

Alcott Louisa May

Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag



Louisa Alcott
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MY BOYS

Feeling that I have been unusually fortunate in my knowledge of a choice and pleasing variety of this least appreciated portion of the human race, I have a fancy to record some of my experiences, hoping that it may awaken an interest in other minds, and cause other people to cultivate the delightful, but too often neglected boys, who now run to waste, so to speak.

I have often wondered what they thought of the peculiar treatment they receive, even at the hands of their nearest friends. While they are rosy, roly-poly little fellows they are petted and praised, adorned and adored, till it is a miracle that they are not utterly ruined. But the moment they outgrow their babyhood their trials begin, and they are regarded as nuisances till they are twenty-one, when they are again received into favor.

Yet that very time of neglect is the period when they most need all manner of helps, and ought to have them. I like boys and oysters raw; so, though good manners are always pleasing, I don't mind the rough outside burr which repels most people, and perhaps that is the reason why the burrs open and let me see the soft lining and taste the sweet nut hidden inside.

My first well-beloved boy was a certain Frank, to whom I clung at the age of seven with a devotion which I fear he did not appreciate. There were six girls in the house, but I would have nothing to say to them, preferring to tag after Frank, and perfectly happy when he allowed me to play with him. I regret to say that the small youth was something of a tyrant, and one of his favorite amusements was trying to make me cry by slapping my hands with books, hoop-sticks, shoes, anything that came along capable of giving a good stinging blow. I believe I endured these marks of friendship with the fortitude of a young Indian, and felt fully repaid for a blistered palm by hearing Frank tell the other boys, 'She's a brave little thing, and you can't make her cry.'

My chief joy was in romping with him in the long galleries of a piano manufactory behind our house. What bliss it was to mount one of the cars on which the workmen rolled heavy loads from room to room, and to go thundering down the inclined plains, regardless of the crash that usually awaited us at the bottom! If I could have played foot-ball on the Common with my Frank and Billy Babcock, life could have offered me no greater joy at that period. As the prejudices of society forbid this sport, I revenged myself by driving hoop all around the mall without stopping, which the boys could *not* do.

I can remember certain happy evenings, when we snuggled in sofa corners and planned tricks and ate stolen goodies, and sometimes Frank would put his curly head in my lap and let me stroke it when he was tired. What the girls did I don't recollect;

their domestic plays were not to my taste, and the only figure that stands out from the dimness of the past is that jolly boy with a twinkling eye. This memory would be quite radiant but for one sad thing – a deed that cut me to the soul then, and which I have never quite forgiven in all these years.

On one occasion I did something very naughty, and when called up for judgment fled to the dining-room, locked the door, and from my stronghold defied the whole world. I could have made my own terms, for it was near dinner time and the family must eat; but, alas for the treachery of the human heart! Frank betrayed me. He climbed in at the window, unlocked the door, and delivered me up to the foe. Nay, he even defended the base act, and helped bear the struggling culprit to imprisonment. That nearly broke my heart, for I believed *he* would stand by me as staunchly as I always stood by him. It was a sad blow, and I couldn't love or trust him any more. Peanuts and candy, ginger-snaps and car-rides were unavailing; even foot-ball could not reunite the broken friendship, and to this day I recollect the pang that entered my little heart when I lost my faith in the loyalty of my first boy.

The second attachment was of quite a different sort, and had a happier ending. At the mature age of ten, I left home for my first visit to a family of gay and kindly people in – well why not say right out? – Providence. There were no children, and at first I did not mind this, as every one petted me, especially one of the young men named Christopher. So kind and patient, yet so merry was

this good Christy that I took him for my private and particular boy, and loved him dearly; for he got me out of innumerable scrapes, and never was tired of amusing the restless little girl who kept the family in a fever of anxiety by her pranks. *He* never laughed at her mishaps and mistakes, never played tricks upon her like a certain William, who composed the most trying nicknames, and wickedly goaded the wild visitor into all manner of naughtiness. Christy stood up for her through everything; let her ride the cows, feed the pigs, bang on the piano, and race all over the spice mill, feasting on cinnamon and cloves; brought her down from housetops and fished her out of brooks; never scolded, and never seemed tired of the troublesome friendship of little Torment.

In a week I had exhausted every amusement and was desperately homesick. It has always been my opinion that I should have been speedily restored to the bosom of my family but for Christy, and but for him I should assuredly have run away before the second week was out. He kept me, and in the hour of my disgrace stood by me like a man and a brother.

One afternoon, inspired by a spirit of benevolence, enthusiastic but short-sighted, I collected several poor children in the barn, and regaled them on cake and figs, helping myself freely to the treasures of the pantry without asking leave, meaning to explain afterward. Being discovered before the supplies were entirely exhausted, the patience of the long-suffering matron gave out, and I was ordered up to the garret to reflect upon

my sins, and the pleasing prospect of being sent home with the character of the worst child ever known.

My sufferings were deep as I sat upon a fuzzy little trunk all alone in the dull garret, thinking how hard it was to do right, and wondering why I was scolded for feeding the poor when we were expressly bidden to do so. I felt myself an outcast, and bewailed the disgrace I had brought upon my family. Nobody could possibly love such a bad child; and if the mice were to come and eat me then and there – à la Bishop Hatto – it would only be a relief to my friends. At this dark moment I heard Christy say below, 'She meant it kindly, so I wouldn't mind, Fanny;' and then up came my boy full of sympathy and comfort. Seeing the tragic expression of my face, he said not a word, but, sitting down in an old chair, took me on his knee and held me close and quietly, letting the action speak for itself. It did most eloquently; for the kind arm seemed to take me back from that dreadful exile, and the friendly face to assure me without words that I had not sinned beyond forgiveness.

I had not shed a tear before, but now I cried tempestuously, and clung to him like a shipwrecked little mariner in a storm. Neither spoke, but he held me fast and let me cry myself to sleep; for, when the shower was over, a pensive peace fell upon me, and the dim old garret seemed not a prison, but a haven of refuge, since my boy came to share it with me. How long I slept I don't know, but it must have been an hour, at least; yet my good Christy never stirred, only waited patiently till I woke up in the twilight,

and was not afraid because he was there. He took me down as meek as a mouse, and kept me by him all that trying evening, screening me from jokes, rebukes, and sober looks; and when I went to bed he came up to kiss me, and to assure me that this awful circumstance should not be reported at home. This took a load off my heart, and I remember fervently thanking him, and telling him I never would forget it.

I never have, though he died long ago, and others have probably forgotten all about the naughty prank. I often longed to ask him how he knew the surest way to win a child's heart by the patience, sympathy, and tender little acts that have kept his memory green for nearly thirty years.

Cy was a comrade after my own heart, and for a summer or two we kept the neighbourhood in a ferment by our adventures and hair-breadth escapes. I think I never knew a boy so full of mischief, and my opportunities of judging have been manifold. He did not get into scrapes himself, but possessed a splendid talent for deluding others into them, and then morally remarking, 'There, I told you so!' His way of saying 'You dars'nt do this or that' was like fire to powder; and why I still live in the possession of all my limbs and senses is a miracle to those who know my youthful friendship with Cy. It was he who incited me to jump off of the highest beam in the barn, to be borne home on a board with a pair of sprained ankles. It was he who dared me to rub my eyes with red peppers, and then sympathisingly led me home blind and roaring with pain. It was he who solemnly assured me that

all the little pigs would die in agony if their tails were not cut off, and won me to hold thirteen little squealers while the operation was performed. Those thirteen innocent pink tails haunt me yet, and the memory of that deed has given me a truly Jewish aversion to pork.

I did not know him long, but he was a kindred soul, and must have a place in my list of boys. He is a big, brown man now, and, having done his part in the war, is at work on his farm. We meet sometimes, and though we try to be dignified and proper, it is quite impossible; there is a sly twinkle in Cy's eye that upsets my gravity, and we always burst out laughing at the memory of our early frolics.

My Augustus! oh, my Augustus! my first little lover, and the most romantic of my boys. At fifteen I met this charming youth, and thought I had found my fate. It was at a spelling school in a little country town where I, as a stranger and visitor from the city, was an object of interest. Painfully conscious of this fact, I sat in a corner trying to look easy and elegant, with a large red bow under my chin, and a carnelian ring in full view. Among the boys and girls who frolicked about me, I saw one lad of seventeen with 'large blue eyes, a noble brow, and a beautiful straight nose,' as I described him in a letter to my sister. This attractive youth had a certain air of refinement and ease of manner that the others lacked; and when I found he was the minister's son, I felt that I might admire him without loss of dignity. 'Imagine my sensations,' as Miss Burney's *Evelina* says, when this boy came

and talked to me, a little bashfully at first, but soon quite freely, and invited me to a huckleberry party next day. I had observed that he was one of the best spellers. I also observed that his language was quite elegant; he even quoted Byron, and rolled his eyes in a most engaging manner, not to mention that he asked who gave me my ring, and said he depended on escorting me to the berry pasture.

'Dear me, how interesting it was! and when I found myself, next day, sitting under a tree in the sunny field (full of boys and girls, all more or less loving), with the amiable Augustus at my feet, gallantly supplying me with bushes to strip while we talked about books and poetry, I really felt as if I had got into a novel, and enjoyed it immensely. I believe a dim idea that Gus was sentimental hovered in my mind, but I would not encourage it, though I laughed in my sleeve when he was spouting Latin for my benefit, and was uncertain whether to box his ears or simper later in the day, when he languished over the gate, and said he thought chestnut hair the loveliest in the world.

Poor, dear boy! how innocent and soft-hearted and full of splendid dreams he was, and what deliciously romantic times we had floating on the pond, while the frogs sung to his accordion, as he tried to say unutterable things with his honest blue eyes. It makes me shiver now to think of the mosquitoes and the damp; but it was Pauline and Claude Melnotte then, and when I went home we promised to be true to one another, and write every week during the year he was away at school.

We parted – not in tears by any means; that sort of nonsense comes later, when the romance is less childish – but quite jolly and comfortable, and I hastened to pour forth the thrilling tale to my faithful sister, who approved of the match, being a perfect 'mush of sentiment' herself.

I fear it was not a very ardent flame, however, for Gus did not write every week, and I did not care a bit; nevertheless, I kept his picture and gave it a sentimental sigh when I happened to think of it, while he sent messages now and then, and devoted himself to his studies like an ambitious boy as he was. I hardly expected to see him again, but soon after the year was out, to my great surprise, he called. I was so fluttered by the appearance of his card that I rather lost my head, and did such a silly thing that it makes me laugh even now. He liked chestnut hair, and, pulling out my combs, I rushed down, theatrically dishevelled, hoping to impress my lover with my ardour and my charms.

I expected to find little Gus; but, to my great confusion, a tall being with a beaver in his hand rose to meet me, looking so big and handsome and generally imposing that I could not recover myself for several minutes, and mentally wailed for my combs, feeling like an untidy simpleton.

I don't know whether he thought me a little cracked or not, but he was very friendly and pleasant, and told me his plans, and hoped I would make another visit, and smoothed his beaver, and let me see his tail-coat, and behaved himself like a dear, conceited, clever boy. He did not allude to our love-passages,

being shy, and I blessed him for it; for really, I don't know what rash thing I might have done under the exciting circumstances. Just as he was going, however, he forgot his cherished hat for a minute, put out both hands, and said heartily, with his old boyish laugh, – 'Now you will come, and we'll go boating and berrying, and all the rest of it again, won't we?'

The blue eyes were full of fun and feeling, too, I fancied, as I blushing retired behind my locks and gave the promise. But I never went, and never saw my little lover any more, for in a few weeks he was dead of a fever, brought on by too much study, – and so ended the sad history of my fourth boy.

After this, for many years, I was a boyless being; but was so busy I did not feel my destitute condition till I went to the hospital during the war, and found my little sergeant. His story has been told elsewhere, but the sequel to it is a pleasant one, for Baby B. still writes to me now and then, asks advice about his future, and gladdens me with good news of his success as a business man in Kansas.

As if to atone for the former dearth, a sudden shower of most superior boys fell upon me, after I recovered from my campaign. Some of the very best sort it was my fortune to know and like – real gentlemen, yet boys still – and jolly times they had, stirring up the quiet old town with their energetic society.

There was W., a stout, amiable youth, who would stand in the middle of a strawberry patch with his hands in his pockets and let us feed him luxuriously. B., a delightful scapegrace, who came

once a week to confess his sins, beat his breast in despair, vow awful vows of repentance, and then cheerfully depart to break every one of them in the next twenty-four hours. S., the gentle-hearted giant; J., the dandy; sober, sensible B.; and E., the young knight without reproach or fear.

But my especial boy of the batch was A. – proud and cold and shy to other people, sad and serious sometimes when his good heart and tender conscience showed him his short-comings, but so grateful for sympathy and a kind word.

I could not get at him as easily as I could the other lads, but, thanks to Dickens, I found him out at last.

We played Dolphus and Sophy Tetterby in the 'Haunted Man,' at one of the school festivals; and during the rehearsals I discovered that my Dolphus was – permit the expression, oh, well-bred readers! – a trump. What fun we had to be sure, acting the droll and pathetic scenes together, with a swarm of little Tetterbys skirmishing about us! From that time he has been my Dolphus and I his Sophy, and my yellow-haired laddie don't forget me, though he has a younger Sophy now, and some small Tetterbys of his own. He writes just the same affectionate letters as he used to do, though I, less faithful, am too busy to answer them.

But the best and dearest of all my flock was my Polish boy, Ladislav Wisniewski – two hiccoughs and a sneeze will give you the name perfectly. Six years ago, as I went down to my early breakfast at our Pension in Vevey, I saw that a stranger

had arrived. He was a tall youth, of eighteen or twenty, with a thin, intelligent face, and the charmingly polite manners of a foreigner. As the other boarders came in, one by one, they left the door open, and a draught of cold autumn air blew in from the stone corridor, making the new-comer cough, shiver, and cast wistful glances towards the warm corner by the stove. My place was there, and the heat often oppressed me, so I was glad of an opportunity to move.

A word to Madame Vodoz effected the change; and at dinner I was rewarded by a grateful smile from the poor fellow, as he nestled into his warm seat, after a pause of surprise and a flush of pleasure at the small kindness from a stranger. We were too far apart to talk much, but, as he filled his glass, the Pole bowed to me, and said low in French – 'I drink the good health to Mademoiselle.'

I returned the wish, but he shook his head with a sudden shadow on his face, as if the words meant more than mere compliment to him.

'That boy is sick and needs care. I must see to him,' said I to myself, as I met him in the afternoon, and observed the military look of his blue and white suit, as he touched his cap and smiled pleasantly. I have a weakness for brave boys in blue, and having discovered that he had been in the late Polish Revolution, my heart warmed to him at once.

That evening he came to me in the salon, and expressed his thanks in the prettiest broken English I ever heard. So simple,

frank, and grateful was he that a few words of interest won his little story from him, and in half an hour we were friends. With his fellow-students he had fought through the last outbreak, and suffered imprisonment and hardship rather than submit, had lost many friends, his fortune and his health, and at twenty, lonely, poor, and ill, was trying bravely to cure the malady which seemed fatal.

'If I recover myself of this affair in the chest, I teach the music to acquire my bread in this so hospitable country. At Paris, my friends, all two, find a refuge, and I go to them in spring if I die not here. Yes, it is solitary, and my memories are not gay, but I have my work, and the good God remains always to me, so I content myself with much hope, and I wait.'

Such genuine piety and courage increased my respect and regard immensely, and a few minutes later he added to both by one of the little acts that show character better than words.

He told me about the massacre, when five hundred Poles were shot down by Cossacks in the market-place, merely because they sung their national hymn.

'Play me that forbidden air,' I said, wishing to judge of his skill, for I had heard him practising softly in the afternoon.

He rose willingly, then glanced about the room and gave a little shrug which made me ask what he wanted.

'I look to see if the Baron is here. He is Russian, and to him my national air will not be pleasing.'

'Then play it. He dare not forbid it here, and I should rather

enjoy that little insult to your bitter enemy,' said I, feeling very indignant with everything Russian just then.

'Ah, mademoiselle, it is true we are enemies, but we are also gentlemen,' returned the boy, proving that *he* at least was one.

I thanked him for his lesson in politeness, and as the Baron was not there he played the beautiful hymn, singing it enthusiastically in spite of the danger to his weak lungs. A true musician evidently, for, as he sung his pale face glowed, his eyes shone, and his lost vigor seemed restored to him.

From that evening we were fast friends; for the memory of certain dear lads at home made my heart open to this lonely boy, who gave me in return the most grateful affection and service. He begged me to call him 'Varjo,' as his mother did. He constituted himself my escort, errand-boy, French teacher, and private musician, making those weeks indefinitely pleasant by his winning ways, his charming little confidences, and faithful friendship.

We had much fun over our lessons, for I helped him about his English. With a great interest in free America, and an intense longing to hear about our war, the barrier of an unknown tongue did not long stand between us.

Beginning with my bad French and his broken English, we got on capitally; but he outdid me entirely, making astonishing progress, though he often slapped his forehead with the despairing exclamation, – 'I am imbecile! I never can will shall to have learn this beast of English!'

But he did, and in a month had added a new language to the five he already possessed.

His music was the delight of the house; and he often gave us little concerts with the help of Madame Teiblin, a German St. Cecilia, with a cropped head and a gentlemanly sack, cravat, and collar. Both were enthusiasts, and the longer they played the more inspired they got. The piano vibrated, the stools creaked, the candles danced in their sockets, and every one sat mute while the four white hands chased one another up and down the keys, and the two fine faces beamed with such ecstasy that we almost expected to see instrument and performers disappear in a musical whirlwind.

Lake Lemana will never seem so lovely again as when Laddie and I roamed about its shores, floated on its bosom, or laid splendid plans for the future in the sunny garden of the old chateau. I tried it again last year, but the charm was gone, for I missed my boy with his fun, his music, and the frank, fresh affection he gave his 'little mamma,' as he insisted on calling the lofty spinster who loved him like half-a-dozen grandmothers rolled into one.

December roses blossomed in the gardens then, and Laddie never failed to have a posy ready for me at dinner. Few evenings passed without 'confidences' in my corner of the salon, and I still have a pile of merry little notes which I used to find tucked under my door. He called them chapters of a great history we were to write together, and being a '*polisson*' he illustrated it with droll

pictures, and a funny mixture of French and English romance.

It was very pleasant, but like all pleasant things in this world of change it soon came to an end. When I left for Italy we jokingly agreed to meet in Paris the next May, but neither really felt that we should ever meet again, for Laddie hardly expected to outlive the winter, and I felt sure I should soon be forgotten. As he kissed my hand there were tears in my boy's eyes, and a choke in the voice that tried to say cheerfully – '*Bon voyage*, dear and good little mamma. I do not say adieu, but *au revoir*.'

Then the carriage rolled away, the wistful face vanished, and nothing remained to me but the memory of Laddie, and a little stain on my glove where a drop had fallen.

As I drew near Paris six months later, and found myself wishing that I might meet Varjo in the great, gay city, and wondering if there was any chance of my doing it, I never dreamed of seeing him so soon; but, as I made my way among the crowd of passengers that poured through the station, feeling tired, bewildered, and homesick, I suddenly saw a blue and white cap wave wildly in the air, then Laddie's beaming face appeared, and Laddie's eager hands grasped mine so cordially that I began to laugh at once, and felt that Paris was almost as good as home.

'Ah, ha! behold the little mamma, who did not think to see again her bad son! Yes, I am greatly glad that I make the fine surprise for you as you come all weary to this place of noise. Give to me the billets, for I am still mademoiselle's servant and go to find the coffers.'

He got my trunks, put me into a carriage, and as we rolled merrily away I asked how he chanced to meet me so unexpectedly. Knowing where I intended to stay, he had called occasionally till I notified Madame D. of the day and hour of my arrival, and then he had come to 'make the fine surprise.' He enjoyed the joke like a true boy, and I was glad to see how well he looked, and how gay he seemed.

'You are better?' I said.

'I truly hope so. The winter was good to me and I cough less. It is a small hope, but I do not enlarge my fear by a sad face. I yet work and save a little purse, so that I may not be a heaviness to those who have the charity to finish me if I fall back and yet die.'

I would not hear of that, and told him he looked as well and happy as if he had found a fortune.

He laughed, and answered with his fine bow, 'I have. Behold, you come to make the fête for me. I find also here my friends Joseph and Napoleon. Poor as mouses of the church, as you say, but brave boys, and we work together with much gaiety.'

When I asked if he had leisure to be my guide about Paris, for my time was short and I wanted to see *everything*; he pranced, and told me he had promised himself a holiday, and had planned many excursions the most wonderful, charming, and gay. Then, having settled me at Madame's, he went blithely away to what I afterwards discovered were very poor lodgings, across the river.

Next day began the pleasantest fortnight in all my year of travel. Laddie appeared early, elegant to behold, in a new hat

and buff gloves, and was immensely amused because the servant informed me that my big son had arrived.

I believe the first thing a woman does in Paris is to buy a new bonnet. I did, or rather stood by and let 'my son' do it in the best of French, only whispering when he proposed gorgeous *chapeaus* full of flowers and feathers, that I could not afford it.

'Ah! we must make our economies, must we? See, then, this modest, pearl-colored one, with the crape rose. Yes, we will have that, and be most elegant for the Sunday promenade.'

I fear I should have bought a pea-green hat with a yellow plume if he had urged it, so wheedlesome and droll were his ways and words. His good taste saved me, however, and the modest one was sent home for the morrow, when we were to meet Joseph and Napoleon and go to the concert in the Tuileries garden.

Then we set off on our day of sight-seeing, and Laddie proved himself an excellent guide. We had a charming trip about the enchanted city, a gay lunch at a café, and a first brief glimpse of the Louvre. At dinner-time I found a posy at my place; and afterward Laddie came and spent the evening in my little salon, playing to me, and having what he called 'babblings and pleasantries.' I found that he was translating 'Vanity Fair' into Polish, and intended to sell it at home. He convulsed me with his struggles to put cockney English and slang into good Polish, for he had saved up a list of words for me to explain to him. Hay-stack and bean-pot were among them, I remember; and when he had mastered the meanings he fell upon the sofa exhausted.

Other days like this followed, and we led a happy life together: for my twelve years' seniority made our adventures quite proper, and I fearlessly went anywhere on the arm of my big son. Not to theatres or balls, however, for heated rooms were bad for Laddie, but pleasant trips out of the city in the bright spring weather, quiet strolls in the gardens, moonlight concerts in the Champs Elysées; or, best of all, long talks with music in the little red salon, with the gas turned low, and the ever-changing scenes of the Rue de Rivoli under the balcony.

Never were pleasures more cheaply purchased or more thoroughly enjoyed, for our hearts were as light as our purses, and our 'little economies' gave zest to our amusements.

Joseph and Napoleon sometimes joined us, and I felt in my element with the three invalid soldier boys, for Napoleon still limped with a wound received in the war, Joseph had never recovered from his two years' imprisonment in an Austrian dungeon, and Laddie's loyalty might yet cost him his life.

Thanks to them, I discovered a joke played upon me by my '*polisson*'. He told me to call him '*ma drogha*,' saying it meant 'my friend,' in Polish. I innocently did so, and he seemed to find great pleasure in it, for his eyes always laughed when I said it. Using it one day before the other lads, I saw a queer twinkle in their eyes, and suspecting mischief, demanded the real meaning of the words. Laddie tried to silence them, but the joke was too good to keep, and I found to my dismay that I had been calling him 'my darling' in the tenderest manner.

How the three rascals shouted, and what a vain struggle it was to try and preserve my dignity when Laddie clasped his hands and begged pardon, explaining that jokes were necessary to his health, and he never meant me to know the full baseness of this 'pleasantrie!' I revenged myself by giving him some bad English for his translation, and telling him of it just as I left Paris.

It was not all fun with my boy, however; he had his troubles, and in spite of his cheerfulness he knew what heartache was. Walking in the quaint garden of the Luxembourg one day, he confided to me the little romance of his life. A very touching little romance as he told it, with eloquent eyes and voice and frequent pauses for breath. I cannot give his words, but the simple facts were these: – He had grown up with a pretty cousin, and at eighteen was desperately in love with her. She returned his affection, but they could not be happy, for her father wished her to marry a richer man. In Poland, to marry without the consent of parents is to incur lasting disgrace; so Leonore obeyed, and the young pair parted. This had been a heavy sorrow to Laddie, and he rushed into the war, hoping to end his trouble.

'Do you ever hear from your cousin?' I asked, as he walked beside me, looking sadly down the green aisles where kings and queens had loved and parted years ago.

'I only know that she suffers still, for she remembers. Her husband submits to the Russians, and I despise him as I have no English to tell;' and he clenched his hands with the flash of the eye and sudden kindling of the whole face that made him

handsome.

He showed me a faded little picture, and when I tried to comfort him, he laid his head down on the pedestal of one of the marble queens who guard the walk, as if he never cared to lift it up again.

But he was all right in a minute, and bravely put away his sorrow with the little picture. He never spoke of it again, and I saw no more shadows on his face till we came to say good-bye.

'You have been so kind to me, I wish I had something beautiful to give you, Laddie,' I said, feeling that it would be hard to get on without my boy.

'This time it is for always; so, as a parting souvenir, give to me the sweet English good-bye.'

As he said this, with a despairing sort of look, as if he could not spare even so humble a friend as myself, my heart was quite rent within me, and, regardless of several prim English ladies, I drew down his tall head and kissed him tenderly, feeling that in this world there were no more meetings for us. Then I ran away and buried myself in an empty railway carriage, hugging the little cologne bottle he had given me.

He promised to write, and for five years he has kept his word, sending me from Paris and Poland cheery, bright letters in English, at my desire, so that he might not forget. Here is one as a specimen.

'My Dear and Good Friend, – What do you think of me that I do not write so long time? Excuse me, my good

mamma, for I was so busy in these days I could not do this pleasant thing. I write English without the fear that you laugh at it, because I know it is more agreeable to read the own language, and I think you are not excepted of this rule. It is good of me, for the expressions of love and regard, made with faults, take the funny appearance; they are *ridicule*, and instead to go to the heart, they make the laugh. Never mind, I do it.

'You cannot imagine yourself how *stupid* is Paris when you are gone. I fly to my work, and make no more fêtes, – it is too sad alone. I tie myself to my table and my Vanity (not of mine, for I am not vain, am I?). I wish some chapters to finish themselves *vite*, that I send them to Pologne and know the end. I have a little question to ask you (of Vanity as always). I cannot translate this, no one of *dictionnaires* makes me the words, and I think it is *jargon de prison*, this little period. Behold: —

Mopy, is that your snum?

Nubble your dad and gully the dog, &c.

'So funny things I cannot explain myself, so I send to you, and you reply sooner than without it, for you have so kind interest in my work you do not stay to wait. So this is a little hook for you to make you write some words to your son who likes it so much and is fond of you.

'My doctor tells me my lungs are soon to be re-established; so you may imagine yourself how glad I am,

and of more courage in my future. You may one day see your Varjo in Amerique, if I study commerce as I wish. So then the last time of seeing ourselves is *not* the last. Is that to please you? I suppose the grand *histoire* is finished, *n'est ce pas?* You will then send it to me care of M. Gryhomski Austriche, and he will give to me in clandestine way at Varsovie, otherwise it will be confiscated at the frontier by the stupide Russians.

'Now we are dispersed in two sides of world far apart, for soon I go home to Pologne and am no more "*juif errant*." It is now time I work at my life in some useful way, and I do it.

'As I am your *grand fils*, it is proper that I make you my compliment of happy Christmas and New Year, is it not? I wish for you so many as they may fulfil long human life. May this year bring you more and more good hearts to love you (the only real happiness in the hard life), and may I be as now, yours for always,

'Varjo.'

A year ago he sent me his photograph and a few lines. I acknowledged the receipt of it, but since then not a word has come, and I begin to fear that my boy is dead. Others have appeared to take his place, but they don't suit, and I keep his corner always ready for him if he lives. If he is dead, I am glad to have known so sweet and brave a character, for it does one good to see even as short-lived and obscure a hero as my Polish boy, whose dead December rose embalms for me the memory of Varjo, the last and dearest of my boys.

It is hardly necessary to add, for the satisfaction of inquisitive

little women, that Laddie was the original of Laurie, as far as a pale pen-and-ink sketch could embody a living, loving boy.

TESSA'S SURPRISES

I

Little Tessa sat alone by the fire, waiting for her father to come home from work. The children were fast asleep, all four in the big bed behind the curtain; the wind blew hard outside, and the snow beat on the window-panes; the room was large, and the fire so small and feeble that it didn't half warm the little bare toes peeping out of the old shoes on the hearth.

Tessa's father was an Italian plaster-worker, very poor, but kind and honest. The mother had died not long ago, and left twelve-year old Tessa to take care of the little children. She tried to be very wise and motherly, and worked for them like any little woman; but it was so hard to keep the small bodies warm and fed, and the small souls good and happy, that poor Tessa was often at her wits' end. She always waited for her father, no matter how tired she was, so that he might find his supper warm, a bit of fire, and a loving little face to welcome him. Tessa thought over her troubles at these quiet times, and made her plans; for her father left things to her a good deal, and she had no friends but Tommo, the harp-boy upstairs, and the lively cricket who lived in the chimney. To-night her face was very sober, and her pretty brown eyes very thoughtful as she stared at the fire and knit her

brows, as if perplexed. She was not thinking of her old shoes, nor the empty closet, nor the boys' ragged clothes just then. No; she had a fine plan in her good little head, and was trying to discover how she could carry it out.

You see, Christmas was coming in a week; and she had set her heart on putting something in the children's stockings, as the mother used to do, for while she lived things were comfortable. Now Tessa had not a penny in the world, and didn't know how to get one, for all the father's earnings had to go for food, fire, and rent.

'If there were only fairies, ah! how heavenly that would be; for then I should tell them all I wish, and, pop! behold the fine things in my lap!' said Tessa to herself. 'I must earn the money; there is no one to give it to me, and I cannot beg. But what can I do, so small and stupid and shy as I am? I *must* find some way to give the little ones a nice Christmas. I *must!* I *must!*' and Tessa pulled her long hair, as if that would help her think.

But it didn't, and her heart got heavier and heavier; for it did seem hard that in a great city full of fine things, there should be none for poor Nono, Sep, and little Speranza. Just as Tessa's tears began to tumble off her eyelashes on to her brown cheeks, the cricket began to chirp. Of course, he didn't say a word; but it really did seem as if he had answered her question almost as well as a fairy; for, before he had piped a dozen shrill notes, an idea popped into Tessa's head – such a truly splendid idea that she clapped her hands and burst out laughing. 'I'll do it! I'll do it!

if father will let me,' she said to herself, smiling and nodding at the fire. 'Tommo will like to have me go with him and sing, while he plays his harp in the streets. I know many songs, and may get money if I am not frightened; for people throw pennies to other little girls who only play the tambourine. Yes, I will try; and then, if I do well, the little ones shall have a Merry Christmas.'

So full of her plan was Tessa that she ran upstairs at once, and asked Tommo if he would take her with him on the morrow. Her friend was delighted, for he thought Tessa's songs very sweet, and was sure she would get money if she tried.

'But see, then, it is cold in the streets; the wind bites, and the snow freezes one's fingers. The day is very long, people are cross, and at night one is ready to die with weariness. Thou art so small, Tessa, I am afraid it will go badly with thee,' said Tommo, who was a merry, black-eyed boy of fourteen, with the kindest heart in the world under his old jacket.

'I do not mind cold and wet, and cross people, if I can get the pennies,' answered Tessa, feeling very brave with such a friend to help her. She thanked Tommo, and ran away to get ready, for she felt sure her father would not refuse her anything. She sewed up the holes in her shoes as well as she could, for she had much of that sort of cobbling to do; she mended her only gown, and laid ready the old hood and shawl which had been her mother's. Then she washed out little Ranza's frock and put it to dry, because she would not be able to do it the next day. She set the table and got things ready for breakfast, for Tommo went out early, and must

not be kept waiting for her. She longed to make the beds and dress the children over night, she was in such a hurry to have all in order; but, as that could not be, she sat down again, and tried over all the songs she knew. Six pretty ones were chosen; and she sang away with all her heart in a fresh little voice so sweetly that the children smiled in their sleep, and her father's tired face brightened as he entered, for Tessa was his cheery cricket on the hearth. When she had told her plan, Peter Benari shook his head, and thought it would never do; but Tessa begged so hard, he consented at last that she should try it for one week, and sent her to bed the happiest little girl in New York.

Next morning the sun shone, but the cold wind blew, and the snow lay thick in the streets. As soon as her father was gone, Tessa flew about and put everything in nice order, telling the children she was going out for the day, and they were to mind Tommo's mother, who would see about the fire and the dinner; for the good woman loved Tessa, and entered into her little plans with all her heart. Nono and Giuseppe, or Sep, as they called him, wondered what she was going away for, and little Ranza cried at being left; but Tessa told them they would know all about it in a week, and have a fine time if they were good; so they kissed her all round and let her go.

Poor Tessa's heart beat fast as she trudged away with Tommo, who slung his harp over his shoulder, and gave her his hand. It was rather a dirty hand, but so kind that Tessa clung to it, and kept looking up at the friendly brown face for encouragement.

'We go first to the *café*, where many French and Italians eat the breakfast. They like my music, and often give me sips of hot coffee, which I like much. You too shall have the sips, and perhaps the pennies, for these people are greatly kind,' said Tommo, leading her into a large smoky place where many people sat at little tables, eating and drinking. 'See, now, have no fear; give them "Bella Monica;" that is merry and will make the laugh,' whispered Tommo, tuning his harp.

For a moment Tessa felt so frightened that she wanted to run away; but she remembered the empty stockings at home, and the fine plan, and she resolved *not* to give it up. One fat old Frenchman nodded to her, and it seemed to help her very much; for she began to sing before she thought, and that was the hardest part of it. Her voice trembled, and her cheeks grew redder and redder as she went on; but she kept her eyes fixed on her old shoes, and so got through without breaking down, which was very nice. The people laughed, for the song *was* merry; and the fat man smiled and nodded again. This gave her courage to try another, and she sung better and better each time; for Tommo played his best, and kept whispering to her, 'Yes; we go well; this is fine. They will give the money and the blessed coffee.'

So they did; for, when the little concert was over, several men put pennies in the cap Tessa offered, and the fat man took her on his knee, and ordered a mug of coffee, and some bread and butter for them both. This quite won her heart; and when they left the *café*, she kissed her hand to the old Frenchman, and said

to her friend, 'How kind they are! I like this very much; and now it is not hard.'

But Tommo shook his curly head, and answered, soberly, 'Yes, I took you there first, for they love music, and are of our country; but up among the great houses we shall not always do well. The people there are busy or hard or idle, and care nothing for harps and songs. Do not skip and laugh too soon; for the day is long, and we have but twelve pennies yet.'

Tessa walked more quietly, and rubbed her cold hands, feeling that the world was a very big place, and wondering how the children got on at home without the little mother. Till noon they did not earn much, for every one seemed in a hurry, and the noise of many sleigh-bells drowned the music. Slowly they made their way up to the great squares where the big houses were, with fine ladies and pretty children at the windows. Here Tessa sung all her best songs, and Tommo played as fast as his fingers could fly; but it was too cold to have the windows open, so the pretty children could not listen long, and the ladies tossed out a little money, and soon went back to their own affairs.

All the afternoon the two friends wandered about, singing and playing, and gathering up their small harvest. At dusk they went home, Tessa so hoarse she could hardly speak, and so tired she fell asleep over her supper. But she had made half a dollar, for Tommo divided the money fairly, and she felt rich with her share. The other days were very much like this; sometimes they made more, sometimes less, but Tommo always 'went halves;'

and Tessa kept on, in spite of cold and weariness, for her plans grew as her earnings increased, and now she hoped to get useful things, instead of candy and toys alone.

On the day before Christmas she made herself as tidy as she could, for she hoped to earn a good deal. She tied a bright scarlet handkerchief over the old hood, and the brilliant color set off her brown cheeks and bright eyes, as well as the pretty black braids of her hair. Tommo's mother lent her a pair of boots so big that they turned up at the toes, but there were no holes in them, and Tessa felt quite elegant in whole boots. Her hands were covered with chilblains, for she had no mittens; but she put them under her shawl, and scuffled merrily away in her big boots, feeling so glad that the week was over, and nearly three dollars safe in her pocket. How gay the streets were that day! how brisk every one was, and how bright the faces looked, as people trotted about with big baskets, holly-wreaths, and young evergreens going to blossom into splendid Christmas trees!

'If I could have a tree for the children, I'd never want anything again. But I can't; so I'll fill the socks all full, and be happy,' said Tessa, as she looked wistfully into the gay stores, and saw the heavy baskets go by.

'Who knows what may happen if we do well?' returned Tommo, nodding wisely, for he had a plan as well as Tessa, and kept chuckling over it as he trudged through the mud. They did *not* do well somehow, for every one seemed so full of their own affairs they could not stop to listen, even to 'Bella Monica,' but

bustled away to spend their money in turkeys, toys, and trees. In the afternoon it began to rain, and poor Tessa's heart to fail her; for the big boots tired her feet, the cold wind made her hands ache, and the rain spoilt the fine red handkerchief. Even Tommo looked sober, and didn't whistle as he walked, for he also was disappointed, and his plan looked rather doubtful, the pennies came in so slowly.

'We'll try one more street, and then go home, thou art so tired, little one. Come; let me wipe thy face, and give me thy hand here in my jacket pocket; there it will be as warm as any kitten;' and kind Tommo brushed away the drops which were not *all* rain from Tessa's cheeks, tucked the poor hand into his ragged pocket, and led her carefully along the slippery streets, for the boots nearly tripped her up.

II

At the first house, a cross old gentleman flapped his newspaper at them; at the second, a young gentleman and lady were so busy talking that they never turned their heads, and at the third, a servant came out and told them to go away, because some one was sick. At the fourth, some people let them sing all their songs and gave nothing. The next three houses were empty; and the last of all showed not a single face as they looked up anxiously. It was so cold, so dark and discouraging, that Tessa couldn't help one sob; and, as he glanced down at the little red nose and wet figure beside him, Tommo gave his harp an angry thump, and said something very fierce in Italian. They were just going to turn away; but they didn't, for that angry thump happened to be the best thing they could have done. All of a sudden a little head appeared at the window, as if the sound had brought it; then another and another, till there were five, of all heights and colors, and five eager faces peeped out, smiling and nodding to the two below.

'Sing, Tessa; sing! Quick! quick!' cried Tommo, twanging away with all his might, and showing his white teeth, as he smiled back at the little gentle-folk.

Bless us! How Tessa did tune up at that! She chirped away like a real bird, forgetting all about the tears on her cheeks, the ache in her hands, and the heaviness at her heart. The children

laughed, and clapped their hands, and cried 'More! more! Sing another, little girl! Please do!' And away they went again, piping and playing, till Tessa's breath was gone, and Tommo's stout fingers tingled well.

'Mamma says, come to the door; it's too muddy to throw the money into the street!' cried out a kindly child's voice as Tessa held up the old cap, with beseeching eyes.

Up the wide stone steps went the street musicians, and the whole flock came running down to give a handful of silver, and ask all sorts of questions. Tessa felt so grateful that, without waiting for Tommo, she sang her sweetest little song all alone. It was about a lost lamb, and her heart was in the song; therefore she sang it well, so well that a pretty young lady came down to listen, and stood watching the bright-eyed girl, who looked about her as she sang, evidently enjoying the light and warmth of the fine hall, and the sight of the lovely children with their gay dresses, shining hair, and dainty little shoes.

'You have a charming voice, child. Who taught you to sing?' asked the young lady kindly.

'My mother. She is dead now; but I do not forget,' answered Tessa, in her pretty broken English.

'I wish she could sing at our tree, since Bella is ill,' cried one of the children peeping through the banisters.

'She is not fair enough for the angel, and too large to go up in the tree. But she sings sweetly, and looks as if she would like to see a tree,' said the young lady.

'Oh, so much!' exclaimed Tessa; adding eagerly, 'my sister Ranza is small and pretty as a baby-angel. She could sit up in the fine tree, and I could sing for her from under the table.'

'Sit down and warm yourself, and tell me about Ranza,' said the kind elder sister, who liked the confiding little girl, in spite of her shabby clothes.

So Tessa sat down and dried the big boots over the furnace, and told her story, while Tommo stood modestly in the background, and the children listened with faces full of interest.

'O Rose! let us see the little girl; and if she will do, let us have her, and Tessa can learn our song, and it will be splendid!' cried the biggest boy, who sat astride of a chair, and stared at the harp with round eyes.

'I'll ask mamma,' said Rose; and away she went into the dining-room close by. As the door opened, Tessa saw what looked to her like a fairy feast, – all silver mugs and flowery plates and oranges and nuts and rosy wine in tall glass pitchers, and smoking dishes that smelt so deliciously she could not restrain a little sniff of satisfaction.

'Are you hungry?' asked the boy, in a grand tone.

'Yes, sir,' meekly answered Tessa.

'I say, mamma; she wants something to eat. Can I give her an orange?' called the boy, prancing away into the splendid room, quite like a fairy prince, Tessa thought.

A plump motherly lady came out and looked at Tessa, asked a few questions, and then told her to come to-morrow with Ranza,

and they would see what could be done. Tessa clapped her hands for joy, – she didn't mind the chilblains now, – and Tommo played a lively march, he was so pleased.

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