

# PEGGY OF ROUNDAABOUT LANE

EDNA TURPIN





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PEGGY STUDIED WHILE SHE WORKED

PEGGY OF  
ROUNDAABOUT LANE

BY  
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"HAPPY ACRES," ETC.

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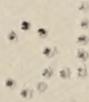


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No. 1.

TO MY DEAR LITTLE FRIENDS  
JEAN BLAIR,  
AGNES GREGORY,  
AND  
RUTH "EDNA" HARRIS



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Peggy studied while she worked . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>	✓
	<small>FACING PAGE</small>	
“Oh! What have they done?” asked Peggy . . .	86	✓
“Tell about butterflies you’ve seen,” Anne in- sisted . . . . .	190	✓
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# PEGGY OF ROUNDABOUT LANE

## CHAPTER I

**T**HE children were going home. The stream that flowed from Westside School went mainly along the eastern and northern streets of Georgetown, Washington's old west end. There was a little trickle southward to tenements over M Street shops and warehouses along the Potomac river. The westward flow was even smaller. Hardly a dozen children went beyond Georgetown College; and of the dozen, four were little Callahans.

Susie Callahan was in front, hopping from sill to sill of the trolley bridge that spanned the ravine behind the college. In her dingy clothes, with her bright eyes and her air of cocksureness, she looked like a little English sparrow.

"Mamie! Sissie!" she called to her two companions. "Hurry, hurry and get your paper dolls."

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“Girls—ugh! Paper dolls—ow! Here, boys, let’s play Cops and Robbers till time to sell papers.”

The speaker was John Edward—familiarily known as Jed—one of the Callahan twins. He and Elmore were alert, terrier-like little fellows, with stiff disorderly hair and outstanding ears. They had friendly blue eyes and big mouths that spread in smiles at the least excuse, and they seemed puzzlingly alike till you found out how different they were. Jed was the sturdier and quicker and firmer, and was followed by Elmore like a shadow.

The other boys—Albert Fischer, Tom Croye, Tim Rogan, and Mike McGinley—agreed eagerly to Jed’s proposal. Cops and Robbers is a favorite game in Georgetown where there are so many byways in which the fleeing “robbers” can dodge the pursuing “cops.” Jed and Mike began to choose sides and discuss bounds.

Peggy Callahan, who was behind with Molly Rogan, heard them and frowned.

“Jed! Elmore!” she called severely. “It’s straight home you ought to come and study for your hist’ry test.”

Jed made a grimace that was reflected on Elmore’s face. They expected and resented and enjoyed Peggy’s disapproval.

Peggy was a bright, ambitious, untidy girl of thirteen,—pretty, especially when smiling lips and dimpling cheeks made the best of her rather heavy features. She had a ruddy fair face, clear blue eyes, and dark hair that on damp days clung in adorable little curls around her pink ears and soft, plump neck. Her greatest troubles in life, so far, were the freckles that speckled her nose, and the difficulties of Eighth Grade English exercises.

Beyond the bridge across the ravine, the children turned from the trolley track and followed Roundabout Lane. It climbed and curved northward and westward in the semicircle of Holly Hill, passing front and back doors of six or seven small houses scattered among gnarled fruit trees, grape vines, rose bushes, and ragged boxwood hedges,—relics of a mansion that had once occupied the hillside. At last the lane turned southward to get to a tumbled-down house and a gabled cottage on the hilltop, and finally dropped back downhill to the trolley track.

Holly Hill and Roundabout Lane, remember, are in the city of Washington. The city paused a long time at Georgetown College, overlooking the ravine and the rugged little hill on which it was impossible to lay out orderly streets and buildings. At last it passed them by and settled

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down and spread out in Riverheight on the gentle slopes beyond the second ravine. Holly Hill was left to country-loving poor folks,—the Callahans and Rogans and Croyes and McGinleys and Fischers,—who want elbow room and space for potatoes and roses.

Instead of following Roundabout Lane with the other children, Peggy climbed a steep, rough little path that brought her quickly to the gabled cottage on the hilltop. She sat down on the porch step, jerked out a book, and began to study her civics lesson, loudly and severely. When Jed came around the house corner and saw her, he promptly turned his back and stuck his thumb over his shoulder to point out the spectacle to his brother.

“Peg thinks she’s so smart, she does.” Elmore agreed with Jed’s unspoken opinion.

“Come on, robbers! The cops’ll be after us in two minutes,” shouted Jed, and scampered away, laughing loudly.

Presently the chill of the late October day drove Peggy indoors.

“Peggy, have you got time to help me?” asked her mother, without looking up from the sewing machine.

Peggy frowned. “I guess so, ma,” she answered slowly. “I guess I can study my civics

and arithmetic and hist'ry and spelling to-night." She made the list as long and difficult as possible.

Her mother hesitated and looked twice at the heap of muslin on the table. Then she said, "Just sew the ribbon on those ruffles, whiles I make the sleeves. 'T won't take you long."

Peggy received the ribbon and muslin in reluctant fingers and began to sew slowly and carelessly.

For awhile Mrs. Callahan rattled steadily on the heavy old machine. Then she paused a minute. She drew a tired, uneven breath and frowned at Peggy.

"Land's sake, child," she said sharply, "hurry up! Go with a stitch and a promise. And sit where you can keep your eye on the window, whiles I'm at the machine. I wouldn't have Doctor Malone catch me machine-sewin', not for money. And him sayin' express I mustn't."

At that Peggy looked troubled. "I wish you wouldn't, ma," she said, sewing faster. "I could do that, if you'd let me. I could gather the ruffles and sew them on."

"Oh, your sewin'!" Mrs. Callahan said, laughing. And when she laughed, her hazel eyes darkened and sparkled and her merry crooked mouth ran toward the dimple that popped out on her left cheek. It would have taken, then, a more

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experienced eye than Peggy's to see that care and illness were ravaging her face.

"Ruffles all of a pucker here and skimped there and sewed on ever' which way!" went on Mrs. Callahan. "This ain't plain sewin', like you can do, child. You run that ribbon on the ruffles. I'll gather and sew 'em in a jiffy; and no harm done, if doctor don't catch me."

Mrs. Callahan began again to stitch rapidly on the machine. Peggy sat down beside the window and finished sewing the blue ribbon on the edge of one long muslin strip. Then she counted the other strips.

"Whew!" she said disapprovingly. "Seven ruffles! And if they were teenchy-tiny wider, five would come to Susie's waist. I don't see the use of so many."

"That's 'cause 'tain't your party," Mrs. Callahan explained wisely. "Didn't Kate Flannagan say she was havin' five ruffles? And it's such a mite little more work—what with the ribbon and two extry ruffles—to make Susie's dress the finest."

"But if doctor said——"

"He ain't said the word of a mother pleasin' a child for her first party. Ain't I give up takin' in sewin', for his say-so? Finish them ruffles, Peggy, or hand 'em over to me."

With a sigh and a frown Peggy resumed work. For many minutes, neither she nor her mother spoke.

The sun shone through the leafless rose branches and patterned the uncarpeted floor with sunshine and shadow. The baby, sitting on the floor with a necklace of spools to amuse him, tried to catch the sunrays in his little hands and crowed with delight.

The poor little room-of-much-work—bedroom, sitting-room, and sewing-room—was homelike and cheerful, like the smiling, untidy, tired woman. So was the room opening from it,—a room so tiny that there was just an alley-way between its two beds and space at the foot of the beds for a table and two chairs. The sun streaming into this room shone on a child lying on the bed beside the west window. She had her face turned toward the wall and was chattering to herself. Suddenly she laughed aloud.

Mrs. Callahan, smiling in sympathy, paused at the end of a seam. "Don't you want the shade down, Lois?" she said. "The sun's in your eyes."

"No, ma'm," said a cheery little voice. "I like bein' in the sun. Me and the Wackersons are havin' a nawful good time. We were jest startin' to a picnic and Mr. Wackerson he fergot

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the lunch box and had to go back for it. The way he had to run to ketch the street car! And him so fat and red-faced." Again the child-laughter rang out.

"I never see such a child for amusin' herself," Mrs. Callahan said, chuckling softly.

Peggy's thoughts were busy elsewhere. Presently she said, "Ma, that hundred dollars will be 'most as much as I'd make being cash girl or bundle wrapper. So I can go to school next year and take the business course, can't I?"

"What? What hundred dollars?" asked her mother.

"That scholarship prize I told you about," said Peggy, impatiently. "Ain't nobody in school ahead of me and I ain't going to let nobody get ahead. Then I won't have to stop school and go to work, will I? I can go to Business High School, can't I?"

"I want you should go to school," said her mother. "But you know how things is. Course, if you got that prize——"

"I am going to get it," declared Peggy, confidently. "That'll put me through next session. Next year maybe there'll be another scholarship prize. Or something will turn up, so I can go another year and then one more. Then I can get a good-paying job. And you——" Peggy

interrupted herself excitedly. "There he comes, ma. There comes doctor up the hill!—Just a stepping!"

"Gi' me the rocker, Peggy. Sit here at the machine. Quick! Slip that ruffle under the presser-foot. Motion like you was sewin', but don't you put in stitches for me to pull out. Hand me the waist. I'll do buttonholes, so as not to be losin' all the time." Mrs. Callahan searched flurriedly for her thimble.

Doctor Malone came in, as keen and wholesome as the breezy, sunny, autumn day.

"How are you feeling today, Mrs. Callahan?" he asked with the hearty vigor that inspired morose patients to feel and answer "Better."

Cheery Mrs. Callahan responded gayly. "Oh! I feel like a spring onion, doctor,—strong enough for anything."

"That's good," laughed the doctor. "And Lois?"

He strode into the little room and looked down at the bed-ridden child whose thin pale face looked paler and thinner because of the big, serious, dark eyes and the mop of thick, disorderly, dark hair.

Lois had been very ill with a heart trouble, caused by diseased tonsils. At first there had been some difficulty about getting her in a hos-

pital and then Lois had begged to stay at home. So here she was, past the painful and dangerous stage of the disease, but having to stay quietly in bed.

"You couldn't be getting on better than you are," the doctor smiled down at her.

Then he went back into the front room, sat down, threw one knee over the other and clasped the topmost with his big, capable, white hands. His humorous red-brown eyes were fixed on Mrs. Callahan while he spoke to Peggy.

"Sewing, eh?"

"Yessir."

In her embarrassment, Peggy twirled the wheel and zigzagged across the ruffle. She tried to resume an even course and broke the thread. Her mother frowned and moved involuntarily toward the machine, then recollected herself, pursed her lips, and sat still.

"And what were you doing, Mrs. Callahan?" asked the doctor, emphasizing the past tense.

"I'm helpin' Peggy by makin' buttonholes, sir," said Mrs. Callahan, meekly.

"Sew on, Peggy," the doctor exhorted mockingly. "I'm interested in seeing you manage that complication of fluffles."

"Yessir."

With the best of good intentions, Peggy

caught a fold of the ruffle under the presser-foot and was brought to an abrupt end by the twisted fabric.

"Ah! I should say it required an expert hand. Is this work of yours important, Mrs. Callahan,—a rush order?"

"It's no order at all, sir," Mrs. Callahan answered indignantly. "It's for my own Susie, goin' to her first party. Would I be lettin' her go ragamuffin-like? It would take the sweetness out of icecream itself. It's little I can buy—cotton ribbon and sleazy muslin—but a few extry stitches make a dress she'll think fine as a queen's. Sure, doctor, you wouldn't have me spare that little for a child like my Susie that's got so much doin'-without on the road ahead of her."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. He walked to the mantelpiece and took up a bottle. "You've been taking this regularly, Mrs. Callahan?"

"To the minute, sir," she answered truthfully.

Dr. Malone looked her over with careful, dissatisfied eyes.

"How about your appetite?"

"It's—not so bad."

"For breakfast you ate——?"

"We had the best of potato gravy, sir. And I took an extry cup o' coffee. Strong like I make

it, it's mighty strength'nin'," Mrs. Callahan said ingratiatingly.

"You have not been taking the milk and eggs I ordered."

Dr. Malone stated the fact so positively that Mrs. Callahan merely faced him with another fact.

"With me not takin' in sewin', there's no money for extrys, sir. And eggs that high!"

The doctor sat down again and looked her squarely in the face.

"I told you three months ago, Mrs. Callahan, that you would not have at home what you need—rest and proper food. You insisted on making the trial. You are—are not getting better. Now you must go to the hospital. Of course, it will take you longer to get well than if you had gone three months ago. If you postpone much longer," he paused impressively, "I'll not answer for the consequences."

"Wh—what's the matter?" Peggy gasped.

"Incipient tuberculosis."

Mrs. Callahan laughed weakly. "You're thunderin' over heads of Peggy and me, with them big words. Pshaw, doctor! I ain't nothin' but a little run down—underfleshed, and a hackin' cough is got a grip on me. You said yourself I'll soon be good as new."

"Yes." The doctor agreed gravely. "I said that three months ago. With proper treatment. But if you wait three months longer——" He shook his head doubtfully. "I assure you, Mrs. Callahan, there is no time to be lost. Fortunately, there is a vacancy at the hospital and I have arranged for you to go there to-morrow."

"To-morrow! I can't."

"You must."

"Why,—but with the ironin' not finished and the week's mendin' all to be done. And——" Mrs. Callahan looked helplessly at Susie's unfinished frock. "My children need me, doctor," she pleaded.

The doctor agreed. "Your children need you, Mrs. Callahan. You! More than they need ironed and mended clothes and folderols like this." He flicked the shabby finery with a man's contemptuous finger. "You must face the situation. If you go on this way too long—and none of us can say how much longer that will be—doctors and medicine can't help you. Instead of bearing your family's burdens, you'll probably be a burden the remainder of your life. I ask you to stop, for a few weeks or months, the life that is killing you, and go to the hospital and give us a chance to cure you. Fresh air and rest and the milk and

eggs will set you up again. And you'll come home a well woman."

"Oh, how grand!" exclaimed Peggy, squeezing her mother's workworn right hand in both her strong young ones.

"But Johnnie and the children," faltered Mrs. Callahan.

"We have made satisfactory arrangements for the children," said the doctor. "Miss Hartman of the Associated Charities came to my office this morning. She has arranged everything. Miss Drayton will take charge of Peggy——"

"Of me?" questioned Peggy.

"Yes; you will stay at her home."

Involuntarily Peggy clapped her hands. "With dear, darling Anne Lewis!" she exclaimed. "It'll be like a party every day. And nothing to bother my studying." She glanced distastefully at Susie's frock; then, ashamed of seeming selfish, she asked, "And the other children?"

"The two older boys will be boarded with Mrs. Rogan," said the doctor. "Lois will be put in a hospital where she'll have the best of care."

A protesting wail came from the adjoining room. "Don't want to go to no hosp'al. I ain't goin' to leave my Wackersons."

Unheeding the interruption, the doctor went on, "Susie and the two youngest children will be

taken care of at the Cloyd Home. Surely you are not hesitating, Mrs. Callahan. Don't you understand what this means for your health—and life?"

"There's Johnnie, sir," Mrs. Callahan faltered.

"Your husband? He can board with a neighbor. Or stay at home and take care of himself."

"Johnnie can stand a powerful heap of lookin' after," Mrs. Callahan said. She was deprecatory, but positive. "I can't leave him to his lonesome."

"Nonsense!" said the doctor. "Well, Mrs. Callahan, I must go. Shall I telephone Miss Hartman you're a sensible woman, and she can go ahead with her plans for to-morrow,—or, say Saturday, to give you a little more time?"

"If it wasn't for Johnnie——" said Mrs. Callahan. "But I can't, sir. I just can't and won't leave him to himself. Not long as I'm livin'."

Dr. Malone was not Irish and red-headed for nothing.

"You're a foolish, wicked woman, Mrs. Callahan!" he flared out. "I wash my hands of you and the consequences. You needn't send for me again. Go to the dispensary. Send for the city doctor. Good-day and good-by to you."

Two little hands clutched his arm, and brought him to a momentary standstill.

"Don't be mad, doctor dear," implored Peggy.

"We—she—— Do you think—— Is she so bad?"

"She'll get well, if she goes to the hospital," said the doctor. "If you could get her to go——"

"She'll go; oh, she'll go! Won't you, ma?" Peggy turned pleadingly to her mother, as the doctor strode away.

Mrs. Callahan's lips set in a firm line. She looked ill and worn, but unchangeably resolute.

"I ain't never goin' to leave your pa by himself," she answered. "It would be same as makin' a will and leavin' him to the gang. And I'm goin' to finish this dress. Shan't nothin' spoil Susie's first party. Peggy, will you finish sewin' on that ribbon or have I got it to do?"

## CHAPTER II

**T**HE next morning, a girl tripping blithely around a Georgetown street corner bumped into another girl who was walking slowly, with downcast eyes.

Two "Ohs" blended into one. Then came in the same breath, "Do pardon me!" "'Scuse me!"

With the next breath it was "Well, now, will you look who's here? Peggy!" "Oh, you, Anne Lewis!"

You will see and hear so much of this friend of Peggy's that we may as well pause now and tell you about her. Anne Lewis was an orphan whom a seeming chance had brought into the lives of two Washington ladies, Miss Sarah Drayton and her sister, Mrs. Patterson. After Mrs. Patterson's death, Miss Drayton made a home for her sister's husband and his only child, Pat, now a manly fellow of sixteen. To this home Anne had come, after many varying fortunes, to be the dear daughter of the house.

She and Peggy had once been classmates, but a session of careful tutoring by a cousin in Vir-

ginia had put Anne a grade ahead and she was now in her first year at the High School. She loyally and cordially kept up the acquaintance with the Callahans, who had been closely connected with the ill and good fortunes of earlier days.

Holding both of Peggy's hands, Anne amplified her apology. "It's so hard for me to remember not to do a thing till after I do it," she said. "Of course I know better than to dash around a corner like that. Didn't I hurt you, Peggy? Are you sure? Oh, I bumped your nose! It's red!" As the words were on her lips, she saw that Peggy's eyes also were red. It was too late now to ignore these signs of distress and leave Peggy the choice of speaking or keeping silent. "It—it isn't anything very bad, is it, Peggy dear?" Anne asked solicitously.

Peggy's eyes brimmed with tears. "I was meaning to come to High School to see you at recess," she said unsteadily, "and tell you I can't come to spend the day to-morrow. I'm awful sorry. But I'm to mind the children. Take them for a picnic."

"I'm sorry, too. But you'll come some other day. Do you know, I think sometimes put-off parties are the nicest? It's such fun looking for-

ward to them. And you'll have a beautiful time to-morrow, I know. Picnics are so lovely."

The cloud on Peggy's face did not lighten at Anne's pleasant words.

"You see, ma isn't so well," Peggy explained.

"Oh! is she in-the-bed sick?" asked Anne, anxiously.

"No; not that."

"Then I don't reckon she's very bad off. Don't worry, Peggy dear. Grown folks get out of sorts—and then they get in again, and it's all right."

"The doctor says she'll be all right if she goes to the hospital."

"Then she'll go and she'll come home well." Anne, to whom this seemed a simple and happy solution of the trouble, smiled reassurance at Peggy.

But Peggy refused to be comforted. "The trouble is about us," Peggy explained gravely. "The doctor and the Charities want us to break up. And ma won't hear to our being put away and pa being left there all lonesome. Oh, the doctor he got so mad! And then the Charities lady came and talked to ma. And I was asked to visit. Miss Hartman said that Miss Drayton——" Peggy looked wistfully at Anne.

"Oh! That's what Aunt Sarah meant when

she said I might have a surprise guest. How lovely! What good times we'll have, Peggy!"

Peggy returned the impulsive hand-squeeze, but not the smile.

"But I can't come," she said soberly. "Ma said she couldn't and she wouldn't have us break up. There's pa. We talked all over and 'round it last night. And Miss Hartman talked to pa. Last, ma said she'd go—making no promise to stay—if pa and all of us stay at home and I make a try at keeping house. So she's going to-morrow. And I'm to take the children picnicking, so they won't make an upsetment when she goes. Pa gave me ticket money for the bunch of us to go to Chain Bridge,—all but Lois and Dan. All the neighbors will see to Lois, and Mrs. Hicks'll take care of Danny-boy."

"Just think!" said Anne. "Your mother is going away, to come back well, and you all will have a good time picnicking. I don't see anything to worry about."

"There ain't no good time in it for me," said Peggy, dolefully. "The children are just crazy about going to hunt nuts. Ma and pa have told so much about the nutting parties they had when they were children in the country. Susie and Finn—and half-way Jed and Elmore—believe they're going out in the woods and get heaps and

basketfuls of nuts—picking them up like they did on the street one day when a colored lady's bag burst. And they'll go there and be disappointed about the nuts. And then they'll come home and be disappointed about ma's being gone."

Peggy ended with a sigh and Anne sighed with her.

"I see," said Anne.

Peggy, having rolled her burden for the minute on her friend's shoulders, stood watching Anne who, absorbed in thought, was as motionless as a poised butterfly. Suddenly her hazel eyes twinkled and her fair eager face broke into a smile so irresistibly gay that Peggy laughed, without at all knowing what was pleasing or amusing Anne. This sudden, contagious glee was one of Anne's charms.

"It will never do for the children not to have a beautiful day," she said. "As you can't come to lunch, I am going to ask Aunt Sarah to let me take the lunch to you and we'll all have a lovely picnic. Perhaps Pat will go with us. I'll ask him. Won't that be splenlightful?"

Peggy uttered an exclamation of joyful assent, but further discussion of the subject was prevented by the tinkle of the school bell.

"Ugh! I've got a cooking-school lesson,"

Peggy said, frowning at the bag dangling from her arm. "Hateful thing! I 'spise it!"

"Good-by!" called Anne. "I'll see Aunt Sarah at noon recess. Meet you after school." Then she opened a book and, on her way to the High School, made a hasty review of confusing "ie" and "ei" words. For the moment, they were the most important things in the world to Anne, for her interested attention was apt to be fixed on what was immediately at hand.

But poor Peggy's mind wandered sadly. Miss Ellis not only reproved her for inattention, but—unusual and mortifying event—required her to recopy her carelessly written receipt.

It seemed to Peggy that the school day would never drag to an end. When the clock hand crawled near three, she strapped her books together and sat in unusual and impatient idleness.

"Attention!" Miss Ellis said at last. The pupils rustled into order and she went on, "Please put all books and papers in order, as if you were to be dismissed at once."

Peggy's countenance fell, for she knew by experience that the "as if" boded delay.

"Then," continued Miss Ellis, "we will proceed to the assembly hall where Mr. Barnes is expecting us. Order! Stand! One, two,—forward!"

They marched into the assembly hall, with the

other pupils of the school. On the platform with Mr. Barnes, there was a stranger, a bulky man in amazing checked clothes. Beside him, Mr. Barnes, with his brown clothes matching his brown eyes and his brown pointed beard, looked even more dapper than usual. In a few crisp pleasant sentences, the principal introduced the guest,—their distinguished fellow-citizen, Mr. Dickson, who came to tell them about a prize he was offering to the pupils of the city schools.

Mr. Dickson came forward and acknowledged the introduction with a smile which made his mouth seem merely one of the creases of his many-folded double chin. He pushed down on his nose the spectacles which shielded his eyes. Then he fingered the massive gold watch-chain which crossed his portly waist, and passed a fat beringed hand across his shiny bald head. At the end of thirty silent seconds, he had the attention of every child in the room.

Jed Callahan put his hand to his mouth and covered a pretended cough. "Ain't he the gink?" he whispered behind this shelter. "If I was a fly, sure I would choose his head for my skatin' rink."

"Keep the stillness!" reprovngly said the classmate whom he addressed,—fair, sturdy, orderly-minded Albert Fischer.

“My young friends and fellow-citizens, including the girls,” began Mr. Dickson, and then he stopped to mop his brow and rub his palms with his handkerchief. He looked so embarrassed and so friendly that the pupils unexpectedly and cheerfully clapped their hands. Thus encouraged, Mr. Dickson plunged forward in his speech. The big political boss was, after all, wonderfully schoolboyish. In spite of his shyness and stage fright, he had a pleasant childlike vanity in addressing school children and putting himself before them as an American example.

He always began, as now, by telling about his start as a grocer’s boy, and how industry and economy and perseverance had brought him “up to where I am now,”—the “where” being evidenced by the sparkling rings and massive chain and expensive gaudy clothes.

Then he discoursed about the “grand country” and the “great and lovely city” which had given his opportunities, and about his interest and affection for the young folks who were starting to-day where he started yesterday. And then he came to the prize he was offering to the city school children, a prize that one must deserve—oh, greatly!—to win it, “and yet,” Mr. Dickson said, chuckling, “the thing is like lightning and you can’t tell where it is going to strike.”

The children looked interested, but mystified.

“It is a Carnegie kind of prize,” he explained. “A fellow can’t just sit on a wharf and make up his mind to save a drowning man. Oh, no! Things don’t happen that way. But one day he goes out fishing and a sudden gale upsets a boat near him and presto! there are a lot of fellows beating the water like fans. He doesn’t think of medals or of anything but of getting the guys out before they swallow all of the river they can hold and go down to the fishes. He gets a Carnegie medal because he was brave and level-headed and was equal to his chance when it came.

“That’s the kind of prize I am offering. Three gentlemen”—He named three men prominent in public life—“have kindly agreed to act as committee and, at the end of this school year, award this prize to the pupil in the Washington City school who in their opinion has performed the most heroic deed. And what is the prize? Why, that boy or that girl gets a medal of solid gold, with his name on it and why it is given, and he gets besides a hundred dollars in cool hard cash. And here’s hoping each one of you will win the prize.”

With this Irishism, Mr. Dickson concluded his speech that excited a friendly, surprised, happy

disorder which Mr. Barnes took some minutes to subdue. At last the pupils were dismissed and Peggy ran to meet Anne.

"I've been waiting for you a very, very long time," said Anne. "What's the matter? You're never kept in."

"We had to go to assembly," explained Peggy, "to hear a man tell about a prize he's offering. A hero prize, a hundred dollars and a medal. I wish Jed or Elmore could put out a fire or stop a runaway horse, and get it. That hundred dollars, with my scholarship—Gee whiz! We'd be the richest folks in Georgetown."

"Maybe one of your boys will get it," said Anne. "Oh, it's a splendid prize! Mr. Dickson told about it this afternoon at our school."

"It's same as the scholarship," said Peggy.

"In money," agreed Anne. "But lots bigger other ways. It's the greatest honor any one could have."

"Maybe you'll get it," suggested Peggy.

"Or maybe you will," laughed Anne. "Oh, Peggy! Aunt Sarah thinks our picnic plan is lovely and she has made it better still. She has been wishing to go to Great Falls while the weather is so fine. She and Pat are going with us to-morrow. Oh, it is so lovely at Great Falls and we are going to have such a good, good time!"

### CHAPTER III

SATURDAY was a sunny, crisp morning that encouraged the picnic preparations in two Georgetown homes.

One was the gabled red-brick Patterson mansion on Q Street. Across its narrow front lawn was a soldierly row of Lombardy poplars; a flagged, boxwood-edged walk led to stone steps in the retaining wall put in when a city street cut across the spacious old lawn. Beyond the rose garden at the rear of the house extended the unhindered lawn overarched by ancient elms. It was a gracious, old-fashioned, hospitable home,—too hospitable, Pat was inclined to think that Saturday morning when unexpected out-of-town guests came in and Miss Drayton had to give up her plan of accompanying the children to Great Falls.

For a while she demurred at letting them go with a party of children only.

Anne begged earnestly to be allowed to go: surely she and Pat could be trusted to look after themselves; and Peggy was so in the habit of

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taking care of the younger children that she was as good as a grown-up.

At last Miss Drayton yielded to the entreaties, and Pat and Anne set off with great glee and with packages of food which taxed their carrying ability. In the place of honor on top of the lunch basket, Pat put a large, well-filled paper bag which made him and Anne giggle whenever they looked at it.

In the little gray cottage on Holly Hill, the Callahans were busy preparing for what was to be a more eventful day than the youngsters dreamed. They were up early and wished to start the minute breakfast was over. But Mrs. Callahan sent Jed and Elmore into the kitchen for a strenuous toilet and she scrubbed Finn while Peggy dressed herself and helped Susie.

The neighbors were running in and out, in excitement which all the children except Peggy associated with the picnic.

Mrs. Rogan waddled up the hill two or three times and stood around in the way, repeating that she would always be ready to help Peggy, and Mrs. Callahan must not worry about anything. Of course you could never know what would happen, especially when you had to leave so many little children that were careless about fire and things. But she must not worry.

"She's a well-meanin' woman, is Mrs. Rogan," Mrs. Callahan said quizzically, gazing after the pudgy figure in the soiled gingham wrapper. "Peggy, you mind how kind she is and how touchy she is, and you keep out of the fusses of her and Mrs. McGinley. Kate McGinley is—is here, bless the heart of her!"

Mrs. McGinley had a breezy way of getting in before you knew she was coming. She had a keen, dark, ugly face, like her son Mike's,—quick to break in smiles or frowns. She went to the sewing machine and picked up a bundle of unfinished garments.

"Top of the morning to you," she said. "It's not a thing I have to be doing this day; so, if you don't mind, I'll finish the boys' shirts and this dress Susie may be needing next week. I'll run in again after the children start." With the last word she was out of the door on her way home.

"Poor Kate! If just she didn't have the gunpowder temper!" said Mrs. Callahan. "She has the best heart in the world. She and Mrs. Rogan both say they'll look out for Lois. You pull the window shade up high every mornin', Peggy, so Lois can wave to the neighbors, if she wants anything. And, Peggy——" Mrs. Callahan went on with instructions about the food and the house

and the children,—most of all, about the comfort and the welfare of Mr. Callahan.

“Keep the lamp chimbley clean,” she said, “and have the newspaper handy. You tie Bud Finn to the bedpost a hour every time he stays out a minute after five o’clock. But you watch the clock and turn him loose before six. Don’t let your pa walk in on any of your scrimmages.—No, Jed, you ain’t goin’ to wear your new necktie. Put on your pa’s old blue striped one. Elmore, go back and wash behinst your ears. You boys stop hangin’ ’round with your ears open. I’m talkin’ to Peggy, not to you.—And, Peggy, if you see your pa look restless, don’t seem to take no notice or say yea-nay. You are old enough now, Peggy, to learn ’tain’t no use to contrary a man. Think up something nice and pleasant to take up his mind. Like askin’ him to tend to Danny-boy while you go an errant to a neighbor’s. He’s the cuddly kind can’t nobody refuse.

“Peggy, Peggy, child, if you just knew how to cook! Your pa’s a fair cook for a makeshift, but he ain’t never had to do it, day in, day out. What a man needs when he comes home from work is something good-smelly and satisfyin’. Le’ me tell you this: If things don’t go all right, I’m comin’ home,—for all they say ‘hospital.’”

Mrs. Callahan went on with a steady stream of

“Do” and “Don’t” to which Peggy responded almost mechanically “Yessum” and “No’m.”

“Here—in the back corner of the top shelf—is the special coffee,” Mrs. Callahan said, opening the cupboard. “It’s for your pa when he looks restless or down in the mouth. Oh, Peggy, if only you knew how to make him a cup of good, strong, tasty coffee!”

“There comes Mrs. Hicks, ma,” said Peggy, welcoming a diversion.

Prilla Hicks was an alert little brown woman who always looked as if she, like the great baskets of clothes that she carried about, had been freshly starched and ironed. She came now to offer help and advice. She would keep baby Dan while the other children were at school. He wouldn’t be a mite of trouble, just company for her. And whether she was at the wash tub or the ironing table she would be in sight of Lois’s window and would come any minute the child waved to her. She was ready and glad to do it, but Mrs. Callahan ought to send that child to the hospital.

And Prilla would cook the Callahans’ food with her own, any time. “That ain’t nothin’ to say ‘thanky’ for,” she protested. “It’s a favor to le’ me do it. It’s a sight easier to cook for a fambly than for jest one like me, and it’ll be a

real help to me to do it. Days I got ironin' fires, your oatmeal an' sich truck can be cookin' well as not,—an' jest keep that much heat from goin' to waste. It'll take no time for Peggy to het 'em up. I'll tell her what to do."

"Sure she will," grumbled Peggy, when Prilla went back to her laundry work. "She's the biggest old advice-giver in the world."

"Shame on you, Peggy, to fault-find on her, and she such a nice, kind, smart, colored lady," said Mrs. Callahan, reproachfully. "When you feel fretted at what she says, just mind that her hand is always as ready as her tongue. And you be sure to help out her kindness by bein' no extry trouble. Keep your pots and pans clean and fix your victuals ready for cookin'."

As she talked, Mrs. Callahan was giving Peggy an object lesson, washing potatoes and dropping them in water, to have them ready to cook for the evening meal.

"Just scrub your potatoes off good, like I'm doin'," Mrs. Callahan said. "Mrs. Rogan wastes half o' hern, cuttin' off a thick peelin'. She says peelin's ain't fit for nothin' but hog slops. But I say you ain't got nothin' to leave for hog slops, when you got seven healthy children to feed,—or six and a pindlin' little one, bless her heart!"

she ended, looking toward the bed where Lois lay.

“Peggy, watch that the children don’t sit around with wet feet. Mind you keep the ipecac bottle handy and dose the children, if they’re hoarse. Peggy, watch out for croupy colds.”

A shadow came over Mrs. Callahan’s face and was reflected on Peggy’s. The one break in the Callahan family circle was the death from croup of the little fellow who was baby before Dan.

“I don’t see how I can go!” exclaimed Mrs. Callahan, as this thought brought anxious forebodings.

“Of course you’ll go,” said Peggy. “I’ll take care of the children. They ain’t goin’ to have croup.”

“You watch ’em good,” adjured Mrs. Callahan. “See they get to school in time. It’s a load off my mind to have Mrs. Hicks see to Lois. Thanks to that play of hers ’bout the Wackersons, the child don’t know what it is to be lonesome.”

At last the picnickers were ready to start. Finn was dissatisfied because his mother refused to let them take the clothes basket to bring back nuts in. He looked sourly at the small basket she provided, but consoled himself with, “T’other basket might ’a’ been too heavy to bring back

full. We'll have this heapin' up and runnin' over."

"I'm goin' to bring you a pocketful of nuts," Elmore said to Lois.

"I'm goin' to bring you a big limbful and you can play it's a tree," said Jed who was never to be outdone.

The other children gave their mother the casual good-bys due a day's parting, but Peggy ran back for a fierce embrace and a shower of kisses. Mrs. Callahan clasped her close and their tears wet each other's cheeks.

"Peggy, my girl, I'm dependin' on you," sobbed the mother.

"Peggy, you Peggy, come on! Hurry up! You'll make us miss the car," called the other children.

Mrs. Callahan gave Peggy a kiss and pushed her after the others, then held her close for a desperate final word.

"My girl," she said, "when—if the gang gets him, keep the children in the other room. He don't mean to. It's the gang, not him."

Mrs. Callahan always spoke of a certain failing of her husband as due to "the gang." To the younger children, "the gang" was an ailment like grip or measles—but with a certain mystery about it—which at times caught their father and dis-

tressed their mother. Poor Peggy was beginning to understand, but she answered bravely, "Yes, ma. I'll do my best."

"Peggy, you Peggy!"

Susie ran back, caught Peggy's hand, and dragged her away. "What's ma scolding you about?" she asked, looking curiously at Peggy's tear-stained cheeks.

Fortunately, answer was made unnecessary by the race down Holly Hill and along the trolley track and then downhill to the station. Ten minutes later, the children were on their way to Great Falls.

Anne and Pat had gone out earlier, and Anne, all merry excitement, met the young Callahans at the car-stop.

She explained that Miss Drayton could not come and that the lunch baskets were in the charge of a kindly caretaker. "Pat?" she said in answer to Jed's eager question. "Oh, yes! Pat came. He's—somewhere. We'll see him presently—after a while.—Oh, Peggy! there's the loveliest secret around here. I can't tell you now, but you'll find out later."

"Come on, come on!" called Jed, impatiently. "Come on! Let's go down the river to look for nuts."

"Oh, no!" Anne objected quickly. "Not that

way. Wait. I'll show you where to find nuts."

Peggy looked surprised. "What difference does it make where they look?" she said in a dejected undertone to Anne. "All they've got to do is to keep on looking till they get tired. Then we'll call it dinner time. That's what you said."

"Yes, I know. But it isn't at all that way to-day," said Anne, merrily. "I can't tell. You'll see. This way, this way, this way to the nut trees!" She tripped up the path, waving a basket, followed by Susie and the boys, and more slowly by the bewildered Peggy.

As Anne ran up the path, she called and called again, "Whoo-ee! whoo-ee!"

At last there was an answering whistle,—or it might have been merely a shrill bird note. Anyway, Anne, following the sound, turned from the path and scrambled up a rocky ledge, closely followed by the other children. As she paused uncertainly, the leaves of a near-by tree rustled and something fell rattling to the ground.

"Nuts! nuts! It's nuts!" Susie cried delightedly, picking up a large English walnut. The other children began a diligent search which was rewarded by a liberal supply of nuts,—a remarkable assortment for a Virginia hillside—pecans, English walnuts, almonds, and Brazil nuts.

Peggy looked amazed. "Gee! there are nuts

here," she said. "But I thought woods nuts had rough hulls you had to beat off with stones. That's how we found 'em—hick'ry nuts and walnuts—the time I went with the Fresh Airers. And what makes 'em fall so fast?"

"Must be squirrels," said Susie.

While Peggy was wondering and the other children were collecting the nuts with unquestioning delight, there came a rattle, clatter, and crash in the branches and Pat Patterson rolled on the ground at their feet.

"Oh, Pat! are you hurt?" cried Anne, running toward him.

Pat was already on his feet. "Not a bit." He reassured her by jumping up and down.

"We thought you were a squirrel throwing us nuts," chirped Susie's disappointed voice. "And you're just a boy."

"I'm just a boy," Pat agreed cheerfully, "but there are squirrels in that tree. That's how I came to fall. I leaned too far to get to the nest. Look here!"

He cautiously opened a peep hole in his cap to which he had clung in his fall. In it was a squirrel, its bright eyes shining and its frightened heart beating furiously. One second it was perfectly still and the next second it was making a

dash for freedom,—only to be restrained by Pat's firm, gentle grasp.

"No, no! Oh, no, my beauty!" he said.

"Poor scared little thing!" exclaimed Anne.

"Did he frow down my nuts?" asked Finn.

"Why didn't you leave him stay up there?"

"Le' me see him. Le' me put my hands on him," begged Elmore. "Whew! ain't he soft?"

"Le' me hold him in my hands," implored Jed.

Anne caressed the frightened, pretty creature, and then begged, "Now let him go, Pat. He's so scared."

Pat refused flatly. "I'm going to take him home and show him to Aunt Sarah and father. Don't look as if you had to cry, Anne. I'll bring him back. I'll turn him loose to-morrow, I promise you, at his own doorstep, under his own roof-tree. I just want to take him home to show him."

"Oh, won't you let Lois see him, too?" begged Peggy. "It'll be like taking the picnic to her."

Pat promised. At mention of Lois, Jed's mouth drooped. "I promised to take her a limb with nuts on it," he said. "And there ain't any."

"I promised her pocketfuls, and I got 'em," Elmore said, rattling his nuts triumphantly.

Jed looked so doleful that Anne pitied him and devised a pretty scheme which, with his assist-

ance, she proceeded to carry out. She selected a maple bough, a glory of scarlet and gold, which he cut off carefully. Then Anne procured a bottle of mucilage from the little shop at the car-stop. She took the pink and blue ribbons from the dainty sandwiches in her basket, cut them in short pieces, glued one end of each ribbon to a nut and tied the other end to the maple bough. The result was a wonderful nut-laden bough which was laid aside to dry.

While the other children played hide-and-seek, Peggy discussed her new responsibilities with Anne.

"Ma told me forty-'leven things to do," Peggy said dismally. "I don't know anything about cooking and I hate housework. Well, I'll do the best I can. But shan't anything bother my studying."

"Oh! you must win that scholarship prize. I know you can," said Anne, one of whose charming traits was a whole-hearted confidence in her friends.

"Yes," agreed Peggy, who appreciated herself. "Gee whiz! I'm crazy to take that business course and get to office work. If I don't, I'll have to be a cash girl and no telling when I'll work up to sales. I'd rather be one of those high-

toned lady office girls than anything in the world."

"Peggy thinks she's so smart," said Jed, who approached in time to hear Anne's remark and his sister's answer. "But Albert gets that scholarship prize. I hope he will. 'T would make Peggy so stuck up we couldn't live with her.— Say, ain't it time for eats?"

"Jed! Where are your manners?" Peggy said sharply.

Jed responded by thrusting out his tongue and making a face.

Anne restored peace by exclaiming that it really was lunch time and she began to unpack the baskets.

Such a picnic dinner as that was! Not many times in their lives had the young Callahans sat down to such a bountiful repast,—sandwiches in tempting and delicious variety, pickles, olives, little cakes and pies, and fruit.

When it was a physical impossibility to eat more, Anne and Peggy gathered up the bountiful remainder of the feast for the Callahans to take home.

"Lois must have a picnic," said Anne.

"The pink icing cake is for ma," piped up Finn. Peggy's countenance fell. In a flash came a

realization of what awaited them at the end of the homeward journey.

On the crowded car, Pat found a seat for Anne and stood beside her, quite unconscious of the fact that the squirrel's sharp teeth were at work, gnawing a hole in his pocket. All at once a little gray creature scampered up his arm and across the shoulder of a grizzled little woman sitting beside Anne.

"Murder! Fire! Death! It's a rat!" shrieked the little woman, jumping up and down.

"Rat!" gasped the fat woman across the aisle, jerking her skirts around her knees and leaping on a seat with amazing agility. But, as the car rounded a curve, she lost her balance and toppled over, clutching at the shoulders below her.

"Here it is!" cried Pat, making a frantic clutch upward.

"Here it is!" yelled a small dapper man at the other end of the car, giving an excited jab with his cane.

"Ouch!" cried the tall fellow beside him, whose toe caught the blow intended for the nimble little beast that was gone almost before one realized it was there.

"Don't hurt it; oh, don't hurt it!" Anne was pleading. She was unheeded in the general confusion,—increased by the frantic efforts of Pat

and Jed and Elmore to catch the little creature which darted to and fro, as if terror had given it wings.

The conductor came from the rear platform.

“What’s the matter here?” he demanded sharply. “Looks like you’ve all gone crazy.—Gosh, boy!” he exclaimed, looking at Jed, who had climbed on the back of a car seat and just then clutched upward, caught the empty air, and came down with a crash.

The door which the conductor had left open presented a means of escape to the terrified animal crouching against a projection of the car top. There was a flash of gray fur, a dash down the car and through the door, a flying leap on the embankment, and a rush into the woods beyond.

“Your squirrel’s gone, Pat Patterson. I saw him runned up a tree,” deliberately announced Susie Callahan, who sat calmly in a corner during the confusion, guarding Lois’s nut bough which Jed had entrusted to her care.

There was a volley of excited exclamations and laughter. Then skirts and voices resumed their usual level and a few minutes later the car clattered across the bridge and came to a standstill in the station. The small Callahans, tired and happy, trailed after poor Peggy to the home where a sad surprise awaited them.

## CHAPTER IV

FOR days and days, the Sunday after the picnic stood out in Peggy's memory as the most miserable day of her young life. The dismay of the children when they came home and found their mother gone faded into insignificance before the cheerless misery of that long bleak Sunday.

And yet Mr. Callahan had risen to the needs of the occasion in a way unexpected by any one, least of all by his devoted wife.

"I don't see how you can get on without me, Johnnie," she said, when she parted from him. "How can a man, with all them little children? 'Tain't reasonable to expect you to. I ain't makin' the hospital folks no promises. When you need me, say so; and doctors or no doctors, it's home I'm comin'."

"Sure, we can get on without you," Mr. Callahan answered promptly. "Ain't I cooked time and time again, on camp trips and when you've been sick? Barrin' fancy dishes like stewed tomatoes and such, I'm as good a cook as you. I

can fry and boil all right. Sure, we'll get on first-rate."

Mrs. Callahan was surprised at her husband's willingness, even eagerness, to have her go. She did not know that he had gone to the doctor's office, and Dr. Malone had explained her condition, emphasizing it with impatient scorn to the husband whose failings had thrown too heavy burdens on her frail shoulders.

"She's overworked, overworried, underfed," said Dr. Malone. "If we can get her to the hospital now, we can build her up. If she doesn't go—or doesn't stay"—he emphasized that—"at the rate she's going on, she'll soon be past our help. It's up to you."

So on Saturday afternoon, Mr. Callahan escorted his wife to the hospital. And on Sunday morning, he went into the kitchen to prepare breakfast and make good his boast of how well they could get on without her. But things all came awry to his hands. It took an unbelievably long time to prepare that simple, unsavory meal, with Peggy's inefficient help.

While her father was frying meat and making coffee, Peggy warmed the oatmeal, cooked the day before, and set the table and cut the bread into uneven hunks which she put on the table

beside the scorched bacon swimming in its own grease.

After breakfast, Peggy left the unwashed dishes on the table and helped the other children dress for Sunday school. It seemed as if they would never get ready. By the time Jed's hair was smooth, Elmore's tie was askew; and when at last they were all ready, Susie upset the dish of bacon grease and had to have her frock changed. Then she cried and said Peggy jerked her arm and she didn't want to go to Sunday school. Of course she must go. It would never do to fail the first day, when they had promised their mother they would go every Sunday while she was away.

"You needn't tell her I didn't go," whined Susie. "She wouldn't know."

"While she is sick, we've got to do things that we promised," Peggy said firmly.

Behind time and with Susie whining protests, Peggy started resolutely to Sunday school. In spite of her efforts, the children looked very unlike the neat youngsters whom it was the pride of Mrs. Callahan's heart to start off every Sunday morning.

Sunday school, which Peggy usually accepted with mild interest, was warmly welcomed that day. It was a place where at least one of the

leaden-footed hours could pass without any responsibility on her part.

The small Callahans went home with their spirits, like the day, dull and lowering. Peggy watched the skies with increasing apprehension. In her purse were the car tickets her mother had given her to take the children to the Zoo to beguile the dreary afternoon.

“And get pa to go, sayin’ like you need him to help with Danny in the Sunday riff-raff crowd,” Mrs. Callahan had charged Peggy. “Give Lois a nickel package of peanuts and ask Mrs. Hicks to notice her at the window.”

But if it rained, they couldn’t go. Peggy checked herself. Oh, it mightn’t rain! What was the use of worrying?

The children returning home found Mr. Callahan flushed and triumphant in the midst of preparing a dinner which he pronounced “fit for a king.” He couldn’t understand why women thought cooking such a job. This morning he hadn’t got the hang of it. The dinner of corn pone, fried ham, and apples fried in ham gravy, was eaten with relish. Then while Mr. Callahan went steadily through the Sunday paper, Peggy washed the dishes, a labor prolonged by many weather-watching visits to the window. In spite of her hopeful predictions that it would “clear

presently," the sky grew gray with one cloud which finally dissolved in a cold drizzle.

She had forgotten her mother's instructions to send Jed and Elmore, on Saturday afternoon, to pick up cinders and coals from the dump heap and around the coal yard. She started a blaze with paper and bits of wood in the old Franklin stove, but it soon died down and the boys flatly refused her demands for fuel. Their father, frowning over his paper, paid no attention to the controversy. The children, unhappy and cross and shivering, hugged themselves in old sweaters and shawls.

"Susie," called Peggy, sharply, "stop turning that machine."

"I'm jest stitching, to sound like ma," Susie said in a small voice. "Peggy, ain't we going to the Zoo?"

"In the rain? You know we ain't," answered her older sister.

Susie, her last hope finally cast down, began to sob aloud.

Lois, roused from an uneasy nap by Susie's wailing, asked fretfully, "Is it the same old day?"

Peggy looked at the clock hands, just crawling past three, and did not have the heart to say how much of the "same old day" was still ahead of them. She produced the package of peanuts for

Lois's consolation, and Lois made a brief diversion by pretending that it was a box of "store-bought candy" and that she was giving a party.

"Here's a choc'late with green cream insides," she announced, handing Peggy a peanut. "Jed, you take this pink pop-corn ball. Elmore, 'd you rather have a lemon stick or a peppermint? Finn and Dan can have hoarhound, 'cause they get croupy colds in bad weather. Susie—Susie's such a cry baby, she'd better have an all-day sucker."

Susie alone refused to humor Lois's game; she took all the peanuts allowed her, retired into a corner, and munched them in sullen silence.

The other children clustered around Lois and there was great smacking of the lips. But a nickel package of peanuts divided among seven children does not last very long. The party came to an end and Susie, standing sniffing by the window, was an added damper on the gloomy day.

"Come here, Susie, and let me wipe your eyes," said Peggy.

Susie shook her head. "'Tain't no use," she said plaintively. "I'm just goin' to cry again." And, good as her word, big tears rolled down each side of her quivering little nose.

"Ain't that just like Susie?" said Jed, disgustedly. "She's always squeezing out tears. Like

she's the only one. Ain't we all lonesome together?"

All lonesome together! Peggy, realizing the truth of Jed's words, remembered her mother's parting instructions. "Keep things clean if you can, but sure keep 'em cheery. If you don't, pa——"

There her mother had stopped, but Peggy knew how to finish the sentence. She glanced quickly at her father who had put aside his paper and was walking restlessly about the room, looking from the chill discomfort inside to the chill discomfort outside. He paused near the rack where his hat was hanging.

Peggy spoke quickly. "Pa, will you keep Danny from underfoot whiles I straighten up?" Without waiting for an answer, she caught up the dimpled, gurgling youngster and dumped him in her father's arms.

Then she turned to the other children, clustered disconsolately at the window. "Ain't we the selfishest bunch—and then some? Here we are setting around whining and grieving—and for what? 'Cause ma, that we pertend to love so good, is gone to rest and get well, 'stead of staying here to work herself plumb to death. And she said expressly for us to show how much we loved her by doing as well as we can. Now ain't we showing

her a lot of love? I'm going to get outside this selfish, whining bunch, I am. I love ma a whole roomful. I'm going to clean up this very minute."

Peggy jerked up the broom and began to sweep vigorously. The other children watched a minute or two, then yielded to the contagion of her cheerful resolution.

Jed, who half an hour earlier had flatly refused to get coal, picked up the scuttle and went out whistling, followed by Elmore who brought back an armful of kindling.

"I love ma good as you do," whined Susie, watching Peggy's diligent broom. "I wish I could give her a roomful of love."

"You can give her a faceful," said Peggy. "Jed's giving her a scuttleful of love and Elmore brought an armful. Don't you know ma says it gives her the gullicumflicks for you to whine? Maybe the gullicumflicks is a part of her being sick. It'll be pretty good loving for you to glue a smile on your face."

Susie wiped her eyes and stood before the mirror with her head cocked on one side, practicing a smile. She looked so comical that the others could not help laughing. It was wonderful how that laughter lessened the gloom of the rainy day.

Lois added to the mirth by announcing with a wry face, "Well, I guess I can love ma a spoonful.

You forgot my medicine, Peggy, and I was goin' to let it by—it's so horrid bitter!—but ma wants me to take it reg'lar, and so I will."

"Bully!" said her father.

"A spoonful of dosing is as big a loving as a whole roomful of cleaning," said Peggy.

After the dose, she gave Lois a segment of the orange kept beside the medicine bottle, straightened the patchwork quilt, shook the pillow, and moved Lois's cot so that the little invalid could watch the fire, now dancing and sparkling in the grate.

"Goody! that's like ma," said Lois.

"What is?" inquired Peggy.

"Doin' cheer-up things, 'thout waitin' to be asked. Looks like she just knows when my pillow is gettin' hard and lumpy. Ain't the room nice and bright?"

The change in the atmosphere was due as much to the glow in their hearts as to the warmth of the fire. Instead of the fretful discontent of an hour before, there was the general satisfaction of contributing to the home welfare and of proving their love for their mother.

"That's bully wood. I found two pieces of pine boards. That's why it blazed so good," announced Elmore.

“And I found some fine big coals. That’s keeping it going,” said Jed.

Mr. Callahan gave a grunt of satisfaction. He pulled off his shoes, and stretched his feet to the comforting warmth of the fire.

“Here are your slippers, pa,” said Peggy. “You might as well put ’em on, now we’re settled for the evening.”

Mr. Callahan thrust his feet into the slippers, took up his newspaper again, and was soon buried in its pages.

Peggy found some spools for Dan and decorated them gorgeously with red ink; she lent Susie a treasured package of picture post-cards; and when Finn said he was hungry, she brought him some bread and molasses.

“It’s gettin’ toward supper time,” Mr. Callahan announced with a sigh, as twilight deepened. He moved uneasily in his chair and looked toward the kitchen. “Gee! It don’t seem no time since I cooked dinner.”

“ ’Tain’t no use to do kitchen cooking to-night, pa,” said Peggy. “There’s some jam and sandwiches left from yesterday. I’ll toast some bread by this fire, whiles you make the coffee.”

Supper went off fairly well, although Peggy scorched both her face and the toast.

“Whew! I hate cooking!” she exclaimed.

"You don't know it to hate it," commented her father. "Not that it's all your fault. 'Stead o' makin' you do things, your ma 'd always say: 'It's less trouble to do than to tell.' She ought to 'a' learnt you."

"I don't want to learn cooking," said Peggy, petulantly. "Course, I want to help you, pa. But when I grow up, I'll never put finger on pot or pan. Everything in 'em comes out wrong for me. I 'spise cooking-school lessons. If they didn't take up so much time, I could do better in English, and that bothers me worst, for the scholarship prize."

"You ain't got no show for the prize, have you?" asked her father.

"Yes, sirree," said Peggy, proudly. "I'm head of everybody in the grade. Albert Fischer's best sometimes in English. But I'm ahead of him in 'rithmetic and hist'ry. Everything else we're 'bout even."

"You ain't smart as you think you are," scoffed Jed. "Bet Albert beats you."

"I bet he don't," said Peggy. "A hundred dollars! I've got to get that prize. I'm going to bed now and get up early and write that English exercise. Gee! I hate it."

## CHAPTER V

**T**HE first two weeks of Mrs. Callahan's absence dragged slowly past. Every day was long and lonesome, though no other day was quite so bad as that dismal first Sunday.

All the children, except Lois and baby Dan, went to school. In the morning, Peggy left Finn at the kindergarten and in the afternoon he was cared for at the playground until she could come for him.

Prilla Hicks took daily charge of little Dan. She was the Callahans' nearest neighbor, living in the house that shared the hilltop with their cottage. At first sight, you would have thought that no one did or could live in that tumbled-down old house. Fallen plastering covered the rickety worn floors; sagging doors, broken windows, decayed shingles, and loose weatherboards left it open to wind and rain.

But on the south side of the rubbish heap, there was a stout little shed room that was occupied by Prilla Hicks, who acted as caretaker and kept the old house from being carried off bodily for firewood.

Susie and Finn Callahan thought that this shed room was the most beautiful place in the world. The walls were papered with gay pictures from Sunday newspapers, there was a bright patchwork quilt on the bed, and a green wooden "chist" served as substitute for trunk and wardrobe. A strip of red carpet, rolled away under the bed on week days, lent its splendor on Sundays to the well-scrubbed floor.

While Prilla washed and rinsed and starched and ironed the great piles of clothes, she sang and chattered to chubby, smiling little Dan, whom she kept tied to a bedpost or a table leg, so that he might be out of harm's way. In and out of season, she stuffed him with meats and pickles and sweets that would have upset the digestion of any baby but a Callahan.

Prilla Hicks never put clothes on or off the line without smiling and beckoning at Lois and she often carried an apple or a cooky to the solitary, unmothered child.

"Poor by-herself child!" Prilla said pityingly.

But to Lois the hours were not long or lonely. She lay in bed day after day while the other children were at school, but kind neighborly eyes looked out for her and she had only to wave a handkerchief at the window to bring Mrs. Rogan

or Mrs. McGinley or Prilla Hicks hurrying to attend to her wants.

When she was alone, the child wandered in a world of her own, with an imaginary Wackerson family, as real to her as her own family and neighbors. In the cracks and crevices of the dilapidated wall, Lois saw their homes and haunts. There in fancy she visited them and spent hours happily, talking to Mr. and Mrs. Wackerson and playing with Big Girl Jinny, Tom Boy, and Little Sis Mamie.

The neighbors who pitied and tended the children gave least sympathy to the member of the family who needed most.

Mr. Callahan had passed the limit of his patience and was dangerously near the end of his endurance. Every day the household tasks grew more irksome to him. He loathed getting up in the morning to kindle the kitchen fire and prepare breakfast. He could hardly restrain his desire to kick over the kitchen stove when, missing Mrs. Callahan's discreet management of dampers and fuel, it grew sullen and smoked and refused to cook.

One morning he gave way to his wrath and threw his coffee cup into the kindling box. He had struggled a quarter of an hour to get the water to boil, to make the coffee. When at last

he poured out the muddy liquid and turned to sweeten it—he liked four spoonfuls—the sugar bowl was empty.

The next morning was even more trying. At breakfast time, Mr. Callahan discovered there was only one loaf of bread in the box. He started to mix some hasty hoecakes and there was no salt and only a handful of meal in the cupboard. He refused to share the children's oatmeal and went to work, breakfastless, in a black rage. How Mrs. Callahan would have trembled if she could have seen him! Even Peggy, with the limited wisdom of her thirteen years, realized that this haphazard mode of living must be stopped.

“We've got to see that things are on hand for pa,” she announced, gazing at her father as he stalked away. “Le'me see what we've got to have to-day. I'll take the money to school and get the things on my way home this afternoon. Here's potatoes, rice, prunes, molasses. No flour. A little meal. Salt box empty. Salt, flour, meal! How much money is in the housekeeping mug, Jed?” she called questioningly.

The Callahan household funds were managed very simply. On each end of the mantelpiece was a begilt, beflowered china mug. In the one

was deposited the housekeeping money; in the other was the rent money.

Jed took down the left hand mug. "Fifteen cents," he reported.

"Fifteen cents!" Peggy repeated. "Sure that ain't all."

"Sure 'tis. Two nickels, five pennies." Jed held them out for Peggy to see.

"There was a quarter," she said, knitting her brows.

Susie explained. "Pa had me take that quarter to go for bacon. One of the boys left the cupboard door open and Dirty Candy took the bacon."

Dirty Candy was the Callahan cat, so named because Mrs. Callahan said he was just the color of molasses candy pulled by the boys' grimy fingers.

"Hateful thing! stealing our victuals. I've got a mind to beat him this minute," Peggy exclaimed wrathfully.

Voices rose in one protest from the pet-loving children.

"'Deed you won't beat him," said Jed, seizing Dirty Candy in protecting arms.

"Sure not," Elmore confirmed, stroking the cat's ears. "He ain't stole nothing. The door

was open and he just took the bacon. He wanted it."

"The boys had ought to shut the door," said Susie.

"You shut up," Jed growled.

"Well," said Peggy, "I'll have to borrow from the rent money for the meal and things."

"Ain't nothing to borrow," Jed reminded her. "Pa ain't paid in any rent money yet. It ain't due for two weeks."

"Then I'll have to ask pa for some money, when he comes home," said Peggy, "and that frets him so. He says he puts more money in the mug every week than when ma was home and there ain't never anything fit to eat in the house.—Gee! it's 'most school time. Jed, put some coal on the fire. You Elmore! take Danny over to Mrs. Hicks. I've got to dress Finny before I'm ready."

Peggy went on to school, worried and resentful. Of course it was annoying to her father for things to be so at odds and outs. It was hateful. But she was not to blame.

She thought over matters self-pityingly, self-approvingly. How much she did! She rose early in the morning and swept and dusted and made the beds. On Saturday, she did the family washing. Before and after school, she struggled with

the ironing. She washed and dressed and cared for Dan and Finn. She helped Susie with her lessons.

It was true that she hurried over and slighted every task, but that was because she grudged the time they took from her lessons.

How much it would mean to her family if she could win that scholarship prize! A hundred dollars! Why, it took her father weeks and weeks to earn that much money. With that fortune, her mother would not have to worry about the rent, she could feast on milk and eggs, she shouldn't do a stitch of sewing. And Peggy could go to school and enter, well-equipped, the ranks of the self-supporting. It was a worthy ambition and Peggy was toiling faithfully to fulfill it.

That afternoon, she hurried home from school and struggled with a difficult English lesson until the page blurred in the twilight. Then she got up to light a lamp.

At sight of the dingy chimney, she recalled, with a little pang of self-reproach, her mother's charge: "Keep the lamp bright for your pa." Peggy hastily filled and cleaned it and then swept the room that she had neglected in the morning scurry to get herself and the other children ready for school. She felt cross and ill-used at having

to "waste" on housework the time that she wished to spend in study.

"Dan, stop scattering spools over the floor," she said pettishly, sweeping the beloved spools into a corner.

The little fellow looked serious and his lower lip drooped as if he were going to cry; all at once, he dimpled and smiled up at Peggy. "Dannny'll pick 'em up," he cooed, toddling after his playthings.

Peggy might have tried to make amends to Dan, if she had not been irritated just then by Lois's soft little voice talking to her make-believe friends, the Wackersons. "Oh, no, Big Girl Jinny! Don't you be coming to our house to-day. It's so hateful and lonesome since ma is away. You'd better be glad you ain't got a big sister, like Peggy, to scold you."

Peggy scowled at Lois. "Pick up those crumbs and wash your face," she said snappishly to Finn, a fair solid youngster whom nothing disturbed so long as he had an unlimited supply of bread and molasses. As he trudged into the kitchen, munching serenely, the door dashed open and Jed and Elmore rushed in.

"Ain't you 'shamed to come so late to your chores?" demanded Peggy. "And gracious!

Look at the mud you are tracking over the floor I've just swept!"

"Cross-patch!" exclaimed Jed, picking up the scuttle. Elmore made a face at her and scraped his feet on the floor before he started out for kindling.

"Hateful things!" commented Peggy. Then she sighed. "Well, I guess I'll start the kitchen fire now, so's to have it ready for pa."

She poked some paper into the stove and applied a lighted match. The paper blazed and the coarse kindling smoldered stubbornly. Peggy opened the window to let out the smoke that was filling the room; then she poked another piece of paper into the stove, and struck another match. Again the fire blazed and smoldered and smoked.

Mr. Callahan was on his way to this scene of domestic discomfort. How he hated the duties which lay before him! He was doing his weary best and was keeping straight—so far. His wife had made no appeal to him; she clearly thought it was impossible for him to do without her. The doctor's contempt had stiffened his resolution to prove that he was man enough to take care of himself and his family. But how hard and increasingly hard was the task! The struggles over the ill-cooked meals were bad enough; even worse were the long cheerless evenings, with only his

newspaper for company while the children conned their lessons.

While Mr. Callahan was brooding somberly over these thoughts, Tim Rogan joined him on the homeward way. Mr. Callahan's face brightened, for Tim always had a good-natured joke or a bit of news. They paused a minute together at the parting of their ways, where Mr. Callahan was to follow Roundabout Lane upward and Mr. Rogan was to turn off to his home on the hillside.

"See here, my boy." Tim gave his neighbor a hearty slap on the shoulder. "It's down in the mouth you are. What you are needing is to get out and have a little fun. I'm coming by after supper to take you out with the boys. You're as dull as dishwater, with the missis away."

Mr. Callahan dissented half-heartedly. "I've got things on my hands," he said. "I can't go."

"Sure but you can and you will! Put the little kids to bed and leave the big kids to mind themselves. It's about seven I'll be there," was the laughing response.

Mr. Callahan did not answer. He looked wistfully after his jovial neighbor. And as he stood there, you saw that his blue eyes were friendly and childlike, and that his mouth was good-natured and weak,—and yet there was about his jaw a hint of the unalterable obstinacy of the

slack, easy-going man. Presently, with a shrug of his shoulders and a scowl, he went homeward.

Peggy was still struggling with the sullen, smoldering fire when Prilla Hicks came to bring a pot of beans she had cooked for the Callahans on her "ironing fire."

"Lawsy, Peggy!" she said. "What is you all doing? That ain't no smokin' stove. Your ma ain't niver had no trouble with it. I pity your poor pa when he comes to sich a mess. My mammy always said a smokin' stove would drive the best of men to drink. What's the matter?" she repeated.

"I don't know," said Peggy, impatiently. "It didn't use to smoke. Now it just smokes."

"Looks like you ought to know. Ain't you studyin' all that kind of stuff at school? Why don't you know?" demanded her neighbor.

"'Cause I don't," snapped Peggy, wiping her streaming eyes, and turning the damper first in one direction and then in the other.

"Well, you needn't go to experiencin' now," said Prilla, who had been making investigations while she questioned. "I ain't been to school and learnt it outen books, but I got eyes and sense in my head. This stove's all choked up—ain't been cleaned since your ma went away—an' dampers been opened when they ought to been shet, and

shet when they ought to been opened. Elmore, give me the little stove raker. Hand me the scuttle, Jed. Now fetch me the long-handled stove duster." She shook and rattled and scraped and swept. "There!" she said at last. "It's ready for startin' a fire, if you knowed how."

"Mrs. Hicks talks so much and so smart!" thought Peggy, as she watched her officious kind neighbor. "She's always good-advicing.—I know how to start a fire as good as she does. I'll show her so." She opened the stove door. "I start that cooking-school fire any time," she said with a superior air. "This way. And so." And she proceeded deftly to put in practice her domestic science lesson.

"Laws, child! you did that as good as me, like you never studied it at school," said Prilla, approvingly. "Well, I got to go. I bet a fire like this will make your pa smile on the right side of his mouth. And I ain't see sich a smile on his face since your ma went away. A big girl like you ought to be doin' the cookin', 'stead of leavin' it to him."

Prilla Hicks went out, leaving the fire burning brightly, but a cloud on Peggy's brow. Of course her father was uncomfortable. Of course he was unhappy. And mother said—oh, how many

charges her mother had given for his comfort and happiness!

Mr. Callahan came in and gave a grunt of satisfaction at finding the fire burning brightly. Then his brow darkened at thought of the irksome duties before him. He picked up a dull knife and began to hack off slices of meat to fry for supper.

“Pa,” said Peggy, “please give Jed money to buy some meal and flour and salt. There ain’t any for breakfast. And there ain’t but fifteen cents in the housekeeping mug.”

Mr. Callahan grumbled. “Always something out and no money! This is all I’ve got to-night.” He held a silver coin in a reluctant hand. Then he tossed the money to Jed. “Get the smallest bag of flour. A gallon of meal. And a pound of salt. That’ll leave me a little change.”

“Pa!” Lois called, “tell Jed to buy some raisins for me. Ma said I was to have ’em on my oatmeal all the time I stay in bed. And I didn’t have none this mornin’. Peggy said they were all gone. Tell Jed to get some,—please.”

Mr. Callahan scowled, but the plea of the ill child was not to be resisted. “Get the raisins, Jed,” he said. “That’ll take the last cent. It’s hard a man can’t keep a few dimes of his money

to get a little fun for himself. And he leadin' a dog's life, hangin' over a cook stove."

Peggy heard his words and she understood them a half hour later.

Mr. Rogan came whistling to the door and asked, "Ready, Callahan?"

"No chink left," growled Mr. Callahan. "Not goin'."

"Oh, that don't cut no ice!" said Mr. Rogan, genially. "Treat's on me."

"Not a bit of it," refused Mr. Callahan. "I ain't dead-beatin' on anybody."

He persisted in his refusal and with a frown he settled down with his newspaper.

Peggy washed dishes in thoughtful silence. If she hadn't looked in the cupboard and seen what was lacking and asked for that money, her father would have had it in his pocket when Mr. Rogan came. He would have gone—and the gang would have got him again. It had been a narrow escape this time. And there would be times in the future. What could she do? Was there anything?

"A dog's life," he had said. "Over a cook stove." No wonder he wanted to get away from it.

"Wow!" she said, excitedly clapping her hands. "That's splendid!"

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“What is? what is it?” Lois and Susie wanted to know.

Peggy pursed her lips and shook her head. “I’ll show you,” she said importantly.

## CHAPTER VI

PEGGY could not carry out at once the plan that she had formed. She had to wait until her father put money into the housekeeping mug, on Saturday night. Then, as her plan was a secret from him, she had to let Sunday pass, for he was at home all day, except for an afternoon visit to her mother.

By Monday, she was so impatient and excited that she had to share her secret with some one. So after school she ran by the High School and walked home with Anne, to confide and discuss it.

Anne was interested and enthusiastic, and she and Peggy earnestly consulted each other and their domestic science note-books.

"It makes you seem like a real grown-up lady, to be planning about housekeeping," said Anne, admiringly. "It's a lovely plan. I can hardly wait to know how surprised and glad your father is."

Peggy folded the list she and Anne had carefully prepared. "I brought some housekeeping money with me," she said. "I'm going by the

grocer's and get these things. Then I'm going home and get busy."

She went home with several bundles and a dejected expression.

"Pa says he is giving me more money than ma had every week," she announced to Lois, the only person at home and so of necessity her confidante. "But it sure does go a little way in buying things."

"Don't you wish you could do like Mrs. Wacker-erson?" asked Lois. "She just takes a basket on her arm and goes to market and brings back everything they want. She has a hard time going up them steps—there where they are so steep—it's a nawful hard pull. She says she sure is glad she has 'em to come down, 'stead of up, on her way home, when her basket is full."

"You're the funniest child, Lois," said Peggy, laughing. "Playing you see houses and people in those cracks on the wall."

"You can see 'em, if you look," said Lois. "Anne sees 'em. There's the house and that little stick-up window is in the girls' room. See?"

"Where the plaster is broken?" asked Peggy.

"It's what you can call the broken plaster if you want to," allowed Lois, patiently. "It is a window. And those are the stairs." She pointed to one zigzag crack and then to another. "The steepest steps go up to the market. Over on that

wall, all the wavies there are sea waves and there's a tall tower growing by the sea. There's where Anne says the giants and fairies live. I wisht she'd come and tell me a tale about 'em. It's been so long since yesterday!" Lois ended wistfully.

Peggy did not answer. She had started the kitchen fire and she was consulting her list. "I'll boil the potatoes and mash them, and boil the rice," she said, checking the list on her fingers. "Then I'll cook the cabbage and fry the meat. And then there's the coffee to make. Ma does those things all at one time. How on earth does she see to so many things at once?"

Peggy washed the potatoes and put them in a stewpan, and she put the rice in the double boiler. Then she unwrapped a package and took out a piece of fat meat. It was hard work, with the dull knife and her unaccustomed hand, to hack it in thick, irregular slices.

"I wish I had remembered," she said ruefully. "Ma gets the grocer to slice her bacon. Maybe this little knife will cut better. It looks sharp."

And it was sharp. Peggy gave it a jerk that sent it sideways through the meat and into her finger. She stopped and tied up the wound and then painstakingly cut the meat into little chunks.

"I never saw any cooked that way," she said doubtfully. "But maybe it'll come out all right. I guess I'd better put the cabbage on and then I'll make the coffee."

But while she was grinding the coffee, she devised a different plan.

"I'll not have boiled rice," she said to Lois. "I'll borrow some of your raisins and to-morrow's sugar and make a pudding. Ma makes such good ones! I don't know just how much of anything she puts in them——"

"She puts in orange peel," volunteered Lois. "She always saves my orange peel, you know, and cooks it with sugar."

"I haven't any orange peel," Peggy said. "But there's the lemon peel from our Sunday lemonade. If I put sugar over that, I guess it'll do as well as orange. It's raw, but it'll get cooked in the pudding."

"Sure!" agreed Lois.

Peggy began to mix the ingredients that she thought would do for a pudding. Mindful of the family fondness for sweets, she put on a double quantity of rice. As it swelled in cooking it seemed to Peggy that it grew and increased and multiplied. She put some in the dish she had prepared for the pudding, and then she filled the little brown baking dish, and then she put over-

running measure in a tin cup, and still there was more!

"It's like gathering up the manna, in last Sunday's lesson," snickered Susie, who had come in and was sitting by the table, watching Peggy. Susie had an unpleasant way of being very cheerful when other people were in trouble.

Peggy saw nothing amusing in the situation. "And still there's too much!" she exclaimed disgustedly, depositing a big spoonful in the garbage can. "I've unmeasured so much I don't know how much sugar and things to put in. I'll just have to guess and taste."

While Peggy and Susie and Lois were tasting and consulting about the pudding, the room filled with the sudden smoke and odor of burning meat. Peggy snatched the charred bacon off the fire.

"You hadn't oughter kept poking wood in the stove," she said wrathfully to Jed.

"Didn't you tell me to keep up a good fire?" he answered as wrathfully. "Gee! That's like a girl. Asks you to help and then, when you do what she says, she blames you for everything that's wrong. Elmore! Come on and let's go—you know," he concluded meaningly. And away they went, unheeding Peggy's request for more wood.

Peggy looked into the oven and found the po-

tatoes sharing the fate of the bacon. She cut off the burnt part and put the small remainder aside with the eggs, and devoted herself again to the pudding.

"The fire's 'most out," piped up Susie, presently, "and there ain't no more wood here but two sticks, an' they're too long."

"Oh, well!" Peggy said desperately. "I guess the pudding is done. It has been in the oven a long time. Anyway, it's no use for it to stay there, for the stove's so cold I can lay my hand on it, an' it's 'most time for father to come. Lois, do you remember how many cups of water I put in the coffee pot?"

Lois did not. Her sister poured in another cupful—and then remembered that she had already put in the right quantity.

Peggy put the unsightly, unsavory food in the best dishes and arranged them on the table. An hour earlier, when she had looked forward with pleasure to the meal which she now dreaded, she had gathered the last chrysanthemums from the one bush in a sheltered nook, and put them in a broken mug on the table. Somehow, their prettiness made her failure seem the more forlorn.

As she stood looking dejectedly at the result of her labors, her father came in.

"What are you doing, Peggy?" he asked.

"I just thought I'd cook supper, pa," she said with none of the pride in her voice which had been in her heart an hour before.

For a minute, her father's face brightened. "'T would sure be a comfort if I could be spared gettin' one meal," he said and took his place at the table. But his face darkened when he looked at and tasted the food. He sat there in a silence more dreadful to Peggy than petulant or angry words. Jed and Elmore were merciless in ridicule.

"What's this?" asked Jed, spearing a chunk of bacon. "Burnt! Smoked! Ugh! Take it away from me," he said, slinging it on Elmore's plate.

"'Tain't no worse than this," Elmore promptly responded, dumping his cabbage on Jed's plate. "What did you do to it, Peggy? It's saltier than salt."

Peggy tasted it. "Guess I forgot and put salt in twice," she said dejectedly.

"Three, four times more like," snickered Elmore.

"Did Peggy think she could cook?" asked Jed, derisively. "Oh! she can cook, can't she? I guess she can—not!"

"Ain't she the cook? Now ain't she? Ain't she not?" chanted Elmore.

Peggy sat in mortified silence, watching her

father as, without a word, he looked at and tasted and pushed aside one article of food after another. The children's comments grew louder and more unfavorable.

"What's them flowers on the table for, Peggy?" asked Elmore. "We can't eat 'em. Victuals is victuals, and flowers is flowers. I don't see no sense in mixing 'em."

"I've got a pudding," Peggy said, trying hard to steady her voice, as she set the dish before her father. If only that was good! Oh, it must be! She had worked so hard. Surely everything could not be a failure. The concoction looked unappetizing, coming unbrowned from the cold oven—and alas! it tasted as bad as it looked. The rice was half-cooked and the lemon peel had given a bitter twang which the small amount of sugar and the half-raw raisins could not conceal. It was the last straw. Mr. Callahan pushed aside his chair and dumped the contents of his plate in the fire.

"Don't you waste no more good victuals with your cookin'," he stormed. "Ain't this a life for a man? To come home, hungry and tired, to a supper like this!"

He jerked up his hat and was stalking from the room. Poor Peggy burst into loud sobs.

“I—I—I did the best I knew,” she sobbed in uncontrollable grief.

The children were silent, awed by the sight of happy-go-lucky Peggy in such a passion of grief. Her father hesitated a second, then came back and put a consoling hand on her head.

“Well, well, Peggeen!” he said. “Don’t cry, don’t cry; don’t worry. I guess you did your best—and a poor best it was. Don’t worry. But spare the victuals and us. Don’t you ever try this sort of thing again.”

## CHAPTER VII

**A**FTER that unfortunate supper, the bickering between Peggy and the twins deepened into a feud-like quarrel. Whenever she found fault with them—and often, in pure mischief, when she did not—the boys laughed and jeered unmercifully about that ill-fated meal; and they always, as Jed boasted, “got a flare up” from Peggy. She, in turn, was cross with them, and resentfully enjoyed the reproofs and punishments the careless little fellows often received.

As they ran home late on Wednesday afternoon, their voices were merry and excited. But they dropped into peevish silence when Peggy met them with scowls and reproaches.

“Here I’ve been waiting ever so long to start the supper fire, and the wood box is empty. I’m going to tell pa on you. He said you were to come in early and get plenty wood and coal.”

Elmore began persuasively, “Now, Peggy, just this one time you needn’t——”

Jed cut him short. “Shut up, Elmore. Don’t wear out your mouth asking favors of Peg. She’d

rather get us punished than eat when she's hungry—hungry enough to eat a supper like the one she cooked on Monday!"

Peggy raised her voice sharply: "Sure, I'll tell pa on you the minute he steps in the door. You coming in so late—from goodness knows where—and bringing no wood!"

"Sure, you'll tell, Miss Cross-patch," agreed Jed, cheerfully. "You can tell tales, if you can't cook.—Don't be worrying, El. Ain't a good time like we've been having worth a scolding?" he said philosophically, as they strolled out to do their chores. "That's a grand place, ain't it?"

"Bully!" said Elmore. "But I wish Officer Brady hadn't come 'round the corner just as I was going in. And Roger was on the wall."

"Maybe he didn't notice," replied Jed. "You ought to have hurried. Roger always moves like slow freight. Don't you forget the matches tomorrow."

"That was a fine way you thought of to carry firewood," Elmore said. "You can carry a good bit tied to a string 'round your waist, and your sweater covers it so folks can't see it."

Peggy met her father with the story of her brothers' misdeeds and they received a scolding and the promise of a whipping if the offense were repeated. With clouded brow, Mr. Callahan

moved clumsily and wearily about the kitchen, making coffee and baking corncakes and frying meat.

At the supper table, Jed dropped some withered chrysanthemums in Peggy's plate.

"Here, Peggeen!" he jeered. "You like flowers for supper."

Peggy threw the flowers in his face.

"You are the hatefulest boys that ever lived," she cried passionately. "I'll get even with you yet, see if I don't."

"Hold the tongue of you, Peggy, and the temper, too, if you can," said her father. "Jed, behave yourself. Ain't you ashamed to act like mad hornets? Glory be! To-morrow I'll have a hard day's work,—but no woman's jobs in a shanty full of scrimmages."

Mr. Callahan was going on the canai boat the next morning to a shop up the river where the blacksmith needed help in shoeing a drove of mules. There would be extra pay for the job; and with neighbors near and kind he was sure the children could get on without him for two or three days.

Early the next morning, he went away. A few minutes later, there came under the boys' window the ear-piercing screech which they fondly be-

lieved was a real Indian war-whoop. Jed lifted a sleepy face to the window.

Mike McGinley was outside. He sent upward a mysterious, anxious question. "Did you see it?"

"See what?" Jed inquired. He opened the window and Elmore's tousled head rose at his shoulder.

"It blazed up to high heaven," said Mike. "That house."

"Not the one where we—we——"

Mike nodded assent. "Come down and I'll tell you," he said.

The boys scrambled into their clothes and ran down for a long conference. They came in with very sober faces.

"What's the matter?" Lois asked in surprise as they went schoolward. "Jed isn't running. He's walking."

"He didn't eat his breakfast," said Finn. "He and Elmore didn't eat no bread and 'lasses. They must be sick." That was the only reason Finn could imagine for a refusal of food.

Jed and Elmore mournfully submitted to the routine of school tasks. At recesses they talked in undertones with Mike McGinley and Roger Park and Tom Croye who were equally doleful.

After school the Callahan twins went straight

home. Dejected and diligent, they brought armful after armful of wood and filled the boxes with coal and cinders.

Lois turned from her Wackerson play and knit her brows.

“What’s the matter with the boys?” she asked. “It makes me want to cry to look at them.”

“It’s glad I am to see the wood box and the coal box full,” said Peggy, observing nothing wrong.

The boys came in and sat down,—very still, but with restless eyes.

Jed turned almost appealingly to Peggy.

“You’ll tell ma we minded what she said ’bout wood and coal and things, won’t you?” he asked.

Peggy looked up from her book and noticed his pale, sober face.

“Are you boys sick?” she asked. “You didn’t eat your breakfast. Don’t you want some bread and molasses?”

“It’s not hungry I am,” said Jed, gravely.

“We’re not just sick,” said Elmore, as if illness were an enviable triviality in comparison with the real trouble.

“What is the matter?” Peggy asked urgently. Neither of the boys answered.

“You be watching awhile, and then I will,” Jed

said to Elmore, with a gesture toward the window.

“We might go out,” Elmore suggested.

Jed shook his head. He sat down at Lois’s bedside and picked up Susie’s paper dolls one by one, looked at them, and put them down. All the while he saw a big, blue-clad man, with accusing eyes and voice, clutch him with one hand and Elmore with the other and march them off to—to—— He caught a sharp quivering breath. Oh! what would be done to them?

Elmore, meanwhile, stared miserably out of the window. He was not looking at the silver-shining Potomac at the foot of the wooded Virginia hills, nor at the skyward-pointing Washington monument, nor at the red walls and gray towers of Georgetown College. His anxious eyes wandered from the trolley track to Roundabout Lane and to the road that followed the hollow from Canal Road and climbed out into Conduit Road. He, too, had visions of stalwart figures in blue, and across the horizon of his thought flamed luridly “that house,” blazing, as Mike said, “up to high heaven.”

Presently he turned and asked a question in an undertone.

“Reform School.” Jed did not lower his voice.

What was the use? They would all hear it soon, from other lips.

Elmore shuddered. "They say that's awful strict. Maybe they won't——?" He questioned for something better.

Jed held out no hope. "Most likely that. A long term."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Peggy asked irritably.

There was a dismal silence.

Suddenly Elmore called excitedly, "Oh! Jed! There——" He interrupted himself. "It ain't. I thought it was. It's a strange man in blue, going down the lane."

Even Peggy caught the feeling of impending calamity.

"What is the matter? What are you talking about?" she asked. Then she exclaimed desperately, "I wish ma was here to make you tell."

"Oh, if ma was here!" Elmore's head dropped on the window sill and he began to sob bitterly and loudly.

Susie stopped cutting out paper dolls and stared at him. Lois began to cry in sympathy.

"Don't cry." Baby Dan toddled to Elmore and patted the wet cheeks with his soft little hand. "I love you. Don't you cry."

“Why—why——” Peggy stammered. “What is it, Elmore? I’m awful sorry——”

“You sorry!” interrupted Jed, fiercely. “You’ll be glad, glad. Shut up, Elmore. You goose, you baby, crying for ma——” He stopped abruptly, and fled to the attic room, with Elmore at his heels, and bolted the door.

“I wish pa was at home,” Peggy said uneasily. “The boys have done something awful bad. I wonder what it is.”

“Maybe they’ve killed somebody,” suggested Lois, wide-eyed with fear.

“You silly!” said Peggy, sharply. “Likely they’ve broken a window, playing Cops and Robbers. They’re always in mischief, with that bad Mike McGinley. I hope they’ll all get whipped and be made to pay for their mischief.” Her high, clear voice went straight to her brothers’ ears.

“Hear that!” said Jed. He stiffened his quivering lips and called tauntingly, “Peggy! make us a rice pudding for supper, won’t you?”

At that moment Susie called from the window, “There comes Officer Brady.”

“Is he coming here?” asked Peggy.

“He’s coming this way. He’s stopped at the McGinley’s. He’s talking to Mrs. McGinley. My! She looks so mad and so scared!”

When the policeman ended the excited conver-

sation, he did not turn back toward Georgetown. Instead, he followed Roundabout Lane up the hill.

“He is coming here,” said Susie, in an awed tone.

And so indeed he was. Peggy went to the door and met his question, “Is your father home from work?”

“He’s away, sir,” she said. “He’s at the shop up the canal. He looks to come back on Saturday.”

The policeman grunted. “Where are those boys—the twins?”

“Upstairs, sir,” said Peggy, and summoned them at his command.

They came down, looking very small and very frightened.

Officer Brady spoke gruffly. “Captain Schmidt wants you at his office in the police station at four o’clock to-morrow. You know what for. If I had the ordering of it, it’s straight to Juvenile Court you’d go, for a good stiff sentence at the Reform School. Housebreaking and burning at your age! It’s in prison you’ll be as soon as you are old enough for the law to put hands on you.”

“Oh! what on earth is the matter? What have they done?” inquired Peggy.

“They’ve housebroke, I tell you,” said the po-



"OH! WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?" ASKED PEGGY



liceman, gruffly. "They broke a window——"

"It was broke and open when we found it," interrupted Jed.

"And got in the old Morris house. I saw one of you going in with Mike McGinley; and wherever one is, the other is close ahead or behind. And Roger Park was following you."

"We didn't mean no harm," protested Jed.

"We just went there to play," added Elmore.

"And carried away the railings and loose wood-work from the front of the house and burned it."

The boys looked amazed.

"We didn't do any such thing," said Jed. "We carried every piece of our wood with us. We didn't burn nothing there. We didn't aim to do no mischief."

"And you left the fire there, with that broken window," went on the policeman; "and it set fire to the house and that summer-house part got burned down to the ground."

Peggy uttered an exclamation of horror.

"We didn't mean no harm," repeated Jed, miserably.

"You'll be doing no harm, many a year to come, in the Reform School where you belong," was the policeman's reply. "To-morrow, four sharp, you be at Captain Schmidt's office."

Housebreaking and burning! What an appalling outcome of their merry afternoon in the old Morris mansion! It was a tall, long, stuccoed house, with ornate iron-work on its high street steps and its side veranda, that had been vacant for many years, except for a caretaker in the front basement. The veranda overlooked a spacious old garden—now a forlorn tangle of neglected trees and shrubs and flowers—and ended in a quaint octagonal structure that had a tea-room below and a music-room above.

The boys had entered the music-room from the upper veranda, through a window which they asserted was open. Then they brought wood—they denied mutilating or even entering the main mansion—and made a fire to roast peanuts. About five o'clock, they went home.

The rest of the story told itself. From the fire left in the rusty grate, a spark popped or a coal rolled on the dust-dry old floor. It smoked and smoldered for hours. Then it flickered into a tiny flame. Fanned into a blaze by the wind from the open window, it flared into a conflagration that destroyed the summer-house, rushed along the veranda, and threatened the mansion. The house was saved only by prompt fire service and the windless night.

Peggy exclaimed loudly. It was just like the

boys—hateful, bad things! Who would ever have thought they would do anything so awful? If they had come home to their chores after school, as they'd been told time and 'again to do, this couldn't have happened. They knew better than to trespass on the Morris place, much less to break in the house, least of all to start a fire. The Reform School! It was a terrible place. Milly Rogan's cousin knew a man that was neighbor to a boy who was sent there, and he hated it. They'd have to stay there years and years. What would pa say, when he came home? When they told ma, she would get sick and white, as she did when Jed's arm was broken.

Peggy was not blessed and cursed with imagination. She did not realize that her words fell like blows on the poor little fellows cowering in their attic room, to which they fled as soon as Officer Brady went away,—not daring to face the world outside.

But they were not to be left alone to their woe. Mrs. McGinley rushed up the hill, her face dark and threatening as a thundercloud. She knocked, and then dashed the door open before Peggy could get to it.

“'Tis a shame and disgrace they are, such boys as those,” she began shrilly.

“That they are,” agreed Peggy.

"I could hardly believe the ears of me, when Officer Brady told it," went on Mrs. McGinley. "To think of youngsters like them breaking into a house and tearing it down and setting it on fire. What will be the end of them?"

"They'll be punished as they deserve," said Peggy. "Officer Brady says they'll all go to the Reform School."

"All?" Mrs. McGinley screeched. "But sure not my Mike, poor innocent! It's myself will tell them they've no right to send him to that awful Reform School, taking him away from his father and mother, just because he followed bad mischief-makers. Them twins always were full of boldness and badness as an egg is of meat. And with their mother away and them running wild, they're not fit for decent lads to go with. And now they've got my poor Mike in this awful, dreadful trouble."

Upstairs, two surprised, resentful boys faced each other.

"He dared me in, and he came next," said Jed.

"He's always making up his own mischief, and he worsens things the others start. Why, that time——"

"Sh! sh! Elmore! What is Peggy saying?" It was an exclamation rather than a question, for Peggy's voice rose clear and steady.

"I was agreeing the boys were bad, Mrs. McGinley, meaning all the boys. Our twins are mischiefy, but they don't get in real badness 'less they are led on by Mike and the others."

Jed and Elmore exchanged looks of amazed inquiry. Was Peggy really taking up for them?—and even accusing Mike to his mother's face?

Mrs. McGinley gasped. "Mike! Sure, you are not meaning to say that poor little fellow——"

"Maybe he'll be better, Mrs. McGinley, now he gets punished for his badness," Peggy suggested politely. "Ma was always saying he wasn't bad at heart. That's why she let Jed and Elmore keep going with him,—just telling them not to follow into his mischief, like they did last April, when he got them to go in swimming and they caught such terrible colds."

"I mind that. Don't you, Mrs. McGinley? And you whipped Mike and said he was a holy terror." Susie assisted Mrs. McGinley's memory.

"With ma away, the boys don't always mind her good advicing," Peggy went on. "And that's how they happen in this mischief. It's bad and terrible and all that, but our twins are no worse than other boys—and sure they are better than Mike."

The defense that family pride led Peggy to

make for her brothers worked on her own feelings. When supper was ready, she called pleasantly, "Come, Jed, you and Elmore; come and get your supper while it's hot."

They came down, slowly and soberly. Elmore seated himself at the table. Jed sauntered to the window and standing there, with his back to every one, he made a brief explanation.

"Sure, we hadn't no business there. But we didn't mean no harm. The window was open. That made us think of going in. Mike and me—we were 'robbers'—ran 'cross the garden. And I saw the window. Mike dared me in, and we went. Then we told the other boys. And we carried wood and made a fire. We didn't burn a railing or nothing."

"Some one did. Officer Brady said so," said Peggy.

"We didn't. Honest to goodness, we didn't," Elmore affirmed.

"We didn't even go in the big house," Jed went on. He had a motive for laying the case before Peggy. "We just peeked through a broken door. And we didn't mean to do no harm. I thought sure I put that fire out."

There was a little silence. "Peggy, will—will you tell ma——" Jed stopped and cleared his throat. But he could not go on. He made vain

efforts to swallow the choking lump in his throat.

“All right.” Peggy went toward him. He was such a little fellow, and he looked so lonesome and so miserable and so mother-sick! Peggy wanted to put her arms around him and comfort him—and cry herself. But there was no habit of affection between them, and so she stood silent and awkward.

At last she put her hand shyly on his shoulder and let it slip upward to rest caressingly on his neck. “Come to supper,—boyeen,” she said, giving his mother’s pet name.

Jed did not speak. He turned his head till his chin rested a minute on the kind soft hand, and then he and his sister moved toward the table together.

## CHAPTER VIII

**T**HE hours of that evening and the next day were frightfully long and miserable to Jed and Elmore. Yet when they were over, it seemed as if they had passed all too quickly and brought the hour of ordeal.

At four o'clock, the young Holly Hill offenders—Tom Croye, Mike McGinley, Tim Rogan, Albert Fischer, and Jed and Elmore Callahan—filed solemnly into Captain Schmidt's office at the police station.

All the boys, except the Callahan twins, were accompanied by their fathers and mothers, and Peggy went with her brothers in place of their absent parents. She held her head high, and flashed a triumphant look at Mrs. McGinley when Mike, in answer to Captain Schmidt's questions, confessed that he was the first to suggest entering the Morris house.

Captain Schmidt, chief of the police precinct, was a wise and kindly man, especially in his dealings with boys. The policemen under him had orders to bring young offenders to his office.

Then he questioned them and investigated their cases, often dismissing, with a reprimand and on probation, cases that other officers would have taken to Juvenile Court. He explained that he liked better to make the youngsters respect and obey the law than to punish them.

He looked very grave over this case. Trespassing, housebreaking, houseburning,—these seemed offenses that would have to go to Juvenile Court and probably land the young criminals in the Reform School.

He fixed his shrewd gray eyes on Jed. “And you say you did not open the window?”

“It was open, sir.” Jed repeated his unshaken statement. “The shutter was swinging in the wind. That’s why we saw it.”

“And you are sure you didn’t burn the stair-rails?”

All the boys declared they did not. Not one of them had gone into the main mansion, they asserted and maintained.

Captain Schmidt frowned and pondered the matter. At last he continued the case until the next afternoon, greatly to the disapproval of Officer Brady who thought the culprits ought to be sent to Juvenile Court for a Reform School sentence.

The boys went home to another miserable night

and miserable day. The more they thought of the matter—and they thought of nothing else—the more definite and dreadful became their forebodings. On Friday afternoon, they returned to the police court in a state of abject misery.

Captain Schmidt met them gravely, but with kind eyes, and kindly but gravely informed them that they were proved not guilty of the most serious charges against them,—housebreaking and burning; but in trespassing they followed in evil footsteps.

A sneak thief, who stole gas and water pipes out of vacant houses, had spent several nights in the Morris house. It was he who burned the wood-work and left unfastened the window through which the boys went in. He entered the music-room, after they went away on Wednesday afternoon, and he left there, in the early morning, the fire that did the mischief. He tried to sell at a junk shop the piping taken from this and other houses, and when faced with the proofs of his misdemeanors, he thought it wisest to make a clean breast of the whole affair.

Captain Schmidt reprimanded the boys severely for trespassing, and then dismissed them, receiving their promise of good behavior and ordering them to report to him every week.

The little Callahans had a great deal to tell

their father when he came home that night. Then the tale was carried to Mrs. Callahan, for her to cry and laugh over. And it was the first thing to be told to Anne Lewis when she came on Wednesday afternoon.

Anne had not seen any of the Callahans for several days and she had come to rejoice with Peggy at the expected culinary triumph. The exciting story about the boys was followed by the pitiful tale of Peggy's misadventures.

Peggy was sorrier than ever for herself, as she told the story of her efforts and her failures. She wept, and had to be comforted and petted by Anne.

Lois, loyal to her sister in trouble, made the best of things. "The pudding wasn't so bad," she said. "It didn't spoil the plums. We picked 'em out and et 'em." She patted Peggy's hand and Peggy kissed her gratefully.

"The worst is, if I'd done what I started out to do and what I knew to do, it would have been all right," Peggy said with the hindsight which brings small comfort. "Pa looked real chirked up when he came in and saw me at the cook stove. If I just hadn't tried to make that hateful old pudding I'd have minded the other things and they wouldn't have turned out so bad.

Though it's a lot easier to do things one at a time than all together."

"That's what puzzles me," said Anne. "I don't see how people start things so that they end at the same time and make a breakfast or a dinner. Aunt Cindy says it's all practice."

"Practice is what I'll never get," said Peggy, mournfully. "Pa told me never to try again. I wouldn't dare. But it makes me so mad to fail that I want to try again and a million times, till I do it right. But I daren't disobey pa. And he's getting so tired of cooking, and I'm afraid—I'm so afraid the gang will get him." Her voice dropped to a whisper.

She looked despairingly at Anne and Anne looked back, pitiful but unhelpful.

"Well," said Peggy, presently, "I can't sit here and hold my hands. You don't mind my sorting the clothes, while we talk, do you, Anne?"

She brought out a basketful of clothes that she had washed with a little help from Prilla Hicks in rubbing and wringing the heaviest things. According to her mother's instructions, Peggy had folded smoothly and put away all the clothes that could be used rough-dry. Those that must be ironed were put into a basket and ironed, a few pieces at a time, as Peggy had opportunity.

Now she looked over the ironed clothes and

sewed on buttons and mended small rents. The stockings and garments requiring much mending were laid aside to be taken to her mother.

“After I mend and place away these,” Peggy said, “I’m going to see that the groceries are handy for pa; and then I’ll start the kitchen fire, so as to have the stove hot when he comes. That’ll save him one trouble. If only I could help him with the cooking! But he’ll never trust me to try again.”

“But if you tried again, you’d do it,” said Anne. “You know now what you did wrong, and that is the first part of knowing how to do right. It was that pudding—and cutting your finger—and trying to do too many things at once. If you try again, you know what not to do, and you’ll do the right things.”

Peggy acquiesced mournfully. “But I daren’t try,” she repeated. “And, my, how I want to! I do hate to stop with failing——”

“I know. It’s like a bitter taste in your mouth,” Anne interrupted.

Peggy nodded and hesitatingly made further explanation. “Pa is so tired, and he gets so mad! He said last night he believed he’d split open if he didn’t kick that old stove over. And then he said he never had known before what a terrible good woman ma was, and he guessed he had to

struggle on and give her a chance to get well. But I'm afraid—afraid he'll break down some day and the gang will get him, before he remembers about ma."

Anne did not clearly understand this speech. Anyway, she was hearing only with her ears, not with her mind. Following the different course of her own thoughts, she said, "It's just the things we've learned at school that you'd have to do. And you never have any trouble there."

"Somehow, it seems different," said Peggy. "I never thought about cooking-school lessons having anything to do with this old cook stove and our victuals. Ma cooked mush two or three times a week, but I never thought about it being the same thing we made in our stewpans at school."

"Why, of course, it is the same," said Anne.

"I know it," said Peggy. "I know it one way, but another way I didn't know it."

Anne hardly heeded this rather puzzling explanation. She went on. "I think it's fun to do the cooking-school kind of cooking at home. I've boiled rice and baked potatoes and made milk gelatine. Aunt Cindy didn't quarrel—much. She's always saying 'she hates to have people messing around her kitchen.' And then one day I was making chocolate caramels and I forgot the pan handle was one that pulled out and I spilled

the chocolate all over the floor and everything was all black and sticky. Aunt Cindy was so mad! She had just scrubbed the floor. And she went straight and told Aunt Sarah. If she had waited a while, she wouldn't have told so cross. And Aunt Sarah said I mustn't go in the kitchen, cooking and worrying Aunt Cindy 'that's old and notiony and a faithful servant.' If it wasn't for that"—Anne now came to the point around which her thoughts had been revolving—"you could come to our house and do your learning. There are shelves and shelves full of things there, and Aunt Sarah says she always expects them to be wasted. I wonder if there isn't some way we can manage?"

None presented itself at once to her mind. She kept on wondering, even while she listened to Lois's tales about the Wackersons and made up a story in turn.

Anne showed Lois, in the cracks and splotches of the wall, a tower beside the sea, with big steps for the giants to go up and little ones for the fairies.

And then, Anne said, one day the giants climbed up and hid a princess in the tallest top of that tower and the fairies came to help her away. The giants saw them and came running, in such a hurry that they didn't go 'round to their

own big steps, but started up the fairies' little steps. And the steps began to creak and shiver and shake. But the giants went on up and up and up. Oh, the poor princess was so scared! And just as the giants were almost—almost there, a fairy like a big butterfly flew off with the princess. And the steps broke down and the giants all tumbled into the sea and were drowned. Oh, it was a wonderful story! When Anne gave reins to her imagination, it ran a gallant race, I assure you.

Lois listened with wide-eyed interest. She loved her Wackersons who lived a life similar to her own. But she gave admiring attention to the romances about giants and fairies, and brave knights and lovely ladies in distress whose abodes Anne saw in the same splotches and crevices that Lois peopled with the Wackersons.

Anne hardly heard the request for another story. She clapped her hands and said eagerly, "Oh, Peggy, Peggy! I have it! I have a plan. Your father just said you mustn't cook at home, didn't he?"

"Of course," said Peggy, wonderingly. "He said I mustn't try any more cooking stunts and spoil good victuals, high-priced as they are."

"That's it," said Anne. "He told you you mustn't try. He didn't say you mustn't do it."

He'd be willing for you to cook, if you knew how."

"And glad and thankful," said Peggy.

"That's it! The thing is for you to do the trying somewhere else, and then do the cooking at home. Now, Thursday is Thanksgiving Day and I'm going to have a party—some girls to lunch—and I want you to come. Oh, you must! Then you and I—— I reckon I'd better ask Aunt Sarah first. But I think—— Oh, I am sure this plan will work! I must go now."

"Don't go; you've been talking to Lois all the time you weren't talking to Peggy. I ain't had none of you," complained Susie.

"But Lois is sick in bed. Poor Lois! Aren't you sorry for her, having to stay in bed so long?" asked Anne.

"No," said Susie, sturdily. "I ain't not sorry for her. What for? She has the best time of us all. She's got herself to play with all the time. Her and them Wackersons have a lot better time than I do. I'm lonesome." Her voice quavered.

"Bless your heart, childie! That's too bad," said Anne. "I'll come to see you and be your company some day soon. Now I really must go home. I'm just bound to see Aunt Sarah and ask her something right away."

She ran home to lay her plan before Aunt

Sarah, but there were house guests,—dreadful guests of the kind who require constant entertaining. Anne, finding it impossible to get possession of Aunt Sarah for consultation, at last took possession of a pause in the after-dinner conversation.

“May I ask you one thing—just one little thing, Aunt Sarah?” she implored. “You know my luncheon party to-morrow and the girls we invited. Well, I’ve asked Peggy to come, too. To-day——”

“Peggy?” said Miss Drayton, vaguely.

“Yes, Aunt Sarah. Peggy. Peggy Callahan, you know. Her mother is in a hospital and——”

“My dear! Why, Peggy is—she isn’t—she——”

Anne waited a polite second, but Miss Drayton’s sentence hung fire. It was absurd, of course. Anne ought to know better than to invite Peggy Callahan, the blacksmith’s daughter, to the charming little luncheon planned for Gabrielle and Polly Mason Blair and Beverley Harvie, with Grace Brevoort and Agnes Le Fevre, visiting girls from New York and New Orleans. Peggy Callahan! It was utterly absurd. But Anne looked so innocent of offense, so earnest, so eager,—one couldn’t hurt her feelings.

"There was such a special reason," Anne started to explain. "I knew you'd want her."

"But—but, dear, you have only six *Bluebird* tickets," Miss Drayton objected.

"Yes, Aunt Sarah," said Anne. "Peggy can't go; she says she must go straight home to study and get the kitchen fire started before her father comes. I was going to stay at home and have her go, but she couldn't."

"You were going to stay at home from your own party?" ejaculated Miss Drayton.

"Yes, Aunt Sarah," answered Anne. "I hated to think of missing it; but I couldn't ask one of my guests to stay away, could I?"

"No," acquiesced Miss Drayton, hastily.

"Aunt Sarah, let me explain about Peggy," Anne began again. "It's a nice, longish story and——"

Miss Drayton caught Mrs. Marshall's eyes consulting the clock and was aware that Miss Irvine was trying not to look at it. Their hostess rose to her duties. She put a caressing hand under Anne's chin and said, "Then, dear, it will have to wait. The car is at the door. It might have been better not to invite Peggy, but I am sure you and she and the other girls will have a good time. I am sorry Mrs. Marshall and Miss Irvine and I can't be with you. But we must have

our trip to Mount Vernon. Good-night, dearie.— Sue, Louise, shall we want heavier wraps?”

Anne followed them into the hall.

“Please, Aunt Sarah, as it’s my party—may I—please let me tell Aunt Cindy what food we want. And mayn’t we—Peggy—go in the kitchen for cooking?”

“Peggy? For cooking?” questioned Miss Drayton.

“Things we learned in cooking school. She can. I know she can. As it’s my party, mayn’t Peggy——”

“Oh! I suppose so. Yes. Tell Cindy. I’ve given the orders. But tell her what you want. And don’t be troublesome. Good-night, good-night, dear.” With a hasty kiss, she followed her guests out of the door.

“We’ll not be late—not very,” she said, as they started theaterward. “Anne is seldom so persistent. But she has her heart set on some project. There is some sauce or salad they have learned to make at cooking school, I suppose, that she wishes to prepare for her own luncheon.”

But the plan which Anne had in mind and which she promptly arranged to carry out was quite unlike anything that Miss Drayton did or could suppose.

## CHAPTER IX

**A**NNE waved good-by to Miss Drayton, and then hunted up a note-book which she carried to the kitchen. Cindy received with glum disapproval the information that Anne and Peggy were to invade her province the next day and that Anne was to give instructions about the luncheon food. But without verbal protest, she settled herself to listen to instructions.

“There are to be prunes,” Anne explained. “And they’re to be put in soak to-night.”

“Yessum. Gwi’ have prune sowfla? ’T would be heap nicer——”

Anne interrupted Cindy’s suggestion. “No. Stewed prunes.”

“Stewed prunes!” ejaculated Cindy.

“Yes,” Anne answered calmly. “I brought down my book to tell you all the things we want, so you can be sure to have them on hand. Our cooking-school teacher says that’s the proper way.”

Anne opened her domestic science note-book and read carefully from its pages:

“Two cups boiling water,—’Course we can boil that—

“One teaspoonful salt.

“One-fourth cup corn meal.—That’s all of that.”

“Mercy sakes!” exclaimed Cindy. “That sounds like mush.”

“It is mush,” Anne said calmly. Then she read from another page:

“One pound prunes,—I told you about them—

“Six cups water,—That’s always on hand—

“Four tablespoonfuls sugar.—That’s all for the stewed prunes.”

“Stewed prunes and mush for company eat-in’!” exclaimed Cindy.

“Yes, and we’ll have toast and bacon and eggs and coffee. That’s all,” Anne continued and concluded.

“Toast and bacon and eggs and coffee!” repeated Cindy, in amazement. “Why, Miss Anne, I thought you were gwine to have a party.”

“So I am,” said Anne.

“A party! with them victuals!”

“I think they’re very good for a party. They’re—they’re wholesome. Except maybe the coffee, and we don’t have to drink that; we just have to make it. Have you all the things we need?”

Anne's explanation left Cindy more bewildered than ever, so she merely answered weakly, "Yessum; uh, yessum. All them things are here. Corn meal—for mush!—and prunes—stewed prunes!—and bread and bacon and eggs and coffee! And what else, Miss Anne?"

"That's all, I told you. Good-night." Anne turned to go, but Cindy detained her. "Miss Anne, what kind of party is it, and who's comin'?"

"It's going to be a very nice party," said Anne, with dignity, for she disliked the fault-finding tone of Cindy's question. "Gabrielle and Polly Mason Blair are coming and their cousin from New York, Grace Brevoort, that's visiting them. And Beverley Harvie, and her chum from New Orleans, Agnes Le Fevre. And Peggy and I make seven. It's a family-sized party."

"It's some kind of prank she's got on hand," Cindy told the housemaid after Anne went upstairs. "I sure am sorry. Miss Sarah ordered sech a nice lunch—icecream and all—jest for them. She's gwine out for the day with her companies, and she told me to have one o'clock lunch for them girls, and James is got to have the auto-beel here at half-past two, to take 'em to a play thing at the theayter. Mush and prunes! It's funny prankin'."

But Anne had no thought of a prank. She was at her most serious and earnest the next morning when she came into the kitchen with Peggy. And Peggy, awed by Cindy and the unfamiliar surroundings, was even more solemn than Anne. Both were armed with their domestic science note-books.

Anne explained resolutely, "I'll be in and out the kitchen, Aunt Cindy, because I have other guests coming. But Peggy'll be in here. She'll try—she's going to do the cooking."

"What?" said Cindy. "What, Miss Anne?"

"It's all right, Aunt Cindy," Anne assured her. "Aunt Sarah said we might come in and cook."

Yes, Miss Drayton had left instructions that Anne and Peggy were to have the freedom of the kitchen. Cindy had intended to tell her mistress about Anne's amazing luncheon order. But Miss Drayton had gone out with her guests immediately after breakfast, telling a housemaid to say to Cindy that Anne and Peggy wished to come into the kitchen; she hoped they wouldn't be in the way. But "do the cooking"—for luncheon and for guests!

"What does she"—Cindy pointed a disdainful finger at Peggy—"what does she know 'bout cookin'?"

"She's learning. And she's got to know. She's

to do things all by herself," said Anne. "Aunt Sarah said——"

"Uh, yessum, yessum!" Cindy surrendered, with disapproval in every line of her face and figure. "Miss Sarah's lettin' you. I got nothin' to do with it."

"Oh, but everything depends on you," said Anne, with flattering earnestness. "It's your showing her about doing things together—Why, it all depends on you."

"Wellum," said Cindy, mollified by this tribute to her importance. "What you want me to do?"

"Peggy, you tell her what you want," said Anne, "and what you want to know."

"I want," said Peggy, and she read the list Anne had rehearsed the evening before:

"Two cups boiling water.

"One teaspoonful salt.

"One-fourth cup corn meal.

"One pound prunes.

"One cup water.

"Four tablespoonfuls sugar—

"And then we are to have coffee and bread and meat," said Peggy.

"Bacon and eggs," said Anne, rehearsing the list she had made out with Peggy. "Coffee for one and the other things for seven. That's a good breakfast."

“You’re talkin’ ’bout a lunch party,” Cindy reminded her.

Peggy and Anne ignored this statement.

“What I want most of all,” said Peggy, desperately, “is to know when to start about which, so as to make a breakfast of it—instead of just things. Won’t you tell me, please?” she appealed to Cindy.

After enough objections to gratify her sense of importance, Cindy acceded to the girls’ request and gave the desired instructions. Peggy was apt and eager to learn and proceeded beautifully with the preparation of the remarkable luncheon. It was almost ready when Anne, to her vast regret, had to leave the kitchen to receive her other guests.

Just then Cindy heard steps on the porch, and opened the door, thinking it was the ice man. It was Pat Patterson who had run in the back way.

“Hm, Aunt Cindy!” he sniffed. “That’s a good breakfasty smell. Are you just having breakfast?”

“It’s lunch, Marse Pat,” said Cindy, waddling out on the porch, delighted to discuss the matter with a member of the family. “Comp’ny lunch—corn-meal mush, stewed prunes, poached eggs, bacon, and coffee.”

“What!” exclaimed Pat.

“Miss Sarah’s off for the day with her companies,” Cindy explained, “an’ Miss Anne’s havin’ a party. She’s got the swellest young ladies in Georgetown here—an’ that Peggy Callahan—and what you reckon she’s ordered to eat? She’s fixin’ to set them young ladies down to corn-meal mush, stewed prunes, poached eggs, bacon, and coffee.” Cindy repeated, with increasing disgust, the list of the articles of food.

“You’re joking, Aunt Cindy,” Pat said, laughing.

“See for yourself, sir,” she answered, beckoning him into the kitchen.

Pat went in and spoke pleasantly, though with evident surprise, to Peggy, who, flushed with heat and embarrassment, stood firmly at her post beside the sizzling bacon.

And then Anne, looking like a fresh-blown eglantine in her new pink muslin frock, ran in to see how Peggy was getting on.

“Anne,” said Pat, “for pity’s sake, who’s the bunch you’re going to serve this food to?”

Anne calmly repeated the names of her guests.

Pat stared, too amazed at first to enjoy the absurdity of the situation. “Why, these girls—they never saw—you never heard—of such a luncheon,” Pat gasped.

"Well?" Anne tipped her stubborn little nose upward.

"What would you think, what would you do," queried Pat, "if any one was to put such a luncheon before you, at Thanksgiving?"

"I'd eat what was set before me, and ask no questions," Anne said primly.

"Anne, for pity's sake, why are you doing this?"

"I haven't time to tell you now, Pat," Anne answered. "My guests have all come. And Peggy has luncheon ready to serve."

The ridiculous side of the affair was beginning to appeal to Pat. But he recognized the necessity of keeping grave in the face of Anne's tremendous earnestness.

"I am sure Aunt Sarah would wish you to discuss this matter—to answer my questions, Anne," he said. "Am I to understand that you consulted her—that she sanctioned your plan?"

"She was busy. She said that Peggy and I might go into the kitchen—and cook. I wished to tell her all about it. She didn't have time to listen," Anne explained briefly.

Pat bit his lips to keep back laughter. He knew the sensitive streak and the stubborn streak of Anne well enough to be sure that if he laughed, she would tilt her chin into the air and invite her

guests in to luncheon. And yet it was hard not to laugh at thought of the Blairs and their cousin and Beverley Harvie and her guest sitting down for a Thanksgiving feast to the food prepared as a pattern meal for the blacksmith's family.

"Aunt Sarah would be mortified—very much mortified—at having such a luncheon served to guests," he said decidedly. "On my honor, she would. Indeed, Anne, you must not do it. You really must not."

Perhaps Anne had had private misgivings about the propriety of her course. Anyway, Pat's earnestness was impressive. She looked disturbed.

"But, Pat," she said, "there's nothing else for luncheon. And it's too late for Cindy to cook things. Aunt Sarah said for us to leave here promptly at half-past two, so as not to miss one minute of the *Bluebird*."

"I promised her I'd leave you at the theater on my way to baseball. But Aunt Cindy will fix a good luncheon. Won't you, Aunt Cindy?" Pat appealed to the old cook.

"I'd like to, Marse Pat," Cindy answered. "Miss Sarah ordered the nicest things! An' then Miss Anne came in. It's mighty late"—she glanced at the kitchen clock, which announced a

quarter past twelve—"an' nothin' fixed. I'll do my best. I c'n make a salad. And sandwiches. And there's fruit. It'll be a poor, scrappy sort of a meal to set company down to."

"I'm sorry. I was just thinking of Peggy and——" Anne's lips quivered and the sentence paused on a note of distressed uncertainty.

"I'm awful sorry. I hadn't ought to let you do it. I'm awful sorry." Peggy forgot everything except Anne's distress. Cindy rescued the bacon in the nick of time and poured off the gravy

"Oh, no, no, Peggy! don't feel that way," said Anne. "I'd rather you'd do this than have the nicest party ever was.—She's practicing to cook breakfast for her father and the children," she explained to Pat. "Her mother's in the hospital."

"I'm awful sorry," repeated Peggy. "I've spoiled your party."

Pat thought quickly and self-sacrificingly. In his purse was the money to buy some tennis balls and to pay for his grandstand ticket this afternoon. Gee! his favorite team was playing and he had looked forward to this game for weeks. But he couldn't leave Anne in such a predicament.

"Don't worry," he said. "The car is at the door. I'll rush somewhere and get things. What

do I want, Cindy, for a Number One luncheon? And where do I go?"

Cindy named the best caterer in the city, and gave a list of things to get. "Chicken patties—I was to make some," she said. "I'll get a fruit salad ready. Get cake and cream. You can buy the icecream in pretty shapes. I'll have the table and the salad ready, time you get back."

Pat rushed to the shop which Cindy suggested and threw himself on the mercy of the fat Frenchwoman in charge. He must have the things at once. For the nicest luncheon possible. Six—seven little girls. They ought to be sitting down to the table now. They were to go after luncheon to the *Bluebird* matinée.

The fat Frenchwoman listened, smiling and attentive.

"The *Bluebird*," she said, as he paused. "Ah, that inspires. Let us see. It shall give the color scheme. So, so! And hurry all the possible."

She began to work rapidly, calling a waiter or two to assist her. She ordered chicken patties and dainty little lettuce sandwiches. She brought out place cards decorated with bluebirds poised on blossoming apple boughs, or winging their way across a blue and spring-like sky. She selected dainty little white iced cakes decorated with green and red cherries. And she put the ice-

cream in dishes covered with pale green paper, having on the side of each a Japanese spray of apple blossoms and an exquisite little bluebird perched on the rim, as if it had alighted there to feast on the spray of cherries atop the cream.

The fat Frenchwoman cocked her head on one side and admired her own handiwork. "Bluebirds, spring, youth, happiness! It is the inspiration," she said. "I had not with all the time made it more exquisite."

"It's fine! fine!" exclaimed Pat. But when the price was named, his countenance fell. "I am sorry," he said frankly and regretfully, "I haven't quite money enough."

"Shall I take the bluebirds from the dishes? Or use the smaller plain dishes?" inquired the shopkeeper.

Pat hesitated. "It is perfect," he said. "I don't want it changed. If you will trust me"—he gave his father's name and address—"I will bring you the money on Saturday."

"With all the pleasure," the shopkeeper responded smilingly. "Your father is a long-time patron of ours. And I rejoice so to fill your first order that you empty your pockets to me with the smile."

Pat hurried home with his purchases, which were received with enthusiastic admiration.

Peggy especially was delighted, for the thought of spoiling her friend's party had been like a lump of lead on her heart. She clapped joyful hands when Cindy said this was the prettiest luncheon table she had ever seen.

"I'm so glad! I'm so glad!" she said. "But don't fix a place for me. Oh, no! no, no! I must go home. I can't sit at that table with the party girls." She looked down at her faded gingham frock.

Pat said that for his part he was shy, also; he was too shy for six ladies, but not too shy for one. So he asked Cindy to spread a little serving-table in the butler's pantry for him and Peggy, and they had as merry a party as the one in the dining-room.

Pat escorted the *matinée* party to the theater and then came back for Peggy and a basket of food which Cindy put up at Anne's request. He went in to see Lois, to display for her benefit his new accomplishment,—that of cutting on an orange a face with an open mouth and then of squeezing the juice through the mouth. Lois's fascinated attention was almost enough to compensate him for the ball game which he missed. Anyway, his favorite team was beaten and he was spared the sight of its defeat.

That night, Pat and Anne and Mr. Patterson

and Miss Drayton sat beside the glowing library fire, in the intimate home comfort which followed the departure of rather trying guests, and discussed all the happenings of the day.

The flickering firelight concealed Mr. Patterson's smile of amusement at the story of Anne's wonderful party. Miss Drayton saw nothing to call forth smiles. She thought Anne had acted very foolishly, but the child was spared the usual grave, tender reproof, because Miss Drayton was troubled about the Callahans.

"I have been so occupied that I forgot about those poor people!" she exclaimed. "And poor little Lois is still in bed? How dreadful! Of course I am glad you gave Peggy a basket of food. If I had thought about the case, I'd have brought it up in the Ladies' Aid Society yesterday. I'll make a note of it for the December meeting and something will be done about it."

## CHAPTER X

**T**HE Thanksgiving holiday was to last until Monday, so Peggy had Friday morning free from lessons for the task she had set herself.

She rose early, smothered the alarm clock under her pillow, dressed hastily, tiptoed into the kitchen, and kindled the fire. Then she put her breakfast materials in order on the table.

First, there were the prunes which she had set to soak the night before. Beside them there were, carefully measured, four tablespoonfuls of sugar. Next in place was a fourth of a cup of corn meal, and by that a teaspoonful of salt. There were three loaves of bread. There was sliced bacon—a more liberal supply than was often seen on the Callahan table, cut at Anne's request by Cindy's unstinting hand. And there were eggs,—one for each member of the family, though Peggy had explained that her mother never cooked more than two eggs at a meal, one for father because he liked it and one for Lois because she was sick.

On the table beside the coffee-pot, Peggy had a big tablespoonful of coffee for her father's cup and a smaller one for the pot. "You be sure to put that in," Cindy had said. "The cookin' schoolers may tell you to do that or they may not tell you. But I been a 'speriencin' cook since 'fore you was born. Don't no good cook forgit the pot."

Peggy began, according to the instructions and experience of the day before, with the articles that required longest cooking.

She put on the kettle, as soon as she started the fire; and in a little while the water was boiling rapidly. Then she measured two cupfuls of water, put it in a stewpan, and added the teaspoonful of salt. She sprinkled in the fourth of a cup of corn meal and stirred it till it thickened. Then she took the pan from the fire and set it over a large pan of boiling water.

She looked at the clock. "A quarter to six," she said aloud to impress it on her memory. "Quarter to six. It can cook an hour and a quarter. Our lesson said 'cook from one to three hours.' Now, let's see what is next."

"Don't you need another stick of wood?" a subdued little voice suggested.

"Sure I do." Peggy put it in the stove. Then she looked toward the open door leading into the

little room she shared with Lois and Susie. "I forgot to shut that door," she said. "I never thought about you waking up so early."

"I wanted to be awake," said Lois, to whom alone of the children Peggy had entrusted the secret of her enterprise. "Heap o' times my back is achey and tired, and I'm awake when I don't want to be. Now, it's fun to watch you. I've wriggled 'round in bed so I can look in there. And I can help you by remembering. Quarter to six. And I'll watch the fire and tell you when it needs wood."

Peggy nodded. She was too busy, thinking and working, to speak. She poured the prunes and the water in which they had soaked into a stewpan and set it on the fire. Then she sliced the bread and set the table, while the other things waited for the corn-meal mush to cook.

Peggy hesitated and her cheeks flamed as she remembered her woeful supper experiment and Elmore's sneering "victuals is victuals, and flowers is flowers." Then she tossed her head and set her lips.

"The Pattersons always have flowers on the table," she said. "There ain't no reason why we shouldn't live up as much as we can."

She took from the table at Lois's bedside the broken mug containing some flowers from Anne's

party, and put it, not only on the breakfast table, but, with a little emphasis, in front of Elmore's place.

Then she tried the prunes with a fork.

"They're soft," she said. "Now for the syrup."

She drained off the water, put the prunes on a dish, poured the water back in the stewpan, and added to it the four tablespoonfuls of sugar.

While this was cooking to a syrup, Peggy moved about rapidly, for her duties now came thick and fast. She made the coffee. She toasted the bread. She fried the bacon and put it on a shallow dish and poured the gravy into a deeper dish.

"Pa's up!" Lois whispered excitedly.

Peggy's heart was in her mouth when she heard her father moving about in the next room. He went up the ladder-like stairs to the room above and wakened Jed and Elmore. Then he opened the door and stood on the kitchen threshold, first staring amazedly at Peggy and then looking critically around.

Peggy's cheeks went from pink to crimson. With shaking fingers she broke the eggs and dropped them into a pan of boiling water.

"What on earth! Why, Peggy!" exclaimed her father.

"I'm not wasting our victuals," Peggy ex-

plained hastily. "Anne gave them to me for a try breakfast."

"Whew! they smell good. I smelled 'em when I was half asleep and thought they were over to a neighbor's, and the smell made me hungry."

"Breakfast is ready now," Peggy said, carefully putting the eggs on the slices of toast. "It's a little early. I wanted to surprise you, and so I had to have it ready about the time you come to cook it."

The boys now scrambled downstairs and came into the room. Sniffing and exclaiming at the unusually good food, they pushed their plates forward to be helped. But Mr. Callahan did not shovel food on them, with the usual unseemly haste. He looked around.

"You 'most ready to come, Peggy?" he asked. Then he said rebukingly to the boys, "Not a mouthful does any one else have till Peggy comes to the table and is helped. The girl that cooks a meal like this is got a right to be helped first and she's goin' to be, too."

So Peggy's was the first saucerful of the cornmeal mush, with a spoonful of prunes and an extra spoonful of prune syrup. The food was good, but far more delicious to Peggy were the praise and enjoyment of her family. Smiling and dimpling with pleasure, she sprang up to pour

her father's coffee and to serve the toast with the poached eggs and to hand around the neatly-cut bread and the crisp bacon.

"It's a bully breakfast, flowers and all," Jed said, smiling at Peggy.

She smiled back. "At Mr. Patterson's, they always have flowers on the table," she explained.

"Well," said her father, "the Pattersons and the President ain't set down to no better breakfast than ours this day. Why, I feel like I can do two men's work on the strength of it."

"Pa," asked Peggy, "did I do well enough to—to keep on cooking?"

"Keep on cookin'?" said her father. "Peggy, if you take them cookin' dishes off my hands, I'll be happier than I ever thought I could be—for I didn't know I could be so miserable. I get so I can't shoe horses proper—I drive the nails in wrong and real vicious,—for thinking of raw and burnin' bread and meat. I'd nigh rather starve than cook another mouthful. Tim Rogan was plannin' a Christmas huntin' trip, and he asked me if I'd go and cook.—See that bruise? That's where he hit me when I mashed his mouth for sayin' 'cook' to me." He turned back to address the boys. "Peggy don't do this work by herself," he said. "She's to have every stick of wood laid ready to her hand and all errants and

chores done for her. And you boys will do the washin' of the dishes, incountin' pots and pans."

"That's girl's work," said Jed. "I don't want to do it."

"All right," said his father. "Don't. Maybe 'tis girl's work. But if you don't do it, you don't eat at this shanty. That's all I've got to say."

"Ma never made us do it," protested Elmore.

"Maybe ma didn't. I'm doin' the makin' now." And Mr. Callahan squared his shoulders with a new and pleasant feeling of pride in his position as head of the house.

So Peggy entered upon new duties.

On Saturday, her father paid his industrial insurance, or family "sick benefit," and put part of his wages in the rent mug. Into the house-keeping mug went the remaining nine dollars that seemed to Peggy such a large sum and yet went such a little way in providing food for the big, hearty family.

Mr. Callahan planned with Peggy how to spend the money, and the mistakes they made and laughed over together brought them not only wisdom but also a more intimate affection. Peggy tried to keep the family rigidly to its allowance, but her father often "lent," for unexpected needs or luxuries, his pocket change earned by extra jobs.

For some time after their experience at the police station, Jed and Elmore were model boys. They were studious, and on time and diligent at all their home duties. But after a week or two, they began to linger and dawdle and come in late.

"This is three days they've been late," Peggy commented irritably, one afternoon when she looked in vain for them to go for the groceries. "What mischief are they in now, I wonder? Susie, you'll have to go to the grocer's." She gave the list and put the money in Susie's hand.

Susie ran down the hill and up the trolley track, and presently she strolled back, bringing two loaves of stale bread instead of four.

"Ma promised me a shiny nickel, to do errands 'thout fussing," she explained, serenely chewing the gum for which she had spent the other nickel. "I done it, and took the nickel."

Peggy scolded her roundly. "Now, we ain't going to have bread enough for supper," she ended.

"You can borrow from the rent money," suggested Susie.

"I ain't," said Peggy. "We'll eat stinted. I ain't going to borrow it."

Her father came in during the discussion and

Jed and Elmore slipped in and sat down with a meek air of having been always in place.

"Here, here! Let's have bread enough," said Mr. Callahan, taking a nickel out of his pocket. "Jed, you run and fetch a loaf of fresh bread." But he did not reprove Susie as Peggy hoped he would.

"Hateful thing! You need a good scolding." Peggy glared at the offender. "Stop chewing that gum."

"Oh, let her chew!" Mr. Callahan interposed calmly.

When supper was ready, Susie started to take her accustomed place at the table. But her father stopped her.

"Stay right where you are and chew on," he commanded.

"I want my supper," said Susie, in surprise.

"You've got all your supper," her father answered. "That's your supper."

"But I want some potato gravy and bread and rice and prunes," she said, beginning to whimper. "I'm hungry."

"You've got all your supper," her father announced firmly.

Peggy interceded for her. "Let her come to supper, pa. She's hungry."

"Not enough to hurt," said Mr. Callahan,

calmly. "If she wasn't hungry, 't wouldn't be a punishment."

Susie caught at the word "punishment." "If you've got to punish me, do it like ma did," she sobbed. "Scold me, or spank me easy—and let me come to supper."

"No," said Mr. Callahan. "You spent the supper money. Now you go hungry."

"Oh, I'm so hungry! I'm 'bout to starve! I'm going to starve! I know I'm going to starve!" Susie wailed.

Her woe so worked on the feelings of the younger children that Finn and Lois began to whimper.

"She's going to starve! Susie's going to starve! She'll starve dead!" Finn wailed even more loudly than Susie.

"Eat your supper, Finn. Hush that squallin', Susie," Mr. Callahan said sternly, "or it's a whippin' you'll get, as well as no supper." Then he said dryly to the other children, "Ain't you heard tell how bears lay down in logs and hollow trees and live all winter on their own fat? Susie's plump, and a night of feedin' on herself ain't goin' to hurt her,—or two nights, for that matter, if she ever does such a thing again."

"I ain't; I ain't ever going to; as long as I live I ain't," asseverated Susie, tearfully.

## CHAPTER XI

**I**N spite of the help which Mr. Callahan required the boys to give Peggy, the new tasks came hard to her young and unaccustomed hands. Domestic duties ate up the hours she wanted for lessons. Though she rose early, there were nearly always household tasks for which there was not time before school and which had to be crowded in with other before-supper duties. After supper she was so tired from the long day of home and school work that her eyes and brain drooped and it was hard to keep them fixed on her lessons. She comforted herself with the thought that she would get on better when experience gave her hands more facility in housework; it took less time and was better done each day than the day before.

Yet now and then, there came desperately blue days. Such was the Saturday morning six weeks after her mother went to the hospital.

It was a gray day, shivery with a cold, drizzling rain. Peggy had meant to rise early and get a good headway on her heavy day's work.

But on that dull, unsunned morning, she slept late and had to hurry about breakfast, so that her father might get to work in time. The children, not under the necessity of getting ready for school, lay abed long after she called them. At last her father came to her help.

“Jed! Elmore! Susie!” he called sternly. “You get up. The one I have to call another time, gets no breakfast.”

Remembering Susie’s supperless evening, they rose and dressed promptly.

Mr. Callahan was missing his wife sadly, and he would have been amazed at being told that her absence had brought him any pleasure. Yet it was true. He enjoyed being the real head of his family. He had now a responsibility and interest and pleasure in his home which had been lacking under the efficient, self-sacrificing management of his wife. And the responsibility and interest and pleasure were helping him keep straight.

While he ate his breakfast that Saturday morning, Peggy, with a great show of secrecy, filled his dinner pail. She put in some nicely-wrapped sandwiches—an invention of her own consisting of sausages and stewed potatoes, which her father said “hit the right spot”—and a piece of

bread pudding which she had learned to make at cooking school.

As soon as the hurried breakfast was over, she set to work on the washing which was her Saturday morning task. Jed and Elmore washed the dishes, a "girl's job" which they resented by rattling plates and splashing dishwater in the most trying way.

The baby, whom Susie had been told to tend, sat fretting and unheeded in the middle of the floor. Susie and Finn were in the girls' room, beside Lois's bed. The poor child had waked with an ache in her back and a bad temper, and was taking fierce pleasure in teasing the other children. Now and then, Finn or Susie broke into loud wails, but they could not be dragged from her bedside.

"Button nose! button nose! button nose!" she said tauntingly to Finn. "I'm goin' to pull it off. Ach!" She gave the maligned member a twitch and then displayed the end of her thumb held tightly between her forefinger and her middle finger. "See! There 'tis. There's your old button nose."

Finn emitted an ear-piercing shriek. "Ow! ouch! ouch! Lois done pulled off my nose," he yelled.

"Finn, hush! You know she ain't," protested Peggy, from the kitchen.

"She is, too!" screamed Finn. "I felt her done it."

Peggy was coming in, to put a stop to the turmoil, but Lois ended it by turning her face to the wall.

"Get out of my way," she said to Susie and Finn. "I'm tired of you. I'm goin' to let you alone now. I'm goin' to see the Wackersons."

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Peggy.

But Finn, whose wails had been subsiding, burst into loud sobs. "I don't want to be let alone. Don't let Lois let me alone. Make her stop letting me alone," he yelled.

"I never saw such hateful children," exclaimed Peggy. "Shut your mouth, Finn, or I'll tie you. Lois, you've been trying yourself this day. Thank goodness, you're going to play that Wackerson foolishness. You'll be one trouble off my hands till I get ready to go to see ma."

Even as her words came tartly, she pulled the cover gently around her little sister and pushed the pillow into a more comfortable position.

A minute later, Lois turned back with a howl. "Ow! ouch! They've got the mumps, the Wackersons is. And I can't go there. I can't go there at all. And I want to see them."

"What do you mean, Lois?" snapped Peggy. "Go on and play. You are just trying to be hateful and contrary."

"I'm not," wailed Lois. "I want to go. I want to go to the Wackersons. I went to the door and knocked. And Miz Wackerson come to the door and she say Big Girl Jinny got mumps on one side, and Little Sis Mamie got 'em both sides, and she 'specting Tom Boy to have 'em turrible bad. And she say I mustn't come in, for fear of ketching 'em. Ow!" Lois ended with a howl.

"Gracious!" Peggy said sharply. "Mercy sake, pretend they're well, and go on and play like you always do. Why do you shut yourself out of fun, saying they are sick?"

"If they've got mumps, they've got mumps," sobbed Lois. "And I can't go there. Ma say mumps is ketching, and she never let one of us go nigh the Rogans when they had 'em. And I'm so lonesome 'thout the Wackersons."

She stoutly refused to pretend away the illness, and spent a doleful morning, only enlivened by Mrs. Wackerson's coming to the door to give a full account of the illness of the children. They caught mumps, so Lois reported, from the McGinley boy who came over to play. Mrs. Wackerson asked him what was the matter with

his jaw and he told her expressly it was tooth-ache. She suspected what was the trouble, and she tried him with a bite of sour pickle "and he shrieked something awful." And then she knew what was the matter, but it was too late to save her children; they had caught it.

The dreary morning dragged past. The cold rain drizzled down unrelentingly and Peggy looked forward with dread to a rainy afternoon. But about midday the wind rose and blew away the sullen clouds.

And as cheering as the sunshine was a little visit from Anne Lewis, who brought some fashion magazines for the children to make paper dolls. Susie and Lois and Finn played happily with these, while Anne helped Peggy with a difficult English lesson.

Then Peggy hung out the clothes, and put some bread and a dish of potatoes on the table for luncheon.

"Anne says of course I'll get that scholarship prize," she announced to Jed and Elmore. "And wouldn't it be grand if one of you would happen along in a fire or a runaway and save somebody and get that hero prize?"

"Nothing ever happens when I'm 'round," said Jed. "I hadn't more'n turned the corner from M Street, coming home last Friday, when that

runaway horse came tearing along, and them two Bailey kids were playing in the middle of the street, where they had been told time and time not to go. And Tim Barney grabbed them and drug them out of the way. Now he's got a chanst at that prize,—just by loafing on the street where he hadn't ought to been, and them good-for-nothing Baileys being where they hadn't ought to been, too." Jed kicked his heels together, in gloomy protest against the injustice of the world.

"That's just the way," agreed Elmore. "Don't nothing come our way. Now, I saw the prettiest cat——"

"Scat!" interrupted Jed, fiercely.

Elmore started. "I ain't told nothing. I ain't going to."

"Is anybody said you was?" demanded Jed.

Then, for no reason that Peggy could see, both boys giggled.

"What on earth makes you act so foolish?" she asked irritably. "Talking of cats, have either of you seen Dirty Candy? Lois keeps on asking for him, and he ain't been here to-day."

"How could we see him, if he ain't been here?" Jed asked pertly.

"Maybe he runned away," said Elmore. "'Cause you talked 'bout whipping him, just for

his getting in the cupboard and on the table when he's hungry. I'd run away, if I was him."

Both of the boys rushed out of the room and Peggy heard their stifled laughter break into ringing peals.

"What are they up to now?" she wondered, gazing after them.

But she had scant time to consider the matter. The winter afternoons were short and she must hurry to the hospital. She sent Susie and Finn to visit the Rogans. She pulled Lois's bed nearer the window. Then she carried Danny to Prilla Hicks's.

At last she was ready to start to the Tuberculosis Hospital, carrying in one hand a bundle for her mother and in the other hand her spelling book. Peggy was beginning to learn to take advantage of spare minutes. She fixed her eyes resolutely on her book, as she went along the broad, pleasant streets overarched with trees. At last the car stopped at the entrance to the hospital grounds. Peggy got out and followed the winding road up the wooded hillside. A smiling nurse directed her to Mrs. Callahan, basking in the sunshine on an upstairs porch.

"Ma!" cried Peggy, gazing on the dear face and realizing more fully how precious her mother was and how ill she had been. The strained, nerv-

ous look was giving place to the tired one that comes when an overworked person relaxes and begins to rest. The hollow cheeks were filling out and were gaining a wholesome color. "Oh, ma, how we miss you! You've got to stay here till you get well."

Mrs. Callahan clasped Peggy tight.

"How's your pa?" That was always the first question. "And Lois? And Danny-boy? And Finn? And Susie? And Jed and Elmore? Does your pa get home reg'lar from work? How do you make out 'bout school? and meals? If they'd only agree to my comin' home onct a week to cook up a pile of victuals! Does your pa get off in good time mornin's for his work? Does he look worrited and lonesome of evenin's? Peggy, child, tell me all about everything."

"You ask questions so fast, you don't leave me room to do nothing but nod and say 'yes' or 'no,'" laughed Peggy. "We are all well. And see what I've brought you."

She opened her bundle and took out the home presents. There was a piece of the bread pudding she made for dinner the evening before, that her father said "was good enough for the President." Lois sent her prettiest paper doll. Susie put in a paper box she made at school—one edge had come ungummed, but it was as good as new

if you didn't want to put anything in it. There was a stick of chewing gum from Finn. Jed sent his weekly report and Elmore his Sunday-school ticket with a motto on it. Danny-boy sent two kisses and a double handful of love. And pa said he was coming to see her to-morrow and bring her the dollar he got for an extra job.

Then, interrupted by and answering a hundred eager questions, Peggy gave a minute account of the family history since her last visit to her mother.

Father regular! Why, she didn't have to look at the clock to know when it was six o'clock. His foot was on the porch to the minute, unless he stayed to do an extra job. Then he gave the children nickels and they went to the movies—all but Peggy; she stayed at home with Lois and studied. Oh, she was studying so hard!

Prilla Hicks cooked their oatmeal on her ironing days, and would cook the mush but pa said Peggy made it better. Mrs. McGinley put the twins to bed and mended their trousers the day before; wild horses couldn't drag out of them how they tore their trousers and where they'd been.

Peggy was keeping up in her lessons, in spite of all the work. She was ahead of everybody except Albert Fischer. He was just a little ahead

of her in English, but her arithmetic and history lessons were the best. So there you were. And she was going to catch up in English, as soon as she had a little more time for lessons. She had brought her spelling book to-day and had learned Monday's lesson, and on the way home she would finish reviewing for next week's test. Oh, she was going to win that scholarship prize!

And she explained to her mother for the doventh time how grand it would be to get it and how much help the money would be to them. After going to Business High School, she could get a grand place in an office, with big wages to help the family.

Then Peggy asked and her mother answered many a question about housekeeping—the burden of which was to do the most with the least money.

“Always keep potatoes on hand,” her mother told her. “They're so fillin'. And dried apples. And corn meal for mush. Make potato gravy real often. It's good and costs next to nothin'. It's just potatoes and water and a piece of meat—big if you've got it, but you can do with little or none—saltin' it real tasty. If there's molasses for the children, and meat and coffee for your pa, you can always get along.”

And then Mrs. Callahan told about her hospi-

tal life, gossiping pleasantly about the doctors and the nurses and the food and the other patients.

“There’s not only three good meals, but milk and eggs between times, all we want,” she said. “And do you see that woman—Mrs. Stanyon she is—crocheting in the corner? She’s been here going on six years and it’s not one cross, hard word she’s heard from nurse or doctor. Ain’t that wonderful? They look so glad to help us. The doctor talks as proud as me about my gainin’ four pounds and bein’ better of my cough.”

All too soon the time came for Peggy to start home.

“And remember, Peggy,” was her mother’s parting charge, “children need to be loved and praised, as well as have Mr. Make Mind after them. Oh, I’m so proud about your pa! Ev’ry night reg’lar!”

“Yes, ma’m, reg’lar. And last rent day ev’ry cent of the money was in the rent mug and pa told me to go to Jobson’s and pay it. And so I did. The receipt is there now in the mug. I told the children pa’d beat ’em, if they so much as touched it. And pa told me to go by the grocer’s to-day and order Sunday things, to be sent after seven o’clock when he’ll be there to pay.

I must hurry home now and have supper ready 'gainst he comes."

Peggy took the bundle of clothes that her mother had mended, and started home, heartened by her mother's praise and counsel and laden with love and messages for the home folks.

Mrs. Callahan opened the bundle of clothes on which she was allowed to sew an hour or two a day. Her hands lingered lovingly over the little ragged garments.

"I really believe," a nurse said, laughing kindly, "that you put in patches and rip them out and put them in again, so as to make the work last longer."

"It's like bein' with my children," said Mrs. Callahan, laughing too, but wistful. "Whiles I'm sewin', it seems 'most like I've got them with me. I 'most catch myself sayin', 'You, Jed, get off that box! One of them nails'll snag your coat.' Look at the seat of Elmore's pants! He will set 'round and wear 'em out. I wonder how him and Jed get all this red mud on their clothes? Poor little Finn! He gets holes in his stockin' heels. He stomps so hard! Bless their hearts, all of them." Mrs. Callahan folded the shabby garments, as if she were caressing her absent children. "I hope Peggy'll get home in time to

have supper ready for her pa when he comes in. She stayed 'most too late."

Peggy was delayed by a behind-time car, but she ordered the groceries and went home and cooked supper and had it ready and waiting—and still her father did not come.

## CHAPTER XII

PEGGY'S heart sank. She went again and again to the door and looked out in the gathering dusk. She tried to cheer herself with one after another of the dozen perfectly good reasons any one of which might explain why her father was detained.

He might have stopped at the grocer's, as he had done before, to add to her order something for a Sunday treat. But that would have delayed him only a few minutes.

Well, there might have been extra work at the shop. Draymen often came in, late and hurried, to have their horses shod—and extra work meant extra pay. Why, he had given each of them a nickel for the movies when he came in half an hour late on Tuesday. But this was Saturday night—and—and——

Now it was more than an hour after his usual home-coming time. It might have taken him that long to go with the boys by the store, to look at the suits he had half promised to buy.

But he had not gone there. While Peggy was

trying to make herself believe he had, Jed came in and said they had not seen their father. He and Elmore did go by the shop, but they were a few minutes late and one of the men told them their father had started home as soon as the whistle blew.

“Did—did you ask who he was with?” inquired Peggy. “And where have you been, this hour since then?”

“I didn’t ask,” said Jed, ignoring the second question.

But Peggy, remembering her mother’s injunction to “keep track of the boys,” persisted. “Where have you been, Jed? and you, Elmore?”

“That’s for me to know and you to find out,” said Jed, winking at Elmore.

Peggy was too worried about her father to persist. The supper which she had prepared in such haste, fearing it would not be ready for him, was getting cold.

“I wonder, I wonder where he is,” Peggy said, going to the door for the dozenth time, to peer and listen into the darkness. In her heart a fear was growing, greater than the wonder.

Lois put the fear into words. “Maybe the gang’s got him. Peggy, is the gang ketchin’, like mumps?”

To the younger children, “the gang,” which

their mother said was the cause of the absences and queer conduct of their father, was still a mysterious ailment. But the older children were beginning to understand.

“The gang ain’t nothin’ but folks what run together. Most times, it’s just for fun. Sometimes——” Jed glanced at Peggy and stopped. Perhaps girls didn’t know.

Ah! but poor Peggy did know. And she knew, too, that Saturday evening, wage day, was the time when her father usually succumbed to the failing which her mother loyally and stoutly attributed to the wiles of bad companions.

By this time, the baby was fretting for food and the other children were cross and hungry.

“Ma didn’t make us wait for pa,” Susie reminded Peggy. “Sometimes he didn’t come till I was ’sleep. Let’s eat.”

“Guess we might as well,” Peggy said dejectedly. She put aside, to keep warm for her father, a liberal portion of the best of their simple food, and then began to divide the remainder among the children.

While she was thus busied, footsteps were heard outside, first on the stepping-stones in the yard, then coming up the steps, and tripping on the board nailed over a hole in the porch floor.

Her father was familiar with that rough place and would not trip over it unless—unless——

As Peggy, her heart in her ears, feared and listened for the next step, steady or unsteady, there came a knock at the door.

It was the grocer's boy with the things she had ordered on her way home. But there was no money to pay for them, until her father came. Grumbling about the long walk for nothing, the boy turned to go, with the basket on his arm.

“Oh! can't you leave the things?” asked Peggy, desperately. “It's breakfast, dinner, supper,—all our Sunday eatings. Not goodies, just the every-day victuals. Father will send you the money as soon as he comes. I—I'm looking for him every minute.”

The boy shook his head. Mr. Callahan was too well known in his neighborhood for his family to have credit. “'Course I can't leave 'em. The boss would send me straight back for 'em. When your father comes home,—if he gets home to-night with any money—he can send for 'em. We keep open till ten o'clock Sat'days. I'll keep the things bundled up, in case he comes.”

“Wait one minute,” said Peggy. “Give me some bread—six loaves. Oh! I ain't got but a dime. I thought there was another nickel in the housekeeping mug. Oh, me! And we ought to

have the dozen loaves for Sunday. The children will be so hungry!"

"I'd like to leave the things,—honest I would," said the kind-hearted boy, "but I've got strict orders. I sure am sorry."

"I know," said Peggy, simply. "Folks is always sorry for us." The pathetic helplessness of her tone was more moving than her appeal.

The boy hesitated and began to fumble in his pockets for small change. "'Bout that bread——" he began awkwardly.

But Jed came to the rescue. "I've got a quarter, Peggy," he said. "I'll lend you the loan of it, if you'll pay me back out of the first house-keeping money. I've got a special use for this, o' Monday. And Elmore's got seventeen cents, he'll loan you same way."

"There's my five cents you can have," said Lois.

"Speak for yourself, Jed," grumbled Elmore, fumbling in his pocket. "You're always sayin' what I'll do."

"Well, you 'most always do what I say, don't you? And you always try to do what I do. Copy cat!"

"I ain't goin' to." Elmore squared himself sullenly.

"Come on!" Jed said persuasively. "We've got

to help Peggy—and us, too—out of this hole. We want something to eat to-morrow. I've fished up all I had. Don't be a pig. Hand out that seventeen cents."

"Ain't got but sixteen. You made me pay the extra cent for that——"

"Shut up!" commanded Jed, looking apprehensively at Peggy.

But she was busy, trying to select from the groceries the ones for fifty-six cents that would best tide them over Sunday—a dozen loaves of stale bread, twelve cents' worth of stew meat, a few potatoes and onions, and a little coffee for her father. She must have that, even if she stinted the stew.

After supper, the children sat around, fretting because their father had not come, bringing promised nickels for the movies—their usual Saturday night treat.

Lois, who had been a whining nuisance all day, was now the only serene one. She turned her back on the fretful children and played contentedly in her world of make-believe.

"Shan't. I'm just startin' to the Wackersons," she said, when Finn held out his fingers and asked her to play William-Come-Trimbleton.

"You said them Wackersons had mumps, and

you couldn't go there till they got well," he peevishly reminded her.

"I couldn't," said Lois, placidly. "But doctor came and said they'd be well to-morrow, and I'm playing it's to-morrow."

"That ain't fair. Is it, Peggy?" protested Susie.

Peggy did not answer. Her ears were alert for coming footsteps. She had a book open before her and was endeavoring to fix her mind on her lesson, but her thoughts wandered to hopes and fears about her father's return and to questions about how they could get on, now "the gang" had got him again. Of course that was what had happened. In the shadow of past experience, fear and doubt faded in Peggy's mind into sad certainty.

When her father had come home without his wages, her mother's sewing money had been the sole dependence of the family. Without that, what would they do next week? Peggy would have to go to Miss Hartman at the Charities office and request help—and have questions asked that would bring out the fact that her father had—that the gang had him again. How her mother would hate that!

Mercy! She wasn't learning a word of this history lesson. Perhaps she could do better with

arithmetic. She opened the book and attacked one after another of the problems—with small success. The family problem of feeding seven hungry children, without money, was more immediate and engrossing than problems about fencing five-acre lots and papering sixteen-foot rooms.

Jed put up his books and nudged Elmore, who stopped in the middle of the exercise he was writing. They had crept to the door, with their caps under their jackets, before Peggy noticed them.

She did not utter the reproof that they expected, the tiresome reminder that they mustn't be out later than eight o'clock and it was past eight now.

Instead, she turned to her brothers for help. "Boys," she said, "you know Sat'day nights, when father and Mr. McGinley come late, Mrs. McGinley goes to look for 'em. Maybe pa wouldn't be very mad if—if I'd remind him about coming home before all the money's gone. And I—I—I—don't know where to look for him."

Peggy brought out the falsehood pitifully. She knew too well the shuttered doors and gay windows behind which Mrs. McGinley searched for her husband those weary nights, while Mrs. Callahan sat at home and sewed and waited. If only they could get her father home to-night, before

“the gang” had fuddled his brain and emptied his purse!

Peggy went on. “And I hate to go by myself. I—I thought maybe you might go with me.”

“Sure!” said Jed.

It was slow Elmore who bettered the offer. “You stay at home, Peggy. We—we know where to look for pa. We’ll ask him to come home.”

Peggy agreed gladly and the boys changed their furtive preparations to open, proud ones. They put on their caps and buttoned up their coats and exchanged suggestions with Peggy as to what they should say to their father.

After the boys slammed the door behind them, Peggy took up her book again and compelled herself to work one problem after another. But the hard life problems before her—poor inexperienced child!—kept getting topmost in her mind.

At last she put aside her books and turned to her Saturday night duties. She gave Dan and Finn their baths and put them to bed; she made up Lois’s bed; she oversaw Susie’s bath and put her hair in papers for Sunday curls; she laid out the boys’ and her father’s clean clothes.

When the boys came in after nine o’clock with no news of their father, Peggy was dismayed. She had dreaded, indeed, where and how they would find him. But at that moment the worst

of her fears realized would have seemed better than this uncertainty.

"We looked in every one of the places on M Street," said Jed. "We peeked in back rooms, too. And we saw all 'the gang.' Old Walt Jones and Mr. Rogan were there, and we asked if they'd seen pa. And Mr. Rogan cussed and said pa don't go with gentlemen now; he's a tightwad and a spile sport."

"That means he ain't been with 'em and they ain't got any of his money to-night," said Peggy.

"What do you guess has become of him, Peggy?" asked Elmore.

Peggy shook her head.

Susie spoke up. "Well—if he don't get home to-night—or some time next week—the cops can look him up. Like they did Mr. Beekman."

"Mr. Beekman jumped in the canal and drowned," said Elmore.

"Mrs. Beekman says he fell in," Jed reminded his brother.

"Whichaway 't was, he drowned," said Elmore.

Peggy shuddered. New visions of horror presented themselves to her mind. Then she gathered herself together sturdily. "Mr. Beekman lived down by the canal," she said. "Pa don't have to go nigh there. He's just loafing 'round somewhere and he'll be home presently. You

boys better scrub up and get out the way before he comes in. Go in the kitchen. Your water's hot on the stove."

The boys bathed and went to bed in their attic room. But Peggy sat by the dying fire, struggling with her lessons and fearing and waiting—waiting——

At last she heard footsteps—heavy, dragging footsteps—and voices. A few times, it had been so bad that neighbors had brought her father home. Poor little Peggy opened the door and stood face to face with the policeman on that beat, Officer Brady.

## CHAPTER XIII

**H**EH, sissy! We're bringing your father home," said the policeman, in a voice made especially cheerful for the occasion.

Peggy stood still in the door, with a heart-sinking feeling that her worst fears were realized.

"Stand out of the way, sissy, and have the bed ready," came another voice out of the darkness.

"Oh!" Peggy gave a frightened little cry.

Then her father spoke in a clear, sober voice. "Don't be scared, my girl. I'm not hurt bad."

Father hurt! In the tumult of fear and—yes, of relief—Peggy found herself mechanically obeying orders. She pulled chairs out of the way, moved Finn, still sleeping soundly, from her father's bed to her own.

The men laid Mr. Callahan down with rough carefulness.

"He's got a sprained ankle. I done sent for the doctor. I guess you'd better have some hot water. Doctor may want it," said Officer Brady.

Without a word, Peggy went into the kitchen, stirred up the coals, added fuel, and put on a kettle of water. Then she returned to the room where Officer Brady and Mr. McGinley were

standing, with their backs to the fire and their hands clasped behind them.

“What else must I do?” inquired Peggy.

“Nothing, sissy, till doctor comes,” said the policeman. “I left a call for him, as soon as I found out what was the matter.”

“Took you times to find out,” complained Mr. Callahan, with grim humor. “Soon as I get up, I’m goin’ to apply for your job. Sure, a policeman ought to know a sober man from a drunk.”

The other men laughed. Peggy felt relieved; things were not at their worst, so long as men could laugh and joke. She picked up her father’s hat from the floor, hung it on its accustomed peg, and then stood anxiously beside the bed.

“Well, yes,” Officer Brady agreed with Mr. Callahan. “But, you know, Callahan—and Saturday night, too——”

“Sure I know,” Mr. Callahan said good-humoredly. “There, there, Peggeen, my girl! I ain’t so bad off.” He put out a hand to pat Peggy’s and gathered her cold trembling little fingers in his big warm clasp. Then he went on, to the policeman. “And I know how it hurt when you stood me up on that broke ankle. To be made to stand on a broke ankle! Seein’ as you got me home at last, I won’t wish that luck on you, Brady.”

“What makes you talk about its being broke?” protested Officer Brady. “It’s a sprain you got, twisting your foot when the car started. You’ll be all right in a day or so.”

“Sure!” agreed Mr. McGinley. “And you’ve got Sunday to rest. I’m going to bring you my boss’s horse to shoe on Monday.”

Mr. Callahan grunted dissent. “Broke,” he announced firmly. “That fool Williams—I’d like to wring his neck. Just slowin’ up, ’stead of stoppin’ on that corner—where they got the street all tore up, too—and then startin’ off with a jerk.”

“He’ll be fired all right, when you report him,” asserted Mr. McGinley, with grim satisfaction. “There’ve been complaints before and he’s been told he’s got to go next time he gets in trouble. He’d have been fired when he smashed into that car last summer—though some folks say the drunk driver was to fault—but his wife went to the boss and put up such a pitiful tale about her and the young uns that they gave him another try.”

“A man like that ain’t got no business on the road,” said Officer Brady.

“Not a bit, not a bit,” agreed Mr. Callahan. He moved restlessly and stifled a groan of pain. “Why in thunder don’t doctor come?” he asked crossly.

“He’ll be here presently,” said Officer Brady. “I’ll give him another call, if I don’t meet him. Wisht I could stay till he comes. But you know how ’tis, Callahan. Saturday night. You boys keep me busy.”

“Yes! I know,” agreed Mr. Callahan. “Much obliged, Brady, for helpin’ me home. Hope I’ll never have to do as much for you. And say,—you needn’t be callin’ names about what motor-man was on that car.”

“It ought to be reported,” said the policeman, turning at the door. “They’ll have all the facts from you when you get to the hospital, if that’s a bad sprain.”

“’Tain’t sprained. It’s broke, I tell you, man. And I ain’t goin’ to no hospital. Missis is one too many there, with all these children at home. But ’tain’t your business to peach on Williams. Nor yours, McGinley.”

The men agreed, grinning.

“Just as you say, Callahan.”

“If you want to let the fool go——”

“Let him go!” exploded Mr. Callahan. “The first thing I’ll do when I get up from here will be to punch his head and give him a genteel beat-in’, but ’tain’t no use puttin’ him out of his job, for his folks to suffer. I’ll settle him myself.”

Brady laughed. "Choose your time when I'm out of the way. I'll be deaf long as I can."

The policeman returned to his duty, and McGinley, a slow, blunt-featured, red-faced fellow, sat by the fire, awaiting the coming of the doctor.

Peggy sat beside her father and listened to his account of the accident.

He had left the shop promptly, with his wages, to go out Northwest to get the extra money from a lady who had driven by at lunch time, with a horse that had a loose shoe. He had some trouble finding the place. Then the lady was at dinner and the servant would not call her, so he had to wait. When she came out, she asked pardon for his being kept waiting and paid his carfare extra, and he started home.

When he reached his corner, the motorman merely slowed up and then started the car with a jerk. It wouldn't have mattered so much, but the pavement was torn up for repairs and he stepped on some cobblestones. A loose stone rolled under his foot and he fell with his weight on his turned ankle.

"And the ankle bone's broke," he insisted in the face of Mr. McGinley's dissent. "I drug myself to the sidewalk," he went on, "and presently Brady came along. He thought—well, he tried to make me stand up, and gee——!" He

frowned at the recollection and gave a restless jerk which brought a sharp twinge of pain that cut short his speech.

There was a moment's silence.

Then he said, "Peggy, what about the groceries?"

"The boy came with 'em," said Peggy, "but I didn't have the money. I had a dime and Jed and Elmore lent me forty-one cents, and Lois lent me five. We got some bread, and things for a stew, and your coffee—ma said let that always come next to bread."

"What about gettin' 'em now? If the boys go——"

"It's after ten," said Peggy. "The grocery's closed. We c'n make out to-morrow,—if we c'n get things Monday," she said doubtfully.

"Sure we can," said her father. "The money—my wages and that extry—is in my pocket book. Feel in the right-hand breeches pocket and get it out."

During this intimate discussion, Mr. McGinley was clearing his throat, whistling, and poking the fire,—making an elaborate pretense of not hearing. Now, however, he spoke briskly.

"There's your sick benefit, Callahan," he said, speaking of the insurance that workmen carry as a prudent matter-of-course. "'Tain't no big

sum, but it'll come in handy. And you'll get good damages from the street car folks."

"The only trouble about damages," Mr. Callahan spoke hesitatingly, "is—is Williams. He'll get fired—as he ought to, blame the sorry scoundrel."

There was a brief silence, while the two men considered the matter.

"It's bread and meat for your children," McGinley said.

"That's what it is," assented Mr. Callahan. "And there's all them other children—five or six dirty-faced tow-heads—and that little woman like a scared rabbit. What can you expect of the man? When he gets away from that bunch and clamps his hand on the car lever, he feels as big as Teddy Roosevelt. The blamed fool! If I had him by the neck right now, I'd leave him know what cobblestones and ditches feel like." Mr. Callahan moved angrily and then bit back a groan.

Peggy squeezed his hand and bit her lips in sympathy with his pain.

"He ought to lose his job," Mr. McGinley got back to the point from which he had started and was ready to begin all over again.

So was Mr. Callahan. "Yes," he said. "But there's the woman and children."

The discussion was cut short by the arrival of

Dr. Malone. With quick, firm, gentle hands, he examined the injured ankle.

"It's broken," he said.

"Told you so. I knew 't wasn't sprained. I heard the bone snap." Mr. Callahan looked triumphantly at Mr. McGinley.

"Yes, it's a break, a bad break." The doctor frowned down at Mr. Callahan. "How did it happen?"

"I was gettin' off the car at the corner where the street's tore up," explained Mr. Callahan, "and my foot turned on a loose cobblestone and I fell, all my weight on that ankle."

"I see," said the doctor, unsympathetically. "That corner's a bad place. It needs a sober head and a steady foot." He emphasized the adjectives.

Mr. Callahan did not answer.

"He was as sober as yourself, sir," said Mr. McGinley. "It was a nasty twist he got, gettin' off the car. The motorman just slacked up and started off with a jerk."

"You shut up," growled Mr. Callahan.

"Well," said the doctor, briskly, "I'll call an ambulance and we'll get you to the hospital and set the bone as quickly as possible."

He was starting out when he was called back

by Mr. Callahan's determined protest. "Sir, sir! I ain't goin' to no hospital, sir. You can set me and fix me at home, like plenty people have done."

"Pshaw, man!" said the doctor, impatiently. "You'll be much better off in the hospital."

"Sure!" agreed Mr. Callahan. "But who'll be here to see to these children?—Peggy here the oldest of the bunch and her not fourteen. If I go, wife's bound to come home. And she don't want a backset now. The treatment's doin' her a world of good. No, you just fix me up, sir, and leave me be at home, where I can see to the children. We've got grand neighbors. They'll help Peggy do for me—and we'll worry along somehow—like folks do, when they've got to."

The doctor disapproved of this, but he had nothing to suggest to which Mr. Callahan would agree. So the doctor yielded. He sent for the articles needed. The broken ankle was set, the bandages and splints were adjusted.

Peggy, pale but resolute, stood near, never in the way, but ready, at a word, for any service.

Dr. Malone did not seem to notice her, but as he was starting away he put a kind hand on her shoulder. "Poor little shoulders!" he said. "They're brave and willing: I wonder if they'll be strong enough? Well, well! We'll see. Good-night, good-night."

As Mr. McGinley started home, Mr. Callahan said, "You heard what I said, McGinley, about gettin' hurt. You say the same, you mutton-head. I can get my sick benefit on the doctor's certificate. What the inspector don't know, ain't goin' to hurt him. He's got no call to know about Williams."

"You've got to tell, to get street-car damages," said Mr. McGinley. "That'll be two or three hundred dollars. And Williams had ought to be fired."

"I'll settle him as soon as I get up," Mr. Callahan said.

"I hope you'll learn him some sense," grumbled Mr. McGinley.

"You can't learn sense to that fool," Mr. Callahan replied. "But one thing sure, I'll take it out of his hide—the sorry cuss!"

"He ought to be reported," insisted Mr. McGinley.

Mr. Callahan agreed with dissent. "Sure. But there's that stick-in-the-mud of a woman and all them children."

The argument was not repeated a fourth time only because at that minute Mr. McGinley's eye fell on the clock. "Who'd thought 't was two o'clock?" he exclaimed. "Bet my old woman has raked M Street with a fine-tooth comb, looking

for me. Good-night, Callahan. I'll be in to-morrow to see how you are getting on. Or send for me, if you want me in the night. Good-night."

"I'm going to leave Finn in my bed, pa, and lay down on your bed," Peggy said, when at last she and her father were left alone. "If you need anything, you can reach out and shake me awake. I sleep so turrible sound."

While she was getting ready for bed, she stumbled over a book on the floor. It was the arithmetic she had dropped when she rose to admit the men bringing her father. How long a time seemed between her and that three hours ago, when she was struggling with papering and fencing problems!

"I'm glad I got all those examples," she said to herself. "I can go over the hist'ry, Monday morning."

"Peggy," her father's voice came to her sleepy ear. "We've got not to let your ma know about me. If she did, she'd be home from that hospital, quick as car and foot could bring her. She's got to stay there and get well."

"Yes, pa," yawned Peggy.

"I'll be well soon. Well enough to maul Williams."

"Ye-e-es." And with the drowsy sibilant, Peggy was asleep.

## CHAPTER XIV

**I**T seemed to Peggy that her tired head had just touched the pillow and her sleepy eyes had been but a minute closed, when she was vigorously shaken by Jed.

“Didn’t you hear the clock alarm?” he demanded. “It’s long past getting-up time. We won’t get to Sunday school in time to get tickets, if you don’t hurry breakfast. I went in your room and waked up Finn ’stead of you. What’s he doing in your bed? And you here?”

Peggy sprang up, rubbing her eyes and wondering why she was on the bed beside her father, instead of in her accustomed place. Then all the events of the night came back to her.

She looked anxiously at her father who was still asleep.

“Start the kitchen fire whiles I dress,” she whispered to Jed. “I’ll be there in a minute and tell you—oh, I’ve got so much to tell you!”

She dressed quickly and went into the kitchen and gave a dramatic account of the night’s events, first to Jed, then over again to Elmore,

and then over again to Susie, as they came straggling in, one by one. This still further delayed her culinary duties. But there was one good thing about not having much to cook—the cooking did not take long. There was only some bread for breakfast, and the oatmeal—of which Prilla Hicks, according to her kind custom, had cooked several days' supply on her "ironing fire."

Peggy put some oatmeal in the double boiler to warm. There were two eggs in the cupboard, which she made into an omelet. She added flour and water to increase its bulk and put in the cold meat left for her father's supper the night before; and the result was a dish of which she was proud.

The omelet was divided between Lois and Mr. Callahan. With a bowl of milk toast, it made a breakfast which they ate with a relish that Peggy enjoyed hugely.

For the other children, healthy hunger was a sauce that sweetened their simple breakfast of oatmeal and bread and molasses.

After breakfast, Peggy helped the other children dress for Sunday school. Then she put the house in order. "I've got to miss this one morning," she said. "I promised ma I'd go reg'lar, but she didn't know what was going to happen. I know she'd 'scuse me this time."

"You've got to go to church," said Mr. Calla-

han, firmly. "You ain't going to act heathen, just because I've got a game foot. Sure, you've got to go to church, Peggy. Your ma's a mighty hand for church-goin' and she'll ask you first thing about that."

"But ma won't see me to ask," said Peggy.

"Sure she'll see you," said her father. "I can't go to the hospital, like I promised, this afternoon. You'll have to go and make a lot of excuses about me." He went on, in answer to the look of doubt on Peggy's face. "Sure, Peggy! You know, if your ma knew I was hurt, she'd come straight home. And that wouldn't be worse than for her not to come, for she'd be layin' there frettin' herself sick about me. We said we'd do our part about her stayin', and here 'tis up to us. She's got to stay there and get well."

Peggy finished her household tasks and dressed for church. She started a little early, so as to go by the McGinleys and the Bradys, to ask them not to mention her father's getting hurt. The doctor had promised to keep it from Mrs. Callahan. So the secret seemed safely bottled up.

After church the Callahans had their frugal dinner. For the children, there was bread and a stew that Peggy made. Mrs. McGinley sent a piece of her Sunday meat-pie to Mr. Calla-

han—such a generous piece that there was enough for Lois's dinner, too.

Then Peggy went to the hospital. It was a cold, rainy afternoon and Peggy went straight upstairs to the women's ward. To her surprise she found her mother with her hat on, standing talking earnestly with a nurse. Her face was flushed and her eyes had the feverish brightness which Peggy's had seen after long hours of sewing.

"Why, ma! You don't look so well as yesterday," Peggy blurted out in her surprise and distress. "I'm afraid you stuck too close to that mending I brought you yesterday."

"How's your pa?—oh! I'm all right. I'm well enough to come home right now. How's your pa?"

"Pa? He's all right. He says tell you he couldn't come this afternoon. Officer Brady came in to visit——"

"Why, why! your pa——" Mrs. Callahan interrupted.

Peggy's voice flowed on, cheerfully. "And he sat down in the rocking chair like he'd come for a visiting visit."

"Your pa——" Mrs. Callahan began again; then she checked herself and said earnestly, "Peggy, did your pa say for you to tell me that?"

"Yessum. Sure!" said Peggy.

Mrs. Callahan hesitated a minute. Then she said adjuringly, "Peggy, if your pa wanted me—if there was need of me day or night—you'd let me know, wouldn't you?"

"Sure, ma," said Peggy, looking surprised. Then in blind wisdom she added the right words, "I wouldn't worry you about home things, ma, but of course I'd tell you if we really needed you. Pa said this morning what a blessing 'tis you are getting so well and strong, you'll be ready for anything."

"That's so; that's so. I s'pose I am doin' you good by stayin' here. And you are sure your pa ain't needin' me,——" Mrs. Callahan said.

"'Course not," said Peggy. She answered the look on her mother's face. "He's getting on fine. What are you worrying about, ma?" she asked with sudden wonder if somehow her mother had obtained disturbing news of the night's events. But a second thought convinced her that was impossible. The only people who knew had promised not to tell and they would certainly keep their promise. "Have you had any company to-day, ma?" she asked.

"Not a soul," said Mrs. Callahan.

"What makes you worry so about pa to-day?"

Mrs. Callahan cast about for a reason. "Well," she said, "you see—well, last night was

Sat'day night—and—well—things happen, you know."

"Oh!" said Peggy, with relief. "You were afraid the gang would get him. No, ma'm! He came home as sober as a judge, and every penny of his wages in his pocket. Cross my heart, he did."

Mrs. Callahan looked relieved, but baffled. "What—what time did he get home?" she asked.

"I was just going to tell you," said Peggy. "He came home late. I was beginning to worry—'cause his supper was getting cold, you know. He went way out Northwest for some extry money for shoëing a lady's horse at lunch hour. He'd promised us money for the movies, but being as 'twas too late when he came home we're all going next week to a ten-cent show. I hope I can leave lessons be and go, too. Won't that be grand?"

"Grand," agreed her mother, reassured by Peggy's genuine enthusiasm.

"Ma," said Peggy, after a pause, "how did you manage about things when you—you forgot to order groceries? I ain't used to things, and when there ain't no—when they don't come Sat'day nights—I don't just know how to get on."

"Peggy," said Mrs. Callahan, earnestly, "did

your pa bring home his wages? Answer me honest, my girl."

Peggy was glad of a question in response to which she could meet her mother's eyes with real frankness. "Sure he did, ma," she replied. "Cross my heart, he did. There 'tis now in the housekeeping mug on the mantelpiece,—three paper notes, a fifty-cent piece, three quarters, two dimes and a nickel. No, he paid Jed twenty-five cents and Elmore sixteen cents and Lois a nickel, that they lent me to pay for groceries before pa came—but the rest is all there."

The circumstantial account was convincing. Mrs. Callahan breathed a sigh of relief. She sat down and Peggy pulled a chair close to her side.

"But there ain't much to eat in the house today," Peggy went on. "I—I didn't get the groceries in last night."

"After my tellin' you what to do! Peggy, ain't you ashamed?" reproved her mother. "With your pa bringin' home the money and him needin' good victuals—men always do—and you so careless not to 'tend to things. And promisin' to go by the grocer's and order for Sunday! I'm ashamed of you, Peggy."

"Yes, ma. But the car was late. And pa was behind time. And I'm not so used to housekeep-

ing. And—and——” In spite of herself, tears rolled down Peggy’s cheeks.

In a flash her mother relented. “You poor child! You poor little thing! You’re doin’ good as you can. I ought to be at home, ’tendin’ to things. I’m comin’ right now.”

Peggy’s hands held her fast. “No, ma’m, you ain’t,” she said. “We want you should stay here, pa and all of us. It was his last word to me, about how good it’s going to be to have you come home well. And you wouldn’t spoil it all?”

Mrs. Callahan’s look of excited resolution faded into one of affectionate anxiety. “I feel like I ought to be at home,” she said, “and help you.”

“I want you to help me now, ma,” said Peggy. “I want you to tell me about things.”

“What things?” asked her mother.

“About eatings. For breakfast we had oatmeal and bread and molasses. And pa and Lois had eggs with bacon in it. I made a omelet, like Mrs. Hicks showed me,—only I put in more flour to make the eggs go farther.” Her mother nodded approval. “And for dinner there was bread, and I made a stew. And Mrs. McGinley’s meat-pie was for pa and Lois. And for supper there’s bread and oatmeal. I can make some meal mush.”

"Is there plenty bread?" asked Mrs. Callahan.

"Yessum. We had it cold, thick sliced, for breakfast and dinner. There's a lot for supper."

"That's good," said her mother. "You can make cinnamon toast. Your pa'll relish that. He always does. You know how to make it. You've seen me make it dozens of times, for Sunday night supper."

"Yessum. But I didn't take notice," Peggy answered. "I don't know how you made it. I just know it was good."

So Mrs. Callahan gave the directions. An egg was to be beaten and added to a tablespoonful of milk. The sliced bread was to be dipped in that and fried, then sprinkled with powdered cinnamon and sugar.

Peggy smacked her lips at memory of the toothsome dish which they always enjoyed. "It's lots of help for you to tell me things, ma," she said wistfully. "I wish I could ask you about—everything."

What a help it would be to consult her mother about her father! But of course he was right. It wouldn't do to worry her and retard her recovery by telling her of his accident.

As Peggy was starting home, a nurse came in. "Well, Mrs. Callahan, I hope your daughter brought good news. Is your husband——"

Mrs. Callahan, who had been making unnoticed signs, now interrupted. "Miss Middleton, I've got something important to ask you. Please let me whisper to you."

The nurse, surprised at her earnest haste, stopped and listened to several whispered sentences; then she nodded and smiled. "Very well," she said. She followed Peggy to the door. "How is your father?" she asked.

"We're all very well, thank you," said Peggy.

"If your father wasn't well, if there was anything the matter at home, you'd better tell me, you know. I know what's best to tell your mother."

"Yes, ma'm. Sure, ma'm. Pa says he's feeling fine." Peggy was smiling, but uncommunicative.

The nurse returned to Mrs. Callahan. "I couldn't find out anything, Mrs. Callahan. She wouldn't tell me. Why didn't you ask her straight out?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Callahan, wearily, "I tried to find out. But I didn't. They're tryin' to keep it from me, for fear of worryin' me. And if they feel better for me not to let on I know, I've got to keep still. It ain't anything terrible bad, or I'd have got it out of Peggy. Oh, dear!" And she sighed.

Peggy, happily unaware of her mother's state of mind, was hurrying home. She prepared the cinnamon toast, with great care and success, and it was greedily enjoyed. There was peace and good-humor in the family until Peggy suggested that it was bedtime. The younger children were tired and drowsy from an outdoors day, but they waked up and rebelled as soon as she proposed going to bed.

"Ma always tells us to go early," she reminded them.

"But she don't make us do it," Elmore reminded her.

"But go early to-night," Peggy urged. "I was up so terrible late last night. And I want a chance to rest before getting-up time. I'm so sleepy!" She yawned. "Do let's go to bed."

"Shut up, Peggy! You're trying to be so bossy," said Jed, hardly lifting his eyes from his book.

"You kids do what Peggy says," their father called sternly from the bed. "Ain't you 'shamed not to?—and her cookin' and cleanin' and takin' your ma's place so good and smart. You go straight to bed."

Jed and Elmore shuffled upstairs to their bedroom, but Susie whined a protest. "We never minded ma in no big hurry."

“Well, you’ve got to mind in a hurry now,” was her father’s decisive rejoinder. “You’ve got to mind Peggy and me, as long as we’re runnin’ this shanty. And I don’t call it mindin’ to hang around and talk back.”

“If we waited and kept on begging, real often ma changed her mind and let us stay up,” explained Susie, who was undressing slowly.

“That ain’t mindin’,” said her father. “You hurry and get in bed.”

## CHAPTER XV

**M**R. CALLAHAN refused to take any steps to get indemnity from the street railway.

He was not budged an inch by the arguments of a plausible insurance lawyer who held out alluring prospects of securing a large indemnity and deducting a very moderate commission—"only fifty per cent."

"No," said Mr. Callahan. "No," he reiterated grimly. "The first day I'm able, I'll take my pay out of Williams's skin. There ain't no sense in gettin' him reported to the comp'ny, to lose his job. December ain't a time for a family man to be out of work—provisions high as they are."

His industrial insurance, or "sick benefit," was obtained promptly and without any mention of the motorman's recklessness. It required skillful contriving to make this little weekly income provide food and rent.

Peggy and her father planned the place of each dime as carefully as if it were part of a Chinese puzzle. It was a great triumph when bread,

potatoes, rice, molasses, stew meat, coffee, and other necessaries were bought and there was a surplus dime or quarter. Such a triumph was celebrated by spending the remaining coin for chewing gum or candy or icecream cones.

During these home-staying days, Mr. Callahan did more than plan the outgo of their small income. He managed his children with unexpected skill and judgment, dealing with them as firmly as with the skittish colts he handled. Instead of running wild during their mother's absence as the neighbors had foretold, the young Callahans were more straitly controlled than they had ever been. They were, indeed, more obedient to their father than they had been to their devoted, long-suffering mother.

Jed, with the shrewdness of childhood, stated the reason. "There ain't any 'maybe so' in pa's 'no,'" he said. Not only was it impossible to twist the "no" into "yes," but delay or teasing was apt to bring punishment.

In the afternoons Jed and Elmore could and did escape their father's notice. Both the boys sold papers after school, and they collected the family fuel,—cinders from dump heaps, bits of coal from the gas house or coal yards, drift-wood from the river bank, broken boxes from the grocer. Supposedly busy with these duties, the boys

were out until dusk and sometimes until dark.

Peggy had an uneasy feeling that their glib explanations did not truly account for their time,—certainly they did not account for the red mud that stained their hands and clothes.

She wondered and worried about the matter, but she bore alone the wonder and the worry. She did not like to tell her father and have him reprimand the boys, unless it was necessary on a definite charge with proof.

She would have been unwilling to burden her mother with the matter, even if she had thought of it when she was at the hospital. But she did not think of it then. She was too harassed, trying to conceal her father's accident. She often got uncomfortably entangled in snarls of contradiction; and more than once she dropped betraying words and had to devise a hasty explanation.

One day she told her mother, with pride, that Dr. Malone himself asked for a slice of her cinnamon toast on Sunday evening when he came in just at supper time; and he said it was "A Number One" and he wanted Peggy to tell his housekeeper how to make it. And then Peggy stopped short, wondering what she should say if her mother asked why the doctor came. But fortunately her mother did not ask. She was as

pleased as Peggy at the doctor's commendation of the cinnamon toast.

Mrs. Callahan never seemed to notice the betraying words, not even when they were followed by a sudden guilty pause and a startled glance to see if she suspected anything. She always asked first and most earnestly about her husband, and he was getting on so well that Peggy could reassure her heartily.

And so the December days were passing.

Peggy was becoming more and more puzzled and worried about Jed and Elmore. Often she intercepted significant glances and gestures and scraps of conversation, but day after day passed without giving a clue to their meaning. As usual, the boys were eager to make every possible cent, but their nickels were no longer spent at the movies. Instead of going there, they came and went with mysterious packages.

Peggy's suspicions were made more definite by Officer Brady whom she met on her way from school one afternoon.

"What are them boys up to now?" he asked. "Where are they going every day? And what for?"

"I don't know," said Peggy. "I thought maybe they were playing Cops and Robbers in Georgetown."

"They ain't," said the policeman. "And they need watching. It happened they got off from that house-burning business. I hope"—he spoke with the emphasis of doubt—"I hope that ain't making them bold in worse mischief. I see them 'most every day, whispering together, and then they sneak off, hiding things."

Peggy looked disturbed. "Who?" she asked.

"Oh! your twins and the McGinley boy and Tim Rogan and some more. There's a gang of them, and a gang of boys needs looking after."

"That they do, sir," Peggy sighed.

She began to question Jed about the matter as soon as he came into the kitchen where she was busy cooking supper.

"None of your business," he said at first.

When she threatened to appeal to their father, he became more talkative,—and, she felt sure, more secretive.

He and Elmore might have been whispering with the other boys. Were they to yell everything they had to say, so that Officer Brady could hear it? What if they were carrying about things that he didn't see? Did they have to show him all their papers and coal and cinders and kindling wood? Hadn't they been keeping the fuel boxes full? What was she fussing about? And what was there to worry father with?

What was there for her to tell him anyway?

Jed sauntered into the other room and Peggy, dropping the subject, finished cooking supper and then settled down to her studies.

The next afternoon she saw Elmore come up the path with a little bundle which he stowed away under the porch steps.

When he went to get kindling, Peggy—feeling very guilty and underhanded—pulled out the package and examined its contents. It was—a bottle of milk! Surely nothing could be more harmless—or more mysterious.

Elmore came back, dumped the kindling in the box, and ran out—pausing at the porch to get his milk bottle—and returned half an hour later in high glee.

What was the meaning of it? Peggy, thoroughly puzzled, told Anne, who suggested all sorts of things. Perhaps there was an escaped criminal whom the boys were harboring and feeding. Perhaps they had fastened up one of their comrades for a prank. Perhaps they had formed a club, or secret society, and were having “spreads.” They were carrying not only milk, but other food. Peggy had seen them cramming bread in their pockets and had complained, thinking merely they were making wasteful provision for ravenous appetites.

The other Holly Hill boys were making inroads on family larders. Peggy learned this one afternoon when she ran to the McGinley's, carrying some apples in the dish that her neighbor had brought over full of stew. It wasn't manners, Peggy's mother had told her, to return empty a dish that came to the house full.

Mrs. McGinley was grumbling because there wasn't meat left for supper. She had put away a hunk of meat and Mike had taken it. It wasn't natural for even a growing boy to have an appetite like his. He had just walked off with 'most a loaf of bread in his hand,—and he would come back and eat supper, as if he hadn't had a mouthful.

Peggy went home, more puzzled than ever. What were those boys doing with all that food? Not eating it, she was sure. Ought she to talk the matter over with her father? She hated to worry him and have the boys call her telltale. So she resolved to wait a while and try to find out for herself.

If only she could depend on what the boys said! If only they would tell the truth! Peggy had often laughed at Anne Lewis's disapproval of "white lies" and now she was beginning to see truth as a fair and desirable thing.

She surprised Anne the next day by saying,

"I wish everybody would tell the truth. It would save a lot of trouble." Then she added quite vindictively, "I am never going to tell a story again, when I don't have to."

But what about school work these days and Peggy's prospects for the longed-for scholarship prize?

For a while after her father's accident, Peggy found life very hard. The short days were over-filled with many various duties that she did not know how to compound. Sometimes house tasks would be neglected, sometimes school work would be slighted, and there were blue days when everything seemed to go wrong and Peggy had a heart-sinking certainty that Albert Fischer would win the prize.

Milly Blake, too, was pressing forward. Milly was clever, but she had always lacked application. Now her father had promised her a gold locket and chain if she won the scholarship prize. She announced, with a toss of her flaxen curls, that she was surely going to get it; she was going to study and study and do nothing but study.

How many things besides study poor Peggy, for her part, had to do! Crowding household duties demanded so much time! And it seemed as if a home emergency presented itself whenever she had an especially difficult lesson. It was hard.

Sometimes it was almost disheartening. Finn would play in the water and catch cold and have to be dosed and amused; or Lois's legs would ache so that Peggy must rub them till the poor child fell asleep; or little Dan would be fretful with his teeth and keep Peggy awake at night, and then she would oversleep and not have time in the morning to study a hard lesson.

But she was doing her best. And some days things went well and she was hopeful, even confident.

Her father, with whom she talked over her work and her ambition, became as interested and eager as she was. He helped her all he could, during those days he lay abed. He tended Danny-boy by the hour while she studied. He worked at her arithmetic lessons, while she was busy over the cook stove or the wash tub, and laboriously mastered and explained the problems. He helped the children and made them help themselves, so as to spare Peggy. Susie and even Finn had to struggle with their own strings and buttons. Jed and Elmore were required to help about housework, as well as to run errands and do chores. It was only Lois of whom nothing was required and whose whims, which her father used to laugh at, were now indulged.

"You don't know how hard it is to lay abed," he said apologetically to the others, when Lois was cross.

The kind neighbors ran in and out to minister to Mr. Callahan's needs and to give Peggy a helping hand.

Often after school Anne Lewis came by to help Peggy over hard places in English, her most disliked study.

Anne could not understand this distaste.

"Why, Peggy dear, English is so easy and beautiful! It's something we use every day," she exclaimed one day, when Peggy opened her book with a sigh.

"I don't," said Peggy. "It's just a book study. And it's awful hard and dry." So it was to her. And she went on saying, "I done got it," while she filled in blanks that said, "I have learned my lesson."

"I reckon I don't know how to tell you," Anne said at last, despairing of her own power to make things intelligible to Peggy. "Why don't you ask your teacher to explain it?"

"I do," said Peggy. "And she explains. And then I don't understand as much as I thought I did. And then she explains some more. And then I don't understand anything. So I just learn it and say it by heart, and don't bother about un-

derstanding it. I like things, like arithmetic, you can put down in figures and add and subtract and multiply and there's a right answer to get." She looked dolefully at the page which commanded her to imagine she was a butterfly and write her experiences.

Anne shuddered. "I hate arithmetic," she said vehemently. "I'd just as soon—as soon eat sawdust as study it. Now this lesson is so easy it's like play. Shut your eyes, Peggy, and think. You've seen butterflies. What did they do?" In Anne's eyes were shining thoughts of sunny wind-swept meadows purple and yellow with wild bergamot and goldenrod, over which hosts of butterflies flitted and basked. "Tell about butterflies you've seen, Peggy," Anne insisted.

"I don't know—oh! one flew in our cook room onct," Peggy said, challenging her reluctant memory. "It flittered in the butter and got awful messed up."

"Ugh!" Anne exclaimed. Then she said pitifully, "Poor thing! Tell about its hard, sad time—like the Ugly Duckling, you know—and let it end happy."

Peggy shook her head. "Can't," she said briefly. "It flopped on the floor and the cat et it."

There was an awful pause. Anne looked at

Peggy with puzzled despair, then rallied and said firmly, "Peggy, that will not do. Think! Think hard! Why, we saw little yellow butterflies that day at Great Falls. Play you're one of them, and tell about what you saw."

"'Bout seeing us? And what we had to eat?" asked Peggy, her pencil poised in air.

"Ye-es," submitted Anne.

"Oh, I can do that," Peggy said confidently. "I can 'magine what I saw. I can say it—I—flew by and saw Susie reach for a nut and stump her toe and——" Peggy began to scribble diligently.

"I'll go in to see Lois and hear about the Wackersons while you are writing that," said Anne.

"All right," Peggy agreed. "Ain't she the funny kid? Making all that up about the Wackersons!"

Anne thought it was stranger not to make things up. She listened pleasantly to Lois's report of the latest Wackerson happenings.

"I like to tell you about 'em," Lois said. "You—you look like you are 'quainted with 'em. Now, Anne, you tell about them old big giants."

Anne wandered off into a story that delighted the eager listener and made her late getting home.

"Where were you this afternoon, Anne?" Miss



"TELL ABOUT BUTTERFLIES YOU'VE SEEN," ANNE INSISTED



Drayton asked at dinner. "I waited for you to go down town shopping."

Anne explained that she had stopped to see Lois Callahan who was still in bed. Mrs. Callahan was in the hospital and now Mr. Callahan was at home with a hurt foot.

"Don't they need help?" asked Mr. Patterson.

"I have sent them food several times," said Miss Drayton, "and I had Miss Hartman of the Associated Charities go to see them. Mr. Callahan told her he didn't want anything from the Charity office. I wonder if he was civil to her? People like that, you know——! Well, something ought to be done for those children. We are going to take the case up at our Aid Society to-morrow."

Meanwhile, in the cottage on Holly Hill, Anne Lewis was under discussion and the fact that she was an adopted orphan was received in a way which amazed Peggy.

Jed started the conversation that brought unexpected results. Anne was going down the path when he came in with an air of just starting out again.

"Is it 'cause Anne Lewis is so nice that she has been more homed than other folks?" he asked, looking after her.

"What do you mean?" asked Peggy .

“Well, when we first knew her she was with Miss Dorcas Read in the Fairview Flats—and she said she had a home before that—and now she is with Pat Patterson at his home,” Jed answered.

“Oh!” said Peggy. “She’s an orphant, don’t you know? Like Orphant Annie in the poetry, only different. And she got lost and came to live with Miss Read that’s her cousin. That’s when she lent her Honey-Sweet doll to Lois and the dog tore it. And then Miss Drayton found her, and took her back to live with her and Pat and Mr. Patterson.”

“How did they get her first? And how did they lose her?” Jed wanted to know.

But Peggy had told all that she knew. “When folks don’t have homes, somebody adopts ’em,” she said. “Ain’t you heard ma tell about the lady that Mrs. Peckinbaugh knows? One day her doorbell rang and when she went to the door, there wasn’t anybody there,—just a basket with a little baby in it and a card pinned on, saying, ‘Please adopt me.’ And the lady took her in and took care of her always.”

“That’s it!” said Jed, clapping his hands. “Glory! That’s it! If they ain’t got homes somebody dopps ’em. Bully! Elmore! Elmore! Come here quick. I’ve got something to tell you.”

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He was out of the house in a flash, followed by Elmore. After two or three minutes' excited consultation, they ran down the path, calling Mike McGinley.

"What foolishness are the boys up to now?" wondered Peggy, looking after them with a worried frown.

## CHAPTER XVI

**T**HE next morning Miss Drayton called up the local office of the Charity Association to ask if it had any recent information about the Callahans.

Miss Hartman was out, but the office assistant who answered the telephone was sure, so she informed Miss Drayton, that the family had not applied for aid recently. The inference—the very strong inference—was that they were not in need. “Once they get the Associated Charities habit, they come to us and depend on us for everything,” said the young woman, cynically.

She did not know that the wise, tactful lady in charge was keeping quiet watch over the Callahans. Miss Hartman welcomed their growing spirit of independence and gladly left the family to work out its own salvation, unhindered by help. For she realized that some privations were better than continued dependence on the Charities.

The Callahans were not suffering nor in real need. They struggled along, living on Mr. Cal-

lahan's insurance money, and were sometimes comfortable and happy, and sometimes uncomfortable—but generally happy still.

Miss Drayton went out of her way to the Aid meeting, in order to carry the Callahans a basket of nourishing food and to get first-hand information about their condition. Mr. Callahan received her with unfriendly gruffness. He always resented the visitors who came "poking in to ask questions." But Lois, who was lying in her bed beside the window, was friendly and smiling.

The small home, especially Lois's room, looked very forlorn to Miss Drayton. "It's the dingiest little place you ever saw," she explained at the Ladies' Aid Society. "Just a cuddly hole opening out of the kitchen—which is dining-room too, for that matter—and the other downstairs room—which is bedroom and sitting-room too. Think of being sick and staying all day long in a little room like that, with plastering cracked and falling! Two beds, two chairs, and a rickety table are all the furnishing of the room. And that poor child has been there flat on her back for weeks, and has to be there for weeks to come. I came by Dr. Malone's office to ask him about the case. Her heart is infected from a tonsil trouble. He says she's getting on as well as

possible, as well as if she were in a hospital. And she says the neighbors listen for her bell and come in whenever she needs them. She had her face turned to the wall and was talking to herself—poor child!—when I went into her room. Ill for weeks—in that room!”

“Couldn’t we get the doctor to send her to the hospital?” asked Miss Lowry, the thin one with the mottled red and purple face.

“I asked him. He said not,” answered Miss Drayton. “He said there are so many charity cases and when there isn’t real need and they can get on at home, he believes in letting them alone.”

“That sounds so heartless! I never heard of anything so pathetic as that child. We must send her things to eat and playthings. Think of her being so lonesome that she lies there talking to herself!” The speaker was the Miss Lowry with the abundant fair hair and the broad pink face and the irritating fixed smile.

“I can’t get it off my mind,” sighed Miss Drayton. “Think of having to lie there all day, looking at those bare, splotched walls. I thought how dreadful it was, when I walked in and saw her lying there, with her face to the wall. If you could have seen it!”

“Oh, you described it wonderfully, dear—

wonderfully. You have quite a remarkable talent for description," said the fat Miss Lowry.

"It was most affecting," said the thin Miss Lowry.

Mrs. Lawson, formal and efficient, made now her first contribution to the conversation. As usual, she had withheld comment until she had formulated a plan of action.

"I suggest that we make a Christmas contribution to this pathetic case," she said in her precise voice. "The mother being in the hospital, and the housekeeping devolving on the eldest daughter—quite a young girl, I understand, Miss Drayton?"

Miss Drayton agreed.

Mrs. Lawson went on: "I suggest that we have the house thoroughly cleaned, the room of the ill child papered, that we furnish it with white iron beds, a new table, some krex or rag rugs, muslin curtains—making the room attractive while appropriate to their circumstances—and so add sunshine and happiness to this little shut-in life," she concluded.

There was a chorus of approval and it was decided to carry out the plan so as to make a "beautiful surprise" for Lois.

Mr. Callahan did not look at all grateful when the enthusiastic kind ladies climbed the hill to

the little gabled cottage to tell him what they intended to do. In fact, he consented to the plan only because it was presented to him as something that would please Lois.

The ladies enlisted Mrs. Rogan's aid. She readily agreed to take Lois for a visit the next day, while the room was being renovated.

"I do it often enough for her not to suspicion nothin'," said the good woman. "But, ladies, she ain't no lonesome child. That she ain't. She's gladder to go home every time than she is to come. You ought to hear her talk 'bout them Wackersons—they make-believe folks she plays with. They're just as real to her as I am."

"It's a queer thing for a child to do. Is she—all right?" inquired Mrs. Lawson.

"Bright as a button," said Mrs. Rogan.

"Nonsense, Louise!" said Miss Drayton. "Children often have such fancies—these playmates that fade away as they grow older. And the children become normal matter-of-fact men and women. Why, Cousin James Drayton had a little imaginary friend, Huckley, that he talked about all the time when he was a little fellow. Now, you know, James is a very efficient stenographer in a railroad office, with no more imagination in him than in his job."

"Well, it will be a blessing to give the child

something pleasanter—and real,” said Mrs. Lawson.

They went complacently ahead with their plan. Lois, consenting rather than rejoicing, was carried to Mrs. Rogan's. Mr. Callahan turned his face to the wall and grimly endured having the place put through a course of floor scrubbing, wall cleaning, and window washing.

“It will save Peggy some work,” he reflected, and pressed his lips together when he longed to order the charwoman out of the house.

Meanwhile, paper hangers were at work in Lois's room and it came from under their hands a bower of roses; buds and blossoms dotted the silvery stripes and there were festoons of roses on the border at the top. The ladies trotted back and forth and put up white muslin curtains and tied them back with pink ribbons. Two white iron beds were brought in—a big one for Peggy and Susie, and a little one at the window for Lois—and new white spreads were put on both. A pink-and-tan rag rug was laid on the floor between the beds. The room was undeniably pretty and dainty, and the ladies viewed it with great satisfaction.

“Anne will be delighted with it,” said Miss Drayton. “I told her to come by with Peggy from school. She is so interested in this child.

I am sure that she will enjoy it as much as Lois."

But Anne did not go into the expected ecstasies. "Yes, Aunt Sarah; yes, indeed, Mrs. Lawson; it's pretty. It's very pretty. Oh, yes, Aunt Sarah! I like it. It's lovely. Like summer and sunshine. But I don't know— Well, maybe—I do hope Lois will like it."

Peggy and Susie and Finn stared around with open-mouthed admiration.

Peggy gave the enthusiasm vainly expected from Anne. "It's grand!" she exclaimed. "Oh, it's perfectly grand! Sure, Lois will like it."

There was a cloud on Anne's brow and it did not lift when Lois was brought home in Mrs. Rogan's kind, capable arms. Miss Drayton, Mrs. Lawson, and the Misses Lowry stood in the kitchen, peeping from behind the half-opened door.

"Sh, sh!" they said to each other, beaming with complacent expectation of Lois's delighted surprise.

Mrs. Rogan unwrapped the shawl and laid the child gently on the new white bed and drew the new white cover over her.

"There, dearie!" she said.

Lois looked around her—and then looked again. There was a long minute of silence.

"This—this ain't my room," Lois said blankly.

"The nice ladies fixed it up to-day. That's

why they sent you visiting. Ain't it grand?" said Peggy. "Look at the walls. All roses. And the curtains. That's sure-enough silk ribbon on them. And the rug to cover the floor 'twixt the beds. Ain't it perfectly grand?"

Lois stared with dismay instead of joy. "My room's gone," she quavered. "I—I don't know this here place."

"Sure you don't," agreed Peggy. "It's so grand it looks like Anne's room. Don't it, Anne?"

Anne stood silent, her eyes fixed on Lois and her face reflecting Lois's changing emotions—surprise, dismay, doubt, and then distress, deepening distress.

Lois burst into tears. "My—my Wackersons!" she wailed.

Mrs. Lawson, perplexed and kindly, came into the room. The other ladies trailed after her. "We expected you would like this pretty room, dear," she said. "Don't you think it's pretty?"

Lois, shaken with sobs, caught her breath and wailed piercingly. "I hate it."

"Haw, haw!" Mr. Callahan roared with delight at the discomfiture of the ladies. Then Lois's distress sobered him and he said something in a fierce undertone.

"I want my Wackersons," Lois was crying.

"We want our home. Oh, oh! Everything's gone."

The ladies, mystified and helpless, looked at the child and at one another.

Anne made a quick step toward the bed. But Peggy, who was nearer, already had her arms around Lois, trying to console her. "Well, well, well! Sister's little girl! There now, there! Don't cry; don't cry, dear," she said.

"I—don't want all that here," Lois sobbed.

"Well, well, dear!" Peggy said soothingly. "Don't cry. You—you'll get used to it."

There was a fresh outburst from Lois. "I don't want to get used to it," she cried fiercely. "I hate it. Take it away. I want my room. I want my Wackersons." She ended with a shriek.

Anne understood. But what could be done? A sudden thought came to her.

She caught Lois's hands in hers. "Lois," she said positively, "listen to me. Listen, Lois. The Wackersons are here. They are right here, just the same."

Lois held her breath on a sob and looked at Anne.

There was certainty and persuasion in Anne's voice. "The Wackersons are here," she said. "These roses have grown up to make a pretty place for them to live in. They are behind these roses, like your house is back of the red rose bush

in summer time. The Wackersons are there, just the same. And all the fairies and giants. I tell you they are."

Lois began to sob again, but less violently than before. "They can't get out," she said.

"Of course they can," said Anne. "See here."

She jerked out a hat-pin and made great jagged cuts and scratches up and down and across the dainty new paper beside Lois's bed. The startled, protesting "Oh!" and "Oh, oh!" of Miss Drayton and Mrs. Lawson and the Misses Lowry were unheeded, unheard.

"See here," said Anne. "This is where they'll come out. There are the steps. There is the house. And what a good time they'll have coming to see you in this pretty room!"

Lois looked slowly around and a little smile curled her trembling lips upward. "It is pretty," she said faintly.

"Can't you thank the nice ladies?" Peggy entreated.

With downcast eyes, Lois mumbled something which the ladies accepted as thanks. Quiet and crestfallen, they left the house and picked their way over the stones among the mudholes.

Mrs. Lawson was the first to speak. "What a queer child!" she said.

"Queer and horrid," agreed the fat Miss Lowry.

"Ungrateful little wretch!" said the thin Miss Lowry.

"Oh!" protested Anne, overtaking them after lingering a minute with Lois. "She didn't mean it that way."

"How did you happen to understand her, Anne?" Miss Drayton wanted to know. "I was sure you would think it was pretty."

"Oh, yes! I did when I looked through my own eyes," Anne explained vaguely. "But I had to see it like Lois. She is the one that has to live there—with the Wackersons."

## CHAPTER XVII

**A** WEEK later came Christmas day. It was the first Christmas of the Great War that was to shadow the world with its horror of death and desolation and hate. But the immensity and the bitterness of it had not yet rooted themselves in the minds and the hearts of people. Even in the trenches, that holiday season, enemy soldiers were exchanging food and tobacco, greetings and kindness. And in Washington City, Albert Fischer and the little Callahans and McGinleys had contributed their pennies to the Christmas ship sent to orphans overseas. And the older Fischers and Callahans gossiped amiably together about soldier brothers and cousins, and rejoiced that they were Americans and that America was a Christmas land of peace and goodwill.

It was Washington's first "white Christmas" for several years. On the afternoon of the twenty-fourth of December, the Holly Hill children went gayly through the storm to see the community Christmas tree on the east front of the

Capitol. The snow underfoot and in the air made more beautiful the tableaux of angels and shepherds and wise men, and the tree resplendent with myriad jewel-like lights.

The sturdy, frost-rosy young Callahans trudged back to a merry home. The kindly, puzzled ladies of the Aid Society had sent food for the family, candy and toys and garments for all the children. For Lois there was a bewildering array of picture books and dolls and teddy bears and mechanical toys and paint boxes. She looked at and admired them all. Then she lent—a Callahan synonym for “gave”—some of the toys to the other children and handed over some to Peggy to put on the mantelpiece for ornaments. The prettiest doll and a pig that squeaked were set aside to be sent to her mother. Then Lois amused herself as usual with the Wackersons who were now very much pleased with their new quarters.

Mr. Patterson had been so interested in what Miss Drayton told about the family—with Anne’s interpolations lending color and incident to the narrative—that he handed Anne a ten-dollar note for her friend, Mr. Callahan.

Miss Drayton approved, in theory for herself and in practice for other people, of giving aid to the poor through organized charity. She looked

with disfavor on this gift and telephoned to Miss Hartman about it, asking her to see that the money was judiciously spent. Miss Hartman sighed as she hung up the receiver. There were many burdens on her frail shoulders during the holidays, but the next day she sandwiched a friendly visit to the Callahans between two duty calls in their neighborhood.

She managed the affair as tactfully as possible. She looked at and admired the children's toys, congratulated Mr. Callahan on his improving health and on the kind friends who were helping him in his time of need.

He did not mention the money. So at last she said, "And Mr. Patterson was so kind as to send you ten dollars! It must be a relief to have your January rent ready. Wouldn't it be a good plan for me to leave it at Mr. Jobson's office—I am going by the door—and then it will be off your mind."

"'Tain't on my mind yet. Why, rent ain't due for a week," Mr. Callahan said.

"It would be nice to start the year paid up," suggested Miss Hartman. "Do," she urged.

"No'm. No," Mr. Callahan answered briefly and positively.

"We've done spent that money. This is what I got out of it." Susie exhibited a curly-tailed dog

that when wound up opened its mouth and produced a wonderful sound by courtesy called "bow wow."

"Surely you've not spent that money just for Christmas knickknacks," said Miss Hartman. Oh, why hadn't Mr. Patterson entrusted it to her, for proper disbursement!

"Yessum," said Mr. Callahan. "Yessum," he repeated firmly and unrepentantly, meeting her troubled eyes. Then, remembering her kindness in former hard days, he gave the explanation he had been minded to withhold.

"The gentleman sent it with the word it was for a rainy day," he said. "Ain't this a rainy day—me laid up and wife in the hospital? If ever a day needed cheerin' up, this does. What should I be savin' up for? There ain't no worse time to come than this. So I just divided up the money, share and share alike, and my kids had the fun of spendin' it. And there ain't a selfish bone in a body of them. Every one of 'em gave part of his money to put with ma's and buy her a breastpin—a fine one, like she been wantin' for years, and——"

"Pa gave all his part to it," interrupted Susie.

"Sure!" said Mr. Callahan.

"Are you talking about ma's breastpin?" asked Peggy, coming from the kitchen. "I wish you

had seen it, Miss Hartman. It had a gre't big di'mond in the middle, big as my thumb, and all 'round that were little sparkly blue and green things, saffires and—and am'thysts or em'ralds, I disremember which the man called them. Pa had me pick it out. It was perfectly grand, and it cost—five whole dollars!”

Well, it was too late to protest. “If the money's spent——” Miss Hartman began.

“It's spent,” said Mr. Callahan, conclusively. “And 'tain't no use worryin' over it. Och, ma'm! It brought a good ten dollars' worth of pleasure, and what more would you be askin' at Christmas time?”

“We lent the boys some money to put with their part,” said Lois, rising on her elbow to look through the open door and share the company. “And they got skates. When they come in, the room's full of the good time they have.”

Miss Hartman smiled and went to talk a while with the child.

According to her principles, the money spending was foolish,—but might not happy times be as good an investment as dollars in the savings bank? She pushed the thought—heretical in her position—to the bottom of her mind. But it came out again that afternoon when she saw the Callahan boys in a merry group on the canal. The air

was full of frosty needle points, but the boys were glowing and happy. Learning to skate was proving strenuous fun. They ran over their own feet and tripped themselves and fell with resounding thwacks on the ice.

"You, Elmore! you and Jed are going to split the ice and break up our skatin'," called Mike McGinley.

Elmore gave a grunt as he scrambled to a sitting posture and rubbed his shins. "B'lieve I'll stop monkeyin' with 'em," he said. "Bet I'll be all over blue and black to-morrow. Come on, Jed. Let's stop. Let's go Bum-a-locking."

"Ain't," said Jed, doggedly accepting the responsibility of his pleasure. "I didn't choose these skates to give up with. I got 'em to learn with."

He struck out again, tumbled again, and got up and tried again. So did Elmore. He had not much perseverance of his own, but Jed's served him just as well; for whatever Jed did, Elmore sooner or later was sure to do also.

The crisp cold weather continued several days. The tidal basin and the canal were frozen over, and wherever there was ice there were throngs of merry skaters. Practice gave facility to the Callahan twins and they found the sport more and more fascinating. While the ice lasted

Peggy found it difficult to get wood and coal, and each of the twins daily insisted that it was the other's time to do a certain mysterious something. And instead of quarreling, as heretofore, over the privilege of visiting their mother, each one insisted on conferring the favor on the other.

Mrs. Callahan, we grieve to say, was not getting on well these days. Her progress had been so satisfactory during the first month at the hospital that Dr. Malone was greatly disappointed at the later lack of improvement.

He shook his head and thrust out his long upper lip, as he had a trick of doing when he was perplexed.

"I don't understand it," he confessed to Miss Hartman. "It's her mental attitude. She's trying to work with us. But she looks worried. She doesn't know about her husband. I thought possibly the boys had let it out. But they declare they've not. Then what is worrying her?"

"Probably home affairs in general," conjectured Miss Hartman,—“the household left in charge of a child like Peggy.”

"She has no need to worry over Peggy," said Dr. Malone, warmly. "Those little shoulders are bearing their burden bravely. She's a girl in a thousand. I'll tell her mother so."

Mrs. Callahan welcomed the praise of her

daughter, but the worried look did not pass from her face.

In fact, it was Peggy who caused it. And, all unconscious of having caused it, it was Peggy who removed it.

Life was teaching Peggy lessons. She was learning, from her worry over Jed and Elmore, some of the practical disadvantages of falsehood. More and more, she hated the task of deceiving her mother; she felt a barrier between them, though she did not realize that it was caused by the falsehoods which shut her mother from her home life.

In Peggy's heart, there was growing a new feeling about the value and rightness of truth. All at once, it blossomed in words.

One Sunday afternoon, she went, as usual, to the hospital to see her mother. In the moment of greeting, she met her mother's eyes following up probingly and beseechingly the question, "How's your pa?"

"Why—why—he—he——" Peggy faltered; then she looked her mother straight in the face and said, "He's getting on fine, ma. He had a fall from the street car some time ago and hurt his foot. But he has got on fine and he can walk on crutches now. Doctor says he'll soon be well."

Instead of the distress Peggy expected—in-

deed, she feared her mother would insist on going home at once—Mrs. Callahan accepted the information calmly and with evident relief.

“So he’s gettin’ on all right. I’m so thankful,” she said. “Did it pain him much, Peggy?”

“It did, the first days,” said Peggy. “But, you see, the doctor got there quick and set it. Officer Brady found pa where he fell off the street car, and he and Mr. McGinley brought him home. He gets about all right now on crutches, and doctor says he can soon go with just a cane.”

“Thanks be!” exclaimed Mrs. Callahan. “I was feared he wouldn’t never get the use of himself. What did they do to that Williams?”

“They never did anything to him. Pa wouldn’t report him because—— Why, ma!” she interrupted herself. “How do you know about Mr. Williams? I ain’t named his name.”

“Ain’t you?” inquired Mrs. Callahan. Then she, too, made a clean breast of the truth. “Why, you see, the day after it happened—that Sunday you came in late—Mrs. Hanscomb’s cousin was here and told her your pa got hurt mighty bad. Dead drunk he was, she said——”

“He was as sober as a judge,” interrupted Peggy, indignantly.

“And I was just startin’ home when you came in and made all them excuses, and I knew your

pa didn't want me to know. And if he knew I knew about it, he'd think I was worryin', and I was feared that would worry him. And I thought if he was crippled for life, I'd got to have my strength to work for him and all of you. So I've been layin' here, tryin' to get well and worryin' about Johnnie."

"And I could have told you every time how well he was getting on and made you easy in your mind," said Peggy.

"If just you had!" exclaimed her mother. "I got Miss Middleton to try to get you to tell her—but she couldn't. I declare, Peggy, I've felt like screamin' when you came in every Sunday with new tales, and I trying so hard to pick out the truth between them. I'd know from your face that your pa wasn't worse, or you'd look more upset. What a comfort it was when you chanced to slip out a bit of truth! Now, tell me all about it, from the beginnin'."

Peggy did—with her mother questioning. And when the story was finished there was a deep and genuine satisfaction in being together that they had not known since the accident.

"Ain't a story a funny thing?" said Peggy. "You think it's helping somebody—and it ain't. All the time it's worrying and hurting them."

Her mother agreed heartily.

Peggy rose to go. "Ma," she said, "pa can make out pretty well on his crutches now. He said to-day he'd come to see you, but for letting you know about his foot. I'll tell him you know, and he'll come to-morrow."

"That'll be grand, Peggy," said Mrs. Callahan, beaming. "It makes me feel 'most well just to think of seein' Johnnie again. And all that worry off my mind!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

ONE afternoon when Jed had lingered on the ice later than usual, Elmore, who had come in half an hour earlier, met him, troubled and yet triumphant.

“I told you so,” he began excitedly. “I told you time and time again you’d better help fix that screen wire. You knew ’twas loose. I kept on telling you so. But no; oh, no! You got to go skating and got to stay all afternoon. Now you done been and went and stayed. And what’s happened? Just what I ’spected. That little white ki——”

Jed slapped his hand over Elmore’s mouth, on the unfinished word. “Ain’t you got no sense? Shut up!” he growled with a look at Peggy.

“What is it, Jed? Elmore, what is it? What mischief are you boys in?” Peggy made the mistake of asking irritatedly.

“Nothing,” Jed said crossly. “Everything you don’t know, you think is mischief we’re in. Let us alone. Why ain’t you got some sense, Elmore? What made you bawl out so? You knew——”

"Yes, but le' me tell you." Elmore drew Jed aside and whispered excitedly.

Peggy looked at them and frowned. During all these weeks they had evaded her efforts to solve their mystery. To-day they were evidently much disturbed. Had they done some unexpected damage? Had they been caught in some mischief? Had—oh! what was the matter? Peggy wondered and worried.

She found it so hard to fix her mind on her lessons that at last she laid aside her books and ran to the grocery to get a box of matches. At a street corner she met Officer Brady.

"Hey, Peggy!" he said. "I was just wishing to see you. What foolishness is them boys up to? They've been racing all over Georgetown—your twins at the head of that Holly Hill bunch—on the hunt for—guess what?—a kitten, a white kitten!"

"What!" exclaimed Peggy.

Officer Brady nodded emphatically to confirm his words. "One and all, they came to me, asking about it," he said. "'Is I see a white kitten?' 'Ain't I see a white kitten?' And presently Tom Croye came out of an alley with it and he called, 'Bum-a-lock! Bum-a-lock!' and mewed—like a cat for the world. And them boys come troop-ing from everywhere. Not one of 'em would

answer a question I asked. And long as I can't prove they're in mischief and nobody has brought complaint 'gainst 'em, I can't make 'em tell anything. See? What in thunder are they up to?"

"I wish I knew," said Peggy, with a perplexed frown. "Couldn't you make 'em tell you whose kitten 'twas?"

"They said 'twas theirs—a little stray. It looked like it knew 'em. I made Tom put it down, and it mewed and went to Elmore and clumb up his arm and snuggled inside his coat. It's a queer thing about kittens, here lately. It looks like they're as catching as measles. A lot of folks have told me about getting 'em, this last month or so. The bell rings and they go to the door and there, wrapped up nice in a basket, is a kitten."

"I never heard of such a thing!" exclaimed Peggy.

"Neither more did I," said Officer Brady. "But it's the truth."

"Maybe the boys got hold of one of those basket cats and took it for a pet," said Peggy. "Our boys are awful fond of cats and pet things."

"Maybe so," said the policeman, unbelievably. "But you'd better look out for them boys. I ain't forgot about last fall. It was trespassing and housebreaking they did, and it might have

been house-burning, too, if that tramp fellow hadn't been to blame. Next time they won't get off so easy. They've got some secret on hand now, and a gang of boys with a secret needs watching."

Peggy sighed and agreed. Pondering the matter, she felt more perplexed and less than before inclined to settled down to her lessons. So she decided to take this time to go to Mrs. Peckinbaugh's, at Riverheight, to get some promised shoes that were conveniently sure to fit one of the Callahans.

So, instead of turning off at Roundabout Lane, Peggy followed the trolley track to the west. Passing the car barn, she came to a bridge that spanned the ravine beyond which lay Riverheight. Peggy paused on the bridge to look about her.

The strip of rugged country was very lovely on that late January afternoon. The northern hillsides stood out against the gray sky, whitened by a light snowfall that had already melted and left bare the southern slopes. The trees showed their winter beauty,—the delicate tracery of elms, the rugged and picturesque branching of oaks, the white-stemmed uprightness of sycamores, mingled with the dark green of pines and cedars. Among the evergreens, there had once been holly trees, numerous enough to give their

name to Holly Hill east of the ravine, but they had long since gone the way of Christmas trees.

Halfway down the steep hillside, Peggy saw a cedar, small and symmetrical and well-berried. It was just the thing for a birds' tree, such as Anne Lewis had once described, to keep on a window ledge, with gifts of food for the birds. Lois would like to have it. Peggy was sure she could scramble down there and get it. In fact, there was a footway, a mere trail leading along the hillside and ending at a pile of pine brush.

The winter afternoons were short, and twilight was falling when Peggy crossed the bridge on her homeward way. She hesitated about going down the bluff, but she had set her heart on carrying the little cedar to Lois and so she scrambled down to get it.

Once or twice she thought she heard voices and she paused and glanced about her. But she saw no one.

The trail along the bluff was indistinct in the twilight, but in Peggy's efforts to avoid briars and bushes, she was unconsciously following the beaten track, and she saw, a little distance ahead, the pile of pine brush she had noticed at its end. But—but—— Peggy stopped in amazement. Instead of lying, as an hour before, haphazard on the bank, the boughs were now piled on one side.

There was a hole where they had been. And beside the hole there was a rough door made of boards, evidently used to cover the opening, before piling on it the concealing brushwood.

Peggy hesitated, uncertain whether to go forward or turn back. Just then some one spoke in the cave, or cabin, whichever it was. At first, Peggy did not recognize the voice.

“Mountin’ Guard, go on.”

“’Tain’t any use,” came the answer. “It’s so much trouble to move the door and pull over the brush. It’s so late and dark, can’t anybody see the hole. I couldn’t see it, ten steps off.”

Why, that was Mike McGinley’s voice! And the first speaker was Jed.

Yes, it was Jed. He came now to the door and glanced around. Peggy was only a few steps away, but the brushwood intervened between her and Jed, and her old brown cloak blended, in the gathering twilight, into the dull colors of the bank. Jed did not see her, and he went back into the den, grumbling about how careless the other boys were.

“We’ve got to leave the door open to see,” said Elmore’s voice. “’Less we light the lantern. And it’s early for that. And we ain’t got much oil.”

Jed grumbled another rebuke.

Mike excused their shortcomings. "We've been chasin' all over Georgetown, lookin' for Princess Whitecoat. That put us so late. We couldn't help it."

"Well," said Jed, "come on. Let's have our meeting." Then he called in a singsong tone:

"Bum-a-lock, Bum-a-lock, mew, mew, mew!  
Bum-a-lock, Bum-a-lock, you, you, you!  
Bum-a-lock, mew!"

The voices of the other boys rose in answer:

"Bum-a-lock, mew!  
Bum-a-lock, mew!  
Bum-a-lock, mew, mew, mew!"

Peggy heard a queer medley of sounds. To the boys' voices calling "mew," were added the impatient mews of—was it? could it be?—real cats.

Then came Jed's pompous voice: "Lord High Guardeen of the Milk Bottle, come forth!"

Evidently some one responded, for there was a shuffling of feet and the mews increased.

"Mitch Master of the Tin Plates, you will present thyself," Jed pursued his rôle of master of ceremonies.

There was a rattle of plates and a voice scatted an impatient pussy.

"Grand Big Chief of the Milk Drinkers, do your duty," said Jed. Then, in an admonishing

undertone, "Pearten up, Slow Coach. Them cats are hungry."

"'Course they are," said Elmore's voice. "They're two hours late getting grub. I ain't to blame."

Peggy's curiosity now led her to exceed the bounds of discretion. She came from behind the brush pile and stepped into the boys' den.

It was a queer place, constructed with long, hard labor. The boys had leveled off a place on the steep bank below the bridge, and had built a cabin of old cross-ties that had been thrown aside when the trolley road was repaired. They had piled earth and stones over the top and sides of their cabin and over all of the backward-sloping front, except the part occupied by the door. This was constructed of three or four boards, with a window-like opening at the top, covered with screen wire. When it was laid close against the cross-ties which formed the door posts, and was covered with the bushes now piled at one side, it was unnoticeable a few steps away.

Peggy, standing now in the doorway, saw little at first. As her eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, she distinguished the figures of Jed and Elmore, Tom Croye, Mike McGinley, Tim Rogan, and Roger Park. They were standing in a circle and in the center of the circle were—cats! a

dozen or more, lapping milk from plates set before them. Each boy had charge of two or three cats, to see that they ate from their own plates, in their own special places. All were so intent on this duty that for a minute Peggy was unnoticed.

Then Jed, realizing that the light had waned suddenly, looked toward the door. He uttered an exclamation of surprise and rage that drew the attention of the other members of the gang, and they faced the intruder with amazement which passed quickly into fury.

After one motionless second, Jed sprang like a tiger at his sister and—we grieve to say it, but truth must be told—he slapped her face soundly. Elmore, too, jumped at her and gave a vicious pinch on the arm. With one accord, the boys pushed and shoved her, and before she or they uttered a word, she was outside the den, the enraged center of an enraged gang.

“Mean thing!”

“Sneak.”

“Spy!”

“If I had known you were following us——”

“Following you! And I coming here to get that cedar for Lois, on my way home from Mrs. Peckinbaugh’s, where I’ve been to get shoes for you—and you pinching and you slapping me like

that!" Peggy glared from one of her brothers to the other.

"Honest Injun, Peg, weren't you following us?" asked Jed.

"Didn't I tell you I was going and coming an errant, Jed Callahan? When I saw the hole and saw you there, 'course I looked in. And you jumping on me and hitting me till my ears ring like a dinner bell—and you scratching me, like a wildcat! We'll see what pa says, when I tell him." Peggy turned away.

Jed caught her sleeve. "Peg, if you honest true weren't spying—and if you wouldn't tell——"

"'Course she'll tell. Girls always do," said Mike McGinley.

Peggy faced him wrathfully. "I'll 'Bum-a-lock' you, see if I don't. You pushing and shoving me out!"

Jed, too, turned on him wrathfully. "What do you mean, Mike McGinley?" he demanded. "Pushing and shoving my sister!"

Meanwhile, Roger laid an entreating hand on Peggy's arm. "If you didn't mean to see and if you just wouldn't tell——" he said. "We have such a good time! Say, boys, she knows the password. We might let her join and then she couldn't tell. What say?"

Peggy's curiosity was getting the upper hand

of her anger. "I've seen what you do—but why on earth do you do it?"

"Oh, to have a gang!" said Jed. "It's lots of fun. We've been in it since Thanksgiving. It took days and days to make this den." He looked around with pride.

"What did you make it for?" inquired Peggy.

"Oh, just for fun! 'Cause the bank and the cross ties were here. And to have a gang. First, we just met here. And then we got the cats."

"Where on earth did you get 'em all?" asked Peggy.

"Oh! they're alley cats, just strayers," said Jed.

Mike explained more at length. "We find them and bring them here and we shut them up in a box a day or two and we feed them every day—salmon and milk and things."

"Oh! that's where your money goes, and all the extry victuals you lay hands on," said Peggy.

"It takes a lot of milk and things to feed all these cats," said Mike. "We've got fourteen now. It was awful when we had thirty-seven."

"What did you get so many for?" asked Peggy.

"We couldn't help it. It was the rule." Jed was spokesman. "The one that brings most cats is Prince-president. 'Course, ev'ry boy wants to be It and brung all he could lay hands on. And

every cat was that many more to buy grub for, and make boxes for, and feed. It was fierce, I tell you!"

"But what did you do with the others?" Peggy wanted to know.

"Oh! we play a 'dopting game," said Roger. "Jed made that up."

"From Anne Lewis," explained Jed. "I thought it up when you said about her being an orphan and 'dopted."

"We get our cats nice and fat," Roger explained. "And we brush 'em and comb 'em and tie ribbons 'round their necks. Then we put one in a basket——"

"And we take and set it on a doorstep," interrupted Jed, "where we've found out there ain't a cat. With a card——"

"On top the basket," interpolated Elmore.

Jed raised his voice and continued, "A card saying 'Please a-dopp me.' See!" He showed one bearing the legend in sprawly letters. "And if the folks—mostly they keep them—if they don't, we take 'em back and try again. It's lots o' fun."

"I think it's awful kind," said Peggy.

"Yes," said Roger. "See how fat they are. All but these two." He pointed at two gaunt felines in wire-covered boxes. "We don't want

them to get too fat. They're the cat-fighting ones."

"The what?" asked Peggy.

"The ones that get turned away from homes three times hand-running," said Jed. "We keep them and make them cat-fight."

"Why?" asked Peggy.

"Oh, because it's the rule!" answered Jed, conclusively.

"Why, there's Dirty Candy!" Peggy exclaimed. "Or a cat like him, only so fat and slick. And with a blue ribbon on."

"It is Dirty Candy," said Elmore, sheepishly.

Mike spoke severely. "That cat's been ready for a 'dopter two or three weeks. And Jed and Elmore keep puttin' off."

Elmore furtively stroked the grayish-yellow fur. "He—he ain't quite fat enough. And maybe his ears'll grow out some."

"You just don't want to give him away," Roger asserted.

"'Course I do," Elmore said indignantly.

"Let him go home," entreated Peggy. "Lois likes him so much and she misses him so."

"No, sirree!" Jed answered firmly. "Can't no cat be turned loose, after it's Bum-a-locked. That's the rule."

“What are we goin’ to do about Peggy? And her knowin’ about our gang?” inquired Mike.

“And about our den?” said Roger.

“And the passwords?” added Jed.

The boys deliberated and finally agreed that Peggy might become a Bum-a-lock, because then it would be her secret and she would have to keep it.

But Peggy hesitated about accepting the offered honor.

“It’s grand, and I’d love it,” she said. “But I don’t want to worry folks, and have to be telling stories to hide what I’m doing.”

“What difference does that make?” Jed wanted to know. “They’re just little white lies.”

“Yes,” said Peggy. “But it looks like that kind makes trouble, too. I’ve been worrying so, for fear you were in some mischief.—Tell you what, I’ll join, if you’ll tell—not the secret, but that you’ve got a gang that’s lots of fun and no harm.”

After a little discussion the boys agreed to this. In the dim lantern light Peggy was initiated and became a member of the Bum-a-lock gang.

“I’ve got to skeet home and get a pick-up supper,” she said, as soon as the ceremony was over. Still she lingered. “Now I’m a Bum-a-lock, have I got a say-so about things?” she asked.

“Same as us,” agreed Mike.

“Then—Lois wants him so!—I say let’s put a ’dopt card on Dirty Candy and leave him at our door.”

Jed and Elmore raised a joyful whoop. “Glory! Why ain’t we thought of that?” they exclaimed.

“I’ll fix him and bring him now,” said Jed. “Elmore, you and Mike can show Peggy the short cut up the bank. Roger and Tom will help me fix the door.”

And so the Bum-a-lock meeting was adjourned.

## CHAPTER XIX

**A**S the days went on, the thing which Peggy feared seemed more and more apt to come to pass. Albert Fischer was getting ahead of her in class work. The end of each week showed an advance on his part, putting him further ahead in some studies and lessening the margin between him and Peggy in others.

Even Milly Blake, spurred on by prospects of a locket and chain, was proving a dangerous rival.

Yet it seemed to Peggy that she must win that scholarship prize. She had planned so often, so wisely, and so unselfishly what to do with the money that she felt as if, by some sort of inherent right, it was hers.

“We need it so bad, I’m bound to get it,” she said to her mother, one Sunday afternoon. “When you come home, Dr. Malone says positive you mustn’t work hard, like you used to do. ’Course, I’m more of a helper now. And that money’d pay rent and buy ready-mades, so you

wouldn't need to sew so much. Oh, I've got to get it!"

"If I was just home to spare you the house-work——" began Mrs. Callahan.

But Peggy pooh-poohed vigorously. "Why, look at the good being here has done you. How grand it'll be to have you at home, all well again! And it sure is a help for you to do the mending. See what a big bundle I brought you this week! I ain't even kept any button-sewing on. I'm going to put in a week of solid study. I'm going to bed early to-night and get up soon in the morning and study two good hours for that English test. If I get good marks on that, I'll be even with Albert. And then all I've got to do is to get a little more ahead and I'm sure to win."

When Peggy went home, her mother cares met her, even before she entered the door. Little Dan had slipped out unnoticed and was splashing an old shingle up and down in a puddle, laughing with glee when the mud and water showered over him. He was sopping wet and blue with cold. Peggy rubbed him dry and put on clean clothes, reproaching the other children for having let him escape. Each one insisted that the others were to blame.

"Looks like none of you ain't any good but Peggy," said Mr. Callahan. Then he added self-

reproachfully, "I hadn't ought to have been so took up with readin' the paper. I ought to have made them rascallions mind Danny-boy."

"Well!" said Peggy, cheerily. "No harm's done. It's warm and dry he is now."

But bedtime found Dan hoarse and fretful, and Peggy looked anxious.

"I wouldn't mind so much, if it was Susie or Finn," she said to her father. "They get head colds and get over them. But Danny's croupy. He's had two or three bad croupy colds since ma was gone."

"If it's like croup, we'd better send for the doctor," said Mr. Callahan, uneasily. Croup was feared in the Callahan family—with sad reason, for the baby before this one had been its victim.

"Ma says 'tain't any use to have the doctor when he ain't got it," answered Peggy. "The thing to do is to fend it off. And when it comes it's so quick you need to do your own doctoring. I'm going to grease Danny's chest with mutton tallow and rub it between his eyes and down his nose, like ma does."

Peggy greased the baby lavishly and then put a spoon beside a bottle on the mantelpiece.

"What's that?" asked Mr. Callahan.

"Ipecac," answered Peggy. "It's what ma gives for croup. She said never to go to bed

when one of the children's got a croupy cold, without having the ipecac bottle handy. There ain't much in the bottle or I'd give Dan a dose now. Anyway, I think he's better. Listen to his breathing. It don't sound so hoarse. Well, I'm going to bed. I want to get up soon in the morning and study that English."

As Peggy snuggled down in drowsy comfort, she heard—as she was aware later—a metallic, hard cough. Then she dropped off to sleep.

She had been asleep—a minute or all night, she didn't know which—when she awakened suddenly. The door was open into the next room, and she heard restless movements.

"I wonder if Danny's pushed off the cover," she thought sleepily, half-consciously. "Ooh! It's nice and warm in bed. I hate to get up. I guess that was pa or Finn moving 'round." But she could not doze off again. "I can't sleep till I see about Dan, so I might as well get up," she grumbled to herself. "Looks like I can't rest day or night."

She went into the other room and bent over the cot, to put the cover in place. She heard a gasping, labored breathing that made her heart stand still with terror. Dan had croup.

Peggy lighted the lamp and for a frightened second she stood staring at the little fellow. Nev-

er before had she seen him like this. His breath came with such difficulty through the croup-contracted windpipe that it seemed as if he were strangling. His eyes bulged, his face was drawn, and the blood was settling around his mouth and nostrils in bluish splotches.

“Dan! Danny-boy!” she cried.

He looked at her and gave a hoarse wail. Then he stretched out his restless hands, crying, “Ma! ma!” For a second, Peggy clasped him close and in her heart she, too, was crying for her mother.

“What’s the matter?” called Mr. Callahan, startled awake by Peggy’s voice.

“Croup,” she explained. She had put Dan gently back in his cot and now had the ipecac bottle in her hand. She measured a dose.

“Take this, Dan; take it, like a good baby, for sister,” she entreated gently.

Dan opened his mouth and seemed about to obey. Then, with a quick sideways movement of the head, he pushed aside the spoon and the dark sticky liquid trickled over his night dress. Peggy looked from the empty spoon to the face distorted and discolored by the painful, irregular breathing.

“Oh, Danny!” she exclaimed. “But you didn’t mean to do that, did you, dear? You must take your medicine. You——” She turned up the bottle

and drained out a few drops. "There—there ain't another dose here," she gasped, meeting her father's frightened eyes with terror in her own.

"Wake the boys. Send for the doctor," said Mr. Callahan, in a taut voice.

Peggy ran upstairs, calling the boys. The unusual quality in her scared tones got them up at once, pulling on their clothes before they were well awake. They were to go for the doctor. Dan! Croup! Oh, hurry, hurry, hurry!

Jed dashed off, followed by Elmore. Peggy ran back downstairs and stood at the cotside. Pitiful and frightened, she gazed at the drawn, discolored face and listened to the labored breathing broken now and then by a hoarse, fretful wail or a painful cough. Over and over again came the appealing cry, "Ma, ma, ma! Take Danny-boy! Please, ma!"

Peggy bent over him, with loving helpless words. "There, there, dear! Let's keep the blanket up. Don't let's get cold." Presently the little fellow moved restlessly and seemed for the first time to see his sister. He stretched out his arms and appealed to her. "Peggy, Peggy!"

The tears streamed down Peggy's cheeks as she gently put under the cover the little arms now stretched appealingly to her and then restlessly threshing the air. Oh, it was agonizing to stand

there and wait and do nothing while little Dan was suffering! But there was nothing she could do. Suppose—suppose he died before the doctor came. Was there nothing she could do?

All at once she remembered a night when Dan had croup and the ipecac bottle was empty. Her mother had put a little turpentine into a vessel of boiling water and held Dan's head, covered with a shawl, over the steam. She said it was an old nurse's remedy. And it relieved him. True, that was not a severe attack like this. But it could do no harm to try the remedy.

Peggy took up the baby and put him in the arms of her father who was sitting up in bed, his frightened eyes fixed on the suffering child.

"He pulls the cover so," she said. "Hold him and keep him warm. I'm going to fix a dose for him."

Fortunately the water in the kettle on the hearth was not yet cold, and there were coals smoldering in the ashes. Peggy raked them together and put on some dry wood. In a few minutes, the water was boiling. But, oh! how long those minutes seemed, filled with Dan's labored breathing!

Peggy emptied the boiling water into a stewpan, and poured into it a few drops of turpentine. Then she held the vessel close to Dan's face and

threw a shawl over his head. He fretted and kicked, but, in spite of himself, he inhaled the vapor.

"How did you know he had croup?" asked her father, as Peggy soothed Dan and held him close.

"I don't know," said Peggy. "I came to see if he was covered up. If I hadn't!" She shuddered at the thought of the baby lying there suffering with no one to minister to his need. "I ought to have come before. I heard him cough—I don't know whether I was 'sleep or 'wake—that rattly cough."

"Will—will he live?" her father whispered, appealing to Peggy, as he had been wont to appeal to her mother in domestic trouble.

And Peggy, the mother instinct in her trained and quickened by these months of responsibility, comforted him, saying cheerily, "Oh! he'll be better pretty soon. He'll be all right."

Soon, indeed, he was better. The cough became less hard and less frequent. The contracted muscles relaxed. Dan breathed with more ease and the congested blood began to circulate.

And then at last, Jed and Elmore came with the doctor.

"The danger is over," said Dr. Malone, after a hasty examination. "Evidently he had a severe attack of spasmodic croup. That needs

prompt, proper attention. What did you do?"

Peggy told, with the doctor nodding approval and interjecting, "Yes, yes! Right, all right!"

"You're a jewel of a girl," he said when she finished. "I couldn't have done better myself."

"There's no smarter girl than my Peggeen," said her father.

"Not even in the old country where my mother says they grow best of all," were the doctor's farewell words.

Peggy put her arms around her father and kissed him good-night, as she used to do when she was a little, little girl. Then she crept wearily to bed. The clock was striking two. She had meant to get up at four. Well, she would get up at five—and study——

She awakened with a start. The clock was striking again—striking—striking seven! Seven! Of course it was wrong. Ah, no! It was, indeed, seven o'clock. Overcome with fatigue and excitement, she had slept soundly. Her father, not allowing any one to awake her, had hobbled on his crutches into the kitchen and was having the children bring him ingredients and utensils to prepare breakfast.

Peggy sprang up and dressed hastily. But, alas! there was no time to review for the English

test. When breakfast was cooked and eaten, it was time to start to school.

That was a hard, hard day. Many of the test questions were from the part of the book Peggy had planned to review that morning, and she had to leave unanswered one question after another. Poor girl! She was so tired and discouraged that, before she knew she was crying, tears were falling on her paper.

She brushed them off and winked back those that were ready to fall. "'Cause I missed one lesson, ain't any reason to give up," she said sternly to herself. "I've got to work harder, that's all. I just can't and won't and mustn't fail."

## CHAPTER XX

**A**FTER its Christmas gifts, the Ladies' Aid Society turned to other cases and the Holly Hill family was practically forgotten. Now and then, indeed, the Callahan case was casually recalled. It was mentioned, one spring evening, at a Social Service meeting in the Patterson home. The purpose of the meeting was to extend the use and usefulness of school buildings, but talk drifted; and so it happened that Mrs. Lawson, to illustrate a statement about the ingratitude of the poor, described, in her exact, unhumorous way, their experience with Lois Callahan.

Among the guests was a young lady who tried hard to keep a proper countenance in face of Mrs. Lawson's solemnity. Once or twice she failed entirely and had to put her fan or handkerchief to her face, while her slender shoulders shook with suppressed mirth.

"I wish I could see that quaint little girl!" she said impulsively to her hostess.

"That wish needs no fairy godmother," an-

swered Miss Drayton. "Here am I, happy to go with you to the Callahan home. My niece—my niece by adoption and affection—was the heroine of the hat-pin."

"How charming!" said the young lady. "Shall we go to-morrow? No, I fear my day is full." She took a little note-book from her bag and consulted it. "Can we go on Friday afternoon, at four?" she asked.

Miss Drayton agreed.

"Then we will go—without announcing ourselves beforehand," said the young lady, who did not like to walk always in the lime-light of her father's station.

The next morning at breakfast, Anne listened with interest when Miss Drayton said that the President's Daughter was at the meeting and was going with her to see Lois. Anne, very naturally and very promptly, went out of her way to tell Peggy. And Peggy, all excitement, ran home to carry the tidings to Lois.

"The President's Daughter is coming to see you!" she exclaimed.

"What!" said Lois.

"The President's Daughter is coming to see you!" repeated Peggy.

"What makes you think so?"

"I know so," Peggy answered with emphasis.

“She told Miss Drayton, and Miss Drayton told Anne, and Anne told me. Whew! Think of the President’s Daughter coming to our house! Ain’t it good your room’s fixed up so grand?”

“H’m!” said Lois, without enthusiasm. Then she asked, “What’s she like?”

“I ain’t never seen her,” said Peggy. “But she’s bound to be awful fine and fixey. Our President is gre’ter than kings and empires—umpires—emp’rors, I mean—so she must be awful grand.”

“Does she wear a crown, like King Herod’s daughter in Susie’s Sunday-school book?” asked Lois.

“No,” said Peggy. “Presidents’ folks don’t dress like that. But I guess she wears fine clothes and lots of jewelry and she rides ’round in a grand carriage all the time.”

“Oh!” said Lois, eagerly. “I bet she looks like that dancing lady we saw to the show. Don’t you mind how grand she was?—all in pinky thin things. When is she coming, Peggy?”

Peggy could not say. Anne had not told that, for the good and sufficient reason that she did not know, as Miss Drayton had not mentioned the time set for the visit.

So Lois lay in bed and, between her Wackerson plays, thought how wonderful it would be some

day to see a carriage with prancing white horses—yes, they must be white and four of them—stop at the door. In would walk a lovely lady, arrayed in pink silk with ruffles to the waist, adorned with sparkling necklaces and bracelets and rings, and wearing a huge, many-plumed hat aslant over her becurled, begoldened hair. Oh, Lois got a very distinct picture from Peggy's vague suggestions!

And then one day two visitors came,—Miss Drayton and a simply-dressed, pleasant-faced young lady.

“Here is a lady who has come to see you, Lois,” said Miss Drayton, putting the best chair beside Lois's bed, for the Other Lady.

“How do you do?” said Lois, shaking hands gravely.

“Very well, I thank you,” answered the Other Lady, choosing the words with which Dickens's Little Paul answered the clock and Dr. Blimber. “I fear you aren't very well. You wouldn't be in bed, if you were. But I hope you haven't many pains and aches. They are bad companions, especially for lonely days.” She straightened a pillow and smoothed the sheet, in the way of one to whom it is instinctive to give service wherever there is need.

“I don't hurt much,” said Lois. “And Dr.

Malone says soon I am going to be well enough to sit up. Every time he comes, he says I'm 'getting along.' ”

“How lovely!” said the Other Lady, with real interest.

Just then, Peggy came in. The other children were out playing and she had waited after school to get Anne Lewis's help in review work for the final English test.

Anne came home with Peggy, to bring Lois a new paper doll. She was surprised to find Aunt Sarah there, with a strange lady, and was going shyly away when the Other Lady asked, with her engaging smile, “Is this the little niece you mentioned?”

“Yes,” Miss Drayton said. “This is my niece, Anne Lewis.”

Anne shook hands with the lady and answered one or two questions. Then she sat down on a little stool in the corner, while Peggy went to give Finn some bread and molasses. If Aunt Sarah and the Other Lady did not stay too long, Anne would wait to tell the doll's name and history. She liked to sit there and watch the Other Lady who had a radiant charm. It was not only, nor chiefly, the bright hair, the bright lovely color, the bright quick smile; there was the shining and sparkling of an undimmable inner light.

"I have heard about your friends, the Wacker-sons," the lady said, turning back to Lois. "Their home is behind those pretty roses, isn't it?"

"Yessum," said Lois, her shyness fading before the lady's matter-of-course acceptance of the Wackersons.

"Do they come to see you often?" asked the lady, as naturally as if she were asking about Prilla Hicks or Mrs. McGinley.

"Wellum, Miz Wackerson don't come so often now. She keeps so busy with five children to do for and she makes Big Girl Jinny and Tom Boy stay home to help her. And course Little Sis Mamie can't come by herself."

"Why, Lois!" Anne said surprisedly. "Five children! You've always told about just three."

"Oh! haven't you heard 'bout the twins?" asked Lois.

"The twins? Why, no!" said Anne.

"Tell us about them, dear," said the Other Lady.

"Oh!" said Lois, eagerly to Anne. "You see, Miz Wackerson she went to market las' Sat'day, and she left Big Girl Jinny to look after Little Sis Mamie. Tom Boy he hadn't come home from selling papers. And Miz Wackerson she was gone pretty long; for she wanted some stew meat and she was waiting for market-closin'

time, so's prices would maybe-so go down. And when she got home, Big Girl Jinny was at the door and she calls out, 'Come on, ma! I've been lookin' for you.' And Miz Wackerson she says, 'I know I'm late, but that stew meat——' And Big Girl Jinny she says, 'Ne' mind, ma, 'bout the stew meat now. Come in and look. Your baby you was expectin' has come—and she is twins.' And Miz Wackerson she was so surprised!"

The two ladies went into peals of laughter and laughed till tears ran down their cheeks. Lois watched them with grave surprise and when they glanced at her sober little face and tried to stop laughing—why, they only laughed the more.

The Other Lady was the first to recover herself. "Pardon me, dear, for laughing," she said gently to Lois. "I think the Wackersons are very interesting people, especially the twins." Her voice quavered, but she controlled it and went on. "I hope you like picture books. Here is one I found in a shop and bought because it is like one I loved when I was a little girl. I hope you'll enjoy looking at it, with the Wackersons and your other friends.

"And I always liked nut caramels to munch on, when I was looking at a picture book, because they last so long. So I brought you some caramels to go with the book."

Lois put out her hand to receive the gifts, but the ladies' laughter had made her too shy to speak. The Other Lady chatted pleasantly with Miss Drayton and Anne, until Lois was put at ease; then she glanced at her wrist watch and said regretfully that she must go.

"You'll tell her who you are," suggested Miss Drayton, urgingly. "It will be such a pleasure for her to remember the honor."

"If you think it will please her——" The lady made a gesture of acquiescence.

Miss Drayton turned to Lois. "Little girl," she said, "this lady who brought you the candy and the pretty picture book is—the President's Daughter!"

Lois looked at the Other Lady and laughed. "She's joking, you know," she said. "The President's Daughter is coming to see me some day. I know how she looks, too."

"How does she look?" asked the lady. "Opinions differ."

Lois answered confidently. "She doesn't wear a crown, because her father is President, and Presidents are so grand they don't have to wear crowns, like kings and umpires, for people know them without. She rides in a carriage with four white horses, and she wears ruffly silk and lots of

jewelry that jingles and dangles, like the lady I saw onct to the show."

Miss Drayton was beginning an explanation, but the Other Lady checked her. "Oh, no, no, please! Don't let us spoil that lovely picture." She laughed merrily. "Let her keep it, as a companion piece to the Wackerson twins." Then she penciled a few words on a card which she slipped in the book. "There!" she said.

And when Peggy saw the card, she gasped and said, "Why, the President's Daughter was here to see you—and we treated her just like she was folks!"

## CHAPTER XXI

**T**HE days passed and brought near and nearer the end of the school year. The children were counting now, not merely the weeks, but the days that lay between them and vacation.

As the days grew longer, Peggy managed to put more time on her lessons. She rose early and studied before time to start cooking breakfast. She kept a book propped open at a lesson, and gave her eyes and her mind to difficult words and dates in the intervals of kitchen duties at which she was now expert. Both her housework and her lessons improved and she took new and greater interest in both.

“Peggy Callahan seems so much more alive,” commented Miss Ellis. “She is going to run Albert a close race for the scholarship prize, but——”

“But!”

Albert, too, was clever and studious. He had more time for study than Peggy, and as she improved, he was improving, also. So the interval

between them did not decrease. In fact, it widened. For, when any home emergency distracted Peggy and made her stand still or lose ground, Albert forged ahead. And ever so small an advantage once lost, Peggy could never regain.

She knew this. In the bottom of her heart, she knew that, unless something happened—some vague something for which she desperately hoped—she was bound to lose.

Jed and Elmore and Susie were now intensely interested in the contest and were helping with the home work so as to give Peggy more time for study. Her brothers' old slighting attitude toward her as "nothing but a girl" had changed into pride of "a great girl" who, father said, was "all 'round the smartest girl in Georgetown." In their zeal, the boys talked of her success with an assurance which poor Peggy, alas! could not feel.

And what were the boys doing these days? The Bum-a-lock gang had depleted the Georgetown supply of homeless cats, and, during the spring days, its members found new sources of interest. For a while their cabin was a pirate den. Then it became a fort which was boldly attacked and bravely defended.

But in the mild days of mid-May, it was almost deserted. Then the boys' hearts were set

on going swimming. Several times they went in the canal, only to be ordered out by prudent elders who said that the water and the weather were too cold.

"I wish we had a swimming place where no one could find us," exclaimed Mike McGinley, one afternoon when his mother had compelled them to come out of the canal, shivering and angry.

"That's what— Golly! I know the place," exclaimed Jed Callahan. "Elmore, you mind that old rock quarry, with water in it, up the hollow?—the one we call Black Water Hole? That's the very place."

"Sure, and that it is," agreed Elmore, enthusiastically.

"How big is it?" asked Albert Fischer, who was one of the swimming enthusiasts.

"Oh, bigger'n that Y. M. C. A. pool," said Jed. "And no bathing suits and tickets required. I bet the water's deep enough to dive anywhere."

"How deep is it?" inquired Tom Croye.

"I don't know," Jed replied carelessly. "It's so black you can't see bottom. What difference does that make? We ain't wanting to get acquainted with the bottom. We are going to swim."

"Have you been in?" asked Albert.

"No," Jed answered. "I ain't thought about that place till now. Anyway, the water's so far down I couldn't get to it. I've got to have a rope to let me down. I'm going to get a rope and go there Sat'day."

"Is your father going to let you?" inquired Tom.

"He might not, if he knew," said Jed. "So I ain't going to ask him. Then I won't be disobeying him."

The other boys decided to adopt the same prudent course.

On Saturday morning, they made their furtive way to the abandoned quarry. Jed carried a clothes line which the boys fastened to a tree near the quarry brink. Then, hand over hand, they went down the sixteen feet of rope that landed them on a rock ledge three feet above the water. They dived and swam, fortunately without striking projecting rocks which would have been quite invisible in the water, blackened by decaying leaves. The rock ledge, however, was so small that not more than four boys could crowd on it at the same time—a serious disadvantage for a gang of six. And there were no other flat ledges near the water surface.

"The next time we can bring another rope," suggested Albert. "We can tie it to a tree up

there and make it fast to a board down here. Then we can hold to the board like a raft."

Jed promptly took the lead. "No," he said. "Let's make a raft, a first-rate one. Pat Patterson, a fellow I know, was at Mountain Lake, down in Virginia, last summer, and he told me about a prime good raft they had. It was made of boards nailed to timbers that were fastened on four barrels,—headed-up, empty barrels, you know—to keep it from sinking. We'll make a raft like that, only not so big. Two barrels will do. Where'll we get them?"

The gang resolved itself into a ways and means committee of the whole, to devise plans of securing the needed materials and conveying them to the desired place. It was the work of several afternoons to collect barrels, nails, and timber at the Black Water Hole. Then a Saturday morning of beaver-like diligence resulted in the construction of a substantial little raft, supported at each end by a barrel.

According to Jed's instructions, some of the other boys had "borrowed" clothes lines from home. Two of these ropes were slipped under the raft, which was put at the edge of the quarry, and then they were wound around a near-by tree. Jed pushed the raft over the brink, while the other boys swung on the ropes and tried to control its

descent. In spite of their efforts to hold it back—efforts which nearly drew them into the quarry—the ropes slipped through their hands and the raft fell with a mighty splash and went under the water.

“Gee! It’s gone,” exclaimed Elmore.

The other boys groaned agreement. But they had not labored so long and hard to no purpose. The raft rose gallantly to the surface.

“There ’tis! Bully!” cried Jed.

“There ’tis! There ’tis!” cried the other boys, jumping up and down in excitement.

They quickly lowered themselves to the ledge and climbed on the raft, and a few minutes later their little naked bodies were splashing joyously in the water.

The other boys were proudly content with their achievement, but Jed saw cause for dissatisfaction.

“The raft is in the way of our diving rock,” he complained. “I tell you what we can do. Let’s tie it with a short rope—this clothes line is too long anyway—to that sharp rock over there. Then we can slide down the rope to the rock, and dive and swim to the raft.”

The suggestion met with enthusiastic approval and was promptly carried out.

The Bum-a-lock Society now became a Swim-

ming Club from which Peggy was excluded and to which Albert Fischer and one or two other good swimmers were admitted. On Saturday, and on every warm afternoon when they could escape from school and home early enough, the boys went to Black Water Hole. They performed feats which risked their lives; indeed, the shut-in pool of unknown depth was a constant menace. But for a few days, all went well. Things might have continued to go well, but for Jed, who regarded each new venture as a mere stepping-stone to a more daring act.

On the last Saturday in May, a day of clouds and sunshine, the boys disported themselves in the quarry pool an imprudently long time. Their lips were blue with cold and it was through chattering teeth that they declared the water was "plenty warm" and "all right."

"I've got to go home," Mike said at last, climbing on the raft. He was promptly followed by Tom and Roger who were near him.

"One more deep dive before we go!" called out Jed who was standing, with Albert and Elmore, on the ledge that the boys called the diving rock.

"No," protested Albert. "The water iss got cold. Let's not do more risks. And there may be sharp rocks near under. We may to get hurt."

"You never will 'to get hurt,'" mimicked Jed.

"You old 'Fraid Cat! You daren't dive. What about you, Elmore?"

"The water's got awful cold," objected Elmore, shivering. "But if you dive, I will, too."

"Good old sport!" approved Jed. "Come on. One, two——"

Just as "three" was on Jed's lips, Tom Croye called, "Look at that whopping big turkey buzzard."

Jed paused and looked. Elmore, poised for the starting signal, tried to stop, but flopped over awkwardly and went into the water.

"What a dive!" cried Mike, ironically. "The way he hit the water sounded like Fourth of July."

Jed was about to plunge in, but Albert, who did not like that splashy dive, caught his arm, saying, "Wait. See where Elmore comes up."

Jed waited a few seconds that seemed very long. For Elmore did not come to the surface.

Albert's eyes were anxious, but he spoke reassuringly in answer to Jed's panic-stricken look. "He iss trying to act smart. Maybe he iss trying to swim under the water to the raft."

"I made him do it." That was Jed's self-reproachful first thought. "Elmore, Elmore! Come up. Don't scare me so." His voice quavered.

There was no answer.

A horrible fear seized all the boys. Tom Croye began to whimper. Roger Park, leaning from the raft and gazing into the black water, stammered over and over, "He's drowned, he's drowned, he'd drowned."

"Watch. He'll come up. We'll get him," said Albert, sharply.

"I made him do it," Jed repeated. "I'm going to the bottom to find him."

He tugged at a loose stone on the quarry side and dived with it in his hands. With its help, he went to the bottom—only twelve feet below, instead of the immeasurable depth the boys imagined.

He groped on the quarry floor. There were only loose stones, leaves, fallen branches,—no human creature. He dropped his rock and rose to the surface. He swam to the rock ledge, and looked questioningly at the boys on the raft. Mike shook his head. Tom was still whimpering. Roger, calling "Help, help, help!" started up the rope, missed a hand hold, and slipped back to the raft.

Jed, with confused resolve to thresh about in the water until he found Elmore, was losing his hold on the rock. But Albert gripped his hand.

"Get up. There iss no sense in your drowning,

when any minute we got to work on Elmore," he said roughly, as Jed hesitated to obey. "Keep your head. Come up and stay put."

Jed scrambled on the ledge where Albert stood leaning forward, with his eyes searching the surface of the water.

"I ought to see them. I ought to see them," he was saying to himself.

The waves Jed had made were subsiding into ripples. There, there—no!—yes, yes! there near the edge of the raft were rising some small bubbles.

Albert dived, and came up, swimming with long, even strokes toward the raft, toward the bubbles that showed where Elmore was. How stupid not to think of that! The awkward plunge had taken Elmore down and up at an unexpected place; he had come up under the raft, instead of to the water surface.

Albert filled his lungs with air and went under the raft. His hand clutched and tugged at a dangling arm. Yes, Elmore was there, under the raft, caught between the barrels. His comrade pulled him out, getting carelessly and dangerously close for a second. It was a second too long. Elmore, frightened and half-conscious, threw his arms around his rescuer's neck and they went under the water together.

For a fraction of a second, Albert lost his head and struggled. Then he got hold of himself and began to practice, in a life-and-death struggle, the things that had been a part of his Scout drill. He trod water. He threw his left arm around Elmore to pull him close, and put his right hand on Elmore's face, covering the mouth with the palm and clutching the nostrils between forefinger and middle finger. Then he kicked his knee in Elmore's stomach, to force the air out of the lungs, while, by the pressure on mouth and nostrils, he prevented the inhaling of air.

Elmore ceased to struggle and Albert pushed him to the edge of the raft. The other boys had stood dazed during the brief struggle. Now they pulled Elmore on the raft and gave helping hands to Albert who for a minute lay exhausted, while the other boys crowded around the unconscious Elmore.

Albert dragged himself to his feet. Elmore must be carried up as soon as possible. There was not room on the raft for the necessary rescue work.

"Up, all you!" he said. "I tie him to the rope and you pull."

Jed, now over his panic, gave ready and intelligent aid. He followed the other boys up the

rope and they hauled up Elmore, fastened with a slip noose around his body.

Then the rope was lowered again and Albert climbed up. He found Jed and Mike making a stretcher with coats and poles. Tom Croye was rubbing Elmore's hands. Roger Park was wringing his hands and crying, "'Tain't no use! He's drowned dead!"

"Stop. That ain't the thing," Albert said to Jed and Mike. "We must here work. Not waste time to carry him. Get away!" he said, pushing Roger aside. "You go to a telephone. Get Emergency Hospital and call a doctor."

"Put on some clothes, idiot!" called Mike, as Roger was starting away, naked.

"You go, too, Tom. Here we do not need you. You will have sense to telephone," said Albert.

As he talked, he was lifting Elmore, whom the other boys had laid flat on his back, and was turning him over on his stomach, the face a little to one side so as to permit the free passage of air. Then Albert extended the arms above the head.

"Oughtn't we to rub him?" asked Jed.

"Not yet. Wait," Albert answered, kneeling beside the limp, motionless body.

He put a hand at each side, in the space between the short ribs. First, he let the weight of his body fall on his hands, in order to force the

water out of the air passages; then he relaxed the pressure, so as to make the chest expand and take in air. Carefully and rhythmically, Albert made the movements, as if they were one of his beloved music exercises. "One, two!" There came the pressure. "Three, four!" It was relaxed. Long minutes dragged past. There was no sign of life.

"He's dead," Mike said, in a hushed tone.

"Don't!" implored Jed. It was the thought that he was fighting away from his own heart.

Albert looked up encouragingly. "We give not up," he said.

At last, at last, there came a faint, fluttering breath. Albert caught and strengthened it, with the rhythm of his movement. But for many minutes it was not repeated. Then Elmore's eyelids flickered and there was a stronger breath. Then came another pause, not so long as before. And then a gasping breath—another—another—pieced into regularity by Albert's movements.

"Rub now—legs, arms, body—toward the heart," Albert said, not pausing for a second in his work of artificial respiration.

Now at last came the summoned help. Tom and Roger hurried back up the hollow, with doctors, followed by a group of curious men and boys.

The doctors examined Elmore and administered a stimulant. Then they questioned the boys, for the first time sufficiently conscious of themselves to begin to put on their clothes. From the pell-mell account, one thing was clear.

"You're a little Dutch hero," said one of the doctors.

The elder doctor put an approving hand on Albert's shoulder. "Good rescue work, my boy!" he said. "He was nearly gone when you got him out. Now, we'll soon have him ready to go home."

## CHAPTER XXII

ON Monday, the one absorbing topic at Westside School was the adventure at the quarry. Albert's schoolmates looked at him with the admiring awe they gave to few people besides the President and Walter Johnson, their baseball idol. Some of the tribute of their admiration was paid to Elmore, and even, in lesser degree, to Jed and Mike and to Tom and Roger.

The story was told over and over by Jed and Mike who answered repeated questions with repeated explicit details. In fact, they and not Albert became the center of attraction at recess. Albert made a very unsatisfactory hero—to the children. He volunteered no information and he answered questions briefly, shamefacedly.

"Elmore dived. He rose under the raft. I dived and came out with him. That iss all." No more could be dragged from him.

"Oh! he'd have drowned sure, if it hadn't been for Albert," said Mike, who was eager to give his comrade due honor, especially as Albert said

nothing about the sorry figure the other boys made. Now, shining with his reflected glory, they were even beginning to feel themselves heroic. "I thought he was gone when Elmore gripped him 'round the neck," Mike said. "But he kicked loose and pushed Elmore up where I could reach him. It was nervy, I tell you."

"And he'd have died after we got him out," said Jed, "if it hadn't been for Albert doing all them stunts to make him breathe." And for the twentieth time Jed repeated, "The doctor said it was good rescue work."

"That was nothing. All we Scouts know to do it," said Albert. He would have crept away with his book, but the boys crowded after him. "So much fussing," he grumbled. "I didn't do nothing but what I couldn't help to do."

Conscious of the unEnglish idiom into which he had lapsed, he glanced at Jed. But Albert need not have felt uneasy. Anything he said or did, was now safe from ridicule. The boys were his adoring subjects, and "the king could do no wrong."

Absorbed in the personal interest of the affair, they were slow to see another side. And yet the very word which named it had been handed them by the hospital doctor.

Jed repeated it now. "That littlest doctor said he was a hero." A sudden thought came to Jed. Why hadn't it come before? "Say, fellows!" he said importantly. "Albert's a hero all right. Bet you, he'll get that hero prize."

There was a chorus of agreeing voices.

Other claims and chances for the Dickson prize had been interestedly disputed before now. It required presence of mind for Lucy Martin to snatch off her coat and wrap it around her little sister running screaming up the alley, ablaze from matches with which she had been playing. It was brave of Jim Alwood to jump into the canal and drag out Lewis Winn who slipped in when the wet bank caved under his feet. It was a daring deed for Tim Barney to snatch the Bailey children from the feet of runaway horses.

But even the children realized that in Albert's act there were a steady courage and an intelligent, persevering presence of mind which put it in a class quite by itself. With unstinted enthusiasm, they acclaimed the fact.

Like honor was being paid Albert that same afternoon by a group of children at the Patterson home. The little Callahans were having an afternoon party with Anne Lewis, while a sewing woman fitted the dimity frocks Miss Drayton was presenting for the school-closing exercises.

Miss Drayton had sent for Lois who was now able to sit up, but could not walk so far as the Patterson mansion. The chauffeur did not venture on Roundabout Lane, but it was even grander, Lois thought, to have him wait on Canal Road, at the foot of Holly Hill, where more people could see the big, shiny car. Peggy and Susie and Finn and Dan went with Lois to the stately home. Their shyness was soon dispelled by the friendliness of Anne and the excitement of discussing the quarry adventure.

Peggy gave circumstantial details about what Elmore felt and Albert did and Mike said and Jed thought. There was a pleasant vagueness about Tom and Roger of whom the other boys, with gang loyalty, told only that "they were awful scared." To this they added that Roger started for a doctor, "naked as a bird;" that was too funny not to tell. But they confessed that none of them thought of putting on clothes until the doctors came.

Anne listened with eager exclamations and interested questions to Peggy's account of the event. Susie and Lois followed the many-times-heard story with rapt attention, and Susie reminded Peggy of the smallest omitted detail.

"Oh, Peggy!" cried Anne, with shining eyes. "It's like a story in a book. Albert is a wonder-

ful hero, and his being so modest— It really isn't cross in him to hate to talk about it—it is modest. That's the way all real heroes do, in the books. And daddy says, in life, too. He knows some live heroes. And now we know one ourselves. Oh, oh, oh!" Anne interrupted herself with the little shrieks which expressed her sudden joy. "Peggy, Peggy! Albert is a hero! This is the heroest—heroicest—thing! He will certainly get that prize. Isn't it lovely to have some one get it that we—you—know? And he saved your brother, and your other brother was there. Why, it's like being in your own family. Isn't it lovely?"

Peggy ought to have been delighted, of course. But her first feeling was a brief—ah! very brief—jealous pang. Not for the hero prize. Oh, no! She was glad and thankful for Albert to get that. But wasn't that enough? It was the biggest, best thing that had ever been offered—not only in their school, but to all the pupils in all the city. And as Albert was to have that, it seemed as if she—who had worked so hard, against such odds, and with such sore need—might get the other prize, the scholarship. And yet in her heart Peggy knew she had no chance of it. During the last month Albert had forged

ahead and gained a lead which she knew she could not overtake.

"I bet I've done better than he'd have done, if he'd had a whole family to cook and clean and wash and tend for," Peggy thought resentfully. "I ought to have that prize. It looks like I'm bound to have it."

"Don't you think so, Peggy? And aren't you glad?" Anne's joyous, insistent voice repeated.

"Ain't I the pig? If it hadn't been for Albert, Elmore would have drowned. And to think of me grudging him anything!" This was the thought which followed swift on Peggy's jealous pang. Then she was ready to answer earnestly and truthfully, "It's just splendid he is, Anne, and he deserves—everything, everything. And I hope—it's all right for him to get——" The words "scholarship prize" stuck in her throat.

Anne looked up with surprise. Then she remembered that Albert was the foremost contestant for the scholarship prize for which poor Peggy had worked so hard. She had forgotten it for the second, in her enthusiasm over Albert's heroism and its recognition and reward.

She squeezed Peggy's hand. "I just don't believe he'll get—the other."

"Yes, he will," said Peggy, soberly. "And if we didn't need the money so terrible—with pa

not getting full wages so long, while he was hurt. And now ma's coming home—oh, joy!—but doctor says she must be careful about good eating and not overworking. Oh, Anne! That money would just mean everything to us now.”

“Of course, it would,” agreed Anne. “And I'm sure you are going to get it. I just ‘feel it in my bones,’ as Aunt Charity used to say.”

This subject was of such absorbing interest that Anne forgot her responsibilities as hostess—and waitress, too, for it was Nora's afternoon off.

Finn was getting restless and very hungry. He had been charged and had promised—on penalty of never coming again—not to ask for anything. But there before him on the table was all that good food and nobody was getting any because Anne and Peggy would talk and keep on talking.

At last Finn could stand it no longer. He held up his plate and half sobbing, piped out the question, “Does anybody want a nice, clean—empty plate?”

Anne went into peals of laughter and the other children joined in her mirth.

“You poor baby, you!” she said. “I beg your pardon for forgetting my duties. We'll put something in that plate and then you'll be willing to keep it, won't you?”

"You bet!" agreed Finn.

There was a brief, satisfied silence.

But Finn, puffed up with pride at having resumed the suspended "party," was unwilling to subside into obscurity. His eyes, roving around the stately old dining-room, had been attracted by a handsome silver cup on a side table. When Anne held the milk pitcher above his glass, he pointed to the cup and said, "I want that. I want my milk in that pretty tin cup."

"Finn!" Peggy's horrified voice rebuked him.

"Never mind, Peggy," said Anne. "He's so little. Of course he likes that pretty shiny cup. He shall have his milk in it. It's my very own."

The cup had belonged to her mother and had been Anne's from her babyhood days and had shared her changing fortunes. Left by her in an orphan's "Home," it had been regained when she was restored to the Patterson family, as its adopted daughter. No wonder she looked lovingly at it and said, "I think everything tastes better out of it than out of any other cup in the world."

Anne put the cup before Finn and brimmed it with cool, creamy milk. He greedily gulped down the milk and then lifted the cup in his two hands.

"Ain't this a pretty tin cup?" he said. "Look at the house and trees on it."

"That ain't tin," explained Peggy. "It's silver, solid silver."

"Silver!" said Susie. "Why, I thought they made money out of silver."

"So they do," explained Peggy, in as much of an aside as was possible. "And cups, too, for rich folks. I guess that cup is worth a hundred dollars."

"Whew-ee! ain't that grand?" said Susie, in awed tones, fixing her eyes on the cup.

Cindy, who had been taking care of little Dan, now brought him for Peggy to hold, while she served the icecream.

Finn gave his undivided attention to the favorite dainty, but even icecream could not draw Susie's interest from the wonderful cup. From time to time she put out her finger and touched it admiringly. When Finn pushed it aside, to reach for another cake, Susie drew it near her and fondled it. "And it's silver, real money silver," she said wonderingly.

Anne noticed her casually and smiled. "It's pretty, isn't it?" she said, patting Susie's curls.

"Yessum. And silver!" Susie said without taking her eyes off the cup.

Finn held out his plate for icecream. "I can hold some more," he announced.

"Finn! You had a big plateful," whispered Peggy. "You don't want any more."

"I'm pretty full," he answered. "But it's the goodest I ever had. I can hold some more."

Anne, laughingly silencing Peggy, served him again. Then she said, "Please excuse me one little minute. I hear Pat in the hall and I want to give him my library book to return. Peggy, let me take the baby for Aunt Sarah to see. I want to show her how cute his curls turn up at the back of his neck. Help yourselves to anything you want on the table. I'll be back in a minute."

Finn calmly reached for the cake plate.

Peggy intercepted his hands. "Pig!" she said. "You've eaten a dozen. You haven't any manners. And you'll have the awfulest stomach-ache."

"These little ones ain't achey. Anne says they're moonshine and sugar. Just two, Peggy, please!" pleaded Finn.

"That's the last two you are going to have," said Peggy. "I'm sure ashamed of you. I ain't going to bring you again."

"They asked me to eat, and I et," said Finn. "That fat colored lady says victuals was made for ap'tites like mine."

During this controversy, no attention had been

paid to Susie, who now slipped down from the table and said, "Ain't it time to go home, Peggy? I want to go home."

"Pretty soon," said Peggy. "It ain't manners to go as soon as you stop eating. You've got to set a while."

"I want to go home. I want to go now," said Susie, in a subdued little voice.

"What's the matter?" asked her sister. Then, seeing both of Susie's hands clasped across her blouse, Peggy vexedly answered her own question. "Lawsee! such pigs! Here you've got stomach-ache, too. Now I've got to take you home, and that sewing lady wanted to try on my dress again."

"I know the way home. I c'n go by myself," Susie said meekly.

"Well, run along," said Peggy. "I'll stay and do the manners. If you have a bad pain, ask Mrs. Hicks to measure you a dose of Jamaica ginger. The bottle's on the shelf by the clock."

"I don't need it," said Susie. And away she sped.

An hour later, Miss Drayton left Peggy and Lois and Finn and Dan on Canal Road, at the foot of Holly Hill. Miss Drayton suggested taking them around Potomac Park, but Peggy re-

gretfully said she had lessons to study and, too, she must see about Susie.

She was relieved, when she arrived at home, to find Susie, evidently quite well, in the yard with the little Rogans. Lois joined her and they took chips for dishes and set a table on a flat rock, and served mud for cakes and icecream.

While the little Callahans were acting over the party, Anne was giving Mr. Patterson a full account of it. She was interrupted by Cindy who came to the library door.

“’Scuse me, Miss Anne,” she said. “Is you got your silver cup here?”

“My cup?” said Anne, in surprise. “Why, no indeed. It’s on the dining table. Finn Callahan had his milk in it. It’s there on the table.”

“No’m, it ain’t,” said Cindy. “I done cleared the table. ’Tain’t there. Nor on the side table. Nor nowheres in the dining-room. I done looked high and low.”

“Oh!” said Anne. “It—it must be there. No one’s been there but the Callahan children.”

“Naw’m,” agreed Cindy, who had never liked the “poorers,” as she called the Callahans. “Naw, ma’m, there ain’t. And that cup certainly ain’t there.”

## CHAPTER XXIII

**P**EGGY, happily unaware of the suspicions directed by Cindy against the Callahan family, studied her lessons and prepared the simple evening meal. The children were as ready for it as if there had been no party at the Pattersons' three hours before.

Susie ate heartily, but she was quieter than usual. She looked perplexed.

"Pa," she said after supper, following her father out on the porch where the odor of his pipe mingled with the fragrance of the roses on the trellis. "Pa, how do you make dollars?"

"Make dollars?" he questioned, looking wonderingly up from his paper. "I make 'em by hard work."

There was a silence, puzzled and ruminating on Susie's part. Then she ventured another inquiry. "Does somebody give you things to make dollars out of?"

"What?" he asked blankly.

Susie became a little more explicit. "Suppose you had—if somebody gave you—something all

solid silver—a cup or something”—her voice dropped and she looked around, to make sure that none of the other children was within earshot—“worth a hundred dollars. What would you do?”

“‘Suppose’! Say, you are a match for Lois,” scoffed her father.

“But what would you do with it?” insisted Susie.

He humored her seriousness. “I’d take it to the mint and get good dollars for it.”

“The mint? What’s the mint?” Susie asked.

“It’s the big building on the Avenue, the other side of the White House, at the corner where the cars turn,” answered her father. “What next?”

“Nothing,” said Susie, and she crept back indoors.

Mr. Callahan glanced after her amusedly. Then his eyes fell on an interesting news item and the incident passed out of his mind.

At bedtime Peggy found Susie lying across their bed, with her hands clutched tightly under the pillow. Peggy lifted her gently to a more comfortable position. As she moved the pillow, the child’s clenched hand unclosed and something bright and shiny rolled on the floor, with a resounding clatter.

Peggy looked down, surprised and dazed.

Susie had—had—— Oh, no, no, no! But yes! Hardly knowing what she did, Peggy stooped and picked up the pretty shining thing and stared at it. Suddenly she dropped it on the bed and with both hands she shook Susie fiercely.

“Susie! You Susie!” she said in a fierce whisper. “You low-down little thief! What do you mean—stealing Anne’s cup?”

Susie’s eyes opened wide. “I ain’t stole nothing,” she said. “I ain’t stole her cup.”

“You can’t lie out of it,” exclaimed Peggy, sternly. “Here’s the cup. Here ’tis. ’Twas under your pillow.”

“I ain’t stole it,” repeated Susie. “I ain’t. Ain’t you hear Anne say for us to take anything we wanted on the table? You said this was silver, like money. And I wanted the money for ma. And pa said I could get—get it at the—the mint,” sobbed Susie.

“Anne didn’t mean things—cups and spoons and dishes,” Peggy explained angrily. “Haven’t you sense to know that? She was talking about eatings, sandwidges and milk and cake and cream.”

“She said ‘anything we wanted,’ ” insisted Susie, beginning to whimper.

“You ought to know what she meant,” said Peggy. “Shut up! Stop crying!” she hissed in a

whisper. "Do you want pa to hear you, and me have to tell him you've taken Anne's cup? Good as they are to us, too! Giving us our school-breaking-up dresses. Hush-sh!" The command softened into an entreaty, with a soothing pat on the shoulder of the sobbing child.

Just then the outer door rattled. "Wh-what's that?" whispered Peggy. Her fingers trembled and she dropped the cup in her lap and covered it with her apron. For a terrified minute she thought that policemen, come to search for Anne's missing cup, were at the door. But it was only the wind.

Susie, now thoroughly frightened, would have wailed aloud, but Peggy clamped a silencing hand over her mouth.

There was a moment of frightened silence.

Then Peggy said, "This cup's got to go back. It's got to go back to-night, before they miss it and send policemen to arrest us for thieving. I'm going to take it to Anne."

Susie clung to her sister. "Peggy, I didn't mean—mean to steal," she sobbed. "I didn't think it was—was thieving. Honest to goodness!"

"You did it underhand," said Peggy, severely. "Ain't anything right that's underhand." She announced the discovery of the truth toward

which she had been traveling for months, as if it had always been a part of her life. "I'm going to take this cup to Anne and tell her the straight-out truth. She'll believe me, if that big-faced old Cindy won't."

Peggy wrapped the cup in her apron and slipped out the kitchen door. She ran down Roundabout Lane, up the trolley track, and along the Georgetown streets. Once or twice she paused in the shadow of a tree trunk or crossed the street, to avoid meeting people. She climbed the stone steps in the retaining wall and ran up the flagged, boxwood-edged walk on each side of which the Lombardy poplars stood like soldiers—or policemen. Peggy breathed a sigh of relief as she stood at the door of the Patterson mansion.

And yet the hardest part of her task was before her. She put her hand to the doorbell, then paused, her heart in her throat. The tinkle of that bell would bring a servant whom she must face to explain why she had come alone to see Anne at bedtime. Perhaps they would take her to Miss Drayton or Mr. Patterson. Perhaps the cup had already been missed and they would accuse her of stealing it. Oh, what must she do!

She dropped the unringed bell and laid her hand on the door knob. It yielded to her touch, and the



PEGGY RAN TO THE DOOR



door opened, inviting entrance into the hall. Miss Drayton and Mr. Patterson had gone to a neighbor's and, as the maid was out, they had left the door unlatched, in homelike Georgetown fashion.

Peggy stepped hesitatingly over the threshold. She hardly realized that she shut the door behind her. She was thinking, quickly and eagerly. The big dark door on the left, near the end of the dimly-lighted hall, led into the dining-room. A few steps beyond that door was the table from which Anne had taken the cup. Without being clearly conscious that she was leaving the straightforward course which she had urged on Susie, Peggy went down the hall,—first hesitatingly, then with furtive speed. The door yielded to her trembling fingers and the moonlight streaming through an unshuttered window revealed the array of silver on the table.

Peggy put the cup in place, crept out of the room, closed the door gently, and was halfway across the hall when the street door opened. Pat Patterson stepped into the hall.

Peggy uttered a little cry and then stood motionless, with downcast eyes.

Pat looked surprised, but he spoke courteously. "Good evening, Peggy? Have you seen Anne? Or you wish to see her?"

No word was possible to Peggy.

Pat looked at her, puzzled by her silence. "Is—is there anything——" he began uncertainly.

Just then a heavy step sounded on the backstairs and Cindy's voice preceded her. "That you, Marse Pat? Nora's out. You want anything?" Then Cindy advanced and saw Peggy. "What's she doin' here?" she asked gruffly.

"I don't know," said Pat. "I just came in and met her here in the hall."

"What are you doin' here this time of night?" Cindy demanded. "What else have you come to steal?"

"Cindy!" rebuked Pat.

"She stole Miss Anne's silver cup to-day," Cindy asserted. "Now she's sneaked in, for something else. That's what you get for bein' friendly with these here poorers." She clutched Peggy's shoulder.

"Anne!" gasped Peggy. "I want to see Anne."

"You ain't gwine to see her," declared Cindy. "You're gwine to see a policeman and give back Miss Anne's cup and say why you came in here this time of night and what else you've taken."

"I never stole anything in my life," cried Peggy, in distress. "Anne! Anne! I want Anne!"

“Don’t—don’t be so distressed,” said Pat, soothingly. “You shall see her. No one shall hurt you. You shall see Anne. Cindy, take your hand off Miss Peggy’s shoulder.”

The indulged old family servant obeyed the voice of authority. She stood grumbling and glaring at Peggy, while Pat went halfway up the stairs and called, “Anne! Anne! Peggy Callahan is here and wishes to see you. Will you come down? Or shall she come to your room?”

“‘Anne, Miss Anne,’” grunted Cindy. “’Tain’t Miss Anne she was lookin’ for, comin’ in this house ’thout ringin’ the bell. She’s nosin’ ’round to find something to steal ’sides silver cups.” She placed herself against the dining-room door. Even Master Pat shouldn’t turn this thief loose there.

“I didn’t, I didn’t,” protested Peggy. “I came to tell Anne about it. Oh, Anne, Anne!” she exclaimed.

She sped up the stairs to the landing where Anne, in answer to Pat’s insistent call, had come, in her kimono, with hairbrush in her hand.

“What in the world——” she began and then, stopped by the sight of Peggy’s grief and terror, she threw her arms around her harassed friend. “Don’t,” she implored. “Don’t, don’t look so, Peggy.”

“Miss Anne, uh Miss Anne! Le’ me tell you——” Cindy began.

But Pat stopped her. “Let Miss Anne alone, Cindy,” he said authoritatively. “Father and Aunt Sarah will be in soon. You can go to them about whatever is disturbing you.”

Cindy, grumbling protests, returned to the kitchen.

Anne, meanwhile, had taken Peggy into her room and was listening, bewildered at first, to the story. Then she understood—oh, blessed Anne! she always understood. She consoled Peggy and said how natural Susie’s misunderstanding was and how generous it was for her to want the cup, to give help to her mother.

And Peggy sobbed for Susie as well as herself, now seeing the affair, with Anne’s eyes, from Susie’s side.

“You poor, poor child!” said Miss Drayton, who had come in and, sent upstairs by the indignant Cindy, was sharing the explanation.

“Pat will walk home with you. It is too late for you to be out alone,” Miss Drayton said when Peggy rose to go.

“You’re awful good to me,” Peggy said earnestly.

“Good!” echoed Anne, throwing her arms around Peggy’s neck. “I think you’re the brav-

est girl I know—a regular heroess—to come here—in the dark—all by yourself—to bring back that cup. It was a hard thing to do.”

“Hard!” said Peggy. “It was terrible. And that Cindy—Oh, it was fierce! I tell you, Anne, I wouldn’t go through it again for anything in the world—not for a whole dollar.”

## CHAPTER XXIV

**T**HERE was a gala air about the Callahan home on the first Saturday in June. The place was as neat as a new pin,—as neat, indeed, as a whole paper of pins.

In every spare minute for days past, Peggy had been cleaning house. The other children combined to help and to keep the place spick-and-span. Susie and Lois scrupulously left their muddy shoes on the porch, and Jed and Elmore—now enjoying bare feet—remembered to rub off the mud or dust before they came indoors. Finn, unreminded, went out on the back step to devour his frequent portions of bread and molasses.

Peggy washed all the windows and Susie helped to polish them with old newspapers. And the curtains, washed by Peggy, were re-ironed by Prilla Hicks because they hung askew after Peggy's ironing. In the end they looked as good as new, hanging in crisp folds over the shining windows.

Jed worked an afternoon at the grocer's for a new wood box and split up the old box into kind-

ling which, with great labor, he packed inside a barrel hoop. Then he ran in and out the kitchen, cocking his head on one side and admiringly viewing the remarkable structure leaning against the wall, as if he had never seen it before.

Peggy used great system in her house-cleaning. Beginning with the closets and the attic room, every place was thoroughly cleaned. And as each was put in order, it was closed to all except absolutely necessary use. By Thursday, the family was limited to the kitchen. And on Friday evening, after the kitchen was scrubbed, the Callahans occupied the porch until bedtime and then tiptoed into the immaculate house.

In several diligent afternoons, Jed and Elmore made the yard as spick-and-span as the house. They pulled up the weeds and raked the grass and swept the yard with brush brooms. Elmore persuaded some workmen to give him enough white-wash to whiten the stepping-stones. All the flowers were carefully watered and tended. For days no one pulled a rose, so that the bush might be as bouquet-like as possible.

What was the occasion of these diligent, whole-hearted preparations?

You could not be two seconds near a Callahan without being told. Their mother was coming home.

For weary months, the Callahan children had reckoned backward and forward from the first Saturday in November. This thing happened "the week before ma went away"; that event took place "two Fridays after ma was gone." Recently—oh, joy!—they had a new calendar and reckoned the days between them and their mother's home-coming. Now at last the day, looked forward to even more eagerly than vacation, was at hand.

On Saturday morning, Peggy rose early to give final retouches to the exquisitely neat house. After breakfast, the children were sent outdoors—luckily, it was a well-sunned day. Peggy made a rice pudding for supper. She chopped up cold meat for croquettes and scrubbed the potatoes, to have them ready to put on to cook. She got out their one tablecloth and put on top of it the napkins—a luxury hitherto unknown in the Callahan family—which she had made out of flour bags, and hemstitched.

At noon, she and the children had a hand luncheon of bread and molasses. Then she prepared for her father's bath by putting a tub on a strip of rag carpet in the kitchen and laying his clean clothes on a chair.

Mr. Callahan hurried in, munched a sandwich, splashed and scrubbed and spluttered, and came

out, shining clean, in his Sunday clothes. Then he marched off to the hospital, to escort his wife home.

Peggy prepared a bath and clean clothes for each of the children in turn, ending with herself, and carefully restoring the kitchen to its immaculateness. Jed and Elmore ran to deliver their newspapers in Georgetown, promising to keep clean and to hurry home. The other shining youngsters—Dan, Finn, Susie, and Lois—were ranged in a row on the porch, and pledged not to stir outdoors, for fear of acquiring a speck of dust or rumpling a ruffle.

While they were sitting there, a stranger, directed up Roundabout Lane by a grocer's boy, stopped at the gate and asked with pardonable curiosity, "What are you doing, little folks, sitting there like ducks in a row?"

"Waiting for ma to come home," Susie answered primly.

"If your ma's away from home, who curled your hair, and washed your faces and your dresses and the floor?"

"Peggy, sir," said Finn.

"Our sister Peggy," said Susie.

"Peggy does it all, sir. We couldn't get on without Peggy," said Lois.

The gentleman nodded sagely. "I thought you

might have a sister Peggy who was just that kind of girl," he said. And then he and the children discussed family affairs with a freedom that Peggy would have checked if she had heard the conversation. But she was busy in the kitchen and did not even see the stranger.

At last he strolled downhill, pausing to chat with Mrs. Rogan and Mrs. McGinley who were having a neighborly visit at the garden fence.

When he went away, Mrs. Rogan said, "What a deal of questions he asked about the Callahans!"

Mrs. McGinley nodded. "Jane Rogan, do you know what I think?" she said solemnly. "I think he's a rich kin of the Callahans. Won't it be grand if he's come to make their fortunes?"

Mr. Callahan, meanwhile, was traveling leisurely homeward with his wife. In his hospital visits he had had a feeling of being out of his own world in a new one by which his wife was made a stranger to him. Now at last she was out of that hated, beneficent place and was his own again. Even the constraint of his Sunday attire could not repress his joy.

Down the winding road from the hospital to the street, they went, alone together, in their Sunday best, as before their marriage. As in their old courtship days, Mr. Callahan took pos-

session of his wife's hand and they walked side by side, swinging clasped hands.

"It's done you a world of good, Maggie," he said, gazing at her with admiring eyes. "You're lookin' like a lass in her teens."

Mrs. Callahan dimpled and blushed with pleasure. "Ah, Johnnie! You've a sad flatterin' tongue in your head," she laughed.

"You look like Peggy's own sister," he declared, as they stood on the street corner, waiting for a car. "And there's no better to be said for her than that she's as smart and as pretty a lass as her own mother, praise be!" He turned and gave his wife's lips a resounding smack.

"Oh, Johnnie! On the street, where folks might see!" Her tightened hand clasp and caressing tone robbed the words of all but the semblance of rebuke.

"I'm not carin' if all the world see," Mr. Callahan answered stoutly, as he gallantly helped her on the car. "It's that fine to have my woman back home, I feel like shoutin' it from the house tops."

They got off at the Georgetown corner where the car turned back cityward, but instead of going straight home, Mr. Callahan stopped at a grocery. "Let's go in here," he said. "We ought to have something grand—sausage or pink cake

or such—for your first Sunday dinner back home.”

“Well, look who’s here! If it isn’t Mrs. Callahan!” exclaimed the grocer, wiping his hands on his apron and coming forward to shake hands. “You’re so fat and well-looking I hardly knew you.”

“That’s how we’re goin’ to keep her, from now on,” said Mr. Callahan, beaming proudly.

While his wife and the grocer exchanged compliments, he glanced around. Presently he said, “That looks like a fair ham, hangin’ there.”

“Fair! It’s prime good,” said Mr. Wells, taking it down. “Just fat enough. Cured just right. And look at the price!” He nodded at the price slip attached. “It’s like giving it away. Think of that ham, with cabbage swimming in its grease. Um-m-m!” He smacked his lips appreciatively.

“If you’ve just the cabbage it needs, I’ll take the ham and them, too,” said Mr. Callahan, grandly.

“Here they are. Best on market. Solid. Sweet. Fit for a king.”

“I want——”

“One head will do; a middlin’-size one,” said Mrs. Callahan.

“Two, and big ones,” ordered Mr. Callahan.

"You're too stintin', Maggie. Two. Wrap 'em and the ham, Wells. I'll take 'em home."

"My boy is going out your way pretty soon. Glad to send 'em," said Mr. Wells.

"I'd rather take 'em," answered Mr. Callahan, fumbling in his pockets. Finally he said, "I don't seem to have the money, Wells."

His wife had looked anxious as soon as he began to fumble in his pockets and now her cheeks flamed. Instinctively she started to pull out her purse and then she paused, remembering that it was practically empty. She turned her head, to avoid the humiliating sight of Mr. Wells's taking back the unpaid-for packages.

"Well, but, Johnnie——" She was going to stammer that they did not need the things and really it was better not to get them.

But her speech was cut short in its beginning by Mr. Wells's prompt reply. "That's all right, Callahan. Pay when it suits you. I'm glad to oblige a good customer like you."

Mr. Callahan roared with laughter. He pulled out a roll of bills. "Here's your money, Wells. Here 'tis. I was just after showin' my wife what credit her husband's got these days."

He chucked his wife under the chin before he picked up his change and his bundle. All the way home he was chuckling with mirth, occa-

sionally throwing his head back and emitting a shout of laughter.

The children ran to meet their mother and crowded around her, like swarming bees around their queen. They went indoors, all talking at once, Mrs. Callahan clasping all of the close group that her arms could encircle.

Without a moment's delay, she was ushered to every room and closet to behold and praise their order and neatness. Her admiring attention was called to the crisp curtains and the shining windows and the orderly kitchen shelves and the hoopful of kindling. Then she must go into the yard, to examine its cleanliness and the white-washed stepping-stones and the profusion of roses. And Prilla Hicks and the Rogans and Croyes and McGinleys and Fischers came out to greet and welcome her.

Oh, it was a wonderful, joyous home-coming!

Mrs. Callahan laughed and wiped the tears from her cheeks and talked and listened and rocked—with her feet on the pink-and-tan rug which Lois had insisted on transferring from her bedside to her mother's room.

At last, Mrs. Callahan glanced at the clock and started.

“Why didn't you tell me the time?” she de-

manded reproachfully of every one in general. "I ought to have been in the kitchen long ago."

"Peggy's there."

"Peggy says for you to stay here."

"Peggy don't want you in there till supper-time."

Mrs. Callahan looked from one speaker to another. "Why, but—I was countin' on givin' you a real good supper," she said.

Mr. Callahan pulled her back to the rocking-chair and kept his arm around her. "No," he said. "You wait. Wait! Peggy'll fix us some kind of supper."

When the bell rang, Mrs. Callahan was ushered into the kitchen dining-room and her family enjoyed her surprise, her amazement, her wonder, her delight, her pride, at the supper which was Peggy's unaided handiwork.

There never were lighter biscuits. There never was crisper bacon. There couldn't be better-seasoned slaw. The potatoes were cooked just right, to be bursting their jackets so. The coffee was as clear and strong as if Mrs. Callahan herself had made it. As for the rice pudding, it was mixed just right and baked just right and altogether it was the most delicious rice pudding that was ever made. Mrs. Callahan confessed she had feared Peggy would ruin the tablecloth,

but it was as well washed and ironed as her own hands could have done. And to think her children were using napkins, like the President's own folks!

The red roses on the table were not brighter than the faces of the reunited family around it.

But alas! all at once gloom fell, like a dark shadow, on those happy faces.

Mrs. Callahan was the innocent cause.

"And I told that head nurse," she said merrily, "that if doctor didn't agree to my comin' home this week, I'd run off and come anyway. And she wanted to know why I was so set on comin' right now. And I told her next week was school-breakin'-up and I was countin' on seein' my Peggy get the scholarship prize."

That was the one subject which they had avoided during these first happy home hours. But after a silent minute, every one except Peggy spoke at once. No one looked at Peggy.

"Albert ain't half as smart as our Peggy," declared Mr. Callahan.

"It's a mean shame not to give her the prize. Just because Albert got a few little better marks on things," said Jed, indignantly.

"Sure it is!" agreed Elmore.

"If it had been anybody but Albert, I'd have

fought him for taking it from Peggy," Jed went on.

Mrs. Callahan looked around in surprise. "It's funny—and sorter nice—to hear you boost your sister, 'stead of knockin' her. I guess Peggy'll get it and——"

"No, no," said Peggy, in the smallest possible voice.

"Everybody knows Peggy ought to have had it," Jed continued to grumble.

"She's just skeered 'cause the time's come. I bet——" began Mrs. Callahan.

"No'm," Peggy interrupted again. "Jed heard Mr. Barnes say Albert got it."

"He came in after school. I was writing a kept-in exercise," Jed explained at length. "He asked Miss Ellis for the hist'ry marks. He run his eyes over 'em and says, 'That settles it. Albert Fischer first. Millie Blake second.' And Miss Ellis says, 'What about Peggy Callahan?' I bet she wanted Peggy to get it. He says, 'Third.' And she says, 'Peggy's done good work, and under diff'culties.'"

"Never mind, ma." Peggy could speak at last. "We—we can't grudge Albert anything. He wants to take the business course. He needs the money, too. And he's worked awful hard."

"One prize is 'nough for him. I wish he hadn't

pulled me out of Black Water Hole," said Elmore, viciously.

"Elmore!" reproved his mother. Then she hastened to agree with Peggy. "Sure we can't grudge him. It makes me shiver and shake to think——"

Then at once all began to talk about the adventure at the quarry.

Bedtime was marked by an incident which, unsuspected by Mrs. Callahan, meant more for the family welfare than even her husband's re-established credit.

She glanced at the clock and said hastily, "Sakes, children! It's past your bedtime. Go to bed, all of you."

There arose the old chorus, so familiar to her.

"I ain't sleepy."

"Oh, ma! let us stay up a while longer!"

"Just till nine o'clock."

"Ma, I've got to tell you about——"

"I was so busy lookin' at you, I forgot the time," said Mr. Callahan. "Bedtime. You kids go to bed."

They were getting up, reluctantly but promptly, when their mother interceded for them.

"Let 'em set up a little while longer, Johnnie," she said. "They don't want to go to bed."

"I ain't sleepy," repeated Finn.

“Not one bit,” said Susie, with emphasis.

“Yes, pa.” “Please.” Jed and Elmore added their petition to their mother’s.

“Bedtime. Go to bed,” repeated Mr. Callahan.

And without another word the children went bedward.

“Why, what’s the matter?” Mrs. Callahan wondered. “Sometimes I beg them children a struck hour to go to bed. And—why, they minded you right away.”

“Sure,” said Mr. Callahan, surprised in his turn. “What’s the sense of tellin’ ’em to do a thing if they ain’t got to do it? And if they got to do what they don’t want to do the quicker it’s done the better off they are.”

## CHAPTER XXV

**F**OR weeks, Peggy had known that the scholarship prize was not for her; and yet, with every reason and fact against her, she had clung to a forlorn hope. The prize might be divided. There might be a second prize. Or—or—something might happen. Now at last her hopes were definitely checked. Her thoughts led her along unpleasant paths. She would have to stop school and get a place as cash girl. Even with her father at steady work help would be needed to support the family and spare her mother overwork. Peggy was the only child of age and ability to work. If only she had won that prize!

“One thing sure,” she said to her mother, “I’m not going to school-closing. Albert got the prize and I ain’t the one to grudge it to him. But I can’t go there and see it given to somebody else, after I’ve been working so hard for it.”

“Of course not,” agreed her mother. “It’s a shame. You ought to have had it. And Johnnie says you worked so good.”

“Albert earned it. His marks were highest. He ought to have it,” said Peggy. “Ma, what makes—I wish you wouldn’t—why don’t you call pa ‘John’?”

“John?” repeated Mrs. Callahan, bewildered.

“Yessum. ‘John’; ’stead of ‘Johnnie’. ‘John’ sounds—well, it sounds better. Like Mrs. Hicks says, ‘Johnnie’ sounds babying.” Peggy floundered over an explanation.

Mrs. Callahan laughingly told Prilla Hicks about this request, as they were hanging out clothes and talking across yards to each other, according to their Monday custom.

“Ain’t children got funny notions?” she commented. “Seems like she thought you liked ‘John’ best. She said ‘Johnnie’ sounds like a babying name.”

Prilla was, as Peggy said, “a great advice giver.” But she hesitated a second. She said afterward, “she had a mind to eat her own words; but she had said time and again she was going to give Mrs. Callahan a full dose and now Mrs. Callahan had opened her mouth for it.”

So Prilla said, “Well, I said that and I said more, too. I’m goin’ to tell you the truth, Mrs. Callahan. I said—and I’ll die by it—it don’t do to baby a man. You’ve got to let him be a man. I ask you plain, Mrs. Callahan, when you call a

big, blowsy, two-fisted man 'Johnnie,' what, in the name of goodness, can you expect of him?"

"Wh-what?" said Mrs. Callahan.

"It's the talk of the neighbors what a smart man Mr. Callahan's got to be," Prilla went on. "He's come home reg'lar, with all his wages, and looked out for his fambly, and made 'em mind. Ain't no better fambly man than he done got to be. For why? His place was empty and he was man enough to step in his own shoes. But if you take one job off him and then another job and then another—first thing you know, he'll be back where he used to was. I tell you for your good, Mrs. Callahan."

"Why, why, men folks need to be taken care of," stammered Mrs. Callahan.

"Give him good cookin' and give him praise," advised her neighbor. "But leave him know he's got to stand under his job."

Mrs. Callahan did not take the advice all at once, but it was leaven and it worked.

The days rolled around and brought the evening on which the school prizes were to be awarded.

When the other little Callahans heard that Peggy was not going to the hall, with one voice they, too, declared against going. But Peggy said, and her father seconded her, that it would

not do for them to stay away. She even persuaded her mother to go. "We don't want to look grudging to Albert," she said. That would be too mean and ungrateful.

And Peggy carefully drilled Jed and Elmore. "You must be with the first to go up and shake his hand and say, 'I congrat'late you. I am proud of your success.' And if—if any one, if he—should happen to ask about me, just say, being as ma's back such a little while—no! You just say I couldn't come." Peggy's voice trembled.

Jed surprised her and himself by giving her a bear hug. "You're a brick, Peggy,—prize or no prize."

Peggy helped the other children dress. She arranged her mother's hair in a becoming new fashion. She brushed her father's coat and tied his cravat. And meanwhile she tried to chat about homely little matters, but over the most indifferent remarks her voice would tremble and her eyes grow misty.

Her father went out and came back with a box of candy, an ornate box trimmed with a broad scarlet ribbon, with a transparent top to display its green and pink and silvered bonbons. He presented it with a flourish and a kiss.

"Treats for Peggy," he said.

Peggy's eyes filled with tears and she clung

around his neck. Then she disappeared into her room.

"Let her alone," her mother said wisely, when Susie would have followed. "She can't help cryin' some. Don't take notice of her."

To the amazement of all, just as they were about to start, Peggy emerged, red-eyed but arrayed in her white dimity frock.

"I'm ready," she said simply.

"Why, Peggy!" and "But you said——" began Jed and Elmore in a breath. Mrs. Callahan shook her head at them in vain.

"Shut up!" Mr. Callahan commanded. "Let Peggy alone. If she chooses to go, she goes."

In no holiday mood the Callahan family went to the school hall, but they made valiant efforts to chat and smile with their neighbors.

First, the grade marks were read out and then a list of the honor pupils. The principal paused to commend Peggy Callahan, whose name stood third on the list, for "excellent work under peculiar difficulty." Then the winner of the scholarship medal and prize was named—Albert Fischer.

And then—then—somehow Peggy was the first to reach Albert.

"I congrat'late you," she said heartily. "You deserve it. I congrat'late you, with all my

heart. But I worked you hard sometimes, didn't I?"

"Indeed, yes," Albert said, clasping Peggy's hand. "You make me glad, Peggy."

"It just came over me how I'd feel," Peggy explained to her surprised mother, when she resumed her seat. "He'd have felt so bad if I had sulked. I ought to be glad. Ain't it funny? Now I've said that to Albert, I am glad for him."

The last thing on the program was the award of the Dickson prize.

Mr. Dickson rose, smiling and friendly and embarrassed, as usual. He plunged into his usual speech about how he made his way from the corner grocery "up to where I am now"—and there were the sparkling rings and the massive watch-chain and the new, expensive evening clothes to illustrate "where." He loved the school children, he believed in them, and it was a joy to find that they were even better and braver and more deserving of hero prizes than he had expected—and people had said that he was expecting too much.

"Why, there was one little girl——" and he told about Lucy Martin's prompt succor of her sister. Then he paused and fingered his watch chain, inviting the applause which she deserved. "And a brave deed was that of the boy who——"

There followed the story of Jim Alwood's rescue of his comrade from the canal. Again Mr. Dickson paused. He mopped his brow while the deed received its meed of popular praise. Then he said, "And it is my privilege to describe another gallant act——" Tim Barney's rescue of the little Baileys.

During the applause that followed, the school children nudged one another.

"Now! Now he'll tell about Albert."

"And give him the prize."

Mr. Dickson began again. "And a deed of signal heroism——"

Peggy smiled and nodded significantly to Albert. He turned red and tried to hide behind a post, while Mr. Dickson told about the courageous, level-headed rescue at the quarry. But, after the prolonged applause at the end of the story, he did not, as every one expected, summon Albert to receive the prize. He looked down at the excited faces with a quizzical smile that said he had a surprise for them. The best—oh, by far the best!—was yet to come. His smile faded into affectionate earnestness, and he leaned forward, as if to get nearer with words that he wished to put, not merely in the ears, but in the hearts of every one in the hall.

“The most heroic deed of all was performed by this brave boy’s schoolmate.”

The Westside children looked amazed. There must be a mistake. The quarry adventure had been the only thrilling event of their school year.

That was true.

“This child did not rescue any one from a runaway horse, a speeding motor car, devouring flames, or death by drowning. Her deed was not described and lauded in newspapers. It made no more noise than sunlight, and it was just as sweet and wholesome as sunlight.

“It was discovered—by me, in fact—in a casual way. I was dining at a Georgetown home and an incident was related about—ah! just about a cup on the table. The story interested me. It interested me so much that I made inquiries about the girl who was concerned in the incident. And I found out—what I believe she has not suspected to this very minute—that this girl is a heroine. Yes, a true heroine! And what did she do? Why, she met the difficulties and hardships and dangers of everyday life with steady courage and cheerful self-sacrifice.

“I reported the case to the committee, and all three of the gentlemen agree with me that this girl ought to receive the prize, and so the award is unanimously made. But if they did not”—

Mr. Dickson threw formality to the winds and his voice rang out in friendly defiance—"if not one of the committee had voted for her, just the same I should unhesitatingly award the prize to this brave girl.

"While her mother was ill at a hospital and her father laid up with a broken ankle"—Peggy started—"this brave young girl bore on her shoulders the burden of her family. She cooked, washed, mended, cared for her small brothers and sisters, and succored them in error and in illness. And, moreover, she was so efficient in school work that she ran the winner of the scholarship prize a hard race. During long and difficult months, this girl saved and kept a home. I am proud of such a girl in America, in Washington, here in this school. It is an honor and a privilege and a joy to award this prize to—Miss Peggy Callahan!"

There was an instant's amazed silence. Then Dr. Malone's red head bobbed up in the back of the hall. "Three cheers for Peggy Callahan!" he shouted like a schoolboy. "Hip, hip, hurray!" And the hall rang and echoed and reëchoed with cheers for the heroine of everyday life.

As Peggy seemed too amazed to move, her father led her forward to receive the medal and the purse of gold pieces. She stammered her

thanks, turned to kiss her father, and then darted back to throw herself in her mother's arms.

Albert Fischer elbowed his way among the friends and strangers crowding around Peggy. "I congratulate you," he said, grasping her hand, his face shining like a full moon. "I am so glad, so glad, so glad!"

Anne Lewis came up, too jubilant at first for sentences. "Oh, Peggy! It's the loveliest—Isn't it the splendidest—Peggy, you precious! Oo-ee! You hero, you dear hero! And you are, you are! And now you can go to school. You can take the business course and be a stenographer."

Peggy, who had been beaming with joy, suddenly sobered. "Be a stenographer," she faltered. "Do—do I have to?"

"Why, no," said Anne. "But you can. As you want to. Just as if you had the prize you worked for."

Peggy laughed happily. "That was the only bad thing about that prize. But it was better than having to stop school. Of course I never thought of getting this. Now I can take domestic science. That's what I love—about home things. And whoever got that scholarship prize had to take the business course."

Anne looked her amazement. "Yes. As you

said—on that nutting party last fall—you wanted to do more than anything in the world.”

Peggy laughed again. “How queer, Anne! It’s funny you think I said that. You must have dreamed it. Anyway, everything’s all right now.”











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