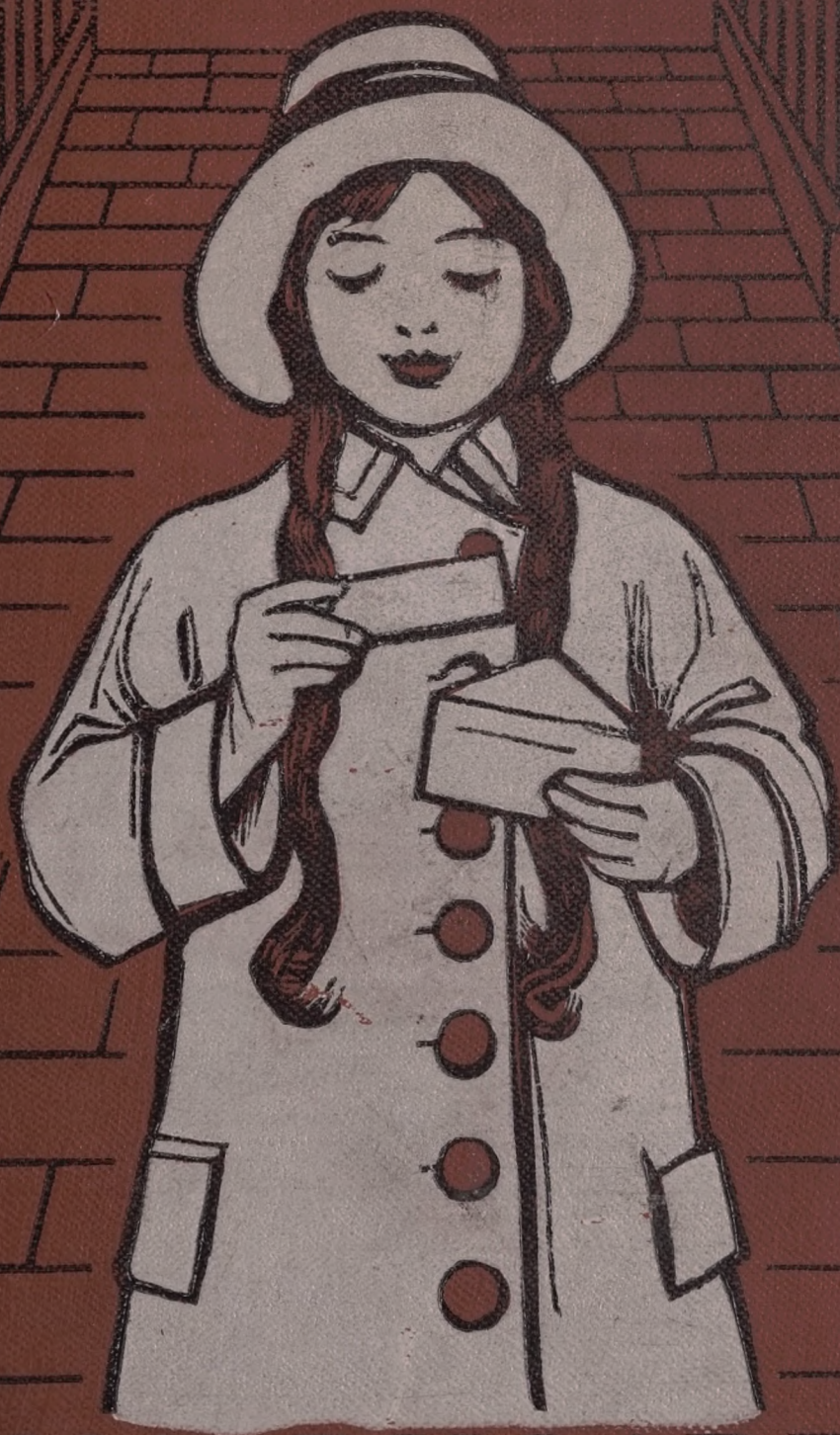


A REAL CINDERELLA



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SHE DID NOT KNOW THAT SHE WAS A CINDERELLA.—Page 11.

A
REAL CINDERELLA

BY
NINA RHOADES

ILLUSTRATED BY ELIZABETH WITHINGTON



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A REAL CINDERELLA



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A REAL CINDERELLA

CHAPTER I

CINDERELLA AT HOME

SHE did not know that she was a Cinderella, as she knelt on the floor putting on Miss Ada Marsh's satin slippers. She had never even thought of such a possibility, and if any one had mentioned it to her she would have opened her big brown eyes very wide, and felt inclined to regard the suggestion as a rather foolish joke. In her own humble opinion she was not a person of the very least importance, being only little Gretel Schiller, whom nobody seemed to care very much about, and who lived with Mrs. Marsh, because there didn't seem to be any other place for her to live. It seemed to her quite natural that she should make herself useful in the family, considering — as Mrs. Marsh frequently reminded her — that her half-brother, who lived in China, paid very inadequately for her support.

But this evening her heart was beating fast and she was regarding Miss Ada Marsh with more interest than usual for was not that young lady actually going to fairy-land?

The slippers were small, and Miss Ada's feet were large, so that the task of getting them on was a more difficult one than might have been at first supposed.

"Aren't they — aren't they just a little tight?" gasped Gretel, when several unsuccessful attempts had failed to produce the desired result.

"Not a bit," responded Ada, with decision. "Just push the heel in more. There, that's better. They do pinch a little, but that's only because they're new. They'll be perfectly comfortable as soon as I've stretched them." And Ada rose, and limped painfully across the room to the bureau.

"There, I believe I'm ready now, except my gloves. You can button them for me, and then just run and see if Mamma needs any help. It's ten minutes to eight, and they always begin those long German operas promptly."

"Oh, you mustn't be late. It would be terrible to miss any of it," said Gretel, anxiously. She was drawing a long white kid glove up over Miss Marsh's plump arm.

Ada shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

"I shouldn't mind missing a little," she said. "All the Wagner operas are so long and so heavy. I wish Mr. Pendleton had asked us to go to the theater instead. There's the door-bell; it must be Mr. Pendleton. My goodness! these slippers do need stretching. I'm thankful the opera house is just across the street; do hurry and finish Mamma. That Dora is so stupid about hooking her up. We mustn't keep Mr. Pendleton waiting."

Gretel hurried away wondering. It seemed very strange that any one could talk about going to fairy-land as Ada did, but then she was only eleven, and there were a great many things in the world that she did not understand. As she was crossing the narrow hall of the apartment to Mrs. Marsh's room, Dora, the maid-of-all-work, opened the front door, and a young man in a dress-suit stepped in, and greeted the little girl good-naturedly.

"Good evening, little Miss Gretchen," he said, with a smile. "Are your cousins ready? Your name is Gretchen, isn't it?"

"My name is Margareta Schiller," said Gretel, drawing herself up with the little air of dignity that always amused grown-up people. "They

call me Gretel, not Gretchen. Ada's nearly ready, and I'm going to see if I can help Mrs. Marsh with the hooks; but they're not my cousins."

"Not your cousins, eh? Why, I thought —" But Mr. Pendleton did not say what he thought, for at that moment Mrs. Marsh's door opened, and that lady appeared, carrying her evening wrap over her arm.

"Ah, Mr. Pendleton, just in time," she said, smiling, and speaking in what Gretel always called "her company voice." "Gretel, darling, run and tell Ada, Mr. Pendleton is here. We must not lose a moment; it would be too sad to miss that beautiful overture."

As Gretel turned away to do as she was told, Mr. Pendleton followed her rather curiously with his eyes.

"What a pretty child," he remarked in a low voice to Mrs. Marsh. "I supposed she was a relative of yours, but she says she is not."

"No, she is not a relative, but it was a most natural mistake for any one to make. It is rather complicated to explain. My dear husband was a cousin of Gretel's mother's first husband. She is an orphan, poor little girl, and her only relative — a half-brother — has been living in

Hong-Kong for several years. I give her a home, and Ada and I do all in our power to make her happy, but in our straitened circumstances it is scarcely possible for us to be as generous as we should like."

Mrs. Marsh sighed, and Mr. Pendleton looked sympathetic, and murmured something about being sure the little girl had a very happy home, but just then Gretel reappeared, followed by Ada, who was still struggling with the last button of her glove.

"Good night, Gretel dear," said Mrs. Marsh, sweetly, as she stepped into the elevator. "Don't sit up too long reading fairy stories, but go to bed early, like a good girl."

"Ada wants me to sit up till she comes home," began Gretel, but on receiving a warning glance from Miss Marsh, she grew suddenly pink and did not finish her sentence.

"Good night, Miss Margareta," said Mr. Pendleton, pleasantly, as he followed the others into the elevator. "Your time will come, too, some day, and we shall have you going to the opera before we know it."

Then the elevator door closed, and Gretel was left standing alone in the hall. But unlike the Cinderella of fairy-tale fame, she did not sit down

among the ashes to cry. On the contrary, she smiled quite brightly, as she closed the door of the Marshes' apartment, and hurried away to the parlor, the windows of which looked down on Broadway, and over at the great opera house just across the street.

Gretel was still smiling when she pushed aside the window-curtains, and flattened her face against the pane. To watch the people going into fairy-land was one of her favorite amusements.

"I wonder whether I really ever shall go," she said to herself a little wistfully. "I don't quite see how I can, for of course nobody will ever take me, and it costs so much money to buy a ticket, even for the standing-up place. But, oh, if I should — it would be something to be happy about forever!"

It was very interesting to watch the long line of carriages and motor-cars depositing their occupants at the doors of fairy-land. Gretel watched them eagerly, but for the first time a little doubt had crept into her mind.

"I used to think they must all be so happy," she said, reflectively, "but Ada didn't seem to care much, and I don't believe Mrs. Marsh did, either, though she pretended to. Father said a

person must have a soul to love music, and I don't believe Mrs. Marsh or Ada have souls — or at least not the kind he meant."

Just then some one came into the room and turned up the light. It was Dora, the maid-of-all-work. For the first moment she did not see Gretel, who was hidden by the curtains of the window, and going over to the center table, she lifted the lid of a candy-box, and was just about to help herself to a caramel when she caught sight of the little girl, and flew back hastily, with a muttered ejaculation of annoyance. But Gretel was too much absorbed to notice what the maid was doing.

"Come and watch them go in, Dora," she said, eagerly. "There are more carriages and automobiles than ever to-night, I think. That's because it's 'Lohengrin.' Father loved 'Lohengrin' best of all the operas; he used to play it for me. I know the 'Swan Song,' and 'Elsa's Dream' and the wedding march. I can play little bits of them myself. Did you ever go to fairy-land, Dora?"

"Fairy-land!" Dora repeated, laughing. "What a funny question! Of course I didn't. There isn't any such place really; it's just in stories."

“I didn’t mean to call it that,” explained Gretel, blushing. “I meant to say the opera. Father and I used to call it fairy-land because he loved it so, and I always call it that to myself. Father took me there once, and it was so beautiful. I’m sure the fairy-land they tell about in books couldn’t be any more beautiful. We sat away up in the top gallery, so it didn’t cost so very much. It was Father’s birthday, and he thought he would give us both a treat, but he was sorry afterwards, because a friend of his came the next day to ask to borrow some money, and he hadn’t any to give him. Father was so kind; he was always giving his money away to people. Mrs. Marsh says that was why there wasn’t any more money left for me when he died, but I’m glad he was like that; all his friends loved him so much.”

“Has your father been dead long?” Dora asked, with a glance at the child’s shabby black dress.

“He died a year ago this winter, just after Christmas. He was very ill on Christmas, but he would get up and light the Christmas tree. You see, Father was German, and in Germany every one has a Christmas tree. We always had one, even when there wasn’t much to put on it.

I didn't know how ill Father was, and I cried because he wouldn't sit up and tell me stories. You see, we lived all alone in the studio, and there wasn't anybody grown-up to take care of Father, and make him stay in bed when he was ill. But the day after Christmas he was so much worse that he couldn't get out of bed at all and then Fritz Lipheim came and brought a doctor."

"Who was Fritz Lipheim?" inquired Dora, who was beginning to be interested, and had seated herself comfortably on the sofa.

"He was a German, too," said Gretel; "almost all Father's friends were German. Fritz played the violin beautifully, but he wasn't nearly as clever as Father."

"What did your father do?" Dora wanted to know.

Gretel's eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"Why, don't you know?" she demanded incredulously. "I thought everybody knew about Father. He was Hermann Schiller the great pianist. I don't believe anybody in the world ever played the piano like Father. He used to play at concerts, and crowds of people came to hear him. He might have been rich, only all his friends were so poor he had to keep giving them money. Everybody loved him. My mother

loved him so much that she gave up her beautiful home, and all the money her first husband had left her, just to marry him and take care of him. She wouldn't let him give away all his money, but she died when I was only four, and after that there wasn't any one to take care of Father but me."

"And what relation are you to Mrs. Marsh?" inquired Dora, who had been in the family only a few weeks.

"I'm not any relation at all to her. Mr. Marsh was a cousin of my mother's first husband, Mr. Douane, but I never knew her till after my father died. You see, when the doctor told Father he was going to die, he was dreadfully worried, because he didn't know what was going to become of me. He asked Fritz Lipheim to telegraph to my half-brother in China. My brother was very kind. He telegraphed back that Father wasn't to worry, and afterwards he arranged with Mrs. Marsh to have me live with her. I have to be very grateful, Mrs. Marsh says, because if he hadn't been willing to support me, I would have had to go to an orphan asylum. The Lipheims would have taken care of me, only they are very poor, and sometimes they don't have enough money to pay the rent, so when

Mrs. Marsh came and said I was to live with her, they were very much relieved. That was the day after Father's funeral, and I was so very unhappy I didn't care where I went."

"And was Mrs. Marsh good to you?" Dora inquired rather skeptically.

"Oh, yes; she and Ada were both very kind that day. Ada gave me chocolates, and Mrs. Marsh explained how good my brother was, and how fortunate it was that I didn't have to go to an asylum."

"I don't think that was much," remarked Dora. "A nice sort of man your brother would have been if he had let you be sent to an asylum. Is he very poor?"

"Oh, no, he isn't poor at all. When Mother married Father all the money her first husband had left her went to her son. I heard Mrs. Marsh tell a lady all about it. Then after Mother died my brother went to live with his grandfather in Virginia, and when his grandfather died he left him all his money, too. He is a great deal older than I; he was fourteen when Mother married Father. He used to come to see us sometimes when I was little, and brought Father and me beautiful presents, but I don't remember him very well, because he went to

China when I was only six. But of course I'm very grateful to him."

"Well, I can't see anything to be so everlastingly grateful about," objected Dora. "But say, don't you want to play me a tune? I love to hear you play."

Gretel sprang to her feet with sparkling eyes.

"Do you really want to hear me play?" she demanded, incredulously. "I didn't suppose anybody cared about it. I'm afraid I've forgotten most of the things Father taught me, and Mrs. Marsh won't let me touch the piano when she is at home. She says the noise makes her nervous."

"It's too bad," said Dora, sympathetically; "you do play so lovely, and if you had lessons, why, my goodness, you might get to be a great musician like your papa. I don't suppose Mrs. Marsh would let you take lessons. If she would I know an awful nice young man who's a real high-class music teacher. He plays the piano at a moving-picture theater, and he's been giving my sister Lillie lessons. I don't believe he'd charge very high."

Gretel's face clouded for a moment, and she shook her head sadly.

"Mrs. Marsh won't let me," she said, with a sigh. "She says my brother only sends a very

little money. That's why I try to do things for Ada, to help pay my board."

Dora gave vent to her feelings by an indignant sniff.

"I suppose that's why you don't go to school," she said.

"Oh, no; my brother sends the money for my education, but Mrs. Marsh didn't happen to know of any good school, so her sister Miss Talcott, who used to teach in a school, said she would give me lessons every afternoon. I used to go to her apartment every day till January, but then a friend invited her to go to California, so I don't have any lessons now. Miss Talcott is very nice and I liked having lessons with her, but she has a great many engagements and quite often she had to be out all the afternoon. I didn't mind much, because she used to let me stay and play on her piano, and I loved that."

"Well, come along and give us a tune now," said Dora, good-naturedly, and Gretel from whose face the momentary cloud had vanished, left her seat in the window, and hastened to open the piano.

It was true that Gretel had forgotten much of the music her father had taught her. It was more than a year since the musical education from

which poor Hermann Schiller had hoped such great things, had come to a sudden standstill. But Gretel still played remarkably well for a child of her age, and as her fingers wandered lovingly over the keys of Mrs. Marsh's rather cracked piano, a strange, rapt look came into her face, and for the moment everything else in the world was forgotten. Dora, secure in the knowledge that the family could not return for several hours, curled herself up comfortably on the parlor sofa. But Dora, though fond of music of a certain kind, was not quite up to Chopin and Mendelssohn, and as Gretel played on and on, a sensation of comfortable drowsiness began to steal over her, and ere long her eyes had closed, and she was fast asleep.

Serenely unconscious of this fact Gretel played on, now a bit of one half-forgotten melody, now another, and as she played she forgot her present surroundings — forgot that she was no longer the child pianist, to whom her father's friends had listened with astonishment and pride — but only a poor little Cinderella left alone in her shabby black frock, while Mrs. Marsh and her daughter went to fairy-land. She seemed to see again the big, half-furnished studio, that had once been home, and Hermann Schiller and his German

friends, smoking their pipes as they listened to her playing, always ready with a burst of applause when her father called out in his kind cheery voice, "Enough for to-night, Liebchen — time to give one of the others a turn." It all seemed so real that for one moment she glanced up, half expecting to see the familiar scene, and the row of kindly, interested faces, but it was only Mrs. Marsh's shabby little parlor, with Dora fast asleep on the sofa. Suddenly a great wave of homesickness swept over the little girl — the music stopped with a crash and dropping her face on the piano keys, Gretel began to cry.

At the sudden pause in the music Dora opened her eyes, and sat up with a start. The next moment she had sprung to her feet.

"Whatever are you crying about?" she demanded in astonishment. "I thought you liked to play."

"I — I don't know," sobbed Gretel. "I think it must be the music. I love it so, and — and I never hear any now. I'm forgetting everything Father taught me, and he would be so unhappy if he knew."

"There, there, I wouldn't cry about it if I was you," soothed Dora, laying a kind hand on one of the child's heaving shoulders. "It's too bad, and

I'm real sorry for you, but maybe we can manage for you to hear some music if you're so crazy about it. My sister Lillie has a lovely voice, and she'd be real glad to come and sing for you some time, I know. My little brother Peter plays the piano, too, though he's never had a lesson in his life. Music just seems to come to him natural, and he makes up things as he goes along. Father's going to try and get him into vaudeville."

Gretel dried her eyes; she was beginning to be interested.

"I should love to hear him," she said, "and your sister, too. Do you think Mrs. Marsh would let me?"

Dora looked a little doubtful.

"Well, I don't know," she admitted. "She's got awful fussy notions about girls having company, even their own relations. But I'll tell you what we might do. Mrs. Marsh and Miss Ada are both going out to dinner to-morrow night and I might get the kids to come round and play for you while they're out. They'd be real proud to have the chance to show off."

"It would be very pleasant indeed," agreed Gretel, "only — only do you think we ought to have them if Mrs. Marsh objects?"

Dora reddened indignantly.

“If Mrs. Marsh wants to keep a decent girl, she’s got to let her have a little liberty,” she declared defiantly. “If anybody can show me where the harm is in my having my little sister and brother to spend the evening with me, I’d like to have them do it. Nobody’s going to do any harm, and a person’s got to have a little amusement once in a while. I’ve been in this house nearly six weeks, and not a living soul have I had to see me since I came.”

“I’m quite sure Father wouldn’t have minded,” said Gretel; “he always wanted people to be happy, but Mrs. Marsh isn’t the least like Father.”

“I should say she wasn’t. Why, what pleasure do you ever have yourself, you poor little thing? It’s nothing but run errands and wait on that lazy Miss Ada from morning till night. It makes me sick, that’s what it does. But you’re going to have a little fun this time, and don’t you forget it. I’m going right off this minute to send a postal to Lillie, to tell her and Peter to come round here and play and sing to you to-morrow evening.”

It was nearly midnight when Mrs. Marsh and her daughter reached home. Mrs. Marsh was

tired and sleepy, and she was not speaking in her "company voice" as she let herself in with her latch key, and switched on the electric light.

"Really, Ada, I am surprised at you. You might at least have let Mr. Pendleton think you enjoyed it."

"I was bored to death, and I suppose I couldn't help showing it," returned her daughter, with a yawn. "I never pretended to care for music, and I don't see why he didn't take us to the theater. There are half a dozen plays I'm dying to see. I hope that child hasn't gone to bed, and forgotten my chocolate."

"Really, Ada," remonstrated her mother, "you ought not to keep Gretel up so late. It isn't good for her, and I expressly told her to go to bed early."

"Nonsense; it doesn't hurt her a bit. Besides, she loves it. All children adore sitting up after they are supposed to be in bed."

Before Mrs. Marsh could say any more, a door at the back of the apartment opened, and a little figure appeared, carrying a cup of hot chocolate on a tray. Gretel's cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were shining; she did not look in the least sleepy.

“It’s all ready,” she announced cheerfully. “I heard the man calling the carriages, so I knew ‘Lohengrin’ was finished, and I went and made it right away. It’s nice and hot.”

Ada gave a satisfied nod.

“Take it to my room,” she said; “you can stay and brush my hair while I drink it.”

“She must do no such thing,” objected Mrs. Marsh, who was looking both worried and annoyed. “Gretel, didn’t you hear me tell you to go to bed early?”

Gretel glanced from Mrs. Marsh to her daughter, and her grave little face was troubled.

“I know you did,” she said, slowly, “but Ada told me to stay up and make the chocolate. I did go to sleep on the sofa after Dora went to bed, but I set the alarm-clock for half-past eleven, so as to be sure to wake in time. I’m sorry if it was wrong, Mrs. Marsh, but it’s very hard to know which I ought to mind, you or Ada.”

Gretel had no intention of being impertinent; she was merely stating a puzzling fact, which she frequently found very troublesome. But Mrs. Marsh reddened angrily.

“That is not the proper way for a little girl to speak,” she began, but her daughter cut her short.

“ Oh, for pity’s sake, don’t begin a lecture at this time of night, Mamma. We are all much too tired to argue. Come with me, Gretel.”

And Mrs. Marsh, who was a weak woman, and who was, moreover, considerably afraid of her tall, domineering daughter, made no further objections, but retired in silence to her own room.

“ How did you enjoy yourself all the evening?” Ada inquired, good-naturedly, as she sipped her chocolate, while Gretel brushed out her long hair. “ I hope you weren’t lonely.”

“ Oh, no,” said Gretel, cheerfully; “ I had a very pleasant time. First I watched the people going into fairy — I mean the opera, and then Dora came and talked to me, and I played on the piano. Mrs. Marsh doesn’t mind my playing when she’s out. I ought to be very grateful to Mrs. Marsh, oughtn’t I?”

Ada laughed.

“ You funny little thing,” she said; “ I never heard a child ask such questions. I suppose you ought to be grateful to Mamma, but what made you think of it?”

“ I — I don’t quite know,” faltered Gretel, blushing. “ I was only wondering about something Dora said. Oughtn’t it to give people pleasure to be grateful?”

“Of course it ought, but Dora had better mind her own business, and not put ideas into your head. You mustn't spend your time gossiping with her, Gretel; she's nothing but an ignorant servant. There, I've finished my chocolate, and I don't believe my hair needs much brushing to-night. Run off to bed; it really is terribly late for you to be up.”

Gretel obeyed, but when she had bidden Ada good night, and was taking the empty cup back to the kitchen, she whispered softly to herself:

“I wonder what ‘gossip’ means? I hope I don't do it if it's something not nice, but I do like Dora very much, and I'm very glad I'm going to know Lillie and Peter too.”

CHAPTER II

MUSIC AND CREAM-PUFFS

GRETEL'S first sensation on waking the next morning was that something pleasant was going to happen. She could not remember for the first few moments just what it was to be, but then it all came back to her; her conversation with Dora; her crying fit over the piano, and Dora's promise to bring her sister and brother to play and sing for her. She was conscious of a little thrill of anticipation as she sprang out of bed and began putting on her stockings. She had lived with Mrs. Marsh for more than a year, but this was the first time there had ever been a question of her having visitors of her very own. Mrs. Marsh and her daughter had plenty of visitors, of course, and some of them had been kind to the little girl, but that was quite a different thing from having people coming expressly to see her. In the old days at the studio they were always having visitors, and she had had almost more friends than she could count, but since her

father's death. all the old friends had seemed to fade away too. They never came to Mrs. Marsh's, not even kind Fritz Lipheim or his mother, with whom she had often stayed for weeks at a time while Hermann Schiller was away on a concert tour. Old Mrs. Lipheim had been very good to the child, and had taught her how to sew on her father's buttons and mend his socks. She was sure the Lipheims would have liked to come to see her if they had not feared Mrs. Marsh would object, but Mrs. Marsh had been so very stiff and unsociable on the day when she had come to take her away from the studio, and had not even suggested that Gretel should see Mrs. Lipheim again, although the little girl had clung to her old friend, crying as if her heart would break. Gretel was very grateful to Mrs. Marsh, but there were times when she could not help thinking how much pleasanter it would have been if her brother had arranged to have her live with the Lipheims instead of with his cousins.

It was nearly eight o'clock, but Gretel's room was still very dark. Indeed, it was never very light at any hour of the day, for its only window opened on an air-shaft. It was a very small room, and before Gretel came had always been

occupied by the maid-of-all-work, but the apartment was not large, and Mrs. Marsh had declared it to be the only room she could possibly spare, so the servant had been relegated to the maid's quarters at the top of the house. But small and dark as it was, Gretel loved her room. To begin with, it was the only place in the world that was all her own, and then it contained all her treasures. There was her father's photograph in a gilt frame, that Fritz Lipheim had given her as a parting gift; and his old German Bible, out of which he used to read to her and show her pictures on Sunday afternoons. There was also her old rag doll, Jemima. She was too old to play with dolls, now, but it was still very comforting to cuddle Jemima in her arms at night, when she happened to be feeling particularly lonely, or when Mrs. Marsh or Ada had been unusually cross. Then there were her father's letters tied together with a red ribbon. There were a good many of them, as there was one for every day that her father had ever been away from her. Some of the later ones were in German, for Hermann Schiller had taught his little daughter to read and write in his own language, and as he and his friends usually spoke

in German when they were together, it was almost as familiar to Gretel as English. But nobody ever spoke in German at the Marsh's, and she sometimes feared she might grow to forget her father's language, as she was forgetting the music he had taught her so carefully. Lastly, there were her books, not many, and all decidedly the worse for wear, but dearly loved, notwithstanding. There were "Poems Every Child Should Know" — Dickens, "Child's History of England" — a few old story-books, and — most cherished of all — Grimm's and Andersen's "Fairy Tales," which she had read over and over so many times that she almost knew them by heart. There was not much space for books in the little room, so they lived on the floor under the bed, and Jemima slept in the bottom bureau drawer with Gretel's night-gowns and petticoats. But notwithstanding its many drawbacks, that little room was the pleasantest place Gretel knew in those days, and it was there that all her happiest hours were passed.

Mrs. Marsh was alone at the breakfast table when Gretel entered the dining-room. She was reading the morning's mail, and merely glanced up from a letter long enough to give the child an

indifferent nod. But Gretel had been taught by her father that one should always wish people a good morning, so before taking her seat at the table, she remarked politely:

“Good morning, Mrs. Marsh; I hope you had a good night.”

Mrs. Marsh did not take the trouble to answer, but Gretel never omitted the little formula, “because,” as she told herself, “Father told me always to say it, so it must be right.” She slipped quietly into her place, and began on the plate of oatmeal and glass of milk, which always formed her morning meal.

She had not taken many spoonfuls, however, when Mrs. Marsh finished her letter, and began to pour her coffee. Dora, having placed the breakfast on the table, had gone away to attend to other household duties. Then Gretel, who was fond of talking, felt emboldened to make another attempt at conversation, unpromising as such an attempt might seem.

“It looks a little like rain, doesn’t it? Do you think it will rain, Mrs. Marsh?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” returned Mrs. Marsh absently. “I wonder what is keeping Ada? Just run and ask her how soon she will be ready, Gretel, before I pour her coffee.”

Gretel promptly departed, returning in a few moments with the announcement that Ada was only just awake, and would like her breakfast in bed.

“Then you had better take it right in to her before it gets cold,” Ada’s mother advised, and leaving her own breakfast to cool, Gretel proceeded to prepare a tempting little tray to be carried to Miss Marsh’s bedside.

But tempting as the meal looked, it did not satisfy the fastidious Ada. The toast was too hard, and the coffee had to be sent back for more cream. Couldn’t Gretel make her a few hot slices of toast, and boil a fresh egg, “not more than three minutes?” Of course Gretel could and did, and by the time Ada was comfortably settled with her tray, Mrs. Marsh had finished her breakfast, and Gretel’s oatmeal was quite cold. She was taking the plate to the kitchen, to warm it, when Mrs. Marsh encountered her, and asked rather sharply: “Where are you going now?”

“I’m going to warm my porridge,” Gretel explained.

Mrs. Marsh frowned.

“Nonsense,” she said sharply; “little girls shouldn’t be so fussy about their food. Sit down

and eat your breakfast at once; you've dawdled over it quite long enough already."

"I wasn't dawdling," began Gretel; "I was boiling an egg for Ada." But Mrs. Marsh was already half out of the room, and did not hear, so, with a sigh of resignation, Gretel sat down to her cold breakfast.

Mrs. Marsh went out to a meeting that morning, but Ada said she had taken cold the night before, and declared her intention of staying in bed till luncheon time.

"If I got up I know I should be worse," she told Gretel, "and then I might have to stay at home this evening."

"You'd better be very careful," said Gretel in a tone of sudden apprehension. "You wouldn't like to have to stay at home this evening, would you?"

"I should hate it," Ada declared emphatically. "The Scotts always give such delicious dinners, and Ethel Scott has promised to put me next a most delightful man."

Gretel was conscious of a sensation of relief.

"Would you like some hot lemonade?" she inquired eagerly. "Mrs. Lipheim once gave me some hot lemonade when I had a cold, and it was very nice."

Ada said she did not care for lemonade, but added that if Gretel really wanted to make herself useful, she might sew some buttons on her boots.

So, in spite of the fact that there were no lessons to prepare, Gretel spent a busy morning, for after the buttons were sewed on, Ada suggested that the child might arrange her bureau drawers, which were "in an awful jumble," and that task took so long, that by the time it was finished Mrs. Marsh had returned from her meeting and it was nearly one o'clock.

It had begun to rain soon after breakfast, and by noon had settled into a steady downpour. Mrs. Marsh came in wet and cross, and bewailing the fact that she would be obliged to go out again in the afternoon.

"I shouldn't think of going under ordinary circumstances," she declared, "but I really feel it is my duty to go to Mrs. Williams' tea. I dare say ever so many people will stay away in this storm, but that isn't my way of doing things. People always appreciate the friends who take the trouble to come to their teas in bad weather."

Gretel was a little afraid lest the storm should prevent Lillie and Peter from coming that evening, but Dora reassured her on that subject.

"They'll come if it rains cats and dogs," she maintained. "They wouldn't miss the chance of playing and singing for the world. And you won't wonder when you hear Lillie," she added, with sisterly pride. "I declare, when she sings 'Break the News to Mother,' or 'Just Before the Battle,' it just brings the tears into my eyes."

"I don't think I ever heard either of those songs," said Gretel. "Are they very beautiful?" To which Dora's only reply was a confident, "Just wait till you hear them."

Gretel was in her room reading "Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs" for about the fiftieth time, when Ada's voice once more summoned her hand-maiden to her side. She had risen in time for luncheon, and was now lying on the parlor sofa reading a novel, and she greeted Gretel with the smile that always meant she intended asking a particular favor.

"Gretel dear," she began sweetly, "would you like to do something just awfully nice for me?"

Gretel looked pleased. When Ada spoke in that tone she almost loved her.

"I'll do anything you want me to," she said, promptly.

Ada glanced rather uneasily out of the window, at the fast falling rain.

“Well,” she said, “you see, I’ve finished my book, and I haven’t an earthly thing to do this whole afternoon. If it were not for my cold I would just run round to the library for another book, but with this sore throat I really don’t quite dare. So I was wondering if you would mind going for me. It’s only four blocks, you know, and it wouldn’t take you any time.”

“I haven’t any waterproof, but I don’t believe the rain will hurt my dress,” said Gretel, with a dubious glance at the old black skirt, which certainly did not look as though rain or anything else could do it much injury.

Ada smiled sweetly.

“You are a dear obliging little girl,” she said. “You can wear my waterproof, and if you bring me back a nice interesting book I’ll — I’ll give you a present.”

“How perfectly lovely!” cried Gretel, her eyes sparkling. “I’ll be right back.” And she darted away to look for her rubbers and umbrella.

When she returned some three minutes later, she found Ada hastily scribbling the titles of some books on a piece of paper.

“Just ask for one of these,” she directed, handing the paper to Gretel. “Any one they happen

to have in will do. Now run along like a good child, and hurry back as fast as you can."

Gretel gave a cheerful nod, slipped the paper in her pocket, and departed, quite forgetting the fact that Miss Marsh had not repeated her offer of lending her a raincoat. In less than twenty minutes she was back again, dripping but triumphant.

"The very first book I asked for was in," she announced. "Wasn't it lucky? I'm afraid the cover is rather wet, it's raining so very hard, but I kept it as dry as I could."

Ada looked very much pleased.

"You really ought to have taken my raincoat," she remarked, regretfully; "you look like a drowned rat. Go and dry yourself by the kitchen fire, and you needn't mention to Mamma that you have been out."

Ada had already opened her novel, but Gretel still lingered.

"Is it a nice interesting book?" she inquired rather timidly.

Ada laughed good-naturedly.

"You sharp little thing," she said; "you are not going to let me out of my bargain, are you? I've got your present right here; guess what it is?"

“I can't guess,” said Gretel, her eyes beginning to sparkle once more. “I haven't had a present since Father died, except the dress you and Mrs. Marsh gave me for Christmas. Is it something to wear?”

“No, it isn't,” laughed Ada; “it's something to spend.” And she held out to the astonished Gretel a bright ten-cent piece.

If Gretel was disappointed she managed to conceal the fact quite satisfactorily, and having thanked Miss Marsh for her unusual generosity, she sped away to the kitchen, where she burst in upon Dora, who was peeling potatoes for dinner.

“Dora,” began the little girl eagerly, “I've got something very important to consult you about.”

“Well, you'd better get that wet skirt off before you do anything else,” objected Dora. “How that fat, lazy thing could send you out in this storm without a waterproof beats me.”

“Oh, she was very kind,” protested Gretel. “She thanked me so nicely, and she gave me ten cents for a present. That's what I want to consult you about. You see whenever Father had company he always gave them something to eat. Sometimes he couldn't afford to have much, but

he said if it was only a cup of coffee it was better than nothing, for it showed you wanted to be hospitable. I can't buy much with only ten cents, but I should like to have some little thing to offer Lillie and Peter this evening, and I thought perhaps you could tell me something they would like that wouldn't cost more than that."

"Well, now, that's real kind of you, I'm sure," declared Dora. "Not that the kids would expect anything. They're both crazy for ice-cream, but you couldn't get enough for two for ten cents. I'll tell you what you might get, though. Lillie just adores cream-puffs and she doesn't get them often, they're so expensive; five cents apiece. You could just get one for each of them for ten cents."

Gretel looked much relieved.

"That will be just the thing," she said; "I hope Peter likes cream-puffs too."

Dora said she was sure he did, and with a promise to "hurry right back," Gretel once more fared forth into the storm; this time to call at the baker's shop on the next corner.

Gretel's heart was beating high with anticipation as she assisted Ada with her toilet that evening. Her only cause for anxiety had been re-

moved now that two fat cream-puffs had been deposited in Dora's charge, and she was all eagerness to welcome the expected guests. Mrs. Marsh and her daughter did not leave for their dinner party until nearly eight, but Gretel had had an early tea in the kitchen.

"I hope you got thoroughly dry after your wetting this afternoon," Ada remarked, with belated anxiety, as she drew on her gloves.

"Oh, yes," said Gretel, cheerfully; "Dora made me sit by the kitchen fire till my skirt was quite dry. There was a hole in one of my rubbers, and a good deal of water got inside, but it didn't do me any harm."

"I'm sorry," murmured Ada, absently. "I think I have an extra pair I can lend you the next time you go out in the rain. I suppose you will amuse yourself drumming on the piano this evening as usual."

Gretel smiled, but did not answer, and just then Dora announced that the cab Mrs. Marsh had ordered was at the door, and the two ladies hurried away to their dinner party.

"Remember, Gretel, you are not to sit up late again to-night," were Mrs. Marsh's parting words. "Little girls must go early to bed if they want to grow up well and strong." She

glanced rather anxiously at Gretel's pale thin little face as she spoke. It had begun to dawn upon her of late that the child was not looking particularly strong.

Gretel promised that she would not sit up late, adding innocently that she did not suppose Ada would need any chocolate, as she was going to a dinner party, at which remark Mrs. Marsh frowned and looked annoyed.

As soon as the closing of the elevator door assured Gretel that Mrs. Marsh and her daughter were really gone, she flew off to the kitchen.

"Have they come?" she demanded breathlessly. "Ada took so long dressing I was dreadfully afraid they might get here before she was ready."

"No, they haven't come yet," said Dora, glancing up from the *Evening World* which she had borrowed from the elevator-boy, "but they'll be here soon now. I told them not to come before eight."

"You are sure they got your postal, aren't you?" inquired Gretel, anxiously.

"Oh, they got that all right," responded Dora, with so much conviction that Gretel felt very much relieved.

"I think," she said, gravely, "that the best

way will be to have the music first and the refreshments afterwards. That's the way Father always did. He said people never liked to play or sing right after eating."

"Oh, you needn't bother about that," said Dora. "Lillie'd sing just as good on a full stomach as on an empty one. She's an awful eater, anyway, and so's Peter. I never saw two kids that can stuff the way those two can. But, look here, hadn't you better keep one of those cream puffs for yourself? You didn't have very much in the way of supper."

Gretel shook her head resolutely.

"I wouldn't eat one for the world," she protested. "Mrs. Marsh says it isn't good for people to eat too much, and Father and I were often rather hungry the day after he had had company to supper. We never minded, though, and Father said he would so much rather be hungry than not be hospitable. Oh, there's the bell! It must be Lillie and Peter."

It was Lillie and Peter. Dora went to open the door, and when she returned she was accompanied by two guests; a girl of thirteen, in a green plaid dress, and wearing two long pig-tails hanging down her back, and a boy of eleven, with very red hair, and so many freckles, that

Gretel regarded him with a kind of fascinated horror. She was sure he was the very plainest boy she had ever seen in her life.

"Here they are," announced Dora, proudly, as she ushered in the visitors; "this is my sister Miss Lillie Grubb, and this is my brother Peter Grubb. Miss Gretel Schiller."

Both the visitors looked rather embarrassed, and Peter's freckled face grew very red indeed, but Gretel, with native politeness, came forward and held out her hand.

"I'm so glad you could both come," she said in her sweet, cordial little voice; "it was very good of you. You can't think how anxious I am to hear you play and sing. I haven't heard any music in such a long time."

"I'm sure we were very pleased to accept your invitation," returned Lillie, in her most grown-up manner, and she shook Gretel's hand very much as though it had been a pump-handle. Peter said nothing, but stuck both hands into his pockets, and grew redder than ever.

"Dora says you sing beautifully," Gretel went on, "and your brother plays. My father was a great pianist; perhaps you have heard of him; his name was Hermann Schiller."

"N—no, I don't think so," Lillie admitted,

reluctantly. "I've heard of Dan W. Quinn and George J. Gaskin, but they were both singers. Did your father play for the phonograph company?"

"Oh, no, Father didn't care much for phonographs; he played in concerts and wrote beautiful music. Perhaps your brother plays some of his things."

Lillie looked very much surprised.

"I thought everybody loved phonographs," she said; "we have one that Father bought second-hand, and we keep it going all the time we're in the house. We've got some dandy records. Peter makes up most of his own pieces; you see, he's never had a lesson in his life. Where's your piano?"

"In the parlor," said Gretel. "Take off your things, and we'll go right in. I'm so anxious to have the music begin."

She turned to Peter with a friendly smile, but that young man was absorbed in removing his rubbers, and did not respond. Lillie, however, appeared to be quite equal to the occasion, for she remarked politely:

"You must play for us, too; Dora says you play the piano something grand."

"Oh, no, I don't," protested Gretel, blushing.

“I used to play much better than I do now; I’m afraid I’ve forgotten a great deal. I shall be glad to play for you, though, if you would really like to have me.” And then, as the visitors had finished removing their out-door garments, she led the way to the parlor.

The first object to attract Peter’s attention was the candy box on the parlor table, and he opened his lips for the first time, and remarked in a rather high-pitched voice:

“Gee! you’ve got something good in that box, I bet.”

Gretel was very much embarrassed.

“I’m afraid we can’t have any of it,” she explained. “I’m very sorry, but you see, it doesn’t belong to me. A gentleman sent it to Miss Marsh, and I don’t believe she would like to have us touch it. We’re going to have some — some refreshments by and by.”

Peter — who had already lifted the lid from the candy box — looked rather crestfallen, but Lillie again came to the front.

“Never mind him,” she remarked, airily; “Peter’s an awful greedy boy.”

“Shut up,” retorted her brother. “I ain’t one bit greedier than you are.”

Lillie flushed indignantly, but before she could

reply, Dora — who had lingered behind to hang the children's wet raincoats up to dry — appeared upon the scene, and hastened to interpose.

“Now stop fighting this minute, the two of you,” she commanded. “You didn't come here to fight. Sit right down at that piano, Lillie, and show Miss Gretel how you can sing.”

Thus admonished, Lillie took her place on the piano stool, and the other three seated themselves in a solemn row on the sofa.

“What shall I begin with?” inquired Lillie. “I know such a lot of songs; I never have any idea what to sing first.”

“Sing ‘Poppa, Tell Me Where is Momma,’” suggested Dora. “That's a beautiful song, and so touching; I know Miss Gretel will love it.”

Peter muttered something about “that stuff being no good,” but nobody paid any attention to him, and after striking a few preliminary chords Lillie began to sing:

“‘Poppa, tell me where is Momma?’

Said a little child one day;

‘Tell me why I cannot see her —

Tell me why she went away.’”

Gretel gave one little horrified gasp, and clasped her hands tightly. For the first moment she was so disappointed that she could scarcely

keep back her rising tears. Was this the music to which she had been looking forward so eagerly all day? By a great effort she controlled the sudden desire to put her fingers in her ears, to shut out those dreadful, unharmonious sounds, but politeness soon overcame other feelings, and by the time Lillie had finished her song and turned from the piano for the expected applause, she was able to give a faint smile, and murmur something about "it's being very pretty."

"Now sing 'Hello, Central. Give Me Heaven!'" commanded Dora, who was looking both proud and triumphant, and without a second's hesitation, Lillie plunged into another sentimental ballad, if possible even more mournful than "Poppa, Tell Me Where is Momma!"

The hour that followed was one of the most uncomfortable Gretel had ever spent. It seemed as if Lillie's stock of songs was endless. The moment one came to an end her proud sister requested another, and the more she sang the more she appeared to be enjoying herself. Peter looked very much bored, but dared not express his feelings in Dora's presence, and was forced to content himself with chewing a large piece of gum, which he had produced from his pocket

and occasionally giving vent to his emotions by kicking the legs of the sofa viciously. Gretel was just beginning to wonder whether Lillie intended to go on for the rest of the evening, when a diversion was caused by a ring at the door bell, which caused a momentary excitement.

“I’ll go and see who it is,” said Dora. “Just keep still till I come back, Lillie. If it’s callers they mustn’t hear anything. They might tell Mrs. Marsh.”

Dora hurried away, and profound silence reigned in the parlor during her absence. Peter stuck his tongue out at Lillie, by way of giving vent to his long pent-up rage, but she was so much absorbed in trying to recall the third verse of “Just as the Sun Went Down,” to notice him. In a few moments Dora returned.

“It’s all right,” she announced cheerfully; “it was only a girl I know, who lives down on the second floor. She wants me to go to her room for a minute to fit a waist on her. I won’t be long, and mind you behave yourselves while I’m gone.”

“Of course we’ll behave,” protested Lillie, indignantly; “what do you think we are, anyway?”

“Oh, you’re all right, I guess, but I’m not so sure about Peter. You’ll be a good boy, won’t you, Peter?”

“Yep,” promised Peter, and Dora departed, after repeating the assurance that she would not be long.

No sooner had the outer door of the apartment closed behind Dora than her younger brother was on his feet. A look of daring and defiance had suddenly replaced the rather vacant expression of his countenance. In two rapid strides he reached the piano, and seized his sister firmly, but not gently, by one of her long braids.

“Come off of there,” he commanded in a tone of authority. “Quit your squalling, and give somebody else a chance to show off.”

“Leave me alone, Peter,” urged Lillie, coaxingly; “I haven’t finished yet. I’ve just remembered the third verse.”

“No, you don’t,” returned Peter, with decision. “You’ve sung seventeen songs already; now it’s my turn.”

“Oh, do let Peter play for us,” put in Gretel, eagerly. “Dora says he plays so well, and I do love the piano so much.”

Lillie looked as if she would have liked to refuse, but she had been warned by her mother to

“remember her manners,” and, moreover the grip on her braid assured her that Peter meant business, so, with a sigh of resignation, she vacated her seat on the piano stool, remarking as she did so:

“Oh, all right, of course, if you want to hear him, but he really can’t play worth a cent.”

“Can’t I, though?” shouted Peter defiantly. “Who says I can’t? Ain’t Father trying to get me into vaudeville to do my stunts? Just listen, and I’ll show you the noise it makes when a drunken man falls downstairs.”

Gretel’s eyes were round with astonishment, but Lillie only shrugged her shoulders indifferently, and walking over to the other side of the room, proceeded to make herself acquainted with the contents of Mrs. Marsh’s workbasket. Peter seated himself on the piano stool, struck a few thundering chords and began what was considered by his family and friends his “very best stunt.”

What followed was so awful that Gretel could never think of it afterwards without a shudder. She bore it in silence for fully five minutes, while Peter endeavored to represent the different sounds supposed to be made by the unfortunate drunken man in his efforts to escape from a saloon, until

the final catastrophe, when, having reached the top of a flight of stairs, he, in Peter's own words, "took a header," and plunged headlong from top to bottom. This Peter represented by a rapidly running scale from one end of the piano to the other, ending with a terrific crash, which brought Gretel to her feet with a cry of horror.

"Stop, oh, please, please stop," she implored, seizing Peter's uplifted arm just as it was about to descend upon the keys with another deafening crash; "it's — it's so dreadful!"

Peter's arm dropped to his side, and he regarded his little hostess in amazement.

"You — you don't like it?" he stammered incredulously.

"No, oh, no," gasped Gretel. "Please don't do it again; I'm afraid you'll break the piano."

Peter was offended. Never before had his "very best stunt" been received in such a manner.

"I won't play any more," he said, sulkily. "I don't know what you want, anyway."

"I told her she wouldn't like it," scoffed Lillie. "She likes real music, the same as I do. You'd better let me finish 'Just as the Sun Went Down.'"

But Peter had no intention of yielding the point so easily.

“You’ve sung enough,” he maintained doggedly. “It’s her turn to play now; let’s see what she can do.”

“I’m afraid you wouldn’t care about my music,” said Gretel, blushing. “Don’t you think perhaps it would be a good idea to have the refreshments now?”

“All right,” said Peter, his face brightening.

Lillie said nothing, but cast more than one regretful glance in the direction of the piano as Gretel led the way to the dining-room.

“Now, will you please sit here while I get things ready?” said Gretel, drawing up two chairs to the dining table. She was feeling decidedly relieved at having gotten her visitors safely away from the piano.

“What have you got?” demanded Peter, the last vestige of whose shyness had melted away the moment his sister Dora left the room.

“Something very nice,” said Gretel, smiling; “at least I hope you’ll think them nice. Dora said Lillie was very fond of them.”

Both visitors looked interested. Lillie seated herself at the table, and folded her hands primly in her lap. But Peter was not so easily satisfied.

“Let’s go and see what it is,” he proposed to his sister, as Gretel left the room.

“Of course not,” said Lillie, indignantly. “Ain’t we company? Company never goes into the kitchen in places like this.”

“Bosh!” retorted Peter. “She ain’t nothing but a kid, like us. I’m going, anyway.”

And, deaf to his sister’s expostulations, he followed Gretel into the kitchen.

Having secured the precious cream puffs from the ice chest, and placed them on a plate covered with a napkin, Gretel was in the act of procuring another plate and a couple of forks, when, startled by a slight sound behind her, she turned to find Peter once more at her elbow.

“I say!” exclaimed that youth in a tone of rapture, “it’s cream-puffs, the best ever; but ain’t there more than two?”

“No,” said Gretel, regretfully, “I — I couldn’t manage to get but two, but I thought it would be all right. They’re quite large, and you can each have one. I don’t care about any myself.”

Peter regarded the two fat cream-puffs with longing eyes.

“That pig, Lill, would grab ’em both if she got her hands on ’em,” he remarked reflectively. “I’ll tell you what we’ll do; we’ll eat ’em up here, and she won’t know. She’s got such grand manners she won’t come into the kitchen.”

“Oh, no, that wouldn't be at all nice,” protested Gretel, half laughing in spite of her horror at Peter's suggestion. “You can each have one; I truly don't want any myself.”

But the demon of mischief had entered into Peter Grubb. Before Gretel had the least idea of his intention, he had sprung forward, snatched both cream-puffs from the plate, and was brandishing one in each hand.

“Catch me if you can,” he shouted, and the next moment he had darted out of the kitchen, and was running at full speed down the long entry.

Attracted by the sound of triumph in her brother's voice, Lillie forgot manners and everything else, sprang from her seat, and rushed out into the hall.

“What's he up to?” she demanded breathlessly.

“He's taken the cream-puffs and run off with them,” explained Gretel, almost in tears at such an exhibition of rudeness as she had never before known. She was still carrying the empty plate, in the vain hope of reclaiming “the refreshments.”

“Cream-puffs!” shrieked Lillie; “my favorites!” And she rushed off in pursuit of Peter, who had taken refuge in Mrs. Marsh's bedroom,

and was already cramming a cream-puff into his mouth, with lightning speed.

Then followed a scene the like of which had never before taken place in Mrs. Marsh's well-ordered apartment. In the scrimmage rugs were rolled up, chairs overturned, and portières and curtains roughly torn aside. Lillie's temper was up, and she fought for her rights like a true little street Arab she was. She was two years older than her brother, and considerably stronger, but Peter was as agile as a monkey, and moreover, he had the advantage of having been the first to secure the prey. In the first moment of the fight Gretel had made a futile effort to separate the combatants, but it was quite useless and she could do nothing but stand idly by, wringing her hands in helpless despair.

"You'll hurt each other; oh, you will, I'm sure!" she wailed, as Lillie, having at last captured her brother, fell upon him, and began pomeling him furiously, while children and cream-puffs rolled over and over on the floor in a confused heap.

There was so much noise that nobody heard the opening of the outer door, and it was only when Dora, with a howl of rage, swept down



"CATCH ME IF YOU CAN!"—Page 59.

upon the combatants, that her younger sister and brother were even aware of her presence.

“You two little limbs of Satan!” cried the irate elder sister; “is this the way you behave when I leave you alone for ten minutes? Get up off that floor this instant. Mercy sakes alive, what a mess! How in the world am I ever to get it cleaned up before Mrs. Marsh comes home?”

How indeed? For even as Dora spoke a key was being turned in the front door, and in another moment it had opened and closed again. Gretel, being nearest the door, was the first to note the danger, and with a desperate effort to save the situation, she sprang forward to meet Mrs. Marsh and her daughter.

“We — we didn’t expect you home so early,” she faltered. “I hope you won’t mind very much, but —”

“I had a bad headache and excused myself as soon as we left the dinner table,” interrupted Mrs. Marsh. “How is it that you are not in bed? I thought I told you to go to bed early.”

“I’m very sorry,” began Gretel, but got no further, for at that moment Mrs. Marsh caught sight of something else — something so astound-

ing as to drive every other thought from her mind.

“What does this mean? Who are these people?” she demanded in a voice of such awful sternness that even Peter quailed. He and Lillie had scrambled to their feet, their faces and garments thickly plastered with the contents of the luckless cream-puffs.

“Oh, Mrs. Marsh, please don't be angry,” pleaded the trembling Gretel. “They're only Lillie and Peter, Dora's sister and brother, and they came to play and sing for me. I bought some cream-puffs for refreshments, and —”

“That's enough. I have heard all that is necessary. Dora, send those children home at once, and then come back here and clear up this disgusting mess. You know my rules about visitors, but I will say no more to you until the morning. Go to your room at once, Gretel, and don't let me hear another word from you tonight.”

“But, Mrs. Marsh, please don't blame Dora; it was all my fault. She only asked them to come for my sake, because I said I was so fond of music.” Gretel clasped her hands imploringly, and the tears were streaming down her cheeks, but Mrs. Marsh was obdurate.

“Not another word,” she commanded, waving her hand majestically in the direction of Gretel’s room. “My head is aching frightfully, and I must go to bed at once, but in the morning I shall have more to say on this subject. As for Dora, she knows my rules, and what she has to expect. I believe her month will be up the end of this week.”

CHAPTER III

A TICKET TO FAIRY-LAND

“**I** WANT to have a little talk with you, Gretel.”

Gretel looked up with a start from the pile of stockings she was darning. Mrs. Marsh, solemn and majestic as usual, was blocking the doorway of her little room, and there was an ominous sound in her voice which caused Gretel's heart to beat uncomfortably fast.

“Won't you come in?” she said, timidly, rising to offer her visitor the only chair the room contained, but Mrs. Marsh waved her back impatiently.

“Go on with your work,” she commanded. “I don't care to sit down; I can say all I have to say in a few words. I am very sorry to be obliged to find fault with you, Gretel, but I feel that I must speak to you about your behavior of the past two weeks. Ada has spoken of it several times, but I have postponed mentioning it to you, hoping things might improve. You have

not been at all like yourself since the night those disgusting children were here."

Mrs. Marsh paused, as if expecting Gretel to speak. The little girl had grown very red, and her lip was trembling, but she said nothing, and after waiting a moment Mrs. Marsh went on.

"It is rather difficult to fix upon any one particular thing you have done, but your whole manner has been different. You have not looked happy; indeed, you have appeared quite sullen at times. Now sullenness is a very disagreeable trait in a child. When your brother placed you in my care, he expected me to take a mother's place to you, and so, painful though it may be, I feel that it is my duty to reprove you for your faults."

Mrs. Marsh paused again, and this time Gretel raised her big honest brown eyes to her face; they were full of tears.

"I'm sorry," she said simply; "I didn't mean to be sullen, but you see, I haven't been very happy since Dora went away."

"Not been happy?" repeated Mrs. Marsh, her voice rising in astonishment; "and why have you not been happy, pray?"

"I don't know exactly," said Gretel, "but Dora was very kind to me, and I liked her. She

wouldn't have let Lillie and Peter come if I hadn't said I loved music, and so it was partly my fault that she had to go away."

"If that is all that is troubling you you may dismiss the matter from your mind at once," said Mrs. Marsh, decidedly. "The girl was very careless and incompetent, and I should probably have dismissed her at any rate. As for the mischief caused by those dreadful children, that certainly was partly your fault. You had no business to bring food into the house without my permission, but I forgave you for that when you assured me you were sorry. I never bear malice, and even though my carpet is practically ruined, I did not intend to refer to the matter again. It is your sullen, disagreeable manner that has pained me so deeply."

Two big tears splashed down Gretel's cheeks, and dropped on the stocking she was darning.

"I'm very sorry," she murmured tremulously; "I don't want to pain anybody."

Mrs. Marsh's face softened a little.

"I don't suppose you do," she admitted. "You are generally a very well-behaved child, I will say that for you, Gretel. You have been much less trouble than I expected you to be when I consented to take charge of you."

“Have I really?” inquired Gretel, her face brightening; “but what made you take me when you thought I was going to be so much trouble?”

Mrs. Marsh frowned.

“You talk too much, Gretel,” she said reprovingly; “little girls should not ask so many questions. I have always tried to do what I have felt to be my duty. Now I hope I have said all that is necessary on this subject. If I see an improvement in your manner I shall know that my little talk has not been in vain. Ada and I like to see happy faces about us, and I am sure that if any child in this world should be happy you should. I wonder how many little girls of your age are having a lovely long holiday right in the middle of the school year? By the way, I had a letter from my sister this morning, in which she tells me that her friend has decided to remain in California longer than she at first expected. They will not be back before the middle of April.”

Gretel did not look as much pleased at this news as Mrs. Marsh evidently expected.

“I’m rather sorry,” she said. “I like Miss Talcott, and she was so very kind about letting me play on her piano. I don’t mind lessons much; I used to love them when Father taught

me. But I will try not to be sullen, Mrs. Marsh; I really didn't know I was."

"That is right," said Mrs. Marsh, in a tone of relief. "Now we have discussed this matter quite enough, and I must hurry. Are you going out this afternoon?"

"Ada wants me to take her new dress back to the dressmaker's. Something has to be done to the skirt, and she's going to stop and try it on on her way home, but she doesn't want to carry the box herself, it's so heavy."

"Very well; the walk will do you good, but don't stay out too long. It isn't at all the proper thing for little girls to be in the streets after it begins to grow dark."

Gretel promised that she would be in the house before dark, and Mrs. Marsh departed, feeling that she had done all that was necessary in the way of "administering a gentle reproof."

When she was alone Gretel sat quite still for several minutes; her hands lying idly in her lap. She was thinking hard. It was quite true that she had not been happy, but she had not supposed Mrs. Marsh or her daughter had noticed that fact. Dora was the first one of all the long list of maids who had come and gone during her residence with Mrs. Marsh who had ever taken

any particular interest in her. Dora was rough, and not very neat, but Gretel had liked her, and there did not seem to be many people to like, now that her father was dead, and all the old friends had gone out of her life. The colored woman who now filled Dora's place was anything but prepossessing, and Ada had been suffering from a cold, which always made her more cross and exacting than usual. She had not meant to be sullen. She had tried very hard to be grateful, as Mrs. Marsh had so often told her she ought to be. She really had no idea that Mrs. Marsh had cared whether she was happy or not.

"I wonder if she truly does care," she reflected. "She doesn't always say things that are quite true. It wasn't true when she told Mr. Pendleton she would rather hear a symphony concert than go to the theater. She doesn't really love music a bit, and I don't believe she loves me, either, though she told that lady who was here the other day, that I was as dear to her as her own child. I don't suppose anybody will ever love me very much now I haven't got Father any more."

Suddenly, without quite knowing why she was doing it, Gretel found herself crying — crying so hard that the stockings rolled off her lap onto the floor, and she buried her face in her hands,

and shook from head to foot with great choking sobs.

But the cry did her good, and being a plucky little soul, she soon cheered up again, dried her eyes, picked up the stockings, and went on with her darning.

When the stockings were finished, and put away in Ada's drawer, Gretel went to the window to look out. The sun was shining, but there was a fierce wind blowing, which rattled the window frames, and sent great clouds of dust into the faces of the passers-by. It did not look like a very pleasant afternoon for a walk. Gretel glanced over across the street at fairy-land, which was closed and deserted that afternoon, but there was nothing surprising about that fact, for it was only Friday, and fairy-land was seldom open on any afternoon but Saturday. But as Gretel glanced at the familiar building, her eye was caught by an announcement, which was posted up in large letters "Saturday Matinee, 2 P. M., Lohengrin."

Gretel caught her breath in a little gasp, and just then she saw two young girls come out of the opera house, and one of them paused on the steps to put an envelope into her purse.

"She's been buying a ticket," said the child

to herself. "I wonder if it's for 'Lohengrin.' Oh, how very happy she must be!"

But there was nothing to be gained by standing there dreaming of impossibilities, and she must hurry if she intended to do Ada's errand, and be at home again before dark. So she turned resolutely away from the window, and ten minutes later was toiling up Broadway in the teeth of the fierce March wind, carrying the big box, containing Miss Marsh's new dress.

It was nearly a mile to the dressmaker's, and the box was heavy for small weak arms to carry, but no one had suggested her taking a car, and as her supply of ready money consisted of but three pennies, riding was out of the question. It was very cold, although it was the middle of March, and by the time Gretel reached her destination her teeth were chattering, and she was shivering from head to foot.

Relieved of her burden, however, the walk home was more comfortable, and for the first few blocks she almost ran, to get her blood in circulation. Then she suddenly realized that she was very tired, and the poor little feet began to lag once more.

"If it were only nice and warm I could sit down in Bryant Park, and watch the children

play," she told herself, with a sigh. "Oh, I shall be glad when summer comes, only then fairy-land will be all shut up, and I can't watch the people going in any more."

Just then a fiercer gust than usual tore off her hat, and by the time she had caught it again, after an exciting chase of more than a block, she began to feel quite warm. Still, it was a relief when the sight of the big opera house assured her that she had almost reached home. There was only one more wide crossing, and then she would be safely indoors, away from the wind and dust.

She paused on the curb, waiting for a momentary lull in the long stream of cars and automobiles, and just at that moment something white came fluttering along the sidewalk, and rested at her feet.

"Why, it's a letter," said Gretel to herself, stooping to pick up the envelope; "somebody must have dropped it. No, it isn't a letter either; it's a ticket. Oh!" Gretel gave one great gasp, and in another second she was darting across the street, clutching a white envelope tightly in her hand.

Her heart was beating so fast when she entered the apartment house that she could scarcely

breathe. It was not until she had reached her own little room, unmolested and unquestioned, that she dared draw a long free breath. Then she sank down on the edge of the bed, and for the first time since that one hurried glance in the street, ventured to examine the contents of the soiled white envelope.

There was not much in the envelope; only one small, thin ticket, but if it had been a hundred-dollar bill Gretel could not have gazed upon it with greater awe. For it was nothing less than an admission to fairy-land.

“It’s for Saturday afternoon,” she said in a rapturous whisper; “it’s for ‘Lohengrin!’ Oh, how wonderful, how wonderful!”

In those first moments she had no other thought than that this wonderful thing had, by some unknown, wholly inexplicable chance, been sent to her. How it happened to be lying there on the sidewalk did not even occur to her. She kept repeating over to herself: “It’s mine; it’s really mine; nobody can take it away from me!”

She sat for some time, gazing at her treasure, with loving eyes. Then she rose, and went to the bureau.

“I must put it away very carefully,” she said

to herself. "No one must know anything about it. If Mrs. Marsh knew she might not let me keep it; she might make me —"

Gretel's hold on the precious ticket tightened imperceptibly, and she grew suddenly very pale.

"She might make me take it back to the opera house," she finished, with a gasp.

Then, all at once came another thought — a thought so dreadful that she actually began to tremble.

"Perhaps I ought to take it back," she whispered. "It may belong to some one; some one may have dropped it. Oh, but I can't — I can't! Nobody in the whole world can possibly want it as much as I do."

Just then she heard Mrs. Marsh's voice in the hall, and hastily opening her bureau drawer, she thrust the envelope and its contents deep down among her handkerchiefs.

Both Mrs. Marsh and her daughter regarded Gretel curiously when she appeared at the dinner-table that evening. The child's cheeks were flushed, and there was such a feverish brightness in her eyes that Mrs. Marsh began to fear she was going to be ill. But when she questioned Gretel on the subject, the little girl assured her eagerly that she was quite well.

“You aren’t eating much dinner, at any rate,” remarked Ada, with a wondering glance at Gretel’s almost untouched plate. “You ought to have a good appetite after your walk in the wind. What an awful afternoon it was. I was almost blown off my feet coming round the corner by the opera house. Madame has promised to have my dress ready for me to wear to the wedding to-morrow, Mamma. Are you very tired, Gretel?”

“I’m not tired at all,” replied Gretel, in a rather dreamy, faraway voice.

“Little girls who cannot eat their dinners properly should not be allowed any dessert,” said Mrs. Marsh, severely. But Gretel only smiled, and when the dessert appeared she ate so little of it that Mrs. Marsh felt more uneasy than before.

“You had better go to bed early, Gretel,” she advised, “and I will give you a dose of medicine, for I am sure your stomach must be upset.” And when Gretel had retired obediently directly after dinner, Mrs. Marsh spoke with more severity than usual to her daughter, on the folly of sending the child on such a long walk in the wind.

Gretel swallowed her medicine without a word of protest, and then, having locked her door

against intruders, she once more drew her treasure from its hiding-place.

“It is mine; it is; it is!” she told herself almost fiercely. “I found it. I don’t have to take it back. Perhaps the person who dropped it doesn’t care any more about ‘Lohengrin’ than Mrs. Marsh and Ada do. Anyway, nobody knows where it is now; nobody but me, and I want it — oh, I want it more than I ever wanted anything in my life before.”

And then Gretel undressed very quickly, and crept into bed, with the ticket to fairy-land safely deposited under her pillow.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMING OF THE PRINCE

IT was half-past one on Saturday afternoon. Mrs. Marsh and her daughter had gone out of town to attend the wedding of a friend, and Gretel knew they could not return much before six o'clock. She had finished her solitary luncheon, for which she had little more appetite than for her dinner the previous evening, and was standing before the bureau in her little room, putting on her hat and jacket. Her heart was thumping in great excited bounds, and her eyes shone in a way which would have convinced Mrs. Marsh more firmly than ever, had she seen them, that the child was feverish.

Ever since she awoke that morning Gretel had been fighting with her conscience. That ever persistent "small voice" had been making itself heard very clearly, but with an almost desperate determination, the little girl had resolutely closed her "inward ear."

“I must go; I must; I must,” she kept repeating over and over to herself. “If it wasn’t ‘Lohengrin,’ I would take it back, but Father loved ‘Lohengrin’ best of all. Oh, it can’t be so very wrong; I am sure it can’t.”

And now the magic hour had actually come. All the morning she had watched the clock, and it had seemed to her that time had never dragged so before. She was sure it ought to have been at least twelve, when the hands of that tiresome clock would persist in pointing to only half-past ten. But at last it was really time to start.

“I’ll go very early,” she had decided. “It will be so beautiful to just sit there and hear the instruments being tuned.”

There was no necessity of making any explanation to the colored maid. She was a stupid, careless person, to whom Gretel and her affairs were of very little consequence, and would scarcely have noticed whether the child were in the house or out of it.

Gretel’s hand shook so that she could scarcely hold the precious ticket, as she stepped out of the apartment-house, and crossed the street to fairy-land. Early as it was the lobby of the opera house was already crowded, and there was

a long line of people waiting for tickets. Gretel pushed her way through the jostling throng, and presented her ticket.

“Balcony, three flights up,” said the man at the gate, hurriedly, and turned to the next comer. In another moment Gretel was climbing the long flight of stairs to the balcony.

She was quite breathless when she reached her destination, and the usher who took her check, and showed her to her seat, regarded the little girl rather curiously. But there was no time to waste in asking questions, so he contented himself with assuring Gretel good-naturedly that “there was lots of time; the opera didn’t begin till two.”

It was all just as she had remembered it, and pictured it to herself again and again. The great house; the crowds of people, and the orchestra tuning up their instruments. With a great sigh of unutterable relief, she sank back in her seat — for the first time in nearly twenty-four hours she felt safe.

“I’m here; I’m really in fairy-land,” she whispered rapturously, “and I’m going to hear ‘Lohengrin.’”

Then the leader of the orchestra appeared, and

was greeted by a burst of applause, followed by a sudden stillness, and in another moment the overture had begun. For the next three hours Gretel was living in a wonderful, beautiful dream. It was even more beautiful than she had anticipated, and she drank in every note of the marvelous music as a person dying of thirst might drink water. During the intermissions she leaned back, with closed eyes, waiting in a kind of silent rapture for the curtain to rise again. As to what would happen when it was all over, and she would have to leave fairy-land and go back to Mrs. Marsh's again, she never once thought of that.

But everything, even in fairy-land, must come to an end at last. It was after five, and "Lohengrin" had sung his farewell, and sailed away in his mysterious swan boat, while the swan himself, miraculously transformed into the heroine's long-lost brother, embraced his heart-broken sister. And then, amid a perfect storm of applause, the curtain fell for the last time that afternoon; "Lohengrin" was over.

The performance had been an unusually fine one, and many of the audience had tears in their eyes as the curtain fell on that final scene, but to one little heart the last notes of the orchestra

fell like the knell of doom. For several minutes Gretel remained in her seat, while the applause continued, and the singers came before the curtain again and again to bow their thanks. All about her people were putting on their wraps, but still she did not move. At last some one touched her on the arm.

"Please let me pass," said a voice, and Gretel awoke from her dream to find the eyes of a plainly-dressed, elderly lady fixed upon her kindly. With a sudden start, she sprang to her feet.

"Is it really all over?" she inquired in the voice of a person suddenly awaking from a long sleep.

"Yes, it is really all over," answered the lady, smiling. "You have enjoyed it, haven't you? I have been watching you all the afternoon."

Gretel did not answer. It would not have been possible for her to have spoken just then, there was such a big lump in her throat, and the tears were so very near the surface. She turned away quickly, and the lady, thinking she was shy, paid no further attention to her.

How bitterly cold it was. Gretel shook from head to foot as she stepped from the steam-heated building out into the windy street. But

what was more surprising to Gretel than the sudden change of atmosphere, was the fact that it was still broad daylight, and that the sun was shining almost as brightly as it had done when she entered fairy-land. She had so completely lost count of time that it had not occurred to her that the world would look just the same when she came back to it again. For the first moment she was almost dazed, and then, with a mighty effort, she pulled herself together, and hurried across the street. To be alone in her own room, that was her one desire just then. She must cry, and nobody must see her. After she had cried for a long time perhaps that dreadful choking feeling in her throat would go away, and she would be able to talk to people again.

Nobody noticed the little girl as she slipped quietly into the apartment-house, but she did not take the elevator, fearing the boy — a friendly person, with whom she had often exchanged remarks — might ask embarrassing questions. She preferred to climb the six long flights of stairs to the Marshs' apartment on foot. Annie, the colored maid, opened the door in answer to her ring, but Annie was not fond of talking, and Gretel slipped past her, and gained her own room, without speaking or being spoken to. Once

there, with the door closed behind her, her first act was to fling herself face downward on the bed, and give way to the long-pent-up burst of tears.

“Oh, I’ve been wicked! I’ve been dreadfully wicked!” sobbed the poor little culprit, as wave after wave of remorse and shame swept over her. “I took a ticket to fairy-land that didn’t belong to me. It was as bad as stealing. I ought to have taken it back to the box office; I knew I ought all the time, but I didn’t do it. Oh, I’m so ashamed — so dreadfully ashamed!”

How long she lay there she did not know, but gradually the storm subsided; the choking sensation in her throat relaxed, and she began to feel more like herself. But she was very unhappy; more unhappy than she had ever been in her life. Even when her father died it had not been like this. Then she had been only sad, not ashamed, and now she was so ashamed that she longed to creep away and hide somewhere, where nobody would ever be able to find her again.

The sound which aroused her at last was the sudden opening of her door, and Annie’s voice saying —

“The ladies has come home, and you’re wanted in the parlor.”

It had not taken Annie long to discover that Gretel was not a person of any particular importance in the household, and she treated the child with as little consideration as possible. She did not even take the trouble to glance into the room as she delivered the message, but turned away at once, and went back to her work, while Gretel rose slowly to her feet, her poor little guilty heart sinking down, down like a lump of lead.

“They’ve found out,” was her first thought; “somebody has told them, and now I’m going to be punished.”

But somehow even this thought failed to frighten her much. She was so unhappy already that it didn’t seem to make any particular difference what happened to her. She took off her hat and jacket, and even stopped to smooth her hair and bathe her swollen eyes. She was a proud child, and she did not want Mrs. Marsh and Ada to know that she had been crying.

As Gretel crossed the hall to the parlor, she became aware of the fact that Mrs. and Miss Marsh were not alone. Mrs. Marsh was speaking in her “company voice,” and Ada was giggling in the affected way she always did when young gentlemen came to call on her. As Gretel

neared the parlor door Mrs. Marsh was saying:

“This really is the most delightful surprise. We had not the least idea you were in this country.” Then, catching sight of the little girl in the doorway, she added in her very sweetest tones —

“Ah, here she is. Come in, Gretel darling, and see if you can possibly guess who this is.”

Gretel advanced slowly into the room, but she did not look at the visitor. Her heart was beating very fast again, and her cheeks were crimson; she was afraid to lift her eyes from the carpet.

Then another voice spoke.

“Hello, Gretel,” it said. “Don’t you know me? Have you quite forgotten your big brother Percy?”

With a great gasp, Gretel looked up to find a pair of kindly, merry blue eyes regarding her earnestly, while their owner, a young man, with a pleasant sunburnt face, held out his hand to her. For a moment she was so astonished that she stood quite still, staring at this sudden apparition, without even attempting to move or speak.

“What is the matter, Gretel? Why don’t you speak to your brother?” inquired Mrs. Marsh,

reprovingly, and with another gasp of astonishment, Gretel came forward, and slipped a cold little hand into that of the sunburnt stranger.

"How do you do?" she said, timidly. "I — I thought you were in China."

"So I was until six weeks ago," the young man answered, smiling. "I only arrived in New York this morning. Aren't you a little bit glad to see me?" And greatly to Gretel's surprise, this tall, good-looking young gentleman, bent down and kissed her.

"Yes, oh, yes," she stammered; "I'm very glad to see you, only — only —" And all at once, without having the least idea why, she suddenly began to cry again.

"Don't be a baby, Gretel," remonstrated Ada, laughing. "If you act like this your brother will think you are sorry to see him instead of being glad."

But Mr. Douane did not seem in the least offended. He gave Gretel's shoulder a friendly pat, and smiled such a kind, understanding smile, that the little girl's heart went out to him as it had not done to any one since the happy days in the studio.

The evening that followed was so wonderful that for the time Gretel almost forgot her trouble

in astonishment. Her brother did not talk very much to her, but he made her sit beside him on the sofa, and all the time he was talking to Mrs. Marsh and Ada he kept casting kindly glances at his little sister. She was almost too shy to answer when he did speak to her, but he seemed to understand when Mrs. Marsh reproved her for not telling her brother what a delightful surprise he had given her, for he interrupted that lady quite sharply, with the comforting assurance —

“Oh, Gretel’s all right. We understand each other, don’t we, little girl?” To which Gretel’s only answer was a rather tremulous smile.

But all the time she was saying over and over to herself —

“He’s the handsomest, splendidest young gentleman I’ve ever seen; I think he must look like the prince in Cinderella, and he’s really my own brother.”

It really seemed almost too wonderful to be true. Hitherto she had only thought of this half-brother of hers as of some far-away benefactor, who had sent Mrs. Marsh the money for her board and education, but who was not at all likely to trouble himself very much more about her. And now here he was, sitting in Mrs.

Marsh's parlor, apparently taking it as quite a natural state of affairs that he should have come all the way home from China, in less than six weeks, and suddenly dropped down in their midst.

Mrs. Marsh insisted that the visitor should remain to dinner.

"You really must, my dear boy," she protested, when Mr. Douane seemed inclined to plead a previous engagement. "I never had the pleasure of knowing your father, but he was my dear husband's favorite cousin, and best friend, and I feel it a great honor to welcome his son to my home."

Mrs. Marsh spoke with so much feeling that her voice trembled, and Gretel thought she must have loved Mr. Marsh very dearly, but then she remembered that *she* was never "Gretel darling" except before company, and reflected that perhaps it was the same way about other people as well. She was "Gretel darling" and "dearest Gretel" all that evening, and once when she was passing Mrs. Marsh, that lady suddenly put an arm round her, and gave her a kiss, which was such an unusual demonstration of affection that the little girl fairly gasped with astonish-

ment. Ada was not so affectionate, but she talked and laughed a great deal and seemed to like Mr. Douane very much indeed. She asked if she might call him Cousin Percy, and seemed so delighted to have him at home that Gretel was rather puzzled, for Ada had once told her that she had not seen Percy Douane since she was a little girl, and scarcely remembered him at all.

But all these things made but a trifling impression on Gretel, for her whole attention was absorbed by her brother. The more she looked at him, the handsomer she thought him, and every time he spoke to her, her heart began to beat so fast that she could scarcely answer him.

"I am sorry to say Gretel is very shy," Mrs. Marsh remarked to the visitor on one of these occasions. "We are doing all we can to give her more confidence in herself, but I am afraid the life with her father was rather bad for her. Her training was sadly neglected."

Gretel felt the hot, indignant color rush up into her cheeks, but she dared not contradict Mrs. Marsh. She ventured a timid glance at her brother, and the expression she saw in his eyes reassured her.

"My stepfather may not have been a dis-

ciplinarian," he said, gravely, "but he was one of the kindest and most generous men I have ever known."

"I am sure it is very noble of you to speak so beautifully of him," Mrs. Marsh murmured, and then the subject was changed.

Mr. Douane was not a great talker, but all that he said was interesting. Ada asked a great many questions about life in China, and Mrs. Marsh appeared very anxious to find out why her cousin had come so unexpectedly.

"I dare say it is only a flying visit," she said, smiling, "and that you will be off to the ends of the earth again before we have had time to realize we have had a glimpse of you."

"I am not so sure of that," said Mr. Douane. "I may decide to settle down for a while. I had a bad attack of typhoid in the autumn, and since then I have had a sort of longing for my own country. A fellow begins to think about home and friends when he is too weak to turn over in bed without assistance."

"Poor boy," cried Mrs. Marsh. "I am glad I did not know of your illness; I should have been worried to death. But you have quite recovered, I trust?"

Mr. Douane assured her that he had never been better in his life.

“The voyage did wonders for me,” he said, “but I was pretty fit even before I left Hong-Kong. Indeed, I doubt if I should have come home at all if some property of my grandfather’s in Virginia had not required looking after. Then I had a fancy to see this little sister of mine; it is more than five years since I saw her last.”

“You must find her very much changed,” remarked Ada, to which Mr. Douane replied rather gravely —

“I do indeed.”

Mr. Douane did not stay long after dinner. He had an appointment with a friend, he said, but before leaving he once more drew Gretel to his side and kissed her.

“Good-night, little woman,” he said kindly, “we shall meet again very soon.” And Gretel was so overwhelmed with astonishment and rapture, that she could not think of a single word to say in reply, and just stood staring after her brother, as he left the room, accompanied by Mrs. Marsh and Ada.

She was still standing in the same spot when

the two ladies returned after seeing their guest to the elevator.

“Really, Gretel, I am ashamed of you,” began Mrs. Marsh, and the little girl noticed that she did not say “Gretel darling” this time. “I am sure I don’t know what your brother must have thought of your manners. You scarcely spoke to him the whole time he was here, and goodness knows you talk enough at other times.”

“I didn’t have much chance to speak,” faltered Gretel, anxious to vindicate herself. “You and Ada were talking all the time, and you told me never to interrupt.”

“You are a very impertinent little girl,” said Mrs. Marsh, severely. “I was only anxious to have you appear well for your own sake. I am sure your brother must have been very much disappointed in you.”

“Oh, do leave Gretel alone, Mamma,” put in Ada with a yawn. “I don’t believe Percy cared whether she talked or not. How could a man of his age be expected to take any particular interest in a child like that, even if she is his half-sister?”

But even this last remark failed to disturb Gretel very much. She was a humble little soul, and it had never even occurred to her as a pos-

sibility that her faraway, almost unknown brother, could care much about her. Indeed, she had not hitherto cared very much about him herself, except to remember Mrs. Marsh's oft repeated injunction to be grateful to her brother, to whom she owed everything in the world. But now all that was changed, and he had suddenly become her hero, the very most interesting person in the whole world to her.

"He kissed me twice," she said to herself, with a little excited thrill, as she went away to her room, "and he said we should meet soon again. Oh, I do wonder how soon it will be."

Then suddenly something that she had almost forgotten in the excitement of the past few hours flashed into her mind, and a look that was half shame and half fear came into her eyes.

"Oh," she gasped, with a little irrepressible sob, "he must never find out about 'Lohengrin.' He would despise me, and if he knew, I think I should die of shame."

CHAPTER V

GRETEL'S SUNDAY OUT

IT was Sunday afternoon, and Gretel was at home alone. Mrs. Marsh had gone to church, and Ada was spending the afternoon with friends. It was the maid's day out, and Mrs. Marsh had told Gretel that she intended calling on a friend after church, and if invited, might remain to supper. Ada did not expect to return until late in the evening.

“So if neither of us comes home, you can get your own supper and go to bed early,” the good lady had added. “You are not afraid to stay by yourself, are you?”

“Oh, no,” Gretel had answered cheerfully; “I don't mind a bit. I'll read, and — and — do you think that perhaps my brother might come again to-day, Mrs. Marsh?”

“I am sure he will not,” said Mrs. Marsh, with decision. “He must have a good many friends in New York, and we cannot expect to see much of him. When he does come again, however,

I sincerely hope you will try to make a better impression than you did yesterday."

Gretel really did not mind being alone. She was not a timid child, and the life she had led with her father had made her unusually independent for her age. But when Mrs. Marsh had gone out this afternoon she did not as usual rush to the piano. Somehow she did not feel quite like playing to-day. Music reminded her of yesterday, and it was not a comfortable recollection. So she went to her room in search of one of her precious books, and had just settled herself comfortably with "Little Women" when she was startled by the sound of the door-bell, and in spite of Mrs. Marsh's assurances, her heart began to beat fast again.

"Hello, Gretel! anybody at home?"

Yes, there he was, her tall handsome brother, looking down at her with his pleasant smile, and this time Gretel was not afraid to speak.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said, regretfully, "but Mrs. Marsh and Ada have both gone out. Mrs. Marsh said she was sure you wouldn't come to-day; she thought you would have so many other friends to see."

She stood holding the door, expecting that the visitor would go at once, as people usually did

when told the ladies were not at home, but to her surprise, he did not move.

“Aren't you going to let me in?” he asked, smiling.

Gretel was covered with confusion.

“Yes, oh, yes, indeed,” she protested eagerly; “I'd love to have you, but I didn't think you'd want to come in when you knew everybody was out.”

“How about you? Don't you count yourself as anybody?” her brother inquired, with a laugh, as he stepped into the hall, and Gretel closed the door.

Mr. Douane's laugh was so pleasant that Gretel suddenly found herself laughing, too, though perhaps more from nervousness than enjoyment.

“I'm only a little girl,” she explained, “and people never come to see me.”

“Well, I have come to see you, at any rate, and to tell the truth, I am very glad Mrs. Marsh and the fascinating Ada are out. Would you like to come with me for a motor-ride?”

“A motor-ride?” repeated Gretel, looking puzzled. “Oh, you don't mean to go to ride in an automobile! I should love it better than anything else in the world, but—but do you really think I could?”

"I don't see anything to prevent. Do you like motoring?"

"I have only been in an automobile once," Gretel explained. "Father was going to play at a gentleman's house in New Rochelle, and the gentleman sent his car for him, and Father said I might go, too, and sit outside while he played. So I did, and we had a lovely ride, but it was rather cold waiting so long for Father. The car went so fast I was a little frightened at first, but I got used to it after a while, and then it was splendid. But I'm afraid Mrs. Marsh wouldn't let me go. You see, the maid is out, too, and she doesn't like to have the apartment left with nobody in it."

Some of the amusement faded from the visitor's face; he even looked a little annoyed.

"So they leave you alone to look after the house," he said dryly. "Well, you are not to stay at home this time, whether Mrs. Marsh objects or not. I have hired a car for the afternoon, and I want to take you out with me; it's a glorious day. I am your guardian, so it is your duty to do as I say, and it's quite time we began to get acquainted with each other. So run and get on your warmest things, and I will write a note explaining matters to Mrs. Marsh. The

apartment will be safe enough; we'll get the janitor to look after it."

Although not feeling at all certain as to how Mrs. Marsh would regard such an unheard-of proceeding, Gretel stood far too much in awe of this big, decided young man to dare argue the point with him, so without another word, she turned to do his bidding. She was just leaving the room when her brother called her back.

"We may stop somewhere for dinner, and not get back until the evening," he remarked cheerfully, "so you may as well put on something pretty." He glanced rather disapprovingly as he spoke at Gretel's shiny black frock, with the big darn in the middle of the skirt.

Poor Gretel stopped short, and all the brightness of anticipation went out of her face. Her voice even shook a little when she spoke.

"I'm very sorry," she faltered, blushing, "but I'm really afraid I won't be able to go. You see, I haven't got any pretty things to put on, and I'm afraid you wouldn't like to take me in this dress."

There was a moment's pause while Mr. Douane regarded his little sister critically from top to toe. Then he gave vent to his feelings in a

long, low whistle. Gretel's cheeks were crimson, and she was fighting hard to keep back the rising tears. But when her brother spoke his voice was as kind as ever.

"Well, never mind about the clothes," he said; "you look very well just as you are. How about a warm wrap, though? Have you a fur coat?"

Gretel was forced to admit that she had not, but she assured her brother that her winter jacket was very warm indeed, and, moreover, that she never felt cold. Mr. Douane smiled a rather peculiar smile, but made no further remarks, and ten minutes later Gretel found herself leaning back in a comfortable touring car, while her brother and the chauffeur wrapped a warm fur robe about her, tucking her in so snugly that she felt sure she could not possibly feel cold even if it should begin to snow.

It was such a wonderful experience that it took Gretel some time to become accustomed to it. She scarcely spoke at all during the first half hour, but it was a beautiful afternoon, and under the combined effects of bright sunshine, crisp air, and delightful motion, the little girl's spirits soon began to rise, and by the time they had crossed Seventy-second Street, and were

bowling up the beautiful Riverside Drive, she was chattering away to her companion as though she had known him all her life.

“I’m not a bit frightened this time,” she declared. “This is something else for me to be grateful to you for, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know about that,” said Mr. Douane, smiling down into the eager, radiant little face; “why should you be particularly grateful to me for a motor-ride?”

“Why, because I must be grateful to you for everything,” said Gretel, innocently. “Mrs. Marsh says I ought to be even more grateful to you than I am to her. She says if it wasn’t for the money you send I should have to go to an orphan asylum. She would be glad to keep me, only she is afraid she wouldn’t be able to afford it.”

“I see,” said Mr. Douane, quietly. “So that is how she explains matters. Well, I must say I think she might have fitted you out a little better as regards clothes. I suppose she is kind to you; you are fond of her, are you not?”

“Oh, yes, she is very kind,” said loyal Gretel, “and — and I suppose I’m fond of her. I try to be very grateful all the time; Ada is kind, too; she gave me ten cents once. Of course it was

pretty hard at first, I missed Father so, but I'm getting used to it now."

Gretel wondered why at that moment her brother suddenly took her hand and patted it. He did not say anything, but there was a very kind look in his eyes, and when he spoke next his voice was unusually gentle.

"Tell me about your school," he said. "Do you like going to school and what are your favorite lessons?"

And Gretel, delighted to find her brother really interested in her affairs, told him all about the lessons with Miss Talcott; of that lady's going to California, and how Mrs. Marsh had advised her to try to make herself useful about the house during her enforced holiday. Mr. Douane listened very attentively, and although he did not say much, Gretel felt sure that he was interested. By dint of a few more questions she was led on to tell about her daily life and in less than half an hour Mr. Douane had learned all, and more than he wanted to know about his little sister's life during the past year.

That was a wonderful afternoon, and Gretel enjoyed every moment. She even told her brother about Dora, and the visit of Lillie and Peter, ending with the story of the cream-puffs,

over which Mr. Douane fairly shouted with laughter.

“It really was rather funny,” said Gretel, who could not help laughing herself at the recollection of that dreadful night, “but Mrs. Marsh was very angry; she says the spots will never come out of her rug, and it was so sad about Dora’s having to go away. Dora was such a nice girl, and it was her first place. Mrs. Marsh wouldn’t even give her a reference.”

Gretel was beginning to look rather troubled, but her brother said he was sure Dora would soon find another place, and then changed the subject by asking her where she would like to dine.

“There’s a lovely restaurant on Seventh Avenue,” said Gretel. “Father took me there two or three times, but perhaps you might think it was too expensive. They charge seventy-five cents for the table d’hôte.”

Mr. Douane laughed, and looked so much amused that Gretel was considerably puzzled.

“I have no doubt it is a very fine restaurant,” he said, kindly, “but I don’t think we will dine there this evening. Suppose we try Sherry’s? I haven’t been there for some years, but it used to be rather good.”

“Do you mean that big place on Fifth Ave-

nue?" inquired Gretel, her eyes opening wide in astonishment. "Mr. Pendleton took Mrs. Marsh and Ada there once, and Ada said the dinner cost fifteen dollars. Oh, do you really think we ought to go there?"

Mr. Douane laughed again, and assured her that he thought they might venture to be extravagant for once, so when they had made the tour of Van Cortlandt and The Bronx, the chauffeur was directed to take them back to the city, and at about seven o'clock the car drew up before the big Fifth Avenue restaurant.

"I've passed here a great many times, but I never thought I should be going in," whispered Gretel to her brother, as they went up the steps, and she was conscious of a delightful little thrill of anticipation.

Fifteen minutes later they were sitting at a small table in the brilliantly lighted restaurant, and Mr. Douane was giving one of the waiters an order which fairly took away Gretel's breath; it was all delightful and beyond her wildest dreams, but she was a little anxious, notwithstanding.

"What's the matter, Gretel?" Mr. Douane asked, regarding her troubled face curiously, as the waiter disappeared with the order. "Are

you afraid you are not going to get enough to eat?"

"Oh, no, indeed!" cried Gretel, reddening; "it's all perfectly wonderful, only — only, are you quite sure you can afford it? It sounded so very expensive."

"Quite sure," laughed her brother. "You are an economical little person, Gretel."

"That's just what Father used to say," said Gretel, her face brightening, "but you see, I had to be rather economical, because Father was so very extravagant. He didn't care a bit about things for himself, but he wanted them to give to his friends. He used to tell me that if I didn't warn him about not spending all his money, he wouldn't have any at all left. He said Mother used to keep his money for him, but after she died there wasn't anybody else to do it, and that was why he was always so poor."

A shade of sadness passed over Percy Douane's pleasant face.

"Poor Mother," he said, with a sigh, and Gretel suddenly remembered that her mother was also his, and felt more intimate with this new brother of hers than she would have believed possible a few hours earlier.

What a dinner that was! Gretel had never in

her life tasted such delicious things. It was rather too early for the usual crowd, but there were plenty of diners to watch, and what with the bright lights, the music, and the delicious food, the little girl felt very much as Cinderella must have felt when she first arrived at the ball. As for the prince, there could not possibly have been a more delightful prince than her brother. The night before at Mrs. Marsh's, she had thought him rather quiet, but this evening he was the merriest of companions, and what was more, he seemed to be enjoying himself quite as much as Gretel was. Gretel had been accustomed to the society of grown-up people all her life, and was in many ways old for her age. She had been her father's friend and companion at an age when most children are still in the nursery, and even the year spent under Mrs. Marsh's stern discipline had failed to altogether suppress her love of talking. So she chattered away, and by the time dinner was over Mr. Douane had learned a good many things, some of which were of such a surprising nature that he found considerable difficulty in restraining his rising indignation.

“Do you mean to tell me that Mrs. Marsh never bought you a Christmas present with the

money I sent?" he inquired once, in a tone of so much surprise that Gretel was a little startled.

"Did you really send money to buy me a Christmas present?" she asked innocently. "How very kind you were. Mrs. Marsh didn't tell me about it, but perhaps she forgot. I suppose she couldn't spend the money that way, because — well, you see, she said she didn't believe you had any idea how much things cost. I'm very glad you told me, though, for it makes another thing for me to be grateful about."

"Don't talk to me about being grateful, Gretel; I don't like it." Mr. Douane spoke so sharply that Gretel was very much embarrassed, but the next moment her brother was smiling again, and had said something to make her laugh.

She felt a little uneasy again when she saw the size of the bill her brother handed the waiter, and the small amount of change which was returned to him, but she was beginning to realize that Percy did not like being reprovved for extravagance, so she wisely said nothing, although she could not help an uncomfortable fear that he might be obliged to go without breakfast the next morning, as her father had sometimes done.

There was just one subject that Gretel never

mentioned once all that afternoon and evening, and that was "fairy-land." When the orchestra played popular airs, and her brother asked her if she cared for music, she said "Yes" in a rather low voice, and instantly became very much absorbed in her ice cream. Music was the one thing about which she did not want to talk, or even to think just then. The more she saw of her brother, and the more she loved and admired him, the less possible it seemed that she could ever tell him about the ticket to fairy-land.

It was not yet nine o'clock when Gretel reached home. She and her brother had walked the few blocks from Sherry's to the apartment-house and the little girl had found the walk through the brightly-lighted city streets with her tall companion very pleasant. She had rather hoped to find the Marshes still out, but the elevator-boy informed them that Mrs. Marsh had already reached home.

"Her friend can't have asked her to stay to supper, then," said Gretel, regretfully. "I'm afraid she'll scold a good deal, but you'll explain about it all, won't you, Percy?"

"I certainly will explain," said Mr. Douane, and his tone sounded so determined that Gretel

felt much relieved, even though her brother was looking rather stern, and not nearly as pleasant as he had looked at the restaurant.

It was Mrs. Marsh herself who opened the door, neither Ada nor the colored maid having as yet returned. She was smiling, and greeted Mr. Douane in her "company voice," but there was something in the glance she gave Gretel, which caused the child's heart to sink with a foreboding of trouble to come.

But Percy Douane did not waste much time in explanations or apologies.

"I took Gretel for a motor-ride, and afterwards we dined at Sherry's," he said, quite as if such unheard-of proceedings were matters of every-day occurrence. "I hope you found the note I left for you."

"Oh, yes, thank you; the janitor gave it to me as soon as I came in. It was a great treat for the dear child. I am sure you have had a delightful time, Gretel."

"It was beautiful," said Gretel, with shining eyes. "I'm sorry you had to get supper all by yourself, though," she added, regretfully. "I hoped that lady you went to see would ask you to stay. You said —"

"Oh, I managed quite comfortably," inter-

rupted Mrs. Marsh, frowning. "I am glad you have had such a happy day, but it is past your bedtime now, so bid your brother good night, and run off at once. I am afraid you don't know much about children's bedtime, Cousin Percy."

"Perhaps not," said Mr. Douane, rather grimly, "but Gretel and I have had a jolly evening, and we are going to have another very soon. Good night, little woman." And he drew his little sister to him, and kissed her with more tenderness than he himself would have believed possible a few hours earlier.

"Good night," said Gretel, returning her brother's kiss heartily. "You said I mustn't talk about being grateful, but I am just the same. I've had a perfectly wonderful time." And then, warned by an impatient gesture from Mrs. Marsh, she hurried away to her own little room.

"And now, Mrs. Marsh, I wish to have a little talk with you," said Mr. Douane, as Gretel's door closed behind her, and there was that in his tone which caused that lady to tremble, and turn rather pale, as she silently led the way to the parlor.

CHAPTER VI

A TRANSFORMED CINDERELLA

MRS. MARSH did not appear at the breakfast table the next morning. She had a bad headache, Annie told Gretel, and was having her coffee in bed. Gretel had nearly finished her own breakfast, when Ada, still in wrapper and curling-pins, came sauntering into the dining-room.

“Where’s Mamma?” she inquired, with a yawn, as she took her place at the table.

“She has a headache,” Gretel explained; “Annie took her some coffee and toast on a tray.”

Ada looked more interested.

“Something’s up,” she remarked, helping herself to an orange. “Do you know what it is, Gretel?”

“No,” said Gretel, looking very much surprised; “she didn’t say there was anything the matter last night. Oh, Ada, I had such a perfectly beautiful time. Percy came for me to go for a motor-ride with him. He says I must call

him Percy, though I don't think it sounds quite polite, when he's so much older than I am. We had a wonderful ride, and then we went to Sherry's and —"

"I felt sure there was something wrong when I came home last night," Ada went on, without paying the slightest attention to Gretel's news. "Mamma was in her room, and wouldn't open the door when I spoke to her. I thought her voice sounded queer, and she seemed very cross. I do hope it isn't any more bother about money; we're poor enough already, goodness knows. I'll go in and get it out of her, whatever it is, as soon as I've finished my breakfast."

As Ada had not proved a sympathetic listener, Gretel refrained from any further information about her own affairs, and in a few minutes she went away to make her bed, leaving Miss Marsh to finish her breakfast alone.

Bed-making is not an easy task for a girl of eleven, especially when there is a heavy mattress, which one has had strict injunctions to turn every morning. Gretel had only this duty to perform since the arrival of Annie, who had pronounced the work much too hard, and insisted on having help. But Gretel was an orderly little soul, who rather enjoyed housework, and when she made

her own bed she had at least the satisfaction of getting her room in order in the morning, instead of waiting till afternoon, which had sometimes been the case during Dora's reign. She had just finished her dusting when her door — which she had closed — was flung suddenly open, and Ada, looking both flushed and excited, appeared on the threshold.

“Well, you've done it!” remarked that young lady in a tone of such exasperation, that innocent Gretel regarded her in amazement.

“Done what?” she inquired, stupidly.

“Oh, I guess you know well enough. It's all very well to pretend you don't, but I don't believe you're quite such a baby as you appear to be, after all.”

“But I don't know, indeed I don't,” protested Gretel. “I didn't think I had done anything wrong, except — oh!” And Gretel stopped short, with a little frightened gasp, and some of the color went out of her face.

“Oh, no, you haven't done anything wrong; of course not,” said Ada, sarcastically. “It wasn't wrong to tell wicked stories to that brother of yours, and prejudice him against Mamma. You're a mean little tell-tale, and you deserve to be severely punished.”

The color had all flown back into Gretel's cheeks by this time, and though very much distressed, she was no longer frightened. Ada's words had at least assured her that her first great fear was groundless.

"I didn't tell my brother wicked stories," she protested, indignantly. "I don't know what you mean, Ada, I truly don't."

There was such a ring of truth in Gretel's voice that Ada — who was not really an unkind girl at heart — was somewhat mollified.

"Well, you've made a lot of trouble, whether you meant to or not," she said, with a sigh. "Mamma hasn't closed her eyes all night, and she's in an awful state this morning. Don't you know it's very mean to tell people's private affairs to any one, even if he is your brother?"

"But I didn't tell Mrs. Marsh's private affairs to Percy," cried Gretel, her voice beginning to tremble. "I don't know her private affairs, so I couldn't tell them, even if I wanted to. I didn't tell Percy about anybody but just myself."

Before Ada could answer Mrs. Marsh's voice sounded down the hall.

"Ada, come here, I want to speak to you. Can't you leave that child alone? I should think mischief enough had been done already." And

without another word, Ada turned away, slamming the door behind her.

Left alone, Gretel stood quite still in the middle of the room, staring at the closed door. She had not the least idea what all the trouble was about, but one thing was painfully clear; in some way, quite unintentionally on her part, she had offended Mrs. Marsh, and made her very angry. She was not fond of Mrs. Marsh, but she did not want any one to be angry with her. She was quite sure she had not told her brother any wicked stories, but if he thought she had, and had told Mrs. Marsh so, what could she do? She was only a little girl, and nobody could be expected to believe her word against the word of a grown-up person, but why, oh, why, had Percy — her beloved Percy — said such cruel, untrue things about her? He had been so kind, and had really seemed to like her, but if he said she told wicked stories he could not possibly like her. It must have been all a mistake on her part. Suddenly a great wave of disappointment and loneliness swept over the poor little girl, and with a sob, she flung herself face downward on the bed, just as she had done on the day when she came back from fairy-land, and began to cry as if her heart would break.

Again it was Annie who disturbed her by opening the door, and putting in her head, with almost the very same words she had used on that other occasion: "You're wanted in the parlor." And having delivered this curt message, went away again, leaving the door open.

Gretel rose slowly, and pushed the tumbled hair back from her face. She had been crying so hard that her head ached, and she felt rather giddy and confused. But this time she did not wait to bathe her face before answering the summons. If Mrs. Marsh wanted to scold her, it might be as well to let her get through with it as soon as possible, and that lady did not like to be kept waiting.

Gretel did not look up when she entered the parlor. She was such a forlorn little figure, in her shabby frock, her face all tear-stained and swollen from crying that the young man standing on the rug by the mantelpiece, was conscious of a momentary feeling of something very like dismay. But when Gretel saw who was the sole occupant of the room, and ran to him with a little cry, his face softened, and it was with real tenderness that he put his arm round her, saying gently:

“What’s the matter, Gretel? Tell me all about it.”

But, to Mr. Douane’s surprise, Gretel did not respond to his caress; she even drew a little away from him, and the big brown eyes were full of a mute reproach.

“What made you say it?” she asked in a voice that was not much above a whisper.

“Say what?” her brother inquired, curiously.

“Tell Mrs. Marsh I told wicked stories, and that I was a — a tell-tale?” finished Gretel, with a sob.

Percy Douane’s face grew very stern, and his eyes flashed ominously.

“Who said I told her any such things?” he demanded in a voice that fairly made Gretel tremble.

“Ada said so; she said I told you her mother’s private affairs, but I didn’t; you know I didn’t. I only told you about myself. Oh, Percy dear, won’t you please tell them you made a mistake? Mrs. Marsh is so very angry, and Ada’s angry too.”

“Gretel,” said her brother, and he made a great effort to speak quietly, “go and put on your hat and jacket; I want you to come out with me.”

Gretel was very much surprised, but she was

pleased as well. It was a great relief to know that she would not have to encounter Mrs. Marsh's wrath just yet, and even if her brother did accuse her of telling people's private affairs, his society was infinitely preferable to that of either Ada or the maid Annie.

"Where are we going?" she inquired, regarding her brother's grave face, wonderingly.

"Never mind; I'll tell you later. Run and put on your things."

"But oughtn't I to ask Mrs. Marsh first? She doesn't like to have people go out without letting her know."

"Mrs. Marsh knows all about it; I told her last night. Now hurry, like a good child; I want to get away from here as soon as possible."

Gretel was very much puzzled. She felt sure that something unusual had happened, but what it was she had not the slightest idea. Without another word she turned, and went back to her room; put on her hat and jacket, and in less than five minutes was back at her brother's side again. Mrs. Marsh's door was closed, and neither she nor her daughter was to be seen. Gretel paused for a moment outside the closed door, on her way back to the parlor. She could hear the sound of low, agitated voices from within but she dared not

linger for fear of making her brother more angry than he appeared to be already.

Mr. Douane was standing by the parlor table, hastily writing a note, when Gretel rejoined him.

“I am leaving this for Mrs. Marsh,” he said; “she will understand everything when she reads it. Are you ready?”

Gretel nodded.

“Come along, then; I have a taxi waiting at the door.”

Gretel’s heart was beating very fast as she followed her brother into the elevator, but she did not ask any questions until they had left the apartment house, and were rattling away in a taxi. Percy had given the chauffeur an address, but Gretel was too much astonished and bewildered by this sudden turn of affairs to notice what it was. But when her brother suddenly began to laugh his pleasant, jolly laugh, and put his arm round her again, she began to realize that this was a most exciting adventure, and, moreover, that she was not at all frightened.

“Well, that’s over!” exclaimed Mr. Douane, in a tone of unmistakable relief. “We actually succeeded in getting away without encountering the ogress. How do you like being carried off in this sudden fashion, Gretel?”

“ I think I’m beginning to like it,” said Gretel, whose spirits were rising rapidly, “ but where are we going, and who is the ogress? ”

“ We are going first to the ‘ Gotham ’—the hotel where I am putting up for the present. Later we are going to Virginia.”

“ Virginia! ” repeated Gretel, staring at her brother in blank amazement. “ You said last night that you were going to Virginia, but — but I never thought I was going with you.”

“ Well, you are — that is unless you have any very serious objections. I have got to look after some property of my grandfather’s, and have decided to take you along with me. We will stay at Old Point Comfort; you will like it there, and it is only a few miles from my old home. You know I lived in Virginia with my grandfather for some years before I went to China. It will be fine to get away from these cold March winds; I’m not accustomed to cold weather in Hong-Kong. What do you think of my plan? ”

“ It’s the most exciting thing that ever happened to me,” declared Gretel, who was still both looking and feeling decidedly bewildered. “ I feel as if I must be dreaming, but — but I’m afraid I can’t go without some more clothes. I didn’t even bring a tooth-brush.”

“We’ll attend to the clothes all right, so don’t worry about that. We are not starting till tomorrow afternoon, and there will be plenty of time to fit you out before then. I’ve had a talk with the housekeeper at my hotel. She seems a good soul, and thinks she knows of a suitable maid to look after you.”

“A maid to look after me!” Gretel felt more convinced than ever that she must be dreaming. “Why, I thought only rich people had maids; I never even had a nurse after I was five. Father did everything for me himself. Oh, Percy dear, I really don’t think I need a maid; it would cost so much, and I can do everything for myself now. Even Mrs. Marsh says I’m not much trouble.”

But Mr. Douane only laughed.

“You’ll have a lot of things to learn, Pussy,” he said, pinching her cheek. “I presume it is something of a shock just at first, but I’ve had a rather severe shock myself. If any one had told me at this hour yesterday, that I should be carrying you off with me to Old Point, I should have been inclined to think it a rather poor joke. But I’ve had my eyes opened since then. Mrs. Marsh hasn’t been playing fair. She and I had a settling-up of accounts last night, and I gave

her a piece of my mind that I don't believe she will forget in a hurry."

Gretel was beginning to understand.

"Is that why Ada was so cross?" she asked. "And why she said those horrid things about my being a tell-tale and talking about Mrs. Marsh's private affairs? But I didn't really tell you anything I ought not; did I, Percy?"

"You certainly did not. You told me nothing but the simple truth, but that was quite enough. I never knew Mrs. Marsh well, but her husband was a fine man, and a great friend of my father's, and I thought I could trust her to do what was right by you. I have found out my mistake, and for the future I shall steer clear of that charming lady and her daughter."

"Do you mean I'm not to go back to Mrs. Marsh's at all?" questioned Gretel.

"Do you want to go back?"

"N — no, not at all, but if I don't live with Mrs. Marsh, who is going to take care of me?"

"I am, for the present, until I can make some other arrangement for you. Don't look so distressed, little woman; are you afraid I won't be able to look after you properly?"

"No, oh, no," cried Gretel, eagerly. "I

should love to live with you, only — only it's all been so very sudden, and if I had known I wasn't coming back I could have taken my things."

"What things?" her brother asked, kindly.

"Father's picture, and his letters, and my books. Oh, do you think Mrs. Marsh will let me have them? I should be so very unhappy without Father's letters."

Mr. Douane assured her that all her possessions should be sent to her, and he spoke in a tone of so much conviction, that Gretel's spirits began to rise very rapidly, and by the time the taxi drew up before the big Fifth Avenue hotel, she was as happy, and as eager for new adventures as any little girl starting on her first journey could possibly be.

They went up a great many stories in an elevator, walked along a wide corridor, with doors on both sides, and finally entered a sitting-room, which was so high up that Gretel could see over the tops of the neighboring houses, and even catch a glimpse of the boats on the river. Here her brother told her to take off her jacket, and make herself comfortable, while he rang the bell for the housekeeper.

In a few minutes the housekeeper appeared,

accompanied by a stout young woman, with very red hair, and a rather pleasant face.

“This is the maid I mentioned to you, sir,” the housekeeper explained. “I telephoned to her at once, and found she was still out of a place. She hasn’t been very long in this country, but I know her people at home in England, and she can show you some excellent references from our best families.”

The young woman then stepped forward with a courtesy, and Gretel noticed that she looked kind, although she was not at all handsome.

“Is this the little girl, sir?” the housekeeper went on, glancing rather curiously at Gretel’s shabby frock, and the hat that looked decidedly the worse for wear.

“Yes, this is my little sister,” said Mr. Douane. “Would you mind taking her to her room, Mrs. Ruggles?”

So while Mr. Douane questioned the maid, and examined her credentials, Mrs. Ruggles, the housekeeper, took Gretel to an adjoining room, which she told the little girl her brother had engaged for her. It was a large bedroom, and there was a bath connecting with it, at sight of which Gretel’s eyes opened wider than ever, but she had

almost reached the point where nothing further could surprise her. If her brother had suddenly changed into a fairy prince, and she herself, been transformed into an enchanted princess, she would have regarded it as quite a natural state of affairs. The housekeeper was evidently very much interested in her, and she asked a great many questions, which Gretel was almost too much bewildered to answer. But in a few minutes Mr. Douane appeared, smiling, and looking decidedly relieved. He was accompanied by the maid, who was also looking very well pleased.

“Gretel,” he said, “this is Higgins; she is going to look after you, and will go with us to Virginia.”

Gretel came forward, and held out her hand.

“How do you do?” she said politely; “are you Miss Higgins or Mrs. Higgins?”

“Just 'Iggins, if you please, miss,” said the maid, smiling, and beaming all over her plain, honest face. “I prefer being called by my last name. It's quite customary with hupper servants in Hengland, miss.”

Gretel thought it was very odd to call a lady by her last name, but then there were so many odd things happening to her that morning, that one surprise more or less did not seem to make much

difference. So she accepted the situation without any further argument.

“You are to go shopping with Higgins,” Mr. Douane went on to explain. “You will need a good many things before we leave for Old Point to-morrow afternoon. Mrs. Ruggles has kindly offered to go with you, and show Higgins the best shops. I have explained what I want you to have, and I think we may leave the selection to her.”

“That you may, sir,” put in Higgins, cheerfully. “I was lady’s maid for two years in Lord Carresford’s family, and I think I know what’s proper in the way of clothes for a young lady.”

“Very well,” said Mr. Douane; “I will leave everything to you and Mrs. Ruggles. As I said before, you need not spare expense. I want my little sister to be as well dressed as any child of her age should be. I don’t know much about such things, but you women do, so I will leave her in your hands for the day. I have some business to attend to downtown, but I shall be back this afternoon. Is it all right, Gretel?”

Gretel nodded; speech did not come easily just then, and ten minutes later, she, Mrs. Ruggles, and Higgins were rattling down Fifth Avenue in a taxi, bound on a shopping expedition, the

thought of which filled the two women with delightful anticipation.

It was nearly six o'clock before Mr. Douane returned to the hotel. As he entered his private sitting-room a little figure, which had been standing by the window, sprang forward to greet him.

"Look at me," cried Gretel; "oh, look at me!" And that was really all she could say.

And Mr. Douane did look at her, and the more he looked, the more surprised he became. Indeed it was hard to recognize the shabby, forlorn little girl of the morning, in the radiant, prettily dressed child before him. Gretel's hair — which usually hung in two long pigtails, had been combed out, and now fell in soft ringlets over her shoulders; she wore a pretty, well-fitting white dress, and altogether, the change in her appearance was so astonishing, that for the first few moments her brother could do nothing but hold her off at arm's length, and stare at her in silence.

"Why, Gretel," he exclaimed, finding his voice at last, "I declare you are pretty," and he looked so very much surprised that Gretel could not help thinking her brother must have considered her anything but pretty hitherto.

"I'm so glad you like me," she said, blushing. "I think my dress is lovely, and I've got ever so



“LOOK AT ME; OH, LOOK AT ME!” — Page 126.

many others besides. Oh, Percy, it has been such a wonderful day! Mrs. Ruggles and Higgins were so kind and we went to such beautiful stores, and bought such quantities of things. I was sure we must be spending too much money, but Higgins said you told her to get everything she thought I ought to have, and she seemed to think I needed a great many things, and so did Mrs. Ruggles."

"They were quite right," said her brother, smiling. "I want my little sister to be as well dressed as any other little girl we may meet on our travels. You really look very fit indeed, Gretel; I compliment Higgins on her good taste."

"Oh, she has beautiful taste!" cried Gretel, enthusiastically. "You see, she lived in a castle in England, and used to dress the young ladies when they went to dinners and balls. I never had such beautiful clothes in my life, and I love them, only — only I don't see how I can ever be quite grateful enough to you for giving me so many wonderful things."

"Look here, Gretel," said her brother, seriously, and he sat down, and lifted her on his knee. "You are not to think any more about being grateful to me, and all that rubbish. You are my own little sister, and what is mine is yours.

I have far more money than I need for myself, and it is my pleasure, as well as my duty, to see that you have everything you ought to have. We are going to be chums, so I don't want to hear any more about gratitude. Just be happy, and try to like your big brother a little, and it will be all right."

"Oh, I do like you, indeed I do. I love you better than I ever loved anybody except Father," cried Gretel, with her arms round her brother's neck. "I'll try to be good always, and do everything you want me to, and — and I think perhaps I'd better tell you something. It's very dreadful, and you may not like me any more when you know about it, but I really think I ought to tell you."

"What sort of a thing is it?" Mr. Douane asked, as he held his little sister close, and looked down smilingly into the child's troubled face.

"It's something I did that was very wicked," whispered Gretel, hiding her crimson face on his shoulder. "It's very hard to talk about it."

"Then don't talk about it," said Percy, laughing and kissing her. "I really don't think I care to know. Come, cheer up, and tell me some more about your shopping expedition. Where did you go for lunch?"

Gretel gave a great sigh of relief. Her brother would never know from what a humiliating confession his kind words had saved her.

“I’ll be so good all the rest of my life that perhaps it won’t matter so very much,” she said to herself when she had gone to bed that night. “Perhaps sometime when I’m grown up I shall be able to earn enough money to buy some poor person a ticket to fairy-land, and then I won’t feel quite so mean and ashamed whenever I think about last Saturday.”

So Gretel silenced conscience, which still persisted in whispering that it would have been better to have told her brother the whole story, and fell asleep, happier than she had ever been since the old days in the studio with her father. As for Mr. Douane himself, he had already forgotten all about the matter.

“She is a dear little thing,” he said to himself, as he sat smoking in the sitting-room after Gretel had left him for the night. “I didn’t quite know what I was in for this morning, but I needn’t have worried so much. I shall have to send the child to some good school before long, I suppose, but in the meantime I believe I am going to rather enjoy having her with me.”

CHAPTER VII

JERRY AND GERALDINE

IT was a glorious spring morning about a week later, and Gretel and Higgins were sitting on the pier at Old Point Comfort, watching the departure of a big battle-ship, which was just sailing out of the harbor. At their feet lay the beautiful bay, the little waves sparkling and dancing in the bright sunshine. In New York it was still winter, and piles of snow were melting in the parks, but here in Virginia spring had already come; the birds were singing, and the grass was as green as if it had been June instead of the last of March.

Although it was only a little more than a week since Gretel had left Mrs. Marsh's, she already looked quite a different child. There was a color in her cheeks, and a brightness in her eyes, which it did her brother's heart good to see, and as for her appetite, she felt quite certain she had never eaten so much in her life. She was very

happy, and enjoying every new experience and sensation to the full. As yet they had not made any friends at the big hotel, but there was so much to see, and so many pleasant things to do, Gretel had not even thought of other companionship than that of her brother and Higgins. Mr. Douane was growing very fond of his little sister, and he was so kind to her, and so anxious to give her pleasure, that Gretel sometimes felt as if this wonderful new life must be a dream, from which she must surely wake some morning, to find herself back in her little room at Mrs. Marsh's, with nothing more exciting to look forward to than watching the people going into "fairy-land."

Higgins was not a very interesting person, it is true, but she too was kind, and she treated the little girl with so much deference and respect, that Gretel was sometimes quite embarrassed.

"I wish Higgins wouldn't say 'Miss' every time she speaks to me," she had said to her brother once when they were alone together. At which Mr. Douane had only laughed, and told her that it was quite customary for maids to address young ladies as "Miss."

Higgins herself had taken a great fancy to the gentle little girl, who always treated her with kindness and consideration, and to dress Gretel in

her prettiest clothes, curl her hair, and take her to walk, were among her favorite occupations.

“Do you know, Higgins,” remarked Gretel, as the battle-ship faded out of sight, “you’ve never told me what your other name is.”

Higgins blushed and looked a little embarrassed.

“Well, you see, miss,” she explained, “I don’t use it very hoften; it don’t seem hexactly suitable. It was this way, miss. My mother before she married was lady’s maid in Sir Marmaduke Cadwalader’s family. ’Er ladyship was very kind, and my mother thought a great deal of ’er in a respectful way, so when I was born she named me for Lady Cadwalader’s second daughter. ’Er ladyship was pleased when she ’eard of it, and Miss Violet ’erself sent me a mug and spoon.”

“Miss Violet,” repeated Gretel; “is your name Violet, Higgins?”

“Yes, it is,” Higgins admitted reluctantly, “and I must say I don’t like it. Violet ’Iggins don’t seem to go rightly together, does it now? That’s why I prefer to be called just ’Iggins.”

“Violet is a very beautiful name,” said Gretel, politely. “I never knew any one named Violet before, but I’ve read it in books.”

“You never read about a Violet 'Iggins, though, did you?” inquired Higgins, rather grimly. And Gretel was forced to admit that she had not.

“I'll call you Violet if you would like to have me,” she said, eagerly. “I needn't do it before people if you prefer Higgins, but I should think you would like to have somebody intimate enough with you to call you by your first name. I should hate to have everybody call me Schiller.”

“It's very kind of you, I'm sure, miss,” said Higgins, who was still looking somewhat embarrassed, “but hif you don't mind, I think I'd just as soon be 'Iggins. You see, nobody ever did call me Violet. My mother thought hit was too grand a name to use without a miss before it, so she shortened it to Sally. I was halways called Sally at 'ome, but since I've been in service I've halways stipulated that I should be called 'Iggins.”

Gretel was a little disappointed. She really liked Higgins, and was anxious to be friends with her, but it did not seem possible to become very intimate with a person who must always be addressed by her last name. But at that moment she caught sight of her brother approaching her, accompanied by a lady and gentleman.

“Oh, look, Higgins,” she exclaimed, eagerly,

“ here comes Percy, and he’s talking to the father and mother of those children we saw at the fort yesterday. You know the little boy and girl we thought must be twins, they looked so much alike.”

“ I remember,” said Higgins, disapprovingly, “ and very hill-mannered children they was, too. There they are now, hout on the very hend of the pier; they’ll be tumbling into the water and getting themselves drowned the next thing.”

At that moment Mr. Douane reached his little sister’s side, and stopped to speak to her.

“ Gretel,” he said, “ I have met some old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Barlow. I have been telling them about you, and they say they will be glad to have you make friends with their little daughter, who is about your age.”

Gretel rose and curtsied.

“ I shall be very glad to know your little daughter,” she said, speaking in the prim foreign way her father had taught her, “ but I think she must be younger than I am. I have seen her and the little boy, too. I shall be twelve years old next August.”

Mr. and Mrs. Barlow looked rather amused, but they shook hands with Gretel very kindly, and

Mr. Barlow — who was a stout, pleasant-faced gentleman — said she was quite correct, and that the twins were only just ten.

“Are they really twins?” inquired Gretel, with much interest. “Higgins and I thought they might be, but we weren’t sure. I think I see them out on the end of the pier now.”

“Yes,” answered Mr. Barlow, following Gretel’s glance, “they certainly are, and a little too near the end, I am afraid.” And he started promptly in pursuit of his small son and daughter. But Mrs. Barlow — a placid, sweet-faced little lady — smiled serenely, and did not seem in the least anxious.

“Mr. Barlow is always worrying about the children,” she said. “I tell him he is very foolish; Jerry and Geraldine are perfectly capable of taking care of themselves. Besides, children must be taught to learn by experience. We must not put the thought of fear into their little minds. My Jerry is the most fearless child I have ever known.”

Mr. Douane looked a little puzzled, as if he found it rather hard to understand Mrs. Barlow’s point of view, but at that moment Mr. Barlow returned, accompanied by Jerry and Geraldine.

“Children,” began Mrs. Barlow in her sweet, rather drawling voice, “such a very pleasant thing has happened. We have met an old friend, Mr. Douane, and his little sister is going to be a dear little playmate for you. Isn’t that delightful news?”

Mrs. Barlow evidently expected the children to be quite overwhelmed with joy, but to tell the truth, neither Jerry nor Geraldine appeared very much impressed. They both regarded Gretel with a prolonged stare, but neither spoke, and when Gretel held out her hand, Jerry instantly put both hands in his pockets, and Geraldine put hers behind her back.

“Shake hands, children,” admonished their father; “don’t you see the little girl is waiting to shake hands with you?”

“Oh, don’t force them, dear,” Mrs. Barlow interposed gently. “Children always get on better together when left to themselves. We are going to the fort for guard mount, Mr. Douane, and shall be very glad to have your little sister join us. Please let her come.”

Mr. Douane said he was sure Gretel would be glad to go, and added that he himself, was obliged to go away for the day, to attend to some business in the neighborhood.

“Then why not let your sister spend the day with us?” exclaimed Mrs. Barlow. “That will be a charming plan, and the children will be so happy. We have only been here two days, and they have not had an opportunity of making any little friends as yet. You are staying at the ‘Chamberlain,’ I suppose?”

Mr. Douane replied that they were.

“We go there for our meals,” said Mrs. Barlow, “but have taken a cottage for the season. The children are just over scarlet fever, and are not to return to school this spring. Would you like to spend the day with us, dear?” she added, kindly, turning to Gretel.

Gretel said she would like it very much.

“Very well, then, you shall come with us to the fort, and afterwards go back to the cottage. We shall all have a very happy day, I am sure, Mr. Douane.”

So the matter was settled, and a few minutes later Gretel was walking away to the fort with her new friends, while Mr. Douane hurried off to catch his train, and Higgins was left to return to the hotel by herself.

“Now, children, you are all to walk together, and make friends,” said Mrs. Barlow, taking command of the party, and accordingly the three

children started on ahead, while their elders brought up the rear.

For several minutes they walked on in perfect silence. Jerry and Geraldine were regarding their new acquaintance critically, and Gretel was beginning to wonder if both her companions could possibly be dumb, when Geraldine at last broke silence with the question:

“Did you come in the boat?”

“Yes,” answered Gretel, delighted at finding an opening for conversation; “we came on the Norfolk steamer from New York; it was lovely.”

“We came by the train,” announced Geraldine; “I hate trains, and so does Jerry; they’re so hot and stuffy. We wanted to come by the boat, and Father was willing, but Mother wasn’t. Were you seasick?”

“No, not a bit. My brother and I sat on deck, and there was music, and we had such a good dinner. Higgins and I both slept so soundly that my brother had to wake us when it was time to get up in the morning. I was never on a steamer before, but I loved it.”

“Of course you did,” said Geraldine, with conviction; “we should have loved it, too. We’re going on a boat sometime, aren’t we, Jerry?”

“Yep,” responded Jerry, shortly. It was the

first time he had spoken, and his voice was so very hoarse that Gretel looked at him in astonishment.

“Has your brother a bad cold?” she inquired sympathetically of Geraldine.

“It’s his tonsils,” Geraldine explained. “Father says they ought to be cut, but Mother’s using Mind Cure on him, and she thinks they’ll get well by themselves.”

“What’s Mind Cure?”

“Oh, don’t you know? It’s the thing people believe in when they don’t take medicine or have doctors. We had a doctor when we had scarlet fever, because Father said we must, but Mother thought it was all nonsense about the fumigating. Before Mother got to be a Mind Cure we had to take castor oil, and rhubarb, and lots of horrid things, but we never do now. We like it much better this way. Does your mother bring you up by the Law of Love?”

“My mother died when I was a baby,” said Gretel, sadly, “and my father is dead too. My brother takes care of me now, and he is very kind, but I don’t think I know what the Law of Love is.”

“Oh, it means never punishing, and only talking to you a long time when you’re naughty, and

things like that," Geraldine explained. "Mother didn't know about it till she went to some lectures last winter. The lady that gave the lectures said children must never have their spirit broken, and must learn things by experience. Mother has a lot of books that tell how to bring children up that way, and she and the lady who gives the lectures write to each other about it, too. It's great fun being brought up by the Law of Love, isn't it, Jerry?"

"You bet!" responded Jerry, heartily. "It's great never having to take any more nasty old medicine, too. Have you got any more of those chocolates along?"

Geraldine produced from her pocket a small box of chocolate creams, which she handed to her brother.

"Have one?" inquired Jerry, holding out the box to Gretel, and addressing her for the first time.

Gretel politely accepted a bonbon.

"Before Mother got to be a Mind Cure we were only allowed one chocolate after dinner," Geraldine observed, complacently, putting a fat cream into her mouth. "Now we can buy all we want, and Mother says if they make us ill we

shall learn by experience not to eat too many again. But they haven't made us ill yet."

At that moment they reached the entrance to the fort, and paused to wait for their elders, who were some distance behind. Mrs. Barlow greeted them with her usual serene smile.

"I hope my little boy and girl have been polite, and kind to their new friend," she said, and Gretel thought her voice sounded as if she were reciting something out of a book. "It is a great pleasure to have a new friend, isn't it?"

Neither Jerry nor Geraldine appeared to consider it necessary to answer this question, but their mother was evidently accustomed to their silence, for she did not look at all surprised, and in another moment they were all crossing the drawbridge into the fort.

CHAPTER VIII

REAL MUSIC

GUARD mount was over, and the Barlows with their guest were on their way back to their cottage. Gretel had enjoyed the morning very much. The soldiers, the bright music, and the crowds of people, had all combined to make the hour of guard mount a most delightful occasion. Then, too, she was beginning to find her new friends very entertaining. Geraldine chatted away incessantly, and Jerry, although much less talkative than his twin, was so amusing that Gretel had found herself laughing almost every time he opened his lips. Mr. and Mrs. Barlow had soon been joined by some acquaintances, and after that the children had been left pretty much to their own devices. Mr. Barlow kept a watchful eye upon the twins, but his wife became so much interested in her conversation with a friend, that she appeared to forget all about everything else. Gretel caught snatches of this conversation, in which the words

“Montessori System” — “Law of Love” and “Wonderful Spiritual Experience” were frequently repeated.

It was when they were walking home from the fort that Geraldine suddenly remarked in a tone of regret —

“The parade was nice, wasn’t it? I’m rather sorry we wouldn’t let Miss Heath come.”

“Who is Miss Heath?” Gretel inquired with interest.

“She’s our teacher. Mother said we lost so much time having scarlet fever that we must have lessons down here, so she brought an old teacher along.”

“She isn’t old,” declared Jerry, in his hoarse little voice; “she’s real pretty, and I wanted you to let her come, but you said it was against rules.”

“Well, so it was,” maintained his sister. “You see,” she added, by way of explanation to Gretel, “when Mother said we had to take a teacher with us, we made an awful row. We said it wasn’t fair to have to study when we weren’t in New York, so at last Mother made a compromise. She said if we promised to study for two hours every day, we could have all the rest of the time to ourselves. We needn’t even see the old teacher if we didn’t want to, and she

wasn't to interfere in anything we did. So when Miss Heath came, we explained things to her, and made her sign a paper we wrote out."

"Did she mind?" Gretel asked. She was thinking that Miss Talcott might have rather enjoyed such an arrangement.

"No; I don't think so; she laughed a good deal, and said we were funny kiddies. She told Mother she would be glad of the extra time, because she wanted to study her music. She offered to give us music lessons, but that was something we wouldn't stand. Arithmetic and history are bad enough, but music! Oh, my goodness!"

"Don't you love music?" inquired Gretel in astonishment.

"Not much, at least not the kind Miss Heath plays. I like the music at dancing-school pretty well, but Mother's crazy about Miss Heath's kind. She's always getting her to play the piano in the evenings, and Father listens, too, but he almost always goes to sleep. Miss Heath wants to play in concerts, and Mother's going to try to get her an engagement when we go back to New York."

"My father played in concerts," said Gretel, eagerly. "He was a great musician, Hermann Schiller — did you ever hear him play?"

Geraldine was forced to admit that she had

not, but added politely that perhaps Mother had, and just then they reached the cottage Mr. Barlow had taken for the season. Mr. and Mrs. Barlow were on their way to call on some friends, so the children went into the house alone.

"There's Miss Heath playing now," remarked Geraldine, as they mounted the piazza steps, and the sound of a distant piano fell upon their ears. "She always plays when she's by herself. I don't believe she really minded about our not letting her go to the fort."

"It was all your fault," declared Jerry; "I was perfectly willing to have her come along."

Geraldine looked a little ashamed.

"Well, if we'd given in to her in one thing, it might have made trouble afterwards," she maintained stoutly. "We said in that paper that she wasn't to come near us except at lessons, and she agreed to it. Come up to my room, Gretel; you can take off your things there."

But greatly to Geraldine's surprise, her new friend had suddenly appeared to lose all interest in her society. As the front door opened, and the sound of the piano became more distinct, she had given one little start, and was now standing quite still, with clasped hands, and parted lips, while her cheeks grew pink, and her eyes began

to shine in a way that seemed to the twins quite startling.

“It’s one of Father’s pieces,” she whispered rapturously — “one he wrote himself, I mean. Oh, how wonderful!” And then, as if forgetful of everything else in the world, she darted forward, and fairly flew across the hall to the parlor, followed by her two wondering companions.

A young lady was seated at the piano; a very pretty young lady, with dimples, and soft light hair, that fell in little curls over her forehead. At the entrance of the children, she paused in her playing, and turned to greet them with a smile. But before she could speak, or the twins offer any explanation, Gretel had sprung to the strange young lady’s side, and laid a trembling little hand on her arm.

“Oh, don’t stop, please don’t!” she cried imploringly; “it’s Father’s sonata, and you were playing it so beautifully. I love all Father’s things so, and I haven’t heard any of them since — since —” A big sob finished the sentence.

“Why, my dear little girl,” exclaimed Miss Heath, her face changing from amusement to real sympathy; “what is the matter — what does this all mean, children?”



“OH, DON'T STOP; PLEASE DON'T !” — Page 146.



The twins shook their heads helplessly, and stared at their visitor in blank amazement.

“There isn’t anything the matter,” faltered Gretel, “only you were playing Father’s sonata, and I was so glad to hear it. I couldn’t help getting excited. Please excuse me; I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

Barbara Heath’s only answer was to slip an arm round the little trembling figure.

“Who is this little girl?” she inquired of the twins.

“Her name is Gretel Schiller,” Geraldine explained. “Father and Mother know her brother, and she’s going to spend the day. We’re going up-stairs now; come along, Gretel.”

But Gretel did not move.

“Gretel Schiller,” repeated Miss Heath. “Why, can it be possible that your father was Hermann Schiller?” And she glanced at the sheet of music before her on the piano.

“Yes, he was,” said Gretel, proudly. “Oh, would you mind finishing the sonata? I want to hear it so very much.”

“Of course I will,” said Miss Heath, kindly. “I am very fond of it myself, but I am afraid I may not do it justice; it is rather difficult, and

I haven't had much time for practicing lately."

"Oh, yes, you will," protested Gretel. "You were playing it just the way Father did. I haven't heard any one play the piano like that since he died. May I stay here for a little while, Geraldine? I want so much to hear the lady play?"

"You can stay if you want to," answered Geraldine, who was beginning to look rather disgusted at this sudden turn of affairs, "but she's Miss Heath, our teacher, and we don't have to stay with her except at lessons. Jerry and I are going up-stairs, and you can come when you get ready." And Geraldine departed, followed by her brother.

Then followed an hour of such bliss as Gretel had not known since her father's death more than a year before. Miss Heath was really an accomplished musician, and what was more, she loved music just as much as Gretel did. It was a real delight to play to any one who seemed to enjoy it as did this odd little brown-eyed girl, who nestled close to her side, and seemed to drink in every note with actual rapture. She finished the sonata, and after playing several other beautiful things, she asked the child kind, interested questions, all of which Gretel answered readily. Miss

Heath knew all about Hermann Schiller, and had even heard him play several times, and she caused Gretel's proud little heart to swell by her praises of her father's talent. Indeed, Gretel was completely fascinated by the pretty young lady, and it seemed to her quite inconceivable that Jerry and Geraldine could regard Miss Heath as a rather tiresome addition to the party, whose society was to be dispensed with on every possible occasion.

At last Miss Heath suggested that it might be well for Gretel to rejoin her friends.

"I can't join them myself," she added, laughing, "because I am under contract to appear only at lesson hours. They are a funny little pair, but I am sure you will like them."

Gretel would have preferred remaining where she was, but feared it might not be polite to leave the twins for too long, so she rose reluctantly.

"Thank you so much for playing," she said in her sweet, courteous little voice; "I didn't know I should ever hear any one play the piano like that again."

"I will play for you as often as you like," promised Miss Heath, who was pleased as well as touched by the simple compliment. "Do you expect to be at Old Point long?"

Gretel said that she was staying at the hotel with her brother, and that he was attending to some business in the neighborhood. She was not sure how long they would remain, but thought it would be several weeks.

“Then you must come to see me often,” said Miss Heath. “I haven’t very much to do, as the children object to my society out of lesson hours. Now come and I will show you the way up-stairs; Jerry and Geraldine will think you have forsaken them.”

Gretel found the twins deep in an animated discussion; Geraldine perched on the foot of her bed; Jerry standing in the middle of the floor, his face very red, and both hands thrust deep into his pockets.

“Here comes Gretel,” exclaimed Geraldine, as the visitor entered the room; “shall we let her settle it?”

“Not if she won’t settle it the right way,” returned Jerry, firmly. “I say it’s mean not to let her go.”

“What is it?” Gretel inquired, glancing from one solemn little face to the other.

“It’s about this afternoon,” said Geraldine; “Father has promised to take us to the navy yard

at Newport News, and Jerry thinks we ought to let Miss Heath go, too."

"Why, yes, of course you ought," declared Gretel, with so much decision that Jerry gave vent to his satisfaction by an eager "Good for you," and favored his new friend with a friendly smile.

But Geraldine was not so easily convinced.

"It isn't in the contract," she objected; "the contract says she is only to be with us at lessons, and to-day is Saturday."

"Bother the old contract!" retorted Jerry. "I say it's mean to leave her by herself all the time, with nothing to do but read books and play on the old piano. If she isn't to go I won't go either; so there!"

Geraldine was troubled; she was very fond of her twin, but a bargain was a bargain.

"I know how we'll settle it," she exclaimed, with a sudden inspiration; "we'll draw lots. I'll get two pieces of paper, a long one and a short one, and you can draw. The long one means she goes, the short one she doesn't. But if she does go she's got to promise not to say a word about history or any other teaching thing all the afternoon."

Jerry consented to this arrangement, and Gretel

looked on with considerable interest while the papers were produced, and Miss Heath's fate decided. Geraldine held the two pieces of paper in her hand, and her brother shut his eyes tight before drawing. There was a moment of breathless excitement, followed by a shout of triumph from Jerry; he had drawn the long piece.

Jerry rushed off to tell Miss Heath the good news that she was to be permitted to share their society for the afternoon, and Geraldine showed Gretel her dolls, and a few other treasures, which she had brought from New York, over which the two little girls soon became very good friends. Then Mr. and Mrs. Barlow came home, and the whole party went over to the hotel to luncheon.

The twins talked a great deal at the luncheon table, and expressed their likes and dislikes on so many subjects, that Gretel could not help wondering why their parents did not reprove them occasionally, but Mr. and Mrs. Barlow did not appear to notice, and as for pretty Miss Heath, she was so bright and merry, and laughed so much at the children's remarks, that Gretel could not imagine why they should not find her a most delightful companion. Every one was very kind to the little visitor, and Mrs. Barlow asked her to accompany the party to the navy yard.

"Miss Heath is going, too," announced Jerry, with his mouth full of ice-cream.

Mrs. Barlow looked a little surprised, but not at all displeased.

"Yes, I am really to be permitted to join the party," said Miss Heath, laughing; "I believe the question was settled by the drawing of lots."

"But there's a condition," put in Geraldine, gravely; "she isn't to mention any teaching things like history or geography all the afternoon. She's just to be an ordinary lady, not a teacher." At which remark Miss Heath laughed more than ever, and Mr. and Mrs. Barlow also seemed much amused.

So, shortly after luncheon the party, consisting of Mr. Barlow, Miss Heath and the three children, started for Newport News. Mrs. Barlow had an engagement with friends at the hotel, but before they started she kissed both twins, and delivered quite a long lecture to them, on the subject of improving their opportunities.

"This visit to the navy yard is a great privilege for my little boy and girl," she ended, "and I shall expect them both to appreciate it, and to remember all they see and hear. Mother will want to be told all about it this evening."

Jerry looked rather bored, and Geraldine fidg-

eted impatiently from one foot to the other, but just then their father called them, and they were off like a shot, without even taking the time to answer.

“Your mother likes to hear about everything you do, doesn’t she?” remarked Gretel a little wistfully to Geraldine, as they were on their way to the trolley car. “My father was like that, too; I always told him about everything.”

“Mother doesn’t really care very much,” answered Geraldine, indifferently; “she gets most of those ideas out of books. She never used to bother so much; it’s only since she’s been going to those lectures. We like her much better this way, though. She used to be always worrying for fear we would take cold or eat something that would disagree with us.”

Gretel enjoyed the afternoon immensely. The ride in the car, which at times went almost as fast as an automobile; the visit to the navy yard, where they were allowed to go aboard a battle-ship; and the pleasant society of her companions. Before the excursion was over she had become quite attached to Jerry and Geraldine, and was sure Miss Heath must be one of the most delightful young ladies in the world. The twins were so fascinated with the battle-ship, that their

father had some difficulty in tearing them away.

“I think to live on a boat must be the loveliest thing in the world,” declared Geraldine, when they were at last leaving the big ship.

“You will have a chance to try if we go abroad next year,” her father told her. But Geraldine did not look quite satisfied.

“Next year is such a long time off,” she objected, “and perhaps we won’t even go then.”

“I’m going sometime, anyhow,” announced Jerry in a tone of settled conviction, and then the subject was dropped.

The car going back to Old Point was so crowded that it was impossible for the whole party to sit together. Mr. Barlow took the twins out on the front platform, and Gretel, much to her delight, found herself alone with Miss Heath.

“Do you think I have behaved myself well enough to be invited again?” the young lady asked, smiling, as the car started. “I haven’t mentioned any ‘teaching things,’ have I?”

“No, indeed you haven’t,” returned Gretel, laughing, “but I wish you would talk a little about ‘teaching things’ to me — that is if you like talking about them. You see, I’m dreadfully behind with my lessons, and I haven’t had any since January. My brother says he is going

to send me to school next year, but he's afraid it's a little late to begin this season."

Miss Heath looked interested, and by dint of a few kindly questions, had soon learned all Gretel's simple story.

"It has been so beautiful ever since my brother came home, that I feel as if I must be living in a fairy story," finished the little girl, "but I'm afraid if I don't begin to learn something soon, he may be ashamed of me. I'm even forgetting my German."

"I will speak German with you if you like," said Miss Heath. "I studied music for several years in Germany, and used to speak the language fairly well." And she added a few words in German, which caused Gretel's eyes to sparkle with delight.

"You speak it beautifully!" she cried joyfully. "Oh, I am so glad. Nobody has spoken German to me in such a long time, and I love it so, because it was Father's language. I wish my brother spoke it, but he says he doesn't know a word."

Miss Heath looked rather surprised, but seeing the tears in Gretel's eyes, she refrained from asking any more questions.

"I, too, had a dear father, whom I loved very

much," she said. "He only left me last year, and I have missed him terribly."

Gretel glanced at her new friend's black dress, and instinctively nestled a little closer to her.

"You know all about it, then," she said, softly.

"Yes, dear, I know all about it."

"But I haven't been so lonely since my brother came home," said Gretel. "I hope you have a brother, too; brothers are so nice. I never knew how nice mine was till he came back from China."

"China!" repeated Miss Heath in surprise; "did your brother go to China? I have been there, too. My father was a great traveler, and he and I have been nearly all over the world together. It was on our voyage home from China that he was taken ill. He died in San Francisco, and I have been alone ever since, for I am not so fortunate as you. I was an only child, and my mother died when I was a little girl."

Miss Heath smiled bravely, but her eyes looked sad, and her lip trembled a little. With a sudden loving impulse, Gretel slipped her hand into that of her new friend.

"I am so sorry," she whispered; "I wish you had a brother." That was all, but Miss Heath squeezed the kind little hand tight, and Gretel felt sure that she understood.

They were on their way from the car to the hotel when Gretel caught sight of her brother, standing on the sidewalk just in front of them, in conversation with another gentleman.

“There’s Percy!” she exclaimed eagerly to Miss Heath, for she still lingered by her new friend’s side, although the twins had run on ahead, and Mr. Barlow stopped to do an errand.

“Where, dear?” Miss Heath asked, for she was beginning to feel some curiosity in this big brother, of whom her little friend seemed so proud.

“There, that tall gentleman, talking to the old man in spectacles. That’s my brother; don’t you think he’s handsome?”

But Miss Heath did not answer. She had come to a sudden standstill, and her cheeks had grown very pink. Just then Mr. Douane caught sight of Gretel and her companion, and he too stopped short in evident astonishment.

“Barbara — I beg your pardon, — Miss Heath! Is it possible?”

Gretel’s eyes opened wide in amazement, and well they might, for there was her tall brother holding Miss Heath’s hand, and gazing down at her with such a strange, glad look in his eyes, and there was Miss Heath actually trembling a

little, as she declared that she had never been so surprised in her life.

"I hadn't the least idea you were in this country," Gretel heard her say, and her voice did not sound quite steady, although she was smiling and looking prettier than ever.

"And you," said Mr. Douane, "I had no idea where you were. I tried to find you, but you had left no address at the hotel in Hong-Kong."

"I suppose Father must have forgotten to leave any," said Miss Heath. "He was not well, and decided to leave rather suddenly."

For the first few moments neither Mr. Douane nor Miss Heath appeared to remember Gretel's existence, but when Miss Heath explained that she had come to Old Point with a Mr. and Mrs. Barlow, and Mr. Douane explained in his turn that he and his little sister were staying at the "Chamberlain," he suddenly remembered Gretel, and turned to look for her. And then everybody was surprised all over again.

"I had no idea the brother my little friend Gretel has been telling me so much about would turn out to be a friend of mine as well," said Miss Heath, "but I don't think I quite understand the situation even yet. She tells me her name is Schiller."

“My mother’s second husband was Hermann Schiller, the pianist,” said Mr. Douane; “Gretel is their little girl. We never knew each other till about ten days ago, but we are great chums now.” And he slipped an arm affectionately round his little sister.

“Oh, Percy,” exclaimed Gretel, the moment she and her brother were alone together, having left Miss Heath at the Barlows’ cottage, “isn’t she the dearest, loveliest young lady you ever saw, and aren’t you glad you’ve found her again? I heard you tell her you’d been trying to find her.”

“I am indeed,” answered Mr. Douane, heartily.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAW OF LOVE

THE ten days that followed were about the happiest Gretel had ever spent in her life. There were so many interesting and delightful things to do, and each day as it passed seemed pleasanter than the one before. Somewhat to the surprise of their parents, Jerry and Geraldine — who had very decided likes and dislikes — had taken a great fancy to Gretel, and the three children were constantly together. Mr. and Mrs. Barlow were glad to encourage the intimacy, and Gretel was included in all the pleasures of the twins. But much as she liked the companionship of her two merry little friends, there was another person in the Barlows' cottage for whose society she cared a great deal more, and that was Miss Heath, the pretty young teacher. True to her promise, Miss Heath was always ready to play, or to speak German; and to hear music and talk in her dear father's language were the two greatest pleasures of Gretel's life.

She was growing to love Miss Heath very dearly, and the young lady, touched at first by Gretel's evident admiration for her playing, soon grew to return the little girl's affection.

Perhaps Gretel did not enjoy quite as much of her brother's society as in the first week of their stay at Old Point, but she did not mind, for when not with her was he not sure to be either walking or driving with her dear Miss Heath? Gretel was an unselfish little soul, and she rejoiced heartily in the knowledge that her new friend was having a good time as well as herself.

So the bright spring days came and went, and Gretel was very happy. If it had not been for one thing — one painful memory — she would not have had a care in the world; but try as she would to forget it, that one uncomfortable recollection would persist in haunting even her happiest moments. Sometimes after she had gone to bed at night, she would bury her face in the pillow, and wonder miserably what Miss Heath would think if she were ever to learn that her little friend had once stolen a ticket to fairyland. Yes, that was what she had done; the more she thought about it the more certain she became. She had known perfectly well that it

was her duty to return that ticket to the box office, and yet she had willfully kept it, and used it herself.

“If I only knew the person who lost it were rich, and didn’t mind very much,” she said to herself over and over again, “it wouldn’t be quite so dreadful, but it may have belonged to somebody who was poor, and who loved music just as much as I do.” And then she would try to imagine how she would have felt if she had bought a ticket to fairy-land and lost it.

“I’m quite sure I could never have forgiven the person who used it,” she told herself with conviction.

It was a cold, rainy afternoon in early April, and Gretel and Miss Heath were alone in the Barlows’ parlor, enjoying an hour of music. Mr. and Mrs. Barlow had lingered at the hotel after luncheon, and the twins were up-stairs.

For the first time that day, Miss Heath had succeeded in persuading Gretel to play for her, and she was much impressed by the child’s evident talent.

“You play very well indeed, Gretel,” she said. “Your brother must let you have lessons from a good teacher. Of course you are out of practice, but you’ll soon pick up what you have lost.”

Gretel's eyes shone with delight.

"Do you really think I ought to ask Percy to give me anything more?" she asked a little doubtfully. "It costs a great deal of money to take music lessons, you know."

Miss Heath laughed.

"I don't think you need hesitate," she said; "I am sure Mr. Douane will be glad to encourage your talent, and as for the expense, I wouldn't worry about that if I were you."

Gretel looked much relieved.

"I'm very glad you think so," she said. "Sometimes I can't help worrying a little for fear Percy may be spending too much money. Father was so extravagant, and I'm not used to having so many things."

"You dear kiddy," laughed Miss Heath, kissing her; "if you were my little sister I think I should want to give you everything you wanted in the world."

"Oh," cried Gretel, returning her friend's kiss with effusion, "how I wish you were my sister!" At which remark Miss Heath laughed again, and grew so very pink that Gretel regarded her in some surprise.

"I think to take music lessons would make me happier than anything else in the world," she said

after a little pause. "I used to dream about having them when I was at Mrs. Marsh's, but I never thought my dream would come true. Oh, Miss Heath dear, did you ever want to hear music so much that it made you ache all over?"

"Indeed I have," answered Miss Heath, with ready sympathy; "I have felt like that more than once during this past year, since my dear father left me, and I have been alone in the world. I know just what you mean, Gretel. There have been days when I have felt that I could spend my last penny for a ticket to the opera."

Gretel gave a little start, and caught her friend's hand eagerly, but before she could speak, a figure passed in front of the window, and Miss Heath rose hastily, exclaiming:

"Here comes Mr. Douane; run and open the door for him, Gretel."

Mr. Douane had come to take Miss Heath to a concert, which was to be given that afternoon by the Hampton colored students; Gretel had a momentary hope that she might be included in the party, but nothing was said on the subject, and she had already noticed that Percy seemed to like to keep Miss Heath to himself.

"The storm is getting worse," Mr. Douane remarked, warming his hands at the fire, while

Miss Heath went away to put on her things. "I am sorry for the people going by the boat to-night; the wind is rising, and I think we are in for a stiff gale."

Gretel went and stood beside her brother on the rug, and he put his arm round her, and looked down very kindly into her flushed, happy little face. She was hoping that Miss Heath might mention the music lessons to him that afternoon, but did not quite dare broach the subject herself.

"What are you going to do this afternoon, Pussy?" Mr. Douane asked.

"She is going to stay with the twins and keep them out of mischief," said Miss Heath, returning at that moment, in hat and waterproof. "Mr. and Mrs. Barlow are going to a tea at the colonel's house, and the children are to be left to themselves. Mrs. Barlow appears to have perfect confidence in them, but I confess I don't feel quite so sure of their keeping out of mischief. I always feel quite safe, however, when Gretel is with them, for she has a level little head on her shoulders."

Gretel watched her brother and Miss Heath from the window until they were out of sight, and then went up-stairs in quest of Jerry and

Geraldine. She found them sitting on the sofa in the temporary nursery, and, somewhat to her surprise, neither of their faces brightened at sight of their friend and comrade.

“We thought you’d gone home,” remarked Geraldine; “you didn’t tell us you were going to stay.”

Gretel was a little offended, but she remembered that the twins were only ten, and tried to make allowances.

“I did mean to go home,” she explained pleasantly, “but Miss Heath asked me to stay. She’s gone to a concert at Hampton with Percy, and your father and mother are going to a tea. It’s raining too hard to go out, so I thought we might play something in the house, or else read aloud. I’d love to read some more about ‘Dave Porter.’”

“Well, I’m sorry, but I’m afraid you can’t stay,” said Geraldine, with decision. “We don’t want any company this afternoon, do we, Jerry?”

Jerry reddened, and looked very uncomfortable. As a rule, he was more polite than his sister, and he was, moreover, very fond of Gretel.

“Couldn’t we tell her about it?” he suggested rather timidly.

“Of course not,” returned Geraldine, indignantly. “You really are a dreadful silly, Jerry.”

Gretel's all right, and we like her, but she can't expect to be in all our secrets. Miss Heath is all right, too, but we don't want her around except at lessons. She understands, and doesn't get mad about it."

"I'm not mad," protested Gretel, reddening; "I don't want to stay if you don't want me. I'll go home and read; I've got a very interesting book that Percy bought for me this morning." And Gretel turned away, and ran quickly downstairs, not wishing to let the twins see how really hurt she was.

"I wouldn't have minded if they had asked me nicely to go home," she said to herself, as she hurried back to the hotel through the wind and rain. "Geraldine is terribly rude sometimes. I think Mrs. Barlow might teach her children to be a little more polite."

She found Higgins sewing by the window in her room. At the entrance of the little girl, the maid looked up with a smile.

"I'm glad you've come 'ome," she said; "it's a hawful hafternoon, and the storm's getting worse hevery minute."

Gretel came over to the window, and looked out. The usually quiet bay seemed transformed into a seething turmoil of waves and foam.

“The Baltimore boat is getting up steam,” she remarked with interest; “I don’t suppose many people will go on her to-night.”

“Well, I pity them that does,” returned Higgins, solemnly; “I’ve been in a storm at sea, and know the danger.”

“Were you shipwrecked?” inquired Gretel, eagerly. “The twins have been reading a most exciting book about a shipwreck.”

“No, we wasn’t, but we hexpected to be hevery minute,” answered Higgins. “It was a hexperience folks don’t forget when they’ve once ’ad it. Where’s Mr. Douane this afternoon?”

“Gone to Hampton to a concert with Miss Heath. Miss Heath asked me to stay with Jerry and Geraldine, but they don’t want me. They told me to go home.”

“Indeed! but what can one hexpect from children brought up as they are, let run wild from morning till night. ’Ow a sweet young lady like that Miss ’Eath can put up with them beats me, but it won’t be for long, I’m thinking; there’s something in the wind.”

“What’s in the wind?” Gretel asked, as a severer gust than usual rattled the windows.

“Never you mind; it ain’t a subject as young ladies of your age should talk about. I know

what's proper for young ladies, 'aving lived in the best families of the Henglish aristocracy. When I was at Sir Cecil Marlow's — where I lived two years before going to Lord Carresford's — 'er ladyship was very particular that Miss Sylvia and Miss Muriel should never 'ear anything in the way of gossip, and quite right she was, too. The knowingness of these Hamerican children is enough to make your blood run cold sometimes. There never was two sweeter or better brought up young ladies that Miss Sylvia and Miss Muriel." And Higgins launched forth into a long story about these two paragons of the British aristocracy, which was so interesting that Gretel forgot to wonder what was "in the wind," and why she was not to know about it.

Higgins now proved a most interesting companion. It is always interesting to hear about people who live in castles, with parks and hunting-lodges thrown in, and in listening to the English woman's stories, the afternoon slipped away very pleasantly. By and by, however, Higgins went down-stairs to her tea, and then Gretel noticed for the first time how the wind was howling, and the rain dashing against the window panes.

"The storm is getting worse, just as Percy

thought it would," she said to herself, with a comfortable feeling of satisfaction at being safely indoors; "I'm glad nobody I know is going on the boat to-night."

She went to the window, and stood looking out at the wild landscape of sea and rain. The pier was almost deserted, but the Baltimore night boat was evidently preparing to start on her journey. A few passengers, chiefly men, were going on board, but there was none of the usual crowd and bustle of departure, which Gretel had enjoyed watching on other evenings, for the windows of her room commanded a fine view of the pier, and all the arriving and departing steamers. She thought of what Higgins had said about shipwrecks, and gave a little involuntary shiver.

Just then her attention was caught by something so astonishing that she uttered a little cry of dismay, and, regardless of wind and rain, hastily threw up the window, and leaned out. Along the pier, battling against the storm, came two resolute little figures; a small boy and a small girl. They had no umbrella, but were evidently dressed for rainy weather, and the boy was carrying a brown paper parcel under his arm.

"Jerry — Geraldine!" shrieked Gretel, leaning as far out of the window as she could, and shout-

ing at the top of her voice; "where are you going? Come back; come right back this minute."

But the noise of the wind drowned Gretel's voice, and at that moment she saw her two little friends calmly cross the gang-plank, and disappear from view on board the Baltimore steamer.

So that was the secret; that was why the twins had sent her home! They had deliberately planned to run away, and take this trip on the boat. She remembered several mysterious hints, which had passed unheeded at the time. The twins had been planning an adventure. But they must be stopped; they must be brought back before the boat started. Gretel did not know just what time it was, but she knew that the boat left at five, and felt sure it could not be far from that hour. If it had been a clear night she would not have been so much frightened, knowing that Jerry and Geraldine were capable of taking care of themselves under most circumstances, but in this dreadful storm — oh, she must do something; she must stop them before it was too late.

Hastily snatching her waterproof from the wardrobe, Gretel opened the door, and, without even waiting to close the window, ran at full speed down the long corridor to the stairs. Most

of the hotel guests were in their rooms at that hour, and the few people she met did not appear to pay much attention to the child, as she flew downstairs, across the covered piazza, and out onto the pier. A gust of wind nearly took her off her feet, and the sudden dash of rain in her face took away her breath, but she pushed resolutely on. Had not Miss Heath said she always felt the twins were safe when she was with them? Surely, oh, surely, she would be able to persuade them to give up their adventure, and go back before the boat started.

It was so slippery crossing the gang-plank that Gretel almost fell, but a strong hand caught her, and a good-natured voice remarked —

“You’re in a mighty hurry, Missie; the boat don’t start for five minutes yet.”

“Five minutes!” panted Gretel; “oh, I must hurry.” And before the astonished steward could ask any questions, she had fled up the stairs to the saloon.

But where were the twins? That was the question. They were nowhere to be seen in the saloon, and Gretel’s heart sank. Suppose she failed to find them before those five precious minutes were up; what should she do? She never thought of her own danger of being car-

ried off; her one desire was to rescue her two little friends before it was too late. There were very few passengers on board that day, for many who had intended taking the trip had changed their plans on account of the storm. The saloon was practically deserted, and Gretel met no one as she hurried along, calling eagerly, "Jerry, Geraldine; oh, children, where are you?"

But this time her voice was not drowned by the gale, and suddenly the door of one of the staterooms was opened a very little way, and a laughing, mischievous face peeped out.

With a bound Gretel reached the door; pushed it farther open, and forced her way in.

"Come back," she cried authoritatively; "come back this minute; the boat's going to start. Oh, how could you do such a dreadful thing?"

But Jerry and Geraldine did not come back; on the contrary, they retreated to the furthest corner of the stateroom.

"We're going to Baltimore," announced Jerry; "we're stowaways. Come in and shut the door."

"Oh, how can you be so silly?" cried Gretel, actually stamping her foot in her impatience; "you know perfectly well you can't go off to

Baltimore by yourselves. Besides, it's an awful storm; the boat may be wrecked."

But if Gretel hoped to frighten the twins by this dreadful possibility, she was much mistaken.

"Shipwrecked!" cried Jerry, with a little skip of delight; "oh, goody, that would be the best of all! Come in and shut the door; if anybody sees us we can't be stowaways."

"But you can't be stowaways, you know you can't. I never heard of anything so ridiculous. Oh, children, do come quick; there's the whistle."

"But we don't intend to come back," said Geraldine, tranquilly. She had seated herself on the lower berth, and taken off her hat and raincoat. "Don't you understand we're doing it on purpose? We've brought some supper with us in a parcel, and we're going to have a wonderful time. We told you we were going on the boat some time."

"But think how frightened everybody will be," urged Gretel, trying a new tack. "You don't want to frighten your mother and Miss Heath, and—and every one, do you? They won't have any idea where you are."

"Oh, yes, they will," Geraldine reassured her; "we left a letter telling them all about it. Jerry

wrote it, but I made it up. It was such a lovely letter; just like one in a book we read, that a boy wrote his mother when he was running away to sea. Mother says we've got to learn things by experience, and how can we learn about boats unless we go on one? They made us come all the way from New York in a horrid train, and we've got to go home that way, too, because Mother doesn't like boats. So if we don't go by ourselves we shall never know what boats are like. We're going to be stowaways, and stay in here for quite a long time, and then we shall let ourselves be discovered, and everybody will be so interested, the way they are in stories. They'll give us lots of good things to eat, and make up a purse for us, but we're so clean they won't need to give us a bath."

Gretel clasped her hands in despair.

"But think how seasick you'll be," she hazarded as a last resource, "and how you'll be punished when you get home."

"Pooh!" sniffed Geraldine, contemptuously; "we're Mind Cures; Mind Cures never get seasick. It's only sillies like you that bother about such things."

"We shan't be punished either," chimed in Jerry; "we're never punished now, not since

Mother began bringing us up by the Law of Love. She'll only talk to us, and we don't mind that much. Besides, she said we had to learn things by experience. There's somebody coming; I've got to shut the door."

And before the horrified Gretel could interpose, or even utter another word of protest, Jerry had closed the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket. And at that very moment the second whistle sounded, and the steamer began to move.

CHAPTER X

LEARNING BY EXPERIENCE

GRETEL sank down upon the bed beside Geraldine, and began to cry.

“The boat’s going,” she sobbed; “we can’t get off now. We’ve got to go all the way to Baltimore, and it’s such a dreadful storm. Oh, it’s awful! It’s awful!” And poor little Gretel lifted up her voice and wailed.

Now, neither of the twins liked to see people cry. Mischievous and troublesome as they frequently were, their hearts were anything but hard, and at sight of their friend’s tears they both began to look rather ashamed of themselves.

“Do stop being such a silly,” said Geraldine, crossly, but she slipped an arm round Gretel’s waist as she spoke, and tried to draw her hands down from her face.

“I don’t see what you came for if you’re such a scare-cat,” remarked Jerry in his gruffest tones.

"We came for an adventure, and you're going to spoil it; I think you're real mean."

"I didn't come on purpose," protested Gretel between her sobs; "I only came to bring you home. I didn't know the boat would go so soon. Oh, I wish I hadn't come. I don't want to be shipwrecked and drowned just now when Percy has come home, and everything is so lovely."

Now, oddly enough, the prospect of being shipwrecked, which had struck the twins as so alluring only a few minutes earlier, had suddenly lost its charm, and both little faces began to look very grave.

"We're not really going to be shipwrecked," said Geraldine, uneasily; "we only said so for fun. We're not a bit afraid, and we're going to have a wonderful time. You'll have a good time too if you'll only stop crying and making such a fuss. We don't mind your coming with us, do we, Jerry?"

"Of course we don't," said Jerry; "I wanted to tell her about it all the time, but you said we mustn't."

"That was because I was afraid she'd tell," explained Geraldine; "but now you're here, Gretel, and can't go back, I don't see why you won't have a good time. The boat won't stop again

till we get to Baltimore to-morrow morning; we found that out before we started."

But Gretel did not feel in the least like having a good time.

"Have you brought any money?" she inquired mournfully.

The twins shook their heads.

"Then how do you expect to get home again?" demanded Gretel, with a fresh burst of tears.

"Oh, the passengers who make up the purse for us will send us home; they always do," Jerry assured her cheerfully. "Stowaways never take any money with them. There was a little boy stowaway on the same ship with our uncle, and the passengers got up a concert for him, and gave him 'most a hundred dollars."

"We didn't bring any other things either," added Geraldine, "not even a tooth-brush. Jerry thought it would be more of an adventure to go to bed without brushing our teeth, and with all our clothes on. Then of course we won't have to take a bath in the morning. You haven't got any night things either, have you?"

"Of course I haven't—how could I have? I was just looking out of the window at the storm, and I saw you getting on the boat. I

knew you were going to do something dreadful, so I ran after you just as fast as I could. Nobody knows where I am. Oh, what will Percy and Higgins think!"

"Oh, do stop howling," exclaimed Jerry, at the end of his patience; "we'll tell them it wasn't your fault, and I don't believe you'll be punished."

"Does your brother often punish you?" Geraldine asked a little anxiously.

"He never has punished me, but I haven't known him long. It isn't the being punished that I mind; it's — it's — oh, everything!" and Gretel broke down once more and wailed.

But there was no use in crying over what could not be helped, and in a little while Gretel dried her eyes, and began to wonder what was going to happen next. The twins would not hear of her first suggestion that they should come out of their hiding-place at once, and Jerry positively refused to produce the key of the locked door.

"We came to be stowaways," he maintained stubbornly, "and stowaways never come out for a long time."

On almost any other day they would probably have been discovered within a very short time, as the stateroom would have been claimed, but

owing to the severity of the storm, very few of the cabins were occupied, and so it was more than half an hour before the stewardess be-thought herself to knock gently at the door, to inquire if the inmate of number fifty-two wanted anything. In the meantime the twins, who, having come out for a good time, were determined to have one, had opened their parcel, and spread out the refreshments, which consisted of cake, bananas, and chocolate.

“We bought them this morning when we were out with Miss Heath,” Geraldine told Gretel. “She didn’t know what we wanted them for, but Jerry said we were going to have a feast, and she knows she isn’t to interfere if it isn’t lesson time. Then we met your brother, and he talked to Miss Heath, and I guess she forgot all about us. It’s pretty early for supper, but I think we may as well begin, don’t you, Jerry?”

“Ye — es,” said Jerry, eyeing the array of good things rather dubiously; “I’m not very hungry yet, though; suppose we wait a little longer. I wonder what makes the boat swing so much.”

“It’s because it’s getting rough,” said Gretel. “I was on a boat once with Father when it was very rough. We went down to Pleasure Bay

on an excursion, and before we got back a storm came up, and the boat rocked dreadfully. Some of the people on board were seasick, but Father and I liked it."

At that moment the steamer gave a sudden plunge, which sent the children nearly off their feet. Geraldine put down the piece of chocolate she had just begun to eat, and turned rather pale.

"I guess we will wait a little while longer," she agreed. "Don't you think it's rather hot in here? Let's open the window."

But the opening of the window proved a more difficult task than the children had expected, and while Jerry and Gretel were still struggling with a refractory fastening, Geraldine suddenly rolled over in a little heap on the bed, in the midst of the refreshments.

"What's the matter?" demanded Jerry, looking a little frightened.

"I — I don't know," faltered Geraldine, with white lips; "I feel very queer; I think I'm ill."

"You're seasick," announced Gretel, who knew the signs; "I guess we'll have to call somebody. We can't open the window, and you won't feel any better till you get some fresh air."

It was at that moment that there came a tap

at the stateroom door, and Jerry, no longer refusing to produce the key, promptly unlocked it, and admitted a colored stewardess who at sight of the three children, and the feast, threw up her hands, with an exclamation of dismay. But when she learned that the children were traveling alone, and had come on board without any luggage, her astonishment and horror were almost beyond the power of words to express. She kept repeating "fo' de land's sake!" over and over again, and finally departed to tell the news to the head steward, and as many of the passengers as cared to listen. By the time she returned, accompanied by the purser and two stewards, poor little Geraldine was really in a very bad way indeed.

"And no wonder," remarked the purser, with a grin; "we haven't had a night like this in months. I'm afraid you're in for it, little miss. And how are you feeling?" he added, turning to the other two.

"I'm — I'm all right I guess," said Jerry, trying to smile, though the effort was rather a failure; "we won't really be sick, you see, because we're Mind Cures. Mind Cures never have anything the matter with them. We've only got to —" But at that moment the steamer gave

a tremendous roll, and Jerry never finished his sentence.

Half an hour later, two very limp little figures, with very white faces, were stretched on the berths in number fifty-two, from which the stewardess had charitably removed the "feast." Both twins were very sick — much too sick to care about feasts, adventures, or anything else.

"I want Mother, oh, I want Mother!" wailed Geraldine, between paroxysms of seasickness; "she always takes care of us when we are ill. Oh, I wish we hadn't come; I do, I do!"

"I think I'm going to die," announced Jerry, and his gruff little voice was very shaky.

"Oh, no, you're not," Gretel reassured him. She was not at all sick herself, but was helping the stewardess minister to her friends. "You are only seasick, and people never die from seasickness."

"I think I'd just as soon die as feel this way," groaned Jerry, at which the stewardess laughed in a way which seemed to the children quite brutal.

But she was not by any means a brutal or heartless person, and was really as kind as possible to the two little sufferers. She tried to persuade Gretel to go down to the dining-saloon to

have something to eat, but although not sick, Gretel had no desire for food just then, and much preferred remaining where she was.

As the evening advanced the storm seemed to grow worse, instead of decreasing, as the passengers had hoped it might when leaving Old Point, and the little steamer rolled and pitched in a manner calculated to disturb even the best sailors.

“Do you think we are going to be shipwrecked?” Gretel whispered anxiously to the stewardess. The twins were beyond caring whether they were wrecked or not.

“Shipwrecked!” repeated the colored woman, scornfully; “no, indeed. Don’t you be scared, Missie; dis yere boat’s all right. We’ll bring you safe into Baltimore to-morrow mornin’, sure as Fate.”

But though the stewardess spoke so confidently, there were some people on board who were not quite so sanguine, and when Gretel went out into the saloon for a little air, she found several of the lady passengers in tears.

“It’s the most terrible experience I’ve ever had in my life,” declared one hysterical woman. “They had no right to start the boat in such a gale.”

“If we ever see Baltimore I shall be very much surprised,” wailed another. “Oh, why did I ever leave my husband and children!”

Gretel did not repeat these remarks to her companions when she went back to the state-room, but her heart was anything but light, and she was growing more frightened every moment.

At ten o'clock the stewardess looked in for the last time before going to bed. The twins were a little better, and had both fallen asleep.

“Dey'll be all right now, I guess,” she told Gretel. “You'd better go to sleep too. Dere ain't any more beds in here, but I can put you in another room. Dere's plenty of empty ones dis trip.”

But Gretel would not leave her friends, and preferred curling up on the sofa, where she lay, with wide-open eyes, listening to the strange sounds of creaking and groaning, all quite familiar to people accustomed to life on ship-board, but which seemed to her very “frightening” indeed. She was sure they were going to be shipwrecked; they would all be drowned, and she would never see Percy or Miss Heath again. She wondered if Percy would be very sorry, and what Miss Heath would say. They had neither of them known her very long, and of course

could not be expected to care as Mr. and Mrs. Barlow would care if the twins were drowned, but they had seemed to be rather fond of her, and, oh, how good and kind they both were. There was no use in trying to be brave or cheerful any longer, and poor little Gretel let her feelings have their way, and sobbed into the sofa cushion.

She cried herself to sleep, and had just fallen into a comfortable doze, when the steamer gave a terrific roll, which sent her off the sofa. Geraldine awoke with a shriek of terror as she struck the floor.

For a moment it really seemed as if something frightful had happened, and the children clung to each other in helpless terror, but then the steamer righted herself once more, and everything seemed quiet.

“Oh, I’m so frightened — I’m so frightened!” sobbed Geraldine, even seasickness forgotten in this new alarm. “Gretel, do you think we’re going to be drowned?”

“I guess it would serve us right if we were,” observed a hoarse little voice from the upper berth. “It was a pretty awful thing to do, to run away by ourselves, and frighten Mother.”

“Mother said we must learn things by experi-

ence," said Geraldine, with chattering teeth, "and I guess we are doing it, all right. It's much worse than being punished. I'd rather be whipped every day, and not have any candy for a month, than be seasick."

"Shut up about candy," commanded Jerry, "I don't ever want to see any candy again, or cake, or bananas either. I don't want ever to eat anything, even meat or vegetables. I say, Geraldine, do you suppose Mother's awfully frightened about us?"

"I'm afraid she is," said Geraldine, mournfully; "she gets scared pretty quickly, even if she is a Mind Cure. I hope she won't be ill, like she was the time she thought Father had been in a railroad accident. She'll feel dreadfully if we're drowned."

"You won't be drowned," her brother assured her; "they always put the women in the life boats first. I may be, because of course I shan't go till all the women and children are saved. Boys never do, you know."

"Oh, Jerry, you are a brave boy!" exclaimed Geraldine, admiringly, "but I wish you wouldn't talk about it; it scares me so."

But Jerry seemed to rather enjoy the subject.

"If I am drowned, you'll tell Father and

Mother how brave I was, won't you?" he said. "Father can have my Waterbury watch, and Mother can keep my seal ring if she wants it. It's too small for her to wear, but she might like to have it to remember me by. I guess I'll let you have my magic lantern and the Punch and Judy show, Geraldine, but you must be very careful of them, because, you know, I might not be dead, after all. I might be rescued, and carried off on a ship, and sold for a slave, like the boy in that book we read, and when I come back of course I'd want my things, and—" Here another big wave sent the steamer over on her side again, and brought Jerry's remarks to a sudden conclusion. Geraldine screamed, and clutched Gretel tight.

"I don't want to be drowned—I don't want to be drowned!" she wailed. "We've been dreadfully naughty, and perhaps God won't let us go to Heaven."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure He will," soothed Gretel. "Let's say our prayers. We haven't said them to-night. I'm sure God will take care of us if we ask Him."

"Yes, let's say our prayers," agreed Geraldine, eagerly. "I was so sick I forgot all about

saying them before, but I'll do it now. You say yours too, Jerry; we'll all say them together."

So the three children folded their hands, reverently, and repeated the evening prayer they all knew:

"Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me,
Bless thy little lamb to-night;
Through the darkness be Thou near me;
Keep me safe till morning light."

And after that although the storm continued, and the little steamer pitched and plunged as much as ever, things did not seem quite so terrible as they had before. Gretel seemed so certain that God would take care of them, and somehow the twins had come to have a great deal of faith in Gretel.

"God always takes care of people when they ask Him to," said Gretel, confidently. "Father asked Him to take care of me when he was ill, and He did. First Mrs. Marsh let me go and live with her, and afterwards Percy came home. Father said I must always ask God to take care of me every day."

"I hope He'll take care of Mother, too, and not let her be ill because she's so frightened about us," said Geraldine, tremulously. "How do you

suppose we are ever going to get home, Jerry? We haven't any money, and nobody has said anything about making up a purse for us."

Jerry had no suggestion to offer, but Gretel, who was nearly two years older than the twins, and had had a good deal more experience, said she was quite sure they would be taken care of.

"Perhaps they'll let us stay on the boat till it goes back to-morrow night," she suggested, but Jerry and Geraldine did not take at all kindly to that idea, and Jerry protested loudly that he would rather walk all the way back to Old Point than spend another night on that dreadful boat. The very thought caused Geraldine a return of seasickness, and she was most unhappy for the next hour.

It was really a terrible night, and our three little friends were not the only people on board who lay awake and trembled, but towards morning the wind began to go down, and the sea grew calmer. By four o'clock they were in comparatively quiet water, and Gretel as well as the twins had fallen fast asleep.

They were still sleeping when the stewardess accompanied by the head steward, came to have a look at them, but at the sound of voices, and

the sudden flood of light caused by the opening door, Jerry sat up and rubbed his eyes.

“Good morning, young gentleman,” said the head steward, pleasantly; “how are you feeling to-day?”

“I’m all right,” declared Jerry, stoutly; “is it breakfast time?”

“It will be pretty soon — are you hungry?”

“I guess I am,” said Jerry, a little doubtfully; “what did you do with our feast?”

“I think the stewardess must have taken charge of it. You didn’t seem particularly keen about eating it yourselves last night. You can have anything you want for breakfast.”

Jerry began climbing down from his high bed.

“I’m ready,” he announced cheerfully; “it’s good I haven’t got to stop to dress. I never went to bed with my clothes on before, but I like it; it saves so much trouble. I don’t think I’ll stop to wash. I haven’t had anything to eat since lunch time yesterday.”

Just then Gretel and Geraldine woke up, and the steward told them they were already in Baltimore harbor, and the boat would be at her dock in a few minutes.

It was more than half an hour later, how-

ever, before the three rather bedraggled little figures made their appearance on deck. In the meantime they had been provided with a bountiful breakfast, to which they had all done justice, but notwithstanding that fact, and the reassuring knowledge that they were actually in Baltimore, all three faces were very grave and troubled. The stewardess had assured them that they would be cared for, and their friends communicated with, but that there was nothing for them to do but remain on board all day, and go back to Old Point on the return trip that night.

"It isn't always as bad as last night," Gretel said, trying to speak cheerfully. "It was really quite smooth the night Percy and I came. Perhaps you won't be sick going back."

The twins shuddered.

"I think a boat is the most dreadful place in the world," declared Geraldine. "Oh, don't you suppose we could get off, and go back by the train?"

Gretel shook her head decidedly.

"And they never made up a purse for us, after all," exclaimed Jerry, in a tone of disgust, and he glanced about the almost deserted deck, for the boat was now at her pier, and most of the passengers had already gone on shore.

The rain had ceased, but it was still cool and cloudy, and the children shivered a little as they stood leaning against the railing, and looked down at the crowd of people and vehicles on the pier.

“It does feel sort of queer to be wearing the same clothes you’ve had on all night,” Geraldine admitted, with a sigh. “Lots of things aren’t as nice when they really happen as people think they’re going to be beforehand. I wonder if that’s what Mother means by learning by experience.”

Jerry nodded.

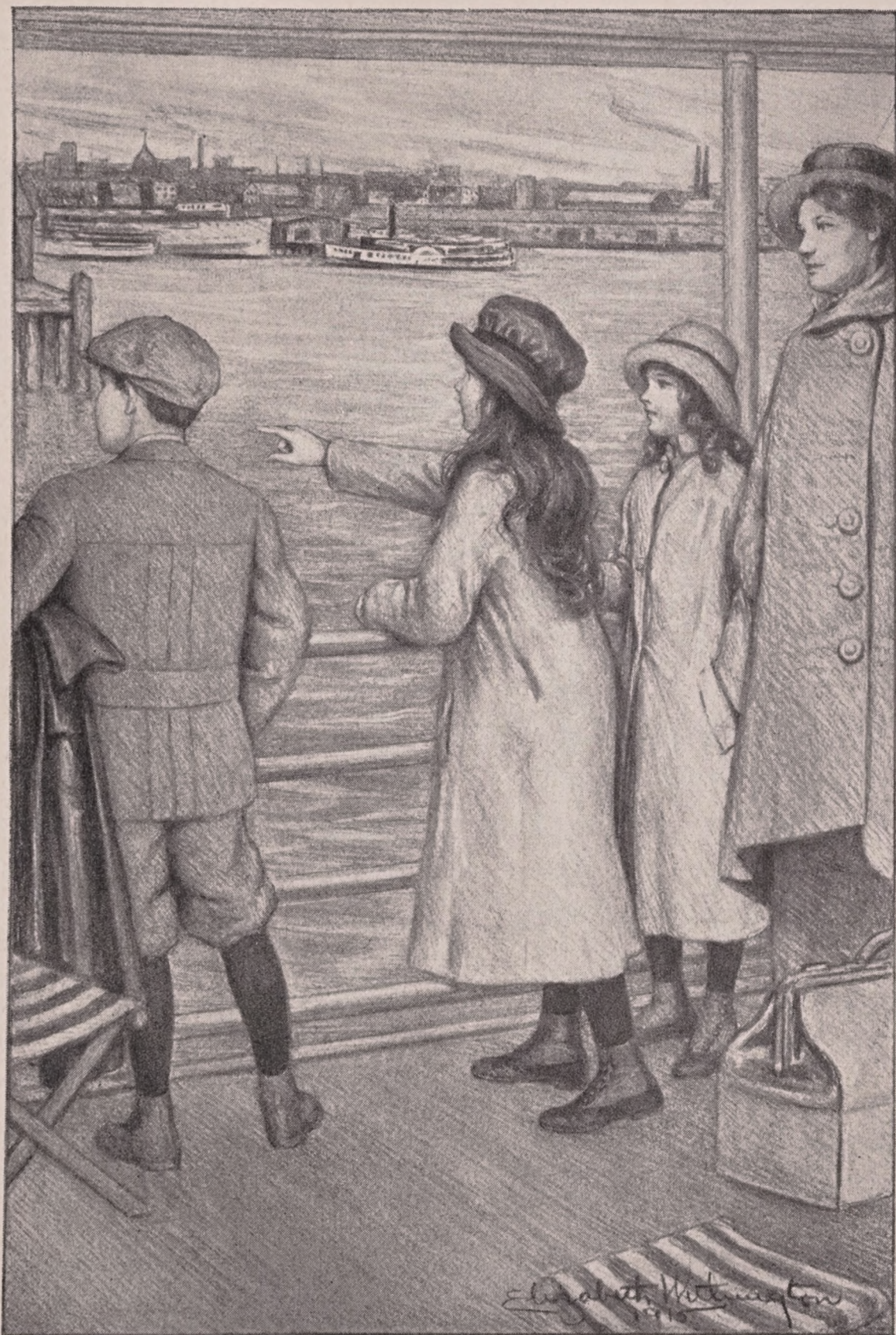
“I guess it is,” he said, “but I don’t think I like learning by experience as much as being punished. I say, let’s ask Mother to go back to the old way. I don’t care much about the Law of Love, anyway. I’d rather have one good punishment, and get it over with; this learning by experience business isn’t much fun.”

Just then there was an exclamation from Gretel.

“Look, oh, look; isn’t that your father on the pier?”

In another second the twins were literally hanging over the railing; their hands waving, their voices raised in wild shouts of excitement.

“Father, Father, here we are,” they yelled, jumping up and down in their sudden joy and relief. “Oh, Father dear, we’re so glad you’ve come, too. Please, please take us back in the train.”



Elizabeth Wetmore
1910

“ISN'T THAT YOUR FATHER ON THE PIER?”—Page 195.

CHAPTER XI

WHAT WAS "IN THE WIND"

IT was afternoon, and the Baltimore express was nearing the station at Old Point. From the window of the parlor car three very solemn little faces were looking out at the familiar landscape. It did not seem possible that less than twenty-four hours had elapsed since they had seen it last. It seemed to the children that they must have been away for at least a month. It had not been a cheerful journey, for Mr. Barlow was very much annoyed, and had had a long serious talk with his small son and daughter, in the course of which Jerry and Geraldine had both been reduced to repentant tears.

"When Father scolds he's much worse than Mother," Geraldine whispered to Gretel. "He doesn't get angry often, but when he does it's something awful. We really have been dreadfully bad. Father says when Mother got our letter, and found the boat had gone, she was so

frightened she had hysterics. Did you ever see any one have hysterics?"

Gretel said she never had.

"Then you don't want to. We've seen Mother lots of times and it's awful. Miss Heath was frightened, too, and so was your brother. I wonder if you'll be punished when you get home."

"Of course she won't," declared Jerry, indignantly; "it wasn't her fault; she only came to take care of us. I'm going to tell Mr. Douane so the minute I see him."

Gretel gave her little friend a grateful glance.

"I shouldn't like Percy to be angry with me," she said. "I wonder if he'll be at the station."

"I guess he will," said Jerry. "Father says he would have come on the night train to Baltimore with him, only they couldn't be quite sure you were with us, so he had to stay and look for you, but Father telegraphed this morning as soon as he found us on the boat, so everybody knows now."

"Here's the station," announced Geraldine from the car window, "and there are Mr. Douane and Miss Heath on the platform. O dear! I wish my hair wasn't so mussed, and my dress so dirty. Miss Heath always looks so neat."

They certainly were a dilapidated looking party as they stepped from the train, and were greeted by their waiting friends. The absence of the usual combing and scrubbing was painfully apparent, and all three children looked very much the worse for wear. But Miss Heath and Mr. Douane were so thankful to see the three little faces again that they were quite ready to overlook deficiencies.

"Mr. Douane," said Jerry, walking straight up to Gretel's brother, in his honest, fearless way, "we want to tell you right off that you mustn't punish Gretel. It wasn't her fault. She only came on the boat to make us go home, but we wouldn't mind her, and then the boat started, and she had to come along, but she didn't want to one bit."

"What did I tell you, Percy?" cried Miss Heath, triumphantly. "I knew Gretel would never do such a thing voluntarily." And, to everybody's surprise the pretty young lady caught Gretel in her arms and hugged her.

"How's Mother?" Geraldine inquired, rather timidly. It was quite wonderful how meek both the twins were at that moment.

Miss Heath looked grave.

"Your mother is better this afternoon," she

said, "but she has been very ill. It was a terrible experience for her."

Miss Heath spoke in a tone the twins had never heard her use before, and regarded the two little culprits with such sternness in her gaze, that they both quailed beneath it.

"Were you very much frightened, Pussy?" Mr. Douane asked kindly, as he and his little sister walked back to the hotel together.

"It was pretty frightening," Gretel admitted, slipping her hand into her brother's as she spoke, "but I thought God would take care of us, and He did. Were you worried about me, Percy?"

"Very much indeed. When I came back from Hampton, and Higgins met me with the astounding news that you had gone out in the storm without even a hat on, I could not imagine what had happened. I went over to the Barlows' cottage, and found myself in the midst of such a scene of excitement as I had never even imagined. The twins' note had been discovered, and poor Mrs. Barlow was in violent hysterics. Of course we thought you must have gone with the others, and yet it seemed very strange. Miss Heath and Higgins were both convinced that you would never have done such a thing, and besides, your name was not mentioned in the note. I

can tell you it was a great relief to our minds when Mr. Barlow's telegram arrived this morning."

"Mr. Barlow was very kind," said Gretel. "He bought me this hat in Baltimore before we went on the train. I should have hated to come all the way home without a hat. He paid the people on the boat too, and gave the stewardess a present for being so good to the twins when they were seasick. I'm so glad Miss Heath didn't believe I went because I wanted to. She said she always felt safe about Jerry and Geraldine when I was with them. That's one reason why I ran after them when I saw them going on the boat."

"Miss Heath is coming over to see you by and by," said Mr. Douane, smiling. "I think she has something to talk to you about."

Gretel looked very much pleased.

It made her feel quite grown-up and important to hear that a young lady wanted to talk to her.

"I love Miss Heath better than any one I ever knew except Father and you," she said; "I'm so glad you like her, too, Percy. Don't you hope we shall keep on seeing her when we go back to New York?"

"I most certainly do," agreed Mr. Douane,

and there was such an odd expression in his eyes that Gretel regarded him rather curiously.

“You look as if you were very happy about something,” she remarked wonderingly; “is it because I’ve come back?”

“Partly for that reason, and partly for something else,” her brother answered evasively, and Gretel did not like to ask any more questions on the subject.

“It was nice of Jerry to tell you why I went with them,” she said, by way of changing the subject. “I like Jerry very much; he’s so honest; he doesn’t talk much, but he thinks a lot. He’s very fond of Miss Heath, too. I’m so glad you will want to see Miss Heath after we leave here. It’s very sad to get fond of people, and then never see them any more.”

“It is indeed,” responded her brother. “I have had one experience of that kind myself, and I don’t want another. I lost Miss Heath once, but I don’t intend to lose her again if I can help it.”

Gretel was much interested, and would have liked to ask a number of questions, but at that moment they reached the hotel, and found Higgins eagerly watching for them from the piazza.

Higgins greeted her little charge with a burst

of genuine affection. She had grown very fond of Gretel, and her joy and triumph when she discovered that she had been correct in her conviction that the child had not run away voluntarily, was almost as great as Miss Heath's had been. She took Gretel up-stairs to her room, where she insisted on undressing her at once and putting her to bed.

"You look about ready to drop," she declared. "To think hof a young lady like you going to bed with 'er clothes on, and running hoff without heven a comb or a tooth-brush, fairly sends chills down my spine."

Gretel protested that she was not at all tired, but Higgins was firm, and really the warm bath, and soft, comfortable bed were very pleasant.

"A bed is much more comfortable than a berth on a steamboat," she remarked, with a sigh of content, as she nestled down between the cool, clean sheets. "I wonder if Jerry and Geraldine have gone to bed, too."

Jerry and Geraldine had gone to bed, but they were not in by any means such good spirits as their friend. The sight of their mother's white, haggard face and swollen eyes, had been more of a rebuke to the two little sinners than any amount of punishment, and Geraldine's first ac-

tion on reaching home was to fling herself on Mrs. Barlow's neck, with a burst of remorseful tears.

"Oh, Mother dearest, please, please punish us," she sobbed. "We'd rather be punished than talked to, we really would. We're so dreadfully sorry, and it was most all my fault, because Jerry never thought of it till I put the idea into his head."

It was late in the evening when Gretel awoke from a long, refreshing nap, to find the faithful Higgins sewing by her bedside. She was feeling decidedly better, and also very hungry.

"May I have some supper?" was her first question, when Higgins had told her what time it was, and complimented her upon her improved appearance.

Higgins said she would go down-stairs, and order something from the dining-room.

"And I'll tell Miss 'Eath you're hawake," she added. "She's been up twice halready, but you were asleep both times. Mr. Douane told me to let them know the minute you hawoke; they're hon the piazza together. I said there was something in the wind; I know the signs."

Higgins departed, leaving Gretel very much puzzled by her last words. This was not the

first time she had heard "there was something in the wind," and she was beginning to be decidedly curious as to what it could be. She was not kept long in suspense, however, for in a very few minutes the door opened, and Miss Heath herself came in, looking prettier than ever, with all her dimples showing, and the brightest color Gretel had ever seen in her cheeks.

"I'm so glad you came to see me," said the little girl joyfully, as her friend, after kissing her, drew a chair to the bedside. "I've had such a nice nap, and I'm not a bit tired now, only hungry."

"Higgins has gone to order some supper for you," said Miss Heath, "and while we are waiting for it I have come to have a little chat. I want to tell you about something which has made me very happy."

"Oh, I'm so glad," cried Gretel, and she took Miss Heath's hand and kissed it in the pretty foreign way her father had taught her. "I know you must be happy; your eyes shine so. Has somebody you love very much come to take care of you, just as Percy came to take care of me? But, oh, I forgot; you haven't any brothers, have you?"

"No, I haven't any brothers," said Miss Heath,

smiling, "but you are not so far wrong in your guess, Gretel; some one I love, and who loves me, is going to take care of me, and I am very, very happy."

"Is it a gentleman?" inquired Gretel, with a sudden flash of intuition, "and do you mean you are going to be married, Miss Heath?"

Miss Heath laughed a rather embarrassed laugh, and kissed Gretel again.

"You clever kiddie," she said; "what made you guess? Yes, I am going to be married to one of the nicest men in the world — aren't you glad?"

"Yes," said Gretel, with a little catch in her voice, "I'm very glad for you, only — only if you get married I suppose you'll go away, and perhaps I won't ever see you any more. Percy and I were talking about you this afternoon, and we both hoped so much that we should go on seeing you when we went back to New York."

"So you shall," promised Miss Heath. "My home is to be in New York, or near it, and I hope we shall love each other very dearly, Gretel."

"Then I am just as glad as I can be!" cried impulsive Gretel, and she threw her arms round Miss Heath's neck and hugged her.

Miss Heath returned the embrace heartily, and

then she took Gretel's hand, and held it, as she went on with her story.

"I have known the — the gentleman for several years," she said. "We met in China, and he and my father were very good friends, but when my father was taken ill, and we left Hong-Kong suddenly, we lost sight of each other for a time. When my dear father died I was very unhappy and very lonely. I came to New York by myself, and hired a hall bedroom in a boarding-house. I could not afford anything better, for my father was not rich, and when he died there was very little money left. I have an uncle in Chicago, who wanted to help me, but he has a large family of his own, and I did not want to be a burden to him. So I struggled along as well as I could, giving music lessons to the few pupils I could obtain, but it was a very different life from that to which I had been accustomed. When you told me about your life at Mrs. Marsh's, and how you used to long for a little music, I thought of myself in the sad, lonely days last winter.

"But one day, just when things seemed about as bad and hopeless as they could be, I received a kind letter from Mrs. Barlow, asking me to join her family, come down here with them, and

teach the children for the rest of the season. That was less than a month ago, but since then everything has changed for me, and now I am so happy that I don't feel as if I could ever be sad or lonely again."

"I'm just as glad as I can be," declared Gretel, heartily; "it's the nicest story I ever heard, but — but, would you mind telling me about how you found the gentleman again?"

"I found him right here at Old Point; wasn't it wonderful, Gretel? We had both come here without having the least idea of finding each other."

"Do Jerry and Geraldine know about it?" asked Gretel.

"Not yet, but they will to-morrow. I wanted you to know first, because — well, you see, Gretel dear, you know the gentleman."

"I know him!" cried Gretel, sitting up in bed, and regarding her friend with wide, astonished eyes. "Why, I don't know any gentleman except Percy and Mr. Barlow, and — oh, Miss Heath, I hope he isn't that old Mr. Oliver, with the bald head."

Miss Heath broke into a merry laugh, which was echoed by another laugh, as Mr. Douane —

who had been lingering outside the door — suddenly appeared on the threshold.

“Old Mr. Oliver; that is a good guess!” he cried, merrily. “Why, he has had three wives already, I believe. Come now, Gretel, can’t you think who the happy man is?”

Gretel gazed from one happy face to the other in growing bewilderment, but before she could speak, Mr. Douane himself settled the question in her mind by putting his arm round Miss Heath, and kissing her.

“I do believe I’m the happiest girl in the whole world,” sobbed Gretel. “I don’t know what makes me cry when I’m so glad, but I can’t help it. I thought it was beautiful enough to have a brother, but to have a sister too — oh, Miss Heath, dear, I’m going to try so very hard to be good enough to deserve you.”

CHAPTER XII

GOING TO A WEDDING

“**I** WISH when people have weddings, they’d have them in the afternoon, instead of in the morning,” observed Geraldine, in a rather complaining tone, as she carefully smoothed out the folds in her white dress before taking her favorite seat on the piazza railing. “We have to wear our good clothes in the afternoon, anyway, but it’s simply awful to be dressed up like this at ten o’clock in the morning.”

Jerry said nothing, but gazed mournfully at his immaculate white suit, and freshly blackened boots, and sighed. It was the first of May, as perfect a spring day as had ever dawned, and it was also Barbara Heath’s wedding day. The twins were occupying the cottage piazza in solitary state, while up-stairs Mrs. Barlow, Gretel, and Higgins, were all engaged in dressing the bride.

“It wouldn’t be quite so bad if it were going to be a big wedding, like people have in New

York," Geraldine went on. "Then we could look at the presents, and perhaps I could be a flower girl, and you could hold up the bride's train, like Bobby Campbell did when his aunt got married, but Miss Heath isn't going to have any train, and there won't be any people in the church but just us, and her uncle from Chicago."

"There isn't even to be any wedding cake," objected Jerry, disgustedly. "I thought of course there would be cake, and we could each have a box to ourselves."

"I know why they're not having any cake, or flower girls, or trains," said Geraldine. "Miss Heath said she wanted to have a very simple wedding. I suppose she didn't want to have Father and Mother pay for things, but I should think Mr. Douane might have paid; he's awfully rich."

"Is he really?" inquired Jerry, looking interested.

"Yes, I heard Father and Miss Heath's uncle talking about it the other night. Father said Miss Heath was a very lucky girl, and I guess Mr. Heath thought she was lucky, too, for he rubbed his hands, and looked as pleased as could be."

"I don't believe Miss Heath cares much,

though," remarked Jerry, in a tone of conviction. "She isn't the kind of person to like anybody just because he's rich. She'd marry any one she was fond of, and she's awfully fond of Mr. Douane."

"It's very nice to see everybody so happy," said Geraldine, "but I do wish they would have the wedding in the afternoon. It's dreadfully stupid to have to sit around like this in the morning, instead of going to dress parade. Oh, here comes Gretel. Are they 'most ready?"

"Almost," said Gretel, as she joined her friends on the piazza. "Barbara and your mother are having a little talk by themselves, and I think they're both crying. Your mother asked me to come and see if you were all right, and to tell you to be sure not to move off the piazza till they come."

"Oh, we're not going to move," sighed Geraldine, resignedly. "Does Miss Heath look pretty?"

"Just wait till you see her," responded Gretel, with shining eyes. "Higgins says Lady Violet Cadwalader wasn't half as pretty when she was a bride, and she wore white satin and point lace. Oh, Geraldine, I'm so happy I feel as if I would like to fly."

"Gretel, do you know that your brother is very rich?" inquired Jerry. He had been much impressed by his sister's remark.

"Oh, yes," said Gretel, simply. "You see, when Mother married Father all her first husband's money went to Percy, and then his grandfather left him a lot more besides. I used to be afraid Percy was extravagant, but Barbara says he isn't, and Higgins says when people have money they ought to spend it for the good of trade, so I don't worry any more. They're going to have a beautiful home, and I'm going to live with them. Isn't it wonderful? I couldn't quite believe it at first, but they both say they want me. Higgins thought they would send me to boarding-school, but Barbara says I'm not to go till I'm fourteen, and I'm not twelve yet."

"You'd better make some rules about lessons then," advised Geraldine. "Draw up a contract, the way we did, and make Miss Heath sign it. If you don't she may want to teach you things all day long."

Gretel laughed.

"I don't believe she would," she said, "and even if she did, I shouldn't mind a bit. I'd rather be with Barbara than any one else in the world."

“Well, you are a queer girl,” said Geraldine, looking rather incredulous. “Miss Heath is all right, and very nice for a teacher, but I can’t imagine wanting her round all day long. Why, the two nicest things about her getting married are that we won’t have any more lessons this spring, and that you are to stay with us for a whole month, while she goes on a wedding trip.”

“But Miss Heath won’t be a teacher when she’s married,” suggested Jerry. “I think she’ll be a very nice person to live with. I wouldn’t mind one bit living with her myself.”

“Mind!” cried Gretel, indignantly; “who could possibly mind? Higgins says she considers it a great privilege to live with such a lovely young lady, and I think I’m the luckiest girl in the world to have her for a sister.”

“Here come the carriages,” announced Jerry, springing down from the railing, where he had been perched beside his twin. “Oh, I hope they’ll be ready soon. Where’s Mr. Douane, Gretel?”

“He’s going to meet us at the church,” said Gretel. “He said good-by to me at the hotel, and I put a flower in his button-hole. He looked perfectly splendid.”

Geraldine said she would go and see if the

bridal party were nearly ready, and forthwith departed up-stairs, returning in a moment with the joyful intelligence, that they were really coming at last.

“You and I are to go in the carriage with Father and Mother, Jerry,” she explained. “Miss Heath wants Gretel to go with her and her uncle. She really does look lovely, even if she hasn’t got a train, or white satin, or anything grand.”

“She couldn’t have a wedding dress like that,” said Gretel, “because, in the first place, there wasn’t any way of getting one made down here, and then she and Percy are going right off in the train as soon as the wedding is over.”

“I don’t see why Miss Heath wouldn’t let Father and Mother give her a wedding breakfast, as they wanted to,” complained Jerry. “There might have been cake then, and there would have been lots of good things to eat, anyway.”

Just then the bridal party was seen coming down-stairs, and for the moment everything else was forgotten. Ten minutes later they were all on their way to Hampton, for it was in the little Episcopal church at Hampton that the wedding was to take place. Gretel and her new sister

sat side by side in the carriage, while Miss Heath's uncle from Chicago — an elderly gentleman, with a tired, careworn face — sat opposite to them, and looked at his watch a good many times during the drive. Nobody talked much, and as they drew near the church Miss Heath took Gretel's hand and held it. She was looking very happy, but there were tears in her eyes, and her lip trembled.

It was a very simple wedding, but that was just what the bride and bridegroom both wanted. The little church was decorated with spring flowers, and as the bride walked up the aisle on her uncle's arm, the organ struck up the Bridal March from "Lohengrin." Gretel caught her breath with a little gasp. It was the first time she had heard that music since the day of her stolen visit to fairy-land, and suddenly her cheeks grew very hot.

"I wonder if I shall ever have the courage to tell Barbara," she thought, uncomfortably, but just then the service began, and she forgot everything else in listening to the solemn words, which she was hearing for the first time in her life.

It was all over. Miss Heath was Hiss Heath no longer, but Mrs. Percy Douane, and the whole

party were in the vestry, where the bride and groom were receiving congratulations.

"It's our turn now, Jerry," whispered Geraldine, excitedly, pulling her brother's sleeve, when the pretty bride had been kissed and congratulated by Mr. Heath, Mr. and Mrs. Barlow, and delighted Gretel. "Oh, dear, I wonder what we ought to say."

"I know," said Jerry; "I've been making it up." And he advanced, followed by his astonished twin. It was the first time in his life that Jerry had ever taken the initiative in anything.

"Hello!" he began, pausing directly in front of the bride, and speaking in his gruffest tones. "We want to say something. We're glad you're married, and we hope you'll be very happy. We can't say we're sorry you're not going to teach us any more, because we don't like teachers much, but you're the nicest teacher we ever had, and if we've got to have one at all, we'd rather have you than any one else."

"Yes, that's true," chimed in Geraldine; "you really have been awfully nice for a teacher, and you've been so fair. You haven't broken the contract once."

How everybody laughed. Mrs. Douane kissed both twins — much to Jerry's disgust — and hugged Geraldine so tight that she came near crushing the bridal bouquet. And then the carriages drove up to the church door again, and it was time to say good-by.

“Good-by, Gretel darling,” Mrs. Douane whispered, coming back to give her little sister a last kiss. “A month will soon pass, and then we shall all be together again, and just think how happy we shall all be.”

“I am thinking of it all the time,” answered Gretel, hastily winking back the rising tears. “I shall count the days till the first of June, though.”

At the same moment Mr. Douane was shaking hands with Mrs. Barlow.

“It is mighty good of you people to take charge of our little sister for the next month,” he said, heartily. “I shall look up a place for the summer as soon as possible, and hope we shall be settled somewhere by the time you come north in June.”

“Indeed you need not thank us,” said Mrs. Barlow, smiling. “It will be a real pleasure to have dear little Gretel with us; I know of no sweeter companion for my children.” And this

time Mrs. Barlow spoke as if she meant what she said, and not as if she were quoting something out of a book.

“Hurrah!” shouted Jerry, waving his cap from the church steps, as the carriage containing the bridal couple disappeared around the corner, “that’s over, and now we can go home and take off our best clothes. Weddings aren’t so bad, after all, but they’re not half so much fun as dress-parade.”

“Come along, Gretel,” said Geraldine, slipping an arm about her friend’s waist; a most unusual demonstration of affection from her. “I’m glad you didn’t go away, too. Miss Heath did look lovely, and I can’t help feeling a little sorry we’re not going to see her any more, but Mother says we can stop at that candy store we passed, and buy all the chocolates we want, to make up for there not being any wedding cake.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE PALACE OF BEAUTY

IT was a lovely June afternoon, and an automobile was bowling swiftly along the Hudson Boulevard, away from the big, noisy city. It was a large touring-car, and in it were four persons. On the front seat were a lady and gentleman, the latter of whom was running the car himself, and in the back were a little girl and a maid. The little girl, to whom motoring was still a novelty, was looking about her in wide-eyed interest, and uttering little ejaculations of delight every few seconds.

"Isn't it beautiful, Higgins?" she cried, turning to the maid. "I didn't know there were such beautiful places anywhere near New York, did you?"

"It's very pretty, miss," returned Higgins, guardedly, "but hit hain't to be compared with Hengland. You should see Lord Carresford's hestate. Hif you could see that, Miss Gretel, you might well call hit beautiful."

But Gretel did not look convinced.

“I don’t see how any place can be more beautiful than this,” she maintained. “See that big house on the hill? It looks just like a castle, doesn’t it? I wonder who lives there?”

“Most likely some of the millionaires,” responded Higgins, who would have died sooner than admit that anything American could equal her beloved England. “Hit’s a pretty place, but hit don’t compare with what I’ve seen in the old country.”

At that moment the lady in the front seat turned her head with the announcement —

“We are almost home, Gretel; that is our place on the hill.”

Gretel gave a great gasp of astonishment; speech failed her at that moment. Even the solid Higgins opened her eyes in surprise, as the car turned in at a pair of iron gates, and in two minutes more had dashed up a wide avenue lined with beautiful old trees, and drawn up before a large stone house with pillars. It was the very house Gretel had described as “looking like a castle.”

“Well, how do you like it, Gretel?” her brother asked, smiling, as he sprang out of the car, and came to help Higgins unpack their belongings.

“It’s the most beautiful place I ever saw,” declared Gretel, finding her voice at last. “Is this really where you and Barbara live, and am I going to live here, too?”

“We are going to spend the summer here, at any rate,” Mr. Douane answered. “I have rented the place for six months.”

“Come in, Gretel,” said her sister-in-law, “I want to show you your room.” And she led the way into a wide hall hung with pictures.

“I really believe it is a castle,” laughed Gretel, pausing on the threshold to gaze about her with eager, delighted eyes. “I feel as if I must be a princess, and you and Percy are the king and queen.”

“Poor little Cinderella,” said Mrs. Douane, and there was a sudden dimness in her eyes, as she led the way up the wide staircase to the second floor.

“No, it isn’t a castle, but just a dear old house, filled with beautiful things. The old lady who owns it was a friend of my mother’s, and she has let us have the place just as it is. I used to visit here when I was a little girl, and have always loved the house, so when I heard that Mrs. Atterbury was going abroad this summer, and

wanted to rent her place, I persuaded Percy to come and look at it, and he was as much delighted as I was. We have even taken the old servants; two of them have lived here for more than twenty years and knew me when I wasn't as old as you. This is your room, right opposite mine. Come in and see how you like it."

"Like it!" cried Gretel, and that was really all she could say just then. It was such a pretty room, with such lovely old furniture in it, and the walls were covered with charming prints and engravings. There were two big windows looking off toward the river, and the mountains on the opposite shore; and the little white bed, with its dainty furnishings was truly a joy to behold. But it was not any of these things which caused Gretel to spring forward, with a little cry. It was the sight of an old rag doll sitting in solemn state by one of the windows, and a row of shabby old books on a shelf over the writing desk.

"They're my own things, my own precious things!" she cried, snatching up the rag doll, and hugging it to her heart. "This is my Jemima, that Father gave me for a Christmas present, when I was only seven, and there are all my dear, dear books and the German Bible, and everything."

“Open the desk and see what is inside,” said Mrs. Douane, smiling.

With trembling hands, Gretel opened one of the drawers in the writing-desk, and there lay a pile of old letters, tied together with a piece of faded blue ribbon. Gretel gave one little sob as she caught them up and kissed them. They were her greatest treasure of all; the letters from her father.

“Oh, Barbara, how did you get them?” she cried, rapturously. “Percy said I should have them again, but I didn’t believe I really could. I was so afraid Mrs. Marsh had thrown them away. She said she hated keeping old things; they cluttered up drawers and made more trouble in house-cleaning.”

With a sudden impulse, Mrs. Douane took her little sister in her arms, and kissed her.

“You dear child,” she said. “Of course Mrs. Marsh did not throw away your treasures; she would not have dared to do such a thing. Percy wrote her from Old Point, asking her to keep everything until he could send for them.”

“Oh, I am so happy,” cried Gretel. “I think I’m the happiest person in the world. Did Percy go to see Mrs. Marsh?”

“No, he wrote to her, giving the address, and

she sent the parcel at once. Percy also received a note from Miss Marsh, announcing her engagement to a Mr. Pendleton. She expects to be married this month."

Gretel looked pleased.

"I'm glad," she said; "I liked Mr. Pendleton; he was always very kind. Once when he came to see Ada he brought me some chocolates."

"Well, I am glad, too, if you are," laughed Mrs. Douane, "though I never had the pleasure of meeting Miss Ada. Here comes Higgins, and I am going to leave you to wash off some of that horrid dust while I get ready for dinner. Dust is really the only drawback to motoring."

But Gretel did not think that even dust could be considered a drawback to such a delightful amusement. She had never been so happy or excited in her life, and it was rather hard work to stand still and have her hair brushed and tied with a fresh ribbon, while there was still so much to see and admire in this beautiful new home. The past month had been a very pleasant one. Mr. and Mrs. Barlow had been as kind as possible, and she and the twins had become the best of friends. They had remained at Old Point until the first of June, and then gone to Washington for a week on their way north. Gretel

had seen the Capitol, and the White House, and spent one delightful afternoon at Mount Vernon, wandering about the beautiful old home of General Washington. They had left Washington only that morning, and on reaching the station in New York, Gretel had been met by her brother and sister in their new touring-car. It had been a rather sad parting, for at the last moment, Geraldine — to everybody's surprise — had suddenly burst into tears, and flinging her arms round Gretel's neck, had positively refused to be parted from her friend. It was not until Mr. and Mrs. Douane had given the twins a most urgent invitation to visit Gretel in her new home, that Geraldine had at last consented to be torn away, and allow Gretel to depart with her family.

The dinner that evening was another revelation to Gretel. The prettily decorated table, with a big bowl of roses in the center; the neat, white-capped maid, who waited on them, and her sister-in-law, looking lovelier than ever in her white evening dress, all combined to fill the little girl with wonder and admiration.

"It is a palace, and Percy and Barbara are the prince and princess," she told herself. "I'm Cinderella, and I've come to live with them, but

oh, how dreadful it would be if it should all come to an end when the clock strikes twelve.”

“What are you thinking of, Gretel?” her brother asked, noticing the look of sudden anxiety on the child’s hitherto radiant face.

Gretel laughed and blushed.

“It was very silly,” she said, “but I couldn’t help it. I was thinking how perfectly wonderful everything was, and then just for a minute I thought how terrible it would be if it should all come to an end just as it did with Cinderella when the clock struck twelve.”

Mr. and Mrs. Douane both smiled, and the latter said —

“I wouldn’t worry about it, if I were you. This little Cinderella has come home to stay, and we are all going to have a happy summer together.”

“By the way, Barbara,” said Mr. Douane, “I saw the man about that pony this morning. I am going to have you learn to ride, Gretel; it’s the best exercise in the world, and we must have you fat and rosy before you go to school in the autumn.”

It was a beautiful moonlight night, and after dinner they all went out on the piazza, and sat watching the boats on the river. It was so still

that they could hear the band on the Albany steamer, as it passed, and so warm that scarcely a leaf stirred. Gretel would have liked to linger there for hours, with the two people she loved best in the world, but at nine o'clock her sister-in-law advised her to go to bed.

"You have been traveling all day," she said, "and need a good night's rest."

"I feel so wide awake that I don't think I can possibly go to sleep," said Gretel, rising rather reluctantly, "but I'll try if you want me to." And she kissed her brother and sister good-night, and went up-stairs to her pretty room, where she found the faithful Higgins busy unpacking.

Gretel had so many things to say to Higgins, that the process of undressing was a rather lengthy one, but it was over at last, and Higgins, having seen her charge safely in bed, was preparing to leave the room, when Gretel called her back.

"Higgins," she said a little timidly, "I don't believe you are very fond of being kissed, are you?"

"I'm not much haddicted to hit," admitted Higgins, who was fond of using long words. "In fact, I 'aven't kissed any one since I said

good-by to my mother hin the hold country. What do you want to know for, miss?"

"I was thinking that — but perhaps you'd rather not do it," said Gretel, evasively. "It's only that I'm so very happy to-night, I feel as if I should like to kiss everybody in the world."

"You mean you would like to kiss me, miss?" There was something like consternation in Higgins' voice, but she flushed all over her plain face, and looked for the moment really quite embarrassed.

"I should like to very much indeed if you wouldn't mind," said Gretel, and as the English woman bent down her face, she threw two soft little arms round Higgins' neck, and kissed her heartily.

Higgins did not say anything, but switched out the light very hurriedly, and Gretel did not see the tears in her eyes, or hear her murmur softly as she left the room —

"There never was a sweeter child hin this country or the hold one either."

It was quite true that Gretel was not sleepy. She was far too happy and excited to sleep, and she lay for some time, with wide open eyes, living over all the delightful events of the day. She had taken the old rag doll to bed with her, and

slipped the packet of her father's letters under her pillow. It was so good to know that all her treasures were safe, and in her own possession once more. She was just beginning to feel a little sleepy, when her ear caught the sound of a distant piano, and she started up wide awake again.

"It's Barbara!" she cried joyfully. "Oh, what a beautiful ending to the day to hear Barbara play before I go to sleep."

She had no idea of doing anything wrong, or even unusual, as she sprang out of bed, and hastily putting on her wrapper and bath slippers — which Higgins had left on a chair by the bedside — opened the door, and stole softly out into the hall. In the old studio days she had often sat up till midnight while her father and his friends played and sang. Yes, Barbara was playing, and eager to get as near as possible to the music she loved, Gretel went on to the head of the stairs. The drawing-room door was directly opposite the staircase, and Gretel could hear every note as distinctly as if she had been in the room. With a little sigh of utter content, she sat down on the top stair, intending to enjoy another sensation of bliss before going back to bed again. The moonlight streaming in

through the hall window, fell across the little figure in the blue flannel wrapper, and rested softly on the child's rapt face.

Mrs. Douane finished the nocturne she was playing, and in the pause which followed, Gretel heard her brother say —

“ Play something from Wagner.”

“ I'll play The Swan Song from 'Lohengrin,' ” his wife answered, and after turning over some music, she began a melody Gretel knew, and which set the child's heart to beating fast, while the hot color rushed up into her cheeks. How well she remembered it all; the crowded opera house; the beautiful scene; the great orchestra, and the clear tenor voice of Lohengrin, singing the farewell to his beloved swan. Then the coming out into the cold, windy street and the shame and remorse that followed.

Suddenly the music stopped.

“ What's the matter? ” Mr. Douane asked, in surprise; “ have you forgotten it? ”

“ No, I haven't forgotten it,” his wife answered, with something between a sob and a laugh, “ but I can't play it to-night; my heart is too full. I haven't played Lohengrin since — why I don't believe I ever told you about my tragic experience last winter.”

“You have told me of experiences which seemed to me sufficiently tragic, but what is this particular one?”

“I suppose I was foolish to take it as seriously as I did,” said Mrs. Douane. “It really wasn’t as tragic as many other things, but it came at a time when I had just about reached the end of my tether, and you know it is always the last straw that breaks the camel’s back. It was in March, and I was about as blue and discouraged as any one well could be. I had been hungering for a little music for once, but never felt I could spare the money for a ticket to a concert. Then one day I happened to see in the paper that they were giving ‘Lohengrin’ at the Saturday matinee that week, and the temptation proved too great to be resisted. I struggled with my economical scruples for two days, and then on Friday afternoon, I let scruples go to the winds, went to the opera house, and bought a ticket for the balcony. It cost me three dollars, and I knew I hadn’t a dollar to waste on frivolities, but it was my one dissipation of the winter.

“I hurried home with my treasure, feeling like a naughty child, who has stolen a piece of cake, and then what do you suppose I discovered?”

“What?” inquired Mr. Douane, as his wife paused dramatically, and Gretel, on the stairs, held her breath, and leaned forward to catch every word.

“I had lost my ticket,” said Mrs. Douane, solemnly.

“Lost your ticket?” repeated her husband; “how did it happen — where did you put it?”

“In my purse, I thought, but it must have dropped out, for I found the clasp unfastened. I really don’t think I ever had quite such a shock in my life. I rushed back to the opera house, hoping the ticket might have been picked up and returned to the box office, but of course it was of no use. It was a very windy day, and the envelope may have been blown away, nobody knows where. There was nothing to be done but go home and bear the disappointment as well as I could.”

“Poor little girl,” said Mr. Douane, tenderly, “I can imagine what it meant to you. I should like to find the fellow who picked up that ticket, and give him a piece of my mind. Any one should have known that the proper thing to do was to return it to the box office. Did you go back again? It might have been returned later, you know.”

“ Oh, yes, I tried twice more before giving up all hope. Unfortunately, I did not remember the number of my seat, and the man at the box office assured me there was no hope. Whoever found the ticket must have used it, but perhaps it was never picked up at all. I think I was about as unhappy that night as any girl could be, but you know the old saying, ‘ The darkest hour is always just before dawn.’ It was the very next day that Mrs. Barlow’s letter came, asking me to go to Old Point, and it was only a week later that you and I met; so I ought not to complain, ought I? ”

“ Well, perhaps not, but I still maintain that I should like to find the person who picked up that ticket. It was a confoundedly dishonest trick not to have handed it in at the box office.”

Mr. Douane said a good deal more, but that was all Gretel heard. As silently as it had come, the little figure on the stairs rose and slipped away. The child’s face was very white, and her eyes were big and frightened. When she reached her own room, she closed the door softly, and sank down in a little heap on the bed. She was trembling all over.

“ It was Barbara’s ticket to fairy-land, and I stole it,” she whispered. “ Percy said it was a

confoundedly dishonest thing to do. Barbara loves 'Lohengrin' as much as I do, and she was poor, too. I knew I had been wicked, but I never knew I'd really been dishonest. I love Barbara better than any one in the world, and I stole her ticket to fairy-land!"

Poor little repentant Cinderella! Her happy day was over; the clock had struck twelve.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER THE CLOCK STRUCK TWELVE

IT was still very early the next morning when Gretel awoke; a robin was singing on a tree just outside her window, but everything else was still. For the first few bewildered moments she could not remember where she was, or what had happened, and lay wondering idly why her head ached, and her eyes felt so stiff and swollen. Then it all came back with a rush; the music, Barbara's story, and those dreadful words of her brother's. Afterwards the long hours she had lain awake, alone in the darkness, trying to make up her mind what she ought to do. She had cried herself to sleep at last, having finally decided upon the course of action, which it seemed to the poor foolish little girl, was the right one to take.

"I've got to tell them; I've got to; I've got to," she had told herself resolutely. "I couldn't go on living here, letting them love me, and be good to me, and not tell them I was a dishonest

person. Of course they won't ever love me any more when they know, but I can't help that. Percy will be so ashamed to have a dishonest girl for a sister, and Barbara won't want to ever see me again."

It was a terrible thought, but it had to be faced. It never occurred to Gretel for a moment that the ticket she had picked up on the sidewalk, in front of the opera house, might not be the one her sister-in-law had lost. "Lohengrin" — the windy afternoon — the date — everything pointed too plainly to the fact that the tickets were one and the same.

And now it was morning, and she must begin her preparations, or it would be too late to carry out the plan she had decided upon. If she waited until people were up, she might be stopped and asked awkward questions, and she must get away before Percy and Barbara knew — she could never face them after that, she would be too much ashamed. With as little noise as possible, she crept out of bed, and began putting on her clothes. How merrily the birds sang and how brightly the sun was shining. She remembered that this was to have been her first day in her beautiful new home. But she never wavered for a moment in her purpose. It did not take

long to dress, for she had decided to omit her usual morning bath, lest the sound of running water should disturb the still sleeping household. She was just fastening her dress when another sound besides the singing of the birds, broke the early morning stillness; the shrill whistle of a passing train, and she suddenly remembered that Percy had told her the railway station was not more than half a mile away.

“I’m glad it isn’t far,” she said to herself, with a feeling of something like relief; “I can easily walk there, and there must be plenty of trains going to New York. I’ve got enough money for a ticket. I’m glad I didn’t spend all the ten dollars Percy gave me the day before the wedding.” And she slipped into her pocket the pretty little silver purse her brother had given her.

This done, Gretel opened the closet door, in quest of her hat. At sight of the row of pretty frocks that Higgins had unpacked the night before, she was conscious of a sharp little stab of pain.

“It’s dreadful to have to leave all those lovely things,” she said, with a sob. “It doesn’t seem quite grateful either, when Percy was so good to buy them all for me, but I couldn’t stay and

not tell, and when he knows I'm a dishonest person he won't want me anyway. Perhaps they can find some other girl to give the clothes to, who will deserve them more than I did."

She selected her plainest hat, and began putting a few necessary toilet articles into the suit case Higgins had left on the lowest shelf of the closet. Having procured a night-gown, and a fresh set of underclothes from the bureau drawer, she hesitated for a moment, and then drew the packet of old letters from beneath her pillow, and tucked it carefully away in one corner of the suit-case. She glanced regretfully at the row of shabby books, but decided it would not be possible to carry them, and tried to comfort herself with the reflection that Barbara would take care of them for her — Barbara was always so kind.

Her preparations completed, Gretel sat down at the desk to write her confession. She selected a sheet of paper; dipped her pen in the ink, and began to write; but her fingers trembled so she could scarcely form the letters, and it was a very blotted, illegible little note that Higgins, coming in an hour later to wake her little charge, found on the desk, addressed to Mr. Percy Douane.

"DARLING PERCY": it began.

"When you get this I shall have gone away,

and you and Barbara won't ever see me any more. I suppose it would be much braver if I stayed and told you myself instead of writing, but I am not at all brave.

“Dear Percy, I may as well say it right away, I am a dishonest person. I stole Barbara's ticket to fairy-land — I mean the opera. I didn't know it was hers till last night, but I always knew it was somebody's. I found it on the sidewalk, and I kept it, and went to hear Lohengrin. I knew it was wicked, but I wanted to hear Lohengrin more than anything else in the world, and I thought nobody would ever find out. Nobody ever did, but now I know it was Barbara's ticket, I can't keep the secret any longer.

“It happened the very afternoon you came home. I was going to tell you once, but you said to let bygones be bygones, and I was so glad, because I thought if you knew you might not love me, and nobody had loved me since Father died. If I hadn't found out it was Barbara's ticket I am afraid I might never have told, but I couldn't go on living here in this beautiful place, and having everybody so good to me, and not have you know I was a dishonest person. If I didn't tell now, I should be a great deal more dishonest than I was before.

“I am going to some old friends of Father's in New York, and I think they'll let me stay with them till I can earn some money. I don't play the piano at all well now, but I play much better than a boy I know, and he said his father was go-

ing to get him into vaudeville, so I think perhaps Fritz Lipheim can get me into vaudeville, too, and just as soon as I have earned three dollars I will send it to Barbara, to pay for that ticket. I heard her tell you it cost three dollars.

“ Please don't be any angrier with me than you can help. I know you can't ever love me any more, because you love Barbara so much, and it was her ticket, but she is so good I think perhaps she will forgive me when she knows how sorry and ashamed I am.

“ Good-by, dear Percy; thank you a million times for all the beautiful things you have done for me, and please try to forgive me if you possibly can.

“ Your loving little sister,

“ GRETTEL.

“ P.S. I am not taking any more clothes than I can help. I hope you will be able to find some other little girl to give them to, for I know she will love them as much as I did.”

Gretel was not at all satisfied with her letter when she read it over, but there was no time to write another, for already the clock on the stairs was striking six, and in another half hour the servants would be up and about. So, having put the poor little confession in the most conspicuous place on the desk and given one more glance about the pretty room, which was to have been

hers, she opened her door, and stepped softly out into the silent hall. How very still it was; evidently the household was still in bed and asleep. Gretel stole on tiptoe past her brother's closed door, and down the front stairs to the lower hall. The front door was fastened, but the key turned easily in the lock, and two minutes later a little figure, carrying a heavy suit-case, was walking rapidly down the broad avenue to the gate.

It was the beginning of a very hot day, but as yet the air felt fresh and cool, and the sun only comfortably warm. How beautiful it all was, with the dew sparkling on the grass in the bright morning sunshine, and birds singing in every tree. Gretel paused at the gate for one last long look, and a big lump rose in her throat, but still she did not waver in her purpose. With one quickly suppressed sob, she turned resolutely away, and in another moment Cinderella had turned her back on the palace of beauty, and was trudging away down the dusty road to the station.

It was still too early for many people to be about, and Gretel did not meet a single person between her brother's house and the little country station, which she remembered having passed in

the motor-car the evening before. The station was closed and locked, and she was beginning to wonder what she should do next when a train came puffing up to the platform. Gretel sprang forward eagerly, her poor little heart pounding so that she could scarcely breathe.

“Is this train going to New York?” she inquired of the brakeman.

“Yes,” answered the man, regarding her rather curiously; “want to get on?”

“I—I haven’t any ticket,” faltered Gretel; “I’ve got the money for one, but the station is shut up.”

“You can pay on the train,” the man assured her. “Hurry up if you want to get on board; we only stop here one minute.”

Without another word, Gretel hastily mounted the steps of one of the cars, the brakeman good-naturedly helping her with her suit-case, glancing behind him at the same time, as though in expectation of more passengers.

“Going to New York all by yourself?” he inquired in some surprise.

Gretel nodded.

“Pretty early in the morning to be going to town, ain’t it? Expecting somebody to meet you at the Grand Central?”

"I am going to some friends in New York," said Gretel, and there was so much dignity in her tone, that the brakeman decided she must be able to take care of herself, and asked no further questions.

"It's quite true, I am going to friends," Gretel told herself, as she sank into an empty seat. "Mrs. Lipheim is my friend, and so is Fritz. I know they'll both be glad to see me, even if they didn't invite me, and I haven't heard from them in such a long time."

She recalled the many acts of kindness shown her by Fritz Lipheim and his mother in the old studio days, and at the time of her father's death. She had once gone to have supper with Mrs. Lipheim, and she remembered the cozy little flat, and the kind old German woman bustling about her neat kitchen. The thought of that supper reminded her of the fact that she had had no breakfast that morning, and she suddenly realized that she was very hungry.

"I'm afraid I shall be late for the Lipheims' breakfast," she thought a little uneasily, "but they are so kind, they'll be sure to give me something to eat."

She had never forgotten the Lipheims' address, although she had not been there since her

father's death. She had once asked Mrs. Marsh if she might go to see her old friends, but that lady had refused so decidedly that she had never dared broach the subject again. Since her brother's return she had not been in New York long enough to make calls, especially as the Lipheims lived in Harlem, but Barbara had promised to take her some day to see her kind old friends. And now she was going all by herself, but under what sadly different circumstances from any she had anticipated.

When the conductor came to collect the tickets, Gretel explained about the closed station, and taking out her purse, inquired the price of a trip to New York. The conductor looked at her much as the brakeman had done, but she seemed such a capable little person, and so thoroughly convinced of what she wanted to do, that he decided it was none of his business, and walked away, after receiving her fare, and returning the proper change.

It was a slow train, and made a great many stops. As they neared the city, the car began to fill up, chiefly with men and women on their way to work, but no one took any particular notice of the solitary little girl. Gretel's heart grew heavier and heavier. She heard a man in the seat

behind her say it was half-past seven. By this time Higgins must have come to call her, and have found her letter to Percy. How shocked and pained they must all be when they learned the dreadful truth about her. Of course they would never want to have anything more to do with her now they knew her to be a dishonest person. A big tear splashed down on Gretel's cheek, and was quickly followed by another, but the child brushed them away hurriedly, fearing the passengers might see that she was crying. Gretel was a proud child, and she did not want to be pitied or questioned by strangers.

CHAPTER XV

ALONE IN THE BIG CITY

IT was eight o'clock when the train steamed slowly into the Grand Central, and Gretel, with the heavy suit-case clutched tightly in her arms, made her way out into the crowded station. The bustle and confusion bewildered her a little, although she had been accustomed to the city all her life. The roar of the elevated trains; the shouting of cab drivers, and the pushing, jostling throngs, made her feel all at once very lonely, and rather frightened. Her head was beginning to ache, too, and she was more than ever conscious of the fact that she had not had any breakfast. Still, it never occurred to her to stop and buy something to eat, although there was still nearly two dollars left in her purse. Her one thought was to reach the Lipheims' flat as soon as possible.

At the corner of Forty-second Street she paused for a moment.

“East One Hundred and Sixth Street,” she said to herself; “I must take the Third Avenue Elevated.” And she turned resolutely eastward.

Early as it still was, the streets were almost unbearably hot. The air which had felt so cool and fresh in the country, was oppressive with heat and smoke, and Gretel’s suit case was very heavy. By the time the little girl had reached the elevated station, and climbed the long flight of stairs to the platform, she felt as tired as if she had been walking miles. She was fortunate, however, in getting a seat in a train bound for Harlem, and it felt cooler up there on a level with people’s second story windows, than it had done in the street below.

The ride uptown was not unpleasant, but it was soon over, and then Gretel found herself standing on a street corner, in a part of the city that was quite unfamiliar to her. She felt bewildered, and uncertain as to which direction she ought to turn.

“I can’t remember whether it was east or west of Third Avenue,” she said to herself, wondering why her head felt so uncomfortably light. “I’ll try east first and see if the numbers are right.”

She turned down a shabby street, where a great

many children were playing on the sidewalk, but after walking a short distance, and scanning the numbers of the houses, she decided that she had made a mistake, and should have crossed the avenue and gone west. So, with a sigh, she turned and retraced her steps to the corner. Having safely crossed the avenue, despite the constant procession of trucks and trolley cars, she once more began an anxious scrutiny of the numbers on the houses. Yes, she was right this time; these were the two hundreds, and two hundred and seventeen was the number of which she was in search. Her heart began to beat very fast again as she neared her destination. After all, it was a long time since she had seen or heard of the Lipheims. Suppose they had moved. Suddenly she stopped short, with a little cry of astonishment.

“Why, why,” she gasped, her eyes growing round with dismay, “that is the house, I’m sure, but — but they’re tearing it down. Nobody can be living there now.”

It was too true. A gang of workmen were engaged in demolishing a building, which had evidently once been an apartment house; already the doors and windows had been taken out, and a part of the walls were down. Gretel stood

quite still, staring stupidly before her. The shock was so sudden and unexpected that for the first few moments she could do nothing but stare in helpless bewilderment. Then, with a great effort, she pulled herself together, and approached one of the workmen.

“Would you please tell me if this house used to be two hundred and seventeen?” she inquired timidly.

“It was that,” the Irishman answered, good-naturedly, “and it’s going to be the same number when it’s made over into a model apartment-house.”

“I — I suppose you don’t know where the people who used to live here have moved to?”

“I do not. Are you looking for somebody who used to live in two seventeen?”

Gretel nodded, and the man regarded the white, tired little face more attentively.

“Maybe you could find out in one of them stores on the corner,” he suggested, and Gretel, having thanked the friendly Irishman, turned, and once more walked back to the noisy corner.

There was a small grocery on the corner, and Gretel, who had not been unfamiliar with such places in the old studio days, went in, and put her question to the young man behind the counter.



“WOULD YOU PLEASE TELL ME IF THIS HOUSE USED TO BE TWO HUNDRED AND SEVENTEEN ?”— Page 250.

"I am looking for some people who used to live in number two seventeen," she explained; "their name is Lipheim. I thought perhaps you could tell me where they have moved."

"Lipheim, Lipheim," the young man repeated; "I sort of remember the name, but — oh, yes, I know, an old German lady, who talked queer English?"

"Yes, that's Mrs. Lipheim," said Gretel, eagerly, "she speaks very broken English. Her son plays the violin — do you know where they live now?"

The man shook his head.

"Couldn't say," he said. "The old lady was in here one day just before they began tearing down those houses, and she told me they were going somewhere in the Bronx, but she didn't leave any address. Wouldn't you like to sit down for a few minutes? It's a hot morning, and your bag's pretty heavy."

"No, thank you," said Gretel; "you are very kind, but I've got to find Mrs. Lipheim." And she turned resolutely away.

She inquired at every store on the block, but always with the same discouraging result. Some of the shopkeepers did not remember the Lipheims at all; others had known them as

customers, but nobody appeared to have the slightest idea where they had gone.

“What shall I do — oh, what shall I do now?” thought Gretel, as she came out of the last shop, and stood looking helplessly up and down the avenue. “Nobody knows where they’ve moved to, and how can I possibly find them?”

But if she did not find the Lipheims, to whom should she go? That was the terrible question, and suddenly Gretel began to tremble, and her head felt so queer she was obliged to lean against a lamppost for support.

“I’m all alone,” whispered the poor child, with a sob, “and I don’t know where to go.”

All at once, she realized that she was both very tired and very hungry. Still, it did not occur to her to buy any food. She must find somebody to take care of her, and help her to earn some money, but who was it to be? Rapidly she ran over in her mind the names of the few people she knew. There were the Barlows. Jerry and Geraldine would be glad to see her, and Mr. and Mrs. Barlow were always kind, but if they knew she was a dishonest person, would they want to have anything more to do with her? She remembered Geraldine had said her mother was

very particular about what children she and Jerry associated with. If Mrs. Barlow knew that she had stolen a ticket to fairy-land, she might refuse to allow her children to associate with her, and, oh, she could not bear that — she would be so terribly ashamed. There were Mrs. Marsh and Ada, but she did not want to go back to them. Besides, it was not at all likely they would take her back, since Mrs. Marsh and Percy had quarreled, and Percy was no longer paying her board. She thought of several friends of her father's, who had once been kind to her, but she had no idea where they lived. She remembered the long list of maids who had come and gone during her year with Mrs. Marsh, but the only one among them for whom she had cared in the least was Dora Grubb. Dora had always been kind, and then there were Lillie and Peter. Peter must be in a vaudeville company by this time. Surely he and his family were the very people most likely to be able to help her now. If she only knew where they lived! She remembered that Dora had once spoken of her family as "living uptown on the East Side." It was rather vague, but still she might be able to find them if she tried very hard. This was "uptown," and it was also "the East Side." She could keep on

walking until — well, until something happened. So, with a weary sigh, she clutched the heavy suit-case more tightly, and moved on slowly along the crowded, noisy street.

It was nearly two hours later, and Gretel was still plodding wearily on. She had walked a very long way, how far she did not know. The part of the city she was in was quite strange to her, and she had no very clear idea as to just where she was. The scorching June sun was beating down upon her, and it seemed to be growing hotter every minute. She no longer felt any desire for food. A faint, sick feeling was creeping over her, which rendered the thought of breakfast anything but agreeable: Every few minutes she was obliged to stop, and set her suit-case down on the sidewalk. She was tired, oh, so tired; there was no use in trying to keep the tears back any longer, and she let them come thick and fast. She had met plenty of boys and girls, but none among them had at all resembled her old acquaintances Peter and Lillie Grubb.

“There isn’t any use; I can’t carry it any longer,” she said, with a sob, as she set her burden down for at least the tenth time in the past hour. “I’ll have to leave it somewhere.”

She looked about for a suitable hiding-place,

but none presented itself. She had turned from a dirty cross street into a wide avenue, noisy with the clang of trolleys, and the roar of an elevated train. There was nothing to be done but leave the suit-case where she was, even at the risk of its being carried off long before she could come back for it. But first she would secure her greatest treasure; the packet of old letters. So, having removed the precious package, and slipped it into her pocket — which was fortunately a large one — she resigned the suit-case to its fate, and prepared to resume her hopeless quest.

There was a dull pain in her head, and queer lights were beginning to dance before her eyes, which at times prevented her seeing very clearly where she was going. Suddenly she realized that she was walking on the sunny side of the street, and that if she crossed the avenue she would be in the shade. How stupid she had been not to think of that before. She would go over to the shade, and sit down somewhere to rest for a little while. Perhaps when she had rested she would feel better. So, with one regretful glance at the suit-case, which must be left behind, she stepped off the curb and started to cross the avenue.

A small boy with his hands in his pockets, was sauntering slowly down the shady side of Second Avenue. It was much too hot to walk fast, and besides, he was in no hurry. It was not yet eleven o'clock, and he dared not present himself before his mother and sisters until noon. For this was a school day, and he had not appeared at the school building at the usual morning hour. In plain English, he was playing truant. He had decided that a swim at one of the free baths would be much more agreeable than spending three hours in a stuffy school-room on that hot morning, but his mother was not a believer in "the law of love," and consequently, he was not anxious to be seen by his family before the noon lunch hour.

The swim had proved most refreshing, but one was not allowed to remain in the free baths for an indefinite period, and hence it was that he found himself wandering aimlessly down Second Avenue at eleven o'clock in the morning, with nothing particular to do for the next hour.

Suddenly his attention was attracted by a small crowd gathered on a corner and he quickened his steps, in the hope of discovering something of interest.

"I bet it's an accident," he remarked aloud,

with a brightening face. He was not at all a cruel boy, but an accident meant an excitement, and excitement was what Peter Grubb craved more than anything else in the world.

"It is an accident," he added, as he drew nearer the scene of action; "the cars are stopped; somebody must have got run over." And he quickened his pace to a run.

"What's up?" he demanded breathlessly of another youth of about his own age, as he shouldered his way through the crowd.

"Kid got knocked down by a trolley car," was the answer; "they've carried her into the drug store, and there's been an ambulance call."

Peter's heart began to beat faster. Not that he felt any particular interest in the unfortunate "kid," but to see some one taken off to the hospital in an ambulance was always an exciting experience, and one that could be related afterwards to a group of interested friends. So he wasted no more time in asking questions, but made his way through the open door of the drug store, round which a sympathizing crowd was hovering.

It did not take Peter long to see what had happened. They had laid the injured child on the counter, and some one was trying to stanch the

blood, which flowed from a deep cut on her forehead. Her eyes were closed, and she lay very still.

"Is she killed?" Peter inquired in a rather awed whisper.

"No, we don't think so," answered the man to whom he put the question. "I saw it happen, and the motor-man got the brakes on just in time. She's badly hurt, though, I'm afraid; there's an ugly cut on her head, and she was unconscious when we picked her up."

"Does anybody know who the little girl is?" somebody asked.

A policeman, who was among the crowd in the doorway, stepped forward.

"She don't live anywhere round here," he said; "I know all the kids in this neighborhood, and I never laid eyes on her before. She's got good clothes on; looks as if she might have come over from the West Side."

Peter edged his way nearer to the counter. The little figure lay so very still that he was beginning to feel uncomfortable. He would just take one look, and then run away. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and turned excitedly to the interested spectators.

“Hello! Oh, I say! I know who she is; I’ve seen her before.”

“Where does she live?” half a dozen voices inquired at once, and all eyes were turned upon the excited Peter.

“Why,” said Peter, looking very much bewildered, “it’s the funniest thing I ever knew. I can’t make out what she was doing around here. My sister used to work for her folks; their name is Marsh, and they live away down Broadway, opposite the opera house.”

CHAPTER XVI

FROM SHADOW TO SUNSHINE

SOME one was playing the Swan song from "Lohengrin"; it was very beautiful, but it sounded so far away. Gretel wanted to get nearer to the music. She tried to rise, but there was such a heavy weight on her feet that she could not move. Then the music changed to the roar of an elevated train, and she felt the hot sun beating down upon her head. Oh, how terribly hot it was, and she was so thirsty, too. If some one would only give her a drink of water, but when she tried to ask for it her tongue refused to form the words. The cruel sun was burning her up. There must be shade somewhere. She would cross the street and try to find it, but what would become of her bag? She was too tired to carry it any longer. How those elevated trains roared. She was afraid to move, yet she must get into the shade. She made another feeble effort to move, and then something soft and cool was laid on her forehead, and a voice that

sounded as if it came from a great way off said —

“Lie still, dear; you are quite safe here.”

Gretel tried to explain about the sun, but the words would not come right, and she gave it up in despair. She liked the soft, cool thing on her forehead, but the trouble was it did not stay cool long enough. Everything was hot, burning hot. If somebody would only give her some cold water to drink, but when at last, a glass was held to her lips, and she tried to swallow, the water, like everything else, seemed hot, and it did not quench her thirst.

There was pain, too, dreadful pain all over her, and every time she tried to move into a more comfortable position, some force seemed to hold her still. At last she found that she could speak, and then she began to call piteously for Percy and Barbara; Jerry and Geraldine; and Higgins, but nobody answered — nobody seemed to understand. She could see faces — so many faces — but there was not one among them, that she knew. Once she was sure she heard some one crying, and for a moment she thought it was Barbara, but when she looked again a strange face was bending over her, and a lady dressed in white,

with a cap on her head, was offering her something to drink.

Gradually she began to remember things in a vague, confused way. She remembered going to New York on the train, and trying to find the Lipheims. Was she still in the street, she wondered? If so, it had grown strangely quiet and cool. She was no longer burning up, only she was so very tired. She must have walked a long way, and then — what had happened? There had been a great noise of shouting, and something big had come terribly close to her, and after that she did not remember any more.

While she was still pondering on this subject, in a weak, half conscious way, some one bent over her, and she saw again the lady in the white dress and cap. The lady did not speak, but she smiled, and her smile was pleasant, and somehow reassuring. Then she put something that looked like a tube under Gretel's tongue, and when she took it out again, she looked pleased, and said to some one, the little girl could not see —

“She is much better; the fever has gone down to a hundred and one. That is a great gain over yesterday.”

Gretel wanted to say that she understood, and to ask some questions, but she was so tired that it

seemed easier just to lie still with her eyes shut. She drifted off into a dream, in which she seemed to hear Percy and Barbara talking about "Lohengrin."

"Poor little girl; poor little kiddie." Yes, that was surely Percy's voice, and it did not sound angry either, only very sorry. Gretel did not open her eyes, but she tried to remember things. Why was her brother sorry, and why had she expected him to be angry? It was something — about — about being a dishonest person. Ah, she remembered all about it now, and with a sharp little cry, she started up, fully conscious at last.

"I stole Barbara's ticket to fairy-land," she wailed. "Percy said I was a dishonest person. I didn't mean to be dishonest; I didn't — I didn't!"

"Hush, Gretel darling, lie still; everything is all right. There, there, don't cry; see, Percy and I are here; we have come to take care of our little girl."

"Did you get my letter, Barbara?" whispered Gretel, as she nestled in her sister's arms, and gazed lovingly into the sweet face bending over her.

"Yes, dearest, but, oh, my poor, foolish little Gretel, how could you do such a dreadful thing as

to run away and leave us? Didn't you know how much Percy and I loved you?"

"I thought you wouldn't love me any more when you knew how wicked I had been," said Gretel, humbly. "I thought I would go to the Lipheims, and ask Fritz to get me a place with those vaudeville people Peter Grubb was going with, but they had moved, and I couldn't find them. Then it got so hot, and I was so dreadfully tired, and —"

"We know all about it, dear; don't talk; just lie still and get well. We won't leave you until you are able to come home, and then we shall all be so happy again."

"And you are not angry — you really can forgive me?"

Barbara did not answer in words, but her kisses and her happy tears were all the assurance Gretel needed.

"And will Percy forgive me, too?" she whispered timidly.

"There isn't anything to forgive, Pussy," said Mr. Douane huskily, as he bent to kiss the pale, wistful little face.

"But I really was a dishonest person," persisted Gretel, feverishly; "are you sure you want a dishonest person to live in your house?"

“Quite sure, little girl; home wouldn’t be home without our Gretel.”

Gretel gave a long sigh of utter content, and her eyelids drooped. In another moment she had fallen asleep.

When Gretel awoke after a long, refreshing nap, her brother had gone away, but Barbara was still in the room, and she and the lady in the white cap were having a whispered conversation by the window. Gretel lay watching them in silence for several minutes. She was very happy, but she did not feel much like talking just yet. Slowly she began to take in the details of her surroundings. She was in a small, plainly furnished room, and an electric fan was waving gently over her bed. She wondered where she could be, but decided that it did not really matter so long as Barbara was there, too, and just then her sister-in-law glanced in her direction, and discovered that she was awake.

“Where are we, Barbara?” Gretel asked a few minutes later, when Mrs. Douane was sitting by her bedside, and the lady in the white cap had given her something to drink, which tasted very good.

“We are in a hospital in New York. They brought you here after your accident.”

“Accident?” repeated Gretel, looking puzzled; “did I have an accident? Oh, yes, I know; I was crossing the street, and something very big came close to me, and then I don’t remember any more. Was I run over?”

“You were knocked down by a trolley car, and badly hurt, but you are ever so much better now, and you will be quite well again soon.”

“How did you and Percy find me?” was Gretel’s next question. She was beginning to feel a good deal more interest in things than she had felt a few hours earlier.

“Why, dearest, it was all quite wonderful. If I tell you about it will you try to lie still, and not ask any more questions? The doctor says you must be kept very quiet or the fever may come back.”

Gretel promised that she would be very good, and Mrs. Douane went on to explain.

“When Higgins came to call you, and found your room empty, she was very much surprised, especially when she discovered that your suitcase had also disappeared. Then she saw your letter on the desk, and went to call Percy and me. You said you were going to some old friends in New York, and the only people we could think of were Mrs. Marsh and her daughter. Percy

started for New York as soon as he could, and in the meantime we telephoned Mrs. Marsh, telling her what had happened, and asking her to communicate with us the moment you arrived. As soon as Percy reached the city he went at once to Mrs. Marsh's, hoping to find you there, but of course they knew nothing about you, and he was just starting off to put the case in the hands of the police, when a telephone message came, saying you had been hurt, and were to be taken to this hospital. And here comes the wonderful part of the story. When you were lying unconscious in a drug store, you were recognized by a little boy, who gave his name as Peter Grubb. He said he knew where you lived, and gave Mrs. Marsh's address to the people at the store, who at once communicated with us."

"How very interesting," said Gretel. "Peter Grubb was the very person I was trying to find when I couldn't find the Lipheims, but I hadn't any idea where he lived, except that it was uptown on the East Side. I thought perhaps he might be able to tell me how to get into vaudeville. Oh, Barbara dear, you can't think what a comfort it is to know you really don't mind seeing me again, even when you know how wicked I was."

"Why, Gretel, how could you think such

dreadful things? Percy and I have been here ever since we heard of your accident, only you were too ill to know us. It has been a very sad time, but it is all over now, so shut your eyes, and try to go to sleep again. I see Miss Simpson is beginning to look as if she thought I was letting you talk too much.”

It was an afternoon a week later, and Gretel was sitting bolstered up with pillows in the arm-chair by the window. She was still very pale and thin, but was gaining strength each day, and that morning the doctor had removed the last strip of plaster from her forehead. Miss Simpson — the white-capped nurse — was reading aloud to her, and on the table was a big bowl filled with beautiful roses, which had arrived only an hour before from Mr. Douane’s place on the Hudson. Gretel looked the picture of content, as she leaned back among her pillows, listening to the adventures of Tom Sawyer. She had grown very fond of kind Miss Simpson, and her days at the big hospital had been anything but unpleasant.

A knock at the door brought the reading to a sudden pause, and in answer to Miss Simpson’s “Come in,” an official appeared with a card, which he handed to the nurse.

“Some friends have come to see you, Gretel,” said Miss Simpson, glancing at the card. “I think they must be the children who sent ‘Tom Sawyer’; Jerry and Geraldine Barlow.”

“Oh, I should love to see them,” cried Gretel, eagerly. “May they come in, Miss Simpson?”

Miss Simpson said they certainly might, and that she would go to the reception room, and bring them herself. She disappeared for a few moments, and when she returned she was closely followed by the twins, both looking very much awed, and almost preternaturally solemn.

At sight of Gretel, with all her hair cut off, and a big scar over one temple, they became so painfully embarrassed, that neither of them spoke a word, and, contrary to the usual order of things, she was forced to make all the advances.

“I’m so glad to see you both,” she said, cordially. “Won’t you sit down?”

The twins took the chairs Miss Simpson placed for them, still in the same embarrassed silence, and the nurse, thinking the children might feel more at their ease if left to themselves, went out of the room, after telling Gretel to ring the little bell at her side if she wanted anything. Then Jerry found his tongue, and remarked in his gruffest tones —

"We're ever so glad you're better."

"You really are better, aren't you?" inquired Geraldine, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, indeed; I'm almost well. I'm to go home the day after to-morrow. Percy is coming for me in the automobile. He and Barbara have stayed here most of the time, but since I've been so much better they have gone home at night. Barbara was here all this morning; I'm sorry you didn't come in time to see her."

"You've been dreadfully ill," said Geraldine, solemnly.

"I suppose I was at first, but I didn't know anything about how ill I was till I began to get better."

"Too bad you had to have your hair cut off," observed Jerry, in a tone of regret.

"Oh, Miss Simpson says it will soon grow again," Gretel assured him cheerfully. "The scar on my forehead won't show so much then either. It's rather pleasant to have short hair in this hot weather. Have you gone to the country yet?"

"No, but we're going to-morrow; that's why we came to see you this afternoon. Mother brought us, and she's coming back in half an hour. She sent her love."

“Mother cried about you when you were so ill,” said Geraldine. “You see, she was afraid you were going to die. I cried, too, and I think Jerry did, though he didn’t want anybody to see him do it.”

“I did not,” declared Jerry, indignantly, and he grew so red, and looked so uncomfortable that Gretel hastened to change the subject by saying —

“I want to thank you for all those nice books you sent. Miss Simpson is reading ‘Tom Sawyer’ to me now, and it’s very interesting.”

“Tom had some fine adventures, didn’t he?” said Jerry, eagerly. He was very glad to steer the conversation safely away from the subject of tears. “I wish we could be lost in a cave, and go for pirates.”

“I don’t,” declared Geraldine, with conviction. “I think one adventure is quite enough for any person to have, and I’ve given Mother a solemn promise never to frighten her again, and I mean to keep my word.”

“Gretel had a bigger adventure than any of us,” said Jerry, not without a shade of envy in his tone. “It must have been awfully exciting to get knocked down by a trolley car, and be taken to a hospital in an ambulance, only I shouldn’t

like to have to stay in bed for such a long time afterwards.”

“But I didn’t go away to have an adventure,” said Gretel, reddening; “I went because — because —”

“We know,” said Geraldine; “Mrs. Douane told Mother, and she told us. She talked about it for a long time one night after we’d said our prayers.”

“Did she think I was a very dreadful person?” inquired Gretel, rather tremulously. “I’m afraid people won’t ever like me any more when they know how wicked I was, even though Percy and Barbara have forgiven me, and say they love me just the same.”

“Mother doesn’t think you at all wicked,” protested Geraldine; “that isn’t the reason why she talked to us. She thinks you were very brave to confess the way you did, and she hopes we should be just as brave if we ever did anything naughty that nobody knew about but ourselves.”

“Did your mother really say that?” demanded Gretel, her face brightening. “You aren’t making it up just to make me feel comfortable?”

“We don’t tell things that aren’t true,” returned Geraldine, indignantly, and Jerry added — “Mother truly did say it, and a lot more, too.

She's awfully fond of you, and so is Father. They were dreadfully worried when they thought you were — I mean when you were so ill."

Gretel gave a long happy sigh.

"It's beautiful to have every one so kind and forgiving," she said; "but even if nobody ever punished me or scolded me, I shall always know myself how wicked I was."

Gretel's pale cheeks had grown suddenly very pink, but her honest eyes looked straight into her friends' as she spoke, and the twins were both much impressed.

"I guess that's what Mother means when she talks about our learning things by experience," said Geraldine, with a sudden inspiration. "She said your punishment was much greater than if you had been deprived of things, or locked in your room. It was all because of your conscience, you know. I think consciences are rather horrid things, don't you?"

"But suppose you hadn't told; nobody would ever have known anything about it," said Jerry reflectively.

"I had to tell," said Gretel, simply. "It was Barbara's ticket, and she and Percy were being good to me every minute. You would have told, too, Jerry, I know you would."

Jerry looked uncomfortable.

“Well, I guess I’d have felt pretty mean if I hadn’t,” he admitted. “I wonder if the Law of Love isn’t the best way, after all. It makes you feel so ashamed when you’re not punished for things you know you ought to be.”

“Of course it is,” chimed in Geraldine; “Mother always knows the best way of doing things. But she doesn’t read those books any more. She says she thinks she’s found out how to do it herself. I guess the Mind Cure is all right too. Perhaps if we’d kept on believing we wouldn’t have been seasick that day, we might have been all right. Anyhow, God took care of us when we asked Him to, and he took care of Gretel.”

“Yes, indeed He did!” cried Gretel, with shining eyes. “Just think how wonderful it all was. If Peter Grubb hadn’t happened to be right there, nobody would have known where I was, and Percy and Barbara might never have found me. We are all very grateful to Peter. Barbara found out where he lived, and went to see his mother. She brought them all some cream-puffs, because I told her how very fond Lillie was of them, and they were so pleased. Peter didn’t get

taken into the vaudeville company after all. They didn't think he had enough talent. Now he thinks he'll be either a fireman or a boy scout instead. But the nicest part of it all is that Barbara has engaged Dora to be our chambermaid. Dora is so happy, for she says she has never had a really good place, and she hates being a maid of all work. I'm so glad I'm going to see her again, for she was the first person who was kind to me at Mrs. Marsh's."

The children chatted on for another fifteen minutes, and then Miss Simpson came to tell them their mother had called for them, and the friends had to say good-by.

"But it won't be for so very long," said Gretel, cheerfully. "You know you are coming to make us a long visit in September. It's almost July now."

"Yes, and I'm going to write you a long letter every week all summer," promised Geraldine, resolutely choking down a rising lump in her throat. "Mother says if we read a little history, and write a letter to somebody every day, we needn't have any more lessons till we come back to New York. Isn't that splendid? We were so afraid we were going to have another old

teacher. Not that Miss Heath was really old, but then, you see, we don't care much for teachers, except when they're not teaching."

"What are you thinking of, Gretel?" Miss Simpson asked, with a smile, as she brought her little patient a glass of milk, when the visitors had gone. "You look as if you were very happy about something."

"I am," said Gretel, softly. "I was just thinking how many lovely people there are in the world, and how beautiful it is to be loved."

THE END

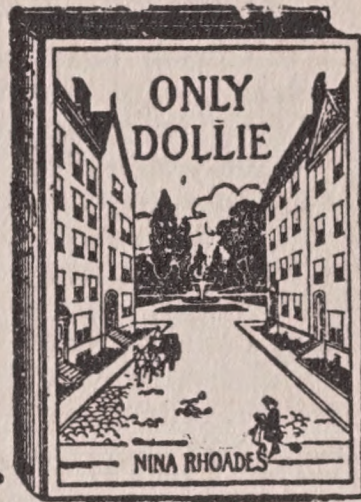
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kindness of heart into prominence, all are made very happy.

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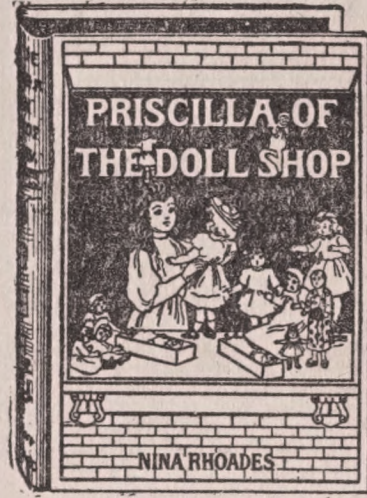
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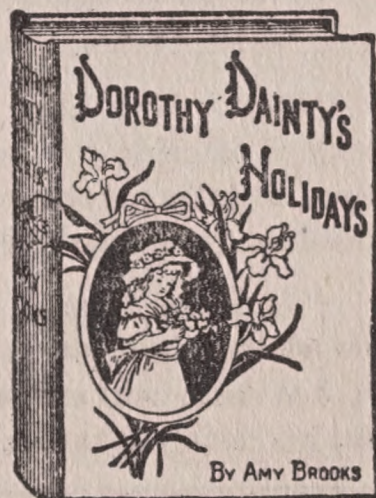
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Dorothy Dainty at School
Dorothy Dainty at the Shore
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