

Mathews Joanna Hooe

Lily Norris' Enemy



Joanna Mathews
Lily Norris' Enemy

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23163883

Lily Norris' Enemy:

ISBN <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/44991>

Содержание

I	4
II	16
III	29
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	40

Joanna Mathews

Lily Norris' Enemy

I

THE "QUAKER LADY."

"If Lily Norris isn't just the most provoking child that ever lived!" said Maggie Bradford, indignantly.

"Yes, I b'lieve she just is," assented Bessie.

"Why," said Mrs. Rush, who was that day making a visit to Maggie's and Bessie's mamma, "how is this? Lily the most provoking child that ever lived! I thought Lily was one of your best friends, and that you were so fond of her."

"Yes, Aunt May, so we are," said Maggie. "We're very fond of Lily indeed; she's one of our dearly beloveds, and we like to have her with us; but for all that, she's very trying to our patience."

"Yes," sighed Bessie, "I think she's tryinger than any child we know; and yet she's hardly ever naughty, – really naughty, I mean."

"How does she try you?" asked Mrs. Rush, though she believed she could herself have answered as to the cause of complaint.

"She puts off so," said Bessie. "Aunt May, I think she's the

greatest put-offer we ever saw; and sometimes it makes things so hard to bear. We try not to be provoked 'cause we love her so; but sometimes we can't help being a little. I b'lieve it troubles people as much as if she was real naughty in some way."

"Yes, procrastination is a very troublesome fault," said Mrs. Rush.

"Not a *fault*, is it, Aunt May?" asked Maggie. "I thought it was only a habit of Lily's."

"And Lily is a pretty good child," said Belle Powers. "She is mischievous, and makes us laugh in school sometimes; but I b'lieve that is about all the naughty things she does, and I think that is a pretty good account for one child."

"Putting off is not being naughty, is it, Aunt May?" pleaded Bessie, unwilling, even amid her vexation, to have one of her favorite playmates thus blamed.

"Well, darling," answered Mrs. Rush, "I fear that procrastination and a want of punctuality must be considered as rather serious faults. I see you are vexed and troubled now; why, I cannot tell, more than that Lily has caused it in some way; and I think that any habit which needlessly tries and irritates other people can be called nothing less than a fault, and a bad one, too. What is the matter now?"

"Why," said Bessie, "you see we are all going to the party at Miss Ashton's this afternoon, and Lily was to be here at four o'clock to go with us; and when grandmamma was going home just now, she said she would take us all around in her carriage;

but Lily was not here, and we did not like to go without her, and grandmamma could not wait. But grandmamma said the carriage should come back for us, and it has; and mamma says it is twenty minutes past four, and there Lily has not come yet, and we don't know what to do, and we can't help being provoked."

"It is just good enough for her to go, and leave her to come after by herself," said Belle, with a pout.

"But you see that would not be so very polite," said Bessie; "and we have to be *that* even if we are pretty provoked."

"I should think people might be punctual when they're going to a party, anyway," said Maggie, impatiently. "The idea of being so wasteful of a party! I never heard of such foolishness! I should think that people who couldn't be punctual at parties, and go just as soon as they are invited, didn't deserve to go at all."

"I should think her mother would send her in time," said Mabel Walton, Belle's cousin.

"Well, I suppose she would," said Maggie; "but you know she has gone away just now, and there's no one at home to make Lily think about the time. Mrs. Norris doesn't have such a bad habit herself, and she don't like Lily to have it either. She is always talking to her about it."

"What are you going to do, Maggie?" asked Bessie, as she saw her sister take up a pencil and a bit of paper, and carry them to Mrs. Rush.

"I am going to ask Aunt May to do a sum for me," said Maggie. "Aunt May, will you please do the sum of four times twenty

minutes, and tell me how much it is?"

"I do not want the paper, Maggie," said Mrs. Rush, smiling as she saw what Maggie would be at. "Four times twenty minutes are eighty minutes, or one hour and twenty minutes."

"Why do you want to know that?" asked Belle.

"I'm going to tell Lily a story when she comes, and let her take lesson by it for herself," said Maggie, rather severely; the severity being intended, however, for the delinquent Lily, and not for Belle.

"Children," said Mrs. Bradford, coming into the room just at this moment, "I do not want you to keep the carriage waiting. Since Lily is not here you must go without her. It is long after the time fixed."

"Oh yes, mamma, we know that; I should think we might," said Maggie, with a sigh of despair.

"There's the door-bell now," said Bessie, who was more patient under her afflictions than the other children. "Maybe that is Lily."

So it proved; and a moment later Lily was shown into the room, followed by her nurse. A chorus of exclamations and reproaches greeted the little new-comer; but she took them all with her usual careless good-nature, though she did look half ashamed, too. Maggie, alone, mindful of the arrow she held in reserve, had nothing to say beyond a word or two of welcome.

"Yes, just what I was saying to Miss Lily, that the young ladies would be disappointed to be kept waiting, ma'am," said the nurse,

speaking to Mrs. Bradford; "and I came in to beg you'd not think it was my fault. I was at Miss Lily a half-hour before I could coax her to come and be dressed; and I knew she'd be late and vex them."

"Oh, never mind. You can go now," said Lily, carelessly. "We'll be time enough."

"Come, let us go now," said Maggie, with an expression which showed that she by no means agreed with Lily that it was "time enough;" and good-by being said to mamma and Mrs. Rush, she led the way from the room, followed by the rest of the young party, who were soon seated snugly in the carriage.

"Lily," said Maggie, as soon as they had fairly started, "I have a story to tell you about punctuality."

"Pooh! I don't want to hear about your old punctuality," said Lily. "Everybody just bothers me 'most to death about being punctual. Tom has been making a fuss about it just now."

"But it is a story, – one of Maggie's stories," said Belle, who thought it quite incredible that any one should decline an opportunity of hearing one of those interesting and valuable narratives.

"Let's hear it then," said Lily.

"It is not a story of my own making up," said Maggie, with the solemnity which befitted a teacher of moral lessons; "but it is very interesting, and may do some good, if people choose to let it. But as there are 'none so deaf as those who won't hear,' so I suppose there are none so hard to teach as those who won't

be taught."

"But what is the story?" asked Belle.

"The story is this," answered Maggie. "Once thirteen ladies went to a meeting, or ought to go to a meeting. Well, twelve of them came at the right time to the house of a very wise old Quaker lady, where the meeting was; but the thirteenth lady did not come for a quarter of an hour after she ought to. So the other ladies were as tired as they could be, 'cause they couldn't begin to do what they had to do without her – but I would have if I'd been there – and some of them yawned – which wasn't polite for them to do, but they could hardly help it – and some went to sleep, and some had headaches, and one who was sitting in a breeze from the window, where she didn't like to sit, took cold, and had a sore throat and a toothache, and she had to go and have her tooth out; which was all the fault of the unpunctual lady, and I should think she'd be very much ashamed of herself."

"So should I," said Mabel, as Maggie paused to take breath.

"What's the rest of the story?" asked Bessie, impatient of delay in such a thrilling tale.

"Well, when she came in," continued Maggie, giving point to her story by the look she fixed upon Lily, – "when she came in, after doing such a lot of mischief, she didn't seem to think it was any great harm after all; but she just said, 'Ladies, I am sorry I kept you waiting, but it is only a quarter of an hour.' Then the wise old Quaker lady stood up and looked very severe at her, and she said, 'Friend, thee' – thee is the way Quakers say you –

'Friend, thee has wasted three hours of time that did not belong to thee. Here are twelve of us, and a quarter of an hour for each makes three hours, and you – thee, I mean – had no right to do it, and thee ought to be ashamed of yourself.' And the lady was ashamed of herself, 'cause it made her feel horridly to be talked to that way before so many people; and she never did so again, which was a great blessing to every one who knew her, because she made herself a great inconvenience."

And here Maggie closed her story, which she had one day lately found in some book or paper, and had brought it up on this occasion for Lily's benefit, adding to it sundry embellishments of her own, which, as she thought, made it more telling and serviceable.

"But," said Lily, who took the moral to herself as it was intended she should do, "but we're not a meeting, and you're not a Quaker lady, Maggie. It's only a party."

"*Only* a party!" echoed Maggie, in an aggrieved tone, which told that this was adding insult to injury; "she says, '*Only* a party'! Now, Lily, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I just want to tell you something."

And Maggie held up the bit of paper on which she had taken the pains to note down the sum Mrs. Rush had done for her, lest she should forget the number of minutes.

"You kept us waiting more than twenty minutes, Lily. Miss Ashton invited us at four, and you did not come till twenty minutes after; and there are four of us besides yourself, so there's

one whole hour, and forty minutes, – which is 'most three-quarters of an hour, – one whole hour and forty minutes of party wasted, and only twenty minutes of it was your own."

"And I'm sure it's a great deal harder to have a party wasted than it is a meeting," said Belle.

"I never thought about it," said Lily, by no means offended, but considerably astonished at the way in which her short-comings were brought home to her. "I never thought of that, and I'm real sorry. I'll never do it again."

"Did the lady with the toothache ever tell the late lady she made her have it?" asked Bessie.

"Well, I'm not very sure," said Maggie, not willing to confess to total ignorance on this subject; "but I think she did."

"Then she wasn't very kind," said Bessie. "It would have been kinder if she hadn't spoken about it. She had lesson enough. I think that old Quaker lady was pretty cross, and I'm glad she's not my grandmamma."

"Maggie," said Lily, as the carriage drew up at Miss Ashton's door, "couldn't you make me a proverb picture about putting off? I would like one ever so much."

For Lily took great delight in these same "proverb pictures," and was very glad to receive one even when it held up her own failings to reproof.

"Is there any proverb about putting off?" asked Belle.

"Yes, to be sure," said Lily. "There's 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'"

"Um – I don't know," said Maggie, doubtful if this adage were quite applicable to the case in question. "I don't think that will do; but if we can't find one, we'll make one, and draw you a proverb picture about it. I'll ask mamma if she knows of any that will do."

"And make it for me very soon, will you?" said Lily, jumping from the carriage with the assistance of Mrs. Ashton's maid, who had come to take them out. "I'll try to have it do me some good."

This was encouraging, and Maggie's imagination was at once put to work; but not to much purpose for this evening, since as yet she knew of no proverb that would answer for the object she had in view.

Our young party was greeted with a chorus of welcome, not only from Mrs. and Miss Ashton, but also from the other little girls who had all arrived before them; for children are generally punctual to such engagements, whatever their elders may be. Indeed, they usually prefer to be before, rather than after the time.

"How late you came!"

"What kept you?"

"It's more than half-past four!"

"We've been here ever so long."

"We've been waiting for you" – and such like exclamations met them on all sides.

"It's my fault," said Lily. "I was not ready in time, and kept them waiting."

"O Lily!" said Carrie Ransom. "You always do keep people

waiting."

"Well, I can't help it," said Lily.

"Yes, you can," said Gracie Howard; "at least, you could if you would do things in time; but you never will."

"I'll grow out of it when I'm bigger," said Lily. "People 'most always cure up their faults before they're grown up."

"Not if they don't take pains with them when they're little," said Bessie, solemnly. "Lily, if you keep on per-cas-ter-nating now, maybe you won't be able to help it when you're grown up, and then people will be provoked with you."

"Were you much provoked with me to-day?" asked Lily.

"Um-m, pretty," said Bessie; "but we're quite over it now."

"Well, I don't care much then," was Lily's thought; but she said aloud, "I don't think it can do much harm when we're little. You see we're all here now. But I will begin pretty soon to correct myself of it."

"She had better begin to-day," thought Bessie; but no more was said on the subject, and they were all soon engaged in a merry game of play.

The party passed off pleasantly, so pleasantly that Maggie found more and more cause for regret that she and her own particular friends had been unjustly defrauded, as she considered it, of so large a portion of it; but she was too forgiving and good-natured to reproach Lily any farther, especially as Bessie privately confided to her that she did not like "that severe old Quaker lady one bit, and am very glad that she is not one of my

friends."

Maggie thought that perhaps she had been rather severe herself, and took pains to be especially agreeable to Lily for the rest of the day.

But perhaps this ready forgetfulness of their vexation was not the best thing for heedless, light-hearted Lily. At first she had felt a little self-reproachful, but when she saw the other children forget their momentary displeasure, she thought her own troublesome want of punctuality did not matter much after all; they were all glad and happy now, and some of these days she would try to break herself of this bad habit.

Ah! you see, that was Lily's way; it was always "one of these days," "some other time," "by and by;" and here lay the root of the trouble which proved so vexatious to those about her, and very often to herself.

"Mamma," said Maggie, as soon as they reached home, "do you know of any proverb that would be a good correction of the habit of putting off, and never being ready in time?"

Mrs. Bradford laughed.

"Yes, I think I do, Maggie. What do you want to do with it?"

"To make a proverb picture for Lily, mamma; she wants us to. She likes our proverb pictures very much, and never is provoked when we give her one. And I think I shall write her a piece of poetry about it too. What is the proverb, mamma?"

"I will tell you in the morning, dear."

"Why not to-night, mamma?"

"Because I want you to go to sleep now, Maggie. If I tell you a proverb to-night, you will lie awake, turning it over in your mind, and making verses and pictures for it; and I do not wish you to do that. Wait till morning, dear."

Maggie submitted, like the docile and obedient little girl she was, though she was disappointed; for as mamma knew, she would have liked to spend part of her proper sleeping time in composing verses, and inventing pictures for Lily's benefit.

"Shall you make the poetry a divine song, or a moral poem?" asked Bessie, who took the greatest possible interest and pride in Maggie's poetical attempts.

"I think I'll mix the two," said Maggie, after a little deliberation. "It might be better, because Lily don't care much to read things that are *very* pious; but she needs them a little. Yes, I'll do that."

And now, according to mamma's orders, they ceased talking; and Maggie, obeying not only the letter, but the spirit of her mother's command, tried to put from her all thought of the lesson she was to teach Lily, and both she and Bessie were soon fast asleep.

II

A MONKEY, A PUPPY, AND A BEGGAR

"Lily!"

"Yes, mamma!"

"Can I trust you to do something for me?"

"Yes, indeed, mamma! you know I like to help you."

"I want it done immediately, dear."

"Oh, yes, mamma, I'm ready. I'll do it right away."

Mrs. Norris sat at the library table, writing. As she said the last words she hastily folded the note she had just finished, and slipped it into its envelope; then, as she put the address upon it, she said, —

"I have an appointment to keep, Lily; and there is Mrs. Bradford now, I believe. I am going with her, and I would like you to lay these papers smoothly in my writing-case, those others in this box, — you know where they belong, — and to put my silver inkstand carefully in the secretary. There, I have closed it, so you cannot spill the ink. Will you be a helpful little girl, and see to that for me, my daughter?"

"Yes, indeed, mamma," said Lily again. "I'm glad you let me do it for you. I'll be very careful with the inkstand."

"And at once, remember, dear," said Mrs. Norris, rising from

her chair. "I do not wish the inkstand left here on the table, or the paper to lie scattered about. It will be a great help to mamma if you do it nicely. Ah! good afternoon, Mrs. Bradford," as that lady was shown into the room. "I am all ready, and will not detain you. I had just received a note which needed an immediate answer, before I left home; but it is finished, and I shall trust Lily to put by my writing materials for me."

Lily looked up at Mrs. Bradford, rather proud of being trusted by her mother; and the lady smiled as she stooped to kiss her.

"Lily likes to help mamma as well as Maggie and Bessie do, I see," she said.

"Yes: and she can often be of great assistance when she is prompt and punctual," said Mrs. Norris, drawing on her gloves.

"Are Maggie and Bessie well, Mrs. Bradford?" asked Lily.

"Yes, dear; and they wished me to ask you to come and see them very soon. I do not know when they want you to come, for they have some plans to arrange with their Aunt Annie, but they will let you know. They are drawing some pictures for you, I believe, and want to explain it to you."

"Oh, yes," said Lily; "they promised me a proverb picture, and their proverb pictures are so interesting. I should think any one might be glad to have them."

"They certainly seem to give great satisfaction, both to themselves, and to those whom they are intended to benefit," said Mrs. Bradford, laughing. "Good-by, Lily. The children will see you soon. I gave them leave to ask you when they pleased; and

you must come early, whenever that may be."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Lily. "I'll come just as soon as mamma will let me."

She followed her mother and Mrs. Bradford to the front door, where the former turned, and said a little uneasily, —

"Lily, attend to the inkstand at once, my darling."

"I am going to, mamma," answered the little girl, meaning what she said at the moment, though she afterwards came so far short of it, as you shall see.

As the door closed after the two ladies, Lily caught the notes of a hand-organ in the street; and running back to the library, she went to the window to look out for the strolling musician who carried it.

She had not forgotten her mother's orders, or the help she had promised to be to her; and as she passed by the table on her way to the window, the scattered papers and the silver inkstand caught her eye, and reminded her of her promise.

But she did not pause.

"Just a moment; I'll put them away in one moment," she said to herself. "I'll just look and see if that organ man is coming here; 'cause I have some pennies in my pocket, and I'll give him some. Oh, yes! there he is, and he has a monkey. I like monkey organ men the best, 'cause the monkeys are so funny. What a funny fellow! Why, he's 'most the cunningest monkey I ever saw;" and Lily had quite forgotten her promise.

She was in great glee over the monkey, who certainly was a

droll, though a very ugly little beast, as monkeys generally are; and she amused herself with him for some time, as he climbed the balcony railings, stoop, and blinds, hopped up and down the broad stone steps, and every now and then came close to the window where she stood, and mouthed and jabbered away at her. Amused though she was, she was glad that the glass was between her and the grinning creature; and she always took the opportunity of his little excursions to open the window and quickly thrust out the pennies, for which he immediately sprang down, and taking them up in his paw hurried with them to his master. Lily treated him also to a cake, which he greedily nibbled; and then, seeing that the poor creature lapped his tongue upon a damp spot on the stone pavement, where a little water had been spilled, as though he were thirsty, she called a servant to bring a cup of water, and gave him a drink.

Finding that she thus provided entertainment for man and beast, and that he was reaping quite a harvest, the organ-grinder stayed for some time; and all the while, the inkstand remained unheeded on the table. Not quite forgotten, either; for every now and then the recollection of it would come to her; but Lily kept saying to herself, "In one minute; I'm going in just one minute."

But the one minute multiplied itself into twenty before the man moved off with his organ and his monkey, and Lily felt at leisure to attend to her mother's wishes.

But it seemed after all that the time had not yet come.

"Miss Lily," said a servant man, putting his head in at the

library door, "is Master Tom at home?"

"No, I b'lieve not; I think he didn't come from school yet," answered Lily, with her hand on the inkstand.

"I'd like to know what time he'll be in," said the man, lingering, "for my brother is below with the puppies Master Tom wanted to see. There's a gentleman wants to buy both; but seeing Master Tom had spoken about one if it suited, he thought it was only fair to bring them here first, and let him make up his mind. But the gentleman must know this afternoon. Wouldn't you like to see 'em, Miss Lily? They're such pretty little dogs."

"Yes, indeed I would," answered the child; and she followed the man to the basement hall, where his brother waited with the puppies, – not without another thought of her still unperformed duty; but again she contented herself with the excuse, "I shan't be half a minute, and the inkstand is shut up. It can't spill the ink."

Alas, alas! it was long before the recollection of it again crossed Lily's mind.

If she had found the monkey bewitching, what did she find the little dogs, – playful, pretty creatures, which seemed delighted with a playmate frolicsome and mischievous as themselves?

Then her brother Tom came in; and, hearing that the dogs were there for his approval, came down to look at them and decide which he would have.

Of course Lily must stay and help him to make his choice; and now that vexatious little feeling that there was something wrong, some duty unfulfilled, had altogether passed away. Lily was quite

at her ease by this time.

The matter was at last settled; the dog chosen, the man paid and sent away, leaving the selected puppy in a very low and melancholy state of mind at the parting. He whined and cried piteously, first scratching and barking at the door where his former owner and his puppy brother had passed out; and at last, after refusing to be comforted by all the petting that was lavished upon him, retiring into private life behind the kitchen coal-scuttle, and resolutely declining to be coaxed out.

"Never mind," said Tom, "he'll be all right by and by, Lily. Wait till he's hungry, and he'll come out and be glad enough to make friends. Now I am going to buy a house for him. I saw some pretty little dog-houses down at Bruner's this morning, and I'll go look at them, and see if they'll answer."

"Oh, Tom! could I go with you?" asked Lily.

"Yes, if you like," said Tom; "I'll be glad to have you; only make haste to be dressed, Lily. Will you go to Nora *at once*?"

"Yes, yes," said Lily, clapping her hands; and away she flew to beg her nurse to make her ready as soon as possible.

Nothing presenting itself just then to take up her attention, or which looked more attractive than the promised walk with Tom, she made no delay, but obeyed his direction to go and be dressed *at once*.

How many boys do you think would have consented as readily, cheerfully, and kindly as Tom Norris did to such a request from a little sister? But that was Tom's way. When he granted a favor

or bestowed a kindness, it was done in a manner which made it seem as if it were a pleasure to himself. And if he were obliged to refuse Lily any thing that she asked, she never grumbled nor fretted, because she knew well that Tom would grant it if he could, or if it were best for her to have it. Tom never said he couldn't be "bothered with girls," or "catch me doing it," or ran off with some other contemptuous or unkind speech, such as boys too often use toward their little sisters. Tom was a true man, and a true gentleman, kindly and courteous in his manner and words toward all women and children, but especially to his mother and little sister: free, fearless, and generous; daring to do and to speak the right; yet so bright, so gay, so manly that not one among his companions ever thought of calling him a "Miss Nancy," a "muff," or other like names.

No, indeed! and was not Tom Norris the king of Mr. Peters' school, the judge in all disputes, the one to settle all difficulties, to "help a fellow out of a scrape"?

Nora would as soon have thought of questioning her own care and wisdom for Lily as she would that of "Master Tom."

"Miss Lily's all right, ma'am, she's with Master Tom," would be answer enough when there was any inquiry about the little girl; and it was quite satisfactory to mother or nurse to know that she was with her brother. No fear that Lily would come to harm or fall into mischief with Tom to guard and guide her.

So she made no objection when Lily came running to her and begged to be dressed to go out with Tom; and she soon had her

ready.

As the little girl went downstairs to join her brother, he stood in the hall below, putting on his overcoat.

"Lily," he said, when he saw her, "did you tell Nora to sew on these two buttons?"

"Oh, Tom!" cried Lily, clasping her hands together, and looking ashamed and troubled, as she well might.

"You told me, Lily," said Tom, "when I wanted to ask mamma to give the order, that you would be sure to attend to it, and that you would go right away and tell Nora. Now you must wait till I go up and have it done. You put it off, I suppose, and so forgot it."

Yes, that was just it; more procrastination, and so forgetfulness.

Tom did not speak angrily, but his voice was grave, and Lily saw that he was vexed.

"I'm so sorry," she said to herself, as she opened the front door, and stood waiting for her brother upon the stoop. "I did mean to remember and tell Nora right away, and I only just stopped to listen to mamma's musical box for a moment, and so I went and forgot. It is too mean I do forget so quick."

What was the reason Lily forgot so quickly and so often?

Because she allowed other things to take her time and her attention from the duty she should first attend to.

"Please, dear little lady, to help a poor woman."

Lily started, and looked around. She had not seen the woman coming, and she now was half way up the steps, almost at her

elbow.

"Please, little lady," the woman began again; "I've a little girl at home no bigger nor yourself, and five more of 'em, and not a mouthful to eat have they had these twenty-four hours. A little money to buy bread for 'em, and bless your beautiful face."

"Oh, dear! I'm so sorry," said Lily; not moved by the woman's flattery, but by the vision of the six children no larger than herself, who were starving. "I think mamma would give you lots of things if she were home, but she is not; or papa either. Couldn't you come again?"

"And I might go home to find them dying or dead," whined the old woman, coming nearer, and trying to peer within the half open door. "You couldn't give a poor mother a loaf of bread, or a few pennies, little lady? I'm not a beggar at all; I'd be ashamed to beg, but I thought if I could get a lift this once, I'd work it out some day. I never begged in my life; but there's the children starving, and me with a broken arm."

Lily, who was a charitable and generous child, felt her sympathy strongly roused, and remembering the store in her money-box upstairs, she said, —

"Oh, yes! I have money of my own, and I'll give you some. But it's way upstairs, so you'll have to wait a minute till I bring it. And I'll see if I can have a loaf of bread for you too."

The woman was about to follow her into the house; but Lily, recollecting certain charges she had heard given to the servants, and also a sad and mortifying thing which had once happened to

Maggie Bradford, would not suffer her to enter. But, not wishing to hurt the woman's feelings, she said, —

"I think you'd better wait outside. Mamma don't like to have strange people come in when there's no one about; and the servants are all downstairs 'cept Nora, and she's up. I'll be back in a minute;" and, with an encouraging nod to the woman, away she flew on her errand of kindness.

Poor Lily! in the midst of her intended prudence, she had been most imprudent; for she left the door partially open, not wishing to seem too inhospitable, and never dreaming the woman would disregard her order, and take advantage of her absence.

She ran into the nursery and found her money-box, taking from it twenty-five cents. Tom was speaking to Nora, who was still busy with his coat, and Lily did not interrupt him. But presently he turned to her.

"Going to do some shopping too, Lily?" he asked, as he saw what she was doing.

"No," said Lily, "this is for a poor woman downstairs. Don't you want to give her something too, Tom? And do you think mamma would let me give her a loaf of bread? She's not a common beggar: she says she's not; and she has six children, all starving, just about as big as me."

"Miss Lily," said Nora, starting up, "now what have you done with her? Where is she?"

"Oh, you needn't be afraid, Nora," answered Lily. "I was very careful, and told her to stay outside, on the stoop, 'cause I

remembered how Maggie let a man come in the house, and how he stole her papa's new overcoat while she went upstairs. I took very good care of her, and told her she couldn't come in, 'cause every one was upstairs or downstairs. Shall you give her some money? and can I have the bread, Tom?"

"Wait till I come down and see the woman," said Tom, who knew that Lily's sympathies were too apt to run away with her judgment.

Lily waited with what patience she might for a moment or two; but it seemed to her that Nora's fingers moved very slowly.

"Tom," she said presently, "couldn't you come and see the woman while Nora finishes the coat? You know those children must be growing starved and starved every minute."

Tom laughed, but consented; and, taking her hand, was about to lead her from the room, when Nora stopped her.

"Miss Lily," she said, "you took away my large scissors this morning, and I need them to cut out some work. Will you bring them to me before you go down again?"

"You find them, please, Nora," answered Lily. "They're somewhere in my baby-house."

"Your mamma forbid it," said Nora. "She told me when you took a thing that way and kept it, I was to make you bring it back, and not go and hunt it up for you."

"Just this once," pleaded Lily.

Nora shook her head, though she would herself willingly have humored the child.

"Your mamma was here, you know, when you took the scissors," she said, "and she told me if you did not bring them back as you promised, I was to send you for them. She said you are getting too much in the way of thinking that I am to hunt up all the things you don't put back in their places, and to see to every thing you put off and leave undone. You must bring me the scissors before you go, dear."

"While you find them I'll go down and talk to your woman with the half-dozen children all just of your size," said Tom, who evidently had his doubts on the subject of Lily's *protégée*; "and if she seems all right you shall give her some food; but we won't give her money till we know more about her. That is mamma's rule, you know. Nora, please bring me the coat when it is done."

And Tom went away, leaving Lily to follow when she had found the scissors.

It took her some three or four minutes to do this; for she had left them among a heap of bits of silk and ribbon with which she had been playing that morning, and neglecting to take the scissors back to Nora when she had finished with them, as she had promised to do, she had forgotten them altogether, and could not find them at once.

The coat was ready when she went back to Nora, and the nurse followed her downstairs with it.

"Your bird had flown when I came down, Lil," said Tom, when he saw her.

"Who, the woman? Had she gone away?" asked Lily.

"Yes, she had gone; no sign of her. But didn't you say you had shut her out?"

"I told her to stay out, 'cause there was no one about in this part of the house to take care of her," answered Lily, with an air of confident wisdom and prudence.

"And did you not shut the door?" asked Tom.

"Not so very tight," said Lily. "I left it a little scrap open, for fear her feelings would be hurt, and maybe she might think I wasn't coming back to her."

"Oh, wise Lily!" said Tom, laughing, as he put on his overcoat; "you left the door standing open, and told her there was no one in this part of the house! Next time, little woman, close the door."

"Did she come in?" asked Lily. "I told her she must not."

"No, I believe not," answered Tom; "and as it is there is no harm done, for I've looked round, and there's nothing touched. The hats and coats are all right, and every thing else seems to be safe. You've had better luck or a better beggar than poor Maggie; but next time, puss, don't you leave any one the chance to walk in when the coast is clear."

"You're sure there's nothing taken, and that she's not in the house, Master Tom?" said prudent Nora.

"Yes, I believe it's all safe," said Tom; "but you'd better call Robert up, and tell him to make a thorough search. Come, Lily, we'll be off now."

III

THE SILVER INKSTAND

"Lily," said Tom, as they went down the street together, "don't you see what a lot of trouble your habit of putting off makes for yourself and every one about you?"

"Yes, I should think I did," answered Lily, with energy. "I'm dreadfully sorry about your coat, Tom; I really am, dreadfully."

Apparently her remorse did not affect her spirits much, for, as she spoke, she went skipping along, swinging her brother's hand back and forth, and smiling and nodding with glee.

"I was not speaking for myself so much, or caring about my coat just then," said Tom. "That does not matter now; but this is such a bad habit of yours, Lily, and it is growing worse and worse."

"Oh, but I'm going to begin to cure myself very soon," said Lily. "Maggie and Bessie are going to make me a proverb picture, and Belle is going to help them; and as soon as I have it I will improve myself by it. Tom, why don't the boys in your school make proverb pictures for each other? I should think they would. Proverb pictures are so very interesting, and so improving too, Tom."

"I dare say, when one is willing to be improved," said Tom; "but I do not think our boys would care much about them. They

are rather too large for that."

"Dear me! I should think the older people are the better they'd like them," said Lily; "'cause they can make them better when they've learned to draw. I can't make them very fit to be seen yet; but when I'm grown up and can draw nicely, I'll make a whole lot; and when I go to make visits, or my acquaintances come to see me, and I see they have faults or bad habits, I'll just give them a proverb picture to help them to correct themselves."

"If you don't change your mind in the mean time," said Tom, merrily. "I don't think you'll be overrun with visitors if you entertain them in that fashion, Lily. But," becoming grave again, "I want you to listen to me, and seriously, too. You see what trouble this putting off and never being ready in time makes for yourself; and you can't help seeing also how it provokes other people, and good reason, too. For you know, Lily, you have no *right* to make such inconvenience for other people."

"Ho!" said Lily. "I see, Tom, you're like Maggie's old Quaker lady, cross old thing! I don't mean you're cross, not one bit; only you think, like her, that somebody has no right to take up other people's time by making them wait."

"What Quaker lady?" asked Tom.

Lily repeated Maggie's story, almost word for word, as she had told it. Tom was very much amused, but he did not let Lily see that; for it was hard to make her talk seriously on any subject, and he did not wish to have her see him laugh just now.

"Yes," he said, with all the gravity he could muster, "I am

much of the opinion of that old lady. I do not think that any one has the right to waste the time of other people, by keeping them waiting, when it can be avoided; or by failing to do that which they are expected, or perhaps have promised, to do. I know a lady – "

"What's her name?" questioned Lily.

"Never mind her name. I know a lady who is never ready at the time for which she makes an engagement, and who in this way makes herself a nuisance to all who are obliged to have any business with her; who always comes into church when the service is half over; who is late at every meal, either in her own house, or other people's – "

"Yes," said Lily; "and don't you remember, Tom, how mad papa was that time she came to dinner at our house when Mr. Francis was there; and he and papa had a very important engagement, and she kept the dinner waiting so long that they could not get to their engagement in time; and wasn't papa mad?"

"Not mad exactly," said Tom, "but he was very much vexed, and with reason; but I see you know whom I mean, Lily."

"Oh, yes, very well indeed; you mean Miss Lee. She's just too provoking for any thing; but then I never mean to be like her. Pretty soon I'm going to begin to correct myself of putting off, and not being ready in time."

"But why don't you begin now, right off?" said Tom.

"Would you?" asked Lily, doubtfully. "I thought I'd wait till I had the proverb picture."

"Yes, begin to-day, this very minute," said Tom.

"There's nothing for me to put off just now," said Lily.

"I mean make up your mind; take a resolution you will begin at once," said Tom. "You see, Lily, it is the same in every thing. You always think, 'it is time enough,' or 'another time will do'; and so the thing is left undone, or you make some trouble. You are a real generous, obliging little girl, but you could be far more helpful if you had not this bad habit. Mamma often asks you to do some little thing for her; but if she trusts to you, ten to one –"

Lily stopped short where she stood, with a face of the blankest dismay, and interrupted her brother in a distressed voice.

"Oh, Tom!" she said. "I did do *such* a thing! Mamma did trust me, and I've done such a thing, and never did it."

"What is it? What have you done, and what haven't you done?" asked Tom, rather at a loss to understand her, as you may imagine he would be.

"Mamma was just going out with Mrs. Bradford, when a note came she had to answer before she went," said Lily; "and she was in a great hurry, and so she told me to be a help to her, and put away all her writing things very carefully. And I said I would, and she trusted me, and told me to do it right away, and – and – oh, Tom!"

"And you did not do it," said Tom, gravely. "You did not do it at once, but put it off, and so left it undone."

"Yes," answered Lily, her eyes filling, and her voice shaking. "I never did it, and I should think I *was* provoking. I should think

the whole world might be provoked with me. Tom, I ought to go back; but you oughtn't to be kept for me any longer. You can take me to our house, and just leave me; and I'll go right in, and put away mamma's things, and stay at home for a punishment to myself, and to make me see how troublesome putting off is."

"Mamma's things are all put away, Lily," said Tom.

"Who did it? You?" asked Lily, recovering her spirits a little.

"Yes. I did not know you had promised to do it, or I should have spoken to you about it; but when I was looking round to see if that beggar woman had been at any mischief, I saw mamma's writing things lying about over the table, and her desk open; so I just put every thing away, and locked the desk. It is all right now," added Tom, believing it was as he said. "But how came you to forget mamma's orders, Lily?"

"It was all the fault of that old monkey," said Lily, as her brother led her on. "Horrid thing! I wish he'd stayed away, and that I hadn't looked at him, or given him cakes or pennies or any thing. His frock was awfully dirty too," she added, forgetting all the amusement the monkey had afforded her, and now only disposed to regard him as the cause of her neglect of her mother's wishes.

"I should not blame the poor monkey if I were you," said Tom. "How was it? You went to look at the monkey in place of attending to mamma's orders, and so forgot all about them?"

"Yes," said Lily. "I meant to look at him for only one minute, and then to put away the things just as mamma told me, but he

was so funny I forgot; and then the puppies came; and that's the way I never remembered them at all."

"Well, you see," said Tom, "you should have put away mamma's things at once, and then gone to look at the monkey. And it was your own fault, not the monkey's, Lily. He did not ask you to come and look at him; it was your own choice."

"Yes," answered Lily, rather meekly for her.

"Now can't you see it is better for you to begin at once?" said Tom. "Don't let Procrastination hinder you here, Lil. The old fellow don't want himself put down, and will trump up all manner of excuses to keep his hold on you. But you root him up just as quick as you can. Begin this very day; and the next time you have any thing to do, don't listen to one of his fine speeches."

"Yes, so I will, I b'lieve," said Lily. "I won't wait for the proverb picture, but just begin to-day. I wish there would come something I want to put off, and I wouldn't put it off, but just do it very quick indeed."

Poor Lily! She was to learn more that day of the evils of procrastination in her own case.

Tom thought he had said enough to her now; and they went on together to the store where he wished to buy his dog-house. Here they chose one, and here also they purchased a collar for the puppy, Tom allowing Lily to pick out a red one, although he would himself have preferred blue. Was he not a kind brother?

As they were on their way home, they met Maggie and Bessie Bradford, with their Aunt Annie.

Lily rushed forward, letting go her hold on her brother's hand; and Maggie ran to meet her, almost as eager as she was.

"Is my proverb picture nearly ready?" asked Lily.

"Yes, quite," answered Maggie; "and we want you to come to our house, so we can explain it to you. We've just been to your house to ask you, but you were out, or else you could have come to take tea with us, if your mamma had said so. I wonder if she wouldn't just as lief you should come now. Can't Lily come with us, Tom?"

Tom had now come up to the little girls, and so had Miss Annie Stanton and Bessie; and, after taking off his hat to the young lady, he answered, —

"I think not to-night, Maggie. At least I do not like to take it upon myself to give her leave; for she had a bad sore throat yesterday, and I do not think mamma would like to have her out in the evening air."

Lily looked as if she were about to cry, and Maggie and Bessie also looked disappointed.

"Never mind," said Bessie, cheering up in one moment; "it will be just as good if you come to-morrow and spend the day. Mamma said we could ask you to do that if you could not come this afternoon; and we will have you a longer time, Lily."

"That's putting off, though," said Lily, with a pout, "and I've just made up my mind not to do it."

Tom laughed, and so did Miss Annie, both somewhat amused at Lily's haste to practise the new virtue as soon as it fell in

with her own wishes; but Maggie and Bessie thought this a very sensible view of the matter.

"But one may put off a thing when it comes in the way of a duty, or of another thing which should be attended to first," said Annie Stanton. "When mamma's wishes and your pleasure come in the way of one another, which should you put first?"

"Why, what mamma wishes, Miss Annie. I should think I would do what mamma wants first. Anyway I *ought to would*" added Lily, thinking of her shortcomings of that very day.

"Then you see you may put off coming to Maggie and Bessie till to-morrow, since your mamma does not wish you to be out at night," said Miss Stanton; and with this agreement, the little friends parted.

"I see," said Lily, demurely, but with a gleam of mischief in her eye, – "I see people don't think it is as much harm to put off things you want to do as it is to put off what you don't want to do."

"Well," said Tom, smiling, "you see that is where it is, Lil. We are so apt to think it will do to put off what we do not care to do very much, – any little duty or task; but if it is some pleasure, we are generally ready enough to do it at once."

"Maggie thinks I put off pleasures too," said Lily. "She was real provoked with me 'cause I kept them waiting to go to the party the other day."

"Do you like other people to keep you waiting, Lily?"

"No, indeed, I don't," said Lily.

"Then ought you not to be careful how you do it to others?"

"Yes, I know, Tom, and I don't *mean* to do it; but somehow I do. But now you see if I do not improve myself a good deal of this habit," said Lily, confidently, yet carelessly; for it was plainly to be seen that she thought this vexatious fault of but little consequence.

Lily had meant to confess to her mother how neglectful she had been of her wishes; but when she and Tom reached home, they found with Mrs. Norris a lady who had been invited to dinner. So Lily thought she would postpone her confession until by and by, and not draw upon herself her mother's grave and reproachful look in the presence of company.

I do not know that she was to blame for this. Few little girls but would have done the same, I think; and Lily had no idea that any mischief or loss had come from her procrastination.

Dinner was over, Tom gone upstairs to prepare his lessons for to-morrow, and Lily, in her favorite evening seat, — that is, perched upon the arm of her father's chair while he read his paper, — was happily playing with some paper dolls, while mamma and her friend sat opposite, talking, when a person came with a message requiring an immediate answer.

Mrs. Norris went to her secretary and wrote the note, using for the purpose an ordinary inkstand which belonged there; and then said approvingly to Lily, —

"My pet, how nicely you put away mamma's writing things; all the papers in their proper places and order. Pretty well done for such a little girl."

"Mamma," said Lily, wishing that she need not speak before Miss Hamilton, but too honest to take credit which was not her just due, — "Mamma, I did not put them away; it was Tom. I — I — forgot, mamma. I waited to look at a monkey before I put them away, and then the puppy came, and Tom took me out; and I forgot all about your things, and how I had promised, and never remembered till we were out in the street; and then Tom told me he had put them away, but he didn't know you had told me to do it."

It was all out now; and Lily, as she glanced at Miss Hamilton, felt as if she could not be thankful enough to that lady for seeming so absorbed in the photograph album she was turning over.

Mrs. Norris uttered no word of reproach; but, as she looked within the well-ordered secretary, she said, —

"Where did Tom put the silver inkstand? I do not see it."

"I don't know, mamma," answered Lily. "Is it not there? Tom said he came in here and saw your things lying on the table, and he thought you must have forgotten them, so he put them all away. Shall I go and ask him what he did with the inkstand?"

"No," said her mother, "I do not wish to disturb him at his lessons. I will look further."

But further search proved vain, though Mrs. Norris looked, not only through each nook and partition of the secretary, but also all over the room. Still she was not at all disturbed at the non-appearance of the inkstand.

"Send up and ask Tom, my dear," said Mr. Norris.

"Oh, it is not necessary," said his wife. "He may have put it in some unusual place. If he took care of it, it is quite safe. He will be down presently, and I do not care to interrupt him."

"See what it is to have a good character, Lily," said her father, passing his arm about the little figure on the arm of his chair, and smiling into the rosy mischievous face before him. "How long before mamma will be able to put such trust in you, do you think?"

"Oh, very soon, papa; you'll see," said Lily, confident in the strength of her newly formed resolution.

It was not long before Tom made good his mother's words by appearing, his lessons all ready for the next day, for it happened that he had not had much to do that evening; and Mrs. Norris immediately asked him, —

"What did you do with my silver inkstand, my boy?"

"I did not have it, mamma," was the answer.

"But you put it away this afternoon, did you not?"

"No," answered Tom, wonderingly, but positively.

"Why, yes, Tom," said Lily, "you told me you had put away all mamma's things that she left on the table."

"But there was no inkstand there," said Tom. "I remember noticing that, because I said to myself, 'Mamma has taken time to put by her ink;' and I supposed you had feared it would be spilled, mamma. There was no inkstand upon the table, I am sure."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.