

Alcott Louisa May

Spinning-Wheel Stories



Луиза Мэй Олкотт

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Grandma's Story

"It is too bad to have our jolly vacation spoiled by this provoking storm. Didn't mind it yesterday, because we could eat all the time; but here we are cooped up for a week, perhaps, and I'd like to know what we are to do," growled Geoff, as he stood at the window looking gloomily at the bleak scene without. It certainly was discouraging; for the north wind howled, the air was dark with falling snow, and drifts were rising over fences, roads, and fields, as if to barricade the Christmas party in the great country house.

"We can bear it pleasantly, since it can't be helped," said gentle sister Mary, with a kind hand on his shoulder, and a face full of sympathy for his disappointment. "I'm sorry for the coasting, skating, and sleighing frolics we have lost; but if we must be shut up, I'm sure we couldn't have a pleasanter prison or a kinder jailer. Don't let grandma hear us complain, for she has made great exertions to have our visit a merry one, and it will trouble her if we are not gay and contented."

"That's easy for a parcel of girls, who only want to mull over the fire, and chatter, and drink tea; but it's rough on us fellows, who come for the outside fun. House is well enough; but when you've seen it once, there's an end. Eating is jolly, but you can't stuff forever. We might dig, or snowball, if it didn't blow a gale. Never saw such a beast of a storm!" – and Geoff flattened his nose against the window-pane and scowled at the elements.

A laugh made him turn around, and forget his woes to stare at the quaint little figure that stood curtsying in the door-way of the keeping-room, where a dozen young people were penned while the maids cleared up the remains of yesterday's feast in the kitchen, the mothers were busy with the babies upstairs, and the fathers read papers in the best parlor; for this was a family gathering under the roof of the old homestead.

A rosy, dark-eyed face looked out from the faded green calash, a gayly flowered gown was looped up over a blue quilted petticoat, and a red camlet cloak hung down behind. A big reticule and a funny umbrella were held in either hand, and red hose and very high-heeled, pointed shoes covered a trim pair of feet.

"God bless you, merry gentlemen!
May nothing you dismay;
Here's your ancient granny come
To call, this Christmas day,"

sang Minnie, the lively member of the flock, as she bobbed little curtsies and smiled so infectiously that even cross Geoff cheered up.

"Where did you get that rigging?" "Isn't it becoming?" "What queer stuff!" "Did grandma ever look so, I wonder?"

These and many other questions rained upon the wearer of the old costume, and she answered them as fast as she could.

"I went rummaging up garret for something to read, and found two chests of old duds. Thought I'd dress up and see how you liked me. Grandma said I might, and told me I looked like her when she was young. She was a beauty, you know; so I feel as proud as a peacock." And Min danced away to stand before the portrait of a blooming girl in a short-waisted, white-satin gown and a pearl necklace, which hung opposite the companion portrait of an officer in an old-fashioned uniform.

"So you do. Wonder if I should look like grandpa if I got into his old toggery!" said Geoff, looking up at the handsome man with the queue and the high coat-collar.

"Go and try; the uniform is in the chest, and not much moth-eaten. Let's have a jolly rummage, and see what we can find. *We* didn't eat ourselves sick, so we will amuse these lazy invalids;" and Min glanced pityingly at several cousins who lay about on sofas or in easy chairs, pretending to read, but evidently suffering from too great devotion to the bountiful dinner and evening feast of yesterday.

Away went Min and Lotty, Geoff and Walt, glad of anything to beguile the stormy afternoon. Grandma smiled as she heard the tramp of feet overhead, the peals of laughter, and the bang of chest-lids, well knowing that a scene of dire confusion awaited her when the noisy frolic was done, but thankful for the stores of ancient finery which would keep the restless children happy for a day.

It was truly a noble garret, for it extended the whole length of the great square house, with windows at either end, and divided in the middle by a solid chimney. All around stood rows of chests, dilapidated furniture, and wardrobes full of old relics, while the walls were hung with many things for which modern tongues can find no names. In one corner was a book-case full of musty books and papers; in another, kitchen utensils and rusty weapons; the third was devoted to quilts hung on lines, and in the fourth stood a loom with a spinning-wheel beside it, both seemingly well cared for, as the dust lay lightly on them, and flax was still upon the distaff.

A glorious rummage followed the irruption of the Goths and Vandals into this quiet spot, and soon Geoff quite forgot the storm as he pranced about in the buff-and-blue coat, with a cocked hat on his head, and grandfather's sword at his side. Lotty arrayed herself in a pumpkin hood and quilted cloak for warmth, while Walt, the book-worm, went straight to the ancient library, and became absorbed in faded souvenirs, yellow newspapers, and almanacs of a century ago.

Having displayed themselves below and romped all over the house, the masqueraders grew tired at last, and early twilight warned them to leave before ghostly shadows began to haunt the garret.

"I mean to take this down and ask grandma to show me how it's done. I've heard her tell about spinning and weaving when she was a girl, and I know I can learn," said Minnie, who had fallen in love with the little wheel, and vainly tried to twist the flax into as smooth a thread as the one hanging from the distaff, as if shadowy fingers had lately spun it.

"Queen Victoria set the fashion in England, and we might do it here. Wouldn't it be fun to have a wheel in the parlor at home, and really use it; not keep it tied up with blue ribbons, as the other girls do!" cried Lotty, charmed with the new idea.

"Come, Geoff, take it down for us. You ought to do it out of gratitude for my cheering you up so nicely," said Min, leading the way.

"So I will. Here, Walt, give it a hoist, and come behind to pick up the pieces, for the old machine must be about a hundred, I guess."

Shouldering the wheel, Geoff carried it down; but no bits fell by the way, for the stout little wheel was all in order, kept so by loving hands that for more than eighty years had been spinning the mingled thread of a long and useful life.

Glorious fires were roaring up the wide chimneys in parlor and keeping-room, and old and young were gathering around them, while the storm beat on the window-panes, and the wintry wind howled as if angry at being shut out.

"See what we've stolen, grandma," cried Min, as the procession came in, rosy, dusty, gay, and eager.

"Bless the child! What possessed you to lug that old thing down?" asked Madam Shirley, much amused as the prize was placed before her, where she sat in her high-backed chair, – a right splendid old lady in her stately cap, black silk gown, and muslin apron, with a bunch of keys at her side, like a model housekeeper, as she was.

"You don't mind our playing with it, do you? And will you teach me to spin? I think it's such a pretty little thing, and I want to be like you in all ways, grandma dear," answered Min, sitting on the arm of the great chair, with her fresh cheek close to the wrinkled one where winter roses still bloomed.

"You wheedling gypsy! I'll teach you with all my heart, for it is pretty work, and I often wonder ladies don't keep it up. I did till I was too busy, and now I often take a turn at it when I'm tired of knitting. The hum is very soothing, and the thread much stronger than any we get nowadays."

As she spoke, the old lady dusted the wheel, and gave it a skilful turn or two, till the soft whir made pleasant music in the room.

"Is it really a hundred years old?" asked Geoff, drawing nearer with the others to watch the new work.

"Just about. It was one of my mother's wedding presents, and she gave it to me when I was fifteen. Deary me, how well I remember that day!" and grandma seemed to fall a-dreaming as her eyes rested on the letters E. R. M. rudely cut in the wood, and below these were three others with something meant for a true lover's knot between.

"Whose initials are these?" asked Min, scenting a romance with girlish quickness, for grandma was smiling as if her eyes read the title to some little story in those worn letters.

"Elizabeth Rachel Morgan, and Joel Manlius Shirley. Your blessed grandfather cut our names there the day I was sixteen, and put the flourish between to show what he wanted," added the old lady, laughing as she made the wheel hum again.

"Tell about it, please do," begged Min, remembering that grandma had been a beauty and a belle.

"It's a long tale, my darling, and I couldn't tell it now. Sometime when I'm teaching you to spin I'll do it, maybe."

But the girl was determined to have her story; and after tea, when the little ones were in bed, the elders playing whist in the parlor, and the young folks deciding what game to begin, Minnie sat down and tried to spin, sure that the familiar sound would lure grandma to give the lesson and tell the tale.

She was right, for the wheel had not gone around many times, when the tap of the cane was heard, and the old lady came rustling in, quite ready for a chat, now that three cups of her own good tea and a nap in the chimney corner had refreshed her.

"No, dear, that's not the way; you need a dish of water to wet your fingers in, and you must draw the flax out slow and steady, else it runs to waste, and makes a poor thread. Fetch me that chair, and I'll show you how, since you are bent on learning."

Establishing herself in the straight-backed seat, a skilful tap of the foot set the wheel in swift and easy motion, and the gray thread twisted fine and evenly from the distaff.

"Isn't it a pretty picture?" said Min to Lotty, as they watched the old lady work.

"Not so pretty as the one I used to see when my dear mother sat here, and I, a little child, at her knee. Ah, my dears, she could have told you stories all night long, and well worth hearing. I was never tired of them."

"Please tell one now, grandma. We don't know what to play, and it would be so nice to sit around the fire and hear it this stormy night," suggested Min, artfully seizing the hint.

"Do! Do! We all love stories, and we'll be as still as mice," added Geoff, beckoning to the others as he took the big arm-chair, being the oldest grandson and leader of the flock.

Camping on the rug, or nestling in the sofa corner, the boys and girls all turned expectant faces toward grandma, who settled her cap-strings and smoothed her spotless apron, with an indulgent smile at her little audience.

"I don't know which one to tell first."

"The ghost story; that's a splendid one, and most of the children never heard it," said Walt.

"Have Indians and fighting in it. I like that kind," added Geoff.

"No; tell a love story. They are *so* interesting," said Lotty.

"I want the story about the initials first. I know it is very sentimental. So do begin with that, grandma," begged Min.

"Well, dears, perhaps I'd better choose that one, for it has the battle of New Orleans, and wolves, and spinning, and sweethearts in it; so it will suit you all, I hope."

"Oh, lovely! Do begin right away," cried Minnie, as the clapping of hands showed how satisfactory the prospect was.

Grandma gave a loud "hem!" and began at once, while the little wheel hummed a soft accompaniment to her words.

GRANDMA'S STORY

"When I was fifteen, my mother gave me this wheel, and said: 'Now, daughter Betsey, it is time for you to begin your wedding outfit, for I mistrust you'll marry young.' In those days girls spun and wove webs of fine linen and laid 'em up in chests, with lavender and rosemary, for sheets and table-linen after they married. So I spun away, making all manner of fine plans in my silly head, for I was a pretty piece, they all said, and young as I was, two or three fine lads used to come evenings and sit staring at me while I worked.

"Among these, was my neighbor Joel Manlius Shirley, and I was fond of him; but he hadn't much money, so I put on airs, and tried his patience very much. One day he came in and said: 'Betsey, I'm going a-soldiering; they need men, and I'm off. Will you think of poor Joe when I'm gone?'

"I don't know how I looked, but I felt as if I couldn't bear it. Only I was too proud to show my trouble; so I laughed, and gave my wheel a twist, and said I was glad of it, since anything was better than hanging round at home.

"That hurt him; but he was always gentle to saucy Betsey, and taking out his knife, he cut those letters under mine, saying, with a look I never could forget: —

"That will remind you of me if you are likely to forget. Good-by; I'm going right away, and may never come back.'

"He kissed me, and was off before I could say a word, and then I cried till my flax was wet and my thread tangled, and my heart 'most broken. Deary me, how well I remember that heavy day!"

Grandma smiled, but something shone in her old eyes very like a tear, and sentimental Lotty felt deeply interested at this point.

"Where does the fighting come in?" asked Geoff, who was of a military turn, as became the descendant of a soldier.

"I didn't know or care much about the War of 1812, except as far as the safety of one man was concerned. Joe got on without any harm till the battle of New Orleans, when he was nearly killed behind the cotton-bale breastworks General Jackson built."

"Yes, I know all about it. Jackson fought against twelve thousand, and lost only seven men. That was the last battle of the war, January 8, 1815. Three cheers for grandpa!" shouted Geoff, waving a tidy, as no hat was at hand.

The others echoed the hurrah, and grandma beamed with pride as she went on: "We couldn't get news from the army very often in those troublous times, and Joe was gone two years before the war ended. After the great battle we had no news for a long spell, and we feared he was one of the seven men killed. Those were dreadful days for all of us. My honored mother was a pious soul, and so was Mrs. Shirley; and they kept up their hearts with hope and prayer; but I, poor thing, was young and weak, and I cried myself half blind, remembering how naughty I had been. I would spin no more, but set the wheel away, saying I should have no need of wedding gear, as I should never marry; and I wore black ribbon on my caps, and one of Joe's buttons strung about my neck, mourning dismally for my lost dear.

"So the winter ended, and the summer went, and no news came of Joe. All said he was dead, and we had prayers at church, and talked of setting up a stone in the grave-yard, and I thought my life was done; for I pined sadly, and felt as if I could never laugh again. But I did; for the Lord was very good to us, and out of danger and captivity delivered that dear boy."

Grandma spoke solemnly, and folded her hands in thanksgiving as she looked up at the picture of the handsome officer hanging on the wall before her. The elder children could just remember grandpa as a very old and feeble man, and it struck them as funny to speak of him as a "dear boy;" but they never smiled, and dutifully lifted their eyes to the queue and the high-collared coat, wondering if Joe was as rosy in real life as in the portrait.

"Well, that's the sentimental part; now comes the merry part, and that will suit the boys," said the old lady, briskly, as she spun away, – and went on in a lively tone: —

"One December day, as I sat by that very window, dreaming sorrowfully at my sewing work, while old Sally nodded over her knitting by the fire, I saw a man come creeping along by the fence and dodge behind the wood-pile. There were many bad folks 'round in those times; for war always leaves a sight of lazy rascals afloat, as well as poor fellows maimed and homeless.

"Mother had gone over to the sewing society at Mrs. Shirley's, and I was all alone; for Sally was so stiff with rheumatics she could scarce stir, and that was why I stayed to take care of her. The old musket always hung over the kitchen chimney-piece, loaded, and I knew how to fire it, for Joe had taught me. So away I went and got it down; for I saw the man popping up his head now and then to spy the land, and I felt sure he meant mischief. I knew Sally would only scream like a scared hen, so I let her sleep; and getting behind the shutter I pointed my gun, and waited to blaze away as soon as the enemy showed signs of attacking.

"Presently he came creeping up to the back door, and I heard him try the latch. All was fast, so I just slipped into the kitchen and stood behind the settle, for I was surer than ever he was a rascal since I'd seen him nearer. He was a tall man, dreadful shabby in an old coat and boots, a ragged hat over his eyes, and a great beard hiding the lower part of his face. He had a little bundle and a big stick in his hands, and limped as if foot-sore or lame.

"I was much afeard; but those were times that made heroes of men, and taught women to be brave for love of home and country. So I kept steady, with my eye on the window, and my finger on the trigger of the old gun, that hadn't been fired for years. Presently the man looked in, and I saw what a strange roll his great eyes had, for he was thin-faced and looked half-starved. If mother had been there, she'd have called him in and fed him well, but I dared not, and when he tried the window I aimed, but did not fire; for finding the button down he went away, and I dropped on the settle, shaking like a leaf. All was still, and in a minute I plucked up courage to go to look out a bit; but just as I reached the middle of the kitchen, the buttery door opened, and there stood the robber, with a carving knife in one hand and my best loaf of spice bread in the other. He said something, and made a rush at me; but I pulled the trigger, saw a flash, felt a blow, and fell somewhere, thinking, 'Now I'm dead!'"

Here grandma paused for breath, having spoken rapidly and acted out the scene dramatically, to the intense delight of the children, who sat like images of interest, staring at her with round eyes.

"But you weren't dead? What next?" cried Walt, eagerly.

"Bless you, no! I only fell into Joe's arms, and when I came to, there the dear fellow was, crying over me like a baby, while old Sally danced round us like a bedlamite, in spite of her rheumatics, shouting: 'Hosanna! Thanks and praise! He's come, he's come!'"

"Was he shot?" asked Geoff, anxious for a little bloodshed.

"No, dear; the old gun burst and hurt my hands, but not a mite of harm was done to Joe. I don't think I could tell all that happened for a spell, being quite dazed with joy and surprise; but by the time mother came home I was as peart as a wren, and Joe was at the table eating and drinking every mortal thing I could find in the house.

"He'd been kept a prisoner till exchanged, and had had a hard time getting home, with little money and a bad wound in the leg, besides being feeble with jail fever. But we didn't fret over past troubles, being so glad to get him back. How my blessed mother did laugh, when we told her the reception I gave the poor lad! But I said it served him right, since he came sneaking home like a thief, instead of marching in like a hero. Then he owned that he came there to get something to eat, being ashamed to go in upon his mother with all her company about her. So we fed and comforted him; and when we'd got our wits about us, I whipped away to Mrs. Shirley's and told my news, and every one of those twenty-five women went straight over to our house and burst in upon poor Joe, as he lay resting on the settle. That was my revenge for the scare he gave me, and a fine one it was; for the women chattered over him like a flock of magpies, and I sat in the corner and laughed at him. Ah, I was a sad puss in those days!"

The old lady's black eyes twinkled with fun, and the children laughed with her, till Walt caused a lull by asking: —

"Where do the wolves come in, grandma?"

"Right along, dear; I'm not likely to forget 'em, for they 'most cost me my life, to say nothing of my new slippers. There was great rejoicing over Joe, and every one wanted to do something to honor our hero; for he had done well, we found out, when the General heard his story. We had a great dinner, and Judge Mullikin gave a supper; but Major Belknap was bound to outshine the rest, so he invited all the young folks over to his house, nigh ten miles away, to a ball, and we all went. I made myself fine, you may believe, and wore a pair of blue kid slippers, with mother's best buckles to set 'em off. Joe had a new uniform, and was an elegant figure of a man, I do assure you. He couldn't dance, poor dear, being still very lame: but I was a proud girl when I marched into that ball-room, on the arm of my limping beau. The men cheered, and the ladies stood up in chairs to see him, and he was as red as my ribbons, and I could hardly keep from crying, as I held him up, — the floor being slippery as glass with the extra waxing it had got.

"I declared I wouldn't dance, because Joe couldn't; but he made me, saying he could see me better; so I footed it till two o'clock, soon forgetting all my sorrow and my good resolutions as well. I wanted to show Joe that I was as much a favorite as ever, though I'd lived like a widow for a year. Young folks will be giddy, and I hope these girls will take warning by me and behave better when their time comes. There mayn't be any wolves to sober 'em, but trouble of some sort always follows foolish actions; so be careful, my dears, and behave with propriety when you 'come out,' as you call it nowadays."

Grandma held up a warning forefinger at the girls, and shook her head impressively, feeling that the moral of her tale must be made clear before she went on. But the lassies blushed a little, and the lads looked all impatience, so the dear old lady introduced the wolves as quickly as she could.

"About half-past two, Joe and I drove off home with four fine hams in the bottom of the sleigh, sent by the Major to our mothers. It was a bitter-cold February night, with just light enough to see the road, and splendid sleighing; so we went along at a good pace, till we came to the great woods. They are all gone now, and the woollen mills stand there, but then they were a thick forest of pines, and for more than three miles the road led through them. In former days Indians had lurked there; bears and foxes were still shot, and occasionally wolves were seen, when cold weather drove them to seek food near the sheep-folds and barn-yards.

"Well, we were skimming along pleasantly enough, I rather sleepy, and Joe very careful of me, when, just as I was beginning to doze a bit with my head on his arm I felt him start. Old Buck, the horse, gave a jump that woke me up, and in a minute I knew what the trouble was, for from behind us came the howl of a wolf.

"'Just the night to bring 'em out,' muttered Joe, using the whip till Buck went at his quickest trot, with his ears down and every sign of hurry and worry about him.

"Are you afraid of them?' I asked, for I'd never had a scare of this sort, though I'd heard other people tell of the fierceness of the brutes when hunger made them bold.

"Not a bit, only I wish I had my gun along,' said Joe, looking over his shoulder anxiously.

"Pity I hadn't brought mine – I do so well with it,' I said, and I laughed as I remembered how I aimed at Joe and hurt myself.

"Are they chasing us?' I asked, standing up to look back along the white road, for we were just on the edge of the woods now.

"Shouldn't wonder. If I had a better horse it would be a lively race; but Buck can't keep this pace long, and if he founders we are in a fix, for I can't run, and you can't fight. Betsey, there's more than one; hold tight and try to count 'em.'

"Something in Joe's voice told me plainer than words that we were in danger, and I wished we'd waited till the rest of our party came; but I was tired, and so we had started alone.

"Straining my eyes, I could see *three* black spots on the snow, and hear three howls as the wolves came galloping after us. I was a brave girl, but I'd never tried this kind of thing before, and in a minute all the wolf stories I'd ever heard came flying through my mind. I *was* mortally afeared, but I wouldn't show it, and turned to Joe, trying to laugh as I said: 'Only three as yet. Tell me just what to do, and I'll do it.'

"Brave lass! I must see to Buck or he'll be down, for he's badly scared. You wait till the rascals are pretty close, then heave over one of these confounded hams to amuse 'em, while we make the most of their halt. They smell this meat, and that's what they are after,' said Joe, driving his best, for the poor old horse began to pant, and limp on his stiff legs.

"Lucky for us we've got 'em,' says I, bound to be cool and gay; 'if we hadn't, they'd get fresh meat instead of smoked.'

"Joe laughed, but a long howl close by made me dive for a ham; for in the darkness of the woods the beasts had got closer, and now all I could see were several balls of fire not many yards away. Out went the ham, and a snarling sound showed that the wolves were busy eating it.

"All right!' said Joe. 'Rest a bit, and have another ready. They'll soon finish that and want more. We must go easy, for Buck is nearly blown.'

"I prepared my ammunition, and, in what seemed five minutes, I heard the patter of feet behind us, and the fiery eyes were close by. Over went the second mouthful, and then the third, and the fourth; but they seemed more ravenous than ever, and each time were back sooner in greater numbers.

"We were nearly out of the woods when the last was gone, and if Buck had only had strength we should have been safe. But it was plain to see that he couldn't keep up much longer, for he was very old, though he'd been a fine horse in his prime.

"This looks bad, little Betsey. Cover up in the robes, and hold fast to me. The beasts will begin to snatch presently, and I'll have to fight 'em off. Thank the powers, I've my arms left.'

"As he spoke, Joe pulled me close, and wrapped me up, then took the whip, ready to rap the first wolf that dared come near enough to be hit. We didn't wait long; up they raced, and began to leap and snarl in a way that made my heart stand still, at first. Then my temper rose, and catching up the hot brick I had for my feet, I fired it with such good aim that one sharp, black nose disappeared with a yelp of pain.

"Hit 'em again, Betsey! Take the demijohn and bang 'em well. We are nearing Beaman's, and the brutes will soon drop off.'

"It was a lively scrimmage for a few minutes, as we both warmed to our work, Joe thrashing away with his whip on one side, and I on the other flourishing the demijohn in which we had carried some cider for the supper.

"But it was soon over, for in the fury of the fight Joe forgot the horse; poor Buck made a sudden bolt, upset the sleigh down a bank, and, breaking loose, tore back along the road with the wolves after him.

"Run, Betsey! run for your life, and send Beaman's folks back! I'm done for – my leg's broken. Never mind. I'll crawl under the sleigh, and be all right till you come. The wolves will take a good while to pick poor Buck's bones.'

"Just waiting to see Joe safe, I ran as I never ran before, – and I was always light of foot. How I did it I don't know, for I'd forgot to put on my moccasins (we didn't have snow-boots, you know, in my young days), and there I was, tearing along that snowy road in my blue kid slippers like a crazy thing. It was nigh a mile, and my heart was 'most broke before I got there; but I kept my eye on the light in Hetty's winder and tugged along, blessing her for the guide and comfort that candle was. The last bit was down hill, or I couldn't have done it; for when I fell on the doorstep my voice was clean gone, and I could only lie and rap, rap, rap! till they came flying. I just got breath enough to gasp out and point: —

"Joe – wolves – the big woods – go!' when my senses failed me, and I was carried in."

Here Madam Shirley leaned back in her chair quite used up, for she had been acting the scene to a breathless audience, and laying about her with her handkerchief so vigorously that her eyes snapped, her cheeks were red, and her dear old cap all awry.

"But Joe – did they eat him?" cried the boys in great excitement, while the girls held to one another, and the poor little wheel lay flat, upset by the blows of the imaginary demijohn, dealt to an equally imaginary wolf.

"Hardly, – since he lived to be your grandfather," laughed the old lady, in high feather at the success of her story.

"No, no, – we mean the horse;" shouted Geoff, while the others roared at the mistake.

"Yes, they did. Poor old Buck saved us, at the cost of his own life. His troubles were over, but mine were not; for when I came to, I saw Mr. Beaman, and my first thought and word was 'Joe?'"

"Too late – they'd got him, so we turned back to tell you,' said that stupid man.

"I gave one cry and was going off again, when his wife shook me, and says, laughing: 'You little goose! He means the folks from the Major's. A lot came along and found Joe, and took him home, and soon's ever you're fit we'll send you along, too.'

"I'm ready now,' says I, jumping up in a hurry. But I had to sit down again, for my feet were all cut and bleeding, and my slippers just rags. They fixed me up and off I went, to find mother in a sad taking. But Joe was all right; he hadn't broken his leg, but only sprained it badly, and being the wounded one he was laid up longer than I. We both got well, however, and the first time Joe went out he hobbled over to our house. I was spinning again then, and thought I might need my wedding outfit, after all – On the whole, I guess we'll end the story here; young folks wouldn't care for that part."

As grandma paused, the girls cried out with one voice: "Yes, we do! we like it best. You said you would. Tell about the wedding and all."

"Well, well, it isn't much. Joe came and sat by me, and, as we talked over our adventure, he cut that true lover's knot between the letters. I didn't seem to mind, and spun away till he pointed to it, saying, with the look that always made me meek as a lamb, 'May it stand so, my little Betsey?'"

"I said 'Yes, Joe,' and then – well, never mind that bit; – we were married in June, and I spun and wove my wedding things afterward. Dreadful slack, my mother thought, but I didn't care. My wedding gown was white lutestring, full trimmed with old lace. Hair over a cushion with white roses, and the pearl necklace, just as you see up there. Joe wore his uniform, and I tied up his hair with a white satin ribbon. He looked beautiful, – and so did I."

At this artless bit of vanity, the girls smiled, but all agreed that grandma was right, as they looked at the portraits with fresh interest.

"I call that a pretty good story," said Walt, with the air of an accomplished critic.

"Specially the wolf part. I wanted that longer," added Geoff.

"It was quite long enough for me, my dear, and I didn't hear the last of it for years. Why, one of my wedding presents was four hams done up elegantly in white paper, with posies on 'em, from

the Major. He loved a joke, and never forgot how well we fought with the pigs' legs that night. Joe gave me a new sleigh, the next Christmas, with two wolf-skin robes for it, – shot the beasts himself, and I kept those rugs till the moths ate the last bit. He kept the leavings of my slippers, and I have them still. Fetch 'em, Minnie – you know where they are."

Grandma pointed to the tall secretary that stood in a corner, and Minnie quickly took a box from one of the many drawers. All the heads clustered around grandma, and the faded, ragged shoes went from hand to hand, while questions rained upon the story-teller till she bade them go to bed.

Nothing but the promise of more tales would appease them; then, with thanks and kisses, the young folks trooped away, leaving the old lady to put the little wheel to rights, and sit thinking over her girlhood, in the fire-light.

Tabby's Table Cloth

The storm kept on all night, and next morning the drifts were higher, the wind stronger, and the snow falling faster than ever. Through the day the children roved about the great house, amusing themselves as best they could; and, when evening came, they gathered around the fire again, eager for the promised story from grandmamma.

"I've a little cold," said the old lady, "and am too hoarse for talking, my dears; but Aunt Elinor has looked up a parcel of old tales that I've told her at different times and which she has written down. You will like to hear her reading better than my dull way of telling them, and I can help Minnie and Lotty with their work, for I see they are bent on learning to spin."

The young folk were well pleased with grandma's proposal; for Aunt Nell was a favorite with all, being lively and kind and fond of children, and the only maiden aunt in the family. Now, she smilingly produced a faded old portfolio, and, turning over a little pile of manuscripts, said in her pleasant way: —

"Here are all sorts, picked up in my travels at home and abroad; and in order to suit all of you, I have put the names on slips of paper into this basket, and each can draw one in turn. Does that please my distinguished audience?"

"Yes, yes. Geoff's the oldest, let him draw first," cried the flock, fluttering like a flight of birds before they settle.

"Girls come first," answered the boy, with a nod toward the eldest girl cousin.

Lotty put in her hand and, after some fumbling, drew out a paper on which was written, "*Tabby's Table-cloth*." "Is that a good one?" she asked, for Geoff looked disappointed.

"More fighting, though a girl is still the heroine," answered Aunt Nell, searching for the manuscript.

"I think two revolutions will be enough for you, General," added grandmamma, laughing.

"Do we beat in both?" asked the boy, brightening up at once.

"Yes."

"All right, then. I vote for 'Dolly's Dish-cloth,' or whatever it is; though I don't see what it can possibly have to do with war," he added.

"Ah, my dear, women have their part to play as well as men at such times, and do it bravely, though one does not hear so much about their courage. I've often wished some one would collect all that can be found about these neglected heroines, and put it in a book for us to read, admire, and emulate when our turn comes."

Grandma looked thoughtfully at the fire as she spoke, and Lotty said, with her eye on the portfolio: "Perhaps Aunt Nell will do it for us. Then history won't be so dry, and we can glorify our fore-mothers as well as fathers."

"I'll see what I can find. Now spin away, Minnie, and sit still, boys, — if you can."

Then, having settled grandma's foot-stool, and turned up the lamp, Aunt Nell read the tale of

TABBY'S TABLE-CLOTH

On the 20th day of March, 1775, a little girl was trudging along a country road, with a basket of eggs on her arm. She seemed in a great hurry, and looked anxiously about her as she went; for those were stirring times, and Tabitha Tarbell lived in a town that took a famous part in the Revolution. She was a rosy-faced, bright-eyed lass of fourteen, full of vigor, courage, and patriotism, and just then much excited by the frequent rumors which reached Concord that the British were coming to destroy the stores sent there for safe keeping while the enemy occupied Boston. Tabby glowed with

wrath at the idea, and (metaphorically speaking) shook her fist at august King George, being a stanch little Rebel, ready to fight and die for her country rather than submit to tyranny of any kind.

In nearly every house something valuable was hidden. Colonel Barrett had six barrels of powder; Ebenezer Hubbard, sixty-eight barrels of flour; axes, tents, and spades were at Daniel Cray's; and Captain David Brown had guns, cartridges, and musket balls. Cannon were hidden in the woods; fire-arms were being manufactured at Barrett's Mills; cartouch-boxes, belts, and holsters, at Reuben Brown's; saltpetre at Josiah Melvin's; and much oatmeal was prepared at Captain Timothy Wheeler's. A morning gun was fired, a guard of ten men patrolled the town at night, and the brave farmers were making ready for what they felt must come.

There were Tories in the town who gave the enemy all the information they could gather; therefore much caution was necessary in making plans, lest these enemies should betray them. Passwords were adopted, secret signals used, and messages sent from house to house in all sorts of queer ways. Such a message lay hidden under the eggs in Tabby's basket, and the brave little girl was going on an important errand from her uncle, Captain David Brown, to Deacon Cyrus Hosmer, who lived at the other end of the town, by the South Bridge. She had been employed several times before in the same way, and had proved herself quick-witted, stout-hearted, and light-footed. Now, as she trotted along in her scarlet cloak and hood, she was wishing she could still further distinguish herself by some great act of heroism; for good Parson Emerson had patted her on the head and said, "Well done, child!" when he heard how she ran all the way to Captain Barrett's, in the night, to warn him that Doctor Lee, the Tory, had been detected sending information of certain secret plans to the enemy.

"I would do more than that, though it was a fearsome run through the dark woods. Wouldn't those two like to know all I know about the stores? But I wouldn't tell 'em, not if they drove a bayonet through me. I'm not afeard of 'em;" and Tabby tossed her head defiantly, as she paused to shift her basket from one arm to the other.

But she evidently was "afeard" of something, for her ruddy cheeks turned pale and her heart gave a thump, as two men came in sight, and stopped suddenly on seeing her. They were strangers; and though nothing in their dress indicated it, the girl's quick eye saw that they were soldiers; step and carriage betrayed it, and the rapidity with which these martial gentlemen changed into quiet travellers roused her suspicions at once. They exchanged a few whispered words; then they came on, swinging their stout sticks, one whistling, the other keeping a keen lookout along the lonely road before and behind them.

"My pretty lass, can you tell me where Mr. Daniel Bliss lives?" asked the younger, with a smile and a salute.

Tabby was sure now that they were British; for the voice was deep and full, the face a ruddy English face, and the man they wanted was a well-known Tory. But she showed no sign of alarm, beyond the modest color in her cheeks, and answered civilly: "Yes, sir, over yonder a piece."

"Thanks, and a kiss for that," said the young man, stooping to bestow his gift. But he got a smart box on the ear, and Tabby ran off in a fury of indignation.

With a laugh they went on, never dreaming that the little Rebel was going to turn spy herself, and get the better of them. She hurried away to Deacon Hosmer's, and did her errand, adding thereto the news that strangers were in town. "We must know more of them," said the Deacon. "Clap a different suit on her, wife, and send her with the eggs to Mrs. Bliss. We have all we want of them, and Tabby can look well about her, while she rests and gossips over there. Bliss must be looked after smartly, for he is a knave, and will do us harm."

Away went Tabby in a blue cloak and hood, much pleased with her mission; and, coming to the Tory's house about noon, smelt afar off a savory odor of roasting meat and baking pies.

Stepping softly to the back-door, she peeped through a small window, and saw Mrs. Bliss and her handmaid cooking away in the big kitchen, too busy to heed the little spy, who slipped around to the front of the house, to take a general survey before she went in. All she saw confirmed her

suspicious; for in the keeping-room a table was set forth in great style, with the silver tankards, best china, and the fine damask table-cloth, which the housewife kept for holidays. Still another peep through the lilac bushes before the parlor windows showed her the two strangers closeted with Mr. Bliss, all talking earnestly, but in too low a tone for a word to reach even her sharp ears.

"I *will* know what they are at. I'm sure it is mischief, and I won't go back with only my walk for my pains," thought Tabby; and marching into the kitchen, she presented her eggs with a civil message from Madam Hosmer.

"They are mighty welcome, child. I've used a sight for my custards, and need more for the flip. We've company to dinner unexpected, and I'm much put about," said Mrs. Bliss, who seemed to be concerned about something besides the dinner, and in her flurry forgot to be surprised at the unusual gift; for the neighbors shunned them, and the poor woman had many anxieties on her husband's account, the family being divided, – one brother a Tory, and one a Rebel.

"Can I help, ma'am? I'm a master hand at beating eggs, Aunt Hitty says. I'm tired, and wouldn't mind sitting a bit if I'm not in the way," said Tabby, bound to discover something more before she left.

"But you be in the way. We don't want any help, so you'd better be steppin' along home, else suthin' besides eggs may git whipped. Tale-bearers ain't welcome here," said old Puah, the maid, a sour spinster, who sympathized with her master, and openly declared she hoped the British would put down the Yankee Rebels soon and sharply.

Mrs. Bliss was in the pantry, and heard nothing of this little passage of arms; for Tabby hotly resented the epithet of "tale-bearer," though she knew that the men in the parlor were not the only spies on the premises.

"When you are all drummed out of town and this house burnt to the ground, you may be glad of my help, and I wish you may get it. Good-day, old crab-apple," answered saucy Tabby; and catching up her basket, she marched out of the kitchen with her nose in the air.

But as she passed the front of the house, she could not resist another look at the fine dinner-table; for in those days few had time or heart for feasting, and the best napery and china seldom appeared. One window stood open, and as the girl leaned in, something moved under the long cloth that swept the floor. It was not the wind, for the March day was still and sunny, and in a minute out popped a gray cat's head, and puss came purring to meet the new-comer whose step had roused her from a nap.

"Where one tabby hides, another can. Can I dare to do it? What would become of me if found out? How wonderful it would be if I could hear what these men are plotting. I will!"

A sound in the next room decided her; and, thrusting the basket among the bushes, she leaped lightly in and vanished under the table, leaving puss calmly washing her face on the window-sill.

As soon as it was done Tabby's heart began to flutter; but it was too late to retreat, for at that moment in bustled Mrs. Bliss, and the poor girl could only make herself as small as possible, quite hidden under the long folds that fell on all sides from the wide, old-fashioned table. She discovered nothing from the women's chat, for it ran on sage-cheese, egg-nog, roast pork, and lamentations over a burnt pie. By the time dinner was served, and the guests called in to eat it, Tabby was calm enough to have all her wits about her, and pride gave her courage to be ready for the consequences, whatever they might be.

For a time the hungry gentlemen were too busy eating to talk much; but when Mrs. Bliss went out, and the flip came in, they were ready for business. The window was shut, whereat Tabby exulted that she was inside; the talkers drew closer together, and spoke so low that she could only catch a sentence now and then, which caused her to pull her hair with vexation; and they swore a good deal, to the great horror of the pious little maiden curled up at their feet. But she heard enough to prove that she was right; for these men were Captain Brown and Ensign De Bernicre, of the British army, come to learn where the supplies were stored and how well the town was defended. She heard Mr. Bliss tell them that some of the "Rebels," as he called his neighbors, had sent him word that he should

not leave the town alive, and he was in much fear for his life and property. She heard the Englishmen tell him that if he came with them they would protect him; for they were armed, and three of them together could surely get safely off, as no one knew the strangers had arrived but the slip of a girl who showed them the way. Here "the slip of a girl" nodded her head savagely, and hoped the speaker's ear still tingled with the buffet she gave it.

Mr. Bliss gladly consented to this plan, and told them he would show them the road to Lexington, which was a shorter way to Boston than through Weston and Sudbury, the road they came.

"These people won't fight, will they?" asked Ensign De Bernicre.

"There goes a man who will fight you to the death," answered Mr. Bliss, pointing to his brother Tom, busy in a distant field.

The Ensign swore again, and gave a stamp that brought his heavy heel down on poor Tabby's hand, as she leaned forward to catch every word. The cruel blow nearly forced a cry from her; but she bit her lips and never stirred, though faint with pain. When she could listen again, Mr. Bliss was telling all he knew about the hiding places of the powder, grain, and cannon the enemy wished to capture and destroy. He could not tell much, for the secrets had been well kept; but if he had known that our young Rebel was taking notes of his words under his own table, he might have been less ready to betray his neighbors. No one suspected a listener, however, and all Tabby could do was to scowl at three pairs of muddy boots, and wish she were a man that she might fight the wearers of them.

She very nearly had a chance to fight or fly; for just as they were preparing to leave the table, a sudden sneeze nearly undid her. She thought she was lost, and hid her face, expecting to be dragged out – to instant death, perhaps – by the wrathful men of war.

"What's that?" exclaimed the Ensign, as a sudden pause followed that fatal sound.

"It came from under the table," added Captain Brown, and a hand lifted a corner of the cloth.

A shiver went through Tabby, and she held her breath, with her eye upon that big, brown hand; but the next moment she could have laughed with joy, for pussy saved her. The cat had come to doze on her warm skirts, and when the cloth was raised, fancying she was to be fed by her master, puss rose and walked out purring loudly, tail erect, with its white tip waving like a flag of truce.

"'Tis but the old cat, gentlemen. A good beast, and, fortunately for us, unable to report our conference," said Mr. Bliss, with an air of relief, for he had started guiltily at the bare idea of an eavesdropper.

"She sneezed as if she were as great a snuff-taker as an old woman of whom we asked our way above here," laughed the Ensign, as they all rose.

"And there she is now, coming along as if our grenadiers were after her!" exclaimed the Captain, as the sound of steps and a wailing voice came nearer and nearer.

Tabby took a long breath, and vowed that she would beg or buy the dear old cat that had saved her from destruction. Then she forgot her own danger in listening to the poor woman, who came in crying that her neighbors said she must leave town at once, or they would tar and feather her for showing spies the road to a Tory's house.

"Well for me I came and heard their plots, or I might be sent off in like case," thought the girl, feeling that the more perils she encountered, the greater heroine she would be.

Mr. Bliss comforted the old soul, bidding her stay there till the neighbors forgot her, and the officers gave her some money to pay for the costly service she had done them. Then they left the room, and after some delay the three men set off; but Tabby was compelled to stay in her hiding-place till the table was cleared, and the women deep in gossip, as they washed dishes in the kitchen. Then the little spy crept out softly, and raising the window with great care, ran away as fast as her stiff limbs would carry her.

By the time she reached the Deacon's, however, and told her tale, the Tories were well on their way, Mr. Bliss having provided them with horses that his own flight might be the speedier.

So they escaped; but the warning was given, and Tabby received great praise for her hour under the table. The town's-people hastened their preparations, and had time to remove the most valuable stores to neighboring towns; to mount their cannon and drill their minute-men; for these resolute farmers meant to resist oppression, and the world knows how well they did it when the hour came.

Such an early spring had not been known for years; and by the 19th of April fruit trees were in bloom, winter grain was up, and the stately elms that fringed the river and overarched the village streets were budding fast. It seemed a pity that such a lovely world should be disturbed by strife; but liberty was dearer than prosperity or peace, and the people leaped from their beds when young Dr. Prescott came, riding for his life, with the message Paul Revere brought from Boston in the night: —

"Arm! arm! the British are coming!"

Like an electric spark the news ran from house to house, and men made ready to fight, while the brave women bade them go, and did their best to guard the treasure confided to their keeping. A little later, word came that the British were at Lexington, and blood had been shed. Then the farmers shouldered their guns, with few words but stern faces, and by sunrise a hundred men stood ready, with good Parson Emerson at their head. More men were coming in from the neighboring towns, and all felt that the hour had arrived when patience ceased to be a virtue and rebellion was just.

Great was the excitement everywhere; but at Captain David Brown's one little heart beat high with hope and fear, as Tabby stood at the door, looking across the river to the town, where drums were beating, bells ringing, and people hurrying to and fro.

"I can't fight, but I *must* see," she said; and catching up her cloak, she ran over the North Bridge, promising her aunt to return and bring her word as soon as the enemy appeared.

"What news? Are they coming?" called the people, from the Manse and the few houses that then stood along that road. But Tabby could only shake her head and run the faster, in her eagerness to see what was happening on that memorable day. When she reached the middle of the town she found that the little company had gone along the Lexington road to meet the enemy. Nothing daunted, she hurried in that direction and, climbing a high bank, waited to catch a glimpse of the British grenadiers, of whom she had heard so much.

About seven o'clock they came, the sun glittering on the arms of eight hundred English soldiers marching toward the hundred stout-hearted farmers, who waited till they were within a few rods of them.

"Let us stand our ground; and if we die, let us die here," said brave Parson Emerson, still among his people, ready for anything but surrender.

"Nay," said a cautious Lincoln man, "it will not do for us to *begin* the war."

So they reluctantly fell back to the town, the British following slowly, being weary with their seven-mile march over the hills from Lexington. Coming to a little brown house perched on the hillside, one of the thirsty officers spied a well, with the bucket swinging at the end of the long pole. Running up the bank, he was about to drink, when a girl, who was crouching behind the well, sprang up, and with an energetic gesture, flung the water in his face, crying: —

"That's the way we serve spies!"

Before Ensign De Bernicre – for it was he, acting as guide to the enemy – could clear his eyes and dry his drenched face, Tabby was gone over the hill with a laugh and a defiant gesture toward the red-coats below.

In high feather at this exploit, she darted about the town, watching the British at their work of destruction. They cut down and burnt the liberty pole, broke open sixty barrels of flour, flung five hundred pounds of balls into the mill-pond and wells, and set the court-house on fire. Other parties were ordered to different quarters of the town to ransack houses and destroy all the stores they found. Captain Parsons was sent to take possession of the North Bridge, and De Bernicre led the way, for he had taken notes on his former visit, and was a good guide. As they marched, a little scarlet figure

went flying on before them, and vanished at the turn of the road. It was Tabby hastening home to warn her aunt.

"Quick child, whip on this gown and cap and hurry into bed. These prying fellows will surely have pity on a sick girl, and respect this room if no other," said Mrs. Brown, briskly helping Tabby into a short night-gown and round cap, and tucking her well up when she was laid down, for between the plump feather-beds were hidden many muskets, the most precious of their stores. This had been planned beforehand, and Tabby was glad to rest and tell her tale while Aunt Brown put physic bottles and glasses on the table, set some evil-smelling herbs to simmer on the hearth, and, compromising with her conscience, concocted a nice little story to tell the invaders.

Presently they came, and it was well for Tabby that the ensign remained below to guard the doors while the men ransacked the house from garret to cellar; for he might have recognized the saucy girl who had twice maltreated him.

"These are feathers; lift the covers carefully or you'll be half smothered, they fly about so," said Mrs. Brown, as the men came to some casks of cartridges and flints, which she had artfully ripped up several pillows to conceal.

Quite deceived, the men gladly passed on, leaving the very things they most wanted to destroy. Coming to the bed-room, where more treasures of the same valuable sort were hidden in various nooks and corners, the dame held up her finger, saying, with an anxious glance toward Tabby: —

"Step softly, please. You wouldn't harm a poor, sick girl. The doctor thinks it is small-pox, and a fright might kill her. I keep the chamber as fresh as I can with yarbs, so I guess there isn't much danger of catching it."

The men reluctantly looked in, saw a flushed face on the pillow (for Tabby was red with running, and her black eyes wild with excitement), took a sniff at the wormwood and motherwort, and with a hasty glance into a closet or two where sundry clothes concealed hidden doors, hastily retired to report the danger and get away as soon as possible.

They would have been much disgusted at the trick played upon them if they had seen the sick girl fly out of bed and dance a jig of joy as they tramped away to Barrett's Mills. But soon Tabby had no heart for merriment, as she watched the minute-men gather by the bridge, saw the British march down on the other side, and when their first volley killed brave Isaac Davis and Abner Hosmer, of Acton, she heard Major Buttrick give the order, "Fire, fellow-soldiers; for God's sake, fire!"

For a little while shots rang, smoke rose, shouts were heard, and red and blue coats mingled in the struggle on the bridge. Then the British fell back, leaving two dead soldiers behind them. These were buried where they fell; and the bodies of the Acton men were sent home to their poor wives, Concord's first martyrs for liberty.

No need to tell more of the story of that day; all children know it, and many have made a pilgrimage to see the old monument set up where the English fell, and the bronze Minute-Man, standing on his granite pedestal to mark the spot where the brave Concord farmers fired the shot that made the old North Bridge immortal.

We must follow Tabby, and tell how she got her table-cloth. When the fight was over, the dead buried, the wounded cared for, and the prisoners exchanged, the Tories were punished. Dr. Lee was confined to his own farm, on penalty of being shot if he left it, and the property of Daniel Bliss was confiscated by government. Some things were sold at auction, and Captain Brown bought the fine cloth and gave it to Tabby, saying heartily: —

"There, my girl, that belongs to you, and you may well be proud of it; for, thanks to your quick wits and eyes and ears, we were not taken unawares, but sent the red-coats back faster than they came."

And Tabby *was* proud of it, keeping it carefully, displaying it with immense satisfaction whenever she told the story, and spinning busily to make a set of napkins to go with it. It covered the table when her wedding supper was spread, was used at the christening of her first boy, and for many a Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner through the happy years of her married life.

Then it was preserved by her daughters, as a relic of their mother's youth, and long after the old woman was gone, the well-worn cloth still appeared on great occasions, till it grew too thin for anything but careful keeping, to illustrate the story so proudly told by the grandchildren, who found it hard to believe that the feeble old lady of ninety could be the lively lass who played her little part in the Revolution with such spirit.

In 1861, Tabby's table-cloth saw another war, and made an honorable end. When men were called for, Concord responded "Here!" and sent a goodly number, led by another brave Colonel Prescott. Barretts, Hosmers, Melvins, Browns, and Wheelers stood shoulder to shoulder, as their grandfathers stood that day to meet the British by the bridge. Mothers said, "Go my son," as bravely as before, and sisters and sweethearts smiled with wet eyes as the boys in blue marched away again, cheered on by another noble Emerson. More than one of Tabby's descendants went, some to fight, some to nurse; and for four long years the old town worked and waited, hoped and prayed, burying the dear dead boys sent home, nursing those who brought back honorable wounds, and sending more to man the breaches made by the awful battles that filled both North and South with a wilderness of graves.

The women knit and sewed Sundays as well as weekdays, to supply the call for clothes; the men emptied their pockets freely, glad to give; and the minister, after preaching like a Christian soldier, took off his coat and packed boxes of comforts like a tender father.

"More lint and bandages called for, and I do believe we've torn and picked up every old rag in the town," said one busy lady to another, as several sat together making comfort-bags in the third year of the long struggle.

"I have cleared my garret of nearly everything in it, and only wish I had more to give," answered one of the patriotic Barrett mothers.

"We can't buy anything so soft and good as worn out sheets and table-cloths. New ones wont do, or I'd cut up every one of mine," said a newly married Wheeler, sewing for dear life, as she remembered the many cousins gone to the war.

"I think I shall have to give our Revolutionary table-cloth. It's old enough, and soft as silk, and I'm sure my blessed grandmother would think that it couldn't make a better end," spoke up white-headed Madam Hubbard; for Tabby Tarbell had married one of that numerous and worthy race.

"Oh, you wouldn't cut up that famous cloth, would you?" cried the younger woman.

"Yes, I will. It's in rags, and when I'm gone no one will care for it. Folks don't seem to remember what the women did in those days, so it's no use keeping relics of 'em," answered the old lady, who would have owned herself mistaken if she could have looked forward to 1876, when the town celebrated its centennial, and proudly exhibited the little scissors with which Mrs. Barrett cut paper for cartridges, among other ancient trophies of that earlier day.

So the ancient cloth was carefully made into a boxful of the finest lint and softest squares to lay on wounds, and sent to one of the Concord women who had gone as a nurse.

"Here's a treasure!" she said, as she came to it among other comforts newly arrived from home. "Just what I want for my brave Rebel and poor little Johnny Bullard."

The "brave Rebel" was a Southern man who had fought well and was badly wounded in many ways, yet never complained; and in the midst of great suffering was always so courteous, patient, and courageous, that the men called him "our gentleman," and tried to show how much they respected so gallant a foe. John Bullard was an English drummer-boy, who had been through several battles, stoutly drumming away in spite of bullets and cannon-balls; cheering many a camp-fire with his voice, for he sang like a blackbird, and was always merry, always plucky, and so great a favorite in his regiment, that all mourned for "little Johnny" when his right arm was shot off at Gettysburg. It was thought he would die; but he pulled through the worst of it, and was slowly struggling back to health, still trying to be gay, and beginning to chirp feebly now and then, like a convalescent bird.

"Here, Johnny, is some splendid lint for this poor arm, and some of the softest compresses for Carrol's wound. He is asleep, so I'll begin with you, and while I work I'll amuse you with the story of the old table-cloth this lint came from," said Nurse Hunt, as she stood by the bed where the thin, white face smiled at her, though the boy dreaded the hard quarter of an hour he had to endure every day.

"Thanky, mum. We 'aven't 'ad a story for a good bit. I'm 'arty this mornin', and think I'll be hup by this day week, won't I?"

"I hope so. Now shut your eyes and listen; then you wont mind the twinges I give you, gentle as I try to be," answered the nurse, beginning her painful task.

Then she told the story of Tabby's table-cloth, and the boy enjoyed it immensely, laughing out at the slapping and the throwing water in the ensign's face, and openly rejoicing when the red-coats got the worst of it.

"As we've beaten all the rest of the world, I don't mind our 'aving bad luck that time. We har' friends now, and I'll fight for you, mum, like a British bull-dog, if I hever get the chance," said Johnny, when the tale and dressing were ended.

"So you shall. I like to turn a brave enemy into a faithful friend, as I hope we shall yet be able to do with our Southern brothers. I admire their courage and their loyalty to what they believe to be right; and we are all suffering the punishment we deserve for waiting till this sad war came, instead of settling the trouble years ago, as we might have done if we had loved honesty and honor more than money and power."

As she spoke, Miss Hunt turned to her other patient, and saw by the expression of his face that he had heard both the tale and the talk. He smiled, and said, "Good morning," as usual, but when she stooped to lay a compress of the soft, wet damask on the angry wound in his breast, he whispered, with a grateful look: —

"You *have* changed one 'Southern brother' from an enemy into a friend. Whether I live or die, I never can forget how generous and kind you have all been to me."

"Thank you! It is worth months of anxiety and care to hear such words. Let us shake hands, and do our best to make North and South as good friends as England and America now are," said the nurse, offering her hand.

"Me, too! I've got one 'and left, and I give it ye with all me 'art. God bless ye, sir, and a lively getting hup for the two of us!" cried Johnny, stretching across the narrow space that divided the beds, with a beaming face and true English readiness to forgive a fallen foe when he had proved a brave one.

The three hands met in a warm shake, and the act was a little lesson more eloquent than words to the lookers-on; for the spirit of brotherhood that should bind us all together worked the miracle of linking these three by the frail threads spun a century ago.

So Tabby's table-cloth did make a beautiful and useful end at last.

Eli's Education

"My turn now," said Walt, as they assembled again, after a busy day spent in snow-balling, statue-making, and tumbling in the drifts that still continued to rise on all sides.

"Here is just the story for you and Geoff. You are getting ready for college, after years of the best schooling, and it will do you good to hear how hard some boys have had to work to get a little learning," said Grandma, glancing at the slip that Walt drew from the basket which Aunt Elinor held out to him, and from which Lotty had drawn the story of "Tabby's Table Cloth."

"This is a true tale, and the man became famous for his wisdom, as well as much loved and honored for his virtue, and interest in all good things," added Aunt Elinor, as she began to read the story of

ELI'S EDUCATION

Many years ago, a boy of sixteen sat in a little room in an old farm-house up among the Connecticut hills, writing busily in a book made of odd bits of paper stitched together, with a cover formed of two thin boards. The lid of a blue chest was his desk, the end of a tallow candle stuck into a potato was his lamp, a mixture of soot and vinegar his ink, and a quill from the gray goose his pen. A "Webster's Spelling-book," "Dilworth's New Guide to the English Tongue," "Daboll's Arithmetic," and the "American Preceptor," stood on the chimney-piece over his head, with the "Assembly Catechism," and New Testament, in the place of honor. This was his library; and now and then a borrowed "Pilgrim's Progress," "Fox's Book of Martyrs," or some stray volume, gladdened his heart; for he passionately loved books, and scoured the neighborhood for miles around to feed this steadily increasing hunger. Every penny he could earn or save went to buy a song or a story from the peddlers who occasionally climbed the hill to the solitary farm-house. When others took a noon-sleep, he read under the trees or by the fire. He carried a book in his pocket, and studied as he went with the cows to and from the pasture, and sat late in his little room, ciphering on an old slate, or puzzling his young brain over some question which no one could answer for him.

His father had no patience with him, called him a shiftless dreamer, and threatened to burn the beloved books. But his mother defended him, for he was her youngest and the pride of her heart; so she let him scribble all over her floors before she scrubbed them up, dipped extra thick candles for his use, saved every scrap of paper to swell his little store, and firmly believed that he would turn out the great man of the family. His brothers joked about his queer ways, but in his sisters he found firm friends and tender comforters for all his woes. So he struggled along, working on the farm in summer and in a clock shop during the winter, with such brief spells of schooling as he could get between whiles, improving even these poor opportunities so well that he was letter-writer for all the young people in the neighborhood.

Now, he was writing in his journal very slowly, but very well, shaping his letters with unusual grace and freedom; for the wide snow-banks were his copy-books in winter, and on their white pages he had learned to sweep splendid capitals or link syllables handsomely together. This is what he wrote that night, with a sparkle in the blue eyes and a firm folding of the lips that made the boyish face resolute and manly.

"I am set in my own mind that I get learning. I see not how, but my will is strong, and mother hopes for to make a scholar of me. So, please God, we shall do it."

Then he shut the little book and put it carefully away in the blue chest, with pen and ink, as if they were very precious things; piously said his prayers, and was soon asleep under the homespun

coverlet, dreaming splendid dreams, while a great bright star looked in at the low window, as if waiting to show him the road to fortune.

And God did please to help the patient lad; only the next evening came an opportunity he had never imagined. As he sat playing "Over the Hills and Far Away" on the fiddle that he had himself made out of maple-wood, with a bow strung from the tail of the old farm horse, a neighbor came in to talk over the fall pork and cider, and tell the news.

"Ef you want ter go over the hills and far away, Eli, here's the chance. I see a man down to Woodtick who was askin' ef I knew any likely young chap who'd like to git 'scribers for a pious book he wants to sell. He'd pay for the job when the names is got and the books give out. That's ruther in your line, boy, so I calk'lated your daddy would spare you, as you ain't much of a hand at shuckin' corn nor cartin' pummace."

"Haw! haw!" laughed the big brothers, Ambrose Vitruvius and Junius Solomon, as neighbor Terry spoke with a sly twinkle in his eye.

But the sisters, Miranda and Pamela, smiled for joy, while the good mother stopped her busy wheel to listen eagerly. Eli laid down his fiddle and came to the hearth where the others sat, with such a wide-awake expression on his usually thoughtful face that it was plain that he liked the idea.

"I'll do it, if father'll let me," he said, looking wistfully at the industrious man, who was shaving axe-handles for the winter wood-chopping, after his day's work was over.

"Wal, I can spare you for a week, mebby. It's not time for the clock shop yet, and sence you've heerd o' this, you won't do your chores right, so you may as wal see what you can make of peddlin'."

"Thank you, sir; I'll give you all I get, to pay for my time," began Eli, glowing with pleasure at the prospect of seeing a little of the world; for one of his most cherished dreams was to cross the blue hills that hemmed him in, and find what lay beyond.

"Guess I can afford to give you all you'll make this trip," answered his father, in a tone that made the brothers laugh again.

"Boys, don't pester Eli. Every one hasn't a call to farmin', and it's wal to foller the leadin's of Providence when they come along," said the mother, stroking the smooth, brown head at her knee; for Eli always went to her footstool with his sorrows and his joys.

So it was settled, and next day the boy, in his home-spun and home-made Sunday best, set off to see his employer and secure the job. He got it, and for three days trudded up and down the steep roads, calling at every house with a sample of his book, the Rev. John Flavel's treatise on "Keeping the Heart." Eli's winning face, modest manner, and earnest voice served him well, and he got many names; for books were scarce in those days, and a pious work was a treasure to many a good soul who found it difficult to keep the heart strong and cheerful in troublous times.

Then the books were to be delivered, and, anxious to save his small earnings, Eli hired no horse to transport his load, but borrowed a stout, green shawl from his mother, and, with his pack on his back, marched bravely away to finish his task. His wages were spent in a new prayer-book for his mother, smart handkerchief-pins for the faithful sisters, and a good store of paper for himself.

This trip was so successful that he was seized with a strong desire to try a more ambitious and extended one; for these glimpses of the world showed him how much he had to learn, and how pleasantly he could pick up knowledge in these flights.

"What be you a-brewdin' over now, boy? Gettin' ready for the clock shop? It's 'most time for winter work, and Terry says you do pretty wal at puttin' together," said the farmer, a day or two after the boy's return, as they sat at dinner, all helping themselves from the large pewter platter heaped with pork and vegetables.

"I was wishin' I could go South with Gad Upson. He's been twice with clocks and notions, and wants a mate. Hoadley fits him out and pays him a good share if he does well. Couldn't I go along? I hate that old shop, and I know I can do something better than put together the insides of cheap clocks."

Eli spoke eagerly, and gave his mother an imploring look which brought her to second the motion at once, her consent having been already won.

The brothers stared as if Eli had proposed to go up in a balloon, for to them the South seemed farther off than Africa does nowadays. The father had evidently been secretly prepared, for he showed no surprise, and merely paused a moment to look at his ambitious son with a glance in which amusement and reproach were mingled.

"When a hen finds she's hatched a duck's egg, it's no use for her to cackle; that ducklin' will take to the water in spite on her, and paddle off, nobody knows where. Go ahead, boy, and when you get enough of junketin' 'round the world, come home and fall to work."

"Then I *may* go?" cried Eli, upsetting his mug of cider in his excitement.

His father nodded, being too busy eating cabbage with a wide-bladed green-handled knife to speak just then. Eli, red and speechless with delight and gratitude, could only sit and beam at his family till a sob drew his attention to sister Pamela, whose pet he was.

"Don't, Pam, don't! I'll come back all right, and bring you news and all the pretty things I can. I *must* go; I feel as if I couldn't breathe, shut up here winters. I s'pose it's wicked, but I can't help it," whispered Eli, with his arm around his buxom eighteen-year old sister, who laid her head on his shoulder and held him tight.

"Daughter, it's sinful to repine at the ways of Providence. I see a leadin' plain in this, and ef *I* can be chirk when my dear boy is goin', 'pears to me you ought to keep a taut rein on your feelin's, and not spile his pleasure."

The good mother's eyes were full of tears as she spoke, but she caught up the end of her short gown and wiped them quickly away to smile on Eli, who thanked her with a loving look.

"It's so lonesome when he's not here. What will we do evenings without the fiddle, or Eli to read a piece in some of his books while we spin?" said poor Pam, ashamed of her grief, yet glad to hide her tears by affecting to settle the long wooden bodkin that held up her coils of brown hair.

"Obed Finch will be comin' along, I guess likely, and he'll read to you out uv Eli's book about keepin' the heart, and you'll find your'n gone 'fore you know it," said Junius Solomon, in a tone that made pretty Pam blush and run away, while the rest laughed at her confusion.

So it was settled, and when all was ready, the boy came home to show his equipment before he started. A very modest outfit, – only two tin trunks slung across the shoulders, filled with jewelry, combs, lace, essences, and small wares.

"I hate to have ye go, son, but it's better than to be mopin' to hum, gettin' desperut for books and rilin' father. We'll all be workin' for ye, so be chipper and do wal. Keep steddy, and don't disgrace your folks. The Lord bless ye, my dear boy, and hold ye in the holler of his hand!"

Her own rough hand was on his head as his mother spoke, with wet eyes, and the tall lad kissed her tenderly, whispering, with a choke in his throat: —

"Good-by, mammy dear; I'll remember."

Then he tramped away to join his mate, turning now and then to nod and smile and show a ruddy face full of happiness, while the family watched him out of sight with mingled hopes and doubts and fears.

Mails were slow in those days, but at length a letter came; and here it is, – a true copy of one written by a boy in 1820: —

Norfolk, Va., December 4th.

"Honored Parents: I write to inform you I am safe here and to work. Our business is profitable, and I am fast learning the Quirks and Turns of trade. We are going to the eastern shore of Va., calculating to be gone six weeks. The inhabitants are sociable and hospitable, and you need not fear I shall suffer, for I find many almost fathers and mothers among these good folks.

"Taking our trunks, we travel through the country, entering the houses of the rich and poor, offering our goods, and earning our wages by the sweat of our brows. How do you think we look? Like two Awkward, Homespun, Tugging Yankee peddlers? No, that is not the case. By people of breeding we are treated with politeness and gentility, and the low and vulgar we do not seek. For my part, I enjoy travelling more than I expected. Conversation with new folks, observing manners and customs, and seeing the world, does me great good.

"I never met a real gentleman till I came here. Their hospitality allows me to see and copy their fine ways of acting and speaking, and they put the most Bashful at ease. Gad likes the maids and stays in the kitchen most times. I get into the libraries and read when we put up nights, and the ladies are most kind to me everywhere.

"I'm so tall they can't believe I'm only sixteen. They aren't as pretty as our rosy-faced girls, but their ways are elegant, and so are their clothes, tell Pam.

"When I think how kind you were to let me come, I am full of gratitude. I made some verses, one day, as I waited in a hovel for the rain to hold up.

"To conduce to my own and parents' good,
Was why I left my home;
To make their cares and burdens less,
And try to help them some.
'Twas my own choice to earn them cash,
And get them free from debt;
Before that I am twenty-one
It shall be done, I bet.
My parents they have done for me
What I for them can never do,
So if I serve them all I may,
Sure God will help me through.
My chief delight, therefore, shall be
To earn them all I can,
Not only now, but when that I
At last am my own man.

"These are the genuine Sentiments of your son, who returns thanks for the many favors you have heaped upon him, and hopes to repay you by his best Endeavors. Accept this letter and the inclosed small sum as a token of his love and respect.

"Your dutiful son,

"Tell the girls to write.

Eli."

In reply to this, came a letter from the anxious mother, which shows not only the tender, pious nature of the good woman, but also how much need of education the boy had, and how well he was doing for himself: —

"Affectionate Son: We was very glad to receive your letter. I feel very anctious about you this winter, and how you are a doing. You cannot know a mother's concern for her boy wen he is fur away. Do not git into bad habbits. Take the Bible for your

rule and guide to vartue. I pray for your prosperity in all spiritall and temporrall things, and leave you in the care of Him who gave you breath and will keep you safe.

"We are all well, and your father enjoys his helth better than last year. I visited Uncle Medad a spell last week. I am provided with a horse and shay to ride to meatin. Mr. Eben Welton took our cow and give us his old horse. Captain Stephen Harrington was excommunicated last Sabbath. Pamelly goes away to learn dressmakin soon. I mistrust Mirandy will take up with Pennel Haskell; he is likely, and comes frequent. I wish you had been here a Christmas. We had a large company to dinner, and I got some wheat flower and made a fine chicken pye. Eli, I hope you attend meatin when you can. Do not trifle away the holy day in vane pleasures, but live to the glory of God, and in the fear of your parents. Father sold the white colt. He was too spirity, and upsat Ambrose and nigh broke his head. His nose is still black. Dear son: I miss you every time I set a platter in your place. Is your close warm and suffitient? Put your stockin round your throat if sore. Do you git good cyder to drink? Take the Pennyryal if you feal wimbly after a long spell of travil. The girls send love. No more now. Wright soon.

Your mother, Hannah Gardener."

"P. S. – Liddy Finch is married. Our pigs give us nine hunderd pound of prime pork."

Many such letters went to and fro that winter, and Eli faithfully reported all his adventures. For he had many, and once or twice was in danger of losing his life.

On one occasion, having parted from his mate for a day or two, wishing to try his luck alone, our young peddler found himself, late in the afternoon, approaching the Dismal Swamp. A tempest arose, adding to the loneliness and terror of the hour. The cypresses uprooted by the blast fell now and then across the road, endangering the poor boy's head. A sluggish stream rolled through tangled junipers and beds of reeds, and the fen on either side was full of ugly creatures, lizards, snakes, and toads; while owls, scared by the storm, flew wildly about and hooted dismally. Just at the height of the tumult, Eli saw three men coming toward him, and gladly hastened to meet them, hoping to have their company or learn of them where he could find a shelter. But their bad faces daunted him, and he would have hurried by without speaking if they had not stopped him, roughly demanding his name and business.

The tall stripling was brave, but his youthful face showed him to be but a boy, and the consciousness of a well-filled purse in his pocket made him anxious to escape. So he answered briefly, and tried to go on. But two men held him, in spite of his struggles, while the third rifled his pockets, broke open his trunks, and took all that was of any value in the way of watches and jewelry. Then they left him, with a cruel joke about a good journey, and made off with their booty. It was the first time poor Eli had met with such a mishap, and as he stood in the rain looking at his wares scattered about the road, he felt inclined to throw himself into the creek, and forget his woes there among the frogs and snakes. But he had a stout heart, and soon decided to make the best of it, since nothing could be done to mend the matter. Gathering up his bedraggled laces, scattered scent-bottles, and dirty buttons, pins, and needles, he trudged sadly on, feeling that for him this was indeed a Dismal Swamp.

"I told you we'd better stick together, but you wanted to be so dre'dful smart, and go travellin' off alone in them out'n the way places. Might 'a' known you'd get overhauled somers. I always did think you was a gump, Eli, and now I'm sure on't," was all the comfort Gad gave him when they met, and the direful tale was told.

"What shall I do now?" asked the poor lad. "My notions aren't worth selling, and my money's gone. I'll have to pay Hoadley somehow."

"You'd better foot it home and go to choppin' punkins for the cows, or help your marm spin. I vow I never did see such a chap for gettin' into a mess," scolded Gad, who was a true Yankee, and made a successful trader, even in a small way.

"We'll sleep on it," said Eli, gently, and went to bed very low in his mind.

Perhaps a few tears wet his pillow as he lay awake, and the prayers his mother taught him were whispered in the silence of the night; for hope revived, comfort came, and in the morning his serene face and sensible plan proved to his irate friend that the "gump" had a wise head and a manly heart, after all.

"Gad, it is just the time for the new almanacs, and Allen wants men to sell 'em. I thought it was small business before, but beggars mustn't be choosers, so I'm going right off to offer for the job 'round here. It will do for a start, and if I'm smart, Allen will give me a better chance maybe."

"That's a fust-rate plan. Go ahead, and I'll say a good word for you. Allen knows me, and books is in your line, so I guess you'll do wal if you keep out'n the mashes," answered Gad, with great good will, having slept off his vexation.

The plan did go well, and for weeks the rosy-faced, gentle-voiced youth might have been seen mildly offering the new almanacs at doors and shops, and at street corners, with a wistful look in his blue eyes, and a courtesy of manner that attracted many customers and earned many a dollar. Several mates, envying his fine handwriting and pitying his hard luck, took lessons in penmanship of him and paid him fairly, whereat he rejoiced over the hours spent at home, flat on the kitchen floor, or flourishing splendid capitals on the snow-banks, when his nose was blue with cold and his hands half-frozen.

When the season for the yellow-covered almanacs was over, Eli, having won the confidence of his employer, was fitted out with more notions, and again set forth on his travels, armed, this time, and in company with his townsman. He prospered well, and all winter trudged to and fro, seemingly a common peddler, but really a student, making the world his book, and bent on learning all he could. Travel taught him geography and history, for he soon knew every corner of Virginia; looked longingly at the ancient walls of William and Mary College, where Jefferson and Monroe studied; where young George Washington received his surveyor's commission, and in his later years served as Chancellor. In Yorktown, he heard all about the siege of 1781; saw Lord Cornwallis's lodgings and the cave named for him; met pleasant people, whose fine speech and manners he carefully copied; read excellent books wherever he could find them, and observed, remembered, and stored away all that he saw, heard, and learned, to help and adorn his later life.

By spring he set out for home, having slowly saved enough to repay Hoadley for the lost goods. But as if Providence meant to teach him another lesson, and make him still more prudent, humble, and manly, a sad adventure befell him on his way.

While waiting for the coaster that was to take them home, he one day went in swimming with Gad; for this was one of the favorite pastimes of the Connecticut boys, who on Saturday nights congregated by the score at a pond called Benson's Pot, and leaped from the spring-board like circus tumblers, turning somersaults into the deep water below.

It was too early for such sport now; the water was very cold, and poor Gad, taken with cramp, nearly drowned Eli by clinging to his legs as he went down. Freeing himself with difficulty, Eli tried to save his friend; but the current swept the helpless man away, and he was lost. Hurriedly dressing, Eli ran for aid, but found himself regarded with suspicion by those to whom he told his story; for he was a stranger in the place and certain peddlers who had gone before had left a bad name behind them.

To his horror, he was arrested, accused of murder, and would have been tried for his life, if Mr. Allen of Norfolk had not come to testify to his good character, and set him free. Poor Gad's body was found and buried, and after a month's delay, Eli set out again, alone, heavy-hearted, and very poor, for all his own little savings had been consumed by various expenses. Mr. Hoadley's money was untouched, but not increased, as he hoped to have it; and rather than borrow a penny of it, Eli landed

barefooted. His boots were so old he threw them overboard, and spent his last dollar for a cheap pair of shoes to wear when he appeared at home, for they were not stout enough to stand travel. So, like Franklin with his rolls, the lad ate crackers and cheese as he trudged through the city, and set out for the far-away farm-house among the hills.

A long journey, but a pleasant one, in spite of his troubles; for spring made the world lovely, habit made walking no hardship, and all he had seen in his wanderings passed before him at will, like a panorama full of color and variety.

Letters had gone before, but it was a sad homecoming, and when all was told, Eli said: —

"Now, father, I'll go to work. I've had my wish and enjoyed it a sight; and would go again, but I feel as if I ought to work, as long as I can't pay for my time."

"That's hearty, son, and I'm obleeged to ye. Hear what mother's got to say, and then do whichever you prefer," answered the farmer, with a nod toward his wife, who, with the girls, seemed full of some pleasant news which they longed to tell.

"I've sold all the cloth we made last winter for a good sum, and father says you may hev the spendin' on't. It will be enough to pay your board down to Uncle Tillotson's while you study with him, so 's 't you kin be gettin' ready for college next year. I've sot my heart on't, and you musn't disapp'int me and the girls," said the good woman, with a face full of faith and pride in her boy, in spite of all mishaps.

"Oh, mammy, how good you be! It don't seem as if I ought to take it. But I *do* want to go!" cried Eli, catching her round the neck in an ecstasy of boyish delight and gratitude.

Here Miranda and Pamela appeared, bringing their homely gifts of warm hose, and new shirts made from wool and flax grown by the father, and spun and woven by the accomplished housewife.

A very happy youth was Eli when he again set off to the city, with his humble outfit and slender purse, though father still looked doubtful, and the brothers were more sure than ever that Eli was a fool to prefer dry books to country work and fun.

A busy year followed, Eli studying, as never boy studied before, with the excellent minister, who soon grew proud of his best pupil. Less preparation was needed in those days, and perhaps more love and industry went to the work; for necessity is a stern master, and poor boys often work wonders if the spark of greatness is there.

Eli had his wish in time, and went to college, mother and sisters making it possible by the sale of their handiwork; for the girls were famous spinners, and the mother the best weaver in the country around. How willingly they toiled for Eli! — rising early and sitting late, cheering their labor with loving talk of the dear lad's progress, and an unfailing faith in his future success. Many a long ride did that good mother take to the city, miles away, with a great roll of cloth on the pillion behind her to sell, that she might pay her son's college bills. Many a coveted pleasure did the faithful sisters give up that they might keep Eli well clothed, or send him some country dainty to cheer the studies which seemed to them painfully hard and mysteriously precious. Father began to take pride in the ugly duckling now, and brothers to brag of his great learning. Neighbors came in to hear his letters, and when vacation brought him home, the lads and lasses regarded him with a certain awe; for his manners were better, his language purer, than theirs, and the new life he led refined the country boy till he seemed a gentleman.

The second year he yielded to temptation, and got into debt. Being anxious to do credit to his family, of whom he was secretly a little ashamed about this time, he spent money on his clothes, conscious that he was a comely youth with a great love of beauty, and a longing for all that cultivates and embellishes character and life. An elegant gentleman astonished the hill folk that season, by appearing at the little church in a suit such as the greatest rustic dandy never imagined in his wildest dreams, — the tall white hat with rolling brim, Marseilles vest with watch-chain and seals festooned across it, the fine blue coat with its brass buttons, and the nankeen trousers strapped over boots so tight that it was torture to walk in them. Armed with a cane in the well-gloved hand, an imposing

brooch in the frills of the linen shirt, Eli sauntered across the green, the observed of all observers, proudly hoping that the blue eyes of a certain sweet Lucinda were fixed admiringly upon him.

The boys were the first to recover from the shock, and promptly resented the transformation of their former butt into a city beau, by jeering openly and affecting great scorn of the envied splendor. The poor jackdaw, somewhat abashed at the effect of his plumes, tried to prove that he felt no superiority, by being very affable, which won the lasses, but failed to soften the hearts of the boys; and when he secured the belle of the village for the Thanksgiving drive and dance, the young men resolved that pride should have a fall.

Arrayed in all his finery, Eli drove pretty Lucinda in a smart borrowed wagon to the tavern where the dance was held. Full of the airs and graces he had learned at college, the once bashful, awkward Eli was the admired of all eyes, as he pranced down the long contra-dance in the agonizing boots, or played "threading the needle" without the least reluctance on the part of the blushing girls to pay the fine of a kiss when the players sung the old rhyme: —

"The needle's eye no one can pass;
The thread that runs so true —
It has caught many a pretty lass,
And now it has caught you."

But his glory was short-lived; for some enemy maliciously drew out the linchpin from the smart wagon, and as they were gayly driving homeward over the hills, the downfall came, and out they both went, to the great damage of Eli's city suit, and poor Lucinda's simple finery.

Fortunately, no bones were broken, and picking themselves up, they sadly footed it home, hoping the mishap would remain unknown. But the rogues took care that Eli should not escape, and the whole neighborhood laughed over the joke; for the fine hat was ruined, and the costly coat split down the back, in the ignominious tumble.

Great was the humiliation of the poor student; for not only was he ridiculed, but Lucinda would not forgive him, and the blue eyes smiled upon another; worst of all, he had to confess his debts and borrow money of his father to pay them. He meekly bore the stern rebuke that came with the hard-earned dollars, but the sight of the tears his mother shed, even while she comforted him, filled him with remorse. He went back to his books, in a homespun suit, a sadder and a wiser boy, and fell to work as if resolved to wash out past errors and regain the confidence he had lost.

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