

LOUIS DON.

She came into the room, Miss Ellen Norton—in a swift, hurried sort of way, and sitting down by mamma's chair, she burst into tears.

"Why, Ellen, what is the matter?" asked mamma, in a voice full of surprise and solicitation, and she leaned forward and took her hand.

Miss Norton is quite at home at our house, and would bring any trouble she had to mamma's sympathy, for whom, I believe, she has more love and reverence than for anybody in the world.

My mother and Miss Norton were old and very dear friends, and when my teacher's father failed and died, and her mother followed her husband in a little while, and left her daughter in her youth, and grace, and sweetness, in the cold and loneliness of the world, mamma sent her to come to us, and offered her a home for life under our own roof. But Miss Norton would not consent to that, so that God had left her well health and education, which must be employed in some service for herself and the world; and when she instead, mamma and papa used their influence, and obtained a situation for her among the teachers at the academy.

That is a long time ago, at least it seems so to me; but they say the years go swifter as they grow heavier on our heads; at any rate, I became a pupil at the academy for every week on which Miss Norton engaged it as teacher, and that is three terms ago.

Miss Norton did not answer for a minute, but the tears flowed through the hand which shielded her eyes, and mamma stroked the other, and asked in her tender voice, "Ellen, my child, what is the matter?" At last she looked up with her stained, flushed face and quivering lips.

"Give me to give him up, Mrs. Hammond?"

"Oh, give you up?" asked mamma.

"That is you, Louis Don. There's no use in attempting to screen him any longer."

"Has he been guilty of any new offence?"

"Yes; and Mr. Allen, our President, says that this time he cannot overlook him, as an example must be made for the sake of the other scholars; and I had not the heart to make any plea in his behalf. He must go, and yet, Mrs. Hammond, I have loved that boy. I hoped to save him!" and the tears of Miss Norton flowed freely.

"I'm sorry—I'm sorry," and mamma shook her head, still holding Miss Norton's hand.

"That's all we can say, I know, for to do now seems beyond my power. This last disobedience of his was like the rest, not malicious, but daring, foolishly defiant. Just beyond the academy grounds there stands a large pear tree, bending under half-ripened fruit. Mr. Allen alluded to it the other morning after prayers, and absolutely interdicted any boy's approaching it. It did not belong to the academy, and he added, with much impressiveness, that any pupil who violated this command would be guilty of theft, and could no longer be an inmate of the school."

"That is the boy took the fruit afterwards. It was a grave offence, and doubly aggravated under the circumstances, Ellen."

"I know it, dear Mrs. Hammond. I do not seek to excuse him; and yet, remember that this boy's moral cultivation has been; remember that he was left fatherless and motherless before he could know either of his parents, and that he has been, so far, brought up by a careless, indifferent, good-natured, but he's under the rule of all his perceptions of right and wrong are confused and obscure. He has been taught to regard an act of this kind as something shriveled, brave, fine, manly, and this very night his uncle will laugh at the boy at home, when he recounts the whole transaction, and slap him on the shoulder approvingly, and say it was a jolly lark, and that 'that boy's nobody's fool,' and he's bound to make his way in the world."

"No, no shame! said mamma, and her voice was tremulous with indignation and pity.

"Yes; and what could one expect from a boy whose moral instincts were thus warped and perverted! And yet what noble possibilities there are in that boy! What a power for good or for evil he will be to the world! How he shrinks from, and loathes anything that he really sees is mean and contemptible! What a bright, warm, generous nature his! I would trust him, at any time, with



A TRUSTY MESSENGER.

unaccounted gold. He would shrink this moment from a lie, that is, what he would call a low mean, sneaking lie, with profound indignation. He has more influence over the boys than any other scholar in my department; and O, if conscientious and judicious parents had planted the right seeds in that affluent soil—true, solid principles had taken their strong, deep roots in that boy's soul, what a man he might become! and now he will be lost—irretrievably lost!" and here poor Miss Norton, my fair and sweet young teacher, sobbed as if her heart would break. And mamma laid her hand upon a more soothingly and caressingly on the young lady's arm.

"Don't say that, my dear child," she said. "You know in whose power it is to save him."

"I know it, O dearly beloved friend of my mother; and yet, my heart has yearned so over that boy—I have so longed to be the means of saving him; and when he goes out from the academy he will go out from all right influences into an atmosphere which can only nourish the weak and evil side of his nature; and he is so impressible, so strongly gregarious, so full of high animal spirits, that he always offers living in fun and frolic, and what he calls scraps; and all these will inevitably lead him into temptation. May God deliver him from evil, poor fatherless, motherless child!" said, fervently, my teacher, Miss Ellen Norton.

I went up to her—I don't think anybody had noticed that I was in the room before—and put my arms about her neck.

"O Miss Norton," I said, "I am sure that if Louis knew how bad you felt he would try to be a better boy!"

She smiled through her tears.

"I believe he would, my dear, if he could only understand it, for he really seems attached to me."

Just then my brother Guy called me to come out and look at the fine trout which he had caught in the brook, and when I returned, my teacher had gone.

Late on that same afternoon mamma sent me with some early strawberries to old Mrs. Matthews's grand-daughter, who is just convalescing from the typhoid fever. The wind blew fresh from the distant shore, and suddenly it seized the naphin which covered the fruit, and tossed and whirled it in the air like a swarm of snow-flakes, and another swift gust caught my bonnet, and swept it over the bars into the wheat field.

"O dear, what shall I do?" I cried, in my dismay, not knowing which to start after first.

"Hurry!—that's jolly!" cried a clear, merry voice, close at my ear, and turning, I beheld Louis Don, his great black eyes flashing and dancing for fun.

"O Louis, how can you laugh at me now?" I cried, just ready to break into tears.

"Well, I won't again, Mary; it's too bad!" Making a dart for the naphin, seizing that, and then springing over the fence, he returned in a moment with both the lost articles, and held them up to me, triumphantly saying—

"Wasn't that pretty well done, now?"

"Yes; thank you, Louis," and as I took them from his hand, and looked in his handsome, boyish face, the thought of all that had transpired last week with mamma and Miss Norton that afternoon returned to me, and I exclaimed—

"O Louis, if you only did everything as well!"

Those great, dark eyes of his grew full of serious wonder, as he asked—

"What do you mean, Mary?"

"I mean, Louis, that it wasn't well for you to climb Farmer Stewart's pear tree, especially after what Mr. Allen had said to all of us."

He started and looked confused a moment.

"Where did you learn that?" he stammered.

"Have the boys found it out? But it's safe with you, I know."

I think Louis likes me very much, as I do him, for he is always bringing me some pretty shells, or early hove, or deserted robin's nest, which proves that I am a favorite of his.

He did not wait this time to get my answer, but he burst into a loud laugh, and clapped his hands.

"O, said he, 'it was fun, the way I came it over old Farmer Stewart. Uncle John said it was the best joke of the season, and he nearly split his sides laughing when I told him."

"O Louis, don't—don't," I was stealing to take those pearls, which didn't belong to you."

"Stealing!" He gave a low whistle, which expressed a great deal of skepticism and contempt, a little anger, too. "You are a little prude, Mary Hammond; but for all that, you don't think I'm a thief?"

"I won't talk about that now, only I want to ask you a question, Louis."

"Well, here's having it," putting his hands in his pockets and looking comically serious.

"Don't you love our teacher, Miss Norton?"

His eyes answered for him, so did his lips—

"O course I do. She's just a darling, I tell you, Mary; I'd go a long way to serve her."

"And it would really trouble you to know she was deeply grieved, so that she cried as though her heart would break?"

"Yes, indeed, Mary. Has anybody been troubling her?"

"Yes, Louis, troubling her more than you can guess."

"Who?"

"And this boy of eleven years looked fierce as the picture of some old palmy knight in his armor."

"Who?—what do you mean, Mary Hammond?"

"And then, I hardly know how I did it, but there, standing before the bars of the great wheat field, with the winds ruffling in and out of the after tresses, and shaking us up until they seemed like drifts of snow, I told Louis all the conversation that had transpired between Miss Norton and mamma that afternoon—I suppose that I did not use just the language that my teacher did, though her words seemed to come right to my lips while I talked, and I know that I did not lose one of the ideas she expressed, and that when I ceased I found myself crying."

Louis Don had grown serious—serious as I never saw him before in my life, while he listened, and those large, black eyes of his seemed to have melted into a mist of tears when I stopped.

"I didn't think of Miss Norton when I went up the tree," he said.

"And if you had, and known just how it would grieve her, you would never have taken the pearls—would you, Louis?"

"Of course I wouldn't; I would have cut my right hand off first. But now it's done, Mary."

"Yes, and you'll be turned out of school, Louis?"

"I'll not let him. I can stand that!" and for a moment the handsome face was swollen, defiant.

"But just think how Miss Norton will grieve for you, because she loves you!" I saw that was the tender place in his heart.

"Yes; and I was amazed as though he thought but him—"I'd do almost anything to save her from feeling bad."

"And you'd grow up and become a bad man, after all?"

He was serious enough, now.

"I never thought of it in that light," he said.

"You know, Mary, that I love fun as I do my life, and to run my neck into all break-neck scrapes, and generally to have a good time, but as for doing anything real mean or bad, why I'd scorn it with all my heart."

"I believe you mean what you say; but Louis, there is one way in which you can gladden Miss Norton's heart—you who have grieved it so many times."

"How?" I was going a long way to do it?"

"It'll be only a short one. Go to President Allen; tell him all you have done, and that you are sorry for it."

He buried his head in his hands—

"O Mary, anything but that—I can't do that," said Louis Don.

"It's the only thing now, Louis, that can be done, and it will be for Miss Norton's sake."

"But you don't know—you can't tell," he went on, half incoherently, talking to himself—'you're a girl, Mary, and don't understand how it will be."

"Yes, I do, Louis, and I know you will be a better braver, nobler boy always, if you do this."

"Why, Mary, you talk like a preacher; and he looked at me half in wonder, half warring.

I said some more words—I can't remember what they were, but they came right out of my heart. At last Louis took my hand.

"At least I will go," he said, and he wrung my hand; and then he started off, and there was a look in his face which made me think he would go straight to President Allen.

The next morning after prayers I trembled when the President rose up, for I knew that unless Louis had acknowledged the truth, that the time had come for his dismissal and discharge.

But the President went on to speak of some trivial matters, and then in a moment dismissed us all to our classes,

