Raymond Evelyn

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
HOW DOROTHY CAME

One spring morning Mrs. John Chester opened the front door of her little brick house and screamed. There, upon the marble step, stood a wicker baby-wagon with a baby in it; and, having received this peculiar greeting, the baby screamed, too. Then it laughed, Mrs. Chester laughed, and, hearing both the screams and the laughter, postman John Chester hurriedly set down his cup of coffee and ran to the doorway. In another instant he, also, was laughing. What childless, child-loving man could help doing so, beholding the pretty sight before him?

For Martha, his wife, had caught the little creature out of the wagon and was ecstatically hugging it, cooing to it, mothering it, as naturally as if this little one she was tossing up and down were not almost the first child she had ever so fondled.

"John! John! O John! *It's meant!* It's for us! See, see? The little card on its coat says: 'My name is Dorothy C. I have come to be your daughter.' Our daughter, John Chester! Oh! what a blessed gift! Who – who – can have sent her?"

Then John Chester stopped laughing and, laying his hand on his wife's shoulder with a protesting pressure, said:

"There, little woman, don't go building hopes on such a thing as this. Doubtless, some of the neighbors have left the little one here for a joke. If the good Lord has sent us no babies of our own it's not likely He'd put it into the hearts of others to give us theirs. It'll be called for before I get in from my rounds. Well, good-bye. Wish I could stay and play with the kid, but I'm late already. Good-bye."

As he stooped to kiss her, after his accustomed fashion, his cap touched the baby's cheek, pressed so close to Martha's, and with a frown and a twist Miss Dorothy C. put up her tiny hand and knocked it from his head. Then she wrinkled her funny little nose, laughed again, and from that instant the letter-carrier became her abject slave.

As he sped down the street, to take a car for the post-office and the morning mail he must deliver, he saw old Mrs. Cecil's carriage drive slowly around the corner. She was not "Mrs. Cecil" exactly, for there was more of her name upon her visiting cards: "Mrs. Cecil Somerset Calvert," and she was one of the proudest of old Maryland dames. But she was called by the shorter title by all sorts and conditions of people. She was on John Chester's route and quite often addressed him as "Johnnie," though Mrs. Martha resented this as being too familiar. In her own eyes John was the wisest and best man in the world, far too good to be called "Johnnie" like any schoolboy. The postman himself did

not resent it. He resented very little that befell and simply trotted through life as he did over his mail-route, with a cheery word and smile for everybody. Therefore, it was quite characteristic that he should good-naturedly obey Mrs. Cecil's summons to come to her carriage, that she had ordered stopped, even though he was just boarding a car and had no time to waste.

"Johnnie, what was that I saw in your wife's arms, as I drove by?" she demanded as he came up.

"A baby. The cutest ever was. Somebody's playing a joke on us, leaving it on our steps."

"I shouldn't like that kind of a joke. Whose is it?"

"I don't know. I'll tell you more when I get round with the mail. Beg pardon, please, there comes another car," he replied, still smiling, although he was edging away as fast as he dared, without giving offense to this quick-tempered old lady.

"Shall you be fool enough to take the youngster in, if nobody calls for it? What salary do you get?" she continued, ignoring his evident reluctance to be further delayed.

He answered hastily, raised his cap, and managed to catch the next car, springing up on the rear platform while it was already in motion and reckoning that he would have to run, instead of trot, if he made up time and got his morning letters to those who expected them along with their breakfast.

As he disappeared Mrs. Cecil nodded her handsome white head a number of times, in satisfaction over something, and remarked to her poodle:

"Made no mistake. He's a straight man. Well, well, well! The idea of anybody being simpleton enough to be glad of the care of a squalling baby!"

Then she drove home to her own fine house, which stood at the junction of the broad avenue and the narrow street. As old Ephraim turned his horses into the spacious grounds a thrill of pride ran through his mistress's heart, while she shouted to her half-deaf coachman:

"Bellevieu never looked finer that it does this spring, boy."

To which the gray-headed "boy" echoed:

"Fine this spring, Miss Betty."

"Had another offer for the place yesterday, Ephraim."

"Dat so, Miss Betty? Grandes' place in Baltimo'," responded the other, who had heard but little of what she had said, but guessed sufficiently near to answer sympathetically. Indeed, he was fully as proud of the ancient estate as its present owner, and of the fact that, while he dwelt in the very heart of the southern city, his stables and appointments were quite as roomy as if an open country lay all about them. His "Miss Betty" and he were the last of the "family"; he considered Bellevieu as much his as hers; and, from his throne upon the antiquated Calvert carriage, looked with charitable contempt upon the drivers of less aristocratic vehicles.

The march of progress had left the mansion and its beautiful grounds untouched. Entrenched behind her pride and her comfortable bank account, Mrs. Betty Cecil Somerset-Calvert

had withstood every assault upon the old place, whether made by private individual or, as yesterday, by the city authorities, who wished to turn Bellevieu into a park. She had replied to the committee that waited upon her:

"No, gentlemen, thank you. This house was one of the first built in the town, though it was then what you call nowadays a 'suburban residence.' Each generation has received it intact from the preceding one, and intact it will descend to my heirs. What they will do with it remains to be seen. I have the honor to wish you good-bye," she concluded, with her grandest manner, yet the familiar local salutation of parting.

The committee felt itself dismissed and bowed itself out; and the old lady summoned her house-girl to open all the windows and ventilate the rooms contaminated by commercial presence. Then she consoled herself and the poodle with the reflection:

"We shall be free from any more 'offers' for at least two weeks. Let us enjoy our freedom."

Yet Mrs. Cecil's pride did not prevent her taking the liveliest interest in her neighbors and their gossip. Having been born and passed all her life at Bellevieu she knew everything which went on anywhere near it. Ensconced upon her broad piazzas, behind the venerable oaks and evergreens which shaded them, her bright old eyes watched the outer world with the zest as of youth and utter loneliness. For alone she dwelt in the many-roomed house, that had once been filled by her now vanished "family," and sometimes found her solitude unbearable. Even

postman "Johnnie's" thrice-daily visits were a most welcome diversion to her, and lest there should be no mail sufficient to bring him so often to her door, she subscribed for all sorts of publications that she seldom opened, in order to have something due at every delivery.

This morning she was so anxious to see him again that she had her breakfast served on the piazza, sitting down to wait for it as Ephraim drove away toward the stable. It was brought to her by Dinah, grumbling as usual:

"Laws, Miss Betty, you-all shuah do try a body's tempah. It am puffickly ridic'lous de way yo' ca'y on. Off drivin' from pillah to post 'fore breakfast done served, an' you-all not so young an' spry like yo' used to was. Yeah am dem scrambled aigs done gone hard an' tough, like a nigger's skin, an' fust off Ah knows Ah'll have yo' laid up wid dat same old misery in yo' chist. Why-all cayn't yo' eat yo' breakfast in de house, propah, like a Christian, Miss Betty?"

"Because I don't wish to, Dinah," retorted Mrs. Cecil, exactly as a spoiled child might have done.

"You-all know how old yo' be, Miss Betty?" demanded the ancient negress, who had been body-servant to her mistress from the earliest youth of both and who was still indulged beyond limit in her freedom of speech and action.

"Yes, Dinah. I am just one year and a day younger than you are. Go tell cook to scramble me some more eggs; and if I prefer driving before to after breakfast, that doesn't concern you, girl."

"Beg pahdon, Miss Betty, but it do concern. Didn't Ah done go promise yo' dyin' ma how't Ah't take ca' of you-all what'd nevah no sense to take ca' yo'self? Huh! Yo' put dat shawl closeter 'roun' dem purty shouldahs o' yo's, whilst I go shame dat cook for sendin' up such no-'count aigs to my young miss!" And away limped Dinah, the "misery" in her own limbs from her "roomaticals" being very severe.

Meanwhile, in the little house around the corner, Mrs. John Chester was superintending another breakfast which had the delightful zest of novelty about it. No sooner had Dorothy C. been taken within doors than she espied the table which John-postman had so hastily quitted upon sound of her own laughter and, at once, began to kick and squirm in the house mistress's arms with such vigor that the good lady came near to dropping her, and exclaimed, in mingled fear and pride:

"Why, you strong little thing! You're as hard to hold as – as a human eel! There, there, don't! You've slipped down so far all your clothes are over your head. Are you hungry? Well, well! You shall have all you want to eat, for once!"

Then she placed the child on the floor while she filled a tumbler with milk and offered it; but this was met by disdain and such another swift toss of the baby arm that the glass flew out of the holder's hand, and its contents deluged the floor.

Whereupon, Miss Dorothy C. threw herself backward with shrieks which might mean anger or delight, but were equally confusing to the order-loving Mrs. Chester, who cried, in

reproof:

"Oh! you naughty baby! Whoever you belong to should teach you better than that! Now, just see. All my nice clean matting splashed with milk, and milk-grease is hard to get out. Now you lie there till I get a pail and cloth – if you hurt yourself I can't help it. John said you were a joke, but you're no joke to me!"

Having just finished her spring cleaning and having had, for economy's sake, to do it all herself, the housewife's tidy soul was doubly tried, and she had a momentary desire to put the baby and her wagon out upon the street again, to take its chances with somebody else. However, when she re-entered with her pail and cloths, she was instantly diverted by the sight that met her.

Dorothy C. had managed to pull her coat over her head and in some unknown fashion twist the strings of her bonnet around her throat, in an effort to remove the objectionable headgear. The result was disaster. The more she pulled the tighter grew that band around her neck and her face was already blue from choking when Mrs. Chester uncovered it and rescued the child from strangling.

As the lady afterward described the affair to her husband it appeared that:

"Seeing that, and her so nigh death, as it were, gave me the terriblest turn! So that, all unknown, down sits I in that puddle of milk as careless as the little one herself. And I cuddled her up that close, as if I'd comforted lots of babies before, and me a green hand at the business. To see her sweet little lip go quiver-

quiver, and her big brown eyes fill with tears – Bless you, John! I was crying myself in the jerk of a lamb's tail! Then I got up, slipped off my wet skirt and got her out of her outside things, and there pinned to her dress was this note. Read it out again, please, it so sort of puzzles me."

So the postman read all that they were to learn, for many and many a day, concerning the baby which had come to their home; and this is a copy of that ill-spelled, rudely scrawled document:

> "thee child Is wun Yere an too Munths old hur burthDay is aPrill Furst. til firthur notis Thar will Bee a letur in The posOfis the furst of Everi mounth with Ten doLurs. to Pay."
> Signed:
> *"dorothy's Gardeen*
> *hur X mark."*

Now John Chester had been a postman for several years and he had learned to decipher all sorts of handwriting. Instantly, he recognized that this scrawl was in a disguised hand, wholly different from that upon the card pinned to the child's coat, and that the spelling was also incorrect from a set purpose. Laying the two bits of writing together he carefully studied them, and after a few moments' scrutiny declared:

"The same person wrote both these papers. The first one in a natural, cultivated hand, and a woman's. The second in a would-be-ignorant one, to divert suspicion. But – the writer didn't think it out far enough; else she never would have given the same odd shape to her r's and that twist to the tails of her y's. It's somebody

that knows us, too, likely, though I can't for the life of me guess who. What shall we do about her? Send her to an Orphanage, ourselves? Or turn her over to the police to care for, Martha dear?"

His face was so grave that, for a moment, she believed him to be in earnest; then that sunny smile which was never long absent from his features broke over them and in that she read the answer to her own desire. To whomsoever Dorothy C. belonged, that heartless person had passed the innocent baby on to them and they might safely keep her for their own.

Only, knowing the extreme tidiness of his energetic wife, John finally cautioned:

"Don't settle it too hastily, Martha. By the snap of her brown eyes and the toss of her yellow head, I foresee there'll be a deal more spilled milk before we've done with her!"

"I don't care!" recklessly answered the housewife, "*she's mine*!"

CHAPTER II
A POSTAL SUBSTITUTE

So long a time had passed that Dorothy C. had grown to be what father John called "a baker's dozen of years old"; and upon another spring morning, as fair as that when she first came to them, the girl was out upon the marble steps, scrubbing away most vigorously. The task was known locally as "doing her front," and if one wishes to be considerable respectable, in Baltimore, one's "front" must be done every day. On Saturdays the entire marble facing of the basement must also be polished; but "pernickity" Mrs. Chester was known to her neighbors as such a forehanded housekeeper that she had her Saturday's work done on Friday, if this were possible.

Now this was Friday and chanced to be a school holiday; so Dorothy had been set to the week-end task, which she hated; and therefore she put all the more energy into it, the sooner to have done with it, meanwhile singing at the top of her voice. Then, when the postman came round the corner of the block, she paused in her singing to stare at him for one brief instant. The next she had pitched her voice a few notes higher still, and it was her song that greeted her father's ears and set him smiling in his old familiar fashion. Unfortunately, he had not been smiling when she first perceived him and there had been a little catch in

her tones as she resumed her song. Each was trying to deceive the other and each pretending that nothing of the sort was happening.

"Heigho, my child! At it again, giving the steps a more tombstone effect? Well, since it's the fashion – go ahead!"

"I wish the man, or men, who first thought of putting scrubby-steps before people's houses had them all to clean himself! Hateful old thing!"

With a comical gesture of despair she tossed the bit of sponge-stone, with which she had been polishing, into the gutter and calmly seated herself on the bottom step, "to get her breath." "To get yours, too, father dear," she added, reaching to the postman's hand and gently drawing him down beside her. Then, because her stock of patience was always small and she could not wait for his news, she demanded: "Well! Did you go? What did he say?"

"Yes, darling, I went," he answered, in a low tone and casting an anxious glance backward over his shoulder toward the house where Martha might be near enough to hear. But having replied to one question he ignored the rest.

However, the girl was not to be put off by silence and her whole heart was in her eyes as she leaned forward and peered into his. He still tried to evade her, but she was so closely bound up with his life, she understood him so quickly and naturally, that this was difficult; so when she commanded in her tender, peremptory way: "Out with it, father mine, body and bones!" he half-cried, half-groaned:

"Worse than all the others! *I – am – doomed!*"

Then he dropped his head on his hands and, regardless of the fact that they were on the street, conspicuous to every passer-by, he gave way to a mute despair. Now when a naturally light-hearted person breaks down the collapse is complete, but Dorothy did not know this nor that recovery is commonly very prompt. She was still staring in grieved amazement at her father's bowed head when he again lifted it and flashed a smile into her freshly astonished eyes. Then she laughed aloud, so great was her relief, and cried:

"There, father John! You've been fooling me again! I should have known you were teasing and not believed you!"

But he answered, though still smiling:

"It's pretty hard to believe the fact, myself. Yet it's true, all the same. Five different doctors have agreed upon it – which is wonderful, in itself; and though I'd much rather not face this kind of a truth I reckon I'll have to; as well as the next question: What is to become of us?"

Dorothy still retained her baby habit of wrinkling her nose when she was perplexed, and she did so now in an absurd earnestness that amused her father, even in the midst of his heartache. During her twelve years of life in the little brick house in Brown Street, she had made a deal of trouble for the generous couple which had given her a home there, but she had brought them so much more of happiness that they now believed they actually could not live without her. As the postman expressed it:

"Her first act in this house was to spill her milk on its tidy

floor. She's been spilling milk all along the route from then till now, and long may she spill! Martha'd be 'lost' if she didn't have all that care of the troublesome child."

This sunshiny morning, for the first time since that far-back day when she arrived upon his doorstep, the good postman began to contemplate the possibility of their parting; and many schemes for her future welfare chased themselves through his troubled brain. If he could only spare Martha and Dorothy the unhappiness that had fallen upon himself he would ask no more of fortune. For a long time they sat there, pondering, till Martha's voice recalled them to the present:

"For goodness sake, Dorothy C.! What are you idling like that for? Don't you know I've to go to market and you have the lunch to get? Then there's that class picnic of yours, and what on earth will Miss Georgia say if you don't go this time? Come, come! Get to work. I'm ashamed to have the neighbors see my marble the way it is, so late in the day. You there, too, John? Finished your beat already? Well, you come, too. I've a mind to take up that dining-room carpet and put down the matting this very day. I never was so late in my spring cleaning before, but every time I say 'carpet' to you, you have an excuse to put me off. I confess I don't understand you, who've always been so handy and kind with my heavy jobs. But come, Dorothy, you needn't laze any longer. It beats all, the lots of talk you and your father always must have whenever you happen to get alongside. Come."

There was a hasty exchange of glances between father and

child; then she sprang up, laughing, and as if it were part of her fun held out her hand to the postman and pulled him to his feet. But it was not fun; it was most painful, serious earnest. He could hardly have risen without her aid, and she had noticed, what his wife had not, that, for a long time now, he had never taken a seat without it was near a table, or some other firm object by which he could support himself in rising. Now, as he loosed her hand and climbed the steps, he kept his gaze fixed upon those same troublesome feet and caught hold of the brass hand-rail, which it was the housewife's pride and Dorothy's despair to keep polished to brilliancy.

Once within the house, Martha returned to the subject of the carpet lifting and again he put her off; but this time her suspicion that all was not right had been aroused and, laying her hand upon his shoulder, she demanded in a tone sharpened by sudden anxiety:

"John Chester, what is the matter with you?"

He started, staggered by her touch, light as it was, and sank into a chair; then knowing that the truth must out sometime, almost hurled it at her – though smiling to think how little she would, at first, comprehend:

"Oh! nothing but '*ataxy locomotor*.'"

"But —*what*? Don't tease. I'm in earnest, and a hurry."

"So am I. In deadly earnest. I'm afflicted with '*ataxy locomotor*,' or *locomotor ataxia*. It's come to stay. To change our whole lives."

She hadn't the slightest idea what he meant, as he had surmised would be the case, but something in his tone frightened her, though she answered with a mirthful affectation:

"Humph! I'm glad it's something so respectable!"

Then she turned away, made ready to go to market, and soon left with her basket on her arm. But she carried a now heavy heart within her. She had seen that underneath her husband's jesting manner lay some tragic truth; and in her preoccupied state, she bought recklessly of things she should not and went home without those which were needful. So that once back there, she had to dispatch Dorothy marketward again, while she herself prepared the simple lunch that served till their evening dinner which all enjoyed the more in the leisure of the day's work done. And now, in the absence of the child they both so loved, husband and wife at length discussed the trouble that had befallen.

"Do you mean, John, that you are losing the use of your feet? What in the world will a postman do without his sound feet and as sound a pair of legs above them?" demanded the anxious housemistress, still unable to accept the dreadful fact.

"Nothing. I can't be a postman any longer. I must resign my position at once. I've kept it longer than I should. I haven't done justice to myself or the office in hanging on as I have. But – "

"How long have you known about it?"

"For several months I've noticed that my feet felt queer, but it's only been a few weeks since they became so uncontrollable. I've not been able to walk without keeping my eyes fixed on my

toes. My legs have a wild desire to fly out at right angles to my body and – Face it, little woman, face it! You have a cripple on your hands for as long as he may live."

"I haven't! You shan't be a – a cripple!" protested the impulsive housewife, whose greatest griefs, heretofore, had been simple domestic ones which shrank to nothingness before this real calamity. Then she bowed her head on her arms and let the tears fall fast. This served to relieve the tension of her nerves, and when she again lifted her head her face was calm as sad, while she made him tell her all the details of his trouble. He had been to the best specialists in the city. That very day he had consulted the last, whom he had hoped might possibly help him and whose fee had staggered him by its size.

"How long has Dorothy known this?" asked Martha, with a tinge of jealousy.

"Almost from the beginning. It was quite natural that she should, for she has so often run alongside me on my routes – going to and from school. Besides, you know, she has the very sharpest eyes in the world. Little escapes them. *Nothing* escapes which concerns us whom she loves so dearly. It was her notion that you shouldn't be told till it was necessary, but it fell in with my own ideas. I – I think, though I never heard of anybody else doing such a thing, that I'll have her go along with me this afternoon, when I make my – my last rounds. I confess that since that doctor's word, to-day, I've lost all my courage and my power to walk half-decently. Decently? It hasn't been that for a long

time, so if you can spare her I'll have her go."

"Of course I can spare her. She was to go to a class picnic, anyway, but she'd rather go with you. Now, I'll to work; and, maybe, I can think a way out of our trouble. I – I can't bear it, John! You, a cripple for life! It can't be true – it shall not be true. But – if it has to be, – well, you've worked for me all these years and it's a pretty how-de-do if I can't work for you in turn. Now, lie down on the lounge till it's time to go to the office again, and I'll tackle my kitchen floor."

For the first time he allowed her to help him across the room and to place him comfortably on the lounge, and she suddenly remembered how often, during the past few weeks, she had seen Dorothy do this very same thing. She had laughed at it as a foolish fondness in the girl, but now she offered the assistance with a bitter heartache.

Dorothy came back and was overjoyed at the changed program for her holiday afternoon. All along she had longed to go with the postman, to help him, but had not been permitted. Now it was not only a relief that her mother knew their secret and that they could talk it over together, but she had formed a scheme by which she believed everything could go on very much as before.

So with a cane in one hand and his other resting on her shoulder, John Chester made his last "delivery." Fortunately, the late mail of the day was always small and the stops, therefore, infrequent. Most of these, too, were at houses fronting directly

on the street, so that the postman could support himself against the end of the steps while Dorothy ran up them and handed in the letters.

It was different at Bellevieu, which chanced to be the end of that trip, and the long path from the gateway to the mansion looked so formidable to father John that he bade Dorothy go in alone with the pouch, emptied now of all matter save that addressed to Mrs. Cecil.

She sped away, leaving him leaning against the stone pillar of the eagle-gate – so called because each column guarding the entrance was topped by a massive bronze eagle – and waved a smiling farewell to him as she disappeared beneath the trees bordering the driveway.

As usual, Mrs. Cecil was on her piazza, wrapped in shawls and protected by her hooded beach-chair from any possible wind that might blow. Old though she was, her eyes were almost as brown and bright as Dorothy's own, and they opened in surprise at the appearance of this novel mail-carrier.

"How-d'ye-do, Mrs. Cecil? Here's such a lot of letters and papers all for you!" cried Dorothy, bowing, as she swept her hand through the pouch which she had slung over her shoulder in the most official manner. "Where shall I put them? I reckon there are too many for your lap."

"What – who – Where's Johnnie?" demanded the lady, leaning forward and first smiling, then frowning upon the girl.

"Oh! he – he's at the gate," she answered, and was about

to explain why he had not come himself. Then a sudden remembrance of how closely he had guarded his secret, even from her mother, closed her lips, leaving the other to infer what she chose; and who promptly exclaimed:

"Well, of all things! Do you know, does he know, that between you the law is broken? Nobody, except a regularly sworn employee has a right to touch the United States mail. How dare he send you? Huh! If I do my duty as a good citizen I shall report him at once. This single breach of faith may cost him his place, even though he has been in the service so long."

Mrs. Cecil's manner was harsher than her thought. For some time she had observed that "Johnnie" looked ill and was far less active than of old and she had intended that very afternoon to offer him a kindness. She would send him and his wife away on a long vacation, wherever they chose to go, till he could recover his health. She would pay all his expenses, including a substitute's salary. Even more generous than all, she would invite that girl, Dorothy C., whom they had so foolishly adopted, to pass the interval of their absence at Bellevieu. She dreaded the infliction of such a visit. She always had insisted that she hated children – but – Well, it was to be hoped the postman would have sense enough to speedily recuperate and take Dorothy off her hands. In any case, she must be gotten rid of before it was time for Mrs. Cecil herself to seek recreation at her summer home in the Hudson highlands.

Now her mood suddenly changed. She had desired to befriend

the postman but, if he had taken it into his hands to befriend himself, it was quite another matter. Let him! Why should she bother with anybody in such a different state of life? Disappointment, at having her prospective kindness returned upon her thus, made her sharply say:

"It takes all kinds of fools to fill a world, and I'm sorry to find Johnnie one of them. Don't stare! It's rude, with such big eyes as yours. Drop the mail. Carriers shouldn't loiter – that's another crime. Your father must come himself next time, else – "

She seemed to leave some dire threat unspoken and again Dorothy was just ready to tell this strange old lady, whom the postman had often called "wise," the truth of the trouble that had come to him; when around the corner of the house dashed Peter and Ponce, the two Great Dane dogs which Mrs. Cecil kept as a menace to intruders. They had just been loosed for their evening exercise and, wild with delight, were hurrying to their mistress on her broad porch.

At the sight of their onrush Dorothy caught up the pouch she had dropped and started to retreat – too late! The animals were upon her, had knocked her downward and backward, striking her head against the boards and, for the moment, stunning her. But they had been more playful than vicious and were promptly restrained by Mrs. Cecil's own hand upon their collars; while the brief confusion of the girl's startled thoughts as quickly cleared and she leaped to her feet, furiously angry and indignant.

"Oh! the horrid beasts! How dare you – anybody – keep

such dangerous creatures? I'll tell my father! He'll – he'll – " tears choked her further speech and, still suspiciously eyeing the Danes, she was edging cautiously down the steps when she felt herself stopped.

Mrs. Cecil had loosed her hold of Peter to lay her hand upon the girl's shoulder and she was saying, kindly but sternly:

"They are not dangerous but playful. They attack nobody upon whom they are not 'set.' It was an accident; and if any further apology is necessary it is from a little girl to the old gentlewoman – for an insolent suspicion. Now go. The dogs will not follow you."

Dorothy did not see how she had done wrong, yet she felt like a culprit dismissed as she lifted the pouch she had again dropped and started gateward, still keeping a wary eye upon the beautiful dogs, now lying beside their mistress in her beach-chair.

As she neared the entrance she cried:

"Here I am at last, father! I didn't mean to stay so long but that dreadful old woman – Why, father, father! Where are you, dearest father?"

He was nowhere to be seen. Nor anybody, either on the broad avenue or the narrow street around the corner; and when she came breathlessly to the dear home in which she hoped to find him it was empty.

CHAPTER III
AT JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL

The door of No. 77 Brown Street stood wide open. Any of the burglars for whom its mistress was always on the watch might have raided the tiny parlor or made off with father John's Sunday overcoat, hanging upon the hat-rack. Now also, while Dorothy hurried from room to room of the six which were all the house contained, the wind of a rising thunderstorm whistled through them and their open windows. Nor was there any reply to her anxious calls:

"Mother! Father! Anybody – somebody! Oh! where are you? What has happened? Mother – dearest mother Martha! Won't you answer?"

Certainly, this was a strange, a terrifying state of things. It was amazing that so careful a housewife as Martha Chester should leave her home in this unprotected condition, but it was quite natural for the well-trained girl, even in the midst of her alarm, to close the sashes against the rain that now came dashing in.

Then she hurried below and out into the little yard, or garden, that was her own special delight. Nobody there; but the pail and brush which Mrs. Chester had been using to clean her back kitchen were still upon its floor, the pail overturned and the water puddling its bricks, and the sight made Dorothy's heart sink lower

yet.

Hurrying back to the street, a neighbor shielded her own head from the downpour and called from a next-door window:

"Something has happened to your father. A boy saw him picked up on the street and a policeman called a Johns Hopkins ambulance, that took him to the hospital. The boy knew him, told your mother, and she's hurried there. Don't worry. Probably it's nothing serious."

"Not serious! Oh! you don't know what you're saying! And to think I left him only such a little while! If that hateful old woman – I must go to him, too, I must, I must!"

With that Dorothy was retreating indoors, but again the neighbor's voice detained her:

"'Tisn't likely you'd be admitted, even if you did go. You'd better stay here and be ready for your poor mother when she comes. It's worse trouble for her than for you."

This might be so and the advice excellent, but the excited girl was in no mood to profit by it. Once, in her early childhood, she had answered to an inquiry: "I love my mother a *little* the best, but I love my father the *biggest* the best!" and it was so still. Her father, her cheery, indulgent, ever-tender father, would always be "the biggest the best" of her earthly friends, and to be absent from him now, not knowing what had befallen, was impossible.

Glancing upward she observed that the neighbor had already withdrawn her head from the dashing rain and was glad of it. It left her free to bang the front door shut, to rush backward through

the house and out at the alley gate, which she also shut, snapping its lock behind her. But she had caught up the key that opened it and, hanging this in a crevice of the fence known for a safe hiding place to each of the family, she started eastward for the great hospital.

Though she had never entered the famous place, she had seen it once from a street-car, and love guided her flying feet. But it was a long, long way from Brown Street, and the present storm was one of those deluging "gusts" familiar to the locality. Within the first five minutes the gutters were filled, the muddy streams pushing outward toward the very middle of the narrower alleys and quite covering her shoe-tops as she splashed through. At one or two of the older thoroughfares she came to the old-time "stepping stones," provided for just such emergencies, and still left standing because of the city's pride in their antiquity. Over these she leaped and was glad of them, but alas! the storm was having its will of her. Her gingham frock was soaked and clung about her with a hindering obstinacy that vexed her, and her wet shoes grew intolerable. She did not remember that she had ever gone barefoot, as some of her mates had done, but at last she sat down on a doorstep and took off her shoes and stockings. After a moment's contemplation of their ruined state, she threw them far aside and stepped upon the brick pavement, just as a policeman in oilskins came up and laid his hand on her shoulder, asking:

"Little girl, what are you doing?"

Dorothy sprang aside, frightened, and wriggled herself free.

She forgot that she had never been afraid of such officers; that, indeed, the one upon her own home beat was the friend of all the youngsters on the block, and that this one could give her the shortest direction to the place she sought. She had long ago been taught that, if she were ever lost or in any perplexity upon the street, she should call upon the nearest policeman for aid and that it was his sworn duty to assist her. She remembered only that it was a policeman who had summoned the ambulance that had carried her father to that horrible place – a hospital! Well, she, too, was bound for it, but only to snatch him thence; and stretching out her small, drenched arms, she wondered if they and mother Martha's together would have strength to lift and seize him.

Then on and on and on! Could one city be so big as this? Did ever brick pavements hurt anybody else as they were hurting her? How many more blocks must she traverse before she came in sight of that wide Broadway with its pretty parks, on which the hospital stood?

Everybody had retreated indoors. Nobody who could escape the fury of the storm endured it, and she had left the officer who could have guided her far behind. But, at last, a slackening of the downpour; and as if by magic, people reappeared upon the street; though of the first few whom she addressed none paused to listen. Yet, finally, a colored boy came hurrying by, his basket of groceries upon his arm, and another empty basket inverted over his head, by way of an umbrella. Him she clutched, demanding

with what little of breath she had left:

"The – way – to – Johns Hopkins' – hospital, please!"

"Hey? Horspittle? Wha' for?"

"To find my father, who's been taken there. Oh! tell me the shortest way, please – please – please! I am so tired! and I must be – I must be quick – quick!"

A look of pity and consternation stole into the negro's face, and he drew in his breath with a sort of gasp as he answered:

"Laws, honey, I reckon yo' *mus'* be 'quick'! But de quickes' yo' is ain' half quick enough. Know wha' dem horspittles is for? Jus' to cut up folkses in. Fac'. Dey goes in alibe, dey comes out deaders. Yo' jus' done cal'late yo' ain' got no paw no mo'. He's had his haid, or his laig, or both his arms sawed off 'fore you-all more'n got started a-chasin' of him. Po' li'l gal! Pity yo' got so wet in de rain jus' fo' nottin'! Wheah yo' live at? Yo' bettah go right home an' tell yo' folks take dem cloes off, 'fore you-all done get de pneumony."

Dorothy was shivering, partly from nervousness, partly from the chill of wet garments in the strong breeze. Though she had often heard the postman comment upon the superstitions of the negroes, who formed so large a part of the city's population, and knew that such ideas as this lad expressed were but superstition only, she could not help being impressed by his words. It was his honest belief that to enter a hospital meant giving himself up to death; and in this ignorance he reasoned that this forlorn child should be prevented from such self-destruction by any

means whatever. So when she still pleaded to be directed, despite the fear he had raised in her, he whirled abruptly about and pointed his hand in a direction wholly different from that she had followed. Then he added with a most dramatic air:

"Well, honey, if you-all done daid-set to go get yo' laigs sawed off, travel jus' dat-a-way till yo' come to de place. Mebbe, if dey gibs yo' dat stuff what makes yo' go asleep, you-all won't know nottin' erbout de job."

With this cheerful assurance the grocer's boy went his way, musically whistling a popular tune, and Dorothy gazed after him in deep perplexity. Fortunately, the rain had almost ceased and the brief halt had restored her breath. Then came the reflection:

"He wasn't telling the truth! I know that isn't the way at all, for Johns Hopkins is on the east of the city, and that's toward the north. I'll ask somebody else. There are plenty of people and wagons coming out now; and – Oh! my!"

As if in answer to her thought, there came the clang of an electric bell, the hurrying delivery wagons drew out of the way, and past her, over the clear space thus given, dashed another ambulance, hastening to the relief of some poor sufferer within. On its side she saw the name of the hospital she sought and with frantic speed dashed after this trustworthy guide.

Though she could by no means keep up with its speed she did keep it well in sight, to the very entrance of the wide grounds themselves, and there she lost it. But it didn't matter now. Her journey was almost done, and the building loomed before her,

behind whose walls was hidden her beloved father John.

From the gateway up the incline to the broad hospital steps she now dragged her strangely reluctant feet. How, after all, could she enter and learn some dreadful truth? But she must, she must! and with a final burst of courage she rushed into the great entrance hall, which was so silent, so beautiful after the storm outside; and there appeared before her half-blinded eyes a figure as of one coming to meet her.

All alone the figure stood, with nothing near to detract from its majestic tenderness; so large and powerful looking; as if able to bear all the burdens of a troubled world and still smile peace upon it. Slowly, Dorothy crept now to the very feet of the statue and read that this was: "Christ the Healer."

Ah! then! No hospital could be a wicked, murderous place in which He dwelt! and with a sigh of infinite relief, the exhausted child sank down and laid her head upon Him. And then all seemed to fade from view.

The next Dorothy knew she was lying on a white cot; a blue-gowned, white-capped nurse was bending over her, and a pleasant voice was saying:

"Well, now that's good! You've had a splendid rest and must be quite ready for your supper. Here's a fine bowl of broth, and some nice toast. Shall I help you to sit up?"

"Why – why – what's the matter with me? Where am I? Have – " began the astonished child; then, suddenly remembering the colored boy's assertions concerning this dreadful place, she

instinctively thrust her hands below the light bed covering and felt of her legs. They were still both there! So were her arms; and, for a matter of fact, she was delightfully rested and comfortable. Again lying back upon her pillow, she smiled into the nurse's face and asked:

"What am I doing here, in a bed? Is this the hospital?"

"Yes, dear, it is; and you are in bed because you fainted in the entrance hall, exhausted by exposure to the terrible storm. That is all – we trust. Now, drink your broth and take another nap if you can."

There was authority, as well as gentleness, in the tone and the patient tried to obey; but this time there was a sharp pain at the back of her head and her neck seemed strangely stiff. With a little exclamation of distress, she put her hand on the painful spot, and the attendant quickly asked:

"Does that hurt you? Can you remember to have had a blow, or a fall, lately?"

"Why, yes. The big dogs knocked me down over at Bellevieu. It made me blind for a few minutes, but I was too mad to stay blind! If it hadn't been for that – Oh! please, where *is* my father?" answered Dorothy.

"Your father? I don't know. Have you lost, or missed, him, dear?" returned the other, understanding now why such a healthy child should have collapsed as she had, there at the feet of the beautiful statue. Excitement, exposure, and the blow; these accounted for the condition in which a house doctor had found

her. Also, there was nothing to hinder prompt recovery if the excitement could be allayed; and to this end the nurse went on:

"Tell me about him, little girl. Maybe I can help you, and don't worry about being here. It is the very loveliest place in the world for ailing people and nothing shall hurt you."

So Dorothy told all she knew; of the long weeks past when the postman's active feet had become more and more troublesome; of his sudden disappearance; and of her now terrible fear that, since the poor feet were of so little use, these hospital surgeons would promptly "saw" them off and so be rid of them.

Ripples of amusement chased themselves across the nurse's fair face as she listened, yet beneath them lay a sympathetic seriousness which kept down Dorothy's anger, half-roused by the fleeting smiles.

"Well, my dear, neither he nor you could have come to a better place to get help. The very wisest doctors in the country are here, I believe. It's a disease with a long name, I fancy – "

"Yes, yes! I know it! He told me. It's 'locomort' – 'loco' something, 'at' – 'at' something else. It's perfectly horrible just to hear it, and what must it be to suffer it? But he never complains. My father John is the bravest, dearest, best man in the world!"

"Indeed? Then you should be the 'bravest, dearest, best' little daughter as well. And we'll hope some help, some cure, can be found for him. Now, will you go to sleep?"

"No. If you please I will go home. But I don't see my clothes anywhere. Funny they should take away a little girl's clothes just

'cause she forgot and went to sleep in the wrong place!"

"In the very right-est place in all the world, dear child! At the Saviour's feet. Be sure nothing but goodness and kindness rule over the hospital whose entrance He guards. Your clothes are drying in the laundry. You will, doubtless, have them in the morning, and, so far as I can judge now, there'll be nothing to prevent your going home then," comforted the nurse, gently stroking Dorothy's brow and by her touch soothing the pain in it. Oddly enough, though her head had ached intensely, ever since that tumble on Mrs. Cecil's piazza, she had not paid any attention to it while her anxious search continued. She was fast drowsing off again, but roused for an instant to ask:

"Have you seen my father? Did he hurt himself when he fell? Did he fall? What did happen to him, anyway? Mayn't I see him just a minute, just one little minute, 'fore this – this queer sleepiness gets me?"

"My dear, you can ask as many questions as a Yankee! I'll tell you what I think: Your father was probably taken to the emergency ward. I have nothing to do with that. My place is here, in the children's ward; and the first thing nurses – or children – learn in this pleasant room is – obedience. I have my orders to obey and one of them is to prevent talking after certain hours."

"You – you a big, grown-up woman, have to 'obey'? How funny!" cried Dorothy, thinking that the face beneath the little white cap was almost the very sweetest she had ever seen. But to this the other merely nodded, then went softly away.

Dorothy lay in a little room off from the general ward, into which the nurse had disappeared, and where there was the sound of low-toned conversation, with an occasional fretful cry from some unseen baby. The doctor, or interne as he was called, making his night rounds, seeing that all his little charges were comfortable for their long rest, and discussing with the blue-gowned assistant their needs and conditions. It was he who had found Dorothy, unconscious on the tiles, and had ordered her to bed; and it was of herself, had she known it, that he and the nurse had just been talking. As a result of this he merely looked in at the door of the little room, blinked a good-night from behind his spectacles, which, like two balls of fire, reflected the electric light above the door, and passed on.

Dorothy intended to keep awake. For a long time her head had been full of various schemes by which she should rise to the support of her family, whenever that day foreseen by the postman should arrive when his own support should fail. The day had come! Very suddenly, after all, as even the best-prepared-for catastrophes have a way of doing; and now, despite her earnest desires – Dorothy was going to sleep! She was ashamed of herself. She must stay awake and think – think – think! She simply *must*– she —

"Well, Dorothy C., good morning! A nice, dutiful daughter, you, to run away and leave mother Martha alone all night!"

That was the next she knew! That was Mrs. Chester's voice, speaking in that familiar tone a reproof which was no reproof

at all, but only a loving satisfaction. And there she sat, the tidy little woman, in her second-best hat and gown, smiling, smiling, as if there were no such thing as trouble in the world! as if both husband and child were not, at that very moment, lying in hospital beds!

CHAPTER IV
DOROTHY GAINS IN WISDOM

"Why, mother! Why – why —*mother*!" cried the astonished Dorothy, sitting up in her cot and smiling back into the happy face before her, yet wondering at its happiness and her own heartlessness, in being glad while her father was so ill. Then she realized that her neck was very stiff and that when she tried to turn her head it moved with a painful wrench, so sank back again, but still gazed at Mrs. Chester with a grieved amazement.

Seeing which, the lady bent over the cot and kissed the little girl, then promptly explained:

"You needn't be troubled, dearie, this is the very best thing that could have happened to us. Your father tired of waiting for you, his head was dizzy, and when he tried to walk home he fell. They hurried him here – his uniform showed he was somebody important – and into that emergency place. There the doctors examined him and they say, O Dorothy C.! they say that there is a chance, a chance of his sometime *getting well*! Think of that! John may get well! All those other outside doctors, that he paid so much to, told him he never could. He'd just grow worse and worse till – till he died. These don't. They say he has a chance. He's to stay here and be built up on extra nourishments, for awhile, and then he's to go into the country and live. Oh! I'm

the happiest woman in Baltimore, this day! And how is my little girl? Though the nurse tells me there's nothing much the matter with you, and that you'll be able to go home with me as soon as you have had your breakfast. Such a late breakfast, Dorothy C., for a schoolgirl! Lucky it's a Saturday!"

Dorothy had never seen her mother like this. At home, when trifles went wrong, she was apt to be a bit sharp-tongued and to make life uncomfortable for father John and their daughter, but now, that this real trouble had befallen, she was so gay! For, even if there was hope that the postman might sometime recover, was he not still helpless in a hospital? And had she forgotten that they had no money except his salary? which would stop, of course, since he could no longer earn it. It was certainly strange; and seeing the gravity steal into the childish face which was so dear to her, mother Martha stooped above it and, now herself wholly grave, explained:

"My dear, don't think I'm not realizing everything. But, since I've been once face to face with the possibility that death —*death*– was coming to our loved one and now learn that he will still live, as long as I do, maybe, I don't care about anything else. God never shuts one door but He opens another; and we'll manage. Some way we'll manage, sweetheart, to care for father John who has so long cared for us. Now, enough of talk. Here comes a maid with your breakfast; and see. There are your clothes, as fresh and clean as if I had laundered them myself. Maybe you should dress yourself before you eat. Then you are

to see your father for a few minutes; and then we'll go home to pack up."

It was long since Mrs. Chester had helped Dorothy to dress, except on some rare holiday occasion, but she did so now, as if the girl were still the baby she had found upon her doorstep. She, also, made such play of the business that the other became even more gay than herself, and chattered away of all that had befallen her, from her discovery of the deserted home till now.

Then came the nice breakfast, so heartily enjoyed that the nurse smiled, knowing there could be nothing seriously amiss with so hungry a patient. Afterward, a quiet walk through long corridors and spacious halls, from which they caught glimpses of cots with patients in them, and passed by wheeled chairs in which convalescents were enjoying a change.

"It's so still! Does nobody ever speak out loud?" whispered Dorothy to her mother, half-afraid of her own footfalls, though she now wore a pair of felt slippers in place of the shoes she had yesterday discarded. "It's the biggest, cleanest, quietest place I could even dream of!"

But Mrs. Chester did not answer, save by a nod and a finger upon lip; and so following the guide assigned them, they came to one of the open bridges connecting two of the hospital buildings, and there was father John, in a rolling chair, wearing a spotless dressing-gown, and holding out both hands toward them, while his eyes fairly shone with delight. An orderly, in a white uniform, was pushing the chair along the bridge, which was so wide

and looked down upon such beautiful grounds that it reminded Dorothy of Bellevieu, and he stopped short at their approach. He even stepped back a few paces, the better to leave them free for their interview.

But if there was any emotion to be displayed at that meeting, it was not of a gloomy sort; and it was almost in his wife's very words that the postman exclaimed:

"To think I should get impatient, lose my head, tumble down, and – up into this fine place! Where I've heard the best of news and live like a lord! Who wouldn't give his legs a rest, for a spell, if he could have such a chair as this to loll in while another man does his walking for him! Well, how's the girl? Why, since when have you taken to wearing slippers so much too big for you? I should think they'd bother you in walking as much as my limpsy feet did me."

Nothing escaped this cheery hospital patient even now, and before Mrs. Chester could interpose, Dorothy had told her own tale and how she had been a hospital patient herself. How now she had been "discharged" and was ready to go home with all her legs and arms intact, a thing she had feared might not be the case when she had ventured thither.

"To think I should have been so silly as to believe that poor boy! Or that, if I had followed his wrong directions, I shouldn't have gotten here at all. Oh! isn't it beautiful! What makes some of the women dress all in white and some in blue? When I grow up I believe I'll be a hospital nurse myself."

"Good idea. Excellent. Stick to it. See if you can make that notion last as long as that other one about being a great artist; or, yes, the next scheme was to write books – books that didn't 'preach' but kept folks laughing all the way through."

"Now, father! You needn't tease, and you haven't answered, about the different dresses. Do you know, already?" protested Dorothy, kissing his hand that rested on the arm of his chair.

"Oh! yes, I know. The orderly explained, for I wasn't any wiser than you before he did. The blue girls are 'probationers,' or undergraduates. They have to study and take care of cranky sick folks for three whole years before they can wear those white clothes. Think of that, little Miss Impatience, before you decide on the business! Three years. That's a long time to be shut up with aches and pains and groans. But a noble life. One that needs patience; even more than the Peabody course!"

They all laughed, even Dorothy who was being teased. After any new experience, it was her propensity immediately to desire to continue the delightful novelty. After a visit to a famous local picture gallery, she had returned home fully intent upon becoming an artist who should be, also, famous. To that end she had wasted any number of cheap pads and pencils, and had littered her mother's tidy rooms with "sketches" galore. When she had gone with a schoolmate to a Peabody recital, she had been seized with the spirit of music and had almost ruined a naturally sweet voice – as well as the hearers' nerves – by a self-instructed course of training, which her teasing father had

sometimes likened to a cat concert on a roof. However, upon learning that it required many years of steady practise and that her life must be filled with music – music alone – if she ever hoped to graduate from the Institute, she abandoned the idea and aspired to literature.

So from one ambition to another, her almost too active mind veered; but her wise guardians allowed it free scope, believing that, soon or late, it would find the right direction and that for which nature had really fitted her. The greatest disappointment the postman had felt, concerning these various experiments, was about the music. He was almost passionately fond of it, and rarely passed even a street organ without a brief pause to listen. Except, of course, when he had been upon his rounds. Then he forced himself past the alluring thing, even if he had himself to whistle to keep it out of mind. This habit of his had gained for him the nickname, along his beat, of the "whistling postman"; and, had he known it, there were many regrets among those who had responded to his whistle as promptly as to his ring of the bell that they should hear the cheerful sound no more.

The news of his collapse had quickly spread, for a new postman was already on his route, and it was only at Bellevieu, where "Johnnie" would be most missed, that it was not known.

The eagle-gate was shut. Ephraim was not to drive his fat horses through it that morning, nor for many more to come. During the night Mrs. Cecil had been taken ill with one of her periodical bronchial attacks, of which she made so light, but

her physician and old Dinah so much. To them her life seemed invaluable; for they, better than anybody else, knew of her widespread yet half-hidden charities, and they would keep her safely in her room, as long as this were possible.

After a time, the invalid would take matters into her own hands and return to her beloved piazza; for she was the only one not frightened by her own condition, and was wont to declare:

"I shall live just as long, and have just as many aches, as the dear Lord decrees. When He's through with me here He'll let me know, and all your fussing, Dinah, won't avail. My father was ninety, my mother ninety-seven when they died. We're tough old Maryland stock, not easily killed."

Indeed, frail though Mrs. Cecil looked, it was the fragility of extreme slenderness rather than health; and it was another pride of Dinah's that her Miss Betty had still almost the figure of a girl. Occasionally, even yet, the lady would sit to read with a board strapped across her shoulders, as she had been used when in her teens, to keep them erect; and it was her boast that she had kept her "fine shape" simply because never, in all her life, had she suffered whalebone or corset to interfere with nature.

This Saturday morning, therefore, a colored boy waited beneath the eagles, to receive his mistress's mail and to prevent the ringing of the gate-bell, which might disturb her. In passing him, on her way home, Dorothy noticed the unusual circumstance and thought how much the gossip-loving dame would miss her ever-welcome "Johnnie." But she was now most

fully engrossed by her own affairs and did not stop to enlighten him.

After leaving the hospital, Mrs. Chester and she had gone downtown to replace the shoes and stockings so recklessly discarded the day before; Dorothy hobbling along in the felt slippers and declaring that she would suffer less if she were barefooted. But her mother had answered:

"No, indeed! I'd be ashamed to be seen with such a big girl as you in that condition. Besides, I must get some new things for John. So, while I select the nightshirts and wrapper he needs, you go into the shoe department and buy for yourself."

"Oh, mother! May I? I never bought any of my clothes alone. How nice and grown-up I feel! May I get just what I like?"

"Yes. Only, at the outside, you must not pay more than two dollars for the shoes, nor above a quarter for the stockings. I could scold you for spoiling your old ones, if I were not too thankful about your father to scold anybody."

So they parted by the elevator in the great store, and with even more than her native enthusiasm Dorothy plunged into these new delights of shopping. The clerk first displayed a substantial line of black shoes, as seemed most suitable to a young girl in the plainest of gingham frocks; but the small customer would have none of these. Said she:

"No, I don't like that kind. Please show me the very prettiest ties you have for two dollars a pair," and she nodded her head suggestively toward a glass case wherein were displayed dainty

slippers of varying hues. There were also white ones among them, and Dorothy remembered that her chum, Mabel Bruce, had appeared at Sunday school the week before, wearing such, and had looked "too lovely for words." But then, of course, Mabel's frock and hat were also white and her father was the plumber. When Dorothy had narrated the circumstance to father John, and had sighed that she was "just suffering for white shoes," he had laughed and declared that:

"Plumbers were the only men rich enough to keep their daughters shod that way!"

But she saw now that he was mistaken. These beauties which the rather supercilious clerk was showing her didn't cost a cent more than the limit she had been allowed. Indeed, they were even less. They were marked a "special sale," only one dollar ninety-seven cents. Why, she was saving three whole cents by taking them, as well as pleasing herself.

The transaction was swiftly closed. White stockings were added to the purchase, on which, also, the shopper saved another two cents, so that she felt almost a millionaire as she stepped out of the shoe department and around to the elevator door, where she was to meet her mother. The lady promptly arrived but had not finished her own errands; nor, in the crowd, could she see her daughter's feet and the manner of their clothing. She simply held out her front-door key to the girl and bade her hurry home, to put the little house in order for the coming Sabbath.

Thus Dorothy's fear that her mother might disapprove her

choice was allayed for the time being. She would not be sent back to that clerk, who had jested about the felt slippers in a manner the young shopper felt was quite ill-bred, to ask him to exchange the white shoes for black ones. So she stepped briskly forth, keeping her own gaze fixed admiringly upon the snowy tips which peeped out from beneath her short skirts, and for a time all went well. She managed to avoid collision with the bargain-morning shoppers all about her and she wholly failed to see the amused faces of those who watched her.

On the whole, Dorothy C. was as sensible a girl as she was a bright one; but there's nobody perfect, and she was rather unduly vain of her shapely hands and feet. They were exceedingly small and well-formed, and though the hands had not been spared in doing the rough tasks of life, which fall to the lot of humble bread-earners, her father John had insisted that his child's feet should be well cared for. He, more than Martha, had seen in their adopted daughter traces of more aristocratic origin than their own; and he had never forgotten the possibility that sometime she might be reclaimed.

Usually Dorothy walked home from any downtown trip, to market or otherwise, and set out briskly to do so now. But, all at once, a horrible pain started in the toes of her right foot! She shook the toes, angrily, as if they were to blame for the condition of things; and thus resting all her weight upon her left foot that, likewise, mutinied and sent a thrill of torture through its entire length. Did white shoes always act that way?

She stopped short and addressed the misbehaving members in her sternest tones:

"What's the matter with you to make you hurt so? Never before has a new shoe done it; I've just put them on and walked out of the store as comfortably as if they were old ones. Hmm! I guess it's all imagination. They aren't quite, not *quite* so big as my old ones were, but they fit ex-quis-ite-ly! Ouch!"

"Excruciatingly" would have been the better word, as Dorothy presently realized; but, also, came the happy thought that she had "saved" enough money on her purchases to pay her car-fare home. She knew that mother Martha would consider her extravagant to ride when she had no market basket to carry but – Whew! Ride she must! That pain, it began to make her feel positively ill! Also, it rendered her entrance of the car a difficult matter; so that, instead of the light spring up the step she was accustomed to give, she tottered like an old woman and was most grateful for the conductor's help as he pulled her in. She sank into the corner seat with a look of agony on her pretty face and her aching toes thrust straight out before her, in a vain seeking for relief; nor did it add to her composure to see the glances of others in the car follow hers to the projecting feet while a smile touched more faces than one.

Poor Dorothy never forgot her first purchase, "all alone"; and her vanity received a pretty severe lesson that day. So severe that as she finally limped to the steps of No. 77 she sat down on the bottom one, unable to ascend them till she had removed

her shoes. The misery which followed this act was, at first, so overpowering that she closed her eyes, the better to endure it; and when she opened them again there stood a man before her, looking at her so sharply that she was frightened; and who, when she would have risen, stopped her by a gesture and a smile that were even more alarming than his stare.

"Well, what is it?" demanded the little girl, suddenly realizing that in this broad daylight, upon an open street, nobody would dare to hurt her.

The stranger's unlovely smile deepened into a gruff laughter, as he answered:

"Humph! You don't appear to know me. But I know you. I know you better than the folks who've brought you up. I can help you to a great fortune if you'll let me. Hey?"

"You – can? Oh! how!" cried Dorothy, springing up, and in her amazement at this statement forgetting her aching feet. "A fortune!" And that was the very thing that father John now needed.

CHAPTER V
DOROTHY ENTERTAINS

Dorothy's punishment for her unwise purchase was to wear the white shoes continually. This was only possible by slitting their tops in various places, which not only spoiled their beauty but was a constant "lecture" to their wearer; who remarked:

"One thing, mother Martha, I've learned by 'shopping' – the vanity of vanity! I've always longed for pretty things, but – call *them* pretty? Doesn't matter though, does it? if we're really going to move and everything to be so changed. When we live in the country may I have all the flowers I want?"

"Yes," answered the matron, absently. Although this was Sunday, a day on which she faithfully tried to keep her mind free from weekday cares, she could not banish them now. Instead of going to church she was to visit the hospital and spend the morning with her husband. Dorothy was to attend Sunday school, as usual, wearing the slitted shoes, for the simple reason that she now possessed no others. Afterward, she might invite Mabel Bruce to stay with her, and they were to keep house till its mistress's return.

"I hope you'll have a very happy day, dear. After I leave John, though I shall stay with him as long as I am allowed, I must go to see Aunt Chloe. There'll be no time for visits during the week,

and besides, she'll want to hear about everything at first hand. Poor old creature! It'll be hard for her to part with her 'boy' and I mustn't neglect her. You needn't cook any dinner, for there's a good, cold lunch. I made a nice custard pie for you, last night, after you were asleep. There's plenty of bread and butter, an extra bottle of milk, and you may cut a few thin slices of the boiled ham. Be sure to do it carefully, for we will have to live upon it for as long as possible. If you tell Mrs. Bruce that the invitation is from me I think she'll let Mabel come. Don't leave the house without locking up tight, and after you come back from Sunday school don't leave it at all. Have you learned your lesson? Already? My! but you are quick at your books! Good-bye. I hope you'll have a happy day, and you may expect me sometime in the afternoon."

"But, mother, wait! There's a cluster of my fairy-roses out in bloom and I want to send them to father. A deep red sort that hasn't blossomed before and that we've been watching so long. I'll fill it with kisses, tell him, and almost want to get half-sick again, myself, to be back in hospital with him. Aren't you going to take him any of that nice ham? You know he loves it so."

"No, dear. I was specially told not to bring food. The nurses will give him all he needs and that's better for him than anything we outside folks could fix. Afterwards – Well, let us hope we shall still have decent stuff to eat! Now I'm off. Good-bye. Be careful and don't get into any sort of foolishness. Good-bye."

Dorothy gazed after her mother as she disappeared and felt a

strange desire to call her back, or beg to go with her. The house was so empty and desolate without the cheerful presence of the postman. Their Sunday mornings had used to be so happy. Then he was at liberty to walk with her in the park near-by, if it were cold weather; or if the lovely season for gardening, as now they repaired to the little back yard which their united labors had made to "blossom like the rose."

John Chester had bought No. 77 Brown Street. It was not yet much more than half paid for, but he considered it his. Martha was the most prudent of housekeepers and could make a little money go a long way; so that, even though his salary was small, they managed each month to lay aside a few dollars toward reducing the mortgage which still remained on the property. But he had not waited to be wholly out of debt to begin his improvements, and the first of these had been to turn the bare ground behind the house into a charming garden. Not an inch of the space, save that required for paths and a tiny shed for ash and garbage cans, was left untilled; and as Baltimore markets afford most beautiful plants at low rates he had gathered a fine collection. Better than that, there were stables at the rear, instead of the negro-alleys which intersect so many of the city blocks, and from these he not only obtained extra soil but stirred his stable friends to emulate his industry. Vines and ivies had been planted on the stable walls as well as on his own back fence, so that, instead of looking out upon ugly brick and whitewash, the neighbors felt that they possessed a sort of private park behind

their dwellings, and all considered father John a public benefactor and rejoiced in the results of his efforts. Many of them, too, were stirred – like the stable-men – to attempt some gardening on their own account, and this was not only good for them but made the one-hundred-block of Brown Street quite famous in the town.

Dorothy had visited the garden that morning before breakfast and had found the new roses which were the latest addition to their stock. She had also shed a few tears over them, realizing that he who had planted them would watch them no more.

"Dear little 'fairies'! seems if you just blossom for nothing, now!" she had said to them, then had resolved that they should go to him since he could not come to them; and, having cut them, she fled the garden, missing him more there than anywhere.

Once Dorothy C. would have been ashamed to appear among her classmates, in their Sunday attire, wearing her slitted shoes; but to-day her mind was full of other, far more important, matters. So she bore their raillery with good nature, laughed by way of answer, and was so impatient to be at home, where she could discuss all with her chum, that she could hardly wait to obtain Mrs. Bruce's consent to the visit. So, as soon as the two girls were cozily settled in the little parlor, she exclaimed:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.