

COOLIDGE SUSAN

CLOVER

Susan Coolidge Clover

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Clover:

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CHAPTER I

A TALK ON THE DOORSTEPS

It was one of those afternoons in late April which are as mild and balmy as any June day. The air was full of the chirps and twitters of nest-building birds, and of sweet indefinable odors from half-developed leaf-buds and cherry and pear blossoms. The wisterias overhead were thickly starred with pointed pearl-colored sacs, growing purpler with each hour, which would be flowers before long; the hedges were quickening into life, the long pensile willow-boughs and the honey-locusts hung in a mist of fine green against the sky, and delicious smells came with every puff of wind from the bed of white violets under the parlor windows.

Katy and Clover Carr, sitting with their sewing on the doorsteps, drew in with every breath the sense of spring. Who does not know the delightfulness of that first sitting out of doors after a long winter's confinement? It seems like flinging the gauntlet down to the powers of cold. Hope and renovation are in the air.

Life has conquered Death, and to the happy hearts in love with life there is joy in the victory. The two sisters talked busily as they sewed, but all the time an only half-conscious rapture informed their senses,—the sympathy of that which is immortal in human souls with the resurrection of natural things, which is the sure pledge of immortality.

It was nearly a year since Katy had come back from that too brief journey to Europe with Mrs. Ashe and Amy, about which some of you have read, and many things of interest to the Carr family had happened during the interval. The "Natchitoches" had duly arrived in New York in October, and presently afterward Burnet was convulsed by the appearance of a tall young fellow in naval uniform, and the announcement of Katy's engagement to Lieutenant Worthington.

It was a piece of news which interested everybody in the little town, for Dr. Carr was a universal friend and favorite. For a time he had been the only physician in the place; and though with the gradual growth of population two or three younger men had appeared to dispute the ground with him, they were forced for the most part to content themselves with doctoring the new arrivals, and with such fragments and leavings of practice as Dr. Carr chose to intrust to them. None of the old established families would consent to call in any one else if they could possibly get the "old" doctor.

A skilful practitioner, who is at the same time a wise adviser, a helpful friend, and an agreeable man, must necessarily command

a wide influence. Dr. Carr was "by all odds and far away," as our English cousins would express it, the most popular person in Burnet, wanted for all pleasant occasions, and doubly wanted for all painful ones.

So the news of Katy's engagement was made a matter of personal concern by a great many people, and caused a general stir, partly because she was her father's daughter, and partly because she was herself; for Katy had won many friends by her own merit. So long as Ned Worthington stayed, a sort of tide of congratulation and sympathy seemed to sweep through the house all day long. Tea-roses and chrysanthemums, and baskets of pears and the beautiful Burnet grapes flooded the premises, and the door-bell rang so often that Clover threatened to leave the door open, with a card attached,—"*Walk straight in. He is in the parlor!*"

Everybody wanted to see and know Katy's lover, and to have him as a guest. Ten tea-drinkings a week would scarcely have contented Katy's well-wishers, had the limitations of mortal weeks permitted such a thing; and not a can of oysters would have been left in the place if Lieutenant Worthington's leave had lasted three days longer. Clover and Elsie loudly complained that they themselves never had a chance to see him; for whenever he was not driving or walking with Katy, or having long *tête-à-têtes* in the library, he was eating muffins somewhere, or making calls on old ladies whose feelings would be dreadfully hurt if he went away without their seeing him.

"Sisters seem to come off worst of all," protested Johnnie. But in spite of their lamentations they all saw enough of their future brother-in-law to grow fond of him; and notwithstanding some natural pangs of jealousy at having to share Katy with an outsider, it was a happy visit, and every one was sorry when the leave of absence ended, and Ned had to go away.

A month later the "Natchitoches" sailed for the Bahamas. It was to be a six months' cruise only; and on her return she was for a while to make part of the home squadron. This furnished a good opportunity for her first lieutenant to marry; so it was agreed that the wedding should take place in June, and Katy set about her preparations in the leisurely and simple fashion which was characteristic of her. She had no ambition for a great *trousseau*, and desired to save her father expense; so her outfit, as compared with that of most modern brides, was a very moderate one, but being planned and mostly made at home, it necessarily involved thought, time, and a good deal of personal exertion.

Dear little Clover flung herself into the affair with even more interest than if it had been her own. Many happy mornings that winter did the sisters spend together over their dainty stitches and "white seam." Elsie and Johnnie were good needlewomen now, and could help in many ways. Mrs. Ashe often joined them; even Amy could contribute aid in the plainer sewing, and thread everybody's needles. But the most daring and indefatigable of all was Clover, who never swerved in her determination that Katy's "things" should be as nice and as pretty

as love and industry combined could make them. Her ideas as to decoration soared far beyond Katy's. She hem-stitched, she cat-stitched, she feather-stitched, she lace-stitched, she tucked and frilled and embroidered, and generally worked her fingers off; while the bride vainly protested that all this finery was quite unnecessary, and that simple hems and a little Hamburg edging would answer just as well. Clover merely repeated the words, "Hamburg edging!" with an accent of scorn, and went straight on in her elected way.

As each article received its last touch, and came from the laundry white and immaculate, it was folded to perfection, tied with a narrow blue or pale rose-colored ribbon, and laid aside in a sacred receptacle known as "The Wedding Bureau." The handkerchiefs, grouped in dozens, were strewn with dried violets and rose-leaves to make them sweet. Lavender-bags and sachets of orris lay among the linen; and perfumes as of Araby were discernible whenever a drawer in the bureau was pulled out.

So the winter passed, and now spring was come; and the two girls on the doorsteps were talking about the wedding, which seemed very near now.

"Tell me just what sort of an affair you want it to be," said Clover.

"It seems more your wedding than mine, you have worked so hard for it," replied Katy. "You might give your ideas first."

"My ideas are not very distinct. It's only lately that I have begun to think about it at all, there has been so much to do.

I'd like to have you have a beautiful dress and a great many wedding-presents and everything as pretty as can be, but not so many bridesmaids as Cecy, because there is always such a fuss in getting them nicely up the aisle in church and out again,—that is as far as I've got. But so long as you are pleased, and it goes off well, I don't care exactly how it is managed."

"Then, since you are in such an accommodating frame of mind, it seems a good time to break my views to you. Don't be shocked, Clovy; but, do you know, I don't want to be married in church at all, or to have any bridesmaids, or anything arranged for beforehand particularly. I should like things to be simple, and to just *happen*."

"But, Katy, you can't do it like that. It will all get into a snarl if there is no planning beforehand or rehearsals; it would be confused and horrid."

"I don't see why it would be confused if there were nothing to confuse. Please not be vexed; but I always have hated the ordinary kind of wedding, with its fuss and worry and so much of everything, and just like all the other weddings, and the bride looking tired to death, and nobody enjoying it a bit. I'd like mine to be different, and more—more—real. I don't want any show or processing about, but just to have things nice and pretty, and all the people I love and who love me to come to it, and nothing cut and dried, and nobody tired, and to make it a sort of dear, loving occasion, with leisure to realize how dear it is and what it all means. Don't you think it would really be nicer in that way?"

"Well, yes, as you put it, and 'viewed from the higher standard,' as Miss Inches would say, perhaps it would. Still, bridesmaids and all that are very pretty to look at; and folks will be surprised if you don't have them."

"Never mind folks," remarked the irreverent Katy. "I don't care a button for that argument. Yes; bridesmaids and going up the aisle in a long procession and all the rest *are* pretty to look at,—or were before they got to be so hackneyed. I can imagine the first bridal procession up the aisle of some early cathedral as having been perfectly beautiful. But nowadays, when the butcher and baker and candlestick-maker and everybody else do it just alike, the custom seems to me to have lost its charm. I never did enjoy having things exactly as every one else has them,—all going in the same direction like a flock of sheep. I would like my little wedding to be something especially my own. There was a poetical meaning in those old customs; but now that the custom has swallowed up so much of the meaning, it would please me better to retain the meaning and drop the custom."

"I see what you mean," said Clover, not quite convinced, but inclined as usual to admire Katy and think that whatever she meant must be right. "But tell me a little more. You mean to have a wedding-dress, don't you?" doubtfully.

"Yes, indeed!"

"Have you thought what it shall be?"

"Do you recollect that beautiful white crape shawl of mamma's which papa gave me two years ago? It has a lovely

wreath of embroidery round it; and it came to me the other day that it would make a charming gown, with white surah or something for the under-dress. I should like that better than anything new, because mamma used to wear it, and it would seem as if she were here still, helping me to get ready. Don't you think so?"

"It is a lovely idea," said Clover, the ever-ready tears dimming her happy blue eyes for a moment, "and just like you. Yes, that shall be the dress,—dear mamma's shawl. It will please papa too, I think, to have you choose it."

"I thought perhaps it would," said Katy, soberly. "Then I have a wide white watered sash which Aunt Izzy gave me, and I mean to have that worked into the dress somehow. I should like to wear something of hers too, for she was really good to us when we were little, and all that long time that I was ill; and we were not always good to her, I am afraid. Poor Aunt Izzy! What troublesome little wretches we were,—I most of all!"

"Were you? Somehow I never can recollect the time when you were not a born angel. I am afraid I don't remember Aunt Izzy well. I just have a vague memory of somebody who was pretty strict and cross."

"Ah, you never had a back, and needed to be waited on night and day, or you would recollect a great deal more than that. Cousin Helen helped me to appreciate what Aunt Izzy really was. By the way, one of the two things I have set my heart on is to have Cousin Helen come to my wedding."

"It would be lovely if she could. Do you suppose there is any chance?"

"I wrote her week before last, but she hasn't answered yet. Of course it depends on how she is; but the accounts from her have been pretty good this year."

"What is the other thing you have set your heart on? You said 'two.'"

"The other is that Rose Red shall be here, and little Rose. I wrote to her the other day also, and coaxed hard. Wouldn't it be too enchanting? You know how we have always longed to have her in Burnet; and if she could come now it would make everything twice as pleasant."

"Katy, what an enchanting thought!" cried Clover, who had not seen Rose since they all left Hillsover. "It would be the greatest lark that ever was to have the Roses. When do you suppose we shall hear? I can hardly wait, I am in such a hurry to have her say 'Yes.'"

"But suppose she says 'No'?"

"I won't think of such a possibility. Now go on. I suppose your principles don't preclude a wedding-cake?"

"On the contrary, they include a great deal of wedding-cake. I want to send a box to everybody in Burnet,—all the poor people, I mean, and the old people and the children at the Home and those forlorn creatures at the poor-house and all papa's patients."

"But, Katy, that will cost a lot," objected the thrifty Clover.

"I know it; so we must do it in the cheapest way, and make the

cake ourselves. I have Aunt Izzy's recipe, which is a very good one; and if we all take hold, it won't be such an immense piece of work. Debby has quantities of raisins stoned already. She has been doing them in the evenings a few at a time for the last month. Mrs. Ashe knows a factory where you can get the little white boxes for ten dollars a thousand, and I have commissioned her to send for five hundred."

"Five hundred! What an immense quantity!"

"Yes; but there are all the Hillsover girls to be remembered, and all our kith and kin, and everybody at the wedding will want one. I don't think it will be too many. Oh, I have arranged it all in my mind. Johnnie will slice the citron, Elsie will wash the currants, Debby measure and bake, Alexander mix, you and I will attend to the icing, and all of us will cut it up."

"Alexander!"

"Alexander. He is quite pleased with the idea, and has constructed an implement—a sort of spade, cut out of new pine wood—for the purpose. He says it will be a sight easier than digging flower-beds. We will set about it next week; for the cake improves by keeping, and as it is the heaviest job we have to do, it will be well to get it out of the way early."

"Sha'n't you have a floral bell, or a bower to stand in, or something of that kind?" ventured Clover, timidly.

"Indeed I shall not," replied Katy. "I particularly dislike floral bells and bowers. They are next worst to anchors and harps and 'floral pillows' and all the rest of the dreadful things that they

have at funerals. No, we will have plenty of fresh flowers, but not in stiff arrangements. I want it all to seem easy and to *be* easy. Don't look so disgusted, Clovy."

"Oh, I'm not disgusted. It's your wedding. I want you to have everything in your own way."

"It's everybody's wedding, I think," said Katy, tenderly. "Everybody is so kind about it. Did you see the thing that Polly sent this morning?"

"No. It must have come after I went out. What was it?"

"Seven yards of beautiful nun's lace which she bought in Florence. She says it is to trim a morning dress; but it's really too pretty. How dear Polly is! She sends me something almost every day. I seem to be in her thoughts all the time. It is because she loves Ned so much, of course; but it is just as kind of her."

"I think she loves you almost as much as Ned," said Clover.

"Oh, she couldn't do that; Ned is her only brother. There is Amy at the gate now."

It was a much taller Amy than had come home from Italy the year before who was walking toward them under the budding locust-boughs. Roman fever had seemed to quicken and stimulate all Amy's powers, and she had grown very fast during the past year. Her face was as frank and childlike as ever, and her eyes as blue; but she was prettier than when she went to Europe, for her cheeks were pink, and the mane of waving hair which framed them in was very becoming. The hair was just long enough now to touch her shoulders; it was turning brown as it

lengthened, but the ends of the locks still shone with childish gold, and caught the sun in little shining rings as it filtered down through the tree branches.

She kissed Clover several times, and gave Katy a long, close hug; then she produced a parcel daintily hid in silver paper.

"Tanta," she said,—this was a pet name lately invented for Katy,—"here is something for you from mamma. It's something quite particular, I think, for mamma cried when she was writing the note; not a hard cry, you know, but just two little teeny-weeny tears in her eyes. She kept smiling, though, and she looked happy, so I guess it isn't anything very bad. She said I was to give it to you with her best, *best* love."

Katy opened the parcel, and beheld a square veil of beautiful old blonde. The note said:

This was my wedding-veil, dearest Katy, and my mother wore it before me. It has been laid aside all these years with the idea that perhaps Amy might want it some day; but instead I send it to you, without whom there would be no Amy to wear this or anything else. I think it would please Ned to see it on your head, and I know it would make me very happy; but if you don't feel like using it, don't mind for a moment saying so to

Your loving

Polly.

Katy handed the note silently to Clover, and laid her face for a little while among the soft folds of the lace, about which a faint

odor of roses hung like the breath of old-time and unforgotten loves and affections.

"Shall you?" queried Clover, softly.

"Why, of course! Doesn't it seem too sweet? Both our mothers!"

"There!" cried Amy, "you are going to cry too, Tanta! I thought weddings were nice funny things. I never supposed they made people feel badly. I sha'n't ever let Mabel get married, I think. But she'll have to stay a little girl always in that case, for I certainly won't have her an old maid."

"What do you know about old maids, midget?" asked Clover.

"Why, Miss Clover, I have seen lots of them. There was that one at the Pension Suisse; you remember, Tanta? And the two on the steamer when we came home. And there's Miss Fitz who made my blue frock; Ellen said she was a regular old maid. I never mean to let Mabel be like that."

"I don't think there's the least danger," remarked Katy, glancing at the inseparable Mabel, who was perched on Amy's arm, and who did not look a day older than she had done eighteen months previously. "Amy, we're going to make wedding-cake next week,—heaps and heaps of wedding-cake. Don't you want to come and help?"

"Why, of course I do. What fun! Which day may I come?"

The cake-making did really turn out fun. Many hands made light work of what would have been a formidable job for one or two. It was all done gradually. Johnnie cut the golden citron

quarters into thin transparent slices in the sitting-room one morning while the others were sewing, and reading Tennyson aloud. Elsie and Amy made a regular frolic of the currant-washing. Katy, with Debby's assistance, weighed and measured; and the mixture was enthusiastically stirred by Alexander, with the "spade" which he had invented, in a large new wash-tub. Then came the baking, which for two days filled the house with spicy, plum-pudding odors; then the great feat of icing the big square loaves; and then the cutting up, in which all took part. There was much careful measurement that the slices might be an exact fit; and the kitchen rang with bright laughter and chat as Katy and Clover wielded the sharp bread-knives, and the others fitted the portions into their boxes, and tied the ribbons in crisp little bows. Many delicious crumbs and odd corners and fragments fell to the share of the younger workers; and altogether the occasion struck Amy as so enjoyable that she announced—with her mouth full—that she had changed her mind, and that Mabel might get married as often as she pleased, if she would have cake like *that* every time,—a liberality of permission which Mabel listened to with her invariable waxen smile.

When all was over, and the last ribbons tied, the hundreds of little boxes were stacked in careful piles on a shelf of the inner closet of the doctor's office to wait till they were wanted,—an arrangement which naughty Clover pronounced eminently suitable, since there should always be a doctor close at hand where there was so much wedding-cake. But before all this was

accomplished, came what Katy, in imitation of one of Miss Edgeworth's heroines, called "The Day of Happy Letters."

CHAPTER II

THE DAY OF HAPPY LETTERS

The arrival of the morning boat with letters and newspapers from the East was the great event of the day in Burnet. It was due at eleven o'clock; and everybody, consciously or unconsciously, was on the lookout for it. The gentlemen were at the office bright and early, and stood chatting with each other, and fingering the keys of their little drawers till the rattle of the shutter announced that the mail was distributed. Their wives and daughters at home, meanwhile, were equally in a state of expectation, and whatever they might be doing kept ears and eyes on the alert for the step on the gravel and the click of the latch which betokened the arrival of the family news-bringer.

Doctors cannot command their time like other people, and Dr. Carr was often detained by his patients, and made late for the mail, so it was all the pleasanter a surprise when on the great day of the cake-baking he came in earlier than usual, with his hands quite full of letters and parcels. All the girls made a rush for him at once; but he fended them off with an elbow, while with teasing slowness he read the addresses on the envelopes.

"Miss Carr—Miss Carr—Miss Katherine Carr—Miss Carr

again; four for you, Katy. Dr. P. Carr,—a bill and a newspaper, I perceive; all that an old country doctor with a daughter about to be married ought to expect, I suppose. Miss Clover E. Carr,—one for the 'Confidante in white linen.' Here, take it, Clovy. Miss Carr again. Katy, you have the lion's share. Miss Joanna Carr,—in the unmistakable handwriting of Miss Inches. Miss Katherine Carr, care Dr. Carr. That looks like a wedding present, Katy. Miss Elsie Carr; Cecy's hand, I should say. Miss Carr once more,—from the conquering hero, judging from the post-mark. Dr. Carr,—another newspaper, and—hollo!—one more for Miss Carr. Well, children, I hope for once you are satisfied with the amount of your correspondence. My arm fairly aches with the weight of it. I hope the letters are not so heavy inside as out."

"I am quite satisfied, Papa, thank you," said Katy, looking up with a happy smile from Ned's letter, which she had torn open first of all. "Are you going, dear?" She laid her packages down to help him on with his coat. Katy never forgot her father.

"Yes, I am going. Time and rheumatism wait for no man. You can tell me your news when I come back."

It is not fair to peep into love letters, so I will only say of Ned's that it was very long, very entertaining,—Katy thought,—and contained the pleasant information that the "Natchitoches" was to sail four days after it was posted, and would reach New York a week sooner than any one had dared to hope. The letter contained several other things as well, which showed Katy how continually she had been in his thoughts,—a painting on rice paper, a dried

flower or two, a couple of little pen-and-ink sketches of the harbor of Santa Lucia and the shipping, and a small cravat of an odd convent lace folded very flat and smooth. Altogether it was a delightful letter, and Katy read it, as it were, in leaps, her eyes catching at the salient points, and leaving the details to be dwelt upon when she should be alone.

This done, she thrust the letter into her pocket, and proceeded to examine the others. The first was in Cousin Helen's clear, beautiful handwriting:—

DEAR KATY,—If any one had told us ten years ago that in this particular year of grace you would be getting ready to be married, and I preparing to come to your wedding, I think we should have listened with some incredulity, as to an agreeable fairy tale which could not possibly come true. We didn't look much like it, did we,—you in your big chair and I on my sofa? Yet here we are! When your letter first reached me it seemed a sort of impossible thing that I should accept your invitation; but the more I thought about it the more I felt as if I must, and now things seem to be working round to that end quite marvellously. I have had a good winter, but the doctor wishes me to try the experiment of the water cure again which benefited me so much the summer of your accident. This brings me in your direction; and I don't see why I might not come a little earlier than I otherwise should, and have the great pleasure of seeing you married, and making acquaintance with Lieutenant Worthington. That is, if you are perfectly sure that to have at so busy a time a guest who, like the Queen of Spain, has the disadvantage of

being without legs, will not be more care than enjoyment. Think seriously over this point, and don't send for me unless you are certain. Meanwhile, I am making ready. Alex and Emma and little Helen—who is a pretty big Helen now—are to be my escorts as far as Buffalo on their way to Niagara. After that is all plain sailing, and Jane Carter and I can manage very well for ourselves. It seems like a dream to think that I may see you all so soon; but it is such a pleasant one that I would not wake up on any account.

I have a little gift which I shall bring you myself, my Katy; but I have a fancy also that you shall wear some trifling thing on your wedding-day which comes from me, so for fear of being forestalled I will say now, please don't buy any stockings for the occasion, but wear the pair which go with this, for the sake of your loving

Cousin Helen.

"These must be they," cried Elsie, pouncing on one of the little packages. "May I cut the string, Katy?"

Permission was granted; and Elsie cut the string. It was indeed a pair of beautiful white silk stockings embroidered in an open pattern, and far finer than anything which Katy would have thought of choosing for herself.

"Don't they look exactly like Cousin Helen?" she said, fondling them. "Her things always are choicer and prettier than anybody's else, somehow. I can't think how she does it, when she never by any chance goes into a shop. Who can this be from, I wonder?"

"This" was the second little package. It proved to contain a small volume bound in white and gold, entitled, "Advice to Brides." On the fly-leaf appeared this inscription:—

To Katherine Carr, on the occasion of her approaching
bridal, from her affectionate teacher,
Marianne Nipson.

1 Timothy, ii. 11.

Clover at once ran to fetch her Testament that she might verify the quotation, and announced with a shriek of laughter that it was: "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection;" while Katy, much diverted, read extracts casually selected from the work, such as: "A wife should receive her husband's decree without cavil or question, remembering that the husband is the head of the wife, and that in all matters of dispute his opinion naturally and scripturally outweighs her own."

Or: "'A soft answer turneth away wrath.' If your husband comes home fretted and impatient, do not answer him sharply, but soothe him with gentle words and caresses. Strict attention to the minor details of domestic management will often avail to secure peace."

And again: "Keep in mind the epitaph raised in honor of an exemplary wife of the last century,—'She never banged the door.' Qualify yourself for a similar testimonial."

"Tanta never does bang doors," remarked Amy, who had come in as this last "elegant extract" was being read.

"No, that's true; she doesn't," said Clover. "Her prevailing vice is to leave them open. I like that truth about a good dinner 'availing' to secure peace, and the advice to 'caress' your bear when he is at his crossiest. Ned never does issue 'decrees,' though, I fancy; and on the whole, Katy, I don't believe Mrs. Nipson's present is going to be any particular comfort in your future trials. Do read something else to take the taste out of our mouths. We will listen in 'all subjection.'"

Katy was already deep in a long epistle from Rose.

"This is too delicious," she said; "do listen." And she began again at the beginning:—

My Sweetest of all old Sweets,—Come to your wedding!
Of course I shall. It would never seem to me to have any legal sanction whatever if I were not there to add my blessing. Only let me know which day "early in June" it is to be, that I may make ready. Deniston will fetch us on, and by a special piece of good luck, a man in Chicago—whose name I shall always bless if only I can remember what it is—has been instigated by our mutual good angel to want him on business just about that time; so that he would have to go West anyway, and would rather have me along than not, and is perfectly resigned to his fate. I mean to come three days before, and stay three days after the wedding, if I may, and altogether it is going to be a lark of larks. Little Rose can talk quite fluently now, and almost read; that is, she knows six letters of her picture alphabet. She composes poems also. The other day she suddenly announced,—

"Mamma, I have made up a sort of a im. May I say it to you?"

I naturally consented, and this was the

IM

Jump in the parlor,

Jump in the hall,

God made us all!

Now did you ever hear of anything quite so dear as that, for a baby only three years and five months old? I tell you she is a wonder. You will all adore her, Clover particularly. Oh, my dear little C.! To think I am going to see her!

I met both Ellen Gray and Esther Dearborn the other day, and where do you think it was? At Mary Silver's wedding! Yes, she is actually married to the Rev. Charles Playfair Strothers, and settled in a little parsonage somewhere in the Hoosac Tunnel,—or near it,—and already immersed in "duties." I can't think what arguments he used to screw her up to the rash act; but there she is.

It wasn't exactly what one would call a cheerful wedding.

All the connection took it very seriously; and Mary's uncle, who married her, preached quite a lengthy funeral discourse to the young couple, and got them nicely ready for death, burial, and the next world, before he would consent to unite them for this. He was a solemn-looking old person, who had been a missionary, and "had laid away three dear wives in foreign lands," as he confided to me afterward over a plate of ice-cream. He seemed to me to be "taking notice," as they say of babies, and it is barely possible that he mistook me for a single woman, for his attentions were rather pronounced till I introduced my husband prominently into conversation; after that he seemed more attracted by Ellen Gray.

Mary cried straight through the ceremony. In fact, I imagine she cried straight through the engagement, for her eyes looked wept out and had scarlet rims, and she was as white as her veil. In fact, whiter, for that was made of beautiful *point de Venise*, and was just a trifle yellowish. Everybody cried. Her mother and sister sobbed aloud, so did several maiden aunts and a grandmother or two and a few cousins. The church resounded with guggles and gasps, like a great deal of bath-water running out of an ill-constructed tub. Mr. Silver also wept, as a business man may, in a series of sniffs interspersed with silk handkerchief; you know the kind. Altogether it was a most cheerless affair. I seemed to be the only person present who was not in tears; but I really didn't see anything to cry about, so far as I was concerned, though I felt very hard-hearted.

I had to go alone, for Deniston was in New York. I got to

the church rather early, and my new spring bonnet—which is a superior one—seemed to impress the ushers, so they put me in a very distinguished front pew all by myself. I bore my honors meekly, and found them quite agreeable, in fact,—you know I always did like to be made much of,—so you can imagine my disgust when presently three of the stoutest ladies you ever saw came sailing up the aisle, and prepared to invade *my* pew.

"Please move up, Madam," said the fattest of all, who wore a wonderful yellow hat.

But I was not "raised" at Hillsover for nothing, and remembering the success of our little ruse on the railroad train long ago, I stepped out into the aisle, and with my sweetest smile made room for them to pass.

"Perhaps I would better keep the seat next the door," I murmured to the yellow lady, "in case an attack should come on."

"An attack!" she repeated in an accent of alarm. She whispered to the others. All three eyed me suspiciously, while I stood looking as pensive and suffering as I could. Then after confabulating together for a little, they all swept into the seat behind mine, and I heard them speculating in low tones as to whether it was epilepsy or catalepsy or convulsions that I was subject to. I presume they made signs to all the other people who came in to steer clear of the lady with fits, for nobody invaded my privacy, and I sat in lonely splendor with a pew to myself, and was very comfortable indeed.

Mary's dress was white satin, with a great deal of

point lace and pearl passementerie, and she wore a pair of diamond ear-rings which her father gave her, and a bouquet almost but not quite as large, which was the gift of the bridegroom. He has a nice face, and I think Silvery Mary will be happy with him, much happier than with her rather dismal family, though his salary is only fifteen hundred a year, and pearl passementerie, I believe, quite unknown and useless in the Hoosac region. She had loads of the most beautiful presents you ever saw. All the Silvers are rolling in riches, you know. One little thing made me laugh, for it was so like her. When the clergyman said, "Mary, wilt thou take this man to be thy wedded husband?" I distinctly saw her put her fingers over her mouth in the old, frightened way. It was only for a second, and after that I rather think Mr. Strothers held her hand tight for fear she might do it again. She sent her love to you, Katy. What sort of a gown are *you* going to have, by the way?

I have kept my best news to the last, which is that Deniston has at last given way, and we are to move into town in October. We have taken a little house in West Cedar Street. It is quite small and very dingy and I presume inconvenient, but I already love it to distraction, and feel as if I should sit up all night for the first month to enjoy the sensation of being no longer that horrid thing, a resident of the suburbs. I hunt the paper shops and collect samples of odd and occult pattern, and compare them with carpets, and am altogether in my element, only longing for the time to come when I may put together my pots and pans and betake me across the mill-dam. Meantime, Roslein is living in a

state of quarantine. She is not permitted to speak with any other children, or even to look out of window at one, for fear she may contract some sort of contagious disease, and spoil our beautiful visit to Burnet. She sends you a kiss, and so do I; and mother and Sylvia and Deniston and grandmamma, particularly, desire their love.

Your loving

Rose Red.

"Oh," cried Clover, catching Katy round the waist, and waltzing wildly about the room, "what a delicious letter! What fun we are going to have! It seems too good to be true. Tum-ti-ti, tum-ti-ti. Keep step, Katy. I forgive you for the first time for getting married. I never did before, really and truly. Tum-ti-ti; I am so happy that I must dance!"

"There go my letters," said Katy, as with the last rapid twirl, Rose's many-sheeted epistle and the "Advice to Brides" flew to right and left. "There go two of your hair-pins, Clover. Oh, do stop; we shall all be in pieces."

Clover brought her gyrations to a close by landing her unwilling partner suddenly on the sofa. Then with a last squeeze and a rapid kiss she began to pick up the scattered letters.

"Now read the rest," she commanded, "though anything else will sound flat after Rose's."

"Hear this first," said Elsie, who had taken advantage of the pause to open her own letter. "It is from Cecy, and she says she is coming to spend a month with her mother on purpose to be here for Katy's wedding. She sends heaps of love to you, Katy, and

says she only hopes that Mr. Worthington will prove as perfectly satisfactory in all respects as her own dear Sylvester."

"My gracious, I should hope he would," put in Clover, who was still in the wildest spirits. "What a dear old goose Cecy is! I never hankered in the least for Sylvester Slack, did you, Katy?"

"Certainly not. It would be a most improper proceeding if I had," replied Katy, with a laugh. "Whom do you think this letter is from, girls? Do listen to it. It's written by that nice old Mr. Allen Beach, whom we met in London. Don't you recollect my telling you about him?"

My dear Miss Carr,—Our friends in Harley Street have told me a piece of news concerning you which came to them lately in a letter from Mrs. Ashe, and I hope you will permit me to offer you my most sincere congratulations and good wishes. I recollect meeting Lieutenant Worthington when he was here two years ago, and liking him very much. One is always glad in a foreign land to be able to show so good a specimen of one's young countrymen as he affords,—not that England need be counted as a foreign country by any American, and least of all by myself, who have found it a true home for so many years.

As a little souvenir of our week of sight-seeing together, of which I retain most agreeable remembrances, I have sent you by my friends the Sawyers, who sail for America shortly, a copy of Hare's "Walks in London," which a young *protégée* of mine has for the past year been illustrating with photographs of the many curious old buildings described. You took so much interest in them while here that I hope

you may like to see them again. Will you please accept with
it my most cordial wishes for your future, and believe me
Very faithfully your friend,
Allen Beach.

"What a nice letter!" said Clover.

"Isn't it?" replied Katy, with shining eyes, "what a thing it is to be a gentleman, and to know how to say and do things in the right way! I am so surprised and pleased that Mr. Beach should remember me. I never supposed he would, he sees so many people in London all the time, and it is quite a long time since we were there, nearly two years. Was your letter from Miss Inches, John?"

"Yes, and Mamma Marian sends you her love; and there's a present coming by express for you,—some sort of a book with a hard name. I can scarcely make it out, the Ru—ru—something of Omar Kay—y—Well, anyway it's a book, and she hopes you will read Emerson's 'Essay on Friendship' over before you are married, because it's a helpful utterance, and adjusts the mind to mutual conditions."

"Worse than 1 Timothy, ii. 11," muttered Clover. "Well, Katy dear, what next? What *are* you laughing at?"

"You will never guess, I am sure. This is a letter from Miss Jane! And she has made me this pincushion!"

The pincushion was of a familiar type, two circles of pasteboard covered with gray silk, neatly over-handed together, and stuck with a row of closely fitting pins. Miss Jane's note ran

as follows:—

Hillsover, April 21.

Dear Katy,—I hear from Mrs. Nipson that you are to be married shortly, and I want to say that you have my best wishes for your future. I think a man ought to be happy who has you for a wife. I only hope the one you have chosen is worthy of you. Probably he isn't, but perhaps you won't find it out. Life is a knotty problem for most of us. May you solve it satisfactorily to yourself and others! I have nothing to send but my good wishes and a few pins. They are not an unlucky present, I believe, as scissors are said to be.

Remember me to your sister, and believe me to be with true regard,

Yours, *Jane A. Bangs.*

"Dear me, is that her name?" cried Clover. "I always supposed she was baptized 'Miss Jane.' It never occurred to me that she had any other title. What appropriate initials! How she used to J.A.B. with us!"

"Now, Clovy, that's not kind. It's a very nice note indeed, and I am touched by it. It's a beautiful compliment to say that the man ought to be happy who has got me, I think. I never supposed that Miss Jane could pay a compliment."

"Or make a joke! That touch about the scissors is really jocose,—for Miss Jane. Rose Red will shriek over the letter and that particularly rigid pincushion. They are both of them so exactly like her. Dear me! only one letter left. Who is that from, Katy? How fast one does eat up one's pleasures!"

"But you had a letter yourself. Surely papa said so. What was that? You haven't read it to us."

"No, for it contains a secret which you are not to hear just yet," replied Clover. "Brides mustn't ask questions. Go on with yours."

"Mine is from Louisa Agnew,—quite a long one, too. It's an age since we heard from her, you know."

Ashburn, April 24.

Dear Katy,—Your delightful letter and invitation came day before yesterday, and thank you for both. There is nothing in the world that would please me better than to come to your wedding if it were possible, but it simply isn't. If you lived in New Haven now, or even Boston,—but Burnet is so dreadfully far off, it seems as inaccessible as Kamchatka to a person who, like myself, has a house to keep and two babies to take care of.

Don't look so alarmed. The house is the same house you saw when you were here, and so is one of the babies; the other is a new acquisition just two years old, and as great a darling as Daisy was at the same age. My mother has been really better in health since he came, but just now she is at a sort of Rest Cure in Kentucky; and I have my hands full with papa and the children, as you can imagine, so I can't go off two days' journey to a wedding,—not even to yours, my dearest old Katy. I shall think about you all day long on *the* day, when I know which it is, and try to imagine just how everything looks; and yet I don't find that quite easy, for somehow I fancy that your wedding will be a little different from the common run. You always were different

from other people to me, you know,—you and Clover,—and I love you so much, and I always shall.

Papa has taken a kit-kat portrait of me in oils,—and a blue dress,—which he thinks is like, and which I am going to send you as soon as it comes home from the framers. I hope you will like it a little for my sake. Dear Katy, I send so much love with it.

I have only seen the Pages in the street since they came home from Europe; but the last piece of news here is Lilly's engagement to Comte Ernest de Conflans. He has something to do with the French legation in Washington, I believe; and they crossed in the same steamer. I saw him driving with her the other day,—a little man, not handsome, and very dark. I do not know when they are to be married. Your Cousin Clarence is in Colorado.

With two kisses apiece and a great hug for you, Katy, I am always

Your affectionate friend,

Louisa.

"Dear me!" said the insatiable Clover, "is that the very last? I wish we had another mail, and twelve more letters coming in at once. What a blessed institution the post-office is!"

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST WEDDING IN THE FAMILY

The great job of the cake-making over, a sense of leisure settled on the house. There seemed nothing left to be done which need put any one out of his or her way particularly. Katy had among her other qualities a great deal of what is called "forehandedness." To leave things to be attended to at the last moment in a flurry and a hurry would have been intolerable to her. She firmly believed in the doctrine of a certain wise man of our own day who says that to push your work before you is easy enough, but to pull it after you is very hard indeed.

All that winter, without saying much about it,—for Katy did not "do her thinking outside her head,"—she had been gradually making ready for the great event of the spring. Little by little, a touch here and a touch there, matters had been put in train, and the result now appeared in a surprising ease of mind and absence of confusion. The house had received its spring cleaning a fortnight earlier than usual, and was in fair, nice order, with freshly-beaten carpets and newly-washed curtains. Katy's dresses were ordered betimes, and had come home, been tried on, and folded away ten days before the wedding. They were not many

in number, but all were pretty and in good taste, for the frigate was to be in Bar Harbor and Newport for a part of the summer, and Katy wanted to do Ned credit, and look well in his eyes and those of his friends.

All the arrangements, kept studiously simple, were beautifully systematized; and their very simplicity made them easy to carry out. The guest chambers were completely ready, one or two extra helpers were engaged that the servants might not be overworked, the order of every meal for the three busiest days was settled and written down. Each of the younger sisters had some special charge committed to her. Elsie was to wait on Cousin Helen, and see that she and her nurse had everything they wanted. Clover was to care for the two Roses; Johnnie to oversee the table arrangements, and make sure that all was right in that direction. Dear little Amy was indefatigable as a doer of errands, and her quick feet were at everybody's service to "save steps." Cecy arrived, and haunted the house all day long, anxious to be of use to somebody; Mrs. Ashe put her time at their disposal; there was such a superabundance of helpers, in fact, that no one could feel over taxed. And Katy, while still serving as main spring to the whole, had plenty of time to write her notes, open her wedding presents, and enjoy her friends in a leisurely, unfatigued fashion which was a standing wonderment to Cecy, whose own wedding had been of the onerous sort, and had worn her to skin and bone.

"I am only just beginning to recover from it now," she remarked plaintively, "and there you sit, Katy, looking as fresh

as a rose; not tired a bit, and never seeming to have anything on your mind. I can't think how you do it. I never was at a wedding before where everybody was not perfectly worn out."

"You never were at such a simple wedding before," explained Katy. "I'm not ambitious, you see. I want to keep things pretty much as they are every day, only with a little more of everything because of there being more people to provide for. If I were attempting to make it a beautiful, picturesque wedding, we should get as tired as anybody, I have no doubt."

Katy's gifts were numerous enough to satisfy even Clover, and comprised all manner of things, from a silver tray which came, with a rather stiff note, from Mrs. Page and Lilly, to Mary's new flour-scoop, Debby's sifter, and a bottle of home-made hair tonic from an old woman in the "County Home." Each of the brothers and sisters had made her something, Katy having expressed a preference for presents of home manufacture. Mrs. Ashe gave her a beautiful sapphire ring, and Cecy Hall—as they still called her inadvertently half the time—an elaborate sofa-pillow embroidered by herself. Katy liked all her gifts, both large and small, both for what they were and for what they meant, and took a good healthy, hearty satisfaction in the fact that so many people cared for her, and had worked to give her a pleasure.

Cousin Helen was the first guest to arrive, five days before the wedding. When Dr. Carr, who had gone to Buffalo to meet and escort her down, lifted her from the carriage and carried her indoors, all of them could easily have fancied that it was the

first visit happening over again, for she looked exactly as she did then, and scarcely a day older. She happened to have on a soft gray travelling dress too, much like that which she wore on the previous occasion, which made the illusion more complete.

But there was no illusion to Cousin Helen herself. Everything to her seemed changed and quite different. The ten years which had passed so lightly over her head had made a vast alteration in the cousins whom she remembered as children. The older ones were grown up, the younger ones in a fair way to be so; even Phil, who had been in white frocks with curls falling over his shoulders at the time of her former visit to Burnet, was now fifteen and as tall as his father. He was very slight in build, and looked delicate, she thought; but Katy assured her that he was perfectly well, and thin only because he had outgrown his strength.

It was one of the delightful results of Katy's "forehandedness" that she could command time during those next two days to thoroughly enjoy Cousin Helen. She sat beside her sofa for hours at a time, holding her hand and talking with a freedom of confidence such as she could have shown to no one else, except perhaps to Clover. She had the feeling that in so doing she was rendering account to a sort of visible conscience of all the events, the mistakes, the successes, the glad and the sorry of the long interval that had passed since they met. It was a pleasure and relief to her; and to Cousin Helen the recital was of equal interest, for though she knew the main facts by letter, there was a satisfaction in collecting the little details which seldom get fully

put into letters.

One subject only Katy touched rather guardedly; and that was Ned. She was so desirous that her cousin should approve of him, and so anxious not to raise her expectations and have her disappointed, that she would not half say how very nice she herself thought him to be. But Cousin Helen could "read between the lines," and out of Katy's very reserve she constructed an idea of Ned which satisfied her pretty well.

So the two happy days passed, and on the third arrived the other anxiously expected guests, Rose Red and little Rose.

They came early in the morning, when no one was particularly looking for them, which made it all the pleasanter. Clover was on the porch twisting the honeysuckle tendrils upon the trellis when the carriage drove up to the gate, and Rose's sunny face popped out of the window. Clover recognized her at once, and with a shriek which brought all the others downstairs, flew down the path, and had little Rose in her arms before any one else could get there.

"You see before you a deserted wife," was Rose's first salutation. "Deniston has just dumped us on the wharf, and gone on to Chicago in that abominable boat, leaving me to your tender mercies. O Business, Business! what crimes are committed in thy name, as Madame Roland would say!"

"Never mind Deniston," cried Clover, with a rapturous squeeze. "Let us play that he doesn't exist, for a little while. We have got you now, and we mean to keep you."

"How pleasant you look!" said Rose, glancing up the locust walk toward the house, which wore a most inviting and hospitable air, with doors and windows wide open, and the soft wind fluttering the vines and the white curtains. "Ah, there comes Katy now." She ran forward to meet her while Clover followed with little Rose.

"Let me det down, pease," said that young lady,—the first remark she had made. "I tan walk all by myself. I am not a baby any more."

"*Will* you hear her talk?" cried Katy, catching her up. "Isn't it wonderful? Rosebud, who am I, do you think?"

"My Aunt Taty, I dess, betause you is so big. Is you mawwied yet?"

"No, indeed. Did you think I would get 'mawwied' without you? I have been waiting for you and mamma to come and help me."

"Well, we is here," in a tone of immense satisfaction. "Now you tan."

The larger Rose meanwhile was making acquaintance with the others. She needed no introductions, but seemed to know by instinct which was each boy and each girl, and to fit the right names to them all. In five minutes she seemed as much at home as though she had spent her life in Burnet. They bore her into the house in a sort of triumph, and upstairs to the blue bedroom, which Katy and Clover had vacated for her; and such a hubbub of talk and laughter presently issued therefrom that Cousin Helen,

on the other side the entry, asked Jane to set her door open that she might enjoy the sounds,—they were so merry.

Rose's bright, rather high-pitched voice was easily distinguishable above the rest. She was evidently relating some experience of her journey, with an occasional splash by way of accompaniment, which suggested that she might be washing her hands.

"Yes, she really has grown awfully pretty; and she had on the loveliest dark-brown suit you ever saw, with a fawn-colored hat, and was altogether dazzling; and, do you know, I was really quite glad to see her. I can't imagine why, but I was! I didn't stay glad long, however."

"Why not? What did she do?" This in Clover's voice.

"Well, she didn't do anything, but she was distant and disagreeable. I scarcely observed it at first, I was so pleased to see one of the old Hillsover girls; and I went on being very cordial. Then Lilly tried to put me down by running over a list of her fine acquaintances, Lady this, and the Marquis of that,—people whom she and her mother had known abroad. It made me think of my old autograph book with Antonio de Vallombrosa, and the rest. Do you remember?"

"Of course we do. Well, go on."

"At last she said something about Comte Ernest de Conflans,—I had heard of him, perhaps? He crossed in the steamer with 'Mamma and me,' it seems; and we have seen a great deal of him. This appeared a good opportunity to show that I too have

relations with the nobility, so I said yes, I had met him in Boston, and my sister had seen a good deal of him in Washington last winter.

"And what did she think of him?" demanded Lilly.

"Well," said I, "she didn't seem to think a great deal about him. She says all the young men at the French legation seem more than usually foolish, but Comte Ernest is the worst of the lot. He really *does* look like an absolute fool, you know," I added pleasantly. Now, girls, what was there in that to make her angry? Can you tell? She grew scarlet, and glared as if she wanted to bite my head off; and then she turned her back and would scarcely speak to me again. Does she always behave that way when the aristocracy is lightly spoken of?"

"Oh, Rose,—oh, Rose," cried Clover, in fits of laughter, "did you really tell her that?"

"I really did. Why shouldn't I? Is there any reason in particular?"

"Only that she is engaged to him," replied Katy, in an extinguished voice.

"Good gracious! No wonder she scowled! This is really dreadful. But then why did she look so black when she asked where we were going, and I said to your wedding? That didn't seem to please her any more than my little remarks about the nobility."

"I don't pretend to understand Lilly," said Katy, temperately; "she is an odd girl."

"I suppose an odd girl can't be expected to have an even temper," remarked Rose, apparently speaking with a hairpin in her mouth. "Well, I've done for myself, that is evident. I need never expect any notice in future from the Comtesse de Conflans."

Cousin Helen heard no more, but presently steps sounded outside her door, and Katy looked in to ask if she were dressed, and if she might bring Rose in, a request which was gladly granted. It was a pretty sight to see Rose with Cousin Helen. She knew all about her already from Clover and Katy, and fell at once under the gentle spell which seemed always to surround that invalid sofa, begged leave to say "Cousin Helen" as the others did, and was altogether at her best and sweetest when with her, full of merriment, but full too of a deference and sympathy which made her particularly charming.

"I never did see anything so lovely in all my life before," she told Clover in confidence. "To watch her lying there looking so radiant and so peaceful and so interested in Katy's affairs, and never once seeming to remember that except for that accident she too would have been a bride and had a wedding! It's perfectly wonderful! Do you suppose she is never sorry for herself? She seems the merriest of us all."

"I don't think she remembers herself often enough to be sorry. She is always thinking of some one else, it seems to me."

"Well, I am glad to have seen her," added Rose, in a more serious tone than was usual to her. "She and grandmamma are

of a different order of beings from the rest of the world. I don't wonder you and Katy always were so good; you ought to be with such a Cousin Helen."

"I don't think we were as good as you make us out, but Cousin Helen has really been one of the strong influences of our lives. She was the making of Katy, when she had that long illness; and Katy has made the rest of us."

Little Rose from the first moment became the delight of the household, and especially of Amy Ashe, who could not do enough for her, and took her off her mother's hands so entirely that Rose complained that she seemed to have lost her child as well as her husband. She was a sedate little maiden, and wonderfully wise for her years. Already, in some ways she seemed older than her erratic little mother, of whom, in a droll fashion, she assumed a sort of charge. She was a born housewife.

"Mamma, you have fordotten your wings," Clover would hear her saying. "Mamma, you has a wip in your seeve, you must mend it," or "Mamma, don't forget dat your teys is in the top dwawer,"—all these reminders and advices being made particularly comical by the baby pronunciation. Rose's theory was that little Rose was a messenger from heaven sent to buffet her and correct her mistakes.

"The bane and the antidote," she would say. "Think of my having a child with powers of ratiocination!"

Rose came down the night of her arrival after a long, freshening nap, looking rested and bonny in a pretty blue dress,

and saying that as little Rose too had taken a good sleep, she might sit up to tea if the family liked. The family were only too pleased to have her do so. After tea Rose carried her off, ostensibly to go to bed, but Clover heard a great deal of confabulating and giggling in the hall and on the stairs, and soon after, Rose returned, the door-bell rang loudly, and there entered an astonishing vision,—little Rose, costumed as a Cupid or a carrier-pigeon, no one knew exactly which, with a pair of large white wings fastened on her shoulders, and dragging behind her by a loop of ribbon a sizeable basket quite full of parcels.

Straight toward Katy she went, and with her small hands behind her back and her blue eyes fixed full on Katy's face, repeated with the utmost solemnity the following "poem:"

"I'm a messenger, you see,
Fwom Hymen's Expwess Tumpany.
All these little bundles are
For my Aunty Taty Tarr;
If she knows wot's dood for her
She will tiss the messenger."

"You sweet thing!" cried Katy, "tissing the messenger" with all her heart. "I never heard such a dear little poem. Did you write it yourself, Roslein?"

"No. Mamma wote it, but she teached it to me so I tould say it."

The bundles of course contained wedding gifts. Rose seemed

to have brought her trunk full of them. There were a pretty pair of salt-cellars from Mrs. Redding, a charming paper-knife of silver, with an antique coin set in the handle, from Sylvia, a hand-mirror mounted in brass from Esther Dearborn, a long towel with fringed and embroidered ends from Ellen Gray, and from dear old Mrs. Redding a beautiful lace-pin set with a moonstone. Next came a little *repoussé* pitcher marked, "With love from Mary Silver," then a parcel tied with pink ribbons, containing a card-case of Japanese leather, which was little Rose's gift, and last of all Rose's own present, a delightful case full of ivory brushes and combs. Altogether never was such a satisfactory "fardel" brought by Hymen's or any other express company before; and in opening the packages, reading the notes that came with them and exclaiming and admiring, time flew so fast that Rose quite forgot the hour, till little Rose, growing sleepy, reminded her of it by saying,—

"Mamma, I dess I'd better do to bed now, betause if I don't I shall be too seepy to turn to Aunt Taty's wedding to-mowwow."

"Dear me!" cried Rose, catching the child up. "This is simply dreadful! what a mother I am! Things *are* come to a pass indeed, if babes and sucklings have to ask to be put to bed. Baby, you ought to have been christened Nathan the Wise."

She disappeared with Roslein's drowsy eyes looking over her shoulder.

Next afternoon came Ned, and with him, to Katy's surprise and pleasure, appeared the good old commodore who had played

such a kind part in their affairs in Italy the year before. It was a great compliment that he should think it worth while to come so far to see one of his junior officers married; and it showed so much real regard for Ned that everybody was delighted. These guests were quartered with Mrs. Ashe, but they took most of their meals with the Carrs; and it was arranged that they, with Polly and Amy, should come to an early breakfast on the marriage morning.

After Ned's arrival things did seem to grow a little fuller and busier, for he naturally wanted Katy to himself, and she was too preoccupied to keep her calm grasp on events; still all went smoothly, and Rose declared that there never was such a wedding since the world was made,—no tears, no worries, nobody looking tired, nothing disagreeable!

Clover's one great subject of concern was the fear that it might rain. There was a little haze about the sunset the night before, and she expressed her intention to Cousin Helen of lying awake all night to see how things looked.

"I really feel as if I could not bear it if it should storm," she said, "after all this fine weather too; and I know I shall not sleep a wink, anyway."

"I think we can trust God to take care of the weather even on Katy's wedding-day," replied Cousin Helen, gently.

And after all it was she who lay awake. Pain had made her a restless sleeper, and as her bed commanded the great arch of western sky, she saw the moon, a sharp-curved silver shape,

descend and disappear a little before midnight. She roused again when all was still, solemn darkness except for a spangle of stars, and later, opened her eyes in time to catch the faint rose flush of dawn reflected from the east. She raised herself on her elbow to watch the light grow.

"It is a fair day for the child," she whispered to herself. "How good God is!" Then she slept again for a long, restful space, and woke refreshed, so that Katy's secret fear that Cousin Helen might be ill from excitement, and not able to come to her wedding, was not realized.

Clover, meantime, had slept soundly all night. She and Katy shared the same room, and waked almost at the same moment. It was early still; but the sisters felt bright and rested and ready for work, so they rose at once.

They dressed in silence, after a little whispered rejoicing over the beautiful morning, and in silence took their Bibles and sat down side by side to read the daily portion which was their habit. Then hand in hand they stole downstairs, disturbing nobody, softly opened doors and windows, carried bowls and jars out on the porch, and proceeded to arrange a great basket full of roses which had been brought the night before, and set in the dew-cool shade of the willows to keep fresh.

Before breakfast all the house had put on festal airs. Summer had come early to Burnet that year; every garden was in bud and blossom, and every one who had flowers had sent their best to grace Katy's wedding. The whole world seemed full of delicious

smells. Each table and chimney-piece bore a fragrant load; a great bowl of Jacqueminots stood in the middle of the breakfast-table, and two large jars of the same on the porch, where Clover had arranged various seats and cushions that it might serve as a sort of outdoor parlor.

Nobody who came to that early breakfast ever forgot its peace and pleasantness and the sweet atmosphere of affection which seemed to pervade everything about it. After breakfast came family prayers as usual, Dr. Carr reading the chapter, and the dear old commodore joining with a hearty nautical voice in,—

"Awake my soul! and with the sun,"

which was a favorite hymn with all of them. Ned shared Katy's book, and his face and hers alone would have been breakfast enough for the company if everything else had failed, as Rose remarked to Clover in a whisper, though nobody found any fault with the more substantial fare which Debby had sent in previously. Somehow this little mutual service of prayer and praise seemed to fit in with the spirit of the day, and give it its keynote.

"It's just the sweetest wedding," Mrs. Ashe told her brother. "And the wonderful thing is that everything comes so naturally. Katy is precisely her usual self,—only a little more so."

"I'm under great obligations to Amy for having that fever," was Ned's somewhat indirect answer; but his sister understood

what he meant.

Breakfast over, the guests discreetly removed themselves; and the whole family joined in resetting the table for the luncheon, which was to be at two, Katy and Ned departing in the boat at four. It was a simple but abundant repast, with plenty of delicious home-cooked food,—oysters and salads and cold chicken; fresh salmon from Lake Superior; a big Virginia ham baked to perfection, red and translucent to its savory centre; hot coffee, and quantities of Debby's perfect rolls. There were strawberries, also, and ice-cream, and the best of home-made cake and jellies, and everywhere vases of fresh roses to perfume the feast. When all was arranged, there was still time for Katy to make Cousin Helen a visit, and then go to her room for a quiet rest before dressing; and still that same unhurried air pervaded the house.

There had been a little discussion the night before as to just how the bride should make her appearance at the decisive moment; but Katy had settled it by saying simply that she should come downstairs, and Ned could meet her at the foot of the staircase.

"It is the simplest way," she said; "and you know I don't want any fuss. I will just come down."

"I dare say she's right," remarked Rose; "but it seems to me to require a great deal of courage."

And after all, it didn't. The simple and natural way of doing a thing generally turns out the easiest. Clover helped Katy to put on the wedding-gown of soft crape and creamy white silk. It was

trimmed with old lace and knots of ribbon, and Katy wore with it two or three white roses which Ned had brought her, and a pearl pendant which was his gift. Then Clover had to go downstairs to receive the guests, and see that Cousin Helen's sofa was put in the right place; and Rose, who remained behind, had the pleasure of arranging Katy's veil. The yellow-white of the old blonde was very becoming, and altogether, the effect, though not "stylish," was very sweet. Katy was a little pale, but otherwise exactly like her usual self, with no tremors or self-consciousness.

Presently little Rose came up with a message.

"Aunt Tover says dat Dr. Tone has tum, and everything is weddy, and you'd better tum down," she announced.

Katy gave Rose a last kiss, and went down the hall. But little Rose was so fascinated by the appearance of the white dress and veil that she kept fast hold of Katy's hand, disregarding her mother's suggestion that she should slip down the back staircase, as she herself proposed to do.

"No, I want to do with my Aunt Taty," she persisted.

So it chanced that Katy came downstairs with pretty little Rose clinging to her like a sort of impromptu bridesmaid; and meeting Ned's eyes as he stood at the foot waiting for her, she forgot herself, lost the little sense of shyness which was creeping over her, and responded to his look with a tender, brilliant smile. The light from the hall-door caught her face and figure just then, the color flashed into her cheeks; and she looked like a beautiful, happy picture of a bride, and all by accident,—which was the best

thing about it; for pre-arranged effects are not always effective, and are apt to betray their pre-arrangement.

Then Katy took Ned's arm, little Rose let go her hand, and they went into the parlor and were married.

Dr. Stone had an old-fashioned and very solemn wedding service which he was accustomed to use on such occasions. He generally spoke of the bride as "Thy handmaiden," which was a form that Clover particularly deprecated. He had also been known to advert to the world where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage as a great improvement on this, which seemed, to say the least, an unfortunate allusion under the circumstances. But upon this occasion his feelings were warmed and touched, and he called Katy "My dear child," which was much better than "Thy handmaiden."

When the ceremony was over, Ned kissed Katy, and her father kissed her, and the girls and Dorry and Phil; and then, without waiting for any one else, she left her place and went straight to where Cousin Helen lay on her sofa, watching the scene with those clear, tender eyes in which no shadow of past regrets could be detected. Katy knelt down beside her, and they exchanged a long, silent embrace. There was no need for words between hearts which knew each other so well.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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