

Mathews Joanna Hooe

Bessie and Her Friends



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Joanna H. (Joanna Hooe) Mathews

Bessie and Her Friends

I

JENNIE'S HOME

Morher," said little Jennie Richards, "isn't it 'most time for farher to be home?"

"Almost time, Jennie," answered Mrs. Richards, looking up from the face of the baby upon her lap to the clock upon the mantel-piece. A very pale, tiny face it was; so tiny that Sergeant Richards used to say he had to look twice to be sure there was any face there; and that of the mother which bent above it was almost as pale, – sick, anxious, and worn; but it brightened, as she answered Jennie. "It is five minutes before six; he will be here very soon now."

Away ran Jennie to the corner, where stood a cane-seated rocking-chair, and after a good deal of pushing and pulling, succeeded in drawing it up in front of the stove; then to a closet, from which she brought a pair of carpet slippers, which were placed before the chair.

"I wish I was big enough to reach farher's coat and put it over his chair, like you used to, morher."

"That will come by and by, Jennie."

"But long before I am so big, you'll be quite well, morher."

"I hope so, dear, if God pleases. It's a long, long while to sit here helpless, able to do nothing but tend poor baby, and see my dear little daughter at the work her mother ought to do."

"Oh, morher, just as if I did not like to work! I don't like 'e reason why I have to do it, but it's right nice to work for you and farher. And I wouldn't like to be lazy, so I hope I will always have plenty to do."

"Dear child," said Mrs. Richards, with a sigh, "you're like enough to see that wish granted."

"At's good," said Jennie, cheerfully, taking her mother's words in quite a different spirit from that in which they were spoken; "it's so nice to be busy."

And indeed it would appear that this small maiden – small even for her six years – did think so; for as she talked she was trotting about the room, busying herself with arranging half a dozen trifles, which her quick eye spied out, and which, according to her way of thinking, were not just in proper order. First, the hearth, on which no spot or speck was to be seen, must be brushed up anew; next, the corner of the table-cloth was to be twitched into place, and a knife laid more exactly into straight line; then a ball, belonging to one of the younger children, was picked up and put in the toy-basket, with the reminder to little Tommy that father was coming, and the room must be kept in good order. One would have thought it was already as neat as hands could make it. Plain enough it was, certainly, but thoroughly comfortable. The carpet, though somewhat worn, and pieced in more than one place, was well swept and tidy, and the stove and the kettle which sang merrily upon its top were polished till they shone. The table in the centre of the room was ready set for tea, and, though it held no silver or cut glass, the most dainty lady or gentleman in the land need not have hesitated to take a meal from its white cloth and spotless delf ware. The only pieces of furniture which looked as if they had ever cost much were a large mahogany table with carved feet, which stood between the windows, and a bookcase of the same wood at the side of the fireplace; but both of these were old-fashioned, and although they might be worth much to their owners, would have brought little if offered for sale. Not a speck of dust, however, was to be seen upon them or the rest of the furniture, which was of stained pine; while at the side of Mrs. Richards' arm-chair stood the baby's wicker cradle, covered with a gay patchwork spread. And that tiny quilt was the pride and delight of Jennie's heart; for had

she not put it all together with her own small fingers? after which, good Mrs. Granby, who lived upstairs, had quilted and lined it for her.

On the other side of the mother, sat, in a low chair, a boy about nine years old. His hands were folded helplessly together, and his pale face wore a sad, patient, waiting look, as if something were coming upon him which he knew he must bear without a struggle. One looking closer into his eyes might notice a dull film overspreading them, for Willie Richards was nearly blind, would be quite blind in a few weeks, the doctors said.

Between Jennie and the baby came three little boys, sturdy, healthy children, always clamoring for bread and butter, and frequent calls for bread and butter were becoming a serious matter in the policeman's household; for provisions were high, and it was not as easy to feed eight mouths as it had been to feed four. This year, too, there had been severe sickness in the family, bringing great expenses with it, and how the wants of the coming winter were to be provided for, Sergeant Richards could hardly tell.

With the early spring had come scarlet fever. The younger children had gone through it lightly, Jennie escaping altogether; but poor Willie had been nigh to death, and the terrible disease had left its mark in the blindness which was creeping upon him. Then, watching her boy at night, Mrs. Richards had taken cold which had settled in her limbs, and all through the summer months she had lain helpless, unable even to lift her hand. And what a faithful little nurse Jennie had been to her! Then two months ago the baby sister was born, whose coming Jennie had hailed with such delight, but whose short life had so far been all pain and suffering.

The mother was better now, able to sit all day in the cushioned chair, where the strong arms of her husband would place her in the morning. But there she remained a prisoner, unable to move a step or even to stand, though she could so far use her hands as to tend her baby. But Mrs. Richards had not felt quite discouraged until to-day. Now a fresh trouble had come, and she felt as if it were the last drop in the cup already too full.

The children knew nothing of this, however, and if mother's face was sadder than usual, they thought it was the old racking pain in her bones. The three little boys were at the window, their chubby faces pressed against the glass, peering out into the darkness for the first glimpse of father. His duty had kept him from home all day, and wife and children were more than usually impatient for his coming.

It was a small, two-story, wooden house, standing back from the street, with a courtyard in front, in the corner of which grew an old butternut tree. It bore but few nuts in these latter days, to be sure, but it gave a fine shade in the summer, and the young occupants of the house took great pride and comfort in it. The branches were almost bare now, however, and the wind, which now and then came sighing up the street, would strip off some of the leaves which still remained, and scatter them over the porch or fling them against the window.

"You couldn't do wi'out me very well; could you, morher?" said Jennie, as she straightened the corner of the rug, "even if good Mrs. Granby does come and do all the washing and hard work."

"Indeed, I could not," answered Mrs. Richards. "My Jennie has been hands and feet to her mother for the last six months."

"And now she's eyes to Willie," said the blind boy.

"And eyes to Willie," repeated his mother, tenderly laying her hand on his head.

"And tongue to Tommy," added Willie, with a smile.

Jennie laughed merrily; but as she was about to answer, the click of the gate was heard, and with shouts of "He's coming!" from Charlie, "Poppy, poppy!" from the younger boy, and a confused jargon from Tommy, which no one but Jennie could understand, the whole three tumbled down from the window and rushed to the door. A moment later it opened, and a tall, straight figure in a policeman's uniform appeared.

"Halloa, you chaps!" said a cheery voice. "Suppose two or three dozen of you get out of the way and let me shut the door; it won't do to keep a draught on mother."

He contrived to close the door, but as for getting farther with three pair of fat arms clasping his legs, that was quite impossible. The father laughed, threw his cap upon a chair, and catching up first one and then another of his captors, tossed them by turns in the air, gave each a hearty kiss, and set him on his feet again.

"There, gentlemen, now let me get to mother, if you please. Well, Mary, how has it gone to-day? Poorly, eh?" as he saw that in spite of the smile which welcomed him, her cheek was paler and her eye sadder than they had been when he left her in the morning.

"The pain is no worse, dear, – rather better maybe," she answered; but her lip quivered as she spoke.

"Then that monstrous baby of yours has been worrying you. I am just going to sell her to the first man who will give sixpence for her."

"No, no, no!" rose from a chorus of young voices, with, "She didn't worry scarcely any to-day, farher," from Jennie, as she lifted her face for his kiss.

Willie's turn came next, as rising from his chair with his hand outstretched, he made a step forward and reached his father's side. One eye was quite dark, but through the thick mist which was over the other, he could faintly distinguish the tall, square figure, though, except for the voice and the sounds of welcome, he could not have told if it were his father or a stranger standing there.

Then began the grand amusement of the evening. Mr. Richards pulled down the covering of the cradle, turned over the pillow, looked under the table, peeped into the sugar-bowl, pepper-pot, and stove, and at last pretended to be much astonished to discover the baby upon its mother's lap, after which the hunt was carried on in search of a place big enough to kiss. This performance was gone through with every night, but never lost its relish, being always considered a capital joke, and was received with shouts of laughter and great clapping of hands.

"Father," said Jennie, when Mr. Richards was seated in the rocking-chair, with a boy on each knee, "we have a great surprise for your supper to-night."

If Jennie did not resemble her father in size, she certainly did in feature. In both there were the same clear, honest gray eyes, the same crisp, short curls, the same ruddy cheeks and full red lips, the same look of kindly good-nature, with something of a spirit of fun and mischief sparkling through it.

"You have; have you?" he answered. "Well, I suppose you know it takes a deal to surprise a member of police. We see too many queer folks and queer doings to be easy surprised. If you were to tell me you were going to turn a bad, lazy girl, I might be surprised, but I don't know as much short of that would do it."

Jennie shook her head with a very knowing look at her mother, and just then the door opened again and a head was put within.

"Oh, you're home, be you, Sergeant Richards?" said the owner of the head. "All right; your supper will be ready in a jiffy. Come along, Jennie."

With this the head disappeared, and Jennie, obeying orders, followed. In five minutes they both returned, the head this time bringing the rest of the person with it, carrying a tray. Jennie held in her hands a covered dish, which she set upon the edge of the table with an air of great triumph. She was not tall enough to put it in the proper spot before her father's place; but she would by no means suffer him to help her, although he offered to do so. No, it must wait till Mrs. Granby had emptied the tray, and could take it from her hands.

What the policeman's family would have done at this time without Mrs. Granby would be hard to tell. Although a neighbor, she had been almost a stranger to them till the time of Willie's illness, when she had come in to assist in the nursing. From that day she had been a kind and faithful friend. She was a seamstress, and went out to work by the day; but night and morning she came in to see Mrs. Richards and do what she could to help her, until one evening she had asked Mr. Richards if

she might have a talk with him. The policeman said, "Certainly," though he was rather surprised, for Mrs. Granby generally talked without waiting for permission.

"I guess things ain't going just right with you; be they, Sergeant Richards?" she began.

Richards shook his head sadly. "I suppose if it wasn't right, it wouldn't be, Mrs. Granby; but it's hard to think it with Mary lying there, bound hand and foot, my boy growing blind, and the poor little baby more dead than alive; with me away the best part of the day, and nobody but that green Irish girl to do a hand's turn for them all, unless yourself or some other kind body looks in. Jennie's a wonderful smart child, to be sure; but there's another sore cross, to see her working her young life out, when she ought to be thinking of nothing but her play. And then, how we're going to make both ends meet this year, I don't know."

"So I thought," answered Mrs. Granby; "and it's the same with me about the ends meetin'. Now just supposin' we helped one another along a bit. You see they've raised my rent on me, and I can't afford it no way; besides that, my eyes is givin' out, – won't stand sewin' all day like they used to; so I'm not goin' out by the day no more, but just goin' to take in a bit of work and do it as I can. That Biddy of yours ain't no good, – a dirty thing that's as like as not to sweep with the wrong end of the broom, and to carry the baby with its head down and heels up. She just worries your wife's life out; and every time she goes lumberin' over the floor, Mary is ready to screech with the jar. Now you just send her packin', give me the little room up-stairs rent free for this winter, and the use of your fire for my bits of meals, and I'll do all she does and more too, – washin', scrubbin', cookin', and nussin'. You won't have no wages to pay, and though they mayn't come to much, every little tells; and Mary and the babies will be a sight more comfortable, and you, too, maybe, if I oughtn't to say it. You're just right, too, about Jennie. It goes to my heart to see her begin to put her hand to everything; she's more willin' than she's able. Pity everybody wasn't the same; it would make another sort of a world, I guess. What do you say to it? Will it do?"

Do! The policeman thought so indeed, and was only too thankful. But it was a one-sided kind of a bargain, he said, all on their side, and Mrs. Granby must take some pay for her services.

This she refused; she was not going to give them all her time, only part of it, and the room rent free was pay enough. But at last she consented to take her meals with them, though somehow she contrived to add more to the rather slender table than she took from it. Now she had a chicken or tender steak for Mrs. Richards, "it was so cheap she couldn't help buying it, and she had a fancy for a bit herself," but it was always a very small bit that satisfied her; now a few cakes for the children, now a pound of extra nice tea or coffee. "Sergeant Richards needed something good and hot when he came in from duty, and he never took nothin' stronger, so he ought to have it."

From the time that she came to them, Mrs. Richards began to improve; there was no longer any need to worry over her disorderly house, neglected children, or the loss of comfort to her husband. The baby ceased its endless wailing, and with Jennie to keep things trim after they had once been put in order, the whole household put on its old air of cosy neatness. Truly she had proved "a friend in need," this cheerful, bustling, kind-hearted little woman.

"Now you may uncover the dish, farher," said Jennie, as having brought a little stand and placed it at her mother's side, she led Willie to the table.

Mr. Richards did so. "Broiled ham and eggs!" he exclaimed. "Why, the breath is 'most taken out of me! I know where the ham came from well enough, for I bought it myself, but I'd like to know who has been buying fresh eggs at eight cents apiece."

"No, Sergeant Richards, you needn't look at me that way," said Mrs. Granby, holding up the tea-pot in one hand; "I ain't been doin' no such expenses. I brought them home, to be sure; but they was a present, not to me neither, but to your wife here. Here's another of 'em for her, boiled to a turn too. Fried eggs ain't good for sick folks. 'Twasn't my doin' that you got some with your ham neither; I wanted to keep 'em for her eatin', but she said you was so fond of 'em, and she coaxed me into it. She does set such a heap by you, she thinks nothin' ain't too good for you. Not that I blame her. I

often says there ain't a better husband and father to be found than Sergeant Richards, look the city through; and you do deserve the best, that's a fact, if it was gold and diamonds; not that you wouldn't have a better use for them than to eat 'em; diamonds fetches a heap, they tell me, but never havin' had none of my own, I can't rightly tell of my own showin'. Come, eat while it's hot. I'll see to your wife. No, thank you, none for me. I couldn't eat a mouthful if you was to pay me for it. Don't give the little ones none, 'taint good for 'em goin' to bed. Jennie might have a bit, she's been stirrin' round so all day, and Willie, too, dear boy." Mrs. Granby's voice always took a tenderer tone when she spoke of Willie. "Well, I'll just tell you how I come by them eggs. This afternoon I took home some work to an old lady, a new customer Mrs. Howard recommended me to. When I was let in, there she stood in the hall, talkin' to a woman what had been sellin' fresh eggs to her. There they was, two or three dozen of 'em, piled up, lookin' so fresh and white and nice, enough to make your mouth water when you looked at 'em and thought what a deal of nourishment was in 'em. So when the lady was through with the woman, says I, 'If you'll excuse the liberty, ma'am, in your house and your presence, I'd just like to take a couple of eggs from this woman before she goes.'

"'Certainly,' says the lady, but the woman says, 'I can't spare no more, there's only a dozen left, and I've promised them to another lady;' and off she goes. Well, me and the old lady settles about the work, and she tells me she'll have more in a month's time, and then she says, 'You was disappointed about the eggs?'

"'Yes, ma'am,' says I.

"'So, thinkin', I s'pose, 'twasn't for a poor seamstress like me to be so extravagant, she says, 'Eggs are high this season, – eight cents apiece.'

"'I didn't want to be settin' myself up, but I wasn't goin' to have her take no false notions about me, so I says, 'Yes, ma'am, but when a body's sick, and ain't no appetite to eat only what one forces one's self to, I don't think it no sin to spend a bit for a nice nourishin' mouthful.'

"'And she says, very gentle, 'Are you sick?'

"'Not I, ma'am,' says I, 'but a friend of mine. Bad with the rheumatics these six months, and she's a mite of an ailin' baby, and don't fancy nothin' to eat unless it's somethin' delicate and fancy, so I just took a notion I'd get a couple of them eggs for her.'

"'And she says, 'I see you have a basket there, just let me give you half a dozen of these for your friend.' I never thought of such a thing, and I was took all aback, and I said would she please take it out of the work. I couldn't think of takin' it in the way of charity, and she says, 'If I were ill, and you had any little dainty you thought I might like, would you think it charity to offer it to me?'

"'No, ma'am,' says I; 'but then there's a difference.'

"'I see none in that way,' she said; 'we are all God's children. To one he gives more than to another, but he means that we shall help each other as we find opportunity, and I wish you to take this little gift for your friend as readily as you would offer it to me if I were in like need.' Now wasn't that pretty? A real lady, every inch of her. And with her own hands she laid half a dozen eggs in the basket. She was askin' some more questions about my sick friend, when somebody pulls the door-bell as furious, and when it was opened, there was a servant-gal lookin' as scared as anything, and she tells the old lady her little granddaughter was lost, and couldn't be found nowhere, and was she here, and did they know anything about her? Well, they didn't know nothin', and the old lady said she'd be round right away, and she herself looked scared ready to drop, and I see she hadn't no more thought for me nor my belongin's, nor couldn't be expected to, so I just takes my leave. And when I come home and shows Mary the eggs, nothin' would do but you must have a couple cooked with your ham for supper."

All the time Mrs. Granby had been telling her story, she was pouring out tea, waiting on Mrs. Richards, spreading bread and butter for the children, and now having talked herself out of breath, she paused. At the last part of the story, the police-sergeant laid down his knife and fork, and looked up at her.

"What is your lady's name?" he asked.

"Mrs. Stanton," answered Mrs. Granby.

"And who is the child that was lost?"

"I don't know, only a granddaughter; I don't know if it's the same name. Why, have you seen the child?"

"I can't tell if it's the same," answered Richards, "but I've got a story for you to-night. I have been thinking all the afternoon I had a treat for Jennie."

"Is it a duty story, farher?" asked his little daughter.

"Yes, it is a duty story."

"Oh, that's good!"

Whenever her father had a story to tell of anything which had happened to him during his daily duties, Jennie always called it a "duty story," and she was very eager for such anecdotes.

II

THE POLICE-SERGEANT'S STORY

Tea was over, the dishes neatly washed and put away by Mrs. Granby and Jennie, the three little boys snugly tucked in their cribs up-stairs, the baby lying quiet in its cradle, and Mrs. Granby seated at the corner of the table with her sewing. Jennie sat upon her father's knee, and Willie in his usual seat at his mother's side, and the policeman began his story.

"It might have been about two o'clock when, as I was at my desk, making out a report, Policeman Neal came in with a lost child in his arms, as pretty a little thing as ever I saw, for all she did look as if she had been having rather a hard time of it, – a gentleman's child and a mother's darling, used to be well cared for, as was easy to be seen by her nice white frock with blue ribbons, and her dainty shoes and stockings. But I think her mother's heart would have ached if she had seen her then. She had lost her hat, and the wind had tossed up her curls, her cheeks were pale and streaked with tears, and her big brown eyes had a pitiful look in them that would have softened a tiger, let alone a man that had half a dozen little ones of his own at home; while every now and then the great heavy sighs came struggling up, as if she had almost cried her heart out.

"When Neal brought her in, she looked round as if she expected to see some one, and so it seems she did; for he put her on thinking she'd find some of her own folks waiting for her. And when she saw there was no one there, such a disappointed look as came over her face, and her lip shook, and she clasped both little hands over her throat, as if to keep back the sobs from breaking out again. A many lost children I've seen, but never one who touched me like her.

"Well, Neal told where he'd found her, and a good way she'd wandered from her home, as we found afterwards, and how she said her name was Brightfort, which was as near as he'd come to it; for she had a crooked little tongue, though a sweet one. I looked in the directory, but no name like that could I find. Then Neal was going to put her down and go back to his beat, but she clung fast to him and began to cry again. You see, she'd kind of made friends with him, and she didn't fancy being left with strange faces again. So I just took her from him, and coaxed her up a bit, and told her I'd show her the telegraph sending off a message how she was there. I put her on the desk, close to me, while I set the wires to work; and as sure as you live, what did I hear that minute but her saying a bit of a prayer. She didn't mean any one to hear but Him she was speaking to, but I caught every word; for you see my head was bent over near to hers. And I'll never forget it, not if I live to be a hundred, no, nor the way it made me feel. 'Dear Father in heaven,' she said, 'please let my own home father come and find me very soon, 'cause I'm so tired, and I want my own mamma; and don't let those naughty boys hurt my Flossy, but let papa find him too.' I hadn't felt so chirk as I might all day, and it just went to the soft place in my heart; and it gave me a lesson, too, that I sha'n't forget in a hurry."

Mr. Richards stopped and cleared his throat, and his wife took up the corner of her shawl and wiped her eyes.

"Bless her!" said Mrs. Granby, winking hers very hard.

"Ay, bless her, I say, too," continued the policeman. "It was as pretty a bit of faith and trust as ever I saw; and after it she seemed some comforted, and sat quiet, watching the working of the wires, as if she was quite sure the One she'd looked to would bring her help. Well, I carried her round and showed her all there was to see, which wasn't much, and then I set her to talking, to see if I could find out where she belonged. I saw she'd been confused and worried before Neal brought her in, and I thought like enough she'd forgotten. So, after some coaxing and letting her tell her story in her own way, – how her dog ran away and she ran after him, and so got lost, she suddenly remembered the name and number of the street where she lived. With that she broke down again, and began to cry and sob out, she did want to go home so much.

"I was just sending out to see if she was right, when up dashes a carriage to the door, and out gets a gentleman on crutches. The moment the little one set eyes on him, she screams out as joyful as you please, 'Oh, it's my soldier, it's my soldier!'"

"Talk of an April day! You never saw anything like the way the sunlight broke through the clouds on her face. The moment he was inside the door, she fairly flung herself out of my arms on to his neck; and it was just the prettiest thing in the world to see her joy and love, and how she kissed and hugged him. As for him, he dropped one crutch, and held fast to her, as if for dear life. I knew who he was well enough, for I had seen him before, and found out about him, being in the way of duty. He's an English colonel that lives at the – Hotel; and they tell wonderful stories about him, – how brave he is, and what a lot of battles he's fought, and how, with just a handful of soldiers, he defended a hospital full of sick men against a great force of them murdering Sepoys, and brought every man of them safe off. All sorts of fine things are told about him; and I'm bound they're true; for you can tell by the look of him he's a hero of the right sort. I didn't think the less of him, either, that I saw his eyes mighty shiny as he and the baby held fast to each other. She wasn't his child, though, but Mr. Bradford's up in – Street, whom I know all about; and if that crooked little tongue of hers could have said 'R,' which it couldn't, I might have taken her home at once. Well, she was all right then, and he carried her off; but first she walked round and made her manners to every man there as polite as you please, looking the daintiest little lady that ever walked on two feet; and when I put her into the carriage, didn't she thank me for letting her into the station, and being kind to her, as if it was a favor I'd been doing, and not my duty; and as if a man could help it that once looked at her. So she was driven away, and I was sorry to lose sight of her, for I don't know as I ever took so to a child that didn't belong to me."

"Is that all?" asked Jennie, as her father paused.

"That's all."

"How old was she, farher?"

"Five years old, she said, but she didn't look it. It seemed to me when I first saw her as if she was about your size; but you're bigger than she, though you don't make much show for your six years."

"How funny she can't say 'R' when she's five years old!" said Jennie.

"Yes, almost as funny as that my girl of six can't say 'th,'" laughed the sergeant.

Jennie smiled, colored, and hung her head.

"And you thought maybe your lost child was Mrs. Stanton's granddaughter; did you?" asked Mrs. Granby.

"Well, I thought it might be. Two children in that way of life ain't likely to be lost the same day in the same neighborhood; and we had no notice of any other but my little friend. You don't know if Mrs. Stanton has any relations of the name of Bradford?"

"No; she's 'most a stranger to me, and the scared girl didn't mention no names, only said little Bessie was missin'."

"That's her then. Little Bradford's name was Bessie; so putting two and two together, I think they're one and the same."

They talked a while longer of little Bessie and her pretty ways and her friend, the colonel; and then Mrs. Granby carried Willie and Jennie off to bed.

"Now, Mary," said Richards, going to his wife's side the moment the children were out of hearing, "I know your poor heart has been aching all day to know what the eye-doctor said; but the boy sticks so close to you, and his ears are so quick, that I couldn't do more than whisper 'yes' when I came in, just to let you know it could be done. I was bringing Willie home when I met Jarvis with a message that I was to go up to the Chief on special business, so, as I hadn't a minute to spare, I just had to hand the poor little man over to Jarvis, who promised to see him safely in your care. Dr. Dawson says, Mary, that he thinks Willie can be cured; but we must wait a while, and he thinks it best that he should not be told until the time comes. The operation cannot be performed till the boy

is stronger; and it is best not to attempt it till the blindness is total, – till both eyes are quite dark. Meanwhile, he must be fed upon good nourishing food. If we can do this, he thinks in three months, or perhaps four, the child may be able to bear the operation. After that he says we must still be very careful of him, and see that his strength does not run down; and when the spring opens, we must send him away from town, up among the mountains. And that's what your doctor says of you, too, Mary; that you won't get well of this dreadful rheumatism till you have a change of air; and that next summer I ought to send you where you will have mountain air. Dr. Dawson's charge," Richards went on more slowly, "will be a hundred dollars, – he says to rich folks it would be three hundred, maybe more. But five thousand is easier come at by a good many people than a hundred is by us. So now we know what the doctor can do, we must make out what we can do. I'm free to say I think Willie stands a better chance with Dr. Dawson than he does elsewhere; but I don't see how we are to raise the money. I'd live on bread and water, or worse, lie on the bare boards and work like a slave, to bring our boy's sight back; but I can't see you suffer; and we have the rest of the flock to think of as well as Willie. And I suppose it must bring a deal of expense on us, both before and after the operation; at least, if we follow out the doctor's directions, and he says if we don't, the money and trouble will be worse than thrown away.

"The first thing I have to do is to see Dr. Schwitz, and find out how much we owe him for attending you and the children, off and on, these six months. I've asked him half a dozen times for his bill, but he always said 'no hurry' and he 'could wait;' and since he was so kind, and other things were so pressing, I've just let it go by."

When he had spoken of the doctor's hope of curing Willie, his wife's pale face had brightened; but as he went on to say what it would cost, her head drooped; and now as he spoke of the other doctor's bill, she covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears and sobs.

"Why, Mary, what is it, dear?"

"Oh, Tom! Tom!" she broke forth, "Dr. Schwitz sent his bill this morning. A rough-looking man brought it, and he says the doctor must have it the first of the year, and – and – " She could get no farther. The poor woman! it was no wonder; she was sick and weak, and this unlooked-for trouble had quite broken her down.

"Now, don't, Mary, don't be so cast down," said her husband. "We'll see our way out of this yet. The Lord hasn't forsaken us."

"I don't know," she answered between her sobs, "it 'most seems like it;" and taking up a book which lay upon the table, she drew from between its leaves a folded paper and handed it to him. He was a strong, sturdy man, this police-sergeant, used to terrible sights, and not easily startled or surprised, as he had told his little daughter; but when he opened the paper and looked at it, all the color left his ruddy cheeks, and he sat gazing at it as if he were stunned. There was a moment's silence; then the baby set up its pitiful little cry. Mrs. Richards lifted it from the cradle.

"Oh, Tom," she said, "if it would please the Lord to take baby and me, it would be far better for you. I've been only a burden to you these six months past, and I'm likely to be no better for six months to come, for they say I can't get well till the warm weather comes again. You'd be better without us dear, and it's me that's brought this on you."

Then the policeman roused himself.

"That's the hardest word you've spoken to me these ten years we've been married, Mary, woman," he said. "No, I thank the Lord again and again that that trouble hasn't come to me yet. What would I do without you, Mary, dear? How could I bear it to come home and not find you here, – never again to see you smile when I come in; never to hear you say, 'I'm so glad you've come, Tom;' never to get the kiss that puts heart into me after a hard day's work? And the babies, – would you wish them motherless? To be sure, you can't do for them what you once did, but that will all come right yet; and there's the mother's eye to overlook and see that things don't go too far wrong; here's the mother voice and the mother smile for them to turn to. No, no; don't you think you're laid aside

for useless yet, dear. As for this wee dolly," – and the father laid his great hand tenderly on the tiny bundle in its mother's arms, – "why, I think I've come to love her all the more for that she's so feeble and such a care. And what would our Jennie do without the little sister that she has such a pride in and lays so many plans for? Why, it would break her heart to lose her. No, no, Mary, I can bear all things short of that you've spoken of; and do you just pray the Lord that he'll not take you at your word, and never hurt me by saying a thing like that again."

Trying to cheer his wife, the brave-hearted fellow had almost talked himself into cheerfulness again; and Mrs. Richards looked up through her tears. "And what are we to do, Tom?" she asked.

"I can't just rightly see my way clear yet," he answered, thoughtfully, rubbing his forehead with his finger; "but one thing is certain, we've got to look all our troubles straight in the face, and to see what we can do. What we *can* do for ourselves we *must*, then trust the Lord for the rest. As I told you, that little soul that was brought up to the station this afternoon gave me a lesson I don't mean to forget in a hurry. There she was, the innocent thing, in the worst trouble I suppose that could come to such a baby, – far from her home and friends, feeling as if she'd lost all she had in the world, – all strange faces about her, and in what was to her a terrible place, and not knowing how she was to get out of it. Well, what does she do, the pretty creature, but just catch herself up in the midst of her grieving and say that bit of a prayer? and then she rested quiet and waited. It gave me a sharp prick, I can tell you, and one that I needed. Says I to myself, 'Tom Richards, you haven't half the faith or the courage of this baby.' There had I been all day fretting myself and quarrelling with the Lord's doings, because he had brought me into a place where I could not see my way out. I had asked for help, too, or thought I had, and yet there I was, faithless and unbelieving, not willing to wait his time and way to bring it to me. But she, baby as she was, knew in whom she had trusted, and could leave herself in his hands after she had once done all she knew how. It's not the first teaching I've had from a little child, Mary, and I don't expect it will be the last; but nothing ever brought me up as straight as that did. Thinks I, the Lord forgive me, and grant me such a share of trust and patience as is given to this his little one; and then I took heart, and I don't think I've lost it again, if I have had a hard blow I did not look for. I own I was a bit stunned at first; but see you, Mary, I am sure this bill is not fair. Dr. Schwitz has overcharged us for certain; and I don't believe it will stand in law."

"But we can't afford to go to law, Tom, any more than to pay this sum. Four hundred dollars!"

"I would not wonder if Mr. Ray would see me through this," said Richards. "He's a good friend to me. I'll see him, anyhow. I never thought Dr. Schwitz would serve me like this; it's just revenge."

"Have you offended him?" asked Mrs. Richards, in surprise.

"Yes," answered the policeman. "Yesterday I had to arrest a nephew of his for robbing his employer. Schwitz came to me and begged I'd let him off and pretend he was not to be found, saying he would make it worthwhile to me. I took offence at his trying to bribe me, which was but natural, you will allow, Mary, and spoke up pretty sharp. He swore he'd make me pay for it if I touched the lad; but I never thought he would go this far. And to think I have had the handling of so many rogues, and didn't know one when I saw him!"

"And Willie?" said the poor mother.

"Ah! that's the worst," answered Richards. "I'm afraid we sha'n't be able to have much done for Willie this next year; for even if Dr. Dawson will wait for his pay, there's all the expense that's to come before and after the operation; and I don't see how we are going to manage it."

Long the good policeman and his wife sat and talked over their troubles; and when kind Mrs. Granby came back, she was told of them, and her advice asked; but three heads were no better than two in making one dollar do the needful work of ten.

III

LITTLE PITCHERS

Three young ladies sat talking over their work in the pleasant bow-window of Mrs. Stanton's sitting-room, while at a short distance from them two little curly heads bent over the great picture-book which lay upon the table. The eyes in the curly heads were busy with the pictures, the tongues in the curly heads were silent, save when now and then one whispered, "Shall I turn over?" or "Is not that pretty?" but the ears in the curly heads were wide open to all that was passing in the bow-window; while the three young ladies, thinking that the curly heads were heeding nothing but their own affairs, went on chattering as if those attentive ears were miles away.

"Annie," said Miss Carrie Hall, "I am sorry to hear of the severe affliction likely to befall your sister, Mrs. Bradford."

"What is that?" asked Annie Stanton, looking up surprised.

"I heard that Mrs. Lawrence, Mr. Bradford's Aunt Patty, was coming to make her a visit."

"Ah, poor Margaret!" said Annie Stanton, but she laughed as she spoke. "It is indeed a trial, but my sister receives it with becoming submission."

"Why does Mrs. Bradford invite her when she always makes herself so disagreeable?" asked Miss Ellis.

"She comes self-invited," replied Annie. "Margaret did not ask her."

"I should think not, considering the circumstances under which they last parted," said Carrie Hall.

"Oh, Margaret has long since forgotten and forgiven all that," said Annie, "and she and Mr. Bradford have several times endeavored to bring about a reconciliation, inviting Aunt Patty to visit them, or sending kind messages and other tokens of good-will. The old lady, however, was not to be appeased, and for the last three or four years has held no intercourse with my brother's family. Now she suddenly writes, saying she intends to make them a visit."

"I should decline it if I were in the place of Mr. and Mrs. Bradford," said Carrie.

"I fear I should do the same," replied Annie, "but Margaret and Mr. Bradford are more forgiving. I am quite sure though that they look upon this visit as a duty to be endured, not a pleasure to be enjoyed, especially as the children are now older, and she will be the more likely to make trouble with them."

"I suppose they have quite forgotten her," said Carrie.

"Harry and Fred may remember her," answered Annie, "but the others were too young to recollect her at this distance of time. Bessie was a baby, Maggie scarcely three years old."

"Shall you ever forget the day we stopped at your sister's house on our way home from school, and found Mrs. Lawrence and nurse having a battle royal over Maggie?" asked the laughing Carrie.

"No, indeed! Nurse, with Maggie on one arm and Bessie on the other, fairly dancing about the room in her efforts to save the former from Aunt Patty's clutches, both terrified babies screaming at the top of their voices, both old women scolding at the top of theirs; while Fred, the monkey, young as he was, stood by, clapping his hands and setting them at each other as if they had been two cats."

"And your sister," said Carrie, "coming home to be frightened half out of her senses at finding such an uproar in her well-ordered nursery, and poor little Maggie stretching out her arms to her with 'Patty vip me, Patty vip me!'"

"And Margaret quite unable to quell the storm until Brother Henry came in and with a few determined words separated the combatants by sending nurse from the room," continued Annie, with increasing merriment. "Poor mammy! She knew her master's word was not to be disputed, and dared not disobey; but I think she has never quite forgiven him for that, and still looks upon it as hard that

when, as she said, she had a chance 'to speak her mind to Mrs. Lawrence,' she was not allowed to do it."

"But what caused the trouble?" asked Laura Ellis.

"Oh, some trifling mischief of Maggie's, for which auntie undertook to punish her severely. Nurse interfered, and where the battle would have stopped, had not Henry and Margaret arrived, it is difficult to tell."

"But surely she did not leave your brother's house in anger for such a little thing as that!" said Laura.

"Indeed, she did; at least, she insisted that Maggie should be punished and nurse dismissed. Dear old mammy, who nursed every one of us, from Ruthven down to myself, and whom mother gave to Margaret as a treasure past all price when Harry was born, – poor mammy, who considers herself quite as much one of the family as any Stanton, Duncan, or Bradford among us all, – to talk of dismissing her! But nothing less would satisfy Aunt Patty; and Margaret gently claiming the right to correct her own children and govern her own household as she saw fit, and Henry firmly upholding his wife, Aunt Patty departed that very afternoon in a tremendous passion, and has never entered the house since."

"Greatly to your sister's relief, I should think," said Laura. "Why, what a very disagreeable inmate she must be, Annie! I am sure I pity Mrs. Bradford and all her family, if they are to undergo another visit from her now."

"Yes," said Annie. "Some sudden freak has taken her, and she has written to say that she will be here next month. You may well pity them. Such another exacting, meddling, ill-tempered old woman it would be difficult to find. She has long since quarrelled with all her relations; indeed, it was quite wonderful to every one how Margaret and her husband bore with her as long as they did. I do not know how the poor children will get on with her. She and Fred will clash before she has been in the house a day, while the little ones will be frightened out of their senses by one look of those cold, stern eyes. Do you remember, Carrie, how, during that last unfortunate visit, Maggie used to run and hide her head in her mother's dress the moment she heard Aunt Patty's step?"

"Yes, indeed," said Carrie. "I suppose she will be here at Christmas time too. Poor little things! She will destroy half their pleasure."

All this and much more to the same purpose fell upon those attentive ears, filling the hearts of the little listeners with astonishment and dismay. It was long since Maggie's hand had turned a leaf of the scrap-book, long since she or Bessie had given a look or thought to the pictures. There they both sat, motionless, gazing at one another, and drinking in all the foolish talk of those thoughtless young ladies.

They meant no harm, these gay girls. Not one of them but would have been shocked at the thought that she was poisoning the minds of the dear little children whom they all loved towards the aged relative whom they were bound to reverence and respect. They had not imagined that Maggie and Bessie were attending to their conversation, and they were only amusing themselves; it was but idle talk. Ah, idle talk, idle words, of which each one of us must give account at the last great day!

So they sat and chatted away, not thinking of the mischief they might be doing, until, at a question from Miss Carrie, Annie Stanton dropped her voice as she answered. Still now and then a few words would reach the little ones. "Shocking temper" – "Poor Margaret so uncomfortable" – "Mr Bradford very much displeased" – "patience quite worn out" until Bessie said, —

"Aunt Annie, if you don't mean us to know what you say, we do hear a little."

Aunt Annie started and colored, then said, hastily "Oh, I had almost forgotten you were there. Would you not like to go down-stairs, pets, and ask old Dinah to bake a little cake for each of you? Run then, and if you heard what we were saying, do not think of it. It is nothing for you to trouble your small heads about. I am afraid we have been rather imprudent," she continued uneasily when her little nieces had left the room. "Margaret is so particular that her children shall hear nothing like

gossip or evil speaking, and I think we have been indulging in both. If Maggie and Bessie have been listening to what we were saying, they will not have a very pleasant impression of Mrs. Lawrence. Well, there is no use in fretting about it now. What is said cannot be unsaid; and they will soon find out for themselves what the old lady is."

Yes, what is said cannot be unsaid. Each little word, as it is spoken, goes forth on its errand of good or evil, and can never be recalled.

Perhaps Aunt Annie would have regretted her thoughtlessness still more if she had seen and heard the little girls as they stood together in the hall. They had no thought of old Dinah and the cakes with this important matter to talk over. Not think of what they heard, indeed! That was a curious thing for Aunt Annie to say. She had been right in believing that Maggie must have forgotten Mrs. Lawrence. Maggie had done so, but now this conversation had brought the whole scene of the quarrel with nurse to her mind. It all came back to her; but in recollection it appeared far worse than the reality. Aunt Patty's loud, angry voice seemed sounding in her ears, uttering the most violent threats, and she thought of the old lady herself almost as if she had been some terrible monster, ready to tear in pieces her own poor frightened little self, clinging about nurse's neck.

And was it possible that this dreadful old woman was really coming again to their house to make a visit? How could papa and mamma think it best to allow it?

Such mischief had already been done by idle talk!

"Maggie," said Bessie, "do you remember about that Patty woman?"

"Yes," answered Maggie, "I did not remember about her till Aunt Annie and Miss Carrie said that, but I do now; and oh, Bessie, she's *awful*! I wish, I wish mamma would not let her come. She's the shockingest person you ever saw."

"Aunt Annie said mamma did not want her herself; but she let her come because she thought it was right," said Bessie.

"I wonder why mamma thinks it is right when she is so cross and tempered," said Maggie, with a long sigh. "Why, she used to scold even papa and mamma! Oh, I remember her so well now. I wish I didn't; I don't like to think about it;" and Maggie looked very much distressed.

Bessie was almost as much troubled, but she put her arm about her sister and said, "Never matter, dear Maggie, papa and mamma won't let her do anything to us."

"But suppose papa and mamma both had to go out and leave us, as they did that day she behaved so," said Maggie. "Nurse has so many to take care of now, and maybe she'd meddle again, – Aunt Annie said she was very meddling too, – and try to punish me when I did not do any blame."

"Jane would help nurse *perfect* us," said Bessie, "and if she couldn't, we'd run away and hide till papa and mamma came."

"She shouldn't do anything to you, Bessie. I wouldn't let her do that, anyhow," said Maggie, shaking her head, and looking very determined.

"How could you help it if she wanted to, Maggie?"

"I'd say, 'Beware, woman!'" said Maggie, drawing her eyebrows into a frown, and extending her hand with the forefinger raised in a threatening manner.

"Oh!" said Bessie, "what does that mean?"

"I don't quite know," said Maggie, slowly, "but it frightens people very much."

"It don't frighten me a bit when you say it."

"'Cause you don't have a guilty conscience; but if you had, you'd be, oh, so afraid!"

"How do you know I would?"

"I'll tell you," said Maggie. "Uncle John had a picture paper the other day, and in it was a picture of a woman coming in at the door, and she had her hands up so, and she looked as frightened, as frightened, and a man was standing behind the curtain doing so, and under the picture was 'Beware, woman!' I asked Uncle John what it meant, and he said that was a wicked woman who was going to steal some papers so she could get some money, and when she came in, she heard somebody say,

'Beware, woman,' and she was so frightened she ran away and was never seen again. I asked him to tell me more about it, but he said, 'No, it was a foolish story, not fit for little people.' Then I asked him if foolish stories were only fit for big people, but he just laughed and pinched my cheek. But I coaxed him to tell me why the woman was so frightened when the man did nothing but say those two words, and he said it was because she had a guilty conscience, for wicked people feared what good and innocent people did not mind at all. So if that old Mrs. Patty – I sha'n't call her aunt – don't behave herself to you, Bessie, I'll just try it."

"Do you think she has a guilty conscience, Maggie?"

"Course she has; how could she help it?"

"And will she yun away and never be seen again?"

"I guess so," said Maggie; "anyhow, I hope she will."

"I wonder why mamma did not tell us she was coming," said Bessie.

"We'll ask her to-morrow. We can't do it to-night because it will be so late before she comes home from Riverside and we'll be asleep, but we'll do it in the morning. And now, don't let's think about that shocking person any more. We'll go and ask Dinah about the cakes."

But although they resolved to try to forget Aunt Patty for the present, they could not help thinking of her a good deal and talking of her also, for their young hearts had been filled with dread of the old lady and her intended visit.

The reason that Mr. and Mrs. Bradford had not spoken to their children of Mrs. Lawrence's coming was that it was not yet a settled thing; and as there was not much that was pleasant to tell, they did not think it best to speak of her unless it was necessary. It was long since her name had been mentioned in the family, *so* long that, as Mrs. Bradford had hoped and supposed, all recollection of her had passed from Maggie's mind, until the conversation she had just heard had brought it back.

IV

PAPA'S STORY

The next morning while they were at breakfast, the postman brought three letters for papa and mamma.

"Margaret," said Mr. Bradford, looking up from one of his, "this is from Aunt Patty to say that she will put off her visit until spring."

Maggie and Bessie both looked up.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Bradford, in a tone as if she were rather more glad than sorry to hear that Aunt Patty was not coming at present. Papa glanced at her with a smile which did not seem as if he were very much disappointed either. Probably the children would not have noticed tone or smile had they not been thinking of what they heard yesterday.

"Holloa!" said Fred, in a voice of dismay, "Aunt Patty is not coming here again; is she? You'll have to look out and mind your P's and Q's, Midget and Bess, if that is the case. We'll all have to for that matter. Whew-ee, can't she scold though! I remember her tongue if it is four years since I heard it."

"Fred, Fred!" said his father.

"It's true, papa; is it not?"

"If it is," replied his father, "it does not make it proper for you to speak in that way of one so much older than yourself, my boy. Aunt Patty is not coming at present; when she does come, I hope we shall all be ready to receive her kindly and respectfully."

"I see you expect to find it difficult, papa," said the rogue, with a mischievous twinkle of his eye. Before Mr. Bradford had time to answer, Mrs. Bradford, who had been reading her letter, exclaimed joyfully, —

"Dear Elizabeth Rush says she will come to us at New Year, and make us a long visit. I wish she could have come at Christmas, as I begged her to do, but she says she has promised to remain in Baltimore with her sister until after the holidays."

"Mamma," said Bessie, "do you mean Aunt Bessie is coming to stay with us?"

"Yes, darling. Are you not glad?"

"Indeed, I am, mamma; I do love Aunt Bessie, and the colonel will be glad too."

"That's jolly!" exclaimed Fred; and a chorus of voices about the table told that Aunt Bessie's coming was looked forward to with very different feelings from those which Aunt Patty's excited.

"Mamma," said Maggie suddenly, as they were about leaving the table, "don't you wish you had forty children?"

"Forty!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradford, laughing. "No, that would be rather too large a family, Maggie."

"But, mamma, if you had forty children, the house would be so full there would never be room for Aunt Patty."

The boys laughed, but mamma was grave in a moment.

"Do you remember Aunt Patty, my darling?" she asked, looking rather anxiously at Maggie.

"Oh, yes, mamma, I remember her ever so well," answered poor Maggie, coloring all over her face and neck, and looking as if the remembrance of Aunt Patty were a great distress.

"I thought you had quite forgotten her, dear," said her mother.

"I had, mamma, but yesterday Aunt Annie and Miss Carrie were talking about her, and then I remembered her, oh! so well, and how fierce she looked and what a loud voice she had, and how she scolded, mamma, and how angry she used to be, and oh! mamma, she's such a dreadful old person, and if you only wouldn't let her come to our house."

"And, mamma," said Bessie, "Aunt Annie said nobody had any peace from the time she came into the house until she went out, and you know we're used to peace, so we can't do without it."

By this time Maggie was crying, and Bessie very near it. Their mamma scarcely knew how to comfort them, for whatever they might have heard from Annie and her friends was probably only too true; and both she and papa had too much reason to fear with Bessie that the usual "peace" of their happy household would be sadly disturbed when Aunt Patty should come there again. For though the old lady was not so terrible as the little girls imagined her to be, her unhappy temper always made much trouble wherever she went. All that Mrs. Bradford could do was to tell them that they must be kind and respectful to Mrs. Lawrence, and so give her no cause of offence; and that in no case would she be allowed to punish or harm them. But the thing which gave them the most comfort was that Aunt Patty's visit was not to take place for some months, possibly not at all. Then she talked of Miss Rush, and made pleasant plans for the time when she should be with them, and so tried to take their thoughts from Aunt Patty.

"And Uncle Ruthven is coming home," said Maggie. "Grandmamma had a letter from him last night, and she said he promised to come before the winter was over; and *won't* we all be happy then?"

Mamma kissed her little daughter's April face, on which the tears were not dry before smiles were dancing in their place, and in happy talk of Uncle Ruthven, Aunt Patty was for the time forgotten.

Uncle Ruthven was mamma's only brother, and a famous hero in the eyes of all the children. None of them save Harry had ever seen him, and he had been such a very little boy when his uncle went away ten years ago, that he could not recollect him. But his letters and the stories of his travels and adventures had always been a great delight to his young nieces and nephews; and now that he talked of coming home, they looked forward to seeing him with almost as much pleasure as if they had known him all their lives. As for the mother and the sisters who had been parted from him for so long, no words could tell how glad they were. A sad rover was Uncle Ruthven; it was easier to say where he had not been than where he had. He had climbed to the tops of high mountains and gone down into mines which lay far below the surface of the earth; had peeped into volcanoes and been shut up among icebergs, at one time had slung his hammock under the trees of a tropical forest, at another had rolled himself in his blankets in the frozen huts of the Esquimaux; had hunted whales, bears, lions, and tigers; had passed through all manner of adventures and dangers by land and by sea; and at last was really coming home, "tired of his wanderings, to settle down beside his dear old mother and spend the rest of his days with her." So he had said in the letter which came last night, and grandmamma had read it over many times, smiled over it, cried over it, and talked of the writer, until, if Maggie and Bessie had doubted the fact before, they must then have been quite convinced that no other children ever possessed such a wonderful uncle as this Uncle Ruthven of theirs. When he would come was not quite certain, – perhaps in two months, perhaps not in three or four, while he might be here by Christmas or even sooner.

And now came faithful old nurse to hear the good news and to have her share in the general family joy at the return of her first nursling, her beloved "Master Ruthven."

"And will your Aunt Patty be here when he comes, my dear lady?" she asked.

"I think not," said Mrs. Bradford, at which mammy looked well pleased, though she said no more; but Maggie and Bessie understood the look quite well.

Mrs. Bradford had intended by and by to talk to her children of Mrs. Lawrence and to tell them that she was rather odd and different from most of the people to whom they were accustomed, but that they must be patient and bear with her if she was sometimes a little provoking and cross. But now she found that they already knew quite too much, and she was greatly disturbed when she thought that it would be of little use to try and make them feel kindly towards the old lady. But the mischief had spread even farther than she had imagined.

That afternoon Maggie and Bessie with little Franky were all in their mamma's room, seated side by side upon the floor, amusing themselves with a picture-book. This book belonged to Harry,

who had made it himself by taking the cuts from magazines and papers and putting them in a large blank book. It was thought by all the children to be something very fine, and now Maggie sat with it upon her lap while she turned over the leaves, explaining such pictures as she knew, and inventing meanings and stories for those which were new to her.

Presently she came to one which quite puzzled her. On the front of the picture was the figure of a woman with an eagle upon her shoulder, intended to represent America or Liberty; while farther back stood a man with a gun in his hand and a lion at his side, who was meant for John Bull of England. Miss America had her arm raised, and appeared to be scolding Mr. England in the most terrible manner. Maggie could not tell the meaning of it, though she knew that the woman was America, but Franky thought that he understood it very well. Now Master Franky had a good pair of ears, and knew how to make a good use of them. He had, also, some funny ideas of his own, and like many other little children, did not always know when it was best to keep them to himself. He had heard a good deal that morning of some person named Patty, who was said to scold very much; he had also heard of his Uncle Ruthven, and he knew that this famous uncle had hunted lions in far-away Africa. The picture of the angry woman and the lion brought all this to his mind, and now he suddenly exclaimed, —

"Oh, my, my! Dere's a Patty wis her chitten, and she stolds Uncle 'Utven wis his lion."

This was too much for Maggie. Pushing the book from her knees, she threw herself back upon the carpet and rolled over, screaming with laughter at the joke of America with her eagle being mistaken for Aunt Patty with a chicken; Bessie joined in, and Franky, thinking he had said something very fine, clapped his hands and stamped his feet upon the floor in great glee. Mrs. Bradford herself could not help smiling, partly at the droll idea, partly at Maggie's amusement; but the next moment she sighed to think how the young minds of her children had been filled with fear and dislike of their father's aunt, and how much trouble all this was likely to make.

"Children," said Mr. Bradford, that evening, "who would like to hear a true story?"

Papa found he was not likely to want for listeners, as three or four eager voices answered.

"Wait a moment, dear," he said, as Bessie came to take her usual place upon his knee, and rising, he unlocked a cabinet secretary which stood at the side of the fireplace in his library. This secretary was an object of great interest to all the children, not because it held papa's private papers, — those were trifles of very little account in their eyes, — but because it contained many a relic and treasure, remembrances of bygone days, or which were in themselves odd and curious. To almost all of these belonged some interesting and true story, — things which had happened when papa was a boy, or even farther back than that time, — tales of travel and adventure in other lands, or perhaps of good and great people. So they were pleased to see their father go to his secretary when he had promised "a true story," knowing that they were sure of a treat.

Mr. Bradford came back with a small, rather worn, red morocco case, and as soon as they were all quietly settled, he opened it. It held a miniature of a very lovely lady. Her bright eyes were so sparkling with fun and mischief that they looked as if they would almost dance out of the picture, and the mouth was so smiling and lifelike that it seemed as if the rosy lips must part the next moment with a joyous, ringing laugh. Her hair was knotted loosely back with a ribbon, from which it fell in just such dark, glossy ringlets as clustered about Maggie's neck and shoulders. It was a very beautiful likeness of a very beautiful woman.

"Oh, how sweet, how lovely! What a pretty lady!" exclaimed the children, as they looked at it.

"Why, she looks like our Maggie!" said Harry.

"Only don't flatter yourself you are such a beauty as that, Midget," said Fred, mischievously.

"Oh, Fred," said Bessie, "my Maggie is a great deal prettier, and I don't believe that lady was so good as Maggie either."

"She may have been very good," said Harry, "but I don't believe she had half as sweet a temper as our Midge. I'll answer for it that those eyes could flash with something besides fun; could they not, papa?"

"Was she a relation of yours, papa?" asked Fred.

"Yes," answered Mr. Bradford, "and I am going to tell you a story about her."

"One summer, a good many years ago, two boys were staying on their uncle's farm in the country. Their father and mother were travelling in Europe, and had left them in this uncle's care while they should be absent. It was a pleasant home, and the boys, accustomed to a city life, enjoyed it more than I can tell you. One afternoon, their uncle and aunt went out to visit some friends, giving the boys permission to amuse themselves out of doors as long as they pleased. All the servants about the place, except the old cook, had been allowed to go to a fair which was held in a village two or three miles away, so that the house and farm seemed to be quite deserted. Only one other member of the family was at home, and this was an aunt whom the boys did not love at all, and they were only anxious to keep out of her way."

"Papa," said Fred, eagerly, "what were the names of these boys and their aunt?"

"Ahem," said Mr. Bradford, with a twinkle in his eye, as he saw Fred's knowing look. "Well, I will call the oldest boy by my own name, Henry, and the youngest we will call Aleck."

"Oh," said Fred, "and the aunt's name was, I suppose –"

"Henrietta," said his father, quickly; "and if you have any remarks to make, Fred, please keep them until my story is done."

"Very well, sir," said Fred, with another roguish look at Harry, and his father went on.

"Henry was a strong, healthy boy, who had never known a day's sickness; but Aleck was a weak, delicate, nervous little fellow, who could bear no excitement nor fatigue. Different as they were, however, the affection between them was very great. Gentle little Aleck looked up to his elder and stronger brother with a love and confidence which were beautiful to see, while the chief purpose of Henry's life at this time was to fulfil the charge which his mother had given him to care for Aleck, and keep him as far as he could from all trouble and harm, looking upon it as a sacred trust.

"There was a large old barn standing at some distance from the house, used only for the storing of hay; and as they found the sun too warm for play in the open air, Henry proposed they should go there and make some boats which later they might sail in the brook. Aleck was ready enough, and they were soon comfortably settled in the hayloft with their knives and bits of wood. But while they were happily working away, and just as Henry was in the midst of some marvellous story, they heard a voice calling them.

"'Oh, dear,' said little Aleck, 'there's Aunt Henrietta! Now she'll make us go in the house, and she'll give me my supper early and send me to bed, though Aunt Mary said I might sit up and have tea with the rest, even if they came home late. Let us hide, Henry.'

"No sooner said than done. The knives and chips were whisked out of sight, Aleck hidden beneath the hay. Henry, scrambling into an old corn-bin, covered himself with the corn-husks with which it was half filled, while the voice and its owner came nearer and nearer.

"'You'd better take care; she'll hear you,' said Henry, as he heard Aleck's stifled laughter; and the next moment, through a crack in the bin, he saw his aunt's head appearing above the stairs. Any stranger might have wondered why the boys were so much afraid of her. She was a tall, handsome lady, not old, though the hair beneath her widow's cap was white as snow. She stood a moment and cast her sharp, bright eyes around the hayloft; then, satisfied that the boys were not there, went down again, saying quite loud enough for them to hear, —

"'If I find them, I shall send Henry to bed early, too; he's always leading dear little Aleck into mischief. Such nonsense in Mary to tell that sick baby he should sit up until she came home!'

"Now it was a great mistake for auntie to say this of Henry. He did many wrong things, but I do not think he ever led his little brother into mischief; on the contrary, his love for Aleck often kept him from harm. So his aunt's words made him very angry, and as soon as he and Aleck had come out of their hiding-places, he said many things he should not have said, setting a bad example to Aleck, who was also displeased at being called 'a sick baby.'

"'Let's shut ourselves up in Dan's cubby-hole,' said Henry; 'she'll never think of looking for us there, if she comes back.'

"Dan's cubby-hole was a small room shut off from the rest of the hayloft, where one of the farm hands kept his tools; and here the boys went, shutting and bolting the door behind them. They worked away for more than an hour, when Aleck asked his brother if he did not smell smoke.

"'Not I,' said Henry; 'that little nose of yours is always smelling something, Aleck.'

"Aleck laughed, but a few moments after declared again that he really did smell smoke and felt it too.

"'They are burning stubble in the fields; it is that you notice,' said Henry. But presently he sprang up, for the smell became stronger, and he saw a little wreath of smoke curling itself beneath the door. 'There is something wrong,' he said, and hastily drawing the bolt, he opened the door. What a sight he saw! Heavy clouds of smoke were pouring up the stairway from the lower floor of the barn, while forked flames darted through them, showing that a fierce fire was raging below. Henry sprang forward to see if the stairs were burning; but the flames, fanned by the draught that came through the door he had opened, rushed up with greater fury, and drove him back. How could he save Aleck? The fire was plainly at the foot of the stairs, even if they were not already burning, while those stifling clouds of smoke rolled between them and the doors of the haymow, and were now pouring up through every chink and cranny of the floor on which he stood. Not a moment was to be lost. Henry ran back, and closing the door, said to his terrified brother, —

"'Aleck, you must stay here one moment until I bring the ladder. I can let myself down from this little window, but cannot carry you. Stand close to it, dear boy, and do not be frightened.'

"Stretching out from the window, he contrived to reach an old worn-out leader which would scarcely bear his weight, and to slide thence to the ground. Raising the cry of 'Fire!' he ran for the ladder, which should have been in its place on the other side of the barn. It was not there. Frantic with terror, as he saw what headway the fire was making, he rushed from place to place in search of the missing ladder; but all in vain; it could not be found. Meanwhile his cries had brought his aunt and the old cook from the house. Henry ran back beneath the window of the little room where he had left Aleck, and called to him to jump down into his arms, as it was the only chance of safety left. But, alas, there was no answer; the poor little boy had fainted from fright. Back to the door at the foot of the stairs, which were now all in a blaze, through which he was about to rush, when his aunt's hand held him back.

"'Live for your father and mother. *I have none to live for.*'

"With these words, she threw her dress over her head, and dashing up the burning stairs, was the next moment lost to sight. Two minutes later, her voice was heard at the window. In her arms she held the senseless Aleck, and when Henry and the old cook stood beneath, she called to them to catch him in their arms. It was done; Aleck was safe. And then letting herself from the window by her hands, she fell upon the ground beside him scarcely a moment before the flames burst upward through the floor. Aleck was quite unhurt, but his aunt was badly burned on one hand and arm. She insisted, however, upon sitting up and watching him, as he was feverish and ill from fright. Late in the night Henry awoke, and, opening his eyes, saw his aunt kneeling by the side of the bed, and heard her thanking God that he had given her this child's life, beseeching him, oh, so earnestly, that it might be the means of turning his young heart towards her, that there might be some one in the world to love her. Will you wonder if after this Henry felt as if he could never be patient or forbearing enough with this poor unhappy lady?"

"But what made her so unhappy, papa, and why were the boys so afraid of her?" asked Maggie.

"Well, dear, I must say that it was her violent temper, and her wish to control every one about her, which made her so much feared not only by the boys, but by all who lived with her. But perhaps when I tell you a little more, you will think with me that there was much excuse for her.

"She was the only daughter and youngest child in a large family of boys. Her mother died when she was a very little baby, so that she was left to grow up without that tenderest and wisest of all care. Her father and brothers loved her dearly; but I am afraid they indulged and spoiled her too much. She had a warm, generous, loving heart, but she was very passionate, and would sometimes give way to the most violent fits of temper. The poor child had no one to tell her how foolish and sinful this was, or to warn her that she was laying up trouble for herself and her friends, for her father would never suffer her to be contradicted or corrected."

"Papa," said Bessie, as her father paused for a moment, "do you mean the story of this passionate child for a lesson to me?"

"No, darling," said her father; "for I think my Bessie is learning, with God's help, to control her quick temper so well that we may hope it will not give her much trouble when she is older. It is not for you more than for your brothers and sister. But I have a reason for wishing you all to see that it was more the misfortune than the fault of the little Henrietta that she grew up with an ungoverned will and violent temper. Whatever she wanted was given without any thought for the rights or wishes of others; so it was not strange if she soon came to consider that her will was law and that she must have her own way in all things. Perhaps those who had the care of her did not know the harm they were doing; but certain it is, that this poor child was suffered to grow up into a most self-willed woman."

"I am very sorry for her," said Bessie, "'cause she did not have such wise people as mine to tell her what was yight."

"Yes, she was much to be pitied. But you must not think that this little girl was always naughty; it was not so by any means. And in spite of the faults which were never checked, she was generally very bright, engaging, and sweet. As she grew older, she became more reasonable, and as every one around her lived only for her pleasure, and she had all she desired, it was not difficult for her to keep her temper under control. It is easy to be good when one is happy."

"This picture, which shows you how very lovely she was, was taken for her father about the time of her marriage, and was said to be an excellent likeness. Soon after this, she went to Europe with her husband and father. There she passed several delightful months, travelling from place to place, with these two whom she loved so dearly."

"But now trouble, such as she had never dreamed of, came to this poor girl. They were in Switzerland, and one bright, sunny day, when no one thought of a storm, her husband and father went out in a small boat on the Lake of Geneva. There sometimes arises over this lake a terrible north-east wind, which comes up very suddenly and blows with great violence, causing the waves to rise to a height which would be thought almost impossible by one who had not seen it. For some reason Henrietta had not gone with the two gentlemen, but when she knew it was time for them to be coming in, she went down to the shore to meet them. She soon saw the boat skimming along, and could almost distinguish the faces of the two dear ones for whom she was watching, when this terrible wind came sweeping down over the water. She saw them as they struggled against it, trying with all their strength to reach the shore; but in vain. Wave after wave rolled into the little boat, and before many minutes it sank. Henrietta stood upon the shore, and as she stretched out her helpless hands toward them, saw her husband and father drown. Do you wonder that the sight drove her frantic? That those who stood beside her could scarcely prevent her from throwing herself into those waters which covered all she loved best? Then came a long and terrible illness, during which that dark hair changed to snowy white."

"Papa," said Bessie, whose tender little heart could not bear to hear of trouble or distress which she could not comfort, – "papa, I don't like this story; it is too mournful."

"I have almost done with this part of it, dear," said her father, "and I tell it to you that you may know how much need this poor woman had that others should be kind and patient with her, and how much excuse there was for her when all this sorrow and trouble made her irritable and impatient."

"Her brother came for her and took her home, but not one of her friends could make her happy or contented; for this poor lady did not know where to turn for the best of all comfort, and she had no strength of her own to lean upon. So the faults of temper and disposition, which had been passed over when she was young and happy, now grew worse and worse, making her so irritable and cross, so self-willed and determined, that it was almost impossible to live with her. Then for years she was a great sufferer, and besides all this, other troubles came upon her, – the loss of a great part of her fortune through one whom she had trusted, and various other trials. So by degrees she drove one after another of her friends from her, until she seemed to stand quite alone in the world, and to be, as she said, 'without any one to care for her.'"

"Did not Aleck love her after the fire?" asked Bessie.

"I think he was very grateful to her, dear, but I am afraid he never became very fond of her. He was a gentle, timid little fellow, and though his aunt was never harsh to him, it used to frighten him to see her severity with other people."

"I'd have loved her, even if she was cross," said Maggie, looking again at the picture. "I'd have been so good to her that she couldn't be unkind to me, and if she had scolded me a little, I wouldn't have minded, because I'd have been so sorry for her."

"Oh, Midget," said Harry, "you would have been frightened out of your wits at her first cross word."

"No, I wouldn't, Harry; and I would try to be patient, even if she scolded me like – like Aunt Patty."

"And what if she was Aunt Patty?" said Fred.

"But then she wasn't, you know."

"But she was," said papa, smiling.

Maggie and Bessie opened their eyes very wide at this astonishing news.

"You said her name was Henrietta, papa," said Maggie.

"Aunt Patty's name is also Henrietta," replied Mr. Bradford, "and when she was young, she was generally called so."

"And Henry was this Henry, our own papa," said Fred, laying his hand on his father's shoulder. "And Aleck was Uncle Alexander, who died so long ago, before any of us were born. I guessed it at the beginning."

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