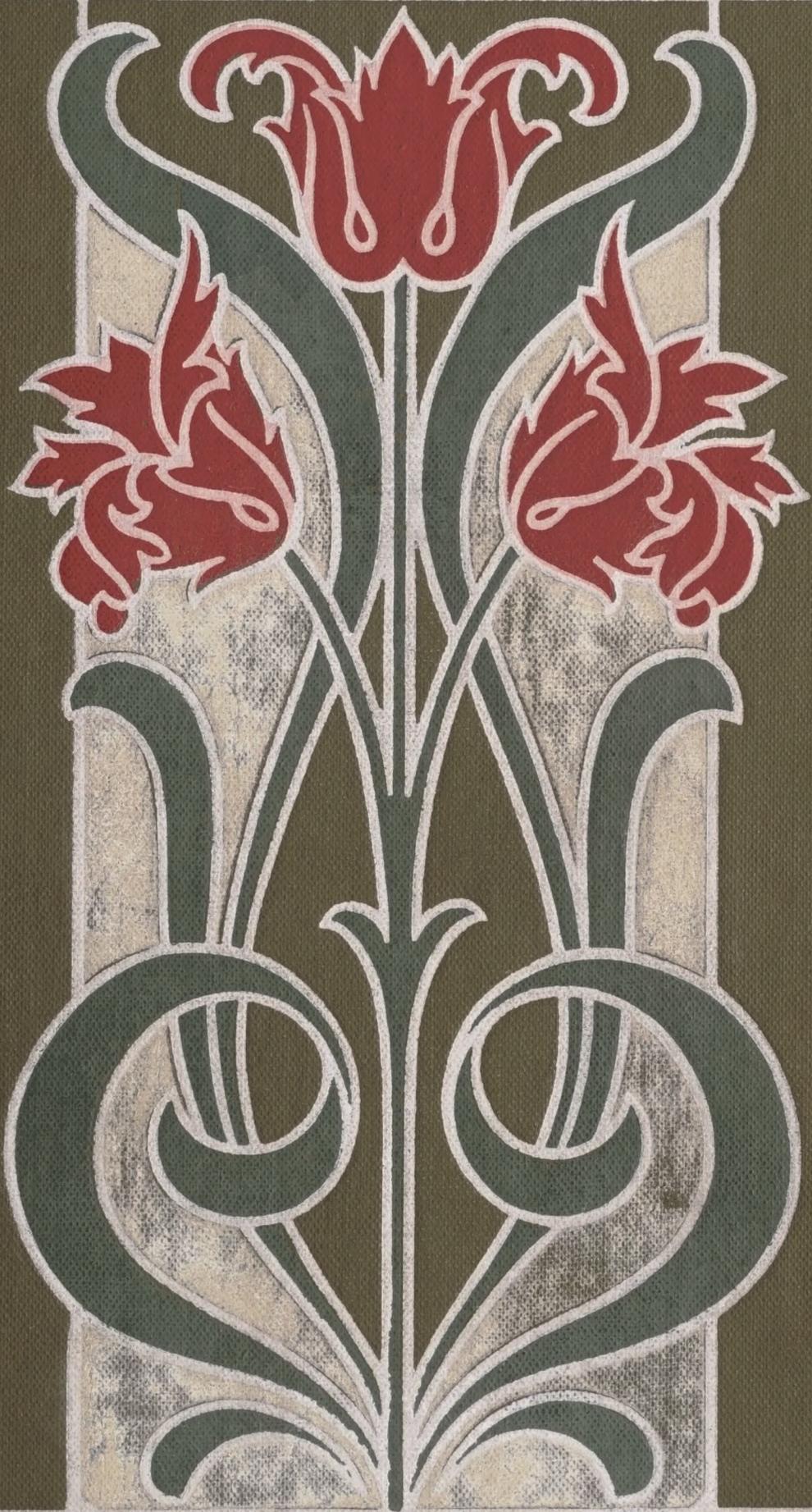


# Sarah the Less



By Sophie Swett



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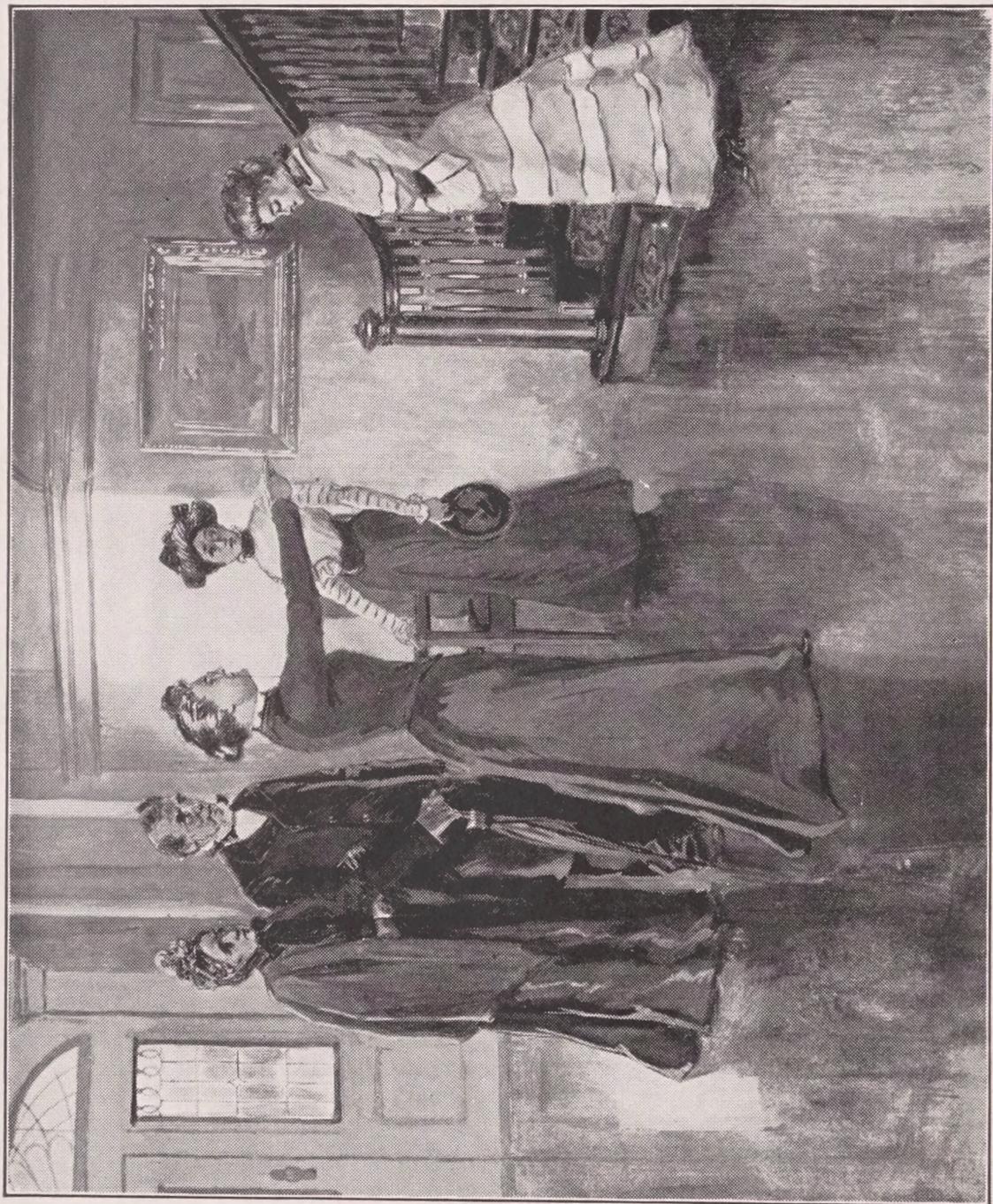












“ ‘SARAH STUYVESANT, GO TO YOUR ROOM!’ ”

# SARAH THE LESS

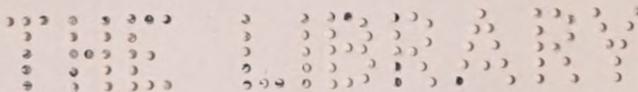


By

SOPHIE SWETT

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Author of "The Boy From Beaver Hollow," etc.



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## SARAH THE LESS

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### CHAPTER I

“SOME one in this family must amount to something, and I am afraid it will not be Absalom; he is so queer.”

Sarah Rogers sighed, as, sitting on a stool beside her mother's worktable, she looked up into Uncle Abram's rugged, world-and-weather-worn face and delivered herself very positively of this sentiment.

Uncle Abram's rugged wrinkles relaxed. They seldom relaxed, and you couldn't guess when they were going to. He even chuckled slightly. He was always inclined to be a little lenient toward Absalom's "queerness"; although one would have thought it just the kind of queerness that he could not tolerate. "I can't have mother sew herself to death," said Sarah, and her sixteen-year-old face and

voice were the more despairing for that chuckle of Uncle Abram's, which reminded her of a complaint of Orinda Jenks, his housekeeper, that "sometimes he didn't appear to have a realizin' sense."

If it were possible, Uncle Abram must be made to have a realizing sense.

"Mother isn't willing that I should sew, because she thinks it hurts me," pursued Sarah; and now her tone was an aggrieved one. "And there isn't any other chance for me unless"—

"She has got a narrow chest like the Rogerses. I can't have her sew; it always makes her cough," said Sarah's mother, quickly. Sarah's father had died of consumption. "If it hadn't been for paying off the mortgage, I expect I could have sent her to the Highbury Seminary, myself, by this time," she added, with a little touch of pride. It came hard, as she said to herself, to ask favors of Abram.

"Learning costs, and it ain't always what it's cracked up to be," said Uncle Abram, sententiously. "I always managed to dispense without it, and my brother Charles that went to college always said he had five

hundred dollars' worth more than ever done him any good."

"I could pay you all that it would cost; I'm sure I could!" said Sarah, eagerly, and swallowing desperately a lump in her throat that meant pride and fear and all such hindering things.

"Paying up is pretty sure to come harder than what you think for," said Uncle Abram. "Between promise day and pay day there is as great a gulf fixed as there was between Dives and Lazarus."

You believed that all hard things were true when Uncle Abram said them. His wrinkles seemed to vouch for them, and his harsh voice. Nevertheless, Sarah persevered.

"I would be so economical; it wouldn't cost very much," she said.

"Dressing up and having receptions is what appears to be mostly going on in the schools and colleges that the gals go to, nowadays," continued Uncle Abram, uncompromisingly. "If you could go as your Aunt Mehitabel went to the Hebron Academy when she was a gal, why that would be worth talking about. She and another gal hired a room and boarded themselves. We

sent 'em provisions from the farm, and it didn't cost anything to speak of. Young folks had to fight and wrestle for an education in them days."

"I would do that—oh, I would do that!" cried Sarah, breathlessly. "Then you would have to lend me so little! And I would pay for everything—everything!—that was sent me."

Uncle Abram looked reflective, but the rigidity of his wrinkles was scarcely propitious. Sarah rose and stood beside her mother's chair; it seemed like a rampart from which one could more successfully assail the enemy; and she meant to conquer Uncle Abram if it were a possible thing. For she must have an education, and there was nothing that a girl could do to earn money in Gilboa. One could not even knit stockings, now, because the factories supplied the market, and the summer visitors seemed to have tired of hooked rugs, even if one made them after an oriental pattern.

Even if her mother had been willing that she should sew, there was not enough dress-making for them both, now that two newer and more fashionable dressmakers had come

to town and more and more people went, every year, to the city for their clothes.

Gilboa's primitive conditions were changing since the manufactories had come. One would think that Uncle Abram might see the practical necessities of the case; Sarah had set them before him plainly enough. And she had, with what she felt to be the wisdom of the serpent, refrained from mentioning to him that longing for book lore which had possessed her ever since she had learned her letters. Uncle Abram constantly avowed his belief that learning was "something that folks could dispense without."

"It is a very different world from what it was when Mehitabel went to the Hebron Academy and did for herself," said Mrs. Rogers, with a touch of asperity. "Sarah is willing and she's smart. I should miss her dreadfully about the trimmings; she has a knack for trimming that I never had—but whether she could stand it to live that way and go to such a fashionable school as Highbury Seminary, I don't know. I shouldn't want her to go there, anyway, if it wasn't the only school near home. There would be so many mortifications."

"I don't mind mortifications; not a bit," said Sarah, stoutly.

Mrs. Rogers was verging upon tears—which Uncle Abram hated. He found Sarah's undaunted spirit a pleasing contrast, and was, perhaps, unconsciously influenced by it. He shuffled uneasily in his chair.

"I expect nothing but what Orindy would spend all her time cooking up for you," he said, grumblingly.

Then Sarah had an inspiration and assumed that he had consented. "Thank you very much, Uncle Abram," she said. "You'll see that I will pay you. And I can cook. Orinda needn't cook a single thing for me!"

No one had ever before taken Uncle Abram's consent for granted, and he drew his shaggy eyebrows together in surprise. But he had, nevertheless, a subtle sense of having been helped out of a difficulty. There was some "smartness" about this niece of his. Since he had no children of his own, perhaps he might as well do a little something for his brother John Henry's daughter. She did seem to understand that if she was going to a fashionable school she must do without frills and furbelows.

“There was Laban Hotchkiss who went through Bowdoin College on Injin meal,” he said, reflectively. And Sarah knew that she had gained the day.

“Laban Hotchkiss never had a mite of health afterwards,” said Sarah’s mother. For she thought that Abram, being the richest farmer in Gilboa, might send Sarah to school and pay her board decently.

“Oh, ’sh—’sh!” murmured Sarah, and gave her a little warning pinch.

Uncle Abram was going out. He thought he had made concessions enough for one morning, and the details of the plan could wait. Moreover, he was a little afraid that his niece’s smartness might lead him farther than he meant to go. He turned back at the door to respond to his sister-in-law’s reminiscence of Laban Hotchkiss.

“Folks that hain’t got a constitution to stand living on Injin meal had better not try to get an education,” he said, gruffly.

But there was one good thing about Uncle Abram: he always kept his word. So Sarah was not afraid that her prospects would be ruined by her mother’s indiscretion.

Sarah danced for joy and hugged her

mother, and immediately proceeded to wind her long braid into a coil. Not even in the morning, at home, must she look so youthful and irresponsible again. But her mother could not be moved to responsive joy.

"I shall never think of you as having a decent meal," she wailed. "And how can you study when you have to cook? and how, in a fashionable school like that, will you get a roommate?"

"A roommate?" Sarah had not thought of that.

"I could not bear to think of you as living all alone; you are not that kind," continued her mother. "I don't suppose that any of those fashionable girls would associate with you, to say nothing of living with you in that way."

"I can live alone! I can do anything for the sake of going! Mother, you don't understand how much I want to go!" cried Sarah.

Her mother looked at her and sighed a little, the sigh of the mother who recognizes in her child the alien, only half-understood, characteristics of "the other side."

"There never was a Rogers that wouldn't

go through fire and flood to get what he had set his heart on," she said to herself. "Well, I suppose you'll have to go. I only hope your Uncle Abram will not be too stingy." She sighed again, perhaps with a recollection of Laban Hotchkiss and his "Injin meal."

Sarah went over to see Uncle Abram the next day. She wanted to have things settled. She was that kind. So was Uncle Abram. It was a Rogers trait, as Sarah's mother would have said. Sarah met him on the way to see her.

"I've made up my mind that I'll pay your tuition and your room rent and allow you a fair amount of provisions for a middlin'-sized gal, like you," he said.

This was one of the somewhat rare occasions when Uncle Abram was sufficiently good-natured to be facetious. Sarah was very tall, and it pleased him to have her so, for that was, also, a Rogers characteristic.

"I'll take your mother and you over to Highbury next week, and we can see the principal and pick out the room," he continued. Sarah heaved a sigh of relief. There was a satisfaction in this promptness. There

was, really, a kindly gleam in the eyes that looked out from under the old man's shaggy eyebrows. Sarah felt, for the first time, something akin to tenderness in the tie of relationship that bound her to Uncle Abram.

"I'll be over next Wednesday morning at nine o'clock sharp," said Uncle Abram, as he turned his horse round.

"I think I'll go over and see Orinda for a few minutes, if you don't mind," said Sarah, and Uncle Abram allowed her to get into the wagon.

"You can pay me just as soon as you get to school-keeping." That was the only remark that Uncle Abram made on the way.

Orinda was mounted on a stepladder on the porch, picking hops from the vine that curtained it, to make a pillow to sleep on when she had neuralgia. Orinda always had neuralgia when the wind was east, and at that time, too, the kitchen stove would not draw. She explained to Sarah before she came down from the ladder that she felt as if she ought not to subject her Christian grace to such a strain as "them two things comin' together," if she could help it.

Sarah was glad that Uncle Abram went

immediately out to the back pasture to see to some colts that he was raising, for she wished to see Orinda alone.

Orinda had been Uncle Abram's house-keeper ever since Sarah could remember, and had always been a devoted friend to her. There was no one to whom she felt more inclined to confide her happiness than to Orinda.

"I hope he'll send you plenty," said Orinda, when she had heard how Sarah was to live. "Anyhow, I'll remember you whenever I do a bakin'. I'll look out for you—never you fear!"

"That's just what I wanted to see you about. You mustn't do it!" said Sarah, positively. "Uncle Abram said you would, and he didn't like it. I could see that he had half a mind not to let me go, on that account. I am determined to do everything for myself that I possibly can. I'll not let mother send me anything that is cooked. Promise me—promise me, solemnly, Orinda, that you'll not!"

"Why—why, land sake! it seems a livin' shame! You poor little cretur!" Orinda's black eyes flashed and grew misty as she

looked commiseratingly at the "poor little cretur" who towered half a head above her. "When I'm bakin' a batch of pies or fryin' a pan of doughnuts, I might jest as well send you some as not. When I roast a chicken or a turkey, it's only a pickin', as you might say, that me and your uncle eats. And he ain't so close as some, not so close as what you'd think he might be about victuals."

"He showed very plainly that he didn't want you to do it. It—it's the greatest thing for me, Orinda!" Sarah spoke with almost breathless eagerness, and a sudden pink wave nearly drowned the little brown freckles that were the bane of her life. "The greatest thing—this going away to school! There's no other way in which I can make something of myself and help mother and Absalom. I can trim well, better even than mother, but she thinks I'm not strong enough to be a dressmaker, and you know I always took to books. It's the only way, and I can't bear to have anything hinder me. What do I care what I eat?" Sarah made a fine gesture of contempt, and puckered her smooth brow, impatiently.

“Learnin’ and dyspepsy are some apt to go together,” murmured Orinda. But Sarah did not heed.

“I can cook for myself, perfectly well, the little that I need,” she continued. “And if you really want to be kind to me, Orinda, you’ll promise me that you’ll not send me a single thing that you’ve cooked.”

“Why, if that has got to be the way of it and is what you really want me to do, of course, I’ll promise,” said Orinda. “But I don’t like it a mite.”

“Uncle Abram will send me just what he chooses—potatoes and meal and such things; and I shan’t starve and you needn’t worry.” Sarah smiled brightly and laid a comforting hand on Orinda’s arm.

“He’ll not pamper you none,” said Orinda, dryly. “When he’s sendin’ out that way, he’s considerable closer than what he is when it’s cookin’ up for the house. But there! he may remember that you’re his niece. He’s some peculiar, your Uncle Abram is. When you think you’ve got him all by heart, you’ll find out, all of a sudden, that you don’t know any more about him than you do about heathen mythology!”

“Orinda, don’t you try to make him do anything for me, but just what he has a mind to do,” said Sarah, earnestly.

She went home with a mind set at ease by Orinda’s reluctant promise. Although it was reluctant, one could rely upon Orinda.

Uncle Abram drove Sarah and her mother to Highbury in his ancient carryall. It was so ancient a carriage that they got into it after a gingerly fashion, expecting it to go to pieces like the “one-hoss shay.” Judy, the old mare, hitched herself along carefully, as if she expected that the same fate might befall her.

Uncle Abram had attired himself with a due regard for the fashionableness of Highbury Seminary, to the relief of Sarah’s mother, who had feared that he might go, as he was in the habit of going to Highbury, in the clothes he wore about the farm.

Uncle Abram was an antiquated figure in his shiny broadcloth suit, his high silk hat of a very ancient style, and a satin stock that reached to the tip of his ears. He always assumed an air of dignity and a solemn demeanor with these clothes, perhaps because he was in the habit of wearing them only to

church, and Sarah felt, vaguely, but with gratification, that Uncle Abram looked like a gentleman. She did not share her mother's fears that the seminary girls would laugh at him; she thought she would not care for girls so ill-bred and so little discriminating as to do that.

It was the beginning of the fall term, and the regular routine of school work had not yet commenced. When the visitors were ushered into the reception room, groups of gay girls were overflowing the piazzas and halls, and their laughter and chatter came from every side like the sound of many magpies.

The principal was stately, but extremely affable, not affected, as Sarah's mother had feared, by the homespun appearance of the party. She said she was very sorry that she was not to have Miss Rogers in the house; the influence of earnest pupils being much needed there. Sarah wondered how she knew that she was going to be an earnest pupil, and thought it was probably because her height made her look old for her years.

There was no difficulty about terms, although Sarah's mother afterwards confided

to her that she was "hot and cold for fear Uncle Abram would beat her down." So far was he from doing so that he paid a quarter's tuition in advance, and he only remarked, doubtfully, as he did so, that he expected that "it would be the gal's own fault if she didn't get the money's worth."

He made this remark as they were going out of the reception room, and two girls in the hall heard it and looked at each other with a giggle. Sarah had thought that she would not mind, but her face burned.

There was a group of giggling girls whose attention seemed to be centered in a constrained and uneasy fashion upon a very plump girl who was seated upon a reception chair in the hall.

"Get up, Lora Bangs! Oh, dear, I never, never meant you to do it! I didn't think you really would!" This voice came from a small, stylishly-dressed girl who came flying through the hall and jerked the plump girl from her seat.

Sarah knew almost by intuition what had happened, before the plump girl's rising revealed the shapeless mass that had been, for more than ten years, Uncle Abram's Sunday

hat. He had felt that it was not etiquette to carry his hat into the reception room, and so had deposited it on a chair in the hall.

“Oh, I—I didn’t think it would be so altogether smashed!” murmured the plump girl. “I wouldn’t have,—only she said it would be such fun!”

Miss Almy, the principal, ignored the plump girl, after one withering glance, and turned her attention to the small, stylish girl in the background.

“Sarah Stuyvesant, go to your room!” she said, in an annihilating tone. “It is generally easy to guess where the responsibility for misconduct rests,” she added; “although I will admit that I supposed you incapable of such vulgar mischief as this.”

Sarah looked after the small figure, silently mounting the stairs, with a feeling of pity. It had been a silly and dreadful thing to advise Lora Bangs to do, but she didn’t like Lora Bangs who was so ready to lay all the blame on her adviser. She pulled out and smoothed out Uncle Abram’s hat until it was possible for him to put it on.

“I trust you will not fear the influences

here for your daughter—your niece,” the principal said, anxiously, to the visitors. “I had hoped that Sarah Stuyvesant would not return, as she is a ringleader in mischief. I shall now feel it to be my painful duty to expel her.”

To be expelled;—what a dreadful thing! How would the girl bear it? thought Sarah Rogers. She had only told the other girl that it would be fun to sit upon Uncle Abram’s hat. It was Sarah’s opinion that the other girl was the more to blame.

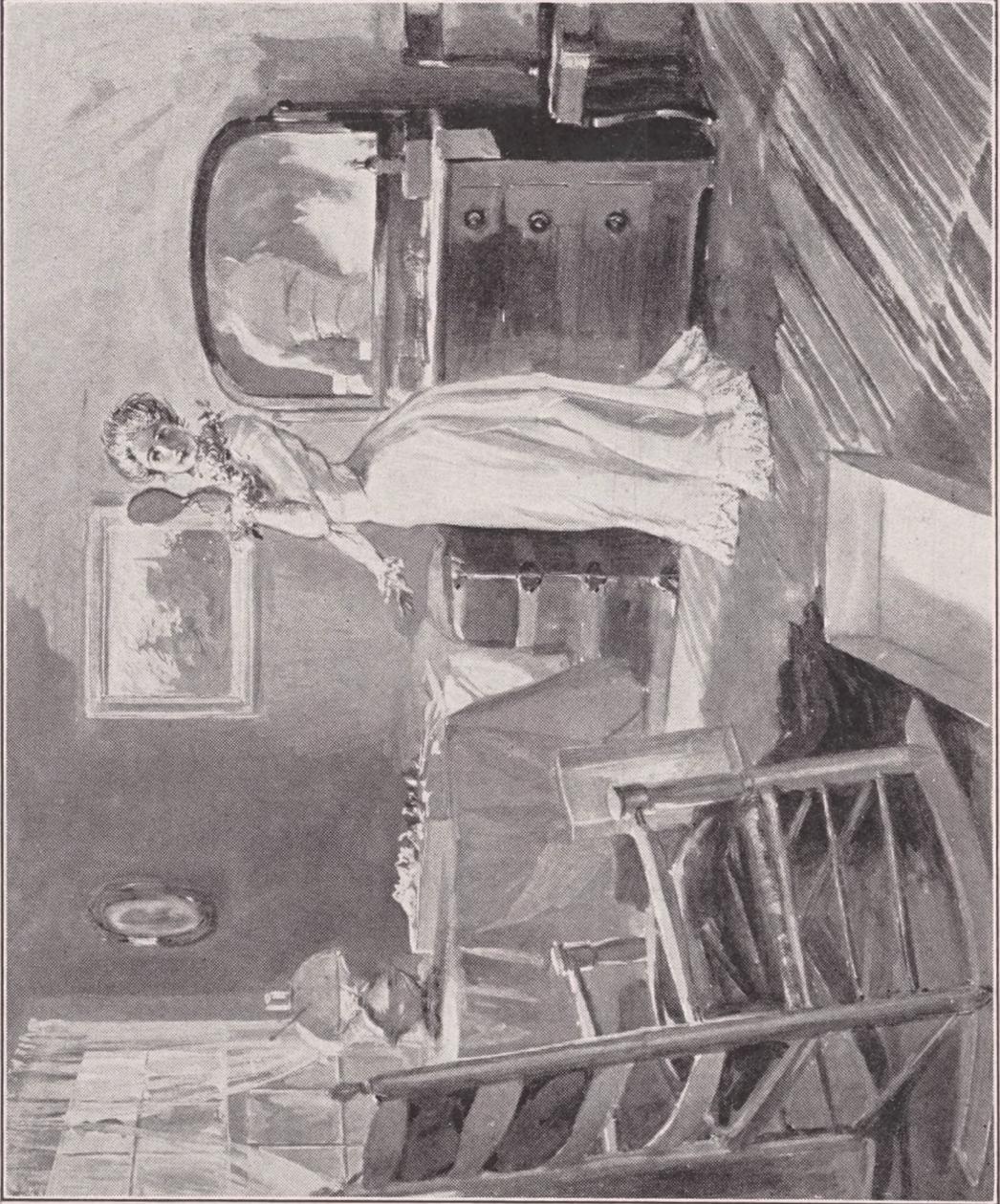
But how could any girls be so foolish—girls who had such a great opportunity, such a chance to learn, and without any struggle at all? thought Sarah.

Probably they had no one who needed their help, whom they longed to help as she longed to help her mother and Absalom. But they needn’t be so childish. Why, they would scorn to play so silly a prank as that in the Gilboa Grammar School!

In the carriage, Uncle Abram took off his hat and regarded it ruefully.

“I’m glad that gal is going to be expelled. Sarah might get more than her money’s worth of learning manners,” he said.





"SARAH GAZED AT HERSELF ADMIRINGLY."

## CHAPTER II

“IF I could have lived as you do, outside of the school, it never would have happened,” said Sarah Stuyvesant. “Oh, I wish I could live with you; you are so strong and sensible! I believe that Miss Almy would let me stay now, if you would let me live with you. You said you would like to have a roommate; oh, would you have me? Say you will and ask her to let me stay as a day pupil!” Sarah Stuyvesant’s small, miserable, tear-stained face was raised appealingly to Sarah Rogers’ calm and somewhat severe one.

Sarah Rogers had been a day pupil at the school for a month, keeping house for herself in two rooms in a dingy old house on one of the Highbury side streets—room rent was expensive from Uncle Abram’s point of view. In the trying social world of a girl’s school Sarah’s straightforward simplicity and indifference to everything but the end she had in view served her in good stead. The few girls who were in-

clined to scorn Gilboa looks and ways, and regard with contemptuous wonder a girl who "did for herself" in two rooms—a plan of living hitherto quite unknown to Highbury Seminary, respected the serene independence that quite ignored the possibility of being ashamed of her humble way of living, and enjoyed the easy good-fellowship that came of her country training.

There is always a schoolgirl freemasonry between good students, and they were the good students who immediately became Sarah Rogers' friends—with one exception. Oddly enough that exception was Sarah Stuyvesant, the girl who was held responsible for the untimely end of Uncle Abram's hat, and who was under sentence of banishment from the school—a sentence which was not immediately carried out only because her mother was living abroad and the uncle to whom she was to go was too ill to receive her.

Sarah Stuyvesant had made the advances toward an acquaintanceship by apologizing, with tears, for the ruin of Uncle Abram's hat.

"I saw you look as if you pitied me that

day. That's why I dared to speak to you," she said.

"I think I wondered at you more than I pitied you," returned Sarah Rogers, candidly. "I saw that you were about as old as I, and it seemed to me a childish thing to do; not funny at all. But yet the other girl needn't have done it; and she threw the blame all upon you."

Sarah Rogers stood looking down upon the smaller Sarah as severely as a young Daniel come to judgment.

"They do that always because they think I don't mind; and I do put them up to things—silly, senseless things like that, very often. I do it because it's so monotonous here. You see, I'm quick and do my lessons easily, and there's nothing else to do. I've never been to school since I was a child, until last year. I lived in Paris with mother, and we were always gay. Now she is married again and she wanted to get rid of me, so she sent me here to school. Uncle Harold doesn't want me, either. He is an old bachelor, living alone. He will get me a governess and shut me up so that I shall scarcely see the light of day. Oh, I wish Miss Almy

would let me stay here and room with you! I couldn't contaminate the girls, then. And you are so strong and sensible, she would know I couldn't hurt you. You ask her!"

The color rose to Sarah Rogers' face, as she looked down at the dainty, elegant little figure that clung to her. It was always a dainty and elegant little figure, for even Sarah's school frocks were sent to her from Paris.

"You don't understand how I live," she said. "Your world has been such a different one from mine. My mother is a dress-maker, and we have to live on what she earns. My uncle, who is a farmer, is lending me the money to come to school, and I am trying to get along with very little. He sends me provisions—potatoes and Indian meal and things from his farm, and I cook things — johnnycake, chiefly." Johnnycake was the staple article of Sarah's diet, for in her earliest zeal she had been stimulated by the example of Laban Hotchkiss.

"Oh, how delightful! and you would teach me?" cried Sarah Stuyvesant. "With such things as that to take up my mind I should never get into mischief, never!"

Sarah's heart warmed to the eager pleader. Moreover, she sorely longed for human companionship. Often she had thought that the queer little housekeeping would seem quite like a picnic if there were but another girl to share it.

"I shouldn't be willing that you should get anything different," she said, sternly. "I couldn't share any more expensive living, and I couldn't—accept anything from you."

"Oh, I understand!" The smaller Sarah wagged her head, knowingly. "You are proud in your way; well, independent, if you like to call it so. As for me, I should simply dote on johnnycakes and potatoes. And I am not rich—oh, not at all! I have a very small allowance, a mere pittance. Mother and I managed to live on very little in Paris. Now she has married an artist, who only sells his pictures once in a while, and she has to cut me down. I haven't had a decent gown sent me for a year—not for a year!"

Sarah Rogers glanced involuntarily from her gingham blouse and her old cashmere skirt, turned and pieced, to the stylish, daintily-made gown that adorned the other Sarah's small figure.

"It's only that mother has a real genius for bargains," said Sarah Stuyvesant, in answer to the glance. "And she fairly tramples on dressmakers. It's the only way with those people! Oh—oh—I forgot that you said"— She stopped in dismay, her face grown scarlet.

"That I said my mother was a dressmaker? I'm not in the least sensitive about it," said Sarah Rogers, quietly. "I should have been one if it had not hurt me to sew."

"Of course it is different, very different, here in New England," said Sarah Stuyvesant, quickly. "I was thinking of the Paris dressmakers."

"Your world has been a different one from mine," repeated Sarah Rogers, reflectively. "But I don't know that that is any reason why we shouldn't get along together," she added. "I heard Miss Almy say the other day that differences in the people we associate with have a developing influence."

"Oh, you will—you will ask her!" cried Sarah. "I have a chafing dish; oh, you will see that I can cook! Mother and I used to, in Paris. And—and really in spite of my silly jokes I think"—she paused, her

breath coming quickly—"I think there is something of me!"

The tall Sarah stooped impulsively and put her arm about the smaller girl.

"I will ask her. I think we would be good for each other," she said. "And I should have so much better times if I had another girl with me."

Sarah Rogers had a private interview with Miss Almy, which lasted for a long time, while Sarah Stuyvesant sat perched upon her trunk, which had already been brought down into the hall, and waited, her childish face growing white and strained.

"No girl who was like her, strong and good for something, ever took to me, before!" she explained to one or two girls who knew what was happening in Miss Almy's sanctum. "And it's such fun to live as she does!" she added, with a lighting up of her troubled face.

"Wait until you have to wash the dishes!" said Alice Freeling, who was generally known as "wet blanket." But Sarah had washed dishes and knew that it was only fun—especially when you washed them in company with Sarah Rogers.

"It's queer that those two girls should take to each other," said one of those who had stopped to speak to Sarah Stuyvesant, sitting upon her trunk. "Sarah Rogers couldn't have found a more unsuitable friend in the whole school. I'm curious to see what comes of it, if Miss Almy lets her stay." This was Albertina Loomis, who was suspected of surreptitiously writing stories and having them returned, in bulky packages, with the result of red-rimmed eyes for the day.

Miss Almy wished, of course, to allow Sarah Stuyvesant to remain as a day pupil. It would cast an unpleasant reflection upon the school to have a pupil expelled. She was sure that she could easily persuade her uncle to let her stay. But had Sarah Rogers duly weighed the responsibility she was undertaking? It was an opportunity for Sarah Stuyvesant; the influence would be most beneficial. But did Sarah Rogers realize how wholly lacking in home training, how frivolous, how irresponsible, was the roommate she had chosen?

"I like her," Sarah answered, sturdily. "And she can't lead me into mischief; I've

got so much to do! And I can keep her out of it, perhaps, as well as any one. At any rate, I'm willing to take the risk."

So it came to pass that Sarah Stuyvesant's trunk was carried to the dingy old house where Sarah Rogers lived, 15 Jayne Street, Highbury, instead of to the railroad station.

A widow and her daughter lived in the old house, with a young nephew, named Jeff, who brought the girls coal and wood, always enlivening the labor by turning a somersault at the door and riding, with a rattling of coal hod, down the stair railing.

Both the landlady and her daughter were deaf, which fact gave Jeff joyous opportunities in the matter of war whoops and general liveliness. But the Sarahs had the sixteen-year-old's blessed unconsciousness of nerves and rather enjoyed Jeff.

Sarah Stuyvesant had a bedroom in the attic to herself and the living room was large, so they were really not badly cramped, in their small quarters.

Orinda herself came over with the second installment of provisions, riding in the farm wagon with Leander, the hired man. Besides a liberal supply of vegetables there was

a fowl, somewhat bony, which Orinda held up, triumphantly.

“That old Plymouth Rock rooster had such a bad disposition, he was just sufferin’ to have his head cut off,” she said. “And t’was your uncle himself that said I’d better fetch him over to you. You can cook him till he’s tender. Your uncle, he asked me why I didn’t cook up something for you! He said I ought to carry you a batch of pies or doughnuts or something; said he expected ’twould hinder you in your studies to have to cook so much. When I said I’d promised I wouldn’t, he got hoppin’. I stuck to it! I told him I was a likely woman and I’d been a professor too long to think of breakin’ a promise, and he said he’d cook up a mess of victuals, himself! He’d see if his own flesh and blood was goin’ to be left to starve. He said he warn’t goin’ to have you mortified, either, before that high-steppin’ little girl that lived with you”—at which Sarah Stuyvesant, who was hearing all, clapped her hands gleefully, and cried, “I told you I would be useful to you! I told you so!”

“He’s always saying he can cook,” pur-

sued Orinda, "but I don't believe he can, no more'n nothin' at all. I don't want no kitchen colonels round, myself, and though there is men cooks, and folks say they do it well, I'm free to confess that I shouldn't like to see a man fryin' doughnuts. If he sticks to it that he is goin' to cook up for you, and I expect nothin' but what he will, for he's a terrible cont'ry man when he sets out, why, you'll just have to heave out the victuals and not let him know it. I'm goin' to try to coax him out of it, for it will be a dreadful waste. He appears to be more liberal to you than ever I see him in my life! He's sent you some of the gilliflower apples that always goes to market."

"Say sweetbreads to him, will you?" said Sarah Stuyvesant, eagerly. "I know such a chafing-dish recipe for sweetbreads and oysters! Oh, I'm so sorry I made Lora Bangs sit down on his hat! Does—does he know I'm the one?"

"Well, he said that if Sarah wanted to do missionary work, he didn't know as he had any objection, but he calc'lated she would have her hands full," answered Orinda, with the candor that was her striking characteristic.

“She hasn’t, so far; she likes me,” said Sarah Stuyvesant, simply. “Don’t you have sweetbreads? I thought people always had them on a farm.”

A fortnight after, Uncle Abram himself came to Jayne Street, bringing the supplies. He was dressed in his Sunday clothes, with a new tall hat. He was evidently thinking more of his niece than he had ever before thought; he had said again to Orinda that he didn’t mean that she should be mortified before “that high-steppin’ gal.”

It was Saturday—a holiday—and Sarah Stuyvesant had coaxed the sterner Sarah into consenting to the dish of sweetbreads and oysters for luncheon. Uncle Abram came in just as they were sitting down and brought a large covered basket, which he set down with an air of mingled pride and embarrassment.

“I calc’late there is folks that’s got more pride than sense. You got some kind of high-flown ideas into Orindy’s head, and when she’s set you can’t turn her no more’n you could the meetin’house. I had to go and cook up some victuals for you, for the honor of the family, as you might say. It

come kind of natural, for when I was a young man I went as mate aboard of a schooner, and when the cook was sick I took his place for more'n two months. I let Orindy know that there was somebody besides her that could cook!"

Uncle Abram's rugged face fairly beamed with pride. It beamed even upon Sarah Stuyvesant, who looked guilty and shamefaced, remembering the affair of the hat.

"You behaving pretty well? Well, I ain't one to lay up anything if you're good company for Sarah," he said, with even a jovial air.

Sarah Stuyvesant was emboldened to invite him to sit down with them and partake of her sweetbreads and oysters, while she busied herself in taking the eatables from the basket.

"There was a hen that was likely to die in debt if she lived any longer," exclaimed Uncle Abram, "so I made her into a pie. Orindy said that she heard your mother say that you set by chicken pie. I don't know as Orindy had her oven just right"— Uncle Abram gazed a little anxiously at the pie, as Sarah Stuyvesant set it upon the table.

“Or, maybe I didn’t fill it full enough; it seems to have fell, somehow.”

Sarah Stuyvesant cut and served the pie. The pastry was heavy and soggy; the fowl only half cooked.

Sarah Rogers withdrew her plate.

“You—you have to parboil it first, you know, Uncle Abram; especially an old hen,” she said.

“That’s the New England way,” said Sarah Stuyvesant, quickly. “Our Paris cook only baked the chicken.”

She served herself liberally and ate heroically. Uncle Abram tried to follow her example, but while nature helped Sarah Stuyvesant, he was obliged to reply upon dentistry, and he failed miserably.

“I want you to try my dish,” said Sarah Stuyvesant, with quick comprehension of his difficulties. “I shall feel hurt if you don’t save your appetite for that!”

There was appreciation—gratitude—in the swift glance that Uncle Abram cast upon her. Surely there were qualities developing in Uncle Abram, thought his niece, which she had never suspected that he possessed. The dainty dish offered no difficulties and

was novel to his palate, accustomed to very plain fare.

Sarah Stuyvesant cast a warning, expressive glance upon her roommate as she served him a second time. That dainty dish had not been intended for a farmer's appetite,—and there was none left!

"I hain't ate it all up away from you, have I?" asked Uncle Abram, looking round him, ruefully—he was looking for more! "I declare, 'twas so good I forgot what I was doin'."

"There's nothing I like so much as doughnuts and coffee," said Sarah Stuyvesant, promptly. "And these doughnuts are delicious." The doughnuts had come out of Uncle Abram's basket.

Even Sarah Rogers' conscientious candor admitted that they were "pretty good."

("I saw to it that the fat wasn't too hot nor too cold, and that's about all there is to doughnuts," Orinda afterwards explained.)

Uncle Abram's face beamed with satisfaction at Sarah Stuyvesant's praise.

"My doughnuts ain't apt to soak fat," he said, with modest pride.

He rose to go. Suddenly he resumed his

stiff manner and said, although with some embarrassment, that he hoped they were not running into extravagance in the matter of eating. He thought that Sarah would better let Orinda cook up for her rather than to spend her money on sweetbreads and oysters.

"The old curmudgeon!—when he ate them all!" murmured Sarah Stuyvesant, disrespectfully, as the door closed upon Uncle Abram and upon his niece, who thought it polite to accompany him to the street door.

Before the words were out of Sarah Stuyvesant's mouth the door opened again, and Uncle Abram's grim face looked in.

"What I meant was that you needn't buy any more of those sweetbreads," he said, in a gruff tone. "I can get 'em full cheaper at the market for you."

Sarah Stuyvesant clapped her hands softly as the door closed again.

"There's an undeveloped side to Uncle Abram," she said to herself.

Sarah Rogers returned with a great pasteboard box under her arm. Uncle Abram had left it in the hall, having his basket of eatables in his hand and on his mind.

“It is Polly Pendexter’s wedding dress,” she said, breathless with haste and eagerness. “Mother wrote me about it. She wants me to trim the bodice and loop the lace flounce on the skirt. I can do those things better than she can. It’s real point lace—think of that! and belonged to Polly’s grandmother. Mr. Pendexter was born in Gilboa, and he and Polly come there every summer. They have a beautiful house; he owns railroads and mines and such things. It was good of Polly to let mother do it. She said long ago, that mother should make her wedding dress. And mother is going to the city with it to make any alterations that it may need. She has Polly’s measure and has made her many a gown, but, of course, this must be perfection. It will be such a delightful trip for mother!”

Sarah Rogers chattered on, carried out of her serene self by her delight.

“You must stand off while I open the box! I’m almost afraid to look at it, it’s so valuable!” she cried.

Sarah Stuyvesant had come very near, indeed, and her face was flushed with eagerness. As she frankly admitted, if there was

anything she loved it was a pretty gown. She went into ecstasies of admiration over the ivory silk and frosty lace; she said she had seen nothing like it since she left Paris. She insisted upon doing all the housework while Sarah Rogers devoted the rest of the holiday to trimming the dress. She even self-forgetfully ate baked beans for supper, the only one of Sarah Rogers' humble viands which she scorned and detested.

Sarah Rogers worked away all the evening, while her roommate sat at her feet and gazed and suggested.

"I must finish it to-night," Sarah said. "Mother will not go until Tuesday and will come here for it on her way, but Mrs. Sibley asked me to stay with them all night, Monday. You know I go to give Margaret Sibley her lesson that afternoon, and a professor of mathematics, whom she wished me to meet, is to be there in the evening."

Already Sarah Rogers was tutoring one of the youngest seminary girls, in algebra. The Gilboa school was given to mathematics, like most country schools, and Sarah had "a head for figures."

"I knew a professor of mathematics, once,"

said Sarah Stuyvesant, "and he was very nice. He went over on the steamer with mother and me, and afterwards used to come to see us in Paris. But he didn't take to me as he will to you. I am only going to Grace Albee's party Monday evening. That suits me better than mathematical professors. It is no wonder that the girls call you Sarah the Greater and me Sarah the Less!"

"Why, that's only because I'm so big and you're so little, you goosie!" said Sarah Rogers, lightly.

"It means more than that. You know it does—and I know it does—and it's just," said Sarah Stuyvesant, with conviction. "But I am quite content to go to Grace Albee's party, and I shouldn't care a bit for the mathematical professor. I only wish I had a decent gown to wear! Grace Albee is about the only one of the Highbury girls who is really stylish and knows stylish people." Sarah the Less had resumed her ordinary light tone, and her mind had wholly returned to gowns. She touched the lace flounce with caressing finger tips. "Mother has some point lace—a fichu; it's a relic of 'ould dacency,' as an

Irish maid of ours used to say. It's the apple of her eye. She will never let me wear it." And she heaved a long, long sigh.

"Do you really care so much to wear point lace?" asked the other Sarah, wonderingly. "I like pretty clothes, but I never think of caring for a costly thing like that. But, of course, life has been different to you. If mother and I were sure of new winter jackets, since mine is outgrown and hers is shabby, and a new overcoat for Absalom, I should be quite satisfied without point lace!"

It occurred to Sarah Rogers to be glad that this was so, Sarah Stuyvesant's pretty delicate-featured face was so marred by discontent and longing.

"I should like to see myself in it just once," said Sarah, wistfully.

But Sarah Rogers did not offer to allow her to try on Polly Pendexter's wedding gown. It would not have seemed to her quite an honorable thing to do.

Sarah the Less felt that some of Sarah the Greater's ideas were quite too severe.

Monday afternoon, when Sarah Rogers had gone to give Margaret Sibley her alge-

bra lesson and to spend the night at her pupil's home, Sarah the Less took the wedding gown out of the box in which her roommate had carefully folded it.

In her opinion it would not harm Polly Pendexter's wedding gown in the least for her to try it on.

The prospective bride was small; the dress fitted Sarah astonishingly well, quite as if it had been made for her, indeed. She would have liked more of a train for a wedding gown; this was only long for an ordinary party gown. There had not been enough of the point lace flounce—the heirloom!—that was the reason, thought Sarah, that the dress had so short a train. Only like an ordinary party gown! simple and girlish and oh, how becoming. Sarah gazed at herself admiringly in every mirror that the small establishment afforded.

Only a party gown,—and with the pink roses which she had ordered at the florist's to brighten up her shabby old green silk it would not look too much like a wedding gown! The temptation came in a flash, and then it was only a question—as it always is in such a case—of how much Sarah Stuyve-

sant had been in the habit of resisting temptations.

When she ran up the street to Pauline Dennett's house—it was Pauline's mother who was to chaperon her to the dance—she wore a white silk dress with a point lace flounce carefully tucked up under her long cloak.

None of the girls in Grace Albee's set were friends of Sarah the Greater; very few of them were seminary girls. No mention of dresses worn at the party was at all likely to reach Sarah Rogers' ears. She meant to be careful of it—oh, so careful! Why should not one have the pleasure of wearing such a gown as that when it would harm nobody? The girls at Grace Albee's would not be greatly surprised at her elegance, for they knew that all her gowns were sent to her from Paris.

Sarah the Greater would think it was a dreadful thing,—but then she would never know it! She would be quite incapable of doing such a thing,—but then she would never be tempted! She was quite right in saying that life had been very different for her. She had had the simple, rigid, rural New

England training. Severest principle, even in trifles, seemed to be as the breath of her nostrils. Now, in Paris they had been full of makeshifts, continually, to get along. They took what sunshine they could get without counting the cost—to any one. Not to any one! There was a faint, vague pang in that thought to Sarah Stuyvesant as she ran on up the street.

She was glad that it would not do any harm to Polly Pendexter not to have the first wearing of her wedding gown, since she would never know it.

### CHAPTER III

SARAH ROGERS returned from Mrs. Sibley's, Tuesday morning, having obtained leave of absence from her morning lessons that she might see her mother when she came to Jayne street for Polly Pendexter's wedding dress.

She arrived early, expecting her mother to come before eight o'clock that she might leave Highbury by the first train. She found Sarah Stuyvesant, trying, faint-heartedly, to get breakfast. Sarah the Less came out in great force for a chafing-dish supper, especially when one or two girls had been invited to share it, or for a Saturday luncheon when there was a dainty dish, but she never had any enthusiasm about getting breakfast. So at first Sarah Rogers scarcely observed that she looked pale and dejected.

Instead of poaching eggs in the chafing dish, as Sarah Rogers expected she would do, she was frugally and severely warming over the baked beans, as even Sarah Rogers would not have done on a Tuesday morning.



"POLLY PENDEXTER . . . GAVE WAY TO HER GRIEF."



She had essayed a johnnycake, and it was soggy and thin. When she took it out of the oven she burst into tears.

“A johnnycake isn’t worth tears,” said Sarah Rogers, wonderingly. “It takes a knack, and you haven’t acquired it yet.”

Sarah Stuyvesant sat down at the table and let her coffee grow cold while she gazed steadfastly at her roommate.

As for Sarah Rogers, she had but little thought to give to Sarah the Less and her dejection, so occupied was her mind with Polly Pendexter’s wedding dress. She was hoping that her mother would think her trimming very pretty and as effective as she thought it. She hoped that the dress would be noticed by the Pendexters’ friends, many of whom were summer visitors at Gilboa; that would naturally lead to a patronage that would be much more profitable and encouraging to her mother than any that she had ever had—the dear mother who had worked so hard and whose labors she so longed to lighten!

That dress might mean so much to them! As she absently ate the soggy johnnycake she wondered whether Polly Pendexter’s wed-

ding dress were so important, even to herself, as it was to her and to her mother.

“How happy you are! how happy you are!” cried Sarah Stuyvesant, suddenly, with a great, strangling sob in her throat.

Sarah Rogers dropped the fork upon her warmed-over baked beans.

“Something is the matter!” she said. “I haven’t been sympathetic a bit! my mind is so full of mother’s affairs; I am so pleased about Polly Pendexter’s wedding dress. But you didn’t have a good time last night.”

“A good time! I had a dreadful time!” wailed Sarah Stuyvesant. “The most perfectly dreadful time that I have ever had in my life. I—I spoiled my dress! A boy—a young elephant who was running around—stepped on the train and tore it frightfully, and then a waiter spilled ice cream all over the front breadth.”

“Oh, what a pity—that pretty green silk!” said Sarah Rogers, with deep feeling.

“Sarah Rogers, it wasn’t the green silk!” Sarah the Less had risen from her seat and her voice was shrill with excitement. “Can’t you understand? Oh, I wish I had run away, only I couldn’t be quite such a cow-

ard! There must be something that I can do about it! oh, there must be something!"

Sarah Rogers rose, also, and her face turned white. She was of quick perception, and she was acquainted with Sarah Stuyvesant. The possible truth flashed upon her in an instant. Yet her voice was incredulous. We are always incredulous of misfortune at the first shock. And this was one of the things that, to Sarah Rogers' mind, seemed too bad to be true.

"You—you didn't"—her voice shook and broke.

"I wore the wedding dress!—it is Polly Pendexter's wedding dress that is ruined!" cried Sarah Stuyvesant, desperately.

It was at that moment that the door opened and Mrs. Rogers came in. Her matronly face was so flushed and eager as to hide all its lines of care. A journey was an unusual event, and this was so pleasant and important a journey!

She uttered an exclamation at the sight of the two distracted young faces.

"O Mrs. Rogers, what shall I do? She is so good and so hard! Are good people always so hard? I did a dreadful thing, and

Sarah will never forgive me—never!” Sarah Stuyvesant had turned to Mrs. Rogers and held out appealing hands, like a child.

“You don’t realize what it is to us! you are thinking only of yourself!” said Sarah Rogers. “What does it matter whether I forgive you or not? I must think what we are to do. Mother, she wore Polly Pendexter’s dress to a party, and ruined it!”

Mrs. Rogers leaned upon the table for support, and looked, in incredulous dismay, from one to the other of the girls.

“I was away and she took it out of the closet and wore it!” said Sarah Rogers. She spoke quietly, but her voice was strained and hard.

“I—I will ask Uncle Harold for money to pay for it! Mother can’t give it to me. Oh, if Uncle Harold won’t give it to me, I will do something!” cried Sarah Stuyvesant, frantically.

“The wedding is the day after to-morrow,” said Mrs. Rogers, in a dull, despairing tone. “If I had the money I couldn’t replace the dress;—that priceless lace and the imported silk! Yet, of course, it must be paid for—it must be paid for!”

“Yes, it must be paid for,” said Sarah Rogers.

Both she and her mother ignored the other Sarah, who crouched in a corner with her arms locked round her knees, sobbing and wailing, “Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do?”

There was a shade of annoyance and contempt in Sarah Rogers’ face which meant that she was vaguely conscious of the disturbing noise. To the two reticent New England women such a manifestation of feeling would have been impossible. Perhaps it would have been too much to expect them at once to feel pity for the girl whose selfish vanity had cost them so much.

“Let me see the dress,” said Mrs. Rogers, at length. Sarah Rogers went to the closet, with a doubtful glance at the other Sarah, who still hugged her knees and wailed.

She found the dress and brought it out, with its torn and draggled lace flounce and its hopelessly-stained front breadth.

“More than a yard of the flounce is ruined,” said Mrs. Rogers, examining the dress, critically; “and there was scarcely enough for a modern dress, anyway! It can

never be worn. The whole front breadth of the dress is stained, and that ivory silk probably can't be matched, except in London, where it was bought. There isn't a color that is so hard to match as an ivory white."

She spoke dispassionately, but her voice shook.

"You just put it into the box, Sarah," she continued, calmly, "and I'll carry it to the Pendexters'."

"It's too hard for you, mother, it's too hard!" cried Sarah. "Let me go! O mother, don't look so! They can get another dress. It will only delay the wedding a little. They can get another, and in time we can pay for this one. Don't look so!" For Mrs. Rogers' face had turned very white, and she staggered as she attempted to stand.

"I'm a little run down; that's all," she said. "I worked hard to get the dress done in time, and then I hurried to get ready to go. I'm sure that's all."

But she was weak and faint, and did not rally readily when they got her upon the lounge.

“You’ll have to let me go, mother; it’s the only way,” said Sarah. “The sooner I go, the better.” She proceeded to get ready even as she spoke. It was a hard thing to do, but it must be done. There was a heroic satisfaction, too, in the thought that she should save her mother from the hard ordeal.

Her heart burned with anger against the girl who had brought this trouble upon them. Her first, foolish prank had shown her that she was irresponsible; why had she not realized that she was unprincipled as well? Now, not only was the better-paying class of patrons which her mother had hoped to gain by that dress, an impossibility, but she and her mother were handicapped by what to them was a heavy debt.

And Polly Pendexter! It was no small thing for a girl to have her wedding dress ruined on the very eve of the wedding! She was sorely troubled for Polly Pendexter, who had trusted them.

Mrs. Rogers had tried to rise to her feet, but found herself too faint and ill.

“I feel as if I must go,” she said. “There might be something that I could do about

getting another dress. Yet I don't know as they would want me to have anything to do with it. We can't expect that they'll not be angry about it. Anyway, it's too hard for you to go."

"I'm the one who ought to go. I am the one who has brought the trouble upon us," said Sarah.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" wailed the other Sarah, toward whom neither mother nor daughter had vouchsafed a glance.

"I can only say that we will pay," continued Sarah, and she spoke as if her lips were stiff,—“that, somehow, so far as money can, we will pay.”

"Yes, that's all you can say," assented her mother. "I suppose that the money value is as much as a hundred and fifty dollars."

"More than that, probably," said Sarah, wearily.

They had no thought, in this conversation, of bringing her guilt home to the reckless Sarah, but only of facing the future for themselves. They simply left her out of the question, as one from whom nothing was to be expected.

She had gradually grown quiet, and, rising

from her corner, stood gazing at them, wonderingly. Only once had she spoken, suddenly intercepting Sarah Rogers as she went to and fro between that room and the inner one, hurriedly dressing herself.

"Why don't you reproach me?" she had cried. "Why don't you say everything that is dreadful to me? Oh, I wish you would! It would be so much better than this!"

"What would be the use?" Sarah Rogers returned, coldly.

"I must get home as soon as I can, Sarah," said Mrs. Rogers, suddenly sitting upright. "I don't want to frighten you, but I am a little afraid that I am going to be sick."

"I must go with you," cried Sarah, looking with sudden alarm at her mother's white face. "I can't let you go alone, whatever happens! And I must get some one there to take care of you. You always feel things so deeply, mother! I am afraid that this will make you really ill. I must send for Cousin Martha Appleby to come and take care of you."

"You must go on to the Pendexters' just as fast as possible. You mustn't even take

time to go to the stage with me," said Mrs. Rogers, anxiously.

"Couldn't—couldn't I go to the stage with her? Couldn't I go home with her?" asked the other Sarah. She spoke hesitatingly, and the color came and went on her face, which seemed to have grown small and pinched. Sarah Rogers suddenly checked the indignant refusal that rose to her lips. This girl who had made all the trouble might as well be of some use! Perhaps, too, there stirred within her, half unconsciously, some pity at the sight of the pinched whiteness of the small face.

"Perhaps you'd better, if—if mother"—she said.

"You can go to the stage with me if you've a mind to," said Mrs. Rogers, not unkindly. "I guess I shall feel able to go the rest of the way alone."

On her way to the railroad station, Sarah telegraphed to Cousin Martha Appleby to come and stay with her mother until she should be better.

She carried with her the great box that contained the ruined dress, and she went on with the steadfast determination with which

she felt one must face the hard things of life that had to be done. It did not even occur to her to run away, as it had occurred to Sarah the Less to do, or even to adopt such a makeshift as to send the box with an apology.

She had been only once or twice in her life to the city, and had looked forward to a journey there as one of the great pleasures sometime to come her way. But there was no pleasure in this journey. It was long, long, and yet she dreaded the end.

It seemed almost as if years had passed, aging years, although it was only a little past noon, when she sat in the luxurious city reception room waiting for Mrs. Pendexter. She had tried to think how many care-encumbered people she had passed upon the way, how many with heavy, lifelong sorrows. Her own trouble, she told herself, was but small and sordid. But it would not lighten, for all her philosophy. That dress had meant so much to her mother and to her, and it was so bitterly humiliating to have failed to fulfill so small a trust.

A message came to her. If Miss Rogers had the wedding dress with her would she please send it up by the servant.

Miss Rogers could not. She said so with stiff lips, to the astonished butler, who would have seized the box. She must ask that Mrs. Pendexter would allow her to show the dress, herself.

Then would Miss Rogers come upstairs with the dress? The butler permitted himself an impatience of tone as if he were echoing his mistress.

Sarah, whose limbs trembled as she walked upstairs, found Mrs. Pendexter and Polly and a smart lady's maid in a little boudoir which was the nest of Polly's dainty girlhood.

Mrs. Pendexter and Polly greeted her with neighborly kindness, as they always did, although in truth they had felt some hesitation in intrusting that gown to a Gilboa modiste, and had only yielded to the urgent desire of Mr. Pendexter to patronize Gilboa industry.

Sarah told the story, simply, almost coldly, in fact, and as if she did not care, the result of the rigid self-restraint that she felt to be necessary. "To cry" before people, she would have felt to be an overwhelming disgrace. Polly Pendexter had no such scruples. She gave way to her grief in an

entirely unrestrained fashion, and had no hesitation in saying that she thought it was perfectly abominable carelessness to allow such a thing to happen. Then Mrs. Pendexter and Polly quite ignored her, in deciding what they should do to repair what Mrs. Pendexter called the dreadful disaster. They ignored her as she and her mother had ignored Sarah Stuyvesant, Sarah vaguely remembered. She had not realized what a severe punishment it could be, to be ignored.

Sarah managed to get a sufficient hearing to say that they meant to pay for the dress so far as money could pay.

“Pay for it, child!” cried Mrs. Pendexter, impatiently, but not altogether unkindly. “That flounce alone is worth three hundred dollars.”

“We shall pay the money in time,” said Sarah, and she said it with determination, although her lip trembled.

The white misery in her face caught for a moment Mrs. Pendexter’s abstracted gaze. Her manner became half-carelessly kind, and she invited Sarah to stay and have some luncheon. Of course Sarah felt bad! She ought to, Polly said in answer to a remark

of her mother's after Sarah had gone. She added that she wished they had never listened to her father, or that she had never been so silly when she was a little girl as to tell Mrs. Rogers that she should make her wedding dress.

Before Sarah reached the railroad station her energetic mind had begun to try to form plans to earn the money to pay for the dress. The debt was likely to cramp and cripple them for years. She must allow as little as possible of the trouble to come upon her mother, since it was to her carelessness that it was all due. Had not Miss Almy, had not even the schoolgirls, warned her of Sarah Stuyvesant's recklessness and irresponsibility? And in spite of all she had taken her for a roommate!

Sarah Stuyvesant had said that she would pay. Of course, that did not mean anything. She had always very little money. She would rather buy herself a point lace flounce with it, than to pay for that one. So Sarah said to herself, with a curling lip.

She must get rid of that girl. She wished that she might never see or think of her again. When she reached her rooms she

found a telegram awaiting her, from Cousin Martha Appleby. Her brother was ill with rheumatic fever, so she could not come to stay with Sarah's mother.

After all, perhaps her mother was not going to be ill, thought Sarah, trying to be hopeful.

It was almost impossible to obtain a nurse in Gilboa, and too expensive to hire one from Highbury or elsewhere. Sarah said to herself that she should be obliged to go home, and that would mean abandoning her plan of coaching three of the Seminary girls in mathematics. In that sort of teaching lay her chief hope of paying for Polly Pendexter's ruined dress.

What had become of Sarah Stuyvesant? This came as an afterthought to Sarah Rogers when she read her telegram. She had probably gone to play tennis with some of the Grace Albee set. She was quite light-minded enough to go and enjoy the game in spite of her frantic demonstrations of grief only that morning.

It could not be possible that she had gone home with her mother and had stayed, was going to stay all night!—for it was now late

in the evening. Sarah said to herself that the girl was in a sufficiently theatrical frame of mind to do such a thing, but she hoped that her mother had not allowed it.

Sarah the Less had shown heroism in the matter of washing dishes and even of eating warmed-over baked beans, but as a sick-nurse, with the household duties also thrown upon her—and Absalom, every inch a boy—Sarah Rogers doubted whether she would be equal to the emergency for even a day. If there had been a conveyance she would have instantly set out for home, but she was obliged to wait for the stage's first trip in the morning, which was not until nearly noon.

The next day as she walked up the hill from the corner where the stage left her, she saw the doctor's carriage turning out of the lane. She stopped him, her heart beating fast with fear.

"Your mother is threatened with a fever," he said. "She has been running down for a good while. I hope to be able to break it up. You have a plucky little piece there for a nurse. Knows what she is about. I don't think it will be necessary for you to stay

at home. I told her I would send Phœbe Nute over from the poorhouse for the rough work—an hour or two a day Phœbe is good for—and that girl makes Absalom toe the mark! She evidently isn't much used to work, but there is undeveloped power there, mark my words."

When the doctor had gone on, after some further explanation of her mother's symptoms, Sarah's mind instantly returned to his extraordinary estimate of Sarah Stuyvesant.

"Undeveloped power!" she repeated, scornfully. "A power to play ruinous pranks. I must stay at home even if it means giving up everything. Fancy trusting mother to her care! and she shall go back as soon as the stage goes."

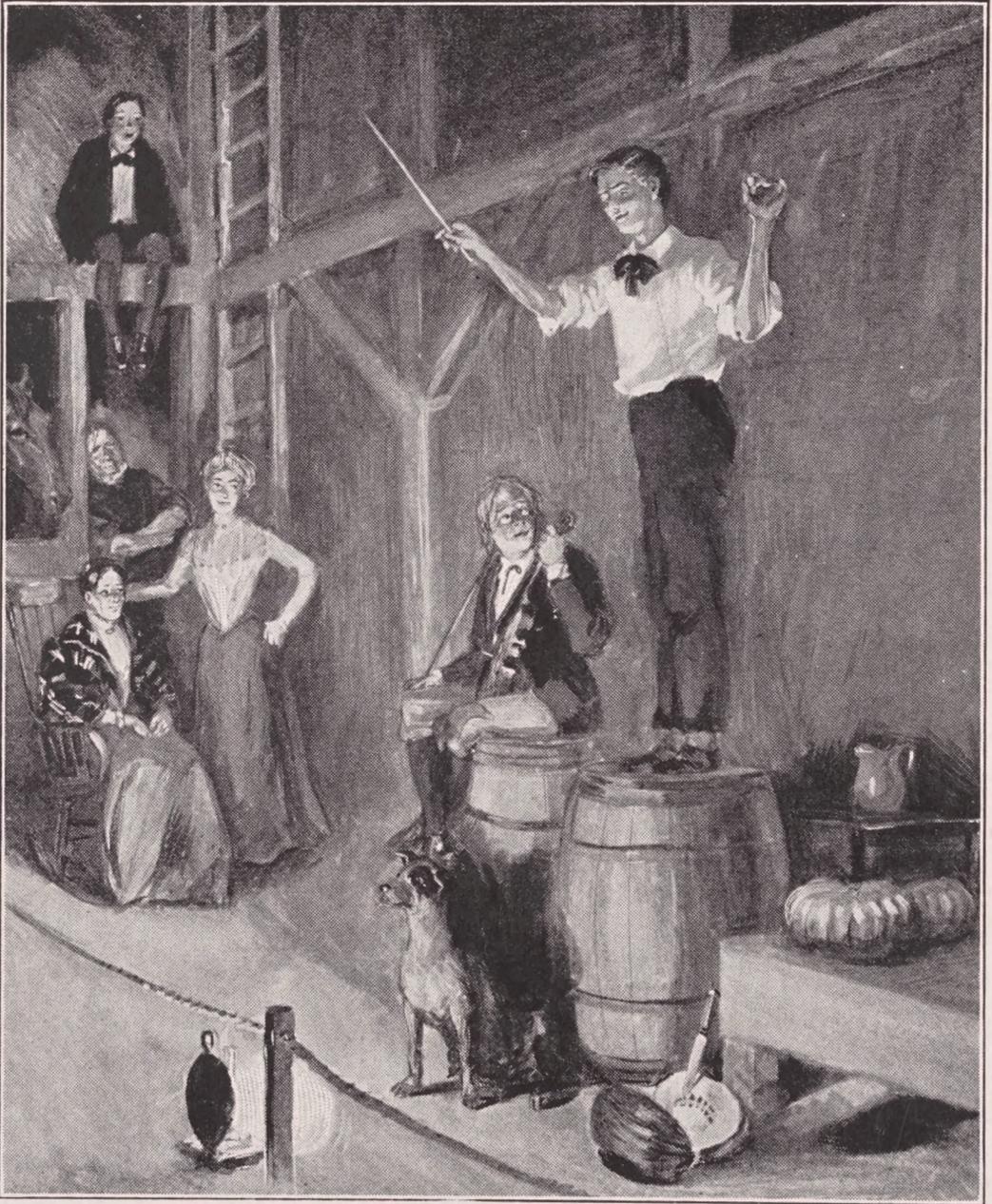
As she entered the lane, she saw Sarah the Less, with sleeves rolled up, hanging out clothes upon the line. Absalom, evidently under her orders, was carrying the great clothes basket about for her. And Absalom was the kind of boy that never likes to help about what he thinks is properly women's work.

He had not liked Sarah Stuyvesant, either, when he had first seen her. "You only like

her because she has a turned-up nose to match your freckles," he had said to his sister. Absalom, besides being every inch a boy, was not always a pleasing boy.

But he was helping now, cheerfully. He was even grinning broadly, as if at some joke. "She wouldn't realize it if mother were very ill. She would go off to a party! She must go back when the stage goes," said Sarah Rogers to herself.





"IT WAS JUST THE SORT OF THING THAT SHE DIDN'T WISH ABSALOM TO DO."

## CHAPTER IV

“ I WISH, oh, I wish you would let me stay!” Sarah Stuyvesant clasped Sarah Rogers’ hand, beseechingly, and looked up at her through a mist of tears. Sarah Rogers thought this a theatrical way and did not like it.

“You don’t like me and you don’t trust me, and it’s no wonder!” continued the tearful Sarah. “But the doctor does, and your mother does, and it will make me feel that I am doing something to make up for the dreadful mischief I did. I am going to pay. I shan’t have a minute’s peace until I pay. But now I want to make it possible for you to stay at school. I know—I know, Sarah Rogers, how you feel about leaving, and losing the chance to coach those girls! You feel as if it were the end of everything for you! and yet you can’t trust your mother to me! Sarah Rogers, you *can* trust your mother to me! I have been waked up. It was doing that dreadful thing and seeing what it brought upon you. I am going to

make amends for it! You have no right to refuse to give me a chance to make amends for it!"

Sarah Stuyvesant's voice was shrill with emotion. She ended in a burst of passionate tears. Sarah Rogers stooped and put her arm round the slender, trembling figure, though her manner was constrained. She instinctively distrusted this tempestuous temperament. "I know you feel just as you say you do," she said—and even Sarah the Greater was somewhat carried out of herself, or she could not have been so frank. "You feel so now; but when it comes to doing the hard, self-denying thing right straight along, it—it isn't so easy!"

The lip of the stronger Sarah was trembling. She felt, suddenly, how hard her own lot had been compared with this girl's whose mind was so light that she could be mean and reckless for the love of wearing a thread-lace flounce.

"You think I don't know that. You think I don't see how different your life has been from mine and that it was dreadful—dreadful! for me to bring such trouble upon you. It's because I do see it that I am deter-

mined to atone for it. Oh, there is more of me than you think! I am not the same girl who made Lora Bangs sit down on your uncle's hat. That was a silly child! The look you gave me cured me of all that! There was pity and there was contempt' in it. You don't pity me so much, now. You had almost to try even to put your arm round me. It is no wonder! You will not believe that I'm not the same girl that wore Polly Pendexter's wedding dress to a party. But only give me a chance to prove it,—only give me a chance!" She clung to Sarah Rogers in her eagerness, and would not let her go.

"I always knew there was something of me!" She added this clause with a sudden, half-mournful, half-defiant smile, and something like a spark in her misty eyes. Sarah Rogers smiled, too. It relieved the strained situation which jarred upon her reticent habit. It also made her share, suddenly, something of Sarah Stuyvesant's belief. If there were not something of Sarah, she would not wish to atone for the mischief that she had done.

"If—if you really think you can take care

of mother and do the work with only Phœbe Nute from the poorhouse to help—and if it should be only a slow fever, as the doctor thinks, and if mother is willing”—

“She will be; she likes me!” interpolated Sarah Stuyvesant, triumphantly.

“I am willing that you should try. I am sure you’ll not want to try it long. And you ought not to leave school. What will your mother say?”

“No one cares what I do if I keep out of too great mischief,” said Sarah, calmly. “I’m going to be a coach when I go back. Think how I have thrown away my French accent! It’s not only in the school that I can get pupils. I can form classes. There is not a native teacher in Highbury. I lived in Paris so long that I am like a native. Oh, I am going to earn money—three hundred and fifty dollars, *soon*; you will see! I will prevent you from losing your chance, too. I will take care of your mother, first, because they will wait for the money until I can earn it. I will ask Mrs. Pendexter to wait.”

“You will ask Mrs. Pendexter to wait! You cannot relieve my mother and me of the responsibility,” said Sarah Rogers.

“You must tell her, then, that I am to blame and will pay. Your mother has worried; she talked to herself in the night,—when she didn’t know that I heard—about the loss of Mrs. Pendexter’s patronage and friendliness. It cut me to the heart! Sarah, didn’t you tell them how it happened?” Sarah Stuyvesant’s breath came quickly in her anxiety.

“I don’t think that Mrs. Pendexter listened, or Polly. I think they got the impression that I had worn the dress,” said Sarah Rogers, slowly. “It doesn’t make any difference. They wouldn’t care. The dress was ruined, and mother and I were responsible.”

“It must be paid for soon—soon!” said Sarah Stuyvesant, with feverish eagerness. Sarah Rogers went into the house, slowly, and toward her mother’s door.

“I will ask mother if you may stay,” she said. After she had closed the door behind her, she reopened it to say: “I am glad, Sarah, that you wish to write to Mrs. Pendexter.”

When the door had closed again, the lesser Sarah stood still, with clasped hands and shining eyes.

“She’s beginning!—she’s beginning to believe in me!” she said aloud, exultantly.

Sarah Rogers had a long conference with her mother and with the doctor. The result was that Sarah Stuyvesant was installed as nurse and housekeeper, with Phœbe Nute, somewhat feeble of mind, but strong of body, to help with the rougher parts of the housework.

Absalom, who was accounted somewhat “queer” and difficult, was sworn to helpfulness and good behavior. This was the more easily accomplished because Absalom “took to” the nurse and housekeeper, declaring his conviction that she was “considerable of a girl”—which was great praise for Absalom.

Mrs. Rogers’ illness was a slow fever; it was not at all dangerous, but it might have a long run. Sarah Rogers went back to 15 Jayne Street alone and resumed the queer little housekeeping that now seemed dreary and strange.

She threw herself with resolute determination into her school work and into the effort to secure pupils. Besides the three Seminary girls who needed coaching she found several younger scholars in public and private

schools who were dull in arithmetic and whose parents were glad to pay to have them helped along. But, at the best, there was not much to earn, and her mother's energetic hands were now idle. Three hundred and fifty dollars was a great deal of money! If the flounce was worth three hundred they could not pay less than that for the dress. Even Sarah Rogers' stout heart was often faint, in those days, and not seldom a little bitter toward Sarah the Less. Debt seemed an intolerable thing to Sarah Rogers.

Her mother's illness ran its slow course, and there were only encouraging reports from home. Sarah could not go home every Saturday, because she had as a pupil a boy in a broker's office who had only evenings at his disposal and was anxious to have a lesson every evening.

One Saturday night, when she went unexpectedly, she found Sarah presiding at the supper table over burnt baked beans and brown bread that would "stay dough," as its maker pathetically said. And there were very red rims round Sarah Stuyvesant's eyes. But for the invalid there was the daintiest of toast and custard.

“She can make the best goodies you ever tasted, and common things don’t count!” declared Absalom, evidently sharing the opinion of the French queen who saw no reason why the people should not eat cake if they could not get bread.

Mrs. Rogers had only praises for her nurse, and the house was daintily neat, even to the greater Sarah’s critical inspection.

“Sarah Stuyvesant, you are having a hard time!” said Sarah Rogers, looking steadfastly, almost sympathetically, into the house-keeper’s eyes.

“I haven’t repented—not for a moment, and I shan’t—if you think they are getting along,” said Sarah the Less, stoutly.

Sarah Rogers returned to Highbury with a greater belief in Sarah Stuyvesant’s staying power, and with less misgiving than she had felt before. Sarah Stuyvesant accepted the amendment that Phœbe Nute should remain to bake the beans and steam the brown bread.

It was two weeks after, that Uncle Abram came, himself, with a stock of provisions to Jayne Street. Sarah had made concessions in view of Uncle Abram’s persistence in the severe and only occasional labor of cookery,

and Orinda now sent a contribution from her Saturday's baking to Uncle Abram's evident relief and gratification. "Cream pies ain't so dreadful expensive on a farm, and Orindy, she does set by making you one," he said, as he carefully lifted a snowy mountain from its protecting covers in his basket. "You don't appear to have sweetbreads and oysters, now the little gal is away," he added, casting a somewhat disappointed glance at Sarah's boiled eggs and cold johnnycake. "Beats all how well she's turned out!" he continued, heartily. "Appeared to me that you was kind of crazy to take her for a roommate after she behaved so foolish and reckless, making that gal sit down on my hat. But there! I'll own your father had a way of seeing through folks quicker'n what I could, and I guess you take after him. Your mother couldn't have had a better nurse, and I don't expect she'll charge you no great for it."

His niece shook her head, slightly, non-committally. She had persuaded her mother not to tell Uncle Abram of the trouble Sarah Stuyvesant had brought upon them. She dreaded to hear his reflections upon her folly

in choosing the reckless Sarah for a roommate, and she dreaded still more to have him know how hampered she was with debt, in the very beginning of her struggle.

“She keeps ’em kind of lively there, too. I declare, I like to go in and listen to her and Absalom going on. I guess she is encouraging him some in playing tricks.”

Sarah looked up in quick alarm. She didn’t like those tricks of Absalom’s; she never had liked them.

“Between ’em they made your mother and me laugh till we cried; that was the first day she sat up,” continued Uncle Abram. “She’s helped Absalom set up a show in the barn for to-night; they’re going to have a great time,—sold tickets. Sent me a compliment’ry.” Uncle Abram chuckled, and rubbed his hands as if at great good fortune. “Wonder she didn’t say anything to you about it.”

“I—I haven’t been over for two weeks, and when she came over here, week before last, she was very busy, looking after pupils in French,” she explained, but with heightened color. She wondered that Sarah had said nothing to her about the projected

show. But then Sarah the Less knew very well how much she would dislike such encouragement of Absalom in his foolishness. How strange it was to be so light-minded with so much care upon her!

“I have been foolish to trust her! How could I trust her again?” she thought, with sudden alarm.

“They’ve borrowed Levi Tackaberry’s rag bags and they’re going to have a procession—‘The beggars are coming to town.’ Levi Tackaberry’s tin wagon has been standing in your barn every night for a long spell, so’s they could look the bags over. Orindy, she’s in it heart and soul. She’d make Levi give ’em every rag he had if they wanted it! Absalom is going to play his tricks—they do say there ain’t a magician hardly anywhere that can beat him—and do some lightning calculating. They do say the schoolmaster is some astonished at Absalom’s lightning calculating, and they expect to draw a crowd. Seems kind of curious that you shouldn’t be knowing of it. But there! She and Absalom ain’t anything more’n a pair of children together. I guess Orindy, she’ll see that they don’t set the barn afire or get into

mischievous; might as well let 'em have their fun."

As soon as Uncle Abram had gone, Sarah proceeded to make arrangements to go over to Gilboa that night. She would not wait for an invitation to the show; a show—the vulgar sort of thing that she had tried so hard to keep Absalom from having anything to do with!

She sent a message to the broker's boy, asking for a postponement of his lesson. It was too late for the stage when she was ready to go, but Josiah Stover, the milkman, allowed her to wedge herself in among his empty, rattling cans, and although Josiah was collecting and was obliged to make numerous stops, they reached Gilboa before eight o'clock.

Sarah slipped into the barn, which was brilliantly lighted and from which came the sounds of a fiddle. She impatiently thrust aside Iky Bemis, who demanded her ticket, and Iky was forced reluctantly to admit the claims of relationship, although he repeated, insistently, that there were "no compliment'ries."

Antoine Pédéloupé, the half-witted French

boy at the poorhouse, who had a remarkable gift as a violinist, was mounted upon a barrel, playing, with Absalom's old dog Dandy, who always barked at the sound of music, as an accompanist. A voice, clear and resonant—Sarah recognized it as that of Sarah the Less—rose now and then above the noise:—

“Hark! hark! the dogs do bark,  
The beggars are coming to town;  
Some in rags and some in tags,  
And some in velvet gowns.”

The procession was rather funny, Sarah Rogers admitted to herself, in spite of her distaste for the proceedings. The contents of Levi Tackaberry's rag bags had been used with skill and discrimination. Absalom had before shown a pretty talent for Fourth of July “horribles,” and he found a fine field for its display in the beggars' coming to town.

It was just the sort of thing that she didn't wish Absalom to do, his sister said to herself, and her face was hot with vexation. His tricks were even worse; she didn't wish to have Absalom laughed at as a mountebank.

She looked about her in a bewildered way at the audience. It was an astonishingly large one. There were chairs in the stalls and benches upon the hay lofts—all full; eager faces of men and women as well as children looked out from the open doors of the granary and the wood shed.

Sarah caught sight of the minister and the schoolmaster, and her face flushed still more deeply. In some of the reserved seats was a party of Highbury people,—Grace Albee and some of her set, and Margaret Sibley, whom Sarah Stuyvesant scarcely knew; Mark Sibley, too, Margaret's brother; and,—could it be possible?—with Mark was the professor of mathematics whom the Sibleys had once invited her to meet.

Sarah Rogers felt as if she were growing dazed. She seemed suddenly to have found herself in a magic realm; the beggars' procession was a witches' dance. Was that her mother, leaning back in a rocking-chair, looking pale, but laughing gayly at the procession? Could she like to see Absalom mounted upon a barrel, with a wand in his hand, like a cheap magician, and crying out, "Presto! change!" as Sarah had heard him cry out when she entered?

There seemed to be a change in the order of the proceedings, now. There seemed to be something better than trick-playing in this unusual gift of Absalom's. But Uncle Abram had seen her from his seat in the great kitchen rocking-chair, where he was making himself proudly conspicuous.

"He whisked my watch right out of my pocket, and when he cut open a big pumpkin, there 'twas!" he said, chuckling with delight. Uncle Abram had always shown what Sarah had felt to be a misguided sympathy with Absalom's trick-playing.

"And Deacon Morrill's watch and chain were in Dr. Parker's hat, over t'other side of the barn;—kind of a suspicious thing for the doctor!" Uncle Abram chuckled again. "That boy does beat all! He held Orindy's ring that she let him take, right up before the audience, and the next minute he sent little Billy Sykes to take it out of a big rutybagy turnip, top of the barrel! And one of the beggars in the procession found Dr. Parker's seal ring somehow on his finger. I tell you it's made lots of fun!"

"I don't care for such fun! I don't like to have Absalom do it," said Sarah, stiffly.

“He never will amount to anything if he is encouraged in it.”

But Uncle Abram was not listening to her. There had come a burst of applause from the audience, at one of Absalom’s arithmetical feats.

Sarah tried to hear the next one. She was not ashamed of Absalom’s gifts in that direction. She had been proud to hear the schoolmaster admit that Absalom had “given him hard mathematical nuts to crack,” and proud that when she had privately sent one of his arithmetical puzzles to the Cumberland County Clarion, it had been accepted and printed. Absalom had been angry at this. He was, it had seemed, strangely sensitive, and shrank from a public display of his mathematical gifts. And yet here he was, only too ready, in his sister’s opinion, to make a mountebank of himself. His quickness of hand he was always ready to exhibit and was sensitive only about his quickness of brain. Sarah had always felt this to be very provoking of Absalom. She wondered how he had been induced to display his gift on this occasion. Her heart thrilled as she listened. Absalom had been delving into

those huge mathematical tomes that the schoolmaster had lent him since she had been away from home. There was wonder on the faces of the audience; the same emotion mingled with respect on the face of the professor of mathematics.

She kept herself in the background. Absalom might be confused, he might even refuse to go on if he should see her. Sarah Stuyvesant seemed to have an influence over him already that she herself had never been able to acquire. Was the pang that this discovery gave her, envy and jealousy? Sarah Rogers feared it, and despised herself.

The "show" resolved itself into a social occasion. The professor of mathematics congratulated Sarah on her brother's remarkable gift. It was a much greater gift, he said, than Miss Stuyvesant had led him to suppose. He did not explain how Miss Stuyvesant had happened to invite him there. The schoolmaster was telling her how he had always hoped that Absalom would have an opportunity to develop his mathematical talent.

Every one was shaking hands with her mother and there were tears of pride and joy in her eyes.

Antoine Pédéloupé's fiddle was started up again and there was another march of the beggars led by two of them, Orinda Jenks and Levi Tackaberry the tin peddler,—Levi being a wooer whom Orinda had put off for fifteen years.

The young people from Highbury joined in the procession and in the games that followed it, and Sarah saw Absalom—Absalom who was so odd that he always hid himself when she had a party!—joining in the festivities and apparently making himself agreeable to Grace Albee.

Sarah Rogers found it difficult to make herself at home. Her heart was burning with indignation against Sarah Stuyvesant, who did not come near her nor meet her eye. She forced herself to admit that Sarah had done well in inducing Absalom to display his mathematical gift, but why had she so ignored her?

The festivities were breaking up when the voice of the mathematical professor came to her ears and roused her from her bewildered reflections.

“Have all the trinkets been returned?” it said. “My ring has not come back to me

and I fear it may have stuck fast in some turnip or pumpkin!"

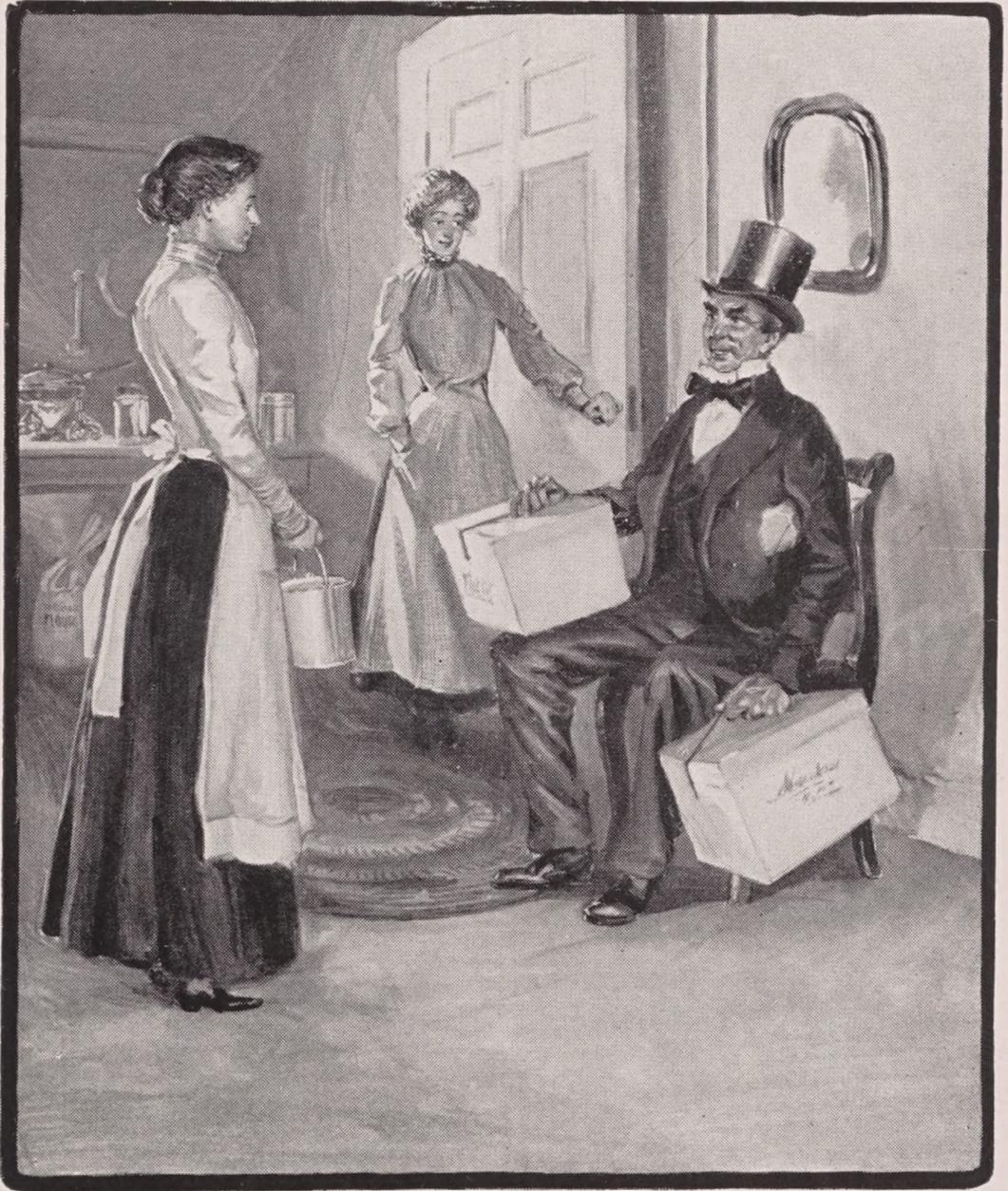
Sarah Rogers' responsibility at once asserted itself. If there was a difficulty it could not be left to Absalom and Sarah Stuyvesant. It would be just like either of them to allow a ring to be lost.

She called out, with a voice of authority, "Absalom, will you see that Professor McMillan's ring is returned to him at once?"

## CHAPTER V

“**I** DON'T know but you are too angry with me to want me to come back here at all,” said Sarah Stuyvesant, standing doubtfully in the doorway of the living room at 15 Jayne Street.

Sarah Rogers was delving at geometry with a great pile of books beside her on the table. She tried to smooth a quick, sharp frown from her brow as she looked up. She was saying to herself very often in these days, that she must be at least just to Sarah Stuyvesant; she must be! She was afraid of being influenced by such mean traits as envy and jealousy. Sarah Stuyvesant had acquired such an influence over Absalom! Sarah did not think that she should be jealous if she would use it only for Absalom's good; she did not *think* she should be. Even Uncle Abram had fallen under Sarah Stuyvesant's spell. He had come in to see his niece twice, when he had been in Highbury, apparently only to tell her with emphasis, in Absalom's phrase, that Sarah Stuy-



“‘I RECKON THEY’LL PLEASE YOU BOTH,  
EITHER ONE OF THEM!’ HE ADDED.”



vesant was "considerable of a gal," and to chuckle over the success of the "show."

At each visit Sarah had asked him if Professor McMillan's ring had been found, and he had replied that he believed they hadn't come across it yet, but he guessed it would turn up all right. Absalom appeared "to run of an idee" that he had slipped it on the finger of one of the beggars in the procession, but none of them had it. 'Twas nothing to be wondered at if the boy had become a little confused with such wonderful tricks as he had done. Why the presti—what d'ye call him?—at the town hall had not been able to hold a candle to him!

As for the ring—well, he had heard that it was a diamond, but Professor McMillan didn't seem inclined to make much fuss about it. He certainly hadn't laid up anything against Absalom. If he had, he wouldn't have offered to teach him mathematics. That was going to be a great thing for Absalom. Sarah had heard about it, hadn't she?

Yes, Sarah had heard. Absalom had come to Jayne Street and told her about it when he came over to see the professor by ap-

pointment. He had seemed very much pleased. Sarah said this and she did not say what was uppermost in her mind—that she wished Absalom would not take the loss of the professor's ring so easily. It seemed like being so disagreeably a wet blanket to say that.

“And it all came about by way of that gal!” pursued Uncle Abram. “Kind of curious, wa'n't it? that she should find that he was an old friend that she and her mother had got acquainted with 'board of a steamer. But it isn't everybody that would have taken advantage of it so quick to help Absalom!”

“It was very kind of Sarah to try to help Absalom,” his niece replied; but her voice sounded strange and unnatural in her own ears.

“I calculate 'twas kind of a lucky day for us when she got that gal to sit down on my hat,” continued Uncle Abram. “That wa'n't anything but a piece of childish foolishness, though I was kind of riled at the time. I was surprised that you wanted her to live with you. Well, well, it's a Rogers' trait to see through folks, and I guess you've got your share of it.” Sarah had not been

able to force herself to any satisfactory responsiveness. Uncle Abram had seemed to become slowly aware of this, for he had turned at the door as he went away to say:—

“I don’t expect you think much of them shows of Absalom’s. But you can’t say but what this one turned out pretty well. Oh, about that ring. I’ll stir Absalom up to find it. He thought it might be in a pumpkin or a turnip, but he’s been ’most through the whole heap looking for it. He kind of whisked things round in a hurry! You knew about Dr. Parker having Deacon Morrill’s watch in his hat? Kind of hard upon the doctor, wa’n’t it?” And Uncle Abram went off chuckling although the ring was lost. A ring, even although it might be a diamond, was not of much consequence from Uncle Abram’s point of view. He had said that for a man to go round with a ring on his little finger appeared to him to be next door to curling his hair.

It was a few days after this visit of Uncle Abram’s that Sarah Stuyvesant returned to Jayne Street, in a doubtful state of mind concerning her welcome.

“Oh, yes; I would rather you would come back,” Sarah Rogers said, and she knew that her tone was even more constrained than she meant it should be.

“Perhaps you mean that you think I should be able to do less mischief here than there,” said Sarah Stuyvesant, half jocose, half serious.

“It was kind—very kind of you to take care of mother. She said that no one could have had a more devoted nurse. And you have helped Absalom. For Professor McMillan to have become interested in him is the greatest of good fortune.” Sarah Rogers spoke heartily, yet the effort she made was apparent to Sarah Stuyvesant’s sensitive ears.

“You didn’t like it because I didn’t tell you about the show,” said Sarah Stuyvesant. “But you wouldn’t have let us have it. So Absalom said. He made me promise at the very first, before I thought it was going to be such an affair. I thought it would be fun, and I—I was a little dull and I didn’t see any harm in it. It was only when I happened to meet Professor McMillan at the Sibleys’, where I had gone to get French

pupils, that I thought of what he might do for Absalom.”

“I can’t be otherwise than grateful to you,” said Sarah. “And my mother’s consent was enough.”

“But you don’t like it, and you don’t like me!” burst forth Sarah, impetuously. “You can’t forgive me, and I don’t wonder. I realize more and more what trouble I brought upon you—more and more as I realize how hard your life has been compared with mine. But I’m going to pay the money, so far as that goes! I’ve got to do it right away! I can’t bear to have it hanging over me. I’ve sold the walking dress and the hat that mother sent me, to Grace Albee. She is just my size; the gown was a perfect fit. It was for me, too! You should have seen me in it! And the hat was from Virot. Oh, but mother has taste, and knows how to make money go a long way!” Sarah sat upon her trunk, which the expressman had brought up to the inner room, and showed a face suddenly tear-drenched, through the doorway.

“Grace Albee was glad enough to get them,” she continued, in a sob-shaken voice;

“and well she might be! A Paris gown and hat don’t come to Highbury every day in the week.”

Sarah Rogers rose suddenly from her books and went and put a comforting arm round the shaken figure on the trunk.

“It was hard for you to have to sell your things!” she said, impulsively. “It was hard at our house, too, I know it was!”

“If you know it, that’s a good deal of consolation!” said Sarah Stuyvesant, becoming suddenly calmer. “Not that you can help it! To atone so far as I can is what I must do to keep from despising myself! Don’t you see? I must do it. No one can help me. When I was a little girl at a boarding school in the south of France, we used continually to play the game of consequences, and there was a moralizing teacher who never failed to say before we finished: ‘Remember, my children, it is so with all our deeds, good and evil—there are consequences! Always consequences!’ We used to laugh at her. I wish that I had laid her moralizing to heart, instead! One may repent, of course, and feel better; but I can’t repent and let you pay for the dress, even

although you were able and willing. I helped you—it really helped you for me to keep your house and take care of your mother, didn't it?" She caught Sarah Rogers' arm and looked up with breathless eagerness into her face.

"It helped me very much. I felt that I could trust you as I scarcely could have trusted a hired nurse. If it hadn't been for you I should have been obliged to go home." At last Sarah Rogers' voice was really cordial.

"You felt that you could trust me, after the dress?" said Sarah Stuyvesant, eagerly. Her countenance fell suddenly. "And then I helped Absalom to get up a show when I knew you disliked to have him play those tricks!"

"I can't complain of that since it turned out so well," said Sarah, after only a moment's hesitation. "Although I am sorry that Professor McMillan's ring was lost."

"Oh, that ring!" Sarah Stuyvesant's face changed, suddenly. "It has worried me so to have it lost! But Professor McMillan is very kind; he insists that it doesn't matter."

“But I feel, and I hope that Absalom feels, as you do about the dress—that the ring must be paid for.”

Sarah Stuyvesant’s face flushed, slowly. “Of course it is much the same thing,” she said. “But it will be found! Oh, of course it will be found! It can’t entirely have disappeared.”

“It seems to me that it would be quite possible for a ring to disappear, dropped upon a barn floor where there were wisps of hay and tramping feet and dragging skirts.”

“But it wasn’t dropped upon the floor—how do you know that it was dropped upon the floor?” said Sarah Stuyvesant, with—as Sarah Rogers remembered afterwards—a queer little catch in her voice.

“It only seemed probable that it was,” said Sarah Rogers. “Absalom still seems to have hopes of finding it.”

“There is a great heap of pumpkins, and he thinks he may have stuck the ring into one that got rolled away. People were sitting on them, you know. The way he did was to have the stem of the pumpkin cut out and a hole made under it. Then there

was cement on the stem. He put the trinket into the hole and then cemented the stem on again. There are a good many 'prepared' pumpkins in the heap, but he hasn't yet found the one with the ring in it."

"He said his first impression was that he had put it on the finger of one of the beggars. He did that with one or two rings," said Absalom's sister.

"But none of the beggars would have run away with Professor McMillan's ring," said Sarah Stuyvesant.

"No, none of them would have," said Sarah Rogers, with conviction. "They are all Gilboa people whom we know. If it should not be found"—

"Don't think of such a thing as that, yet! don't! I couldn't bear it. Let me get Polly Pendexter's wedding dress paid for before I have to think of another dreadful piece of mischief that I've done!" cried Sarah the Less.

"You would not be responsible for the ring," said Sarah Rogers. "That is Absalom's affair. Although, of course, if"—

"If I hadn't encouraged him to have the show and invited Professor McMillan," inter-

rupted Sarah Stuyvesant. "I have been only a dreadful trouble to you from the first!"

"You may have brought us great good fortune in interesting Professor McMillan in Absalom," said Sarah Rogers. But when one is trying to be just, the effort is very likely to show in the tones of one's voice.

It was a relief to Sarah Rogers when there came a knock at the door and Uncle Abram's gruff voice called out a greeting and Uncle Abram's rugged face looked in upon them, with the cheerful and kindly expression which it almost always now wore on his visits to Jayne Street.

Sarah Stuyvesant promptly turned her back and retreated out of sight, disliking to have the visitor see her tears. Sarah Rogers shut the door behind her when she went out to the living room. She felt suddenly a wave of real pity and tenderness for Sarah Stuyvesant, and a desire to protect her. There was even a feeling of respect mingled with this softer sentiment. The girl had really borne suffering in the effort to make amends for what she had done. Suffering was not too large a word to describe Sarah's feeling at parting with her Paris gown and

hat, certainly not too large to express what she had undergone as nurse and housekeeper. Chafing-dish parties in a Paris flat had not prepared her for Gilboa winter housekeeping! Her small hands had pathetic bruises and callous spots which she tried to hide.

“Sarah will be out in a minute,” she explained to Uncle Abram, whom she suspected of a lively expectation of sweetbread and oyster luncheons, now that Sarah Stuyvesant had come back. Uncle Abram’s economical principles had, somehow, received a severe setback in the last few months. He had supplemented the supplies from the farm with dainties from the market and had manifested disappointment that, when her housemate was away, Sarah relapsed into perpetual johnnycake.

“She—she’s some smart! that is more’n what you’d think she would be,” said Uncle Abram, always ready now, with praises of Sarah Stuyvesant.

“There—there’s a good deal that is fine about her,” said his niece, with an emphasis that meant a sudden impulse to atone for much silence or faint praise. “She has had

a hard time—a very hard time. She wanted to pay something—it was a debt of honor—and she sold the Paris gown and hat that her mother had just sent her.”

Somewhat carried out of herself by sympathy and self-reproach, Sarah Rogers forgot the probability that from Uncle Abram’s manly standpoint this self-sacrifice would not seem so noble or so extreme as from her own.

“Sold her dress and her bonnet! What has she sold her dress and her bonnet for?” demanded Uncle Abram, who believed in calling female headgear by the name that it had borne when he was young.

“She felt that she ought to—to pay a debt,” said Sarah Rogers. “She likes pretty things to wear, too; she likes them even better than most girls.” Quite unconsciously Uncle Abram’s niece heaved a sigh. She had scarcely had time to sigh for pretty things in her life, or had even thought of the possibility of having them, but she, too, liked them!

“What kind of a bonnet have you got?” demanded Uncle Abram, after a moment of deep reflection.

“Only my last winter one, yet. I’m—I’m getting a good many pupils,” answered Sarah. “It does very well,” she added, quickly. “A girl who is borrowing money to pay for her education must not think of new hats!”

Uncle Abram sat in silence for a few minutes.

“Do you expect that Sarah Stuyvesant would feel like cooking up if I should go and fetch some sweetbreads and oysters?” he asked, at length.

“I think she always likes to,” Sarah answered. She thought that a little feast might cheer her housemate; and she always liked to please Uncle Abram, who had shown himself so much kinder than she had expected he would.

He started up at once and went out, and his niece went and told Sarah Stuyvesant, who smiled through her tears and immediately donned her long-sleeved apron.

The market was not far away, but the two girls waited so long for Uncle Abram’s return that his niece began to fear lest a return of his economical principles might have induced him to walk sternly by the

market. But at last his heavy footsteps were heard upon the stairs. When his niece opened the door he entered with the bundle of sweetbreads under his arm and a large pasteboard bonnet box in each hand. A boy with a can of oysters followed him up the stairs. He sat down with a box on each side of him and emitted a chuckle of satisfaction.

“I don’t know but ’twas a little mite reckless, but seeing I haven’t got a great many to do for, I made up my mind that I would get both of you gals a new bonnet! Open the boxes, Sarah! I’ll leave you to take your pick and settle it amongst you. They come high, but I was bound they should be the right thing!”

The genuine pleasure of benevolence, all the greater because it was so new an experience in his life, fairly transformed Uncle Abram’s grim and rugged countenance.

“I reckon they’ll please you both, either one of them!” he added.

The girls opened the boxes trying to subdue their amazement to proper politeness. Sarah Rogers’ unsophisticated frankness almost betrayed her into an exclamation of

dismay when she took out a gaudy, tasteless, overladen piece of cheap millinery.

"Try it on, Sarah," she said, hastily. "And yet perhaps this smaller one would be more becoming to you!"

The second hat that she had taken from its box was smaller, but an even more startling combination of violet-colored feathers and flowers and dazzling beads and buckles.

"They're beauties, both of 'em, ain't they?" said Uncle Abram, triumphantly. "And Orindy will have it that I'm color-blind, so none of the women folks round will trust me to buy 'em a skein of worsted. They can't say that I haven't got some taste, anyhow!"

"It was very kind of you to buy them for us," said Sarah Stuyvesant repressing a shudder and painful recollection of her Paris hat.

"I think I would better keep the large one," said Sarah Rogers, heroically. "It is the more suitable for me. I am sure it was very kind of you, Uncle Abram!"

"I wa'n't going to have it said that my niece had to wear her last winter's hat when she was going among genteel Highbury folks," said Uncle Abram, so highly pleased

with himself that he wondered why he had not done this sort of thing before. "And as for the other little gal"—with a kindly nod in Sarah Stuyvesant's direction—"why, she was so handy and took such good care of your mother that I kind of felt as if some of us ought to make her a present."

"I don't deserve it! I don't deserve it!" cried Sarah Stuyvesant, and her voice was shrill with sudden excitement. Sarah Rogers regarded her, wonderingly. Did she mean that she did not deserve this horror of a hat? Was she sarcastic? There was always something that she could not quite understand about Sarah Stuyvesant.

"I don't deserve that you should be kind to me! I have brought nothing but trouble upon you—nothing but trouble!" continued Sarah, with threatening tears.

Sarah Rogers found an opportunity to shake her head at her, warningly. Why would she be so foolish? Sarah was very anxious that Uncle Abram should not know of the trouble about Polly Pendexter's dress.

"Trouble? Why, you surely ain't thinking about that old hat of mine that you sat down on the first day we ever see

you? Come to think of it, I am heaping coals of fire buying you one." Uncle Abram chuckled, delightedly. "Come, now, you needn't feel that way about it! Orindy said 'twas time I had a new hat anyhow, and I expect it was. It did me a sight of good, it really did, to buy them two hats and think how proud you'd feel wearing 'em and how the folks in church would stare when you come over to spend Sunday. You just go to work and make the sweet-breads taste as good as they did the last time and we'll not say anything about my old hat!"

Sarah Stuyvesant tried to be responsive to his jesting mood, but, as she went about her cooking, Sarah Rogers observed how pale and worn her face had grown.

After Uncle Abram had finished his luncheon, which he ate with great zest, and gone his way, Absalom suddenly came in—Absalom in overalls and jumper, an oxgoad in his hand.

"I'm working in the woods for Orrin Cressy; didn't she tell you?" he said to his sister, with a nod toward Sarah Stuyvesant. "Come out with a load of logs. Yes, I've

given up school and Professor McMillan. I had to. There wasn't any other way. Kind of queer luck we have!" Absalom laughed a hoarse and unmusical laugh. "I found out that the ring I lost was worth more than a hundred dollars! Of course a fellow must pay for it. The professor said 'twas of no consequence, or, if I wanted to, I could pay for it after I got my education. Maybe that would be wiser, if a fellow could stand it. I tried to think so, but I found that I wasn't the kind that could stand it. I've got to pay up and start fair and square."

His sister sat down opposite him with her elbow resting upon her knees and her chin upon her palms, and stared at him intently. She thought that one would scarcely have known him for Absalom—Absalom who shirked work and liked to play tricks and was generally unsatisfactory. The true man in Absalom had suddenly appeared.

"That's it!" said Sarah Stuyvesant, sympathetically. "You've got to pay it so as not to hate yourself!"

"Why didn't you tell me what Absalom had done?" asked Absalom's sister, turning suddenly to Sarah the Less.

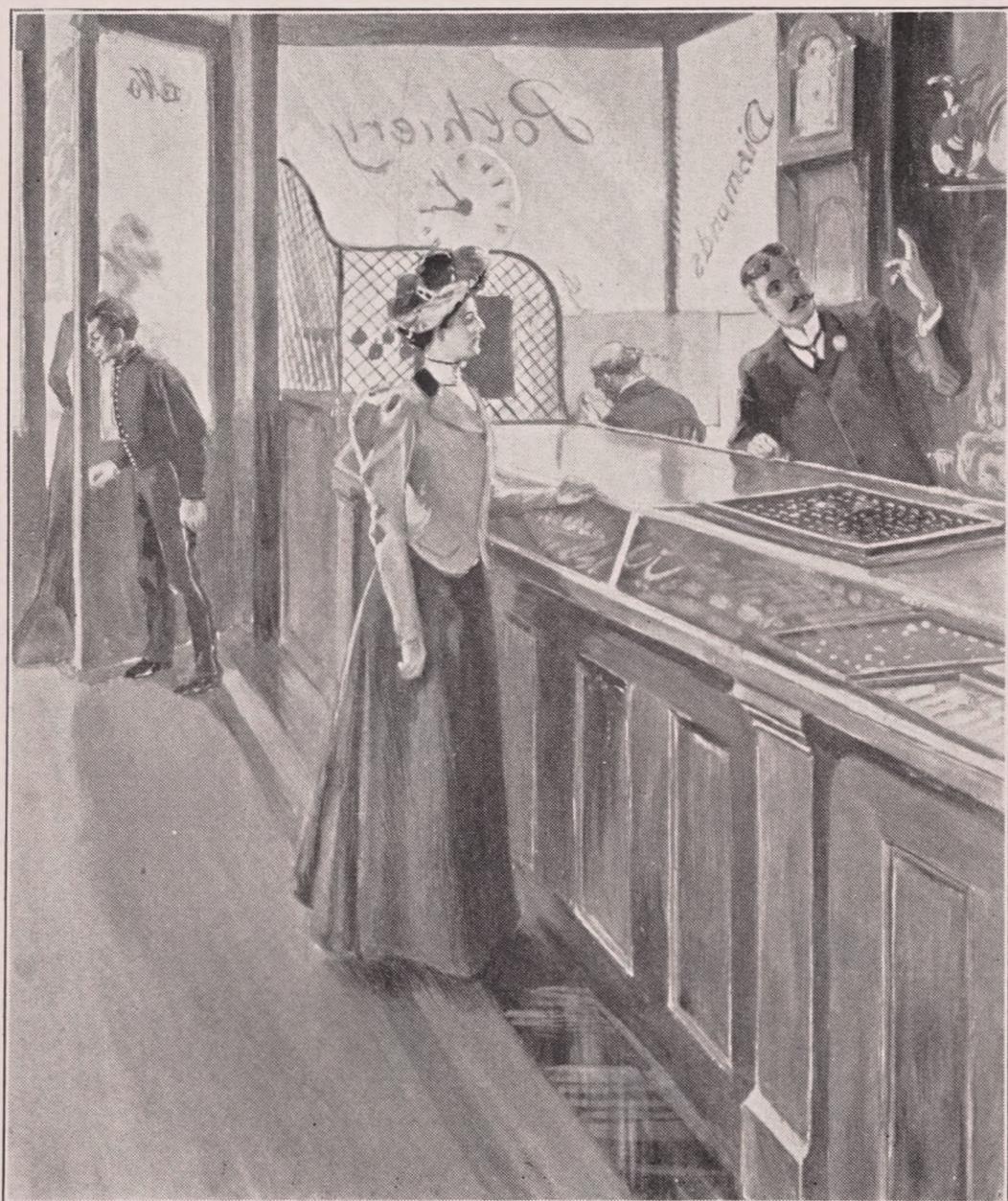
“I couldn’t bear to—oh, I couldn’t bear to!” she answered. “Everything has been my fault.”

She burst into tears and rushed into the inner room and shut the door.

## CHAPTER VI

**A**BSALOM would never be anybody now that he had given up his lessons with Professor McMillan, his sister thought, despairingly. It had been a sudden and short-lived hope that the professor's kindness and Absalom's unexpected ambition had given her. At least, things were not much worse with him than they had been before; he had left school, but he had shown a manliness and a moral sense which she had not supposed that he possessed; and she tried to comfort herself with this view of the matter.

He would probably go along doing "jobs" like this wood-chopping for Orrin Cressy, after he had paid for the lost ring. But even that would be better than giving shows! There had been a fear that Absalom would never do anything that involved effort. Many Gilboa people had said, in Sarah's hearing, that good old stock had "run out" in Absalom. This sudden outcropping of the strong moral sense of his



"I THINK THE YOUNG LADY SAID IT HAD BEEN  
WORN BY A GENTLEMEN," SAID THE CLERK."



Puritan ancestors seemed a refutation of that charge.

If only he need not have missed the chance to develop his remarkable mathematical ability!

Sarah revolved in her mind a plan to ask Uncle Abram to lend him the money to pay for the ring. But even if Uncle Abram's newly developed liberality should extend so far as that, which was doubtful, she was sure that Absalom would not accept it. He was queer; very hard to influence. It began to appear, now, that he had strength of character. He had determined to pay that money and "start fair and square."

But that he would sink into his old, indolent, unambitious ways, and never start at all, again, was what his sister feared.

She felt an impulse to ask Sarah Stuyvesant to influence him to try to borrow the money of Uncle Abram. Something held her back; she was not sure whether it was a subtle distrust of Sarah or a jealousy for which she was ready to despise herself. Sarah Stuyvesant could influence both Absalom and Uncle Abram as she could not. She resolved to think the matter over and

not allow herself to be influenced by any unworthy sentiment.

"You needn't feel bound to keep the large hat. I couldn't look worse than I do in the small one!" said Sarah Stuyvesant, dejectedly, as they cleared away the remnants of the luncheon—to which Absalom had not failed to do justice with an appetite sharpened by wood-chopping. "I suppose if we go over to Gilboa next Sunday, we must wear them."

"I am not thinking about hats," said Sarah Rogers, briefly, even sharply. Then she looked at the lesser Sarah's pinched and tear-stained face and reproached herself for being so unnecessarily disagreeable. Moreover, that dreadful hat had not been a small trial to her before the sharp disappointment about Absalom had driven it out of her mind.

"I don't think we need to wear the hats," she said. "I think we could change them, and Uncle Abram would never know the difference. I know that he has always been said to be color-blind. Let us go down to the milliner's, now."

Sarah Stuyvesant, red-eyed and dejected, did not wish to try on hats, but she wished

—oh, she wished—that Sarah Rogers would change them both.

“There are only a few things that suit me,” she said, “and you know exactly what they are.” So Sarah Rogers, glad to atone for being disagreeable, and not altogether unmindful of the pleasurable possibilities of having a pretty hat, took the two hatboxes to the milliner’s shop, and exchanged the hats, much to her satisfaction.

There were some alterations to be made and the hats were to be sent home. So Sarah Rogers walked homeward, unburdened, and looked in at the shop windows along the main street to divert her mind.

She halted suddenly before the door of Highbury’s one large jewelry store. She would like to know if Professor McMillan’s ring could really be worth one hundred dollars. It was only a small diamond. She had observed it on his finger, because in Gilboa men did not wear rings.

She entered the store, and pointing to some rings in a tray under the glass case asked the price. The polite clerk took the tray out and did not permit himself to look in the least surprised, as she had expected

he would do, that she should wish to know the price of diamond rings.

“That—that is the one I wish to know the price of!” she exclaimed, suddenly, pointing to a small brilliant stone in a black enamel setting. It was, she thought, exactly like Professor McMillan’s lost ring.

“That—oh, that would cost you about a hundred dollars, but it is not for sale—at least, not just yet.” The clerk smiled, slightly. “It is not a new ring and the owner wishes the opportunity to buy it back again within three months. We don’t do a pawnbroking business”—the clerk smiled again — “but there is a young ladies’ school here and we have sometimes been asked to accommodate in that way. That is a beautiful stone, although it is so small.”

“A—a young lady?” gasped Sarah Rogers.

The thought that flashed into her mind was too vague, too bewildering, to be called a suspicion; almost instantly, she reproached herself that it should come at all. The clerk glanced at her, evidently with a doubt whether his confidences were prudent. The stamp of rustic Gilboa was still upon her

rather than that of the seminary, and he looked reassured.

“Allowances from home sometimes run short,” he explained, “and the young ladies sell their jewelry.”

“It—it is a lady’s ring, isn’t it?” faltered Sarah Rogers.

“I think the young lady said that it had been worn by a gentleman,” said the clerk, and placed it upon his own little finger.

Professor McMillan’s hand with the glittering ring was what Sarah saw rather than the clerk’s.

She hurried away with a murmured excuse for haste.

Absalom had put Professor McMillan’s ring upon one of the beggar’s fingers, as he had thought at first—upon Sarah Stuyvesant’s finger. She had sold the ring, intending, perhaps, to buy it and return it later, as the clerk had suggested. Perhaps she had persuaded herself, because she meant to do this, that it was not a theft, but only a borrowing.

It seemed to Sarah Rogers too much like a nightmare to be true! Such things as thefts had not come into her life. Now,

the girl who had lived with her, who had been her close friend and influenced Absalom as no one had ever before influenced him, had been guilty of this dreadful thing!

She must have done it that she might pay for the dress at once; she had said that she could not endure to have the debt hang over her. Her sense of honor was then merely a pretense. She was assuming to be what she was not. In her effort to be just to her, she (Sarah Rogers) had almost persuaded herself that it was her influence that had developed in Absalom that fine integrity that had made him abandon the opportunity that was so dear to him in order to be able to "start fair and square."

Sarah Rogers' heart burned within her at the thought of the wrong done to Absalom, as she walked along the Highbury main street, scarcely conscious, in her excitement, of where she was going.

Why had Sarah Stuyvesant made this opportunity for Absalom, only to snatch it away so cruelly and with so coarse a sin?

Professor McMillan came up with and greeted her and walked along by her side.

"I am very much interested in your

brother, Miss Rogers," he said, with abrupt earnestness, "and I want you to coax him out of this Quixotic idea of abandoning his studies to earn money to pay for my ring that was unfortunately lost on the night of his show. It is altogether foolish, you know! I have told him that he may pay for it after he gets started upon his career in life, but he'll not listen to reason." Sarah forced a non-committal response out of her bewildered consciousness.

"I hope you are not upholding him in his stubbornness," continued the professor. "I rather suspect that he is influenced by my original and independent little friend who is, I believe, your friend and roommate. She has such a sturdy little Puritan conscience! It is somewhat incongruous with her frivolous foreign tastes and habits, and she says it has been developed by Highbury Seminary associations. Now, if you are responsible for her exaggerated conscientiousness, and she is responsible for your brother's"—

"I don't think that Sarah Stuyvesant has any exaggerated conscientiousness," interrupted Sarah Rogers, and her harsh tone that jarred upon his light one sounded grim

and unpleasant in her own ears. Yet she did not repent of it. How could one help wishing to cry out upon Sarah Stuyvesant as a whited sepulcher?

"I couldn't persuade her to bring your brother to a better mind," said Professor McMillan. "She said she liked that kind of a boy. Oh, I am quite sure that it is she who has put this high-flown notion into his head!" He spoke lightly and he looked with something of wonder at Sarah's pale and severe face.

"It isn't like Absalom—not like what Absalom has always been," said Sarah, slowly. "He hates to work. I think it may make a man of him."

At the same time she was thinking that she had been hasty in her dreadful suspicion of Sarah Stuyvesant. Sarah could not have done such a thing—she could not!

"If it makes a man of him it will certainly be better than making a mathematician," said Professor McMillan. "I will grant you that there is not too much of that sort of honesty in the world. Still, I wish you would try to influence him to stick to his studies, since I am not suffering for

another ring. And, by the way, I want you also to persuade my little friend Sarah Stuyvesant not to work herself to death. She is looking very pale and worn. Her French accent is very much in demand, and she is taking too many children to teach. She seems to have some special need of earning money, but you mustn't let her wear herself out. I have been very glad that she had such a friend as you."

Sarah murmured something, she was scarcely conscious what. Such a friend as she! That was what she had meant to be—a friend who should teach Sarah better than to be so foolish and mischievous as to be expelled from school. And Sarah had brought such trouble upon her that her heart was bitter against her.

But she must be just to her—she would be just, and try to put away from her this dreadful suspicion. It might be her duty, for Absalom's sake, to discover the truth, but at least she would wait for positive proof before she believed Sarah guilty.

Sarah was certainly making great efforts and sacrifices to pay for the dress she had spoiled; real sacrifices, for Sarah disliked

work as much as Absalom did. Sarah Rogers had felt the pathos of her small hands, bruised and hardened by the unaccustomed hard work at Gilboa.

The unaccustomed teaching would be toilsome, too, but Sarah would persevere in it, her roommate felt sure. With all this suddenly developed strength of character, was there a strange lack of moral sense?

Sarah Rogers' brain was bewildered with the effort to think the problem out. She must tell some one, ask some one's advice.

At the door of 15 Jayre Street, Levi Tackaberry's tin-peddling wagon was standing. In the living room, Sarah Stuyvesant was entertaining Levi Tackaberry with the adaptability which was her very attractive characteristic.

Gilboa was democratic and almost every man, woman and child in the town was Sarah Rogers' friend. With "a way she had with her," as Orinda said, Sarah Stuyvesant was rapidly making them all her friends.

But Levi Tackaberry was reticent of habit and now evidently disturbed in mind. He

was sitting with his whip held stiffly upright, responding to Sarah Stuyvesant's efforts at conversation only by monosyllables.

"I can't make anything of him," complained Sarah Stuyvesant, following her roommate into the inner room where she went to take off her things. "He wants to see you and he has something on his mind. How can Orinda think of marrying such a numskull?"

"He isn't exactly that. He has the reputation of being very sharp at a bargain; that's why he wants to marry Orinda," said Sarah Rogers, unwontedly facetious in her effort not to show her feelings.

"I want to consult you," said Levi Tackaberry, when Sarah Rogers had seated herself in the living room in an attentive attitude and with the doors closed, "as I wouldn't consult any living being that wasn't a good friend to Orindy. She promised to marry me, come New Year's day, and she has gone back on her word again and she'll not tell me the reason why. I want to know if you that are a friend to Orindy have got any idee of the reason why. I know Orindy thinks that you've got an old head on young

shoulders, and if there's anybody she would confide in 'twould be you."

Levi was tall and spare, with high cheek bones and an Adam's apple by which he seemed in danger of being suffocated. He was nervous, and he shuffled his feet uneasily and pounded the floor with his whip, as he talked.

"She hasn't confided in me, and I am very much surprised and very sorry," said Sarah, sympathetically.

"It was some time before she would agree to have me," said Levi. "Everybody in Gilboa knows that." He smiled slightly in a melancholy fashion. "But I never thought she would go back on her word after she named the day."

"It isn't a bit like Orinda!" said Sarah Rogers.

"That's just it! It ain't a mite like her, is it?" said Levi, eagerly. "That's why I'm sure there's some reason that I can't make out. And I run of an idee that it has something to do with—with that gal in there!"

Levi lowered his voice and nodded toward the closed door of the living room.

“Oh—oh, no, that couldn’t be!” exclaimed Sarah Rogers. “Why should you think that?”

Levi shuffled more uneasily than ever.

“I don’t know as I could say exactly why,” he answered; “but she and Orindy has been back and forth considerable while she was over to your house. Orindy was learning her to do housework. She appeared to think a good deal of her, Orindy did. And, well, she ain’t Gilboa kind of folks, anyhow, and I didn’t know but she had got it into Orindy’s head that I wa’n’t good enough for her. No more I ain’t and I know it, but I—I’d be a good provider, and I’ve set by Orindy ever since she was a little girl. It don’t seem to be exactly the fair thing for anybody to try to set her ag’in me.”

“Why, she wouldn’t do that—Miss Stuyvesant wouldn’t do that! And what reason could she possibly have?” said Sarah Rogers, in bewilderment.

“Being ’long of her seemed to set Orindy ag’in me; that’s all I know about it,” persisted Levi, positively. “I thought maybe I could set you to use your influence the other way. Being own folks, as you

might say, it seems as if she might hear to you more'n to them that are strangers and aliens." Levi cast a suspicious, disapproving glance in the direction of the inner room.

"I don't think that Orinda is one to be easily influenced," said Sarah Rogers, meditatively. "I think she makes up her own mind and wouldn't listen to either Sarah Stuyvesant or me. But I always liked you, Levi, always, and if there is anything I can say to influence Orinda I will certainly say it."

"And you'll not tell her what I came for?" Levi nodded again darkly toward the inner door—"nor let Orindy know that I asked you to help me?"

As Sarah Rogers let him out at the door he turned to drop a half-whisper, heavy with emphasis: "If you don't live to find out that she's a cur'us little piece, I'll miss my guess!" "She" meant Sarah Stuyvesant as a cautious side-glance showed. "She appears to me to be one of the kind that's got the power of making folks do just as they're a mind to. If she'd lived in the times when folks believed in witchcraft"—

Sarah laughed, absently and mirthlessly. She formed a sudden resolve to take counsel of some one. It should not be Miss Almy, who had warned her of Sarah Stuyvesant, nor her mother, because she was yet too feeble to hear the exciting story of the ring. It should not be Uncle Abram, for he seemed to be one of those whom Sarah the Less had bewitched. Orinda? In spite of a lack of education, Orinda seemed capable of giving sound and sensible advice—unless it might prove that Levi's suspicion was correct and that she, too, had fallen under Sarah Stuyvesant's spell.

"I think I'll go home to-night and spend to-morrow if you don't mind being left alone," she said, suddenly, at the supper table. "Josiah Stover will take me along with the milk cans, or I can walk."

Sarah Stuyvesant looked up in surprise from the baked beans which always seemed to assume for her the character of a penance.

"I thought we were going together to spend next Sunday," she said.

"I have a special reason for going to-night," said Sarah Rogers. Her tone was cold, and, in spite of herself, a trifle severe

to Sarah Stuyvesant since she had seen that ring.

Sarah the Less rose suddenly from the table.

“I can’t make you like me! You’re even worse to me than you were!” she said, in a voice that shook pathetically. “But I will show you that I am in earnest—that there is something of me. I’ve got the money all ready to pay for Polly Pendexter’s gown. Of course I—I haven’t earned it all yet, but I wanted to change Mrs. Pendexter’s feelings toward your mother. I realized, when your mother was ill, how much it worried her, and I couldn’t bear to wait!”

She rushed out of the room and came back to thrust a roll of bills into Sarah Rogers’ hands.

“Three hundred and fifty dollars! That is surely enough, isn’t it? I know you want to pay it yourself, and the responsibility was yours, of course. You never will like anything that I do”—Sarah Stuyvesant’s face was vividly flushed, and she was excited to the point of incoherence—“but, at least, now you will own that I have done my best!”

Sarah Rogers thrust the money away from her. She rose from the table and stood trembling in all her tall frame.

“I can’t take it. I can’t touch your money!” she cried.

## CHAPTER VII

SARAH ROGERS' mind was in a tumult of doubt as she hastily dressed herself.

That Sarah Stuyvesant should have stolen the ring and sold it seemed rather like the invention of a hackneyed, foolish story than a real happening. It could not be true. "I used to read too many commonplace stories; they have affected my imagination," she said to herself at one moment. At the next moment the overwhelming suspicion returned. She knew all about Sarah's allowance; she was constantly mourning over its smallness. How could she have come into possession of all that money? Yet the ring would certainly not account for it all.

"I must go away and think and ask some one else—some one older and wiser than I to help me think," she said to herself.

The hats had come and Sarah Stuyvesant was trying one on before the mirror in the living room when she went out.

"You meant the small one for me and



"'I BE FEELING KIND OF PEAKÉD,' SAID ORINDA."

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you chose my colors—just the right thing! It is really almost as pretty as my Paris hat!” Sarah the Less pirouetted and gave her head a little airy toss. But her face was pale and her eyes red-rimmed. “I don’t know what you mean! Why won’t you take the money? You treat me so strangely!” she said suddenly. She stood with clasped hands before Sarah Rogers, her breath coming quickly. “If you won’t take it, why then I shall assume the right to pay Mrs. Pendexter myself! I have a right to pay it! It is hard enough for me—if you only knew how hard!—to get the money.”

Her lips quivered. Sarah the Greater stooped suddenly as if to kiss her. She felt a sudden impulse to thrust away all this harrowing suspicion. She would believe in Sarah Stuyvesant! Yet she drew back. She could not—she could not! Sarah Stuyvesant’s color came and went.

“I couldn’t wait until I had earned the money, as Absalom can. I couldn’t. Then your mother would have had no chance with the summer people, as she will have when the money is paid. I had to get it as I could. You don’t know how I got it!”

She paused, looking curiously, breathless into Sarah Rogers' face.

"No, I don't know," said Sarah Rogers, and waited as breathless as the other Sarah. She could not speak like this if the dreadful suspicion were just, she could not!

"And I can't tell you," continued Sarah Stuyvesant. "But you ought to be glad that I can pay for that dress at once. Why won't you take the money?"

"Wait until I come back! I can't tell you now," said Sarah Rogers, and she said it stiffly and coldly. Had the girl so little moral sense that the matter of the ring seemed a trifle?

Sarah Rogers rode along among Josiah Stover's milk cans, with her mind full of miserable questionings. Would it not be her duty, for Absalom's sake, her duty even on purely moral grounds, to denounce Sarah Stuyvesant and tell Professor McMillan where he could find his ring? Sarah Stuyvesant's face, worn and pathetic as it had grown to look of late—even more pathetic for the merry, tip-tilted nose of Absalom's scorn—arose before her and her heart thrilled with pity—pity and a blessed, hopeful doubt.

She would see what Orinda thought; just such people as Orinda sat upon juries; clear-headed, sagacious, unbiased. She was sure that Orinda would be unbiased in spite of the nonsense that Levi Tackaberry had talked about her having been bewitched by Sarah Stuyvesant.

She went, among the milk cans, directly over to Uncle Abram's. It was on Josiah Stover's way and she could easily walk back home. It was Saturday evening and Uncle Abram would be gone to rehearsal; he sang a high and quavering tenor in the "seats," where he had sung since he was a young man, and never missed a rehearsal or a Sunday service.

Sarah paused upon the porch to collect her thoughts. She had not yet decided just how far she would confide in Orinda. Coupled with the desire for counsel was the strong shrinking from possible injustice to Sarah Stuyvesant. But Orinda, who liked Sarah, would be just and would keep the secret.

She could hear Orinda stepping to and fro, clearing away her supper dishes and singing a mournful hymn. Orinda always sang

hymns as an accompaniment to her housework, their character varying with her state of mind.

“On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand” rose high and shrill from the kitchen. Ever since she was a little girl Sarah had observed that Orinda sang “Jordan’s stormy banks” when she was very much depressed.

When she stood in the lighted kitchen she saw that the roses that still blossomed on Orinda’s forty-year-old cheeks were quite faded out and their color seemed to have gone into the rims round her eyes. This was so unusual a sight that Sarah cried out in astonishment.

“I be feeling kind of peakéd,” said Orinda, with candid dejection. “It’s a shame to let yourself feel so in the Lord’s good world, but—but I don’t know as there’s anything much harder than to be disappointed in them you set by.”

Sarah Rogers sat down in Uncle Abram’s great chintz-covered arm-chair and heaved a long, long sigh. She had “set by” Sarah Stuyvesant. It was all wrong to choose her for a roommate; she had been told so; but she had pitied her because she was going to

be expelled, and in the wake of the pity love had come. It had quenched the petty envy and jealousy that had threatened it; it had made her forget the act that had brought such trouble upon them, and it was because she felt that the love was there that she was trying to harden her heart. She did not want to be weak and foolish; she did not want to be deceived.

As in a flash it was all revealed to her, when Orinda made her moan that there was nothing much harder than to be disappointed in those you loved.

“That’s it, Orinda! that’s it!” she cried. “And when you have got to show what they are—to bring open disgrace upon them!”—

“Why, land—why, land!” Orinda dropped the dish towel and stood dismayed. “You don’t expect it’s bringing real disgrace upon him, do you?”

“You—you mean Levi. I was thinking of some one else,” said Sarah, the cause of Orinda’s trouble slowly penetrating her consciousness.

“I expect you know that I’ve jilted him. I expect it’s all over Gilboa by this time. But folks don’t know the reason why.

There's a good many that would say—"I told you so," if they did." Orinda relapsed into silent meditation for a moment after she had said this, and Sarah tried to turn her thoughts sympathetically away from her own troubles to Orinda's.

"You know Levi has the name of being snug," said Orinda, slowly, at length. "I've known he was some snug, but I never would give in, as my sister Marilly wanted me to, that he wanted to marry me for what I've saved up. I told him that the Eastport bank had failed and I didn't tell him that I took my money out a year ago. I told him that I'd lent my money that I'd saved up to furnish the house when there wasn't any great likelihood that I'd get it back again for a good while if I ever did, and that's true enough; for everybody knows there's a risk in lending without security. I told him I couldn't marry him on account of them two things and he—he cleared out quicker'n scat!" Two great tears rolled slowly down over poor Orinda's high cheek bones.

"But, Orinda, I'm sure he—he thought you meant it!" stammered Sarah, trying desperately to think how she could convince

Orinda of this fact without betraying Levi's confidence.

"Why hadn't he up and said that money was of no consequence between us two?" demanded Orinda. "That if my money was all gone, why, he was ready and willing to take care of me? That was what I was looking for! I'd made up my mind that was just what he would say. I'd even repeated it over and over again to Marilly, in my mind, triumphant. But he never said any such a thing! He never said a word! And it's all over between us. I'm making up a bundle of things he has given me to send back to him." Orinda resolutely repressed her tears, but her lip quivered.

On the sitting-room table Sarah could see a collection of treasures; not a large collection, although Levi and Orinda had been "keeping company" for more than fifteen years, for Levi was "snug";—there was a large and ornate photograph album and a bouquet of crystallized grasses, dyed in rainbow hues, a brush and comb in a cheap case, and a painted tin tray, and a feather duster, doubtless from his own wares. Cheap

and tasteless tokens of affection, but bedewed with Orinda's tears.

"Orinda, I'm sure it's all a mistake! I'm sure that you're the very apple of Levi's eye," said Sarah. "He thought you meant it and he was so hurt that he didn't say anything."

"Men folks are dreadful dull," admitted Orinda, doubtfully. "But it seems as if the dullest of 'em ought to know that folks don't always mean just what they say. I rather guess Levi would if he was a mind to."

"Take my advice and don't return his presents!" said Sarah, earnestly, after a moment's reflection. "I prophesy that Levi will get his courage up and come round asking you to reconsider!"

"You're a real comforter!" said Orinda. "It isn't to everyone that I'd own up how I feel about Levi, but I guess you would kind of suspect it, anyhow, seeing you've got such an old head on your shoulders. Your mother is doing real well, isn't she? and I declare she has had the best kind of nursing. If that isn't the best-hearted and faithfulest little soul that ever I saw!"

"Sarah, you mean. She is, isn't she?" said

Sarah Rogers, eagerly, and her heart grew warm—and then chilled suddenly, remembering why she had come.

“It’s real wonderful to see a city girl, not brought up to work, take hold as she did,” said Orinda, heartily. “Spunky wa’n’t any word for her! She’d burn her fingers to the bone and never let the tears come. It seemed as if she couldn’t do enough for you. It’s no wonder she felt so after getting you into such trouble. She told me about her spoiling the wedding dress. It seemed as if she thought of nothing but getting your mother well and then earning money to pay for that dress. If she couldn’t earn enough teaching French she wanted to come over here next summer and keep bees, the way she’d seen it done in the south of France! She said ’twas sure to pay where there was such buckwheat fields. I guess she put paying up into Absalom’s head, didn’t she? I don’t know but it’s kind of a pity that he shouldn’t stick to his studies, seeing Professor McMillan urges him to, but there! I do like to see him so spunky.”

Orinda talked on, while only murmured responses came from Sarah Rogers. It was

difficult, more difficult that she had expected it would be, to tell her suspicions of Sarah Stuyvesant to Orinda.

"I do hope the poor little cretur isn't going to work herself to death going to school and teaching, too," continued Orinda. "Of course it was a dreadful caper to wear that dress and spoil it so, and I expect 'twas nothing in the world but that that made your mother sick. But when anybody tries to make up for it as she is trying"—

Sarah Rogers rose, suddenly.

"I only thought I would ride over with Josiah Stover, since he was coming this way," she said. "Now, remember, I'm sure that Levi wouldn't have taken 'No' for an answer if he hadn't been sure that you meant it. He'll come back for another answer when he has time to think it over."

Orinda shook her head, doubtfully, although her face had brightened a little.

"Sometimes it seems as if other folks were right about him and he was too—too thrifty. Almost as if he didn't care about anything but money! But when you've set by folks for a long time it's terrible hard to leave off, whatever they be. And you can't help feel-

ing that you wouldn't have done it if they hadn't been good at heart."

"You do feel so, don't you?" said Sarah Rogers, eagerly. She stood still upon the porch, although the snow was beginning to fall, and the wind was keen. "And I think we ought to believe in people, don't you? unless there is absolute proof against them—absolute proof!"

"I expect so," said Orinda. "We're all poor, short-sighted creturs that need the Lord's leadings, anyhow. And—too—I expect there's kind of a warp in folks's natures sometimes, and you've got to put up with it anyhow and set by 'em just the same—that is, if they're your own or—or them that the Lord meant for you."

It was evident that Orinda's whole mind was bent upon Levi, while Sarah—Sarah was thinking solely of her roommate, Sarah the Less, the girl of the frivolous mind. "Them that the Lord meant for you." Was there a meaning in the providence of God that brought people together, or was it all mere chance? Had Sarah Stuyvesant been sent to her and she to Sarah?

She stood in the chilling wind and won-

dered. As she turned the corner of the house she heard Orinda singing again:—

“God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wo-onders to-o perform”—

Orinda was cheerful, hopeful again; that was Orinda’s strongest-hearted hymn. And she, Sarah Rogers, had gained a new understanding of herself, but she was still doubtful, doubtful. There was Absalom to think of—Absalom and duty.

Her mother and Absalom greeted her with surprise and immediate inquiries for Sarah Stuyvesant. Why had she come as soon as Sarah returned? and why had not Sarah come also? Would not she be lonesome? They were so fond of Sarah! But Sarah Rogers had no jealousy; she was sure of that. It warmed her heart to hear Sarah’s praises.

“She is good and true, isn’t she?” she said, eagerly, “good and true!”

She explained that she wished to see Orinda; that was why she had come. As for Sarah Stuyvesant, she had not thought of asking her to come, since she had but just returned.

Absalom looked at her curiously after her eager outburst that had changed, suddenly, into matter-of-fact explanation.

“You don’t seem to really think she’s good,” he said, gruffly. “I said in the first place that you only took to her because her nose turned up and you were freckled. I don’t think you like her at all, now. You don’t realize how much of a girl she is.”

This was a great deal for Absalom to say. He seemed to feel that it was, himself, and looked shamefaced. He was sitting at the table to-night in his rough working clothes, as Sarah disliked to see him. Absalom was a boy who liked to keep his hair smooth and wear a pretty-colored necktie—and he looked tired. This work might be making a man of him; Sarah honored and approved of him for insisting upon doing it, but if Sarah Stuyvesant had cruelly, wickedly brought it upon him, she could not forgive her!

“I—I don’t quite know what she is!” she said, impulsively.

“Well, she’s great—that’s what she is!” said Absalom. “A girl that there’s no nonsense about; a girl who likes to have a good time and who knows how to help a

fellow to put his best foot forward; and who can bear things like an Indian and— and makes a fellow ashamed not to do as much as she can!” Absalom was almost incoherent between his strong feelings and his embarrassed swallows of tea.

Sarah looked at him in wondering silence; Absalom so seldom approved of a girl! Her reticence seemed cold and discordant, and Absalom resented it.

“She’s more of a girl than some folks that is a great deal bigger!” pursued Absalom, evidently becoming sheepish under Sarah’s surprise and relapsing into boyish self-defense.

“Absalom, I can’t bear your doing this! I can’t bear your giving up your lessons! Professor will not be in Highbury another year,” said Sarah, suddenly.

“I’m going to pay for that ring if it takes me a year of wood-chopping! I’ve undertaken it and I’m going to do it!” said Absalom. Sarah heaved a sigh. Absalom would always be queer and “set.”

“It’s well that he hasn’t got any worse notion into his head,” his mother had said, philosophically.

"Absalom, can't you remember what you did with that ring?" asked Sarah, suddenly.

"You can't help getting mixed up when you're trying to do so many things at once," said Absalom, slowly. "I could have sworn, almost, that I slipped it on to Sarah Stuyvesant's finger. And she—she thought it might possibly have caught in the fringe of the ragged old shawl that she wore, for she remembered that she thought she heard something hit against the staff she carried—she was a lame beggar, you know."

"Why didn't she look? Why didn't she say something?" flashed Sarah.

"Why, she didn't know that I tried to put the ring on her finger, if that *was* the way of it. She said she didn't. You wouldn't think anything of a little sound like that, you know, when you had no reason to suppose that it meant anything. I did wish that she had told me before she did. Levi had sold the rags, then, at Barnby's mills. I went down to the mills and they let me look over the rags. But Levi's were all mixed up with others and there were mountains of them. I might as well have looked for a needle in a haymow."

“I don’t think a ring would be very likely to catch in the fringe of a shawl,” said Sarah, reflectively. “And I don’t see how you could help knowing, or how she could help knowing if you tried to put it on her finger.”

“The shawl was all rags and hitched up every way to make it look worse,” explained Absalom. “And there was a great rush and scramble ; I told the beggars to rush and scramble to hide what I was doing. It wasn’t so strange that the ring should be lost, I can tell you! It isn’t likely that it will ever come to light, but I shall get it paid for, sometime, and be my own man.” Absalom’s voice was gruff with feeling, but it sounded really manly.

“I rather guess I shall give up the show business”;—there was a slight twinkle in Absalom’s eye as he glanced at his sister—“and after I’ve paid for that ring I’m going to keep on working until I get enough money to give me a start. I’m going to pay my own way through college.” Absalom threw a challenging glance at his mother and sister as if he did not expect to be believed. “It

can be done, you know, if you have got it in you!"

Was this Absalom, the indolent, the unambitious? How strangely things came about! thought Sarah Rogers. It seemed true that "all is the gentle will of God"—these small, hard trials, the great fatalities, and all.

There came a jingling of tinware and a loud "Whoa!"—Levi Tackaberry's voice at the door.

## CHAPTER VIII

LEVI TACKABERRY brought a ragged old shawl into the kitchen and held it up for inspection.

“I found that amongst a lot of other rags that I hadn’t sold after all,” he said, “and I brought it along just to satisfy your mind that no ring could have stuck to it. See! that fringe is just as smooth as silk.” Levi’s countenance, shrewd, though kindly, was wrinkled with anxiety. “I know you’ve given up thinking about it and I don’t want to stir the matter up again, but I should like to convince you that the ring never got amongst my rags, wherever it went.”

“You wouldn’t have been to blame if it had,” said Absalom.

“No,” said Levi, doubtfully; “I hope my character is above suspicion, but still there has always been kind of a feeling in the community that tin peddling as an occupation was a strain on a man’s morals. And some things that have happened lately



"THE DOCTOR FRANKLY EXPRESSED A DOUBT  
OF THE PATIENT'S RECOVERY."



have kind of made me think that some folks may have been set against me"—

"Oh, no, no, I'm sure it wasn't that!" cried Sarah. "I'm sure that she—that no one would ever think such a thing for a moment." She drew Levi aside and spoke impressively. "You go right over there to-night, Levi, and don't take 'No' for an answer!"

"But—but you see it was this way," objected Levi. "She told me, for an excuse, that the Eastport bank had failed, when I happened to know that she took her money out of that bank more'n a year ago! What difference does her money make to me? 'Twas kind of slurring me and made me mad to talk as if I wasn't able to provide for her! I've kind of suspected that that girl that was over here tried to set her against me, and it come over me all at once that it might be she had kind of insinuated that I had got the ring"—

"Oh, no, oh, no!" cried Sarah Rogers, and there was an accent of piteous appeal in her voice. Must she hear more evidence against Sarah after she had resolved to believe her innocent? Certainly Orinda had implied nothing of that kind. "You go right over

and tell Orinda what you just told me—that you care nothing about her money, and it will all come right,” she said, earnestly.

Levi went. One could tell by the jingling of the tins that he was going rapidly.

Sarah was tempted to share her doubts and fears with her mother, with whom she had hitherto shared all her troubles, but as she was still weak, physically, though in a happy and hopeful state of mind, she shrank from disturbing her.

Mrs. Rogers said that she felt almost as if the ruining of Polly Pendexter's wedding dress that had seemed such a grievous thing were a providence. It had been the means of developing Absalom so astonishingly. And she loved that little girl; she had been so brave and self-sacrificing. If she had had the right kind of a bringing up she never could have worn that dress; she was sure that Sarah Stuyvesant had a fine and noble nature, now that something had happened to bring it out. She was being developed like Absalom. Sarah Rogers assented hopefully, trying to thrust away the lurking doubt.

“Be sure to bring Sarah home with you the next time you come,” her mother called

after her as she set out for Highbury, Monday morning.

She was returning without having consulted any one, and yet with her mind fully made up to believe in Sarah Stuyvesant. Professor McMillan's ring had been lost in the barn; that was the natural and probable supposition. Some other seminary girl than Sarah Stuyvesant had sold that ring to the jeweler. She must take Sarah's money and pay for Polly Pendexter's dress.

She greeted Sarah the Less with a half-apologetic tenderness. But Sarah looked at her, doubtfully, and was reticent and constrained. She said nothing about the money and they were obliged to hurry to the seminary, so there was no time for explanation.

Cordial greetings were showered upon Sarah Stuyvesant by the seminary girls, after her long absence. Even Miss Almy's severe manner relaxed. She told people, now, that the improvement in the girl since she had lived with Sarah Rogers was most remarkable. Sarah Rogers' heart was touched by the brightening of the pinched and wan little face under the girls' warm friendliness.

"I have treated her dreadfully," she said

to herself, with keenest self-reproach. "I was wickedly resentful about the spoiling of the dress. I have been hard and cold and cruelly suspicious. I was worse because I was so fond of her, because she disappointed me so; but that is no excuse for me—not the least excuse!"

There were many comments made upon Sarah Stuyvesant's altered looks. In the history class Lora Bangs, the actual perpetrator of the outrage upon Uncle Abram's hat—whom Sarah Rogers had never liked—sat beside her and whispered curious questions about Sarah Stuyvesant, with whom she had never been on good terms since the affair of the hat.

"She has changed so much!—and why is she so awfully in need of money?" said Lora, with eager curiosity. "She is getting all the pupils in French that she possibly can, and she used to be almost the laziest girl in school! And that isn't all!" Lora lowered her voice, cautiously. "She is selling her jewelry!—at least she sold a diamond ring at Fluellen's. Marie Duhring's brother was in the store and saw her. She asked to be allowed to buy it back again. I think that

seems so queer and common—to be pawning one's jewelry! Marie said that she turned red and white, and looked as if she would sink through the floor when she saw her brother."

It was Sarah Rogers' turn to recite. Rome in the time of the Cæsars?—the words sounded in her ears and had no meaning. The room swam before her and she grew faint. It was Sarah Stuyvesant who ran to help her as she stretched out her hands.

"Oh, go away, go away! I don't want you to come near me!" cried Sarah Rogers, thrusting her away.

The faintness passed in a moment. Sarah scorned such weakness and would not leave the class room. She put Sarah Stuyvesant resolutely out of her mind and recalled Rome and the Cæsars so that she was able to recite when her turn came again.

It was Sarah Stuyvesant who was pale and ill when they walked homeward together. Sarah Rogers, trying to collect her scattered thoughts, trying to decide what she must do in this harrowing dilemma, saw suddenly the white distress of her companion's

face. Was it illness or the workings of conscience? At all events one could not accuse or denounce a person in this condition.

"I think perhaps you would better send for the doctor," Sarah Stuyvesant said, as she lay down on the lounge in the living room as soon as they reached home.

Was this because she suspected that her evil deed had been discovered—only as a subterfuge to secure sympathy or insure delay? thought Sarah Rogers, and reproached herself, the next moment, for the unworthy suspicion, for there was every sign of illness in the pathetically worn face of Sarah the Less.

"You ought not to have done that housework! You ought not to have taken care of mother! you were not strong enough!" she cried. "I was cruel to let you!"

"You couldn't very well have helped yourself," said Sarah the Less, with a sudden spark in her eye. "I was just determined to be somebody—somebody like you! To make a woman of myself after I wore that dress. I couldn't do it; the work didn't hurt me, but—but things have been so hard! I—I couldn't bear to wait until I had earned the

money. Why, don't you see that it might be a year or more before I could earn all that money? and—and you don't approve—you won't take the money!"

Her voice broke, her small, worn face worked piteously.

"Don't—don't talk about it now! You are ill!" cried Sarah Rogers. "You must keep quiet. Your head is burning and your hands and feet are as cold as ice."

She sent for the doctor in haste. Perhaps confession would ease Sarah Stuyvesant's mind, but she felt that she could not bear to hear it now. What could she say to her? She seemed to have no idea of the enormity of the deed she had done. She complained that she "didn't approve," apparently realizing that she had been discovered. Was she one of the strange people who entirely lacked moral sense? Sarah Rogers had heard that there were such.

For Absalom's sake, for the sake of right and justice, Sarah Stuyvesant must be made to undo, so far as possible, the wrong that she had done, but now, whatever she had done, her heart ached with pity for her. The hardness was all gone. She seemed so small,

so young. The girls had done well to call her Sarah the Less.

“I will be her friend, whatever she has done, just so long as she needs me!” said Sarah Rogers to herself. Only one who realized just how Sarah Rogers felt about such evil deeds as Sarah Stuyvesant had committed, how every fiber of her nature revolted against them, could understand what this meant.

Along with her stern New England rectitude Sarah Rogers had a capacity for loving which she developed wonderfully in this association with the weaker nature that clung to her.

“Whatever she has done!” Sarah repeated, firmly, and bent suddenly and kissed the fevered face before she hurried away to summon a doctor.

Sarah the Less had clung to her.

“You will take the money—say you will take the money!” she had begged, half-frantically. Sarah Rogers had put her gently away, saying that she was not well enough to talk about it now.

She was delirious with fever before the next night. She had been overtaxed, the

doctor said, and seemed to have something on her mind that worried her.

She tried to draw the long breadths of Polly Pendexter's wedding gown through a finger ring and cried out that she was being smothered in its lace flounce. She sang shrilly, beating time with an imaginary staff, as if she were marching in the beggar's procession; she tried to help Absalom with his mathematical calculations, counting laboriously on her fingers—arithmetic was not her strong point—and then relapsing into the monotonous chanting of the multiplication table, in French, as if she were saying her lesson at the little *pension* in the south of France where her childhood had been spent.

Then she would suddenly become excited and frantically beg a jeweler to keep a ring until Absalom had chopped wood enough to pay for it.

“She will tell all about the ring! Every one who hears her will know!” said Sarah Rogers to herself. And she resolved that if it were possible to avoid it there should not be a strange nurse. When the doctor said that she must not undertake to care for

the patient alone, she sent for Orinda. Uncle Abram was willing to spare her, he liked "the little gal"; being proud of his domestic talents, he declared, also, that he always liked "a spell of doing for himself"; it kind of rested him. Orinda was glad to come. She said that she "set by that little cretur the first minute she laid eyes on her, and 'twould be a labor of love, if ever anything was, to take care of her."

At first her presence seemed to make the sick girl restless. Without apparently recognizing her she associated her, in her mind, with Levi Tackaberry, and she raved that she had torn down Levi Tackaberry's new house and made Levi ill of a fever.

"The poor little cretur!" Orinda exclaimed, with her eyes full of tears. "She's been worrying about that money that I lent her. I made her take it, too. It come over me all of a sudden, when I knew what a hurry she was in to pay for that dress she had spoiled, that if I should lend her the money, why, I could tell Levi that I couldn't furnish the house and so kind of find out if he did think as much of money as folks said he did. I—I didn't tell you, being so

worked up about this poor child,"—Orinda blushed as beautifully as if she were twenty instead of forty—"but it's all come right. Levi wa'n't looking for my money!"

"I'm sure he wasn't," said Sarah, but she said it absently. "Orinda, you lent Sarah money?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Two hundred and fifty," said Orinda, concisely. "I asked her not to tell anybody, for I didn't want Levi to hear of it and kind of suspect why I done it."

"Two hundred and fifty dollars!" echoed Sarah, slowly. And the great thrill of joy she had felt died away. Sarah Stuyvesant had offered her more money than that to pay for Polly Pendexter's dress and she knew about the ring—she knew! How strange a nature was this! Sarah Stuyvesant had really worked and suffered to atone for the wrong she had done and then had committed this dreadful wickedness.

"Ain't it pitiful, now, to see her wring them little calloused hands of hers because the flour gruel for your mother is burnt?" said Orinda, with tears running down her cheeks.

"I ought not to have let her take care

of mother! I ought not! She was not strong enough!" cried Sarah Rogers, self-reproachfully. "Oh, how much might have been saved if I had not!" she added to herself. One good thing had come out of it—Absalom was becoming a man; but the cost had been great—too great! She kissed Sarah's little calloused hands, she watched over her with utter devotion; she closed the doors carefully lest in her delirium she should divulge her pitiful secret.

She must not keep the secret; she could not when Sarah was well, but now she would protect her—and love her! Whatever had come, whatever could come, she should always do that. And so far as was possible she would protect her. There came a day when it seemed not long that the protection would be needed. The doctor frankly expressed a doubt of the patient's recovery. The crisis had come and she had but little strength. Orinda's softly-crooned hymns, which seemed to soothe the sick girl, changed their character. "God moves in a mysterious way" gave place to "Jordan's stormy banks" and to a camp-meeting hymn which, even now, many years afterwards, rings in Sarah

Rogers' ears when she recalls the darkened room and the tossing head upon the pillow—the piquant, childish face so wan and changed:—

“The day is a-wasting, wasting, wasting,  
The day is a-wasting, night draws nigh;  
Lord in the twilight, Lord in the deep night,  
Lord in the midnight, be thou nigh!”

The doctor was doubtful and they sent word to Sarah Stuyvesant's mother, in Paris, who cabled that she was herself too ill to come. Her uncle, her only other relative of whom they knew, had gone abroad. So Sarah the Less was left, a solitary waif and stray, to comparative strangers' hearts and hands—and none could have loved her better or cared for her more faithfully.

Sarah Rogers, with what Orinda thought exaggerated self-reproach, cried continually, “I am to blame for it all!” What she said to herself was that if she had been less hard and cold, more forgiving about the wearing of the dress, which seemed now but a childish escapade, she should have won Sarah to confide in her, she would not have left her so alone to allow the strange warp in her nature, or the result of her frivolous, unprin-

ciplined training, to carry her to such lengths. She was to blame!

Before her loomed an almost greater dread than the dread of Sarah's death; she must tell Sarah what she knew. She must force her to confess the wrong, or if she would not she must denounce her. It would be impossible to shield her from the consequences of such an act as that.

Meanwhile there was doubt and they must wait—wait with the ancient comfort of the cry of Orinda's hymn to hold them up:—

“Lord in the midnight, be thou nigh!”





" 'I FOUND THAT RING 'LONG WITH THE CORN IN HIS CROP!' "

## CHAPTER IX

SARAH STUYVESANT'S childish blue eyes, with dark hollows beneath them, looked out from a peaked little face, but the strained, unnatural look was gone. She was weak, but she would come back to life and health; the doctor said she would even come back rapidly, because the blessing of youth was hers.

Orinda sang joyful hymns and gay songs. Sarah Rogers told stories which Sarah the Less loved with a childish love, and read to her. The time of convalescence, especially with youth to back up hope, is apt to be a happy one, and it was sometimes even merry in the sick room at 15 Jayne Street.

The schoolgirls came in relays as soon as they were allowed. Sarah jested happily because her popularity had so increased in her absence.

"I always said there was more of her than there seemed to be," said one of the more serious-minded of them to Sarah Rogers, confidentially. For the story of the ruined

dress and Sarah's effort to atone for the trouble she had made had leaked out. Grace Albee knew it, and Grace was known as "The Highbury Journal."

"Would they have to know all the rest?" queried Sarah Rogers, inwardly, with a sinking heart.

Sarah Stuyvesant had begun to follow her about with a wistful, questioning gaze; and Sarah Rogers turned her face away when she met the gaze. The old shadow was beginning to be dark between them. It could not be long now—not long before all must be made known, was Sarah Rogers' constant, torturing thought.

On the first day when she was able to sit up all day, Sarah Stuyvesant had thrust her hand under the pillow, where she had insisted upon keeping her money, and tried again to put the three hundred and fifty dollars into Sarah's hand. Sarah had drawn back, with a distressed face.

"Not yet—not yet!" she said. "We will—we must talk about it soon."

"But there is nothing to talk about!" said Sarah Stuyvesant, with a rush of color over her pale face. "I had a right to do what I did. Every one borrows."

Orinda had then told her that things had come right with her and Levi, and that she was at liberty to tell that she had lent her money. Orinda, good, guileless soul, had listened to all Sarah's delirious wanderings without suspicion. But she should not have suspected, herself, thought Sarah Rogers, if she had not seen the ring in the jeweler's shop. She should not have known if Lora Bangs had not told her that Sarah Stuyvesant had sold a ring.

Sarah Rogers had listened with averted face, saying nothing.

"I like being so upright and strong as you—I like it!" continued Sarah the Less, earnestly. "I never knew anything like it before, and I tried to be so myself. But it is hard to be so—so severe. It is no harm to borrow! It is almost spring, and the summer people will be coming to Gilboa. I want the dress paid for before they come, so that Mrs. Pendexter will make things all right for your mother. It has almost killed me to be so to blame for things—and you—you have have been so good to me and yet you are still so strange and hard about the money!"

“Wait until next week—only till next week!” Sarah Rogers begged, in a cold voice, but with her heart aching with tenderness. It was so winning—this childish nature with the strange warp!

By the next week the patient was so much better that when Uncle Abram sent word that he and Absalom wished to come over Saturday to luncheon it was immediately decided that they should be allowed to come. Sarah Stuyvesant clapped her hands in childish glee at the prospect. She wished to cook her famous dish of sweetbreads and oysters, but it was feared that the effort would be too much for her strength. Moreover Uncle Abram’s message had been to the effect that he wished especially to bring the viands with him, all prepared.

“Your uncle has been cooking-up again,” said Orinda, with an indulgent smile. “If there’s anything that makes him feel as if he was one of the lords of creation, it’s cooking-up. Seems as if he couldn’t stand it to feel as if women folks could get the better of him, even in that way. And land! I have to say to myself ‘Remember Ananias,’ every time he asks me if his victuals ain’t good. It’s real

hard to have to hurt his feelings and yet even for a man he's a terrible poor cook. If I don't miss my guess he'll make a chicken pie, for he couldn't help knowing how dreadful soggy that one was he brought over here, and I know it's been a ranklin' ever since. But it will never do for that poor child to eat it. I've thought more'n once that it wouldn't be strange if this sickness of hers was owing to her eating the other one, for all it's so long ago!"

Sarah Rogers said they would manage to have something else and yet not hurt Uncle Abram's feelings. It was a relief to her that he was coming; it would put off the evil day of disclosure. She need not tell Sarah Stuyvesant what she knew until after that day.

Sarah the Less grew more and more light-hearted in the prospect of the luncheon. It was very strange, thought Sarah Rogers, that she did not suspect that she was discovered.

Uncle Abram appeared, on Saturday morning, carrying a huge basket and with all his grim wrinkles relaxed. Behind him came Absalom, dressed in his best, and with a new, subdued happiness in his face that made his

sister suddenly feel that wood-chopping was the very best work in the world for a boy.

“I got through early to-day and I’m going to see Professor McMillan; that’s why I’m so dressed up,” he explained.

“Now don’t you go to putting the cart before the horse, Absalom!” said Uncle Abram, hastily. “I want to tell ’em all about this chicken pie!”

What Professor McMillan could have to do with the chicken pie didn’t seem quite clear, but Uncle Abram was in one of his rare moods of overflowing good humor, and no one ever interfered with these.

Orinda cast glances full of warning upon Sarah Rogers as Uncle Abram proudly opened his basket. They meant: “We must protect our patient from that chicken pie!” How happy was Orinda, thought Sarah Rogers, to have no heavier care than this upon her mind!

Uncle Abram would allow no one but himself to touch his chicken pie. He took it out of the basket and set it upon the table, and he cut and served it.

“There is something very remarkable about this chicken pie,” he remarked.

"It's good!" exclaimed Orinda, who had just eaten her first mouthful, and her face beamed with cheerful wonder.

Uncle Abram frowned a little; there had been a slightly uncomplimentary suggestion about her ready response and its tone of surprise; but he smiled broadly the next moment; it was so undeniably good a pie! It entirely removed the sting of remembrance of that other pie from his mind.

Orinda decided that it was light enough for the invalid to eat, and Uncle Abram constantly discovered dainty bits for her. He almost forgot his own luncheon, an unheard-of thing for Uncle Abram.

Sarah the Less sat in a great armchair at the table, waited upon assiduously and petted until her little, wan face was all alight. She looked almost well again, and her tip-tilted nose, which gave her face a merry look, was no longer so incongruous as it had been in her illness.

"Appears as if considerable had happened since you two gals began to get your schooling together, don't it?" remarked Uncle Abram, when his mind had been wholly set at ease by the unquestionable success of his frosted sponge cake.

“If he’s got to frosting and made it come right, he’ll be dreadful hard to get along with. I ain’t sorry I said ‘Yes’ to Levi!” Orinda whispered, aside, to Sarah Rogers.

“And as you might say the schooling ain’t any great part of what’s happened,” continued Uncle Abram, reflectively. “For my part I always said that schooling was something that folks could dispense without. I calculate you have learned some things that ain’t wrote down in the books!”

Sarah the Less glanced timidly at Sarah the Greater, who avoided her eyes.

“I have been telling my niece that she knew how to pick and choose better than I did,” pursued Uncle Abram, looking, with quizzical kindness, at the lesser Sarah. “Appears as if hardly any two girls could have suited each other and got along together better than you two!”

“Oh, why wouldn’t Uncle Abram stop?” thought Sarah Rogers. Her face was scarlet with embarrassment and Sarah Stuyvesant kept stealing those shy, wistful glances at it.

“Now the day you sat down on my hat I should skurce have thought”—

“Oh, please, don’t say I sat down on your

hat!" begged Sarah Stuyvesant. "I suppose it was just as bad to make Lora Bangs do it, but"—

"Just as bad," said Sarah Rogers, and she did not smile. Even although she was disagreeable, a jarring note in the general concord, she would not fail to try to show to Sarah her strange lack of moral sense.

"I'm not such a child as I was then, anyway," said Sarah Stuyvesant.

"'Twas considerable many months ago," smiled Orinda.

"'Tisn't time that counts," said Absalom, and his voice was husky with a boy's diffidence in speaking of what he feels most. "Sometimes a fellow takes a start to grow. And I suppose it's the same way with a girl."

"There's a sight of growing pains that we all have to have," said Orinda, gently, with a sympathizing glance at both Sarah Stuyvesant and Absalom. "I aint so old but what I've known what they be myself, lately."

Uncle Abram leaned back in his chair suddenly and heaved a long sigh.

"I declare, Orindy, even when you get to be my age some of them pains is likely to get hold of you! I've had 'em lately my-

self!" He looked about him in a startled, shamefaced way, as if he had said more than he meant to. "I expect you can't even get to be a master good cook without feeling some of them growing pains!" he added, with a light laugh.

There was silence round the table for a few minutes, the silence that is apt to follow at such a time the touching of any but the lightest chords of life.

Growing pains! Sarah Rogers wondered, a little bitterly, if they were what she was having to suffer. She had been gaining a knowledge of human nature, but she was baffled and disheartened. The simple, trying experiences of life which Orinda thought had caused only "growing pains" were not as simple as they seemed! What would they say when they should know all the truth, as they must know it soon? It seemed hard and cruel to crush little butterfly Sarah with the truth. It seemed as if one ought to be able to say, "This would have been a dreadful deed, a crime, for any responsible person, but you are a child—a child!" But one could not say that—not even with as much truth as on the day when Uncle Abram's hat was sat

upon. Sarah Stuyvesant had developed into a woman.

“This is a curious kind of a world,” resumed Uncle Abram, sententiously, after the pause; “whatever way you look at it, it’s curious. And queer things are continually happening. Some of ’em are most as queer as the yarns that old Cap’n Amos Toothaker used to tell, sitting in the store. He was mate of the Flying Dolphin that sailed for foreign parts. When you get off among them gorillas and cannibals and such folks it seems as if ’most anything might happen and be according to nater. They’re so out of all nater as you might say, anyhow. But where a thing happens right in our own barns, as you might say”— Here Uncle Abram and Absalom exchanged significant glances and Uncle Abram put his hand upon his vest pocket.

What did it mean? They listened breathlessly to hear what strange thing had happened “in our own barns.”

But Uncle Abram went on to tell one of Captain Toothaker’s remarkable yarns, in which mermaids and man eaters and wild men figured, and to which no one listened

but Absalom. It was told somewhat absent-mindedly; Uncle Abram evidently had a tale in reserve which he was rolling as a sweet morsel under his tongue.

“Now that ain’t any queerer, maybe, for them foreign parts than things that I’ve known to happen right here in Gilboa before this part of the world,” he remarked, when he had finished his tale.

He began another one of Captain Toothaker’s yarns, but Sarah Stuyvesant interrupted him. She had half risen from her arm-chair and she leaned over the table toward him, her face aglow, her slight figure trembling.

“I know—I know what has happened!” she cried. “I know why you’re so pleased! I know why Absalom is going to see Professor McMillan!”

“Well, now I’m pleased because I’ve had such a master good luncheon, of my own cooking, in such good company,” said Uncle Abram, facetiously. “And Absalom isn’t going to see Professor McMillan because he has given up wood-chopping, are you, Absalom?”

“It gives a fellow muscle—and money,”

said Absalom, very gruffly, indeed. "I expect to chop for Orrin Cressy till spring, anyway. But I'm going to have a little time off for lessons."

Sarah Stuyvesant's face, that had darkened slowly, brightened again.

Uncle Abram's fingers moved toward his vest pocket again, and he smiled at her—smiled so genially, so jovially, that he scarcely looked like Uncle Abram.

"You've found the ring!" cried Sarah Stuyvesant, joyfully. "Oh, say you have! I've been more to blame than I could bear to say! I saw a sparkle on the floor and I thought nothing of it; if I had not been so stupid! Say you have found it!"

Found the ring! Sarah Rogers gazed in wonder, her heart beating like a trip hammer in her ears, as Uncle Abram drew a ring from his pocket, a ring with a flashing diamond and with black enamel laid upon its gold.

Had he been to Fluellen's? What did it mean? Had she made a strange mistake? If only Uncle Abram would not be so slow of speech!

"Now, you just listen to this! And what-

ever may be thought of Cap'n Toothaker's, this yarn is true! When I made up my mind to make a chicken pie to fetch over here, I looked round amongst my old hens and thinks I they'll be too tough. When a fowl has to be parboiled all to rags before it's fit to bake, why there's no taste to the pie, and any experienced cook will tell you so."

Uncle Abram delivered himself of this culinary knowledge with an air of great importance and grave headshaking.

"So when I looked round amongst my pullets and they were all laying, every one, it seemed a sin and a shame to kill 'em. I hadn't but two young roosters, but I remembered hearing Absalom say that they had more than they wanted to keep, so I just carried over one of my pullets and changed it for a rooster. That rooster was pecking round over the barn floors and in the stalls"—

"I'd swept and swept!" interpolated Absalom.

"Now don't you go to putting the cart before the horse! I'm telling this," said Uncle Abram, with a frown.

"The rooster was pecking round and he had pecked up more'n corn from that barn

floor! When I come to dress him I found that ring 'long with the corn in his crop!"

Sarah Stuyvesant clapped her hands for joy as they all gathered round Uncle Abram to see the ring.

"I declare I'm real glad for you, Absalom, and for more'n you," said Orinda, fairly weeping for joy. "Levi, he was real worried for fear folks would think 'twas in his rags."

"It makes a fellow feel as if he had lost about a hundred pounds weight off him," said Absalom. "But where that rooster could have found that ring after I had swept and swept"—

"Land! That great big barn floor is full of chinks and crannies," said Orinda. "You might have swept the ring into one of 'em and the rooster pecked it out. It don't appear to me so dreadful strange."

Uncle Abram resented this view of Orinda's. He said, "If 'twas printed in a paper, folks would think 'twas like one of Cap'n Tooth-aker's yarns."

Sarah Rogers had looked and listened, standing with clasped hands, her breath coming quickly and her face pale. She stretched

out her hands suddenly toward Sarah the Less, her self-control all gone in a rain of tears.

“O Sarah, Sarah, can you ever forgive me?” she cried.

Sarah Stuyvesant, wondering, drew the outstretched arms about her neck.

“Were you so angry with me because I brought the trouble upon Absalom by helping him to have the show?” she asked. “I felt to blame—it has worried me so! Oh, I am so thankful that it has all come right! And you will take the money now and pay for Polly Pendexter’s dress?”

“I can’t tell you what I thought, oh, I can’t tell you!” cried Sarah Rogers. “It was such a cruel suspicion! And yet—and yet things happened so strangely, I could hardly help it! Yet if I hadn’t been self-righteous and cold and hard”—

“You have been good to me—always good to me!” cried Sarah the Less, “except about the money for the dress. Being with you has made a woman of me! I don’t want to know what you suspected—don’t ever tell me! It’s no wonder, after what I did about the dress”—

“What’s that about the dress?” asked Uncle Abram. “I just took and fixed that up, seeing how ’twas worrying your mother when she was sick, and the money isn’t owing to anybody but me. Your mother said that you girls didn’t want me to know it, but I kind of coaxed it out of her. I never thought, Niece Sarah, that this schooling of yours wa’n’t going to cost anything but the Injin meal you lived on!”

Uncle Abram was still good-natured in the face of all this! What growing pains he must have suffered! his niece thought, wondering.

“I can pay you—I have the money!” cried Sarah the Less, eagerly.

“’Twas a hundred dollars. Mr. Pendexter said that was all the actual cost of the damage done. They got new stuff for the dress and had it made shorter so they could take some out of the flounce. Pendexter said nobody need pay, but I told him Gilboa folks were honest and the little gal that done the mischief, she was as honest as daylight, too, and working her fingers to the bone”—

Sarah Stuyvesant’s face was radiant. “Did

you tell him that living with Sarah had made me different?" she cried.

"No, I didn't, because living with other folks won't fetch out what ain't in you. I shouldn't wonder if you gals had kind of helped one t'other along"—

"Only a hundred dollars!" repeated Sarah, happily. "I can buy father's ring back after I have taught a while. Mr. Fluellen gave me fifty dollars for it and said he would keep it for a while so that I might buy it if I could. And I got another fifty for my Paris gown and hat. Orinda, I can pay you back your two hundred and fifty and you can furnish your house after all!"

Orinda flushed and looked shamefaced.

"I should kind of take a pride in doing it now I've found out that Levi is all he ought to be. It's been worth considerable to me to find out that Levi really thought more of me than he did of my money! Seems as if things had kind of worked together for good, for all of us. I expect they be doing that always on the Lord's providence, only we can't always see it."

"I can't—I can't believe that he meant me to think such a dreadful thing!" cried Sarah

Rogers, with a strangling sob in her throat. "Oh, I can't bear to tell you what I thought!" She clung to Sarah Stuyvesant as if they had changed places and hers was now the childish nature that leaned upon the stronger one.

"Don't tell me what you thought!" said Sarah Stuyvesant, soothingly, "and if I can guess, I'll not think about it! Don't let's ever speak or think of it again!"

Absalom started up to go. He was in haste to carry the ring to Professor McMillan; moreover, he had an avowed objection to seeing girls have "teary times."

He announced, before he went, that he was not going to allow Professor McMillan to persuade him to abandon wood-chopping altogether; he meant to chop his way through college yet.

It was years before the two Sarahs spoke again about the incident of the ring—after a strong friendship had been cemented by sisterhood, for Sarah the Less was married in the course of time to Professor Absalom Rogers, who filled the chair of mathematics in ——— College.

(If I should tell you the professor's real

name and the real name of the college, it is very likely that you would have heard it before, for there is much that actually happened in this little tale that may read only like a queer little comedy.)





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