me his card. It had a picture and

advertisement of 'The Royal Dish-faced Berkshire Pig' on it; and I 'm sure, by her expression when she saw it, that she will never be his 'live partner.' No, I don't think I 'll have an out-of-door occupation, it's so trying to the complexion. Now, how about millinery? I could be an apprentice, and gradually rise until I imported everything direct from Paris."

"But, Polly," objected Margery, "you know you never could tie a bow, or even put a ribbon on your sailor hat."

"But I could learn. Do you suppose all the milliners were called to their work by a consciousness of genius? Perish the thought! If that were true, there wouldn't be so many hideous hats in the shop windows. However, I don't pine for millinery; it's always a struggle for me to wear a hat myself."

"You 've done beautifully the last year or two, dear, and you 've reaped the reward of virtue, for you 've scarcely a freckle left."

"Oh, that isn't hats," rejoined Polly, "that's the law of compensation. When I was younger, and did n't take the boarders so much to heart, I had freckles given to me for a cross; but the moment I grew old enough to see the boarders in their true light and note their effect on mamma, the freckles disappeared. Now, here 's an idea. I might make a complexion lotion for a living. Let me see what I 've been advised by elderly ladies to use in past years: ammonia, lemon-juice, cucumbers, morning dew, milk, pork rinds, kerosene, and a few other household remedies. Of course I 'm not sure which did the work, but why could n't I mix them all in equal parts,—if they would mix, you know,

and let those stay out that would n't,—and call it the 'Olivera Complexion Lotion'? The trade-mark might be a cucumber, a lemon, and a morning dew-drop, *rampant*, and a frightened little brown spot *couchant*. Then on the neat label pasted on the bottles above the trade-mark there might be a picture of a spotted girl,—that's Miss Oliver before using her lotion,—and a copy of my last photograph,—that's Miss Oliver radiant in beauty after using her lotion."

Margery laughed, as she generally did at Polly's nonsense.

"That sounds very attractive, but if you are anxious for an elegant and dignified occupation which shall restore your mother to her ancestral position, it certainly has its defects."

"I know everything has its defects, everything except one, and I won't believe that has a single weak point."

"Oh, Polly, you deceiver! You have a secret leaning toward some particular thing, after all!"

"Yes; though I have n't talked it over fully yet, even with mamma, lest she should think it one of my wild schemes; but, Margery, I want with all my heart to be a kindergartner like Miss Mary Denison. There would be no sting to me in earning my living, if only I could do it by working among poor, ragged, little children, as she does. I run in and stay half an hour with her whenever I can, and help the babies with their sewing or weaving, and I always study and work better myself afterward,—I don't know whether it's the children, or Miss Denison, or the place, or all three. And the other day, when I was excused from my

examinations, I stayed the whole morning in the kindergarten. When it was time for the games, and they were all on the circle, they began with a quiet play they call 'Silent Greeting,' and oh, Margery, they chose me to come in, of their own accord! When I walked into the circle to greet that smallest Walker baby my heart beat like a trip-hammer, I was so afraid I should do something wrong, and they would never ask me in again. Then we played 'The Hen and Chickens,' and afterward something about the birds in the greenwood; and one of the make-believe birds flew to me (I was a tree, you know, a whispering elm-tree), and built its nest in my branches, and then I smoothed its feathers and sang to it as the others had done, and it was like heaven! After the play was over, we modeled clay birds; and just as we were making the tables tidy, Professor Hohlweg came in and asked Miss Denison to come into the large hall to play for the marching, as the music-teacher was absent. Then what did Miss Denison do but turn to me and say, 'Miss Oliver, you get on so nicely with the children, would you mind telling them some little story for me? I shall be gone only ten or fifteen minutes.' Oh, Margery, it was awful! I was more frightened than when I was asked to come into the circle; but the children clapped their hands and cried, 'Yes, yes, tell us a story!' I could only think of 'The Hen that Hatched Ducks,' but I sat down and began, and, as I talked, I took my clay bird and molded it into a hen, so that they would look at me whether they listened or not. Of course, one of the big seven-year-old boys began to whisper and be restless, but I

handed him a large lump of clay and asked him to make a nest and some eggs for my hen, and that soon absorbed his attention. They listened so nicely,—you can hardly believe how nicely they listened! When I finished I looked at the clock. It had been nine minutes, and I could n't think what to do the other dreadful minutes till Miss Denison should come back. At last my eye fell on the blackboard, and that gave me an idea. I drew a hen's beak and then a duck's, a hen's foot and then a duck's, to show them the difference. Just then Miss Denison came in softly, and I confess I was bursting with pride and delight. There was the blackboard with the sketches, not very good ones, it is true, the clay hen and nest and eggs, and all the children sitting quietly in their wee red chairs. And Miss Denison said, 'How charming of you to carry out the idea of the morning so nicely! My dear little girl, you were made for this sort of thing, did you know it?'

"Well, I should n't think you had patience enough for any sort of teaching," said Margery candidly.

"Neither did I suppose so myself, and I have n't any patience to spare, that is, for boarders, or dishes, or beds; but I love children so dearly that they never try my patience as other things do."

"You have had the play side of the kindergarten, Polly, while Miss Denison had the care. There must be a work-a-day side to it; I'm sure Miss Denison very often looks tired to death."

"Of course!" cried Polly. "I know it 's hard work; but who cares whether a thing is hard or not, if one loves it? I don't mind work; I only mind working at something I dislike and can never

learn to like. Why, Margery, at the Sunday-school picnics you go off in the broiling sun and sit on a camp-chair and sketch, while I play Fox and Geese with the children, and each of us pities the other and thinks she must be dying with heat. It 's just the difference between us! You carry your easel and stool and paint-boxes and umbrella up the steepest hill, and never mind if your back aches; I bend over Miss Denison's children with their drawing or building, and never think of my back-ache, do you see?"

"Yes; but I always keep up my spirits by thinking that though I may be tired and discouraged, it is worth while because it is Art I am working at; and for the sake of being an artist I ought to be willing to endure anything. You would n't have that feeling to inspire and help you."

"I should like to know why I would n't," exclaimed Polly, with flashing eyes. "I should like to know why teaching may not be an art. I confess I don't know exactly what an artist is, or rather what the dictionary definition of art is; but sit down in Miss Burke's room at the college; you can't stay there half an hour without thinking that, rather than have her teach you anything, you would be an ignorant little cannibal on a desert island! She does n't know how, and there is nothing beautiful about it. But look at Miss Denison! When she comes into her kindergarten it is like the sunrise, and she makes everything blossom that she touches. It is all so simple and sweet that it seems as if anybody could do it; but when you try it you find that it is quite different. Whether she

plays or sings, or talks or works with the children, it is perfect. 'It all seems so easy when you do it,' I said to her yesterday, and she pointed to the quotation for the day in her calendar. It was a sentence from George MacDonald: 'Ease is the lovely result of forgotten toil.' Now it may be that Miss Mary Denison is only an angel; but I think that she 's an artist."

"On second thoughts, perhaps you are right in your meaning of the word, though it does n't follow that all teachers are artists."

"No; nor that all the painters are," retorted Polly. "Think of that poor Miss Thomas in your outdoor class. Last week, when you were sketching the cow in front of the old barn, I sat behind her for half an hour. Her barn grew softer and softer and her cow harder and harder, till when she finished, the barn looked as if it were molded in jelly and the cow as if it were carved in red sandstone."

"She ought not to be allowed to paint," said Margery decisively.

"Of course she ought n't! That's just what I say; and I ought not to be allowed to keep boarders, and I won't!"

"I must say you have wonderful courage, Polly. It seems so natural and easy for you to strike out for yourself in a new line that it must be you feel a sense of power, and that you will be successful."

Polly's manner changed abruptly as she glanced in at her mother's empty chair before she replied.

"Courage! Sometimes I think I have n't a morsel. I am a

gilded sham. My knees tremble whenever I think of my future 'career,' as I call it. Mamma thinks me filled with a burning desire for a wider sphere of action, and so I am, but chiefly for her sake. Courage! There 's nothing like having a blessed, tired little mother to take care of,—a mother whom you want to snatch from the jaws of a horrible fate. That 's a trifle strong, but it's dramatic! You see, Margery, a woman like my mother is not going to remain forever in her present rank in her profession,—she is too superior; she is bound to rise. Now, what would become of her if she rose? Why, first, she would keep a country hotel, and sit on the front piazza in a red rocker, and chat with the commercial travelers; and then she would become the head of a summer resort, with a billiard-room and a bowling-alley. I must be self-supporting, and 'I will never desert Mr. Micawber,' so I should make beds and dust in Hotel Number One, and in Hotel Number Two entertain the guests with my music and my 'sprightly manners,'—that's what Mr. Greenwood calls them, and the only reason I am sorry we live in a republic is that I can't have him guillotined for doing it, but must swallow my wrath because he pays twenty dollars a week and seldom dines at home. Finally, in Hotel Number Three I should probably marry the ninepin-man or the head clerk, so as to consolidate the management and save salaries, and there would end the annals of the Olivers! No, Margery!" cried Polly, waving the scissors in the air, "everybody is down on the beach, and I can make the welkin ring if I like, so hear me: The boarders must go! How, when, and where they shall

go are three problems I have n't yet solved; and what I shall find to take the place of them when they do go is a fourth problem, and the knottiest one of all!"

CHAPTER III

THE DOCTOR GIVES POLLY A PRESCRIPTION

As the summer wore away, Mrs. Oliver daily grew more and more languid, until at length she was forced to ask a widowed neighbor, Mrs. Chadwick, to come and take the housekeeping cares until she should feel stronger. But beef-tea and drives, salt-water bathing and tonics, seemed to do no good, and at length there came a day when she had not sufficient strength to sit up.

The sight of her mother actually in bed in the daytime gave Polly a sensation as of a cold hand clutching at her heart, and she ran for Dr. Edgerton in an agony of fear. But good "Dr. George" (as he was always called, because he began practice when his father, the old doctor, was still living) came home with her, cheered her by his hopeful view of the case, and asked her to call at his office that afternoon for some remedies.

After dinner was over, Polly kissed her sleeping mother, laid a rose on her pillow for good-by, and stole out of the room.

Her heart was heavy as she walked into the office where the doctor sat alone at his desk.

"Good-day, my dear!" he said cordially, as he looked up, for she was one of his prime favorites. "Bless my soul, how you do grow, child! Why you are almost a woman!"

"I am quite a woman," said Polly, with a choking sensation in her throat; "and you have something to say to me, Dr. George, or you would n't have asked me to leave mamma and come here this stifling day; you would have sent the medicine by your office-boy."

Dr. George laid down his pen in mild, amazement. "You are a woman, in every sense of the word, my dear! Bless my soul, how you do hit it occasionally, you sprig of a girl! Now, sit by that window, and we 'll talk. What I wanted to say to you is this, Polly. Your mother must have an entire change. Six months ago I tried to send her to a rest-cure, but she refused to go anywhere without you, saying that you were her best tonic."

Two tears ran down Polly's cheeks.

"Tell me that again, please," she said softly, looking out of the window.

"She said—if you will have the very words, and all of them—that you were sun and stimulant, fresh air, medicine, and nourishment, and that she could not exist without those indispensables, even in a rest-cure."

Polly's head went down on the windowsill in a sudden passion of tears.

"Hoity-toity! that 's a queer way of receiving a compliment, young woman!"

She tried to smile through her April shower.

"It makes me so happy, yet so unhappy, Dr. George. Mamma has been working her strength away so many years, and I've been

too young to realize it, and too young to prevent it, and now that I am grown up I am afraid it is too late."

"Not too late, at all," said Dr. George cheerily; "only we must begin at once and attend to the matter thoroughly. Your mother has been in this southern climate too long, for one thing; she needs a change of air and scene. San Francisco will do, though it 's not what I should choose. She must be taken entirely away from her care, and from everything that will remind her of it; and she must live quietly, where she will not have to make a continual effort to smile and talk to people three times a day. Being agreeable, polite, and good-tempered for fifteen years, without a single lapse, will send anybody into a decline. You 'll never go that way, my Polly! Now, pardon me, but how much ready money have you laid away?"

"Three hundred and twelve dollars."

"Whew!"

"It is a good deal," said Polly, with modest pride; "and it would have been more yet if we had not just painted the house."

"A good deal!" my poor lambkin! I hoped it was \$1012, at least; but, however, you have the house, and that is as good as money. The house must be rented, at once, furniture, boarders, and all, as it stands. It ought to bring \$85 or \$95 a month, in these times, and you can manage on that, with the \$312 as a reserve."

"What if the tenant should give up the house as soon as we are fairly settled in San Francisco?" asked Polly, with an absolutely new gleam of caution and business in her eye.

"Brava! Why do I attempt to advise such a capable little person? Well, in the first place, there are such things as leases; and in the second place, if your tenant should move out, the agent must find you another in short order, and you will live, meanwhile, on the reserve fund. But, joking aside, there is very little risk. It is going to be a great winter for Santa Barbara, and your house is attractive, convenient, and excellently located. If we can get your affairs into such shape that your mother will not be anxious, I hope, and think, that the entire change and rest, together with the bracing air, will work wonders. I shall give you a letter to a physician, a friend of mine, and fortunately I shall come up once a month during the winter to see an old patient who insists on retaining me just from force of habit."

"And in another year, Dr. George, I shall be ready to take care of mamma myself; and then—

"She shall sit on a cushion, and sew a fine seam,
And feast upon strawberries, sugar, and cream."

"Assuredly, my Polly, assuredly." The doctor was pacing up and down the office now, hands in pockets, eyes on floor. "The world is your oyster; open it, my dear,—open it. By the way," with a sharp turn, "with what do you propose to open it?"

"I don't know yet, but not with boarders, Dr. George."

"Tut, tut, child; must n't despise small things!"

"Such as Mr. Greenwood," said Polly irrepressibly, "weight

two hundred and ninety pounds; and Mrs. Darling, height six feet one inch; no, I 'll try not to despise small things, thank you!"

"Well, if there 's a vocation, it will 'call,' you know, Polly. I 'd rather like you for an assistant, to drive my horse and amuse my convalescents. Bless my soul! you 'd make a superb nurse, except"—

"Except what, sir?"

"You 're not in equilibrium yet, my child; you are either up or down, generally up. You bounce, so to speak. Now, a nurse must n't bounce; she must be poised, as it were, or suspended, betwixt and between, like Mahomet's coffin. But thank Heaven for your high spirits, all the same! They will tide you over many a hard place, and the years will bring the 'inevitable yoke' soon enough, Polly," and here Dr. George passed behind the girl's chair and put his two kind hands on her shoulders. "Polly, can you be really a woman? Can you put the little-girl days bravely behind you?"

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