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HER ARMS WERE FULL OF SNOWY CHRYSANTHEMUMS



# A QUAKER MAIDEN

A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY EVELYN  
RAYMOND

Author of  
"A Yankee Girl" etc.

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*Illustrated by*  
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## CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A QUIET HAVEN . . . . .	5
II. FAREWELLS . . . . .	15
III. THE SAIL TO TODDINGTON . . . . .	29
IV. NOVEL EXPERIENCES . . . . .	35
V. A PERPLEXING RETURN . . . . .	46
VI. HAPPY HAVEN . . . . .	59
VII. IN THE STILLNESS OF THE NIGHT . . . . .	66
VIII. THE HUDSON HOUSEHOLD . . . . .	77
IX. LOST AND FOUND . . . . .	94
X. BID PALMER HUDSON COME TO ME . . . . .	102
XI. DELIGHT AND HER GUARDIAN . . . . .	112
XII. THAT, TOO, IS LOST . . . . .	121
XIII. AN HEIRLOOM'S COMMAND . . . . .	127
XIV. IT MIGHT BE SANTA CLAUS . . . . .	136
XV. MARIA ARRIVES . . . . .	146
XVI. A DREARY CHRISTMAS EVE . . . . .	157
XVII. THE DAWNING OF CHRISTMAS . . . . .	170
XVIII. DELIGHT IS MISSING . . . . .	179
XIX. A CHANCE MEETING . . . . .	194
XX. DEMAND AND REFUSAL . . . . .	202
XXI. PEACH ALLEY . . . . .	212
XXII. A VISITOR TO HARMONY STREET . . . . .	219
XXIII. BEGINNING THE SEARCH . . . . .	227
XXIV. WHEN ALL THE WORLD WAS STILL . . . . .	241
XXV. DELIGHT'S CAPTIVITY . . . . .	246
XXVI. CAPTAIN HARRIET AGAIN . . . . .	255
XXVII. AN EVENTFUL MORNING . . . . .	262
XXVIII. THE AMATEUR DETECTIVE . . . . .	271

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIX. MR. WATERS' OPINION . . .	279
XXX. MASTER IN HIS OWN HOUSE . . .	283
XXXI. MR. WATERS' THEORY . . .	288
XXXII. CAPTAIN HARRIET'S LETTER . . .	296
XXXIII. GEORGE EXPLAINS SOME THINGS . . .	302
XXXIV. MARIA GETS A NEW TIN OVEN . . .	309
XXXV. IN CAP AND GOWN . . .	317

# A Quaker Maiden

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## CHAPTER I

### A QUIET HAVEN

IT was on an afternoon of late November, while there yet lingered in the air a faint warmth of Indian summer, that Delight Roloson climbed, for the last time, the straggling street of Seabury village, from the rock-strewn beach below to Prospect Hill above.

A sunset of unusual brilliancy touched with a crimson glow the weather-beaten, unpainted cottages lining the way and transformed their ugliness into something like beauty. Though Delight was quite unconscious that they were ugly and fancied, as her gaze rested tenderly upon one after another, that nowhere on this earth could be a spot so charming. For she loved them and their indwellers, each and all, and in the sight of love nothing is ugly.

The old stone church and schoolhouse, crown-

ing the Hill, sheltered between their white-washed sides a well-filled burying-ground; and it was toward a week-old mound within this graveyard that the girl was now hurrying.

Her arms were full of great snowy chrysanthemums, heaped with such reckless profusion as almost to hide her own face, and Esther Marlow remarked, as she passed:

“Looks like she’d torn ’em up root an’ branch. Well, the old garden will go to waste now, I guess. But I’m sorry for the child with all my heart; an’ for us, too.”

“Seabury won’t know itself, nor want to, without a Roloson in it,” chimed in the cobbler, “Bachelor Jim,” from his seat beside her door, where he had paused “to talk it over”; though the subject had already been discussed from every point of view. “Here they’ve been, first and foremost, ever since the original father of the whole kit came and built his house down there in the cove. Well, he did come over in the *Mayflower*, and no mistake. Brought his famous chest of drawers with him, or his wife did, and here they’ve been ever since.”

“Tut, tut, man! You’re away out in your story. He came in the famous ship, true enough, but he brought neither wife nor furniture with him. He was a bit of a boy, then, and a good many other pilgrims had followed

the first ones before he found either the one or the other. The records say he was even nearing sixty when he married."

"A good ninety when he went. They're a long-lived race, these Rolosons. This one just gone—was she his granddaughter or great?—a round ninety-six."

"Ninety-seven she would have been come next Fast day. A pity she couldn't have finished the hundred measure. But the Lord knows best. Odd, isn't it? I'm only seventy, yet I've felt old this twenty winters, while she never did, not a minute. I allow, either here or anywhere else, there have been few livings and dyings like Aunt Delight Roloson's."

"Right you are, neighbor," affirmed Widow Winston, who had also hobbled across the street to hear a bit of gossip and to be the handier for the last farewell when the girl who had gone up the hill should come down again. "Right you are. Her 'passing' suited a Roloson. Sitting in her own chair, gazing at the sunset she so loved, peaceful as a baby, with the light on her face, and smiling. Truly, she but stepped from one room into the next—only—she took all my daylight with her!"

The words ended in a wail and the feeble creature, who, more than any other, would miss both the one who had gone and the one who was

going, limped back into her lonely cottage and closed the door.

“She was a saint, dear Aunt Delight!” sighed Esther, reverently. “And this Delight will be another.”

“Saint? She? Up yon? Not a bit of it. She’ll be all human, every atom of her. The best sort, after all, for this world. Many’s the tongue-lashing she’s given me already and she not more than a dozen years old, is she?” asked the cobbler.

“Fifteen last month and looks every day of it. The most womanly girl in Seabury township.”

“Which isn’t saying so much, considering there’s no more than a dozen young folks under twenty left in it. Came over me like a sort of a thunder-clap, this very morning, as I was half-soling Cap’n Danforth’s Sunday boots, what a forsaken, out-of-the-way town Seabury’s got to be. Why, in all the houses here, the families number but two or three. Time was when things were different.”

It was not often that Bachelor Jim moralized. He was commonly a jolly soul, of somewhat rotund figure, who took life and “little Delight’s” “tongue-lashings” with a cheerful indifference. Just now a heaviness had come upon him, remembering that soon there would be no



clear-voiced girl to dash in on him at any time of day with her scoldings and pettings and "set him on his feet again" when he was discouraged.

Esther Marlow's eyes followed his gaze downward and upward over the little town where both had always dwelt. On the beach were stranded the hulls of long-decaying vessels, which they remembered to have seen set sail for other waters on many a prosperous whaling voyage. The once staunch wharves were hopelessly out of repair, though close to one of these rocked a smart little fishing smack all ready for sailing on what, to the Seaburyites, was the most important trip of many a day. For wasn't she to carry from among them, probably forever, the last of all the Rolo-sons?

"Yes. Trade and travel have long passed us by. The nearest railroad is a dozen miles off, and even the stage has cut down its trips to two a week. When I was a girl they were two a day and I used to think the sound of the coach horn, coming down over Prospect Hill, was the most exciting music in the world. I guess, 'Bachelor Jim,' that Seabury is now a better place to go away from than it is to stay in. For those who have anywhere to go," she concluded with a sigh.

The cobbler echoed the sigh then laughed. "After all, Esther, neither you nor I would be satisfied anywhere else. It's quiet here, and

peaceful. Same kind of human natur', too. Once I was in Boston city; and I thought I'd clean lose what little wit I had, with the racket and confusion all around. There's other places just as bad, too; even this Chester, where Delight is going, has electric street cars, theatres, and more churches than you can shake a stick at."

"Thank you, I've better fish to fry than shaking sticks at any church, even those that aren't orthodox. Speaking of churches, there comes the pastor's wife this minute, and here I've sat gossiping and grieving and left all my dusting. She so particular, too!"

Now dressmaker Esther Marlow's little front room was the common meeting ground of all the village wives; being convenient to the store, which was also post office, and half-way the length of the hill-street. In it all the affairs of the little township were fully discussed; here were held the society meetings of the church; and to this familiar room Delight Roloson would be certain to return to make her last farewells. So here now congregated all of those who could, that loved and would miss her, from the store-keeper's wife down to the few young folks who were not yet old enough to go away and seek their fortunes in a broader field.

Meanwhile, up in the ancient burying-ground, the girl, for whom all this friendly ovation, had

finished her loving task. The gaping cracks between the fresh cut sods had all been hidden by the snowy "Christ flowers," which she who lay beneath them had once so loved and rising from her knees Delight murmured, sadly :

"There. That's the very last I can do, auntie darling. There's nothing left now but—to go."

"Belike, the very hardest thing of all," said a harsh, though kindly, woman's voice, close by.

Delight turned eagerly :

"Captain Harriet, thee here! Then I'm glad, for it will spare me going to the cōttage."

"I'm liker here than elsewhere, as you know, lassie, save the weather is too bitter. And as for giving up a visit to the house, that will never do."

"I was told to hurry. Captain Danforth——"

"Must even put that quick temper of his in his pocket. Though, do the man justice, he, nor none, will be overhasty to carry the last of the Rolo-sons away from her home. There's a matter on my mate's mind that will not rest till he's seen and told it to you. A sort of secret, he claims, though I warn you it may be naught but a sick man's whim."

"A secret? For me? How strange."

"That's as proves. I know not. I asked nought. But, if you're done, come away to him. Indeed, you've made this spot a pretty sight to see. And when the posies fade, as fade they

will, I'll see to it that the rubbish is all clean carried away."

"That's my errand to thee, Captain Harriet;" and as she spoke, Delight pulled from her pocket an old-fashioned wallet, bound round with a soft leather strap. "Auntie gave me this, last winter, when she feared she might not stay with me longer than the spring. Thee knows how she would always have this dear old place kept tidy and trim. Well, in here is the money to pay thee, or anybody thee'll hire, to keep it so. When it is gone, I hope I may send more. I don't know how much is in it, for she fastened the purse and I—I can't undo it to see. That is, I'd rather not; but, of course, thee'll look, and reckon how long it will last."

For a moment Captain Harriet did not reply. She was a tall, spare woman, whose angular frame was scantily clad in a faded denim gown. A crimson shawl was pinned about her shoulders, and her rough grey hair was crowned by a dingy "sou'wester," once her sailor husband's. This was her only headgear and she wore it both indoors and out.

She now stood leaning on her spade handle, and regarding the astonished girl with a growing anger in her dark, shrewd eyes.

"And is it to me—to me—that a Roloson offers pay for doing her duty and her pleasure?"

Have I been sexton and gravedigger these twenty years in Seabury township, and ever taken a cent beyond my wage for this?" sweeping her hard hand about, as if to emphasize the neatness of the place. "Where's the garden in this village is kept like my ground, here? Child, child, you've given me a blow."

The anger died out of her face and a look of keen distress took its place. This was too much for Delight's composure; and flinging her arms around the old woman's shoulder she sobbed in the misery of her own grief.

"There, there, lassie. Cry no more. She meant it well. She meant it well, no doubt; nor ever for a minute saw that it was a stab she gave, and not a blessing. Why, who was it but herself, when my Enoch came home from his last voyage, broken and wrecked like those old ships down below—that went about among the folks and got consent he should be made sexton of Seabury for the rest of his life. Nor he, with his rheumatics and queer-headedness, being fit to keep even such a job what would have befell us but for her? I mind it was but yesterday; she came and took me to the parson's and spoke the good word for me. 'Harriet's as good a skipper as Enoch,' said she. 'Can sail a boat or ring the meeting bell, or dig as square a grave. Give her the place, it's all the same,' said she, 'and I'll go

bail her duty'll be well done.' Hasn't it, what she promised for me?"

"Yes, yes, Captain Harriet. Yes, indeed. But, maybe, she thought of harder times and thee needing—— Thee knows she loved thee, old friend. She wouldn't have hurt thee, no, not for all the money in the world."

"No, she wouldn't," answered the gravedigger, now consoled. "And I've a good thought in the matter. Let us take this money and use it for her. She's the last of her house to be resting here, and the dearest. I'll step across to Billstown and there I'll buy a tidy iron fence to put around her grave. That'll mark it special from the rest; and it'll comfort us both to know she's tucked in all safe and snug before the winter comes."

"Oh! will thee? I'd like that. But—would *she*?"

"Liked she not always what made you happy? It shall be done. But come now to Enoch. Else, he'll maybe even rise and leave his bed. Who guesses?"

"Then, indeed, I'd best not go!" cried Delight, with something like her natural mirthfulness.

Whereupon, with an answering smile, Captain Harriet tucked the girl's arm under her own and strode away to the cottage.

## CHAPTER II

### FAREWELLS

“CAP’N ENOCH ” lay in his “bunk ” before the cottage window. Everything about him was scrupulously neat and shipshape, as befitted a disabled seaman; but the total absence of all save actual necessaries gave the low room a hard bare look.

Delight, born and reared in the sunny, many-windowed “Snuggery,” always fancied she felt a chill whenever she entered the place; and she now realized the first pleasure of her going away in the thought:

“I shall not have to come here any more.”

“Took your reck’nin’ so’s to sail without touchin’ this port again, hey?” began the seaman. “Needn’t think I’m quite like one o’ them old ships down below, just a good-for-naught cast up by the tide. There’s a power o’ life left in me yet, I tell ye. So you was goin’ without salutin’, was ye? Though I ordered Harriet to tow you here, wind or weather.”

Delight had always disliked old Enoch, though all her life she had still been accustomed to

visiting and helping him as she could. However, this had been at Aunt Delight's desire and not of her own free will. She answered gently, now, moved by a feeling of pity for him and for his nobler wife :

"Oh! no, indeed. Surely, thee knows I wouldn't go without farewell, except I had not time left for it."

"I should say not. Not if you know which side your bread's buttered!"

"Which is more nor you seem to do, mate!" retorted Captain Harriet, with more spirit than she often showed toward him, as she stooped and picked from the rag-woven rug a slice of the food in question. "You're generally hungry enough to keep your supper where it belongs."

"It's that wuthless table. Ought to be a shelf, then things 'd stay put."

"All right, Enoch. But little Delight's in a hurry. Cap'n Danforth's waiting an' that's a thing he hates."

"Let him wait an' hate, long's as pleases me, then. Ain't a clumsier critter afore the mast 'n that young Stephen Danforth. Think o' him bein' a skipper o' any decent smack. Faugh! It makes me sick!"

"Wasn't he apprenticed to thee? I thought I'd heard thee say so," remarked Delight, innocently.

Enoch frowned and Captain Harriet smiled.



Then she averted a further mischance by leaving the room, saying :

“Now, Enoch Legg, if you’ve any business with our girl here, I’ll give you five minutes to do it in. When the time’s up she’s going shoreward and the chance is past. It’s one thing for me to be bothered by your cantankerousness, but it’s quite another sort for the whole of Seabury township to stand and wait your pleasure.”

“What’s Seabury township got to do with me an’ my affairs?” demanded the old man, with a startled look.

“With you, naught. With ‘little Delight,’ with the last of the Rolosons, much. Why, the whole community, from parson’s and store-keeper’s wife down, will be on the beach when the *Emily Jane* sails this night. So be quick about it and remember, mate, how you talk to the darling of a whole village.”

Yet this had been an unwise speech for the gravedigger to make and she realized the fact as soon as it was uttered.

“What a foolish thing to say! If mate thinks he’s important enough to keep folks dancing to his music he’s like to play for the rest of the night. Hmm. Poor fellow. Time was—but what’s the use of thinking. He’s mine. I took him of my own free will. I’ve sailed with him this forty years and I don’t know him yet.

Times are, when he gets these queer streaks, I'm almost afraid of him, myself; yet there he lies, doubled up with rheumatiz, one arm and one eye gone, while I'm strong as the tower o' Babel, and pretty near as tall!"

She ended her soliloquy with a chuckle, then folded her arms and stood like a mighty sentinel outside the window, silent, till, the five minutes past, she opened the door and reëntered the cottage.

"What you back for, so quick?"

"Time's up. Come, little Delight."

"I ain't half through talkin', yet."

"Time's up."

"What's all this hurry for? I ain't afraid o' Stephen Danforth nor none o' his crew."

"Why should you be, mate? Yet if the *Columbine* was afloat and ashore, ready to sail for Toddington harbor this tide, you'd be in a nasty temper enough if a bit of gossip hindered the start. Danforth's temper's as like your own as to be its twin brother. So judge for yourself. But as for Delight Roloson, she says good-bye now and heaves away."

A curious expression passed over the face of the half-blind old skipper, and Delight fancied there was more of softness in it. She knew, as did all Seabury, that when Enoch Legg had lost both his only child and the trig little craft which

bore her name, on a certain dark night long in the past, his heart had broken.

He had lost all ambition and tried to die. But he had not died. He had sailed on more than one stormy voyage thereafter, until that memorable last one from which he returned a wreck, to lie stranded on the hilltop, helpless for the rest of his days.

“Well, so be, then. Here, girl. I’m not caring now if Harriet knows. This paper, it tells all. What will you do with it? I offered it once, long back, to madam, but she’d have none of it. ‘Some time, if need be, when I’m gone, give it to little Delight.’ Them was her words. And last night she come and stood outside the window. I seen her as plain as the moonlight. So I must hand it over, though I’d hoped to keep it snug and hidden till my own old hulk was buried under.”

“But I do not wish it. What sort of paper is it? If it is valuable, thee’d surely better keep it still. Something might happen to it——”

“I wish there might! But there won’t. More than one has tried to lose it and failed. The man who last had it got rid of it to me, consarn him!”

Delight sprang up in abhorrence. She had never seen old Enoch’s hard face wear such a look of evil as it wore then. There had never

been anything lovable about him, save in Captain Harriet's eyes, but now he was repulsive in extreme.

"I do not want it. I cannot take it. If auntie would not, why should I. It's dirty and ——"

"It's parchment. And take it you shall! Harriet, find me somewhat to wrap it in, since she's so dainty. Well, that runs in the Roloson blood, too, as well as—some other things."

For an instant Captain Harriet hesitated; then she slipped out of the house for a moment, and when she came back she held toward her husband the ancient wallet which Delight had so lately given her. But it was empty.

"There, mate, take that. If there's aught evil about the paper this will be counter-charm. There's virtue in anything that Aunt Delight ever touched."

Enoch looked at the wallet critically. He would have liked to keep it. He had a fancy for hiding "notions" beneath his pillow and beguiled the lonely hours when his better half (literally) was out upon her duties by looking them over and playing with them, as a child with its toys. Indeed there was, at times, so much that was childish about the old sailor that Delight was not surprised to see Captain Harriet take the parchment peremptorily from his gnarled fingers and place it in the wallet.

She did this with an air of great disdain, and having bidden her "mate" to say farewell—still in that same manner of commanding a willful child—she led Delight away from the lonely cottage. She walked so briskly that the girl was compelled to run to keep abreast of her, but at the brow of the hill she paused abruptly.

"There, lassie, go your way, and may it be a peaceful one, as befits the daughter of the Rolosons and a Friend. But see well to this wallet and what it holds. It may be a vagary of my mate's addled brain or it may be—Heaven knows what!"

A cloud came over her rugged face and her eye fixed its gaze upon the glorious sunset sky, as if seeing, yet not seeing whereon it rested.

"Farewell, then, old friend."

Captain Harriet's thoughts came back with a shock to the present. Those in which she had lost herself, if only so briefly, were evidently absorbing and distressful ones; and holding out her calloused hand she said with a grim smile:

"So be it. Fare you well. But for the grave-digger, she must even fare as she has done in the past."

She would have turned and retraced her footsteps toward the bleak cottage and its more forbidding inmate without a further word. But this the warm-hearted girl could not allow.

“Why, Captain Harriet! Old friend of all the Rolosons, that’s not the way to part. Why, it’s but the other day, it seems to me, since thee carried me on thy shoulder when we went berrying up the Hill. Thee wouldn’t even let me wet my shoes, I remember. Now, it’s this way and no other that thee and me says farewell.”

With a sudden fling of her arms about the old woman’s gaunt shoulders, Delight kissed the weather-beaten cheek again and again. Always there had been love between these two, so different from one another, and yet, in a certain rugged strength of character so like. But hitherto the love had been expressed by deeds rather than caresses.

Now, something within the gravedigger’s soul was stirred profoundly. She saw once more the little daughter, her only child, who had gone down into the sea on the good ship *Columbine*. Herself named *Columbine*, by a mother’s fancy, for the delicate flower of the rocks which her baby fingers had loved to hold. So, with the tenderness of wakened motherly memories, Captain Harriet folded the desolate Delight in her strong arms and kissed her in return.

“There, bonny lassie, I never thought to do the like again for aught human. But you’re aye dear to my lonely heart, little Delight—well named! Take courage, child. This parting is

not for always; though if it were, there are many in the world to which you go who would marvel at sight of your curly head upon my shoulder and wonder you could grieve over so rough a creature as I am. Good-bye. It's over long I've kept you. Tell Cap'n Danforth it was my fault, and so — Good voyage, and God guide your craft!"

With tears blinding her own eyes Delight hastened down the slope; but the tears were not for long. Until the last sad week she did not remember ever weeping; but now she had grown "weak enough to cry over everything."

"That comes of thinking too much of myself. Darling auntie would always say: 'Keep thyself out of the matter, whatever is in hand, and thee'll be cheerful enough. Live up to thy name, as all who have worn it have tried, and thee'll find life quite happy, despite whatever sorrow the Lord sees fit to send.' Oh! what a wise, wee old body she was! How shall I live without her! But I—must. And I'll be as like her as I can. I'll begin this very minute;" and with an upward glance toward Heaven, asking its protection, she moved briskly forward.

All down the village street, beside those gathered in seamstress Esther's room and a larger group at the wharf itself, were knots of people watching her descent. Old time friends,

who had loved her from her infancy and who realized that in her departure they were losing the brightest spirit of their quiet homes.

“She’s a strong and sturdy maiden, who’s taken her fifteen years of life vigorously,” said the minister, wiping his spectacles on Miss Esther’s apron. “She shows in face and figure how she has lived in the open ; and now, for the first time, she faces a great trouble. How will she bear it, I wonder.”

“She won’t bear it, dominie. She’ll face it, as you said. She’ll conquer it. She’s a Roloson, beam and timber, an’ if the world ain’t the better for her comin’ into it she’s the first of her kin ever failed it yet. Money they hadn’t so much, none of ’em. Their wealth lay in hearts, and I ain’t been sittin’ cobbling an’ thinking so long, all by myself, without learning which is best. Lord bless her, bonny lass !”

More than one sniffed audibly.

“I declare, this seems more of a funeral than the other was,” said the storekeeper’s wife, smiling a little. “Suppose we all put a brave front on it and send her off with a laugh, instead of so much salt water. She’ll get enough of that betwixt here and Toddington.”

“That won’t scare her ; she’s a born sea baby,” responded the parson’s sister, who kept the school—when there had been anybody young enough to



attend it—and who had taught Delight all she herself knew of “the three R’s.”

“Captain Danforth’s waiting for you, Delight!” called the storekeeper’s lady; and, as a person of prominence in the community, her opinion had weight; so everybody present welcomed the girl with a smile.

This was pleasant and suited with the assumed bravery of Delight’s own mood.

“I’m sorry to have kept him waiting, but I had to see Cap’n Enoch, and that hindered. Oh! Mrs. Robinson, I forgot to tell thee. If thee’ll go into the garden, around by the west cellar steps, thee’ll find that calla lily Aunt Delight promised thee. But where is Maria?”

All looked and wondered. Maria was the old servant of the late Madam Roloson, and an inmate of the “Snuggery” from her own earliest years. Maria’s father had been an “able seaman” under the orders of some dead and gone Captain Roloson and her devotion to “our family” had passed into a proverb.

“As faithful as Maria,” it was strange she had failed at the very end.

“Doubtless, she’s down at the wharf. She’d be at the last spot where she could see you, my dear.”

“Very well, I’ll hurry faster, then. Are any coming with me? Good-bye, dears, and good-bye!”

Most of those at Esther's cottage followed the traveller shoreward and each affected a cheerfulness which did not for a moment deceive either themselves or her, yet made the last period less unhappy. But look where they would, there was no Maria visible; and the saddest part of the whole leave-taking was this, her first act of unfaithfulness.

"Well, bad as she might feel, she'd no business to cut up this way!" said Bachelor Jim, indignantly.

Delight sprang aboard, smiling and waving her hand bravely.

"Sometime, somehow, I'm coming back!" she called; and this was the joyfullest farewell she could have left to old Seabury.

"Aye, aye, lass! Come back, come back! And may it be soon!" shouted the cobbler, making his hands his trumpet.

The *Emily Jane* danced away from shore, as light as a bird on the wing. Her captain bawled out, for by no light speech could he make them hear:

"Don't you worry, neighbors. I'll see her and her famous chest of drawers safe to her v'yage's end. I 'low this is the vallyblest cargo ever went to sea from this cove, since I was born into it. But I hope I'll live to fetch 'em back again. So—here she goes!"

The little vessel swept steadily out to sea; its "crew" of one, with the inherent delicacy of those who live close to nature, avoiding as much as might be the corner where little Delight crouched and ducked her head to catch the last glimpse of her home.

"Oh! how I love it all—all!"

Even yet the last rays of the sunset lighted the church on the hill and the gleaming headstones beside it, and Delight's eyes rested on a faint white spot where lay heaped the last of the once famous "Roloson artemisias." Then her gaze swept downward to the low-roofed homestead, lying so snugly amid its fields and gardens, where had lived and died so many of her race, and from which she, the last, was now a wanderer.

"Reckon if this wind holds we'll make Toddington an hour or better afore train-time. I've crossed this bay when 'twas so dark an' foggy couldn't tell nose from toes; and with this moonlight — Ahoy, there, lass! You ain't cryin', are ye?"

A low sob answered him.

"To goodness knows! You mustn't take it that way. This here cargo of heirlooms—you an' your bureau—will reach happy haven yet, don't doubt. Why, by all the red herrin'! 'Tain't many a maid has the whole community, from the parson's wife down, turn out to wish

'em good v'yage, as you did. You ought to be proud an' well sot up. Schools an' company of your own age; new sights an' pretty ones; fine, I tell you. Anyway, it's the ones are left has the hardest time. Old Margaret now, or 'Bachelor Jim' ——"

"Don't!" cried poor Delight, and hid her face in her hands.

"Sho! might ha' known 'twas clear Roloson grit an' nothin' else was keepin' her up so peart an' chipper. Dolphins! what a blunderer I am. Well now, Danforth, chew your cud an' keep your fool mouth shut, the rest o' this v'yage," muttered the captain to himself, and relapsed into absolute silence.

But into this broke the voice of the solitary passenger with the cry:

"Skipper! A boat in distress! Signals—north-northwest!"

## CHAPTER III

### THE SAIL TO TODDINGTON

“DISTRESS! On such a night in such a mill-pond!”

“Yes, yes! It’s a little boat—with a woman in it—alone—she’s waving her oar and something big—does thee see?” lined out Delight, at broken intervals, watching with her clearer sight the peculiar movements of the boat she had descried.

The captain used his glass. Used it so long and with such varying expressions that Delight felt as if she must snatch it away and see for herself what so amazed him. Finally, as if he realized her anxiety, he quietly handed her the glass, exclaiming:

“That woman, Maria!”

“It can’t be!”

“True as the compass. So, here’s for it. Well, we *may* make Toddington to-night!”

The skipper rested his own vessel and waited for the adventurous Maria to come up; but it was soon evident that this could not be. She was certainly in trouble.

“Dolphins! Somebody’s got to go after her!”

“Let me!” cried Delight, who was almost as much at home on the water as the captain himself.

“With Laddie, then.”

In a moment or two Laddie, the captain’s son and “first mate,” had their small boat ready and Delight leaped into it. Steering as he rowed, they were soon beside the little *Glideabout*, the girl’s own dainty craft which it had been such grief to leave behind.

“Maria Disney! What is thee doing here?”

“Tryin’ to keep from drownin’.”

“What made thee come?”

“Don’t stop to ask questions. One of you help. I’ve lost the oleander already and in a minute the calla ’ll go down, too.”

“The calla! For goodness! But auntie gave that to Mrs. Robinson.”

“Only because she thought we couldn’t keep it.”

“How can we? Oh! Laddie, help her. She’ll tip over, surely.”

“Did you ever see such a sight?” he demanded, laughing, yet working busily to right the cargo of the *Glideabout*, so to keep it afloat.

This cargo consisted mainly of monster potted house-plants which had been the pride of Maria’s heart for many a year. Added, were a small trunk, a tin oven, a spinning-wheel for flax, a pile

of bedding, and last, but by no means least, portly Maria herself.

“Well, I’d like to know where thee is going,” said Delight, as sternly as she could for the laughter she could not suppress.

“Easy answered. To Toddington first, and wherever thee goes after.”

“But thee can’t. It was all the Hudsons were willing just to have me sent to them. I’m sorry, but we must part, dear.”

“I’ll see about that,” said the other, grimly.

Delight sighed. She had rarely come in conflict with the stubbornness of the old servant but she had been worsted on the few occasions when she had. In any case, the broad sea was not a spot in which to argue the matter out.

“Well, we can’t stay here and keep Captain Danforth waiting. Laddie, thee get in and row Maria to the sloop and I’ll row back by myself.”

“He’ll do naught of the sort. I’m right enough now. I set out to go to Toddington, on my own hook, and to Toddington I’ll go exactly as I planned.”

“Why, but my dear! Thee can’t expect the captain to wait for thee. The wind is rising and he’ll make good headway. Come aboard, tie the *Glideabout* to the stern, and take the chances with the cargo. Who but thee would ever have

dreamed of going to sea in a rowboat with a lot of stuff such as that?"

"Stuff? Humph. And is this the first time a rowboat has crossed harbor to the mainland?"

"Of course not. But—*thee*—oh! Maria!"

Words failed to express Delight's emotions, yet certainly her leave-taking from the "faithful" one was proving anything but sad.

When she reached the *Emily Jane*, its captain heard the story with more vexation than amusement.

"If I go on and let her foller, like's not she'll tip over an' get more salt water 'n she 'planned.' But I know Maria. Might as well try to move a meetin'-house as her hard-sottedness. Well, I see nothin' to do but give her her head an' it's sure to fetch her up against some rock or other, o' trouble."

"But though she can row pretty well it's a long trip to Toddington and I don't remember that she ever made it, since I was born."

"Oh! don't get worried over that, lassie. Laddie here shall keep his boat near hand, and so act sort of harbor police to fetch this runaway into port. Bless my soul! if this ain't the queerest, female-ishest piece o' doin's I ever heard of. Old critter ain't been out o' cove in twenty year, most like, a settin' off after nightfall to row a boat full o' house plants clean across this



bay. Well, her pluck deserves better luck than it'll get, I fear."

The outcome of the incident was that Delight utterly forgot that she was leaving her old home for a strange one and became so absorbed in watching for the *Glideabout* and its occupant that she scarcely realized her sail was over till the captain called out:

"Toddington, ahoy, little Delight!"

"Aye, aye, skipper!" she returned, after his own manner, knowing it would please him. "Can thee sight the *Glideabout*?"

"No. Well, Laddie is 'on deck.' It's all right. But I reckon the amiable Maria has made us too late for the evening train. We'll have to put up at some tavern till morning, 'less you can make out to snooze a bit in my bunk here."

"Of course. I'd like nothing better. Only, what will thee do?"

"Make shift well enough. So, I'll tidy up a bit an' then you'd best turn in. Can't do any good lyin' awake, an' I ain't worryin' none. There you be; snug's a bug. I'll just have a pipe an' then I'll take a nap, too."

Before the pipe was finished Delight was in a deep slumber; and the sun was shining when, at last, the captain roused her to eat the bit of breakfast he had prepared. Yet with the first realization she had of how and where she was,

she saw, also, that her friend's face was very grave.

This roused her completely and springing up she asked :

“Have the boats come in?”

“No. Neither one. Somethin's wrong.”

## CHAPTER IV

### NOVEL EXPERIENCES

“WHAT could be, with Laddie at hand? Besides, even if Maria is out of practice she was once a good sailor. Though why she should try such a way of crossing the bay puzzles me.”

“It don’t me, then. But come, eat your breakfast. Starving yourself won’t help what’s done.”

“Still, I don’t understand. Thee knows more than thee tells me and, surely, I should know, too. Maria was so faithful to auntie and me.”

“Hang her faithfulness! It was that mis’able notion fetched all this squall. When it come to the scratch what does that woman do but declare, up and down, that if you left Seabury she left Seabury, too. She wouldn’t stay a minute in the old place, ’less it had a Roloson to save it.”

“Why didn’t she come *with* us, then? Not try to do what she did.”

“Don’t ask me to ’count for no female doin’s. I’ve been married three times to as good women as ever baked bread, an’ I hain’t got the hang o’ the critters, yet.”

“Never mind that. Maybe thee didn’t try. What about Maria?”

“Drink that coffee. Only this. Down she come yesterday, just as I was cleanin’ up a mite, against your v’yage, an’ says she, ‘I’d like to sail on the *Emily Jane*, too, cap’n.’ ‘You?’ says I, struck all aback. I’d as soon thought of the ‘Snuggery’ moving as her, an’ all the folks in the community glad an’ willin’ to give her a home. Let alone all the rest. I mean about her havin’ saved up enough to pay her way, anywhere.”

“Yes, I know. She was real forehanded.”

“Well, I knew that wouldn’t do. There was you, goin’ amongst strangers, maybe none too willin’—— Pooh! that slipped out——”

“I knew it,” said Delight, simply.

“Hmm. The worse for them then. But, of course, you couldn’t go there, handicapped by as contrary an old woman as ever trod shoe leather. Moreover, I’d made Maria an offer, plain an’ square. If she’d a mind to come an’ keep house for me an’ Laddie, I was willin’ to marry her an’ so settle the business of her turnin’ adrift at her time o’ life.”

“What? Thee marry our Maria? What a good thing she said no. But go on, please.”

At another time the captain might have resented the smile lurking about Delight’s lips, but just then he was too deeply disturbed to care.

“She said she’d marry nobody. But she was goin’ to Chester to look after you. ‘Would I take her in the *Emily Jane*?’ ‘No. I wouldn’t.’ You see we was both kind of mad, ’cause we hadn’t agreed on that other subject. ‘That’s final, is it?’ ‘Yes. Final as the grave. I’ll have no hand in any such nonsense.’ ‘All right. Then I’ll take the nonsense into my own hand. It won’t be half so much of a job as bein’ fourth consort to you,’ says she; ‘and to Chester I’m goin’, as sure as my name is Maria Disney.’ Of course there wasn’t another smack goin’ out, afore to-morrow night, if then; an’ stage day is three off. So that’s all. But if she’s drowned—or Laddie—I shall feel—as if—I’d—murdered—’em.”

It was terrible to see this breakdown in one so self-confident as Captain Danforth and, for a moment, Delight could not answer. She leaned her head on her hand and tried to think. But it couldn’t be that the missing ones were really lost. It could not. It had been natural, maybe, that dear old Aunt Delight should “pass,” in the peace and serenity of her extreme age; but this vigorous Maria, who had ruled at the “Snuggery” with an iron hand, and Laddie, in his youth—No.

“I can’t and won’t believe it. Nor shall thee till ——”

For silent answer, the captain pointed to the side of the pier where he had fastened the *Emily Jane*. There floating idly, tied to another sloop which had come in during the night, was a white rowboat, bearing in scarlet letters the name: "*Glideabout*." It was quite empty, and Delight stared at it as she might at a ghost.

"I don't understand."

"Nor I. But Skipper Lawson found it about three o'clock this morning, bottom side up. An' there was nothing else in sight but a broken oar an' a woman's shawl. Here 'tis."

With a chill of dismay Delight recognized the familiar old "*Broché*," which Maria had cherished so carefully. Still, she would not believe any evidence so flimsy.

"What of that? I suppose she lost it overboard. I'm glad it was found and maybe it can be dried and made good again. I suppose she got tired of her own boat and got into Laddie's. It was bigger and would hold all her traps better. Maybe, too, they have gone the wrong way, or lost their oars, or something."

"Laddie was born afloat, so to speak. He knows Toddington Bay as he knows this deck. There wasn't wind enough to upset any craft, last night, and if he was such a fool as to lose his oars, well—he about ought to drown. But he didn't, not from no common cause. I didn't

mention it afore, but—there was a ‘man eater’ seen in the bay last week.”

“Well, if there was, it hasn’t eaten either our Maria or Laddie! I *don’t* believe that any real mischance has come to them. So cheer up, dear captain, and do as thee bade me. Drink some coffee and thee’ll feel better.”

He obeyed, but as soon as he had finished, remarked:

“What has happened to anybody else can’t affect you. You were due at Chester last night, an’ I pledged myself to get you there. You mustn’t lose the morning train, anyhow.”

“But I couldn’t possibly leave thee in the midst of this trouble. It’s my trouble, too. It was for me Maria came, so it’s not thee but my poor self who is to blame if harm has happened them. I’m not believing it has, though.”

“I’d like to have you stay, but you could do no good. And I’ll tell you what I’ve been thinking. I can put you an’ your luggage aboard the train and speak a word to the conductor. He’ll take as good care of you as I could; and maybe he’ll hire somebody to go with you from the station in Chester to your cousin’s house. Or”—and the captain paused to well consider so flighty a proposition—“we might even telegraft ’em.”

Even Delight was aghast at this startling sug-

gestion. She had seen but few telegrams in her life and these had always reference to some trouble. She didn't think she would like a telegram sent about so simple a thing as herself and said so frankly.

"All right. I s'pose it would be kind of extravagant. An' you're a smart girl enough. So we'll leave it that way. I'll go hunt up a drayman, one that takes my fish for me, and set you off. I feel, after all, 'at *I* myself must stay right here, against somethin' comin' to light."

"But, if there is any news how shall I hear? And will thee send Maria to me as soon as she gets in?"

"When Maria gets in I'll send her to you," said the captain with great solemnity. Then he hurried away to seek his drayman; and Delight soon found herself perched on her own trunk in a small cart, that smelled very strongly of fish and was not over-clean.

She didn't object to that, however. It was a familiar odor, and brought back so many crowding memories that she forgot her present surroundings in them. It was a short ride to the station, and she was startled by the sound of the puffing steam from the engines on the tracks beyond it and scarcely heard the instructions which the drayman gave her, as he handed her her ticket and the check for her trunk.



“Here’s the rest of the money, miss. The captain said the big piece, a bureau I guess, had best go by express. It’s lucky it can go on this same train and it’ll be there about as soon as you are. I’ve spoke to the train hand about it and he’ll send it along skipping. Well, good-day, miss, and a pleasant journey.”

He was about to leave her but her frightened expression arrested him. All her dreams of railways, back there in her peninsular home, had not conjured up anything so noisy and nerve-distracting as these monster things upon the rails, and her self-possession had quite left her.

“Pshaw! I forgot. The captain said you’d come from a terrible quiet place. I was to hunt up the conductor an’ put you in his care. Here he is. Must be about time to start. Hello, sir!”

“What’s up? all aboard!” answered the man in blue and brass buttons.

“I’d like to get this girl ‘up,’ if you please, sir. And pray have a care of her. She’s not used to travelling and is a bit scared.”

“All right. Here you go, miss. It’s a high step, but there! Go right into this car and take a seat about the middle of it. This side will be the pleasantest and there’s plenty of room yet. We’ll take on a crowd at the next station where the northern express meets us. All aboard!”

With a scarcely perceptible motion the long train moved out from the station and at first Delight was not conscious of anything but the curious conveyance in which she found herself. Then the houses and trees began to rush by her, at an ever-increasing speed, as if hurling themselves against the car, and she clutched the seat's arm as if she expected to be thrown out of the window herself.

No such dire calamity occurring, however, she began to enjoy herself. The rapid motion, the odd effect of the scenery—as if she were standing still and it flying past her—so engrossed her that for some distance she noticed nothing else, not even the passengers.

Then they came to a larger town than even Toddington had seemed; and here, as the conductor had foretold, a crowd of travellers boarded the car. It was the last station on the bay, and a nearer one from Seabury; but not so convenient for the business Captain Danforth must transact. From here onward the road would plunge deep into the heart of the state, and there would be many hours of even this swift travel before Delight could reach the inland city of Chester whither she was bound; and to which place the skipper had originally intended to accompany her.

“Oh! the folks! I didn't know there were so many in the world. Or, at least, I didn't expect

to see them all in a bunch, so," she thought. "I wonder where they'll sit. I must get up and let some older person have my place."

Yet she was afraid to stand up and offer it.

"I should certainly be thrown down. It wiggles around so."

She did not know she had spoken aloud till a pleasant voice near her remarked:

"Yes, it does wiggle, horribly. It makes me dizzy. May I ask if this half your seat is engaged?"

"I was sitting here alone, if that is what thee means."

A flash of pleasure came into the stranger's eyes. For many a day she had seen nothing so charming as the quaint simplicity of Delight's appearance; and now the "plain speech" explained the slightly modified grey costume which Esther Marlow had fashioned from Aunt Delight's own meeting attire.

"Ah! my child. Are you a Friend?"

"Yes. Is thee?" answered the girl, delighted, as the pleasant woman sank into the seat beside her.

"Only by birthright. I'm a sadly worldly creature now, I fear."

"Thee doesn't look it," said Delight, scanning the other's garb. It was grey, also; but with what a difference! Every detail bore the stamp

of a fashionable designer's hand; and, had the ignorant maiden known it, she was riding beside a woman whose "style" was famous in more than one city.

"Thank you. Thank thee, I feel like saying. That is the prettiest compliment I've had this many a day."

Delight's perplexity showed in her clear hazel eyes and the lady hastened to explain:

"It was so sincere, my dear, and so straight from your heart. Are you travelling far?"

"To Chester."

"Ah, indeed! That is a long way. Alone?"

"Yes. With all these people."

The lady smiled. "How delicious! Yet one may be more alone in a crowd than in a wilderness."

Delight thought this very queer but, being too courteous to say so, turned her eyes toward the window.

A moment later she had risen in her place and was making frantic efforts to get away from it, through the crowded narrow aisle, toward the equally packed doorway.

"Child! Where are you going? What is the matter? What did you see?" asked her seat-mate in swift succession, and startled by the pitiful eagerness of the girlish face.

But for only answer Delight faced back to

the open window and stretched her arms through it:

“Oh! Maria, Maria! Here I am! Here—here!”

The next instant she was forcibly pushed downward into her seat and the window as promptly closed.

## CHAPTER V

### A PERPLEXING REUNION

“DIDN'T you know that was a fearfully dangerous thing to do? With all these trains passing and repassing. You might have been seriously hurt.”

“Might I? But I saw Maria!”

The lady smiled. “A friend?” she asked.

“Yes, yes. We didn't know but she was drowned.”

“Ah! indeed! Then I don't wonder you were excited.”

“I must get to her. How can I do it? There are so many folks.”

“Wait a moment, my child. The train generally runs out a little way from the station, then backs into it again to take on a connecting one, before the final start. You will probably see Maria again, when we run back. Or if you must leave the car I'll ask some gentleman to help you off.”

Delight sat down again, partly because the motion of the car jarred her so that she could not stand steadily; but she glued her eyes to the fast

shut window and stared at every object passed. After a short advance they began to move backward again, as the lady had said.

But when they came abreast of the platform there was no Maria to be seen, while a fresh crowd of belated passengers, bound cityward and hurrying to catch this "through express," still further confused the anxious and frightened girl.

"How can I force my way through all those people? But I must get to her!" she cried.

"Wait! There's some sort of a commotion at the entrance. Not until that's over can you get a chance, if even then."

"Oh! it's Maria herself!"

It was, indeed. But such a Maria as the quiet purlieus of Seabury had never seen. Dishevelled, water-soaked, and fierce of aspect, she pushed and elbowed her way toward the spot where she, also, had caught a glimpse of familiar features. Before the vigorous thumps of her sharp elbows, one and another gave way, so that much sooner than a gentler person could have accomplished the transit, the "faithful" one had gained at least a speaking distance from her object.

"Oh! Maria! What a fright thee gave us! Why wasn't thee drowned? I mean—— Oh! do take care. Thee's crushing that man's hat!"

"Look here, my good woman. Slow and easy

goes far in a day," remarked one traveller, upon whose toes the energetic creature had stepped.

"But fast and firm is better!" she retorted.

Of course, several laughed and as the crowd had thinned, nearly all finding places, Maria was left the central figure of a considerable space. To do her justice, this was not at all to her liking. Determined as she was in her pursuit of Delight she had no unwomanly desire to be conspicuous. She had travelled more than the girl she followed but not often enough to make her at ease in new scenes, unless dominated by some set purpose.

This purpose she had accomplished. Delight was found and would be kept well in sight for the future, so that now the devoted servant had leisure to think of herself and her appearance.

"What would madam have said! Or the parson's wife. I'm glad, too, that that hateful old Captain Danforth can't see me now. I guess the quieter I keep, for the present, the better for 'our family's' sake."

So she very meekly accepted the only seat which could be found for her, at the extreme rear of the car and so far removed from that of Delight that speech between them was impossible. Very soon the swift and regular jarring movement of the train lulled her weary senses to rest, for she had been awake all night,



and after a while the only evidence she gave of her presence was a peaceful snore. This occasionally reached even to Delight's ears, but the familiar sound filled her with a comfort beyond words.

"You look happier," remarked the lady at her side.

"I am. Just listen to her, please. That's the way she used to do at the 'Snuggery'; and I don't feel alone at all now."

"None of us do!" laughed the lady, and seeing the amused expression upon many faces near her Delight laughed, also, in sympathy.

After that, as long as the woman in grey travelled beside her, the journey was a charming one. The new friend was certainly familiar with the road, for she pointed out all the interesting bits of scenery, which they passed, and named the various towns through which they rushed without stopping.

"It's all so wonderful, isn't it? Doesn't thee love to travel?" asked Delight, with shining eyes.

"Never more than to-day. It's a pleasure to see so much enthusiasm as you have and you almost make me forget that I've been over this route so many times that I'm tired of it, or was, till I met you, and I'm really sorry to say that at the very next place the train will stop and I

shall have to get off. But I hope you'll reach your friends safely, and that we shall meet again. I am quite frequently in Chester. I shall be there at the holiday season, and if you'd like to see me again—why, this will be my address at that time."

The lady drew a card from her pocketbook and scribbled an address upon it, then gave it to Delight.

"Thank thee. I shall be sure to go and see thee—if I can."

"Will there be any reason 'thee' can't, my dear?"

"I don't know. I don't know my cousins, at all. But I must do whatever they wish, if it's right. Aunt Delight bade me."

The lady elevated her eyebrows slightly and smiled a little. Her manner was new and fascinating to the soberly trained girl who watched her closely.

"I think, I hope, there is nobody in Chester who will object to my acquaintance," she said, quietly. "Ah! there's the warning whistle, and there's the conductor to remind us of it. I rarely have to travel in this sort of car; but to-day, because of somebody's blunder, there was no parlor car attached. Now I'm very glad of it, else I shouldn't have known you."

"Black River Junction! Change for Boston!"

This announcement and direction was yelled from either end of the carriage, and simultaneously ; but only an experienced traveller could have understood the cry. However, so many people rose and pressed toward the narrow exits, that Delight sprang up and would have followed them.

But her seat-mate shook her head.

“Not this time, my dear. In general, it’s safe to ‘go with the crowd’—though not always. Remember I shall be glad to see you—‘thee’—if your friends will allow.” Then with a merry smile and cheery good-bye the woman in grey was gone.

Through the window the girl saw her once again, as she crossed toward another waiting train, whose carriages were much handsomer than that in which she was riding. There were curtains at the windows, of some rich stuff, and she caught a glimpse of cushioned chairs and dainty furnishings.

“Why, I wonder if she knows those colored men. How very nice to her they are.”

Indeed, the pleasant stranger might well have been a person of importance ; for, from the moment she issued from her first train, she was surrounded by men in uniform, who took one her satchel, another her wrap, and with many bows and flourishes assisted her aboard their own “Palmyra.”

Then they were moving swiftly apart, and as Delight glanced about, the deserted seats gave her a sense of loneliness. For the first time she reflected how soon she would have to face that new life of which she, naturally, stood in dread; nor was her courage greatly strengthened when Maria came staggering forward, along the aisle, reeling with the swift motion of the car and clutching wildly at every seat she passed. Finally, she dropped into the place vacated by the lady in grey.

Then with a smile, as full of perplexity as pleasure, Delight slipped her hand into that of her old friend and begged:

“Now, Maria, tell me the whole story, please. Whatever made thee try to cross Toddington Bay in a rowboat—thee?”

“I’ve done it before.”

“I don’t remember it.”

“Likely enough. It was before thee was born.”

The lapse into the plain speech, which the “faithful” one always used in the “family,” yet never outside of it, touched and comforted the other. It was sign of a gentle mood and, though Maria’s coming had been a mistake, Delight wanted to hear how it had happened.

“Tell me the whole story, please.”

“From the beginning? As thee always teased for when thee was little?”

Delight nodded. The racket about them made anything like confidential talk between them seem impossible; yet the same noise also drowned their voices. But this didn't trouble the narrator, who was quite indifferent to the opinions of strangers, and she began by a question:

"Did thee really think I would tarry at Seabury after all our 'family' was gone?"

"What else could I think? Where can thee go?"

"To the same place thee does."

"But, Maria, I fear they will not make thee welcome. It's hard, I know, and oh! how *I'd* love to have thee. But the minister said my cousins were not over willing to have even me. They said I might go to them for awhile, but they didn't promise to keep me for always."

Then the girl's gaze fell upon the water-stained gown which had been Maria's holiday attire and her heart reproached her, remembering the peril through which its wearer must have passed.

"First, my dear, what happened thee last night? Where is Laddie?"

"In Toddington, long before this. Well, all happened was—we upset."

"Both?"

"Yes. I was just trying to move them plants so's they'd be steadier when first I knew the whole boat-load swamped. Me with it."

“Oh! thee poor thing! But, thank the dear Lord, thee was saved.”

Maria smiled, grimly. “Hmm. I reckon I do thank Him. I’m an old fool but He took care of me. He always does of fools and children.”

“But thee’s neither the one nor the other. Thy ‘Broché’ shawl is at Toddington.”

“For the land’s sake!”

“Yes; and the *Glideabout*, too. Captain Lawson found and brought them in. The *Glideabout* was bottom side up and the shawl was caught in the oar lock, with a broken oar. Captain Danforth said that we should never see thee again. Or Laddie. He felt terribly and I hated to leave him. But he made me. He said I couldn’t help by staying at Toddington.”

“No. Thee couldn’t. Well, I lost them all. I lost everything, except what I have on. And this;” tapping her breast, significantly.

“What does thee mean?”

“My money. My savings. It’s all in good hard silver and gold, and weighs—a ton.”

“Maria!”

“Oh! thee needn’t look at me, as Aunt Delight used to do. It’s all right. It’s heavy, that’s all. Though lucky for me the most of it was in gold. Eagles and double eagles. Captain Danforth used to get my wages changed into it, whenever I wanted, if he was going to Boston.

He's seen a good deal of the world, the captain has."

"I suppose so. But tell. Did Laddie help thee out?"

"Yes. For a good spell he made fun of me and my luggage. Said it wouldn't hurt the plants to get a lot of water. I told him salt water 'd kill 'em. Then he was smart, according to his lights, and teetered the boat. The tin oven was the first thing to go—and how shall I ever make another batch of salt-rising, without that? Then the spinning-wheel. The trunk seemed to fall on me—and I don't know the rest. I guess I would have drowned but for Laddie. He quit fooling, soon's he saw I was in real trouble an' grabbed me. But I clutched him pretty hard, I guess. Anyway, I pulled him into the water, too, and overset his boat. But he righted it soon and when I kind of got my wit back, there was we two drenched critters a sittin' in Captain Danforth's boat, without a word to say for ourselves."

Delight made no comment. Already she was wondering what the outcome of the matter would be. This her shrewd companion surmised, and observed:

"Thee needn't worry about me, little Delight. Worrying's a new job for thee. I'll be all right. I'll try first if those cousins will take me in, too,

for the sake of 'our family.' If they won't, no matter. My father used to say: 'Your money's your best friend,' and luckily, that 'friend' is safe in that inside pocket of mine, this minute. I couldn't let the last of the Rolosons go away into the strange world alone. I couldn't; and come what may I'll be near hand to look after my old mistress' treasure. Nor do I care a mite if all that stuff did go down to Davy Jones' locker. I suppose"—doubtfully—"that there'd be as good a tinsmith at Chester as there is over to Billstown. At any rate I could watch him make the oven, sitting close by——"

"I suppose so. But, probably Hannah Hudson may have a tin oven of her own."

This hopeful view of the situation gave Maria such comfort that she presently sank into another doze, from which she did not rouse until the train reached a place where a stop was made for dinner.

"Maria, the people are eating in that big room, yonder, and I'm very hungry. Let us go and get something, too."

"Humph. Hey? Hungry. I'm not. Not a bit."

"But I am. All I remember of my breakfast is a cup of coffee that scalded me and was all ground-sy."

"It's a regular flying in the face of Providence



to waste money on store victuals. I had a nice lot of crullers and sage cheese in my carpet bag."

"Yes, no doubt! But that is at the bottom of Toddington Bay, and—— Come, please. See. Already some are coming out. We'll be too late."

"Well, I suppose thee'll have to be indulged. Aunt Delight did her best to spoil thee. Come on, then. Keep tight hold my hand and don't stare round at folks."

Delight obeyed. Then she swallowed a hasty luncheon for which Maria reluctantly paid, nor would the good woman touch a morsel herself.

"I can pay thee back, Maria. I have all the money I had when I started. The captain would buy my ticket for me. He said it was for the Roloson part of me and because he loved Aunt Delight. He was as kind as kind could be, and yet he was in such trouble about Laddie. And, of course, thee," she added, as an afterthought.

"Hmm. Much he troubled himself about *me*, I reckon. But he's good-hearted, Stephen Danforth is. There. We're back again and I'm going to sleep. I feel terrible queer and messy in these clothes, though I sat the heft of the night before the fire in the boathouse, where we landed, trying to dry myself. Wake me up when we get to Chester."

She had plenty of time for her rest. So had

Delight for thoughts. These were troubled, whenever they included her drowsy companion, but for herself she was determined to follow her dear aunt's good advice :

“Love others so much that they can't help loving thee.”

Besides this the watching of an ever-changing landscape was a delightful thing ; and though the darkness had come down and almost hidden the scenes through which they sped, it had seemed a short day after all, when at length the guard opened the door and shouted : “Chester !”

## CHAPTER VI

### HAPPY HAVEN

AT Madam Roloson's death, a telegram was sent to her nearest, though distant, relatives, Dominie Babcock himself going to Billstown to dispatch it.

As no response came to the message, he followed it by a letter, enclosing a sealed one that had been entrusted to him by his dying friend. In his own epistle he spoke warmly of little Delight, and the blessings which would accrue to those who gave her a new and happy home. He would gladly have kept the girl under his own roof, but he realized, as did Madam Roloson, that she must now acquire a fuller education than was possible at secluded Seabury. He, therefore, hoped to receive a prompt and favorable answer.

The reply was prompt enough, but exceedingly brief. To the tender-hearted old divine it seemed almost brutal in its terseness.

“The Hudsons were sceptical of uninvited blessings, and in their already crowded house was little room for any stranger. As for the education to which he referred, Chester was not remarkable for its advantages. However, they

had their family pride quite as much at heart as any stranger could possibly have, and they would receive the girl—for the present.”

Not a householder in Seabury but would far rather have kept the child who had grown up among them than send her to such scant welcome. Still it was Aunt Delight’s wish, and to them that was law.

Small wonder, then, that as the trainman’s cry of “Chester!” fell on her ears, Delight’s courage faltered for an instant. The next, she had resolutely banished her misgiving and recalled another of wise Madam Roloson’s sayings:

“Thee should never go half-way to meet trouble.”

“Come, Maria. Here we are, at our journey’s end.”

Maria opened her eyes, confused somewhat by the surroundings, for she had been peacefully dreaming of her old home; but she was wholly refreshed by her hours of sleep and her native energy returned in full measure.

“Have all thy wits about thee, child, and take care. It’s spooky sort of business getting into a strange place after dark. But stick tight to me and thee’ll be all right.”

Yet it was not Delight who was disconcerted by the hubbub without the station. The novelty of the scene, the street lights, the hurrying pedes-

trians, the shouts of the hackmen and hotel runners, excited and thrilled her. She found it altogether pleasant to be in and a part of the life of a great town; and when a man in a long coat, much adorned by brass buttons, approached and asked: "Have a carriage, miss?" she replied, with a smile: "Thee is very kind."

"What is it, child?" demanded Maria, nervously clasping her charge's hand.

"He is asking if we will ride in his carriage. Is that right, friend?"

"Yes, miss. Take you any part of the city?"

"How good of thee."

"Hold on, Delight. Can't get something for nothing in this world. Is this your wagon, teamster?"

"Yes, lady."

"I allow you don't run it for charity."

"Ma'am?"

"We want to go to No. 777 Argyle Terrace. What will be the tax?"

"Eh, ma'am?"

"Come. Don't be stupid. How much will you charge to take Miss Maria Disney and Delight Roloson to No. 777 Argyle Terrace, city of Chester, house of Palmer Hudson. There. Is that plain enough?"

"Quite, ma'am. One dollar and a half, ma'am. Cheap at that. Argyle Terrace is a good bit off."

“A—dollar—and—a—half! For the land’s sake. You must think I’m made of money. Come on, Delight. We’ll foot it.”

The indignant woman moved away at a brisk pace, and Delight followed, nothing loath to be walking along the strange street, with its odd sights and sounds. But they had not progressed even one block before Maria paused abruptly, and with her familiar exclamation:

“For the land’s sake!”

“What now, dear?”

“The chest of drawers!”

“Oh! What about it? Where is it?”

“That’s what we must find out. We must go right back to the cars and see if it’s there.”

They retraced their steps and Maria asked questions of almost every person she met. By dint of these, and in despite of various conflicting replies, the travellers found their way to the express office in the big station. To their relief, the ancient, burlap-shrouded piece of furniture stood in plain sight; and the spinster speedily contracted for its safe and immediate delivery at No. 777 Argyle Terrace.

“Though I will say, ma’am, that as it is such a clumsy thing and my load is about full I would rather leave the delivery till morning. No great hurry, is there?”

Maria’s temper rose. She was used to having

people do as she said, and she was very hungry. Her economy in the matter of luncheon had not improved her mood.

“You can take it or leave it. If you can’t, I guess you aren’t the only man in the city of Chester owns a wagon. Besides, if you’re a mind to do it, I’ll pay for the bureau and something to boot, if you’ll carry this girl and me in the same trip.”

The expressman considered.

“Well, certainly, ma’am. If you are willing to ride in such a shape. The seat’s broad enough for three.”

“All right. Hitch up then as soon as you can. I’d like to get there.”

The man laughed softly to himself and made the haste required. The address she had given him he knew to be in the most fashionable part of the city, and he wondered not a little what a rich household would think to have its guests come riding up to their door in a baggage van.

When they had driven for what seemed a very long way, the driver suddenly turned the corner and entered a beautiful avenue. Parks extended through its centre, with a broad driveway on either side. Wide granite pavements, fronted cosy little grass plots and from behind these, still again, rose the handsome residences of Chester’s wealthy citizens.

“Oh! what a beautiful place! Did thee ever see anything like it, Maria?”

“No. I suppose he took us this way to show us the sights.”

A moment later, before one of the largest mansions, brilliantly alight from attic to basement, the wagon came to a halt.

“This, miss, is No. 777 Argyle Terrace.”

“For the—land’s—sake!”

Maria Disney was so overcome by the grandeur of her surroundings, that she suffered the expressman to almost lift her down bodily from her lofty seat. But Delight leaped to the ground, aglow with pleasure. What a wonderful, beautiful palace! It was like that fairyland of which Gentleman Jim had told her so many tales.

Strains of bewitching music floated out from the half-opened windows and, behind the lace draperies of some of them, people were moving to and fro.

“Bless my soul, Delight. It seems as if this must be a mistake. I told him to wait. He’s sure it’s the number. But them Hudsons wrote that they were poor. They could ill afford to keep even you. Wait. I’ll knock and find out.”

Quite ignorant of the electric bell and its manipulation and missing the familiar “knocker” which adorned Seabury front doors, Maria used her knuckles.



Used them with such good effect that they seemed to drown the music, which stopped at that same instant and suddenly—though this was because the melody was finished. With equal suddenness the door opened and revealed a pompous colored servant in gorgeous livery.

To him Maria's plain and sea-worn appearance suggested but one conclusion: Beggars.

"Go away, woman. You cayn't come in heah. Go to de basement an' mebbe de cook 'll give you a bite."

"W-h-a-t!" almost screamed the indignant spinster.

"There's some mistake, Maria. Let us go right in;" for having travelled a day and a night to reach this happy haven, Delight had no intention of not casting anchor there.

So she stepped eagerly, yet modestly, forward into the blaze of the electric lights, into the sight of all that goodly number of guests, and into her new, unknown life.

## CHAPTER VII

### IN THE STILLNESS OF THE NIGHT

FOR a moment, Delight was dazzled by the scene. The hall which she had entered was brilliantly lighted and groups of gaily dressed young people were standing or moving about, while the rich staircase ascending from it seemed, in her bewildered sight, to rise into an upper fairy world where unknown plants bloomed, and light and laughter reigned.

But as none of the many guests seated on the palm-bordered stairs spoke to her, and those nearest her gave her but a brief, well-bred glance, she moved forward and laid her hand upon the arm of a young girl, apparently but little older than herself.

“Can thee tell me, please, if Hannah Hudson lives here?”

At the sound of the plain speech, and the lady's name so familiarly given, there was an instant's silence; during which the young girl had faced about to Delight, with an expression of annoyance.

“Oh! Ah? I suppose—— My mother's name is Hannah, I believe, and Mrs. Palmer Hudson does



"CAN THEE TELL ME, PLEASE, IF HANNAH HUDSON LIVES HERE?"



live here. Are you—the girl from that country place—Seafort, Sea—something—I forget?”

“I am Delight Roloson from Seabury. Am I not expected here?”

“I suppose so. We didn’t look for you so soon. Come this way, please. I’ll find my mother;” and the young hostess hurriedly led the way to another room.

“Wait a moment, please, will thee? Maria is outside the door, and the expressman with the luggage. Thee may have heard of the chest of drawers and, of course, my trunk.”

Gwendolyn Hudson paused, with an expression of such disgust and dismay, that a youth standing near her laughed aloud.

“Uninvited guests, eh, Miss Gwendolyn?”

“Yes,” she said, sharply, and poor Delight felt more uncomfortable than ever before in her happy, sheltered life.

Fortunately, however, Mrs. Hudson herself had become aware of some unusual happening in her entrance hall, and appeared from the reception room, where she had been chatting with her guests.

“What is it, Gwen, dear? Ah! This young lady? I have not the pleasure——”

“It’s that Roloson girl, mamma. You know. With a maid, I guess and her luggage. What’s to be done?”

A few things were done, and so quickly, that before either Delight or Maria had recovered from their astonishment at their surroundings, they found themselves in a quiet basement room, which was on ordinary occasions the servants' dining-room. The precious bureau stood in one corner, ponderous in its wrappings, while a very ancient and time-worn hair trunk, which held Delight's simple wardrobe, kept it company.

Above their heads echoed the tread of many feet, the music commenced again and then they could hear the distant hum of conversation.

"I guess it's one of them receptions or something like that. I can't make it out at all. Hannah must have forgot all her Quaker bringing up," remarked Maria, with some disdain.

Then a neat person in a white cap and snowy apron attended them, bringing in a tray on which were various dishes of delicately prepared food.

"For the land's sake! All those victuals for two folks!" exclaimed Maria.

The waitress smiled, but said nothing, though she poured them cups of hot cocoa and served them with the supply of meats and salads which had been hastily gathered from the banquet prepared for the invited guests.

Delight looked curiously at the dainty sandwich rolls, tied with bits of ribbon, and was puzzled how to handle them. In this, however, she

was aided by the servant, who deftly slipped the ribbons off and heaped the rolls on the girl's plate. She did this as if it were part of her business and with so kind intention that her charges felt an instant liking for her.

Maria found her voice, and began a flood of questions.

"Do you live here? What kind of a party is it? Is anybody getting married? I thought the Hudsons were poor, but they're awful rich, aren't they?"

Dalton, the maid, could not attempt replying to all the inquiries. She satisfied them as simply as possible, without forgetting that the first duty of a good servant is to mind her own business. Yet she made them as comfortable as lay in her power; urging them to eat heartily and, when they had finished, suggesting that she should show them to their room.

"For you must be tired with your long journey, miss, and I'll take your bag. Please come this way," she said, kindly.

"This way," as they afterward learned, was by a dark back stairway, for servants only; but both the travellers were glad to escape another passage through that part of the house where the guests were assembled, and when they reached a small chamber on the top floor felt a sense of great relief.

“Seems as if now I might get my wits together,” remarked Maria, plumping her stout body into one of the two chairs visible.

“Is there anything more you’d like, miss? I suppose I may be needed below,” said Dalton, preparing to leave them.

“No, thank thee. I just want to go to sleep.”

“Hmm. There’s one thing *I’d* like, though. I want to know how to turn out the gas. I’ve read about folks as green as I am smothering themselves by their ignorance. I’m not going to do that just because I’m ashamed to ask for information,” said Maria, glibly. She had quite recovered her natural spirit and was now inclined to take a cheerful view of their reception.

“I suppose they were sort of upset, having two folks come in on them, unexpected like. And Parson Theron Babcock must have misunderstood, about their unwillingness. He’s a sensitive old fellow and terrible free-handed himself. He oughtn’t to expect folks that didn’t know us to like us as well as them that did,” she remarked, though nobody replied.

Indeed, Dalton had seemed to listen only because she must and seized the first break in the other’s speech to explain :

“This is not gas but electric light. You do this—and it’s out, or off. Turn so—it’s on.”



“Humph! For the land’s sake. That’s as easy as falling off a log.”

Even Dalton laughed, then bidding them good-night she immediately went out and closed the door behind her.

“Now, little Delight, thee undress and go to bed, quick’s thee can. Pshaw. That’s a narrow bed, and hard’s a rock. Think of my nice feather tick going down into all that salt water. I’m so flustered by things and all that’s happened since I left Seabury that I don’t feel as if I could shut a lash. It’s hot enough in here to roast an egg, besides; so I’ll just sit down by the window a minute to cool and calm off. Good-night, dearie. Thee needn’t lie so far over, right on the side-board. Indeed, if ’tis narrow, I’ll make out. One thing I’m glad of, though: that is that I put my money in thy trunk downstairs. I feel as if it was safer, under lock and key, than it was going round inside my dress. It got heavy, too, small bag as it might be.”

“Thee thought about it so much, maybe, made it weigh—I mean — Oh! I’m so sleepy!”

“Sleep, then, child, and get good rested.”

Delight obeyed, but Maria sat down by the open window and leaned her head against its frame to grieve over the comfortable wardrobe she had lost in Toddington Bay and the amount she would have to spend to replace it. But her

reflections soon ended in a profound slumber, which was broken at length by the chill that struck through her, from her long sitting in the November night air.

It took her some time to realize where she was, and, though she still shivered, she sat for a moment longer looking curiously out upon the roofs and steeples of the city. At that hour it seemed as quiet as Seabury itself. Street cars had ceased to run and milk carts had not yet begun. All pedestrians had disappeared, and the house itself was "silent as the grave."

Wait! What were those three men doing out there in what Maria called a lane. She was alert in an instant and drew the skirt of her gown up over her shoulders, resolving to watch them.

Now beneath all the spinster's matter of fact exterior lay a peculiar love for the romantic and adventurous. She knew it was a weakness, but she had always delighted in cheap and lurid literature. Detective tales had been the relaxation of her prosaic life and held a deeper interest for her, no doubt, from the fact that she enjoyed them surreptitiously. Captain Danforth had used to buy them for her when he went across the bay; and, because Aunt Delight had objected to them, Maria had secreted them in her own room and perused them after bedtime and at hours which would have shocked even "Gentle-

man Jim," had he known of them. She was, therefore, just the person for the present situation.

The actions of the men in the alley were, indeed, suspicious. In the moonlight, from her attic window, Maria saw them approach the high board fence which separated the Hudson yard from the "lane," and one of them tried the door which opened through the wall. It did not yield and, from their movements, she imagined this to be a surprise and disappointment; for, after a brief consultation, one of the trio climbed upon the shoulders of a mate and reaching his arm over the top of the fence slid the bolt, which fastened the door, aside. Then they entered the yard.

For one instant, as they walked directly, though cautiously, up the path to the basement door, Maria wondered if, after all, they might not be members of the family, belated for some reason. Then she as quickly rejected the idea, and returned to her former opinion.

"They're burglars sure enough. I never expected to really be a heroine, but, if those men are felonious robbers, I'm going to circumvent their burglarious intentions or my name is not Maria Disney!"

In her excitement the alarmed woman whispered to herself, using the longest and most

blood-curdling words she could recall from her beloved stories.

“What a chance! It’ll clinch my welcome in this household if I appear to it in the light of a rescuer. Besides, there’s the Roloson chest of drawers. If anything should happen to that—— For the land’s sake! The trunk! My money—my money!”

The whisper rose to a sort of scream, but Delight was too soundly asleep, as were all the other gaiety wearied people in the house, to be disturbed by it. But the memory of her foolish confidence in the security of a trunk—as it now appeared to her—made her frantic. Till she reflected:

“Maybe they haven’t found that yet, if they have really got in and I suppose they have. They didn’t go away, but they’re still as death. So ’ll I be. I’ll take off my shoes and stockings and my feet will help me feel where I’m going. Oh! I must be in time—I must. Oh! I can’t lose that—and live!”

She rushed out into the hall, now totally dark because all rooms opening upon it had closed doors so that no light could penetrate it even from the street. But Maria had a keen memory and observant eye. She easily groped her way to the back stairway and made a rapid, noiseless descent of it. Her soft plump feet clung to the

polished steps and she grasped a handrail which ran along the wall, until the rail suddenly ended at the frame of a door.

“This must be the bottom of the house. I don’t seem to recollect that doorway, but it must lead somewhere. I guess it’s the bottom, and down in that cellar part is where I allow the burglars are yet.”

At the very word her courage and ambition flamed afresh. She almost forgot the peril of her own especial fortune, as she reflected:

“This is the chance of my life. I was born for it. Folks wondered what sent me trapesing off from Seabury township, at my time o’ life, but when they read in the papers, where it’s sure to be printed, how’t Maria Disney was a heroine, then I guess!”

The room into which she had passed was wholly unfamiliar. It was even more densely dark than the stairway had been. She advanced toward its centre with extended arms and carefully groping feet. After a few steps, the outstretched hands touched another wall.

“It must be a little room, of some kind. I’ll feel round and see.”

She kept her hands pressed against the wainscoting; hitting now and then a set of shelves, or some appurtenance that suggested a pantry; and finally coming to an opening, like a door-

way. She paused a moment, listening intently. There was no sound, but down below, or through, this open space she caught a glimmer of light.

“This is either the way I came or some other way. That light means something—or nothing. I’ll step right ahead and see if it’s them!”

With this resolution prudence forsook her. She ceased pushing one fat foot forward, as an advance guard for her substantial person, but strode boldly onward into—space.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE HUDSON HOUSEHOLD

DELIGHT awoke, shivering and frightened. It was daylight, and through the still open window a soft snow was drifting over the chair where Maria had sat to watch the burglars.

Somebody was calling loudly and impatiently; and this outcry mingling with a peaceful dream of her old home startled her with a sense of impending danger.

Then the calling suddenly ceased, the door was pushed open, and a small boy came in.

“Well, my mother says, aren’t you never going to get up. Are you the girl from the country?”

“I’m Delight Roloson,” she replied, sitting up in bed and drawing the covers about her shoulders. “Where is Maria? Why didn’t she call me? I’m sorry if I have overslept and kept breakfast waiting.”

The little fellow stared at her, and she returned the gaze, with interest. She had never seen anything as beautiful as he was. He was all in blue, in a natty little costume which even

to her untrained sight suggested the extreme of fashion and his wonderful golden curls fell rippling to his waist. Yet his face was not rosy as a child's should be and his voice had a querulous, unpleasant ring.

Putting his arms akimbo he scanned her to his satisfaction :

“You didn't s'pose breakfast would wait for anybody, did you? Why, everybody eats when everybody wants to.”

Delight laughed. “Then I shall be all right. I feel very much like eating and I will get up and dress, right away, if thee'll go out and give me a chance. But, has thee seen Maria?”

“Oh! she's dead, I guess,” he said coolly. “Aren't you most froze with that window open? I'm sorry you're such a big girl. I hoped you'd go out and play with me. But you'll be just as bad as Gwen or Gladys. And you might as well get up. I'm going to stay here and show the way down. My mamma says she doesn't want any more excitements, she doesn't. She's about terribly prostrated, my mamma is. And my papa says you're her folks, anyway, and she got herself into the scrape.”

“What does thee mean about Maria? Has anything happened to her?”

“I guess there has. Lots. What makes you say thee to me?”



"I always speak that way. What has happened to her? please tell me, quick."

Delight was up and dressing rapidly as she asked the question, but her informant took his own time in replying. He walked to the window, climbed upon the chair and pulled the sash down. Presently, as she was tying her shoe, something cold and soft landed plump between her brows; and the child laughed uproariously.

She pressed the bit of snow into a ball and tossed it back with equal precision, but begged again:

"Won't thee tell me what it is about Maria?"

"Why, nothing. Only —— Say, will you go sliding with me in the park?"

"Yes. If I can. But Maria?"

"Oh! her. Well, she fell down the dumb waiter. My mamma thinks she was a crazy woman. She's all broke to pieces. She was barefooted. She had all my silver in a bag. She'd smashed open that funny old trunk of yours and ripped the stuff off that old bureau. My mamma says she can't have such goings on here and she's gone off in an ambulance. My papa says maybe she was a thief. No. It was Dalton said that. Say, will you go out in the yard and make a fort, if the snow comes enough?"

Delight said yes to every invitation, forgetting in her excitement and anxiety about Maria to

add the saving clause: "If I may." But when she had finished her simple toilet and was ready to go downstairs she paused for a moment, folded her hands, and bent her head above them.

Bertrand regarded her curiously, but some innate delicacy forbade him to interrupt, though the instant her head was lifted again his question was ready:

"What were you doing, then?"

"It was my morning worship."

"What's that?"

"Why—doesn't thee know? I was just speaking with God."

Bertrand's dark eyes expressed his surprise. She certainly was different from any girl he knew. Then he volunteered:

"I s'pose that's the same as saying your prayers. I said mine long ago. On my knees. Come, let's go down."

Delight watched her little guide with equal curiosity. She, also, found him wholly different from any of the few children she had known at Seabury—Mrs. Morrison's sturdy, untrained youngsters and the old sea captain's grandchildren.

As they entered the hall he turned toward her with the manner of a grown-up gentleman and extended his small hand.

"You better let me lead you. Not being used

to our stairs and house. That's why my mamma sent me up after you. Said she didn't want anybody else falling down and breaking themselves. Was bad enough to have one. It's trying to her nerves. She has delicate nerves, mamma has; but she is the sweetest thing. This way, please."

They descended by way of the handsomely carpeted front stairs, of which Delight had caught but a glimpse on the night before; and as they passed the now open doors of the various rooms she realized that their furnishings were of a kind very unlike the homelike simplicity of the "Snuggery."

Everywhere, there was the disorder natural after any large company; but white-capped maids were busy regulating, and in the parlors and reception-rooms some men were removing the decorations which had transformed them on the night before. Through the open front door she saw a florist's monster wagon, into which other men were carefully putting the wonderful palms and potted plants that had made her "fairyland."

"Where are all the people? Cousin Hannah, and the rest?"

"Down in the breakfast-room. Mamma doesn't often feel able to come down till luncheon, but this morning she was so disturbed she might as well come as not. She's got to have it over

with, she supposes, and might as well be now as ever. Then, maybe, she'll get some rest."

This was nothing that Delight could understand, and probably it was as well that it was so. For she might not have been able to face the room full of strangers with so calm and bright a bearing. As it was, she was so interested in everything about her and so absorbed in anxiety concerning Maria that she quite forgot herself and this gave her an ease of manner which rather astonished her city-bred relatives.

The breakfast-room was really half below the street, and one glance upward through the windows showed the park and its bushes heaped with snow. The warmth and luxury within contrasted vividly. The table was loaded with a profusion of dishes which suggested to Delight rather the remains of a Thanksgiving dinner than an ordinary breakfast, and was, indeed, a hasty gathering of the fragments of the late feast.

Passing swiftly toward the lounge, where Mrs. Hudson lay on a heap of silken cushions, Delight bade her good-morning. Then plunged at once into inquiries after her old friend.

"I'm sorry thee had to be disturbed last night, Cousin Hannah, but I can't make out what it is the little boy means. He says Maria is hurt or even dead. What is it, please?"

“That dreadful creature! Why did you bring her here, child? Surely, you haven’t been used to the luxury of a maid, all your life.”

“A maid? I don’t understand. I didn’t wish her to come, that is, I didn’t know she was coming until she did. She was unwilling to let me leave my home alone, and oh! won’t somebody please tell me what has happened to her?”

“Sit down. It tires me to see anybody stand and act so restlessly.”

Delight dropped into the nearest chair and kept her hands folded, waiting patiently.

“Is it possible you heard none of the commotion in the house, this morning? or in the night?”

“I heard nothing till the child called me.”

“Oh! Bertrand. Yes. Well, it seems, or we suppose, that your old servant went crazy. Toward morning, there was a fearful crash in the house; and, when Mr. Hudson went to see what it meant, there was the creature lying on the kitchen floor. She had a bag full of silverware in her arms and had evidently robbed your trunk.”

At this point Mrs. Hudson paused and looked appealingly toward a tall youth, who was leaning against the mantelpiece. “You tell it, George.”

“Robbed my trunk!”

“That’s what we think. Dalton was the first to notice it. She also saw her put your money in the trunk last night when she was giving you your supper, and this morning the money was gone.”

“But I had no money in it. She put her own there, for she was tired of carrying it about.”

George laughed, derisively. “Had she so much?”

“Yes. She had all the savings of all her life.”

“Whew!”

“Where is she? Mayn’t I see her?”

“She’s been taken to the hospital, long ago.”

“And what is that?”

“A place where—why don’t you know anything of hospitals?”

“No. Bertrand says she was hurt. How badly?”

Despite her courage a quiver came to Delight’s lip and a terrible homesickness assailed her. Among all the persons in the room there was not one who regarded her with any feeling more kindly than curiosity. There was not one who did not feel her an unwelcome addition to their household, except it might be little Bertrand who fancied she would make a good play-fellow.

Gladys saw the trembling of the stranger’s lip and came forward. It wouldn’t do for her

mother to go through any further painful or exciting scenes, and if the girl was going to cry the crying must be averted.

"You'd better have your breakfast now. Dalton, please serve it," she said as, in answer to a bell, the maid came in.

Delight looked up at her eagerly. She had seemed friendly on the evening before and George had spoken of her seeing Maria after her accident whatever it had been.

"Oh! *thee*'ll tell me! Everything. I cannot understand."

Dalton looked at her mistress who nodded approval.

"Well, then, miss, I was wakened by a dreadful noise. I thought everybody was tired and I didn't call anybody at first. But I went down into the basement to see what it might be about. There was the woman who came with you, lying on the floor, in her bare feet. She had a coarse bag full of the plate right beside her. She had gone down in the dumb waiter, for it was all broken to pieces. That is, some of the shelves were smashed. The butler left it down last night, instead of fastening it up as he should. Your trunk was open, and the bag of yours she had put in it was gone. The back door was unfastened. Her arm and ankle are broken, the ambulance surgeon said, and her head is hurt

some way. She didn't speak after I found her; and I thought she was dead. So I called Mr. Hudson, and he had her sent to hospital as soon as he could. Will you have two lumps of sugar in your cup?"

"I—the water will do. I'm not hungry. I want to go to Maria, right away."

Mrs. Hudson rose, languidly, as another maid appeared in the doorway, remarking:

"Your room is ready, Mrs. Hudson."

"Very well. I'll go upstairs and try to rest. Gwendolyn, you must take charge of things."

"But, mamma dear! This is my morning for kindergarden; and afterward, the fruit and flower mission."

"Gladys, then. And George, do go up and see to the florist. I'm not equal to arguing with him. Tell him to send his bills to the office. By mail, remember. Send them by mail. If he happened to call when your father was busy or out of sorts I don't know what would happen. Oh! dear. What is it? Bertrand, why can't you speak distinctly? not talk as if your mouth were full of bread and butter."

"But it is, mamma dear. Say, may I go out in the park? May this new Delight girl go with me? She said she would."

"Oh! anything. Anything for peace. Put on your reefer and leggings, and don't forget



your gloves. You went out without them yesterday and I was so mortified."

"I hate gloves. All the boys don't wear them."

"All young gentlemen do," said Gwendolyn, catching up the little fellow and giving him a caress. "Oh! you darling! You are just too lovely for words. Isn't he, mamma dear?"

A faint smile illumined Mrs. Hudson's delicate face. She must have once been very pretty, but was worn and almost haggard now. In society, she could still be animated and agreeable, but in her household life she was fretful and faultfinding. Her face had a look of continual suffering or anxiety and Delight pitied her. With real concern, she sprang up and offered to help the lady with the cushions she was piling.

"Does thee want these upstairs, too? Can I help thee? Thee looks so ill."

For a moment the familiar speech and the ready helpfulness carried the care-weary woman back to her own simpler youth and happier days. Her heart almost warmed to the unwelcome guest and she did say, with a smile:

"How odd yet how natural 'thee' sounds. But I'd rather you finished your breakfast. Jane will carry these. Understand, all of you. On no account—on no account—am I to be disturbed before three o'clock. I must dress and go out

then; but if I don't get some rest soon I shall have nervous prostration."

George had already gone up to speak with the florist, who had furnished the floral decorations for the evening's reception, and Gwendolyn also slipped away. Only Gladys, the girl so near Delight's own age, and little Bertrand remained with her, as she made an attempt to eat the food which had been placed before her. But she soon gave over trying and crossed to the window to look out. She moved a filmy lace curtain aside, because it obstructed her view of the passers-by, and was instantly reproved by her young cousin.

"Mamma doesn't like to have the draperies disturbed. It makes the house look so common."

"Common? To look out of a window?"

"In that way, well, yes. You can look through the lace easily enough."

Delight dropped the curtain and crossed to the chair where the other girl was seated, looking over the morning paper.

"Will thee tell me a little more about Maria?"

"That tiresome thing? What about her?"

"I want to see her. Where is the hospital?"

"I don't know. There are several. I don't really know which one she was sent to."

"Does thee think she will die?"

"I don't know. She was hurt badly, and she

ought to have been. Robbing the people that gave her shelter.”

“That could not be. She was not robbing anybody.”

“Then how came she downstairs?”

“I don’t know. Maybe she heard some real robbers and went to help protect the house.”

“How came she with the silver-ware close beside her then?”

“What is a dumb waiter?”

“Come and I’ll show you. What a queer place you must have lived in, not to know about any sort of thing.”

“Oh! maybe I do know about things, though not your sort. Aunt Delight used to say that what was suitable for one place wasn’t for another. The ‘Snuggery’ is the dearest house in the whole wide world, but it’s not at all like this.”

“Humph. How big is it?”

“Quite big. But this house is—tremendous.”

“Not half as large as we need.”

Delight opened her eyes in amazement, and Gladys explained:

“Times like last night, when we want so much room; mamma says we must have another place. Only this is in the real ‘swell’ part of the city so she doesn’t like to move.”

When they viewed the broken dumb waiter or

“lift,” as Gladys affected to call it, Delight remarked :

“I suppose she stepped through that door in the dark, by mistake. But doesn’t thee see that she couldn’t get the silver and put it in a bag, after she had fallen? Besides, Maria would never put such stuff away so carelessly. Every piece of ours was wrapped in flannel and packed nicely. She needn’t have broken the lock to my trunk, as thee sees it is, because she had the key herself. And she never would have scratched Aunt Delight’s chest of drawers like that. Oh! I fear it is ruined.”

The girl had peered beneath the wrappings of the ancient heirloom and discovered that its time-polished surface had been more defaced during that past night than in all the years of its previous existence. With a pang she reflected how grieved her great-aunt would have been and was almost glad that she was not alive to view the sacrilege.

Gladys laughed. “How funny to care for that old thing. Well, I must go out. I didn’t think to tell mamma, but I promised Nannie Tucker to go down town with her this morning. It’s not worth while going to school to-day, any way. It’s so late. Mamma will not care, for Nannie Tucker is one of the ‘swagger’ set, and she’s always glad to have me seen with the real

stylish ones. By the way, do you know, you carry yourself finely. If you were not so outlandishly dressed you'd have quite an air."

"Indeed! That's 'all Greek' to me, as 'Gentleman Jim' would remark. But I'm glad if anything about me pleases thee. I want thee to love me."

Gladys stared. "Why, of course. But none of us like 'gush.' And you'll have to drop that Quaker way of talking. It will attract unpleasant attention, it's so outlandish. If you're sent away to any school it would make people laugh at you."

The outstretched hand dropped to her side and Delight felt as if an icy wind had nipped her. But she instantly remembered what Maria had said about her being a stranger and remarked with a smile:

"Of course, thee can't love me yet. But I'll hope thee will, by and by. Yet I must keep to my plain speech. I couldn't give that up, I think. Will thee tell me one thing that puzzles me? Why, when this is such a big house, did Cousin Hannah have to send my poor Maria away to that hospital?"

"Why, you don't imagine we could or would keep her here, do you? If she hadn't been hurt she might have gone to the station house, unless papa had disliked the notoriety. As it is——

Why, the very idea ! Who of us would be willing to take care of such a creature ? and certainly none of the servants would. Besides, that room is so small—the absurdity of it. Of course, the hospital was the only place.”

“ Will thee not help me to find out where it is ? ”

“ I can't, not now. I don't know as mamma would be willing, anyway. Or rather, I do know that she would not. You can't do her any good. Don't forget to tell mamma where I've gone ; and if you're fond of reading you'll find some books for young people in the right hand bookcase in the library. I don't have time to read, myself. Now let's go upstairs. The girls want to clear up this room.”

On the stairs they met Bertrand capped, gloved, and coated in most approved style ; and Delight was glad to see his sister stoop and give his sunny curls a loving twist and set his leg-gings straight.

“ Oh ! you beautiful boy ! Don't play with any of the side street boys, remember. Just keep with those that live on the avenue ; then you'll be all right, and mamma will be pleased.”

“ All right. Delight, will you come with me ? ”

Gladys was running up the stair and did not pause to hear the answer, else results might have been quite different.

“Yes. Gladly, if thee’ll show me the way to the hospital where they’ve taken my dear Maria.”

A few hours later two very weary and be-draggled young people sat down to rest upon a wet bench in a park lying upon the very outskirts of the big city. The little boy had kept up manfully as long as possible, acting as guide to the stranger, but now his collapse was complete. With a very childish and natural movement he threw himself into Delight’s arms and sobbed out :

“I guess I didn’t know and we’re lost—we’re lost!”

## CHAPTER IX

### LOST AND FOUND

“LOST? Why, dear, how can we be, just here in the daylight? We’ll soon be all right again. Thee rest a moment in my lap and afterward we’ll go on.”

But presently even she began to feel the chill which follows exercise, too long continued, while Bertrand was shivering visibly. His face, tear wet and lying against her shoulder, seemed extremely frail and delicate and she reproached herself that in her anxiety about Maria she had been thoughtless of him.

“Cousin Hannah said she was not to be disturbed for any reason else I could have asked her. But it can’t be far and I mustn’t let him go to sleep, out-of-doors, even if he is tired.”

With that she stood up and set Bertrand upon his feet. He refused to use them and leaned upon her, fretfully.

“I can’t. I can’t. You’re a nasty, bad old girl. I want to go home. I want to be carried. I can’t walk. I won’t try.”

“But, my dear! Thee’s such a big, heavy



child. I fear I could not carry thee, even if I tried. Cheer up. I'm sorry now that we came, but we'll soon be safe at home again."

"Isn't your home. Don't like you. My mamma said she didn't see why you had to come. Oh! dear!"

A flush came out on his thin cheeks and his long lashes drooped upon them. He was evidently worn out, and with the departure of his strength all his quaint airs of premature manliness left him. His words would have had a sting in them for the listener, if she had not been too anxious about him to think of herself.

"I am unwelcome. I know that, and there's no use trying to forget it. Well, Aunt Delight planned it all for me and said it was best. Else I should not have come or been received at all, I suppose. But the first thing is to get this poor little midget home. I'm just as ignorant as he is, though so much bigger. It makes me think of the babes in the woods," ran her troubled thoughts. Then she looked up and saw a carriage approaching down one of the park avenues.

"Wait here, dearie. I'll step and ask the people coming to tell us the way home."

Propping Bertrand against the back of the bench she ran to meet the advancing vehicle. But, as it was apparently passing on without heed-

ing her, she pulled off her little grey cape and waved it frantically.

The effect was greater than she had desired. The horses, which were high spirited and being driven rapidly to reduce that very spirit, checked their onrush and one reared suddenly upon its haunches. The coachman tugged at the reins, and the lady in the carriage screamed. Delight felt a touch on her hand and wheeling sharply found Bertrand at her side.

“Step back! Step back!” yelled the driver, but the advice came too late. The child had sprung in the wrong direction, and another instant would have found him beneath those iron-shod hoofs.

The lady in the carriage saw a flash of grey skirts, the sudden bending of a blond head, the tossing aside of a child’s body, and covered her eyes. But the frightened animals had now come under control and the footman leaped to the ground.

“I reckon she’s only stunned like, ma’am,” said he, a moment later, and the owner of the equipage asked to be assisted down.

“That was the bravest thing I ever saw!” she cried, bending above Delight, lying motionless on the asphalt.

“About the most foolish, too. Scaring horses that way might have killed us all,” murmured John.

“She saved the child’s life. What a sweet faced girl she is, and looks like a Friend, so quaintly dressed.”

But the servant made no reply, knowing that none was expected; though he stood ready to obey orders when they should come.

“Lift her up, John. Carefully. Now, while I hold her head, run to the spring and bring a cup of water. Break the chain, if it’s fastened, but bring the water any way.”

He was back in a moment; yet even before this Delight had opened her eyes and was gazing confusedly into the face above her. Then her thoughts cleared and she smiled.

“What happened to me? Did the horses kick me? Is Bertrand safe? Is he?”

“Here I am, Delight,” answered the child, for himself, bending a very frightened glance upon her. “You shouldn’t have gone and run under the horses, you shouldn’t.”

“No, dear. I shouldn’t. Only thee ran first.”

She tried to rise, yet felt strangely dizzy and bewildered.

But the lady was ready with assistance and, as soon as she was really upon her feet, the girl grew rapidly better.

“I think it was the pole struck her, ma’am. But I reckon she’s all right,” again volunteered John.

“Yes, I’m all right, thank thee.”

“You are a Quaker, then,” said the lady. “I thought your dress expressed the fact. Where do you live? There are not many of your people here, in Chester, I think.”

“I am living, or I came to live, at my Cousin Hannah Hudson’s house. That is No. 777 Argyle Terrace.”

“Indeed! Why I know of her; but Argyle Terrace is a long way off. Away across the city. Several miles from here. How did you get so far?”

“We walked.”

Bertrand’s manliness returned, for he felt himself safe, now, with anybody who knew his mamma.

“I brought her. We’re going to the hospital to see Maria. We got lost, that’s all.”

“And quite enough, I should say,” answered the lady, smiling upon the pretty child. “But to what hospital were you going and who, pray, is ‘Maria’?”

“I don’t know. That is about the hospital. My little cousin, here, thought he could show me the way. Maria is Maria Disney of Seabury township. She came here with me and has met with an accident.”

“She stole my silver and Delight’s money,” added Bertrand. “She jumped down the waiter

and she's crazy. I guess that's why she goes barefooted in the winter time."

"Bertrand, did thee see Maria?" asked Delight, suddenly, her cheeks flaming with indignation at the calumny heaped upon her old friend.

"N-o-o. But I heard, didn't I?"

"Yes. But I wish thee would not speak in that way. Maria is—I love Maria!"

There was a silence, which the girl herself broke.

"I must ask thee to pardon me for keeping thee so long, friend; but if thee'll tell me which way to go to get back to Cousin Hannah's house we'll go at once. I'm sorry now that I didn't ask the direction from the people we met, but Bertrand liked to have me trust to him and I thought he knew. Having lived here all his life," she concluded, naïvely.

"Which is not a long while and the city is so big," laughed the lady. "But it is much easier to take you back to Argyle Terrace than to direct you how to reach it otherwise. Besides, two such innocents might be lost again. So, if you'll both please step into my carriage, John shall drive us there directly. I hope your friends have not been worrying about you, as it is."

Bertrand ran to the footman who lifted him in and Delight followed the lady into the vehicle. The horses' heads were turned in an op-

posite direction from that in which they had been travelling when Delight had frightened them and they set off at a swift pace.

This was another new and wholly delightful experience to the country girl, and her spirits rose in response to the exhilarating motion and the beauty of the park they were traversing.

“Why, it’s like the country only—more so!” she laughed. “Seabury is like it, yet without these beautiful trees. And those white figures are statuary, or statues, are they not? But Seabury has the *sea*.”

Such a wistful look came over the bonny face that the lady was touched.

“Tell me about your home, my dear, if that is it,” she said; and with such evident sympathy in the subject that Delight’s tongue was promptly loosened. With a few graphic words, she introduced to this stranger her old friends, “Bachelor Jim,” Esther Marlow, and the quaint grave-digger, so that the listener felt she should know them should she ever meet them anywhere. From that to the tale of her yesterday’s adventures and the trouble that had befallen Maria was an easy passage; and long before the drive was ended the new acquaintance knew as much as Delight herself concerning the unfortunate woman and guessed still more.

So, when they reached the block upon which

the Hudson's house stood, she remarked, quietly :

“If little Bertrand will get out here my man shall take him to his own door; then I'll beg to keep you a while longer and will help you to hunt up your injured friend.”

“Oh! thank thee. How good thee is. But that's what darling auntie said: That the world was as full of gentle hearts as of sunshine. Everybody was always very sweet to Aunt Delight.”

“Because she was always very 'sweet' to them, no doubt.”

“Yes. I think she was. I wish thee could have known her.”

“But since I could not, I am glad to know her great-great-niece,” said the lady, laying a caressing touch upon the girl's folded hands.

## CHAPTER X

### BID PALMER HUDSON COME TO ME

THE carriage drove slowly round and round the block while the footman escorted Master Bertrand to his mother's door; to leave him and explain where he had been found. Also, to "make Mrs. Vanderhagen's compliments, and she asked the courtesy of keeping Miss Roloson to lunch. The young lady would be returned in safety, some time before dinner."

Then the messenger came back and climbed into his place on the high seat; where he immediately became a rigid automatic personage, after the approved fashion of footmen.

Mrs. Vanderhagen rarely asked for information from her servants. When she did they as rarely failed her.

"John, if a person had been injured as this Maria was, where—from this part of the city—would she most likely be sent?"

"To Fairview Hospittle, ma'am."

"Drive to Fairview."

This now, had Delight known it, was equally a new experience for Mrs. Vanderhagen. She was



a warm-hearted, sympathetic person, who gave largely to all sorts of charities of everything except—herself. The sight of suffering was painful to her, and the odors in the homes of the poor exceeding disagreeable. So she contented herself with dealing out dollars from her big supply of them, and in other ways taking life quietly.

But something about the fresh-faced girl whom she had picked up in the park had stirred a deeper feeling.

“I’d sooner do almost anything else, my child, than visit a hospital; yet if you’re so anxious to see this ‘Maria’ I must go with you. You are too young and ignorant to go alone.”

“Oh! I wouldn’t have thee go, then, for anything. I can surely get along. It’s only a big house, I suppose, where sick folks are cared for. That’s what George told me.”

“Who is George?”

“Cousin Hannah’s son.”

“Why didn’t he come with you himself, instead of letting his little brother?”

“Oh! don’t blame him. I don’t suppose he knew. I had no chance to tell anybody except the little one.”

“Humph. But, child, how white you are. Are you ill? If so, the hospital’s not the best place for you to visit, odd as that may sound.

I've been told there were always unpleasant odors and scenes in such a place."

"I feel a little dizzy, now and then. That's all. Besides, at home, I used to eat very heartily, because I was out of doors so much, auntie thought. I think I forget my breakfast, pretty much, and then getting knocked down. That's all. I don't mind. Thee is so good to me."

"That's all! I should say it was quite enough. John, turn through Broadway and stop at Burleigh's. We'll have lunch down town, first, and then take the sick one afterward. I am right hungry myself; which is more than I often can say."

So the horses stopped before a fine building, in whose plate-glass windows were grouped many such plants as had decorated the Hudson parlors on the previous night; and where, had Delight known it, a meal would cost enough money to keep a Seabury household for several days, or even longer.

But as yet she knew little of the value of things and only their novelty and beauty interested her. The famous restaurant had both these features in high degree. White costumed waiters obsequiously bowed the guests forward, into an inner handsomely furnished room where the tables were faultlessly arranged.

At one of these little tables, in the pleasantest

alcove of all, Mrs. Vanderhagen and her charge sat down—after what was, to the girl, a surprising amount of attention in the matter of pulling and pushing of chairs and flourish of napkins.

Then a bill of fare was placed before each, but as Delight looked curiously at hers and found it printed in some foreign language the lady smiled and said:

“I’ll order for both, my dear; and what I think is best.”

So, while Delight was still gazing about her, profoundly interested in every person and thing she saw, a simple but perfectly cooked luncheon was placed before them. Delight’s share of it was enjoyed to the utmost, and even the luxury-sated Mrs. Vanderhagen found a zest imparted to her own appetite by the other’s frank appreciation of the delicate food.

Then they were back in the carriage again and now there was nothing languid about the Seabury bred girl.

“I *was* so hungry! It *was* so good. I thank thee so much. Does thee mind if I ask a great many questions? Dominie Theron Babcock said that was the way to learn and I feel as if I didn’t know anything—I mean about all this.”

“Ask all you wish, child, and I will answer if I am wise enough.”

So there was no pause in the talk; and words

flew back and forth between them like a shuttle. Some of Delight's queries brought a smile to even the faces of the servants on the high seats, though they were as quickly banished as possible; and for Mrs. Vanderhagen, she had not felt so much gratification in any companion she recalled as in this wide-eyed little maid, with her perpetual "Why? What? Where?" and her swift understanding of each explanation.

Save for the worry about Maria, which was almost forgotten during that happy drive, it would have been a perfect afternoon. Yet now and again a thought of her would obtrude, and when the carriage was again brought to a standstill before a high brick wall surrounding a group of large buildings Delight was both glad and sorry.

"Peters, you would better go to the entrance and inquire. Tell them we have come to see the woman who was injured at No. 777 Argyle Terrace. Her name is Maria Disney. We are her friends."

If poor Maria could have known and understood all this she would have held her head high in pride. That one of the wealthiest women in that great city should come to the door of that free hospital, where were received all the "scum" of the town, and send in her name as that of "friend" to the unknown countrywoman was amazing indeed.

But it did not seem at all strange to Delight, or that it was a thing to wonder at. To be kind was the rule under which she had been trained; and that the possession of money or the want of it should make any difference in this matter of kindness did not enter her mind.

“This way, madam.”

Peters, who was experienced, would have liked to add: “And I think it’s no place for you, ma’am;” but his duty forbade.

The hard bareness of this anteroom, where visitors waited admission to the hospital proper, was almost appalling to a person of Mrs. Vanderhagen’s habit. The plain board floor, the narrow benches and uncovered table, with the few anxious faced people grouped about it, oppressed her. Oddly enough, they gave her sense of something like guilt, remembering the comfort of her own home. Besides, even here at the portal, so to speak, the air was heavy with that indescribable “hospital odor” which, inhaled for the first time, is apt to turn a novice faint with a nameless fear.

Yet, offsetting this, was the exquisite neatness of the place—despite the coming and going of many feet; the alert cheerfulness of the hospital attachés, and the passing glimpse of a white gowned nurse smiling good-day upon some familiar guest. So, before she had quite made up

her mind to turn coward and retreat, leaving Delight alone, the lady's "nervousness" was set aside by the appearance of a linen coated messenger, announcing:

"You can see the patient inquired for, now, madam."

So they rose and followed their guide, through long uncarpeted halls, up bare and freshly scoured stairs, the "odor" growing stronger as they penetrated deeper into the heart of the place, and more than once, Mrs. Vanderhagen pitying herself for a "soft-hearted simpleton," who would much better have kept free from affairs that did not concern her.

Not so Delight. Fairview, like all the rest of this new world into which she had come, was full of keenest interest; though now, as in nothing before, was her heart stirred to sympathy and a desire to help.

"Oh! the white faces! Oh! the pity of it. All ill, all in trouble, and I so strong!"

Thus, as her companion's mind had been half-troubled concerning her abundance of comfort, the girl regarded her own robust health. Till the thought came:

"Maybe I *can* do something, some time, to help."

Maria's bed was at the extreme end of the accident ward and was, like all the others in the

great room, a narrow iron affair; plain but spotless in arrangement. About many of the cots screens were placed, so that the faces of the sufferers upon them were not visible to the visitors; and from here and there came loud or subdued groans and laments, which betrayed the recently injured.

Mrs. Vanderhagen's faintness half overpowered her and a watchful nurse, seeing her pass, stepped forward and suggested:

"If you are not used to this sort of thing, madam, had you better remain here?"

The lady smiled. "Thank you. I am ashamed of myself, but I'll overcome it directly. It's my first experience, you see."

"You would get over the shock if you came often, madam," replied the nurse, and returned to her own post.

Indeed, the unpleasant sensation was passing already and by the time the lady had followed Delight's eager advance to the side of her old friend she had forgotten it entirely.

"Oh! Maria! Thee dear, dear woman! I am so sorry, so sorry!"

It was a very helpless and forlorn Maria which lay before them. Her head was swathed in bandages, and her plump figure was rigidly outstretched. One arm only was free, and the full face was pale from pain. But she was quite con-

scious again, and about her lips played the familiar, half-cynical expression Delight remembered so well.

“This is a pretty kind of a heroine, isn’t it?”

“Wh-a-t? I don’t understand thee.”

“Likely enough. No matter. I’m punished. Aunt Delight didn’t believe in them but I would have them. If I hadn’t, I might have had sense and yelled. If I’d yelled it might have been that somebody else pitched headlong, instead of me. That’s what the nurse says. I don’t know. Last I remember I was sort of play-acting and stepped out right smart. The next thing—here I was. It’s a hospital. How did thee find me?”

“This lady brought me. Mrs. Vanderhagen is her name.”

“Much obliged to you, ma’am, I’m sure. Are you one of the family?”

“No, I am not,” replied the stranger, with some decision.

“Hmm. Didn’t know.”

“The visit must be short, to-day,” suggested the nurse, watching her patient’s face. “You can come again.”

“Can’t talk, even. Well—two things, then. Take the money out the trunk, little Delight, and keep it safe; and say to Palmer Hudson these words: Maria Disney, of Seabury township, bids him come to her. Remember,” she added, im-



pressively : " Maria Disney bids Palmer Hudson come. They must have speech together. There. Go away. I'm tired, and I guess—that this is a sorry—pass—a heroine—Stephen Dan ——"

" Oh! what is it?" begged Delight, catching the nurse's arm.

" Nothing," she returned composedly, " but what we anticipated. She will probably be delirious, for awhile. We think she will pull through all right. Good-morning."

## CHAPTER XI

### DELIGHT AND HER GUARDIAN

“THERE comes the lady’s carriage, mamma dear.”

A faint flush rose in Mrs. Hudson’s thin cheek and she glanced a bit nervously into the great mirror. But her attire was satisfactory, even to herself, and she waited, expectantly, for the entrance of a desirable visitor. One whom it had long been her ambition to know.

Yet, when the bell rang, nobody sought admittance save Delight Roloson and she was calling out in a brisk, cheerful voice:

“Where is thee, Cousin Hannah?”

“In the drawing-room, miss,” answered the butler, and she followed the direction which he gave, for as yet the many rooms of the mansion much confused her. But she entered the apartment almost running and flushed with eagerness and the chill of the outer air. Her bright brown eyes seemed equally ready to laugh or cry and her lips were parted to let out a flood of words. Her yellow hair that, despite its strict up-bringing, would curl whenever it could escape

bondage had broken loose from the braid in which it had been confined and rippled under her grey gipsy hat in a fashion so like Bertrand's that it would have provoked admiration in some eyes.

But not in Mrs. Hudson's. To her it suggested only carelessness, and the disappointment she felt as she heard the carriage rolling away from her door gave her voice a more than customary peevishness.

"Child! Has nobody taught you to enter a room differently and that loud calling out is vulgar?"

Delight stopped midway the floor and the eagerness died out of her face.

"Why, was that wrong? I did not know it. I am sorry; but I wanted to tell thee so much, and to ask if thee had been worried about me." Then she added, sweetly: "I suppose I *am* very ignorant of what people should know who live in cities; but I will try to learn as fast as I can. I will, indeed."

"Well, never mind. You can sit down quietly now and tell me where you have been."

"I thought Bertrand would have told that. I hoped he would. But, of course, I have been to the hospital and have seen Maria. Oh! my poor Maria! I fear she is very ill. Yet the nurse said she hoped she would pull through; that

means, will live, I think. Why thee would have never known her with her bandaged head. Then she has some sort of plaster casts around her arm and her ankle. Mrs. Vanderhagen said it would be months, maybe, before she could walk or use her arm. Poor Maria, who was never ill in her life. That I know of."

"Well, I hope it will teach her a lesson."

"Why, Cousin Hannah!"

"Delight, I think it would be better if—while you are here—you should say 'Mrs. Hudson.' I am not especially fond of my name, anyway; and I prefer the other form."

"Very well; but I thought if thee was my kinswoman, as auntie darling said, that thee would be as glad to love me as I thee."

Delight said this very quietly, though with a heavy heart. Life seemed to open before her as an exceedingly puzzling matter. She had met the greatest kindness from a total stranger and an almost utter lack of it in the house of her friends; but she was resolute to be happy and to make others so and the first help to doing this, at present, was to forget herself.

Mrs. Hudson saw the trouble on her young relative's face and volunteered to explain:

"You must know, Delight, that our kinship is a very distant one. I do not even know the rights of it, but we are only far away cousins. I

believe that my husband managed most of our great-aunt's money matters and I suppose that is the reason she felt she could send you to us. Otherwise, you have no real claim. But you will have to discuss all that with Mr. Hudson. He knows exactly about your position, how much, or rather how little, property you have, and all the rest of it. Such matters tire me, so that I seldom talk about them. I leave it all to him.

“Now, I would like an account of your day, if you please. But let me here say that on no account are you ever again to take my precious Bertrand so far away from home. It would have killed me outright if anything had happened to him.”

“Why, it was he took me,” answered Delight, in surprise; “and I, too, should have felt very unhappy if harm had come to him.”

Mrs. Hudson waved her white hand. “I am waiting to hear.”

“Did he tell thee about his nearly getting under the horses' feet?”

“Under the horses' feet! What do you mean? Quick! *Was* he under them?”

“Nearly. I frightened them with my cape and I didn't know he was there. But he was not hurt. They didn't touch him. The pole, or something, hit me and made me dizzy. It soon passed, though. Then Mrs. Vanderhagen brought

us home, or brought him; and because thee was so poorly and couldn't go with me, and nobody else seemed able, she took me to see Maria. But first we went to a beautiful place, all flowers and little tables, and had a delicious dinner. I never saw anything so pretty, not even thy breakfast-room."

"Thank you. Did you happen to hear the name of this palace of delight?"

"The lady called it 'Burleigh's.' I saw that word, too, over the doorway, made out of colored balls."

"Burleigh's? Burleigh's! Upon my word, you have done well for yourself. It is really very romantic. For do you know that that is the most expensive and stylish place in Chester city. Why, my own girls, even, never set foot inside that restaurant, to my knowledge, and they've lived here always. Hmm. If this beginning is a sample of what we are to expect—I don't know what to say."

"Say nothing, mamma dear!" said Gwendolyn, coaxingly, as she put her hand on her mother's shoulder, and sank into the empty place beside her.

Delight looked at the young girl in frank admiration. Both Gwendolyn and Gladys were very pretty. They said unpleasant things to each other, in a peculiar way which nobody seemed to take to

heart, yet there were occasional little touches of affection between them which Delight thought very sweet. They had been present all the time since her return, garbed as for an evening company, but till now had taken no part in the talk. Even George, the tall elder son, had come into the room and stood lounging in his favorite pose against the mantel. Delight thought he had a nice face, "if he would only look more alive."

"No. Don't say anything, pro or con," he now remarked. "We are an aspiring family. We are well up to the social ladder, and who knows how high we may yet climb. Even a cousin from 'Wayback,' if she is given to adventures like this, may be of use. Really, Delight, you have astonished us all. I may say Delighted us all, but that would be a pun and not allowed here."

The stranger looked at him in such a puzzled manner that Gladys observed:

"Don't mind him, child. He thinks he is smart but he isn't. You're the smartest one present, for you've done what I couldn't. I'd give anything to know that Mrs. Vanderhagen, she is so awfully rich. She has a fancy for young girls, too, and gives no end of little entertainments for them. Of course, I'm not 'out' yet but she's worth knowing, I tell you. She's a leader."

"She is very kind. If thee wants to know her why doesn't thee go and see her? I never saw a pleasanter person."

"Go to see her, uninvited? That shows how little you know of etiquette. The idea! Hmm."

At that moment dinner was announced and Gwen suggested to Delight that she should go upstairs and make herself presentable.

"Put on a light evening dress if you have one."

"I have nothing better than this one, cousin."

"Mercy! Well, it doesn't matter. You don't know anybody yet so won't have to come down."

"Except Mrs. Vanderhagen," said George teasingly. "Hark. Is that father coming in? I warn you, girls, to take care. Something's wrong with him to-day. He's as blue as a whetstone."

Delight had not yet seen Mr. Hudson, her guardian, nor did he appear at table. She heard somebody remark that he had gone directly to his library and wished no dinner kept for him.

"I suppose all those bills have come in," said Gwendolyn, coolly. "He's always like that, at such times."

After dinner, guests came and nobody urged Delight to remain in the drawing-room, where she had little desire to be. She was used to early sleep, and besides that could not rid her mind of Maria's emphatic message: "Tell Palmer Hudson to come to me."



“Well, I’ll bid Cousin—I mean Mrs. Hudson, good-night, then go the library and tell him. After that to bed. What a strange day it has been and how far away dear Seabury seems!”

To her tap on the closed library door nobody replied, and thinking it might be empty she opened it and looked in.

A light was burning low upon the big table, and beside this sat a grey-haired man. His head was bowed upon his arms, outstretched along the table’s top, and he did not move at sound of her entrance. Delight paused, thinking him asleep, and afraid to advance or retreat lest she should disturb him; but she was just drawing softly back into the hall when she caught the sound of a sob or groan which seemed to come from the depths of the man’s spirit.

So she ran to him and laid her hand on his head.

“Why, friend, is thee ill? Can I help thee?”

He raised his haggard face, so white it frightened her. “What is it? Who are you?”

“Why, just Delight. Delight Roloson. I’m sorry thee is suffering and that I came, if I can’t do thee any good. I had to come, though, because she may be dying and it is her message. She bade me give it.”

The man roused himself from his preoccupation and stared at her absently, forcing his atten-

tion back to the present. As he did so and caught the plain speech a fresh spasm of pain crossed his haggard features. An almost forgotten memory arose and tortured him. In her face he seemed to see not hers alone but that of her dead father to whom she was so like.

His expression frightened her and she anxiously explained :

“Maria. Maria Disney from Aunt Delight Roloson’s, at Seabury township. She came with me and was hurt here, thee knows, this morning. She is in the hospital. She said: ‘Tell Palmer Hudson to come to me.’ That’s all. Now, if I can do nothing for thee—good-night.”

Then she went away ; but for long afterward her guardian sat gazing into vacancy, thinking thoughts that none might envy.

## CHAPTER XII

### THAT, TOO, IS LOST

MR. AND MRS. VANDERHAGEN sat at breakfast in their home and each was looking over a morning city newspaper. He, intent upon the quotations in stocks and similar matters; she with an idle interest in society chronicles. These having been exhausted, she turned to the column of local news and read, in dramatic headlines, the statement:

“Failure of Palmer Hudson & Company. The Gold Street Speculator has met his Waterloo.”

“Why, Blasius! Do you remember my telling you, last week, about my meeting that young Quakeress, or Friend, in the park? And of our visit to the hospital?”

“Perfectly.”

“She had come to live with those Palmer Hudsons who are making such desperate efforts to get into the ‘four hundred.’”

“Yes. Well?”

“He’s failed, I see.”

“Ah? That’s too bad. I’m sorry for him. Sorry for any poor fellow who goes under. Yet

that's the curse of speculation, as everybody finds out who tries it. Sooner or later, the crash. Another cup of coffee, please."

The lady filled the cup and returned to her reading. But, laying the paper down, remarked, reflectively: "I wonder how it will affect that child's life. She was the brightest, sunshiniest thing. I hoped to meet her again. Her freshness did me good; so different from the affectation of almost all the girls one knows. When she talked of the sea I could almost smell salt water."

Mr. Vanderhagen laughed.

"You are not prone to such enthusiasm, Henrietta. Let us hope this failure will not bring misfortune to your little acquaintance. Well, I'll be off down town. By the way; there is a picture sale at Hornbeck's this morning. If you'll drive down about noon, I'll try and get off and visit it with you. We might pick up something good."

"Very well. I'll do so. Good-bye."

The childless, grey-haired couple kissed and parted as tenderly as if they were but at the beginning instead of near the close of life; and each was speedily busied with personal affairs, quite forgetting, after their brief comment upon it, the news of the Hudson failure.

Yet at No. 777 Argyle Terrace was dire distress. It was the knowledge of coming finan-

cial ruin that had bowed Palmer Hudson's head so abjectly on that night when Delight had first seen him. Then had followed a few days of such anxiety to all concerned that they remembered them ever after as one recalls a nightmare. Sleepless nights and irregular meals made irritable nerves and Delight would have been utterly miserable had it not been for her daily visit to Maria.

This Mrs. Hudson now provided for by sending Dalton with her in a street car; and the trips to and from hospital were fascinating to the girl. Though there was little satisfaction in the interviews with the sick woman, who lay mostly in a sort of stupor and but rarely recognized her visitor.

"The injury to the head was more serious than we thought," the nurse explained. "She will be ill, probably, for a long time. Yet we still believe that she will finally recover."

Delight took what comfort she could from this and at home made fast friends with little Bertrand, which helped them both.

But, after the suspense of waiting, it was almost a relief to all concerned when the failure was publicly announced and the worst had come.

At this announcement, Mrs. Hudson was not present, having gone to bed with a nervous headache, and her husband would not have her dis-

turbed. But he gathered the rest of the family together and in a few words told all.

Gladys was always readiest to talk and now the first to inquire :

“What does it mean, papa dear? Just what? It sounds so vague; and though I know it’s dreadful trouble, from the way you and mamma act, I really do not understand. I remember the Griffiths ‘failed,’ or I heard so, but I didn’t see that they were any different afterward.”

“The Griffiths were fortunate in having rich friends to set them on their feet again. Our, my collapse, is complete. We are ruined, utterly.”

“Yes, but what? Just what?” repeated the practical Gladys.

“I do not own a dollar in this world. I do owe more dollars than I can ever hope to repay. This house is not mine. The clothes you have on your backs are not paid for. We will have to leave Argyle Terrace, almost at once, and Heaven only knows where we shall find another shelter.”

“Oh! father!” cried Gwendolyn, aghast.

“I gave you what I could when I could. I can give you nothing more.”

“But we must go somewhere. We can’t all die and get out of it that way,” said Gladys, sharply. Yet her heart reproached her as soon as the speech was uttered, for the look her father turned upon her cut her to the soul.

Delight had remained a silent listener, until then, but her desire to help now overcame her fear of the stern man whom even his children seemed to dread.

“But, Cousin Palmer, why can't we go back to Seabury? The 'Snuggery' is big enough for more than all of us.”

“The 'Snuggery'!” groaned Mr. Hudson.

“Indeed, it is a dear old home. So sunshiny and breezy and peaceful. Thee'd get rested there and forget all thy troubles. Why not?”

In her eagerness the girl did that which amazed the others and what none of his own children would have presumed to do, so far away from him had they grown in their fashionable life. She laid her cheek against his and threw her arms across his bowed shoulders.

He could not but be touched by her simple and natural action and, with a strange glance toward his pretty daughters, he removed her hand and gave it a gentle pat. But even a deeper gloom rested upon his haggard face, and though the bitterness was gone from his voice it had a ring of profound sadness as he replied:

“The 'Snuggery' has gone with all the rest.”

It was Delight's turn to gasp and grow white.

“What do I hear thee say? The old home gone? How could that be? Wasn't it mine, after Aunt Delight?”

“With all the rest, that, too, has gone,” repeated her guardian, as he rose and went away; and perhaps the keenest pang the ruined man suffered came in the thought of her unwarrantable loss and his own betrayal of trust.



## CHAPTER XIII

### AN HEIRLOOM'S COMMAND

THE financial ruin of the Palmer Hudsons was as complete as the head of the family had said.

“We are a good deal worse off than penniless. We are so loaded with debt that I can never again hope to stand upright and look my fellow-men in the face. Wherever we are to find shelter I cannot guess.”

But one old friend who pitied them and had, it might be, helped to bring about the failure—since he had advised certain investments which turned out badly—came to their aid with the offer of a temporary home.

“It’s a shabby, unrentable house on a side street. It will seem a wretched place to your family, Mr. Hudson, but such as it is you are welcome to use it—for the present.”

Because they could do no better, they moved into it; with such remnants of necessary furniture as the law allowed them and chattel mortgages had not covered.

Here Mrs. Hudson’s overstrained nerves relaxed entirely and she took to her bed, in the

best room of the house, a confirmed invalid; and here, with their mother so helpless and their father glooming about in idle despondency, life seemed a blank and dreadful thing to the gaiety-loving children.

But there were two to whom the change was an agreeable one: Delight—since she found herself now supremely useful; and Bertrand who was wholly and sincerely careless. Indeed, neither of these had ever been happier. Even Delight's sunny life at the dear old "Snuggery" had not given her the satisfaction of this new and laborious one, wherein from sun-up till sun-down she must forget self and remember others.

At last, one afternoon in late December, just before the night fell, she found a little time in which to try and put into some agreeable order the tiny back attic room which was her own—so-called.

"That's the third time I've tried that bureau in that corner and that's the third time it wouldn't go. The dear beautiful old thing is like the donkey in 'Bachelor Jim's' song. I'm afraid it's a 'white elephant,' and I almost wish it were back in the 'Snuggery.' But, oh! dear! There is no 'Snuggery,' no auntie darling, no Maria—even; no—anything!" and for a brief space a very grave look settled on the girl's bonny face, as she dropped upon the floor, to rest



BERTRAND CAME TUMBLING IN



her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands, in a favorite attitude when "thinking things over."

But just then rose a wail, in the hallway without, which grew in volume continually.

Delight cocked her head and so jerked her white dust cap jauntily awry, as she reflected:

"That progressive outcry can come from none other than my young Cousin Bertrand. He's the funniest little chap!" But she sprang to open the door and peer out into the dimness of the passage.

"Heigho, youngster! For the smallest boy thee can make the biggest noise! What's the trouble now, sir?"

"I played with the scrubber's boy and he's got my jackknife."

"Yes? A very good thing, indeed.

Bertrand came tumbling in, laden with a basket of kittens, a broken kite, and a syrup jug. He received Delight's laughing comment with a puzzled stare.

"Why a good thing?"

"Because thee cannot cut any more fingers with it. How many have I bandaged already, to-day?"

The child dropped both basket and jug, which rolled against the bed's leg, as he contemplated his rather grimy hands.

“One, two, three, four.”

“And quite sufficient. Well, what am I to do for thee now?”

“See my kitty-cats?”

“I see. Only too well. Whence came they and whither will they go?”

Bertrand stared again, then suddenly threw his arms about the girl's waist and exclaimed, earnestly:

“Delight, I love you!”

“That's good. Why?”

“Because you're so—so funny.”

“A sensible and not too flattering reason. But about the cats. Let's keep to business. Where did thee get them?”

“Beefsteak man.”

“What's thee going to do with them?”

“Give them to you. That little mousey one is just beautiful.”

“Hmm. Well, for the present, here thee goes!” with a strong swing, she lifted the little boy and deposited him in the middle of her narrow bed. Then she gathered up the extremely young kittens and gently tossed the soft furry things into his lap. Last of all the syrup jug was picked up and examined.

“This is another new thing. Where did thee get it? Lucky it is empty.”

“Bought it,” answered Bertrand, leaping

down, and strutting about with his hands in his pockets. "I've got a lot more, too. See?" pulling out one hand.

Delight regarded the few coins in the delicate little palm with some anxiety. She knew there was very little money in that house and her own scanty supply had long ago been exhausted in buying fruit for Mrs. Hudson.

"Where did thee get them?" she asked gravely.

"Sit down and I'll tell."

So down upon the floor again she dropped, for the one chair belonging to her room had been set away from the dust of sweeping. Bertrand placed the jug carefully upon the bureau and himself upon her lap. Then he looked up and laughed. So did Delight.

Time had not improved the clearness of the ancient mirror above the heirloom, and it hung at an angle which foreshortened their reflections oddly.

"Why, we look just like him. All squeezed up together. You more'n me. He has a white cap, all crooked, and so have you. He has little yellow curls and brown eyes and so have you. He's awfully jolly and so are you. I'm very, very glad I picked him out, 'stead of that other white image. A kind of Cupid, I guess; but it wouldn't hold anything. The jug man will."

“It is very nice. But I should enjoy hearing about the money, my dear.”

“Well, you know my jackstraws? They were my own. My papa said so. I asked him. And there was a boy. He lives—somewhere round. He saw me have them and he said he’d give me a lot of cents for them. I was glad. I wanted to get a Christmas present for you.”

“Oh! thee darling! That was very lovely and unselfish of thee. Still—— Well, go on. All about it. Why, syrup jug, especially?”

“Two things. It was the biggest I could get for what I had. That didn’t cost it all. Then I told the milk-store woman it was for you. And she said: ‘That sweet girl?’ and I said, ‘Yes.’ Then she looked all round and helped me choose it. It was the sweetest thing she had. Do you like it, Delight?”

“More than any gift I ever had! And I’m glad thee didn’t wait till Christmas. Besides, I think that syrup is not so very costly and maybe thee and I can have our suppers up here, sometimes, with the jug man to help out. He certainly has a fine complexion!”

“Hasn’t he! Such red cheeks and such a white nose. Say, Delight?”

“Well.”

“Show me the inside of it, now? You’re always so busy.”



“And must be this minute. But how could I refuse a dear little lad who sold his playthings to make me happy? Wait. I’ll bring in the chair and thee can stand upon it to see.”

So Bertrand was perched where he could inspect the interior of the curious top of the old chest of drawers. In the first place the little mirror was, by the pressure of a spring, slipped down into the back in a most bewildering way. Then another spring was touched and the top slowly raised.

“As if,” said Delight, “it felt the dignity of its great age and would do nothing lightly. Hear it creak! ‘Bachelor Jim’ used to say it was rheumatic.”

Inside the polished, darkened top, was set a small brass plate, on which was engraved in quaint characters the even quainter triplet:

“Deare Daughtere Delight,  
Make Thy Life Brighte,  
As By Name Highte.”

“Isn’t it funny! What does it mean?”

“That I must live up to my chest of drawers! As all my ancestresses—— Oh! what a long word!—have done or tried to do.”

“How can a girl live up to a bureau? I think it’s queer.”

“I think it’s sometimes difficult. But—time’s

up! Thee really must go now, so that I can finish and put that lesson into practice."

"Will I leave the kitty-cats for you to bring?"

"Surely not! Put them in the basket and—disappear!"

The girl's spirits had risen to a high pitch. Into a rather discouraged mood had come her little cousin with his tale of self-sacrifice, and that he loved her well enough to make the sacrifice had touched her deeply. It was almost the first expression of appreciation that had come to her, since her arrival in the Hudson household, and she now quite forgot all her anxieties. Likewise her prudence.

Bertrand started for the basement, and she attacked her chest of drawers with another sturdy push, trying to get it into a corner several inches too narrow. The effort and the rusty castors upon the bare floor made a rumble and squeak; and at the instant came a scream from the hall.

"Oh! Bertrand! What now?"

"Mew, mew, mew!"

"Child! What is thee doing to those cats?"

"Putting them back in the basket. They won't stay. They're so squirmy and twisty."

Then another thump, thumpety thump, and an agonized mewing.

"Bertrand, thee must leave them alone."

“They won't leave themselves alone. They've all tumbled out.”

By this time the kittens had tottered on their weak little legs to the topmost stair, and one had wriggled over upon the next step. Delight laughed.

“They are funny! And imitation is flattery. Sir Tortoise Shell has tried to break his spine and now all the other little toadies are trying to break theirs. Well, let them wobble! That way lies the basement; and if they crawl fast enough and fall far enough they'll reach it without anybody's help.”

Bertrand was uncertain whether to join in the laugh or to cry; but he did neither for a door opened in the floor below and a voice called out, sharply:

“Delight Roloson! I should think you would be ashamed! You've driven dear mamma about frantic with your noise. You are a horribly thoughtless girl.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### IT MIGHT BE SANTA CLAUS

A SINGLE kerosene lamp burned on the centre table in the little back parlor of the new home in Harmony street. The bare floor was partially covered by a few rugs, and a scant supply of chairs were scattered about. On a lounge at one corner Gwendolyn lay with her back to the light and, for the most part, silent. When she did speak it was to reprimand her younger brother for the noise he was making with his marbles or to retort in monosyllables to some sharp speech of Gladys.

Of all, only Delight was busy. She was knitting and the light glanced brightly from her flying needles to her sunny hair. She made a quaint and pretty picture in her grey gown with the white turned over collar and cuffs that had once been the pride of Maria's heart to keep spotlessly laundered. They were still clean, indeed, but showed they had been ironed by inexperienced hands, as did the large white apron with which she protected her gown. But to her fashion loving cousins her attire was a continual annoyance ; though its neatness and simplicity con-

trusted most favorably, had they known it, with their own clothing, now so out of keeping with their altered circumstances.

Yet it was not of anybody's apparel that either of the three girls were thinking just then; and Gladys presently voiced the thoughts of all in her exclamation:

"So to-morrow will be Christmas!"

"Such a Christmas!" moaned Gwendolyn.

"Such a Christmas, indeed!" echoed her sister.

"Will it be so very different then, from all the others?" asked Delight.

"Different! Humph! Maybe down there in 'Seabury township' they didn't keep the holiday, but we always have and oh! so charmingly. Why, last year I made such beautiful gifts for each girl in our set; then we had a Christmas Eve party, with a monster tree and loads of presents for all. Just one item, even: each of us two girls had fifty dollars for knickknack money, alone, besides our regular Christmas things. George had seventy-five, and Bertrand twenty. Now—I haven't a cent to bless myself with, as Dalton used to say; and life is just—horrible!"

"Oh! Gladys!"

"Prove that it isn't. Of all the people I ever knew you can get the most out of the least; but surely even you can't see anything very rose colored about to-morrow—here."

“I do see a great deal. But—I mean, I wish I could show thee just how it looks in my mind, without the telling it. Talking doesn’t always help.”

“Try it, once.”

“Well, if I had been living as—as Cousin Palmer did, owing everybody and dreading the crash that was sure to come, it would be relief to have it over. I couldn’t enjoy things that weren’t paid for. I shouldn’t think they were mine.”

“But *we* knew nothing of all that.”

“Now that thee does know, how can thee regret getting into—into an honest way of life?”

“Do you mean to say that my father wasn’t an honest man?” flashed Gladys.

“No, no. I said nothing like that——”

“But you did mean it.”

“Never,” said Delight, earnestly, and fixed her truthful eyes on her cousin’s heated face. “I do not presume to judge anybody; but I think even Palmer Hudson is less worried now than before the failure. When I was dusting this room, yesterday, and he sat here by the window, he talked to me a little. One thing I remember, for it made me laugh: ‘When a man has reached the bottom he can’t fall any further.’ But, odd as it was, I do believe there was some comfort in it; and, may I say something else?”

“Say anything. Free your troubled spirit, as it moves thee. That’s Quaker talk, isn’t it?”

“It’s—irreverence, I think,” interposed Gwendolyn, sitting up and facing them. “And I think, Gladys, that Delight deserves something better at our hands than ridicule of her religion.”

“Oh! I didn’t mean to ridicule it, and I didn’t know as it was religion. I thought it was the way she had been brought up. That’s all. I’m sorry, of course. But, I confess, Gwen, I don’t see what makes you take the rôle of reprovèr. You haven’t been especially kind to Delight, any more than I have. You’ve snapped her up, time and again, for making a noise or not making enough.”

“I know it. I’m sorry, and I’m going to say right here, Delight, dear, that I have seen how much you do for all of us. You go into the kitchen and work and yet I don’t believe—say, child! Did you ever wash dishes when you lived there at the ‘Snuggery’ with your old aunt?”

“Yes, indeed. Many times. I liked it.”

“The dirty soapy water and greasy plates?”

“Delight can’t complain of any too much grease here. It’s oat meal three times a day, seems to me.”

“Thee thrives on it. So does little Bertrand. I never saw such an improved small boy as he is.”

“Improved! He’s in trouble all the time. He is running wild on the street, mixing with all the butchers’ sons and the milkman’s daughters. I saw him in a regular fisticuff row with some ragged child this very afternoon. He’ll be ruined and all his pretty manners spoiled.”

“He’ll grow up a deal manlier for the ‘roughing it.’”

“And than his brother George!” cried a mocking voice, as the youth himself came in.

“I hope so!” retorted Delight, merrily.

“Delight Roloson, where did you ever learn such heaps of wisdom? At your age?” demanded George, in real earnest.

“I’m not wise. I remember what auntie darling used to say. That’s all. She loved manly men and womanly women. She used to talk to me a great deal as I sat sewing beside her. I hated sewing, I do still. She made me do it, though, and called those hours ‘the discipline of the seam.’ She managed to teach me a lot, along with the hemstitch and the buttonhole. That makes me think. We ought to talk things over. Does thee know, George, that almost the last dollar of money in the house will be gone by the end of the week? It may not seem that I should be the one to first speak of it, but Cousin Hannah told me ——”

“I thought all such matters were kept from



her. Who's been worrying her with that?" asked Gwendolyn, hastily. "Who has dared ——"

"Invade your province? Isn't she our mother as well as yours?"

"Of course. But if you all knew how hard I've tried and how—bitter it all is."

Down went the girl's head again and something like a sob broke from her.

"Whew! this is more than a fellow can stand!" cried the elder brother, and picking up his hat he went out, hurriedly.

To the surprise of the others, Delight followed him as swiftly. They heard the outer door slam, open, and close again.

"What in the world! If she isn't the very queerest girl."

But in a few moments, both George and Delight reëntered; he looking rather ashamed as well as amused, and she with a heightened color and that sidewise carriage of her head which, with her, indicated a mental conflict.

There was an awkward silence, for the other girls felt that there was more in Delight's action than appeared on the surface; and to break this the brother inquired:

"Well, Gwen. How went the kindergarten this morning? Don't you always go there to help fix for Christmas?"

"It was on a piece with all the rest. Horrible."

“What do you mean?”

“That—that, for the first time in my life, which I remember, I—was—snubbed!”

“And what snob, pray, did the snubbing?” asked Gladys, hotly.

“What is the ‘kindergarten,’ cousin?”

“It’s a charity school for the little poor children that a lot of us rich girls supported. All the girls in our old set. I always gave as much or more than anybody else, and—but Roma Fiske was positively horrid. I saw her look me over from head to foot and her nose went up and up. Then when I said that I couldn’t come to play for the children, to-morrow, because mamma was ill, she caught me up as quick as a flash. She had a friend who would gladly take my place. As if I didn’t know it! and that the girl had been trying no end to get among us.”

“But still I do not understand.”

“You’re not usually dull, Delight. It’s this way: We clubbed together and hired a teacher, or director, for our school. Then to help her one or two of us pledged ourselves to be there each morning and play the piano, turn and turn about, during their ‘games’ and ‘occupations.’ Two or three of us went, sometimes. I loved it. I did really love the little creatures; but that’s all spoiled. I shall never go again, though I’d paid my dues for a year ahead, or nearly so long.

When we wanted to refurnish the room, papa gave me the money; and I only wish I had it back now! The hateful thing!"

Delight's eyes had opened more and more widely.

Observing her, George laughed. "See her stare. What would a 'Seabury' girl do under such circumstances, eh?"

Delight waited a moment. Then she said with an accent that Gwendolyn never forgot:

"I wouldn't be a coward because another girl turned up her nose."

All at once Gwen saw her own conduct in a new light. Had she been cowardly?

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't thee do it for 'charity'? To help the poor little ones?"

"Yes. I did, really. Because, more than anything else, I was interested in them. I love them. I cared more for my work there than at the flower mission even; yet that's a beautiful charity, too."

"Then, Gwendolyn, if thee loves it and has a gift for it, thee shouldn't turn thy back on it, no matter what it costs thy pride. That's what Auntie Delight would say, I'm sure."

"I did have, I do have a gift, as you say. The director often told me; and that she would rather have me to help her than any of the others."

“I can understand it. It is on a piece with thy liking to nurse Cousin Hannah. But, is thee sure? Could any girl be so mean, so little as to ‘snub’ thee because thy father had become poor?”

“Plenty of them. Oh! I was right enough in my judgment if not in my action. It would have been different if Bessie Hooper had been there. She’s the richest girl in the whole set and of a very old family. She doesn’t dress at all well, but—somehow the rest are sort of afraid of her. Of offending her, I mean. She has the chance to throw lots of fun their way, or not; as she pleases. Well, I must go upstairs to mamma.”

“But about the money! How we are to get more,” exclaimed Delight. “Cousin said there wasn’t more than enough to buy food for another week.”

“Delight! It can’t be so bad as that.”

“I fear it is. Well, we must earn some. Doesn’t thee think so?”

“‘Thee’ frowns on all my personal efforts,” said George, with meaning.

She flashed him a glance of half anger, half contempt, but made no answer, and all further talk was prevented just then by the clanging of the harsh door bell, which rang as if a powerful and impatient hand were at the knob.

George rose, reluctantly, but Delight observed this and went herself. They heard her open the door, give a scream that might be either fright or pleasure, and then there sounded along the passage the tap, tap of somebody's crutches.

"It might be Santa Claus!" cried Bertrand, joyfully.

## CHAPTER XV

### MARIA ARRIVES

“It’s Maria!” announced Delight, preceding the visitor into the parlor, and with a ring of pleasure in her voice.

“That—crazy—woman!” ejaculated Gladys. “If that isn’t the last straw!”

“Well, young miss, I reckon there have been a good many straws before I blew this way. Else I shouldn’t have come. My, but I’m tired! To save my soul I can’t get the hang of these crutches. Come, little boy. Don’t stand and stare as if you never saw folks before but push that big chair along toward me. I’m hefty, and I can’t afford to risk any more of my bones in uncertain places.”

Bertrand obeyed in silence. This might be Santa Claus, though under no form that he had pictured. Yet the newcomer had a sizable bundle with her, which might contain gifts, and it was as well to keep a sharp eye on it.

Maria deposited her capacious person in the one rocker that the room afforded and heaved a sigh of relief. Then she laid her crutches down on the floor and sighed again.

“Now, don’t all speak at once and say how glad you are to see me!” she laughed, and, in spite of their disgust, she had so shrewdly guessed at the thoughts of the household that they, also, laughed.

At the sound of the bell Gwendolyn had slipped down to see who the stranger might be and was retreating upstairs again to report to her mother, when Maria intercepted her.

“Give my respects to Hannah Hudson and tell her that some folks have entertained angels unawares. I’m not making any application of the words, as Dominie Theron Babcock used to say, after he’d given us the veriest hatchelling about our sins. That’s all. I know I’m not wanted but I had to come. Where my little Delight is there I must be. This night of all nights, when the whole village—I mean city—has gone crazy with racket.”

“I’m sure —” began the society trained girl, politely.

“Hold on. Don’t say what you don’t mean, even to please a woman just out of hospital. I’m sure, too, but it’s not your kind of a ‘sure.’ However, that’s neither here nor there. I’ve come to tarry, for the present. Welcome, or unwelcome. And, for the land’s sake! This is a mighty change from that other house of yours, now ain’t it! But I like it better. I certainly like it better. It

could be made real cozy if a body used some gumption."

"I'm afraid, Maria dear, that 'gumption' is just what we are all short of. I thought I knew ever so much about housekeeping, yet I don't. I didn't pay half as much attention at home as I should. I find that out now. But Gladys is a capital cook. She made an omelet the other day that was as nice—almost as nice as thy own."

"Good enough. Well, it takes trouble to bring out the real stuff that's in folks; and Gladys, you couldn't have a nobler gift than cooking a good meal of victuals."

The girl shrugged her shoulders. Certainly, this person *must* be a little unbalanced in mind who called cookery a noble gift.

"Fact. As you, that have men folks to care for, will soon find out. Little Delight, who clear starched those cuffs?"

"I did, Maria."

"I should think thee did! Come here, child, and kiss me. For the land's sake, but it does seem good to see a home face once more and to be out of that hospital. Not but what they treated me fair enough, and I got real well acquainted with the nurses and doctors. They said I'd healed remarkable. They expected that I'd be on their hands this long time yet. I would



have been, too, if they'd had their way. My! but they do enjoy it!"

"Tell us. Enjoy what, Maria?"

"Tinkering folks up, and making them over. Same's Esther Marlow used to make over an old dress. Said you never got the good of clothes, the first wearing of them."

"I'm glad thee got well quicker than they thought."

"So 'm I! But I've healed crooked. That's what's bothering them. They've found I'm going to be a regular hoppety-pat, all the rest of my days, unless I'll let them take hold and break me to pieces again."

"What does thee mean?" cried Delight, laughing as Maria herself was laughing, even at her own misfortunes.

"Just what I say. They'd like to snap my bones in two and set them over again, straighter. Thee must know I wasn't a very good patient. I couldn't keep still. I tried, but it was the hardest work I ever did. So now, 'twixt Pontius and Pilate, my broken leg is considerable shorter than its mate. Besides, I'd sell my arm for a new one, any day, and give something to boot."

All the young folks drew a bit nearer the rocking-chair. Their unwelcome guest had brought a new and cheerfuller atmosphere into the room. There was a look of homely kindness

on the plump face beneath the plainly brushed hair, and she wore her new blue print gown with an air of pride, calling attention to it by the remark:

“I feel very much dressed up in this, Delight. Isn't it a pretty pattern? A lady gave it to me.”

“The last time I was there, thee didn't tell me thee was going to leave hospital. Else, I would have come to fetch thee.”

“Hear her! Fetch me! When I'm the identical woman that followed thee to Chester city on purpose to take care of thee. A nice mess I've made of it, too, haven't I? But that's a tale not finished yet. Is Palmer Hudson in this house?”

Her abrupt change of tone and manner surprised them all; and Bertrand shrank away behind Gladys fearing this might indeed be a “crazy woman,” as the girl had exclaimed.

“No. He has gone down town to—to meet some of—the creditors,” answered George, with hesitation; yet wondering why he felt that he must be so explicit.

“Maria, if thee would be better off, made all straight and sound again, shouldn't thee let those doctors break the bones again? If they would, after thee having said ‘No’ once.”

“Oh! they'd admire to do it, even if I'd said ‘no’ a thousand times. They're not Friends and

so particular. They vowed, if I'd say 'yes,' they'd find a way this time to make me keep still, or know the reason why. They said I was a 'beautiful case,' a fine subject. As sound as a nut. Yet here am I, lame for life, with nobody knows how many years before me. Enough, I hope, to straighten out some of thy affairs better than they fixed my ankle."

"Maria, seems as though thee *must* be hungry."

"No, dearie. For a wonder, no. Thee remembers that I always used to be, doesn't thee? Well, I had a fine supper, I tell thee. There's been a lot of nice women pottering around the hospital all day, getting ready for to-morrow. I declare it made me think of Thanksgiving at our 'Snuggery.' Where, since the Lord had taken all her own folks to Himself, Aunt Delight used to gather in about every soul in Seabury township that would come. Or, leastwise, them that didn't have children coming to their own houses for the holiday. Remember the pies and pies and pies! My! But I've seen as many as three dozen fat mince pies, baked at one time, all stood round on the big pantry shelves; and grand they were, too, if I did make them, as shouldn't mention it. I reckon Cap'n Steve Danforth was thinking of those pies that time he asked me to come keep house for him. The idea!"

A very queer look had gradually stolen over

little Bertrand's face. In the old days when dainties were everywhere ready for his enjoyment he cared nothing for them. His indoor life had kept him from it; but now, when there was nobody to attend him and he was allowed to run about all day in the open, he was always ravenously hungry. Now, too, by the strangeness of life, there was little for him to eat, except the simplest food. Suddenly, as Maria finished her description of the toothsome delicacies she knew how to prepare, his head went down on Gladys' shoulder and a big tear sparkled on his cheek.

"Hello, youngster! What's up?"

"Nothing," he answered manfully. "I was only—I guess the light's pretty bright."

"And I guess it's mighty dim!"

Maria lost nothing of this little by-play. Said she: "And I guess that boy's hungry, even if I'm not. When did you have your supper, bubby?"

"I'm not 'bubby.' I'm Bertrand Whittredge Hudson. I had my supper when the rest did."

"So did I. That don't hinder my getting hungry again sometime. I might be now, if I hadn't had good victuals. Pshaw! Let's be plain spoke, as befits Friends. Who does your cooking now? I mean, what this girl Gladys can't do."

There was a silence. Then Delight replied: "I do."

"Oh! my fathers! Then no wonder the child's mouth waters to hear tell of decent food. In the old days at Seabury, thee was just about as master a hand at cooking as thee was at ironing! Come on, bubby. Pick me up those crutches, and show me the way to the kitchen. I may not need any more supper but I shall want some breakfast; and I'd like to look around and see what's planned."

Delight laughed in a way that was good to hear. Maria's coming, her adoption of her old "I'm-taking-care-now" sort of tone, seemed to lift a burden from her own shoulders. With a clap of her hands, she anticipated Bertrand's aid, and placed the crutches in her old friend's hands.

"Oh! Maria! I am so glad thee has come. Now all these dear folks can have a really nice Christmas dinner."

"Humph. 'Dear folks.' Then, I take it, thee isn't so unwelcome as thee was."

"I hope not."

"She's the mainstay of the house," said George warmly; and this tribute, coming after Gwendolyn's, set Delight's heart beating to an even happier rhythm.

Yet it was impossible for her to help smiling when Maria undertook the handling of her new

“supports.” New “hindrances” she herself called them, and she was so round, so awkward, and so hasty, that the stiff pieces were continually slipping out side wise, at imminent risk to her recently repaired anatomy.

Finally, with an indignant sniff, she tossed them away.

“Give me your shoulder, little Delight, and you small sir, your hand. If I can’t get into the kitchen any other way, I reckon I can fall there.”

“Just like Delight said the kittens could!” cried Bertrand, again feeling cheerful.

“What makes city folks go and fix their kitchens down cellar for, beats all my first wife’s relations. But so long as it’s there, I s’pose I must go to it. Yet, so far forth as I’ve seen, Chester city can take a good many lessons from Seabury township and be the wiser for it.”

The trio left the parlor; and as soon as Gladys was alone with her brother she remembered how eagerly Delight had followed him, when he had gone out a little while before, and asked:

“George, what made Delight run after you like she did? She looked frightened. What were you going to do?”

“Break my word,” he answered, slowly.

“What do you mean?”

“Exactly what I say. I can tell you nothing more. I was going to break a promise and she

guessed it. She wouldn't let me lie, if she could help it, nor for fear of my being angry. I was mad, too. I about hated her."

"Goodness! She's the oddest creature."

"She is."

"I just said so, didn't I? But how do you mean?"

"Because she is always absolutely true. The worst of it is she means to make the rest of the world live up to her standard, if she can. She does not say much—just looks volumes."

"But *what* were you going to do? Tell me, please."

"Get a Christmas dinner for you and the rest. If I could. I think I could."

"Then I think you might! But how?"

"Ask Delight."

"If you won't tell me I don't suppose she will. She's as close as an oyster if she doesn't wish to talk."

"If she wishes to talk, in this case, I shall be very much disappointed in her. Hark! That's father's key in the latch. Do you know, I think he will be anything but pleased to see this old woman here again."

Gladys ran into the hall. She meant to give her father a sort of Christmas welcome home, surmising the fact that his late "appointment with some men," would have been a trying ordeal.

It had been, but it was as nothing in comparison to the meeting which awaited him in the hallway of his own home. Where a poor and half-helpless old woman confronted him at the turning of the latch.

So inquisitive Gladys was just in time to get an impression of another "mystery," beside that between Delight and George. For as the door opened to her father's entrance, she heard Maria's stern defiant exclamation:

"Ah! Palmer Hudson! I bade thee come to me! Now—I have come to thee."

For an instant, the weary man turned as if he would again leave the house; the next he had dropped into a chair and covered his face with his hands.



## CHAPTER XVI

### A DREARY CHRISTMAS EVE

FOR a moment, nothing more was said. Then Maria, lifting her hand from Delight's shoulder, directed:

"Thee and the little boy go back to that room. Palmer Hudson will help me down the stairs, I think, since he and I have somewhat to discuss with one another."

Tottering where she stood, the lame woman waited a bit to see whether her request would be granted. Then the gentleman rose, offered her his arm, and carefully assisted her to the floor below.

"How queer that all is!" thought Delight, and to Gladys' question: "Why, what have you done with her?" she could only reply:

"I've done nothing at all. She dismissed me, and Bertrand, too, the moment she saw thy father. I suppose they are old friends or——"

"Friends! Papa and a servant!"

"Hmm. Maria may have been our servant, at the 'Snuggery,' but she was, also, my great-aunt's close friend. I have a notion that she

knows more about my family than I shall ever know myself. Thee should hear her old tales of Seabury. They are fine!"

"I dare say. But—what's to be done with her? You must see that she can't stay here. There isn't room. It takes all that little second floor for mamma and Gwen, even putting papa in that back room. Up top are only George's and my rooms, with Bertrand's tiny one and your back one. There's no place."

"There's the empty room in yonder," said Delight, nodding toward the shut up front parlor; which, despite their altered circumstances, the sisters felt must be furnished with the best of their belongings and kept in state for the company which so seldom came.

"Our drawing-room! We can't give that up."

"Then I do not know," said Delight simply. She had reached a point where she could see no further, and wisely concluded not to worry about the matter. As she calmly resumed her knitting, Gladys again exclaimed, impatiently:

"I don't see what you sit there like that for, as if you didn't care. Something's to be done, of course, and I notice, nowadays, that all the 'doing' comes upon us two."

"I think it will not any longer."

"Why not?"

"Because Maria's come."

“That lame ‘hoppety-pat,’ as even she called herself. One thing, I hate her. It seems as if her first coming was the beginning of our troubles. I won’t ever lay a finger on her to help her. I was indignant to see how she made Bertrand do it. The darling! He never had to help a servant before.”

“Gladys, I think the days for such ridiculous airs are past,” observed George, rather sternly.

“For goodness sake! What’s come over you, boy? It’s not so long since you were the biggest ‘dude’ a-going. As dainty as my lady and as helpless.”

“Well, then, I tell you there’s nothing takes the nonsense out of a fellow so fast as being a beggar—and worse.”

“George Hudson!”

“It doesn’t sound pretty, I know. It’s not the sort of speech to which all our once delicate ears have been accustomed. But it’s truth; and Delight, here, is fast teaching me that there’s ‘nothing so beautiful as the truth.’ Though, I confess, it all depends upon the point of view.”

Delight’s color rose. She knew from the tone of his voice that George was still angry, and her needles flew the faster. But she resolutely kept her lips shut, though her own quick spirit suggested a cutting answer.

After a moment she called Bertrand to her and

proposed that she should see him safely to bed, but he objected and preferred to drowse against her knee, while Gladys picked up a fashion magazine of ancient date and pretended to read.

George stretched himself upon the lounge; but the thoughts of all followed the murmur of voices which rose to them from the kitchen below, where Mr. Hudson and Maria were evidently holding a serious discourse.

Finally the murmur ceased and Mr. Hudson came up to them. His face was very grave and pale and his voice trembled slightly as he announced:

“Maria Disney will remain here as our guest. She is to be treated as such, in every respect. Remember that any discourtesy offered to her is offered to me. She wishes to see Delight. Good-night, all of you.”

They listened in amazement; both George and his sister recalling, distinctly, that on the night of her unfortunate arrival at Argyle Terrace their father had been the most anxious to rid himself of her presence and to have her sent to hospital. They remembered, too, that if he had not accused Maria of an attempted burglary he had silently assented to the probability of the fact, as suggested by the glib-tongued Dalton, and echoed by the policemen who had responded to her call for aid.

“If she were a thief then she is so still. Her having been injured doesn’t alter that fact. Papa certainly acts very strangely!” exclaimed Gladys, as soon as Delight had gone down in answer to Maria’s request.

“I wouldn’t discuss it, if I were you, Gladys. I fancy there is more in this affair than comes to the surface. Papa was guardian for Delight and speculated with her money as well as his own. I don’t know the law—I don’t want to know it. But maybe this hard-headed old woman does, and thinks she has the whip hand of us. Anyway, the best we can do—is to obey papa as nearly as we can. The poor old fellow has had awful hard luck no matter how we look at it. If much more worry comes to him he’ll be having brain trouble of some sort. Hark! That’s Delight calling.”

George went into the hall as he finished speaking, then repeated to Gladys:

“This Maria wants to see us both. It seems to be a council of war, or something like it. Come on and face the enemy.”

They found their guest seated beside the range, poking at the ashes and cinders which had clogged its grate and put out the fire.

“See here, lad. Show me the trick of this stove. I’m used to burn wood down home. I haven’t got the hang of coals, yet, but I will in time.”

Gladys hated housework, and knew next to nothing about it; yet during the past few weeks she had found herself—for the first time in her life—of real usefulness to her family, and had been proud of her necessity to them. Oddly enough, now that somebody else had come upon the scene and quietly set her aside she resented the relief. So she interposed, sharply:

“What can you do with a fire when you can’t even walk alone?”

“Time’ll tell, child. I guess I can manage somehow. If I’m crippled in body I must be the livelier in my wits. Pshaw, son! From the fuss you make I don’t believe you know a mite more about the miserable thing than I do. It’s all guesswork with both of us. Never mind. We’ll get it cleaned out and in the morning I’ll conquer it or—let you!”

An expression of such disgust rested on George’s face that everybody laughed. This made him ashamed of his own ignorance and pocketing his foolish pride he stripped off his coat and went to work.

Maria looked on with grim approval. Of all the young folks in the house, besides, of course, her own Delight, she liked George best. He had developed a tone of manliness that was unexpected and gave promise of great things.

“Well, girls, while he’s experimenting with

that ark of a stove — My! but I wish I had our little square one out of the 'Snuggery' kitchen! —let's talk over things. Take account of stock, and find out how we stand. Gladys, since you're housekeeper, tell me exactly what's in the house to eat. Cooked and uncooked."

It was not a long list and it was not a judiciously selected one. Maria sniffed at various items mentioned, such as nuts and raisins for desert when there were not enough potatoes for a first course. But she said little, and when all the available food supplies were actually brought out and placed before her she asked:

"Is there a store open anywhere's near? So 't we can buy some decent victuals? If to-morrow's Christmas, I suppose there won't be any chance of providing our dinner then. Besides, I like to have my turkey on hand over night, dressed and ready for cooking as it should be in the morning."

"I think there are stores enough, Miss Disney, but I—my father—that is —"

"What in the world are you chopping your speech into such bits for? I asked a plain question."

"Very well," said George, with an effort, and not without a glance toward Delight. "None of us young folks have any money to pay for a dinner and I'd rather go without than ask my father."

Maria almost gasped. Such a state of affairs as this was quite beyond her anticipation. She knew that Palmer Hudson had "failed" and that he had been compelled to give up his rich home as well as his business; but that he was actually poor, as she understood poverty, had not entered her mind.

"For the land's sake! For—the—land's—sake!"

"Well, I guess you see now, Miss Maria Disney, that we are in no condition to entertain anybody, even—even you. Of course, it's horrid to have you or anybody know; but you forced it from us. Like George, here, I'd rather starve than——"

"Hold on, Gladys. I didn't say that. I've no desire to starve, and of course, something will happen to set us going again. I mean, I hope papa——"

Maria held up her hand. "That's enough. We'll discuss ways and means later on. Now, the stores are open, you say, and that's more to our purpose. Delight, go to your trunk and fetch me my bag. The one, thee knows, with the money. Then all you youngsters may go to market."

The request fell upon, apparently, unheeding ears for nobody moved. Not even Delight who had used to speed so swiftly on any helpful errand for another. The silence lasted long



enough to make Maria look up from her study of the range's intricacies and repeat her request.

"I say, child, get my money. I owe a lot of it, or a pretty considerable, for the new clothes the hospital folks saw to buying for me. Those in my bundle that I brought; but when needs must—there's nought but to obey."

"Thy money, Maria! Why—why—that's gone. Long, long ago. Didn't thee know? Didn't *thee* take it?"

"I take it? What on earth, or how on earth could I? Didn't I lock it up in thy trunk that night we came? And the next thing happened me was that I fell down the hatchway, or something. Quit fooling. This is no time for pranks."

Delight flashed one triumphant glance toward George and his sister. They, she remembered, had scoffed at her declaration that the missing money which Dalton had seen deposited in Delight's trunk had been Maria's own. They had all along believed that Delight had made her statement regarding it simply to shield her old friend. Since the silverware had been found beside her, and all of it, the only loss, as they argued had been Delight's, and so they had let the matter drop. Now they realized that their cousin had been correct and were too astonished to speak.

"Delight Roloson! What's become of thy

tongue? Is that the way Aunt Delight trained thee? To not answer thy elders?"

"Oh! Maria! I have answered thee the truth. Only the truth. The money is gone. Has been gone ever since that night. I hoped thee must have taken it, and I never asked because thee was so ill, and, after that, I forgot it. It was thy own thee knows; I did not like to meddle about it with thee. It seemed——"

"Well! What did it seem?"

"That thee might—I can't say it."

"I'll say it for her. We all thought you took that money out of the trunk, yourself. That it wasn't yours, as Delight said, but hers. Dalton saw it put in there and in the morning the lock was broken and the money gone. That, and finding you with your arms folded around a bag of our silver, why—you must imagine, what we all thought."

"Delight!" cried the poor woman, in a tone of anguished reproach.

"Maria, I did tell them. I did! Over and over. They didn't believe me, they laughed at me, and then I kept still. That's all."

"Yes. 'That's all;' and ever since, after I'd risked my life even to save your property, you have all been thinking me a common thief. Hmm. Well, Palmer Hudson! that makes one more account we have to settle."

So malevolent an expression settled upon Maria Disney's face that even Delight, who loved her, for a moment shrank from her. The next instant it had cleared again, as she remembered all the heroic emotions with which she had descended the stairs, at Argyle Terrace, on the night of her misfortunes.

"Well. That settles me—for life. I played the heroine, didn't I! Poor silly old woman!"

Then she became so absorbed in her own reflections that the others hated to speak, though all the time the kitchen grew colder and the half-filled lamp burned more dimly.

Finally, Delight stole up and slipped her arm about Maria's neck.

The woman roused herself with an effort.

"Yes, yes, dearie. There's no use sitting here brooding. If I knew where to go! if I had a dollar to pay my keep anywhere, if I wasn't a poor, broken-down old woman—all the savings of my life—all—old—infirm——"

To see Maria weep, was consternation.

"But, dear, here we are and nothing to be altered. Remember auntie darling and her saying: 'The Lord never shuts one door, but He opens another.' Does thee suppose thee could climb three flights of stairs to my little room to sleep?"

"No. No, child. I'd thought that out, al-

ready. Now, you young fellow, if you've had mean thoughts about me, try to make up by decent actions. I've come to stay. First, from choice. Now, because I can't help myself. Spilt milk can't be gathered up. That's done and ended. But sleep somewheres I must. Fly around and hunt some bedclothes, and a cot or little bedstead. Fetch them down here. This little back room ——”

“The laundry,” explained Gladys, meekly.

“Looks as if needed laundering, itself. I'll make it my bedroom, for the present. Fly around.”

They did “fly around,” and each contributed something from his or her stock, so that very soon the disused lower room was fitted up into at least a tenantable bedroom. Both the young Hudsons were grieved and ashamed of their suspicions concerning Maria, and this made their feelings toward her more kind. After all, her coming had diverted them, and if she stayed—which began to appear a wholly desirable thing—she might prove of the greatest comfort to them.

George had the courage to go to her, at a moment when the two girls were busy spreading the narrow bed, and apologize for his unworthy suspicions; and she received his apology with more graciousness than he expected.

“Never mind, lad. You may turn out all

right, yet. You're not to blame for your upbringing, which has not been of the best, according to my lights. Now, all of you go. Leave me to think this matter out. Good-night."

Even Delight did not linger, but followed the others upstairs, after having done what she could for the silent Maria, who had once more relapsed into a grim reverie.

"What is to be done! What—is to be—done!" the poor woman considered, again and again. "How can I eat their bread after this—even if there were any!"

But an answer was coming which none of them anticipated. Before the young folks had reached the parlor and sleeping Bertrand, there came a violent ring at the front door bell; which was apparently answered, or at least accompanied, by a piercing shriek from the second floor.

"Why, that's Gwen! What can have happened!"

Uncertain which appeal to answer first, they paused, while ring after ring sounded through the house, echoed once again by Gwendolyn's shrill cry for help.

"Come—come! Help, help!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE DAWNING OF CHRISTMAS

GLADYS and George echoed Gwendolyn's cry and, seeing this, Delight herself opened the front door. But when she did so she found nobody visible between her and the street lamp, while the dark vestibule apparently sheltered no person. Yet there, so close to the inner threshold that she nearly stepped into it, stood a large market-basket, heaped with all sorts of Christmas cheer.

The claws of a monster turkey protruded from a pile of sweet potatoes ; and some yellow celery tips nodded protectingly over a bag of scarlet cranberries.

"Oh the fairies!" cried the girl, laughing in memory of "Bachelor Jim's" marvellous tales. "Of course, though, there's no such thing as a fairy—but how well this would answer for the work of one! Gladys! George! Come—come quick! Here's Santa Claus in earnest!"

He was coming, indeed, two steps at a time ; yet as he reached her side, George did not even pause. He called out something which sounded

like: "Papa—dying!" and was off into the darkness, as fast as he could run.

Delight's heart almost stopped beating. All the events of the evening had come as a succession of shocks, but this last was so great it made the others seem insignificant. She quite forgot to wonder how the basket of provisions came to be at their door, but took it up mechanically, and struggled with it toward the kitchen where such things belonged. Then half-way down to the basement, she recalled Maria's decided dismissal of her and paused, irresolute.

However, her old friend's ears were keen and had caught both the lusty rings at the door and the frantic shrieks from above. She now heard Delight and demanded:

"Who's there? What's the matter? Come quick, whoever you are."

"Only me, Maria. Wait. I'll light the lamp. I know where the matches are."

Then followed swift question and reply and before the girl had spoken two sentences Maria was putting on the clothes she had just taken off.

"Hear to me, Delight Roloson. Men and women plan—but the Lord does with them what He will. I've just been at my wits' end. My patience' end, too; and almost blaming God for that good thing—my life. I felt there was no more room nor work for me in the world—and

lo! If ever in my life I've been allowed to do a fair turn by any other, I'm put here to do it now. I don't admire to heap coals of fire on my enemy's head, but when the Lord lights them and puts them into my hand and says: 'Heap!' I guess I know enough to obey."

"What is thee going to do?"

"Get to the room where Palmer Hudson may need my forgiveness. Help me along."

"But about this basket. Shall we keep it?"

"There's a card on it. Read it, if thee can."

"Hmm. That says plainly enough: 'For the Hudson's Christmas dinner, from a well-wisher.'"

"Take it and be thankful. Put the basket up high, on them pantry shelves, where no rats can get it. That'll do. Now, hurry."

It was wonderful to see with what ingenuity the crippled woman climbed the narrow flights of stairs between her and the spot where she was, indeed, sorely needed. She literally crept up them, dragging her helpless foot, like a dead weight, and with Delight close behind to prevent any mischance of slipping backward.

"Oh! my husband!" wailed a white-faced invalid, who had left her own bed for the first time in weeks. "Is he dead? Is he? so sudden—without a word?"

Maria had her crutches by then and awkward or not made swift pace to the lounge upon which



the stricken man lay. She had always been a good nurse and her hospital experience had taught her many things.

“Fetch me a chair. I want to use my hands.”

They thrust one under her, the crutches dropped with a clatter that nobody heeded, and she was instantly at work, loosening the clothing of the sufferer who did not appear even to breathe.

The others watched her in an agony of dread.

But after a moment's uncertainty she announced with quiet decision :

“He's alive. It's a seizure of some sort. Send for the doctor.”

“George has gone. He's so long ! Why doesn't he come ?”

“I reckon it won't make much difference. I guess this has been coming on some spell. It will take another spell to get over it. Slow works both ways.”

“But he will get over it ? He will, Miss—Disney ?” demanded Mrs. Hudson, shivering with cold and fear.

“Call me Maria, Hannah. Old times were better times than these. But though he's not dying, thee will be if thee doesn't get back to thy warm bed again, mighty sudden.”

“Oh ! I can't go back there and leave him here.”

“Fetch me some hot water, one of you. Isn't any ? Get a fire started and make some hot.

The doctor will want it as well as me. Take so long? Use kindling. Use *judgment*. Put some water on in the teakettle—and be quick!”

Gladys' feet scarcely touched the stairs as she sped kitchen-ward, all her latent affection roused by this danger to her father. Gwendolyn slipped a shawl about her mother, and Delight caught up Bertrand, who had been wakened from his sleep in the back parlor, and had climbed to his mother's room in a dazed terror of he knew not what.

“Don't cry, dearie, and make things worse. Thy papa is ill. That's all. Maria says he will be better. Thee had best let me put thee to bed—quick as a jiffy. Then I can do things for the rest.”

“Will it help? Will I be useful, like you, Lighty, dear?”

“Help more than anything.”

So presently, the little fellow was in his own crib and unconscious of any sorrow, even that of a probably empty stocking on the morrow.

“Mamma, dear, you must go back to bed. Miss—Maria and I will do all we can and George must soon fetch a doctor. Come.”

“I can't. I cannot leave him.”

“Should think you couldn't, Hannah. Thank the Lord I never had a husband, but if I had I rather think I'd stay near hand if he was sick. 'Pears so, without having experience.”

Oddly enough, Mrs. Hudson resented this prompt agreement with her own decision, and petulantly exclaimed :

“But you don’t know, Maria. I haven’t sat up a day since we left home.”

“Home? Where are you now, then?”

“Oh! I mean —— He is easier, isn’t he?”

“He’s easy enough. Most too easy to suit me. I’d rather he’d trounce around more than lie so still. Hannah Hudson, I’m plain spoke. You know it. Well, then. I tell you that here’s *real* trouble. *Real* sickness. Not hypochondria like’s been bothering you. If you’re a bit of the girl you used to be, rouse yourself. Put on your clothes and go to nursing somebody that needs it ’stead of your own notions. The Lord takes more’n one way to send His blessings; and I begin to think that taking the money out of your purse—and mine, too—and taking whims away and leaving realities is one of ’em. Go dress yourself, anyway. You can’t be ’round like this when the doctor comes.”

When the doctor came—it was not so long after—he found all done that inexperience could have accomplished toward the relief of his patient; and a frail but determined wife sitting head watcher by Palmer Hudson’s side.

“Why, my dear madam! Are you strong enough?” he asked, in unfeigned surprise.

“I must be strong enough. Oh! tell me what it is!”

When the physician had diagnosed the case he gave as his opinion, which he qualified by a long name that nobody understood:

“I think there is no immediate danger. Mr. Hudson will probably remain unconscious for some time. How long, of course it is impossible to say. In the meantime keep him as quiet as possible, and should he recover consciousness, let nothing of a disturbing nature be mentioned before him. I will call in the morning, after church. If you need me before, send for me.”

His manner was kind. He had known and attended them but a short time, since their removal into his immediate neighborhood, and his terms were cheap. It would have been useless to wait to send across town for their old family physician whose minutes were charged for at dollar rates, almost; and who would not have served them better nor more quickly.

When he had gone, Maria observed:

“Let us understand how we stand. I’ll stay up here to-night, being’s I’m here, and you may need me. But in the morning, if he’s no worse—even if he is—I’ll go down below where I’m fixed. It’s as much help in nursing to have the nurse’s victuals on time and tasty as ’tis to sit and keep flies off the sick ones. I’ll go be-

low and there—I'll do the best I can, as the Lord decrees. You'll be better, Hannah, too. You'll forget yourself. You've all been living beyond your means, beyond your nerves, beyond—your station. Doesn't sound pretty, does it? The truth, doesn't, generally. But you've all some cause to be thankful, this coming Christmas Day; and, maybe not the least—maybe not the least—is that your husband and father lies just where and how he does.”

The words were strange and the tone solemn. It was, also, self-reproachful, though this none of them realized.

“What do you mean?”

“Just what I say. The Lord has been here this night. He has dealt with me, and He has dealt with him—there. I planned different. I thought to take judgment into my own hands, but I was not let. ‘Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord. I will repay.’ Almost, I can hear Aunt Delight speaking those words this minute. Hmm. I'm feeling queer myself. I'll lie down somewheres. But who is going to be nurse here, beside Hannah; or in case she gives out again?”

Gwendolyn came out of the shadow where she stood. Her manner was gentle and humble.

“I am,” she said, with a new and sweet dignity that almost transformed her in their

eyes. She took her place on the further side of her father's bed and, during all that anxious night, neither faltered nor failed in her steadfast watch and exact obedience of the doctor's directions.

Meanwhile the stars paled and the daylight stole into the east. The churches all over the city took up a gladsome peal, ringing "Good tidings" to hearts desolate and hearts gay; and moving, as they had never moved before, the souls of the little household in Harmony street.

So Merry Christmas came to them.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### DELIGHT IS MISSING

DINNER was over in the Vanderhagen mansion, and its owners were enjoying that comfort which waits upon a good digestion and a clear conscience.

Mr. Vanderhagen sat dozing behind his paper and before the fire; but his good wife had stationed herself beside a window to watch the passers-by.

“I love to see them; all looking so holiday-like. The little children please me most. Do, Blasius, dear, put down that tiresome reading and look out. There’s just snow enough to make new sleds skim finely, and for once the policemen are not interfering with the sport.”

“Make terrible slippery walking for us, tomorrow. Law requires the snow to be taken off the sidewalks at once.”

“Who cares for such a law on Christmas Day?”

“Not you, apparently, dear. Well, you should feel satisfied. How many hungry creatures, besides your own household, has your purse fed today?”

“How can I tell? I hope nobody went without a dinner, that needed it. I sent a dozen turkeys to Fairview Hospital, a dozen to—— My conscience!”

Mr. Vanderhagen laid aside his paper and joined her at the window. “I hope your conscience enjoyed them, dear!” he said, teasingly.

“Look, Blasius! see that girl?”

“I see lots of them. They’re as merry as the boys and as sturdy. I’m proud of the youngsters of Chester city. There’s not a finer crowd to be seen anywhere. If——” and he sighed, but in a manner that did not denote satisfaction.

“Yes, dear. But the Lord did *not* think best. I suppose, maybe, I wouldn’t have been a fit mother to little children. Who can tell? Anyway, children we have not; so there’s no use spoiling our own Christmas and grieving about unalterable things. At least we have each other and are lovers still; which is more than some can say who have been wedded a quarter of a century. But—I declare! It certainly *is*! What is she doing in this neighborhood? I want to see her. I wish you could hear her quaint and happy speech.”

“My dear, who are you talking about?”

“That girl in grey—away in the middle of the block. See? Some little ones fell off their sleds, and one of them must have been hurt, or



scared. She's stopped to set him right again. Now—she's drawing him. My! but isn't she fleet and graceful? How perfectly unconscious of everything except to give the child pleasure, and make him forget his trouble. There! I knew it. It is—my little Quaker lass."

"Hmm. The one that you found in the park, one day and went with to the hospital?"

"Yes. It certainly is she. There couldn't be two dressed so quaintly and—now I see her face: it is that little Delight."

"She is an attractive looking maiden, surely enough. What a bright face! Maybe she's coming to make you a visit. Didn't you invite her?"

"In a general way, yes. But I'd almost forgotten her and supposed she had me, entirely. See. She's looking around as if not certain of her whereabouts. I'm going to send out to her and invite her in, whether she were coming or no."

"My dear! you are certainly enthusiastic. If you like her so much, why didn't you follow up the acquaintance when first made?"

"Easy to answer. I was away, you know, for some time. Then company, and Christmas matters coming along, I haven't been able. Besides, I—really forgot."

But the warm-hearted woman was again wholly

interested in Delight, for it was, indeed, she who was peering at the numbers of the houses she passed, looking for some certain one; and when presently a servant in livery approached her and respectfully touching his hat informed her that she had been recognized by his mistress, and that he had been sent to invite her in, if so be she had a few moments to spare, she answered, eagerly :

“ Why, of course, and thank thee. She was the lady I set out to find. I’m strange to this neighborhood and thee’s very kind to show me the way.”

The man bowed, assumed a rigidly upright attitude and marched stiffly along at a little distance from the girl ; but in his heart was a kindly feeling because she had spoken so considerately toward him.

Then he ushered her into the house, which in richness exceeded any of her imaginings, even though she had heard more than once what wealthy folks “ those Vanderhagens ” were.

For a moment her country-bred ideas made her a trifle abashed ; the next all consciousness of her surroundings was lost in the smile of welcome that lit the kindly face looking at her from beneath the portière.

“ Ah ! little Delight ! Welcome, and Merry Christmas ! ”

The girl sprang forward and clasped the extended hands with grateful eagerness. "Thank thee for both. I was so afraid I should miss of the place, for thee must know I hunted it up all by myself, and I feel so proud! I'm not wise even yet about city streets; and has thee been right well since that day thee was so good to me about the hospital?"

"Well, indeed, but busy and careless. I meant to see you again, when I left you at your aunt's—was it?"

"No. My second cousin once removed."

"And are you well? Though I need not ask that, your face is one glow of color and health. But tell me, is the life at Argyle Terrace as happy as that in 'Seabury township'? You see I remember some things, even if I forget some others."

"Oh! we left Argyle Terrace long ago. I was there but a short time. Maybe thee doesn't know that Palmer Hudson failed in business."

"I did know but I had forgotten. So the failure was a real one, eh? and affected his living."

"Of course. We moved to a house in Harmony street; and oh! my friends are in such trouble. That's why I'm here."

A gentleman rose and came forward from the recess where he had been sitting; and to him De-

light was duly presented. She thought Mr. Vanderhagen quite as kindly as his wife, and went on with her story as freely as she would have told it to her alone.

“Then I can’t flatter myself you came because you wanted just to see me again, can I?” laughed the lady.

Delight looked puzzled. Then she replied:

“Thee must know I would be glad to see thee, and that I could never forget all thee did for me that day we met. But it was mostly because I thought, I hoped, thee could help me now, that I came.”

“Another of Henrietta’s beggars!” reflected Mr. Vanderhagen, and waited what would come.

“In what way?” asked his wife and, despite her will, her tone hardened somewhat. She did not like to class Delight with those who importuned her because of her money yet the girl’s own speech indicated this.

“I want to ask thee if there is not something thee has to do—that thee would have to hire done—which I could do. I want to earn some money.”

“Child, is this necessary? You are so young and, pardon me, so ignorant of what the world considers right and proper. You just said you came here unknown to your friends; would they be pleased if they knew your errand?”

“N-o, I think they would not be pleased. Yet, I do not see that it is not right. They are very poor. Maria’s money all was taken, that night she was hurt. None of us know. Please, let me tell thee the whole, whole story.”

She did tell it and enlisted the sympathy of both listeners to the fullest. Mr. Vanderhagen felt a great pity for the unfortunate business man, thus sadly stricken down, no matter what his methods might have been; while thoughts of people used to luxury having to undergo actual poverty disturbed Mrs. Vanderhagen’s comfort loving soul. As for Delight, herself, the lady had formed an instant and determined plan.

But after the tale was finished she merely asked a few quiet questions:

“You say that there is no money in the house. Did neither of the parents have any on hand at the time of the failure?”

Mr. Vanderhagen explained:

“People who habitually live beyond their means are always cramped for ready money. Doubtless what the Hudsons did have went to pay small and pressing debts. The man could not earn any more, as a differently trained person could have done. He wouldn’t know how; nor would anybody willingly give him a position of clerk or assistant, since he did so badly for himself when he was his own master.”

“It’s a hard world, Blasius.”

“Yes, my dear. But a rather just one, after all. In his youth a man should eat his bread in carefulness lest in age he come to penury.”

Delight felt her courage sink; but she rallied and put the matter plainly.

“I can do fine sewing well. I do not like it, but I can do it. I can dust things nicely. I can mend. I can run errands—which I should like best of all. I can write a fair hand though I’m rather poor in grammar. But I’m so young and so strong and so willing—if *thee* has nothing to put out to hire, can thee tell me of somebody who has?”

“Hmm. In good time we’ll talk of that. But I thought you came to Chester to go on with your education. Didn’t you tell me that was your great-aunt’s desire?”

A cloud came over the eager, bonny face.

“Darling Auntie Delight! Yes. She was anxious. She couldn’t spare me while she lived, for she knew it would not be long, at best; but I was to make up for it afterward. Still—I think—I don’t know—but it seems to me she would now tell me to work instead of study. With her it was ‘always the duty that’s nearest,’ when one was perplexed; and isn’t the nearest duty I have, to-day, to try and help the Hudsons?”

“They were not so anxious to help you,” observed Mr. Vanderhagen.

“I mustn’t remember that.”

“Why not?”

“Because Aunt Delight said it would belittle one’s self to remember unkindness. Thee sees,” she laughed, “I have a name that means a great deal to me. There has been a ‘Delight’ in the family ever since there was a family. Each who has been so called has tried to make her name typify her life. I’m the last now, and I want to try harder than any of them. To succeed even better, only nobody could ever hope to be half as wise and lovable as Aunt Delight who reared me. That’s why the old chest of drawers is handed down from one generation to another. To keep each in memory of the name—duty. I wish thee could see the dear old heirloom! It’s too big for its present quarters, but I can never part with it. That is forbidden, even if I wished.”

“I will come and see it, if I may.”

“Oh! will thee? How glad that makes me.”

“Then I certainly will come. But, child, let us go back to the education question. It is imperative that a girl as bright as you are—pardon plain speech in one who isn’t a Quaker—it is imperative, I say, that you should improve the faculties God has given you. Your future life will be a deal more useful, in a broader sense, than if you give up study now for the sake of

earning a little money which would not even begin to support a family."

Delight's face fell. She did not expect to earn any large sums, and she was quite ignorant of what it costs to live. A dollar to her seemed a big lot of money.

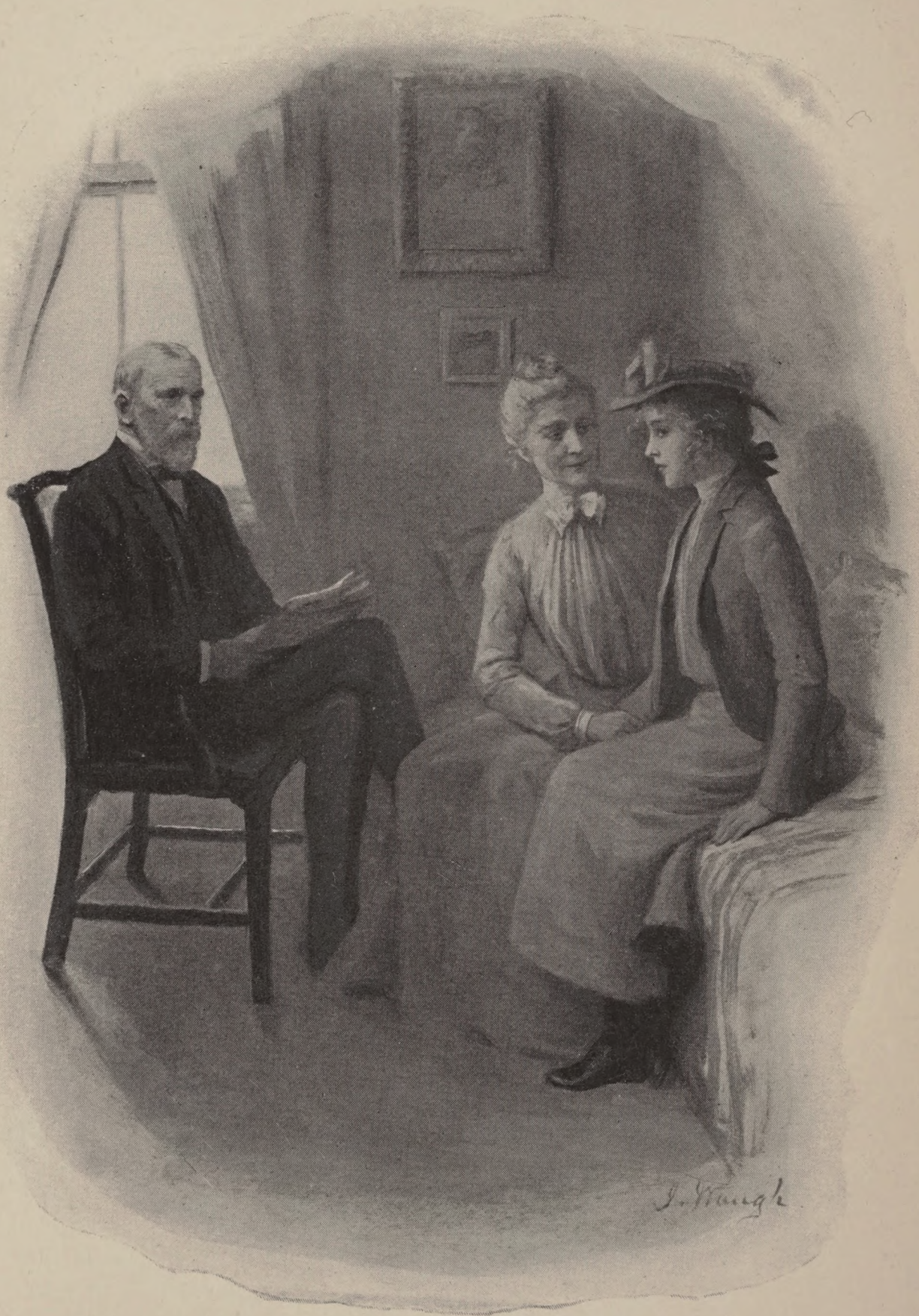
"How much, my dear, did you hope to receive for your labor?"

"I can darn stockings nicely, auntie said. I thought two cents a pair; and as much as that for big holes in clothes. But"—and her glance swept the rich apartment—"it seems different here than it did in my little back attic room in Harmony street. Maybe"—yet she felt a sort of shock at the unthrifty thought—"maybe thee doesn't need to have thy stockings darned."

"No, sweetheart, I do not. Not now. In my early days my stockings were not only darned but 'cut over,' a thing which my own servants would now disdain. But it may be because of those early careful habits that I am now able to make a proposal to you which, I hope, may please you as much as its acceptance would me. Will you come here and live with a lonely couple? who would try to treat you well, and who, for the sake of your companionship, would gladly undertake the expense of your education, and relieve your other friends of your support?"

As the lady ceased speaking she flashed a





"WILL YOU COME AND LIVE WITH A LONELY COUPLE?"



bright glance toward her husband. The adoption of a daughter had always been a step he had urged upon her, but she had never before met just the girl to satisfy her fancy as Delight now did. Even yet, she did not put the matter in the light of an adoption, until it should be tested, but as a pleasant way of spending some of that surplus wealth which her protégée so needed. Still, she waited the reply in more anxiety than she had supposed possible. Delight, bright, bonny, sincere, unspoiled—what a precious daughter she would be!

For a moment the girl was silent. She was so wholly surprised and, as the thought of what all this proposition might mean came to grow clearer in her mind, she became very grave. If her new friend had known it there was nothing in the world Delight now so craved as a fuller education. Since she had come to Chester and had had a little glimpse of what there was in the world to understand and appreciate her wish for knowledge had become a passionate craving. Already, at the few odd moments she could secure, she had pored over the discarded school-books of her cousins, and found—as all real students do—that the more she gained the less she felt she knew and the more she desired.

But she had been well taught in self-subjection. Personal ambitions must give place to

what she believed her duty. With a little catch in her voice she answered :

“ I don't know how to thank thee. Such kindness is—it takes my breath away. And it almost breaks my heart to say—I must not accept it.”

Mrs. Vanderhagen also was silent for a space after this. Her own disappointment was a surprise to herself. She was accustomed to securing whatever she desired and she now desired this girl very greatly.

“ Why must you not ? ”

“ I know, I am sure I can do something to help my kinsfolk. Then there is Maria. She is old now, and followed me to Chester, only to meet with terrible trouble. She grieves continually because she is lame. If it weren't for that she says she could take service again with somebody. Be a housekeeper or something of that sort and so earn her own living. I can't leave her even if I could them. But I do thank thee ; I beg thee will believe it ; and I should be so happy here. It is all so very, very beautiful.”

“ Well, then, little Delight, I will not urge you. But though I may not have stockings to darn I can find something else to do. I have a pile of old laces that have broken in places. They belonged to an ancestress of mine, who was more careless of them than she should have been.

They are, of course, very old, but—anyway, I'll let you try your hand at mending them. We will be business-like. If you will come at a regular hour and devote yourself faithfully to the work I will pay you twenty-five cents an hour. When can you begin?"

"To-morrow, if thee wishes."

"To-morrow, then, at nine o'clock in the morning. I think you will be punctual."

"I will, indeed."

"Then that is settled. Now, you must have a little supper with us, early; after that I must send you home, lest your friends grow anxious about you."

But when the supper was over, Mrs. Vanderhagen remembered that she had given her coachman a holiday and would have to trust Delight to find her own way back to Harmony street.

"You walk to the second corner and turn across the park. The yellow cars pass within a block of your home and if you ask the conductor he will put you off at the right place. Good-night, and Merry Christmas. Here is a little parcel of sweets; will you take them to the lad Bertrand?"

So, loaded with a generous package of dainties, the happy girl started toward Harmony street; and at the corner turned to wave her hand in

farewell to the white-haired lady who watched her from the window.

Yet at nine o'clock on the next morning, she did not reappear; and as the day wore on Mrs. Vanderhagen felt strangely uneasy. "I did not think she would lightly break her word," reflected she, "but perhaps she has been forbidden to come. Well, of course, I cannot, at present, interfere in the matter. I must wait and watch. Though I declare I did not dream I did love her so dearly, already. The happy, innocent darling."

A few days passed, and again she held an argument with herself. "Of course she should come to me, not make me go to her, but I am terribly worried, though Blasius says that's all nonsense. Anyway, when I go out to exercise the horses this afternoon I'll drive to Harmony street and inquire. As well take the air in that direction as in a more fashionable one. Then, if the Hudsons—silly things!—have objected to her working for hire I can make that right with them. Certainly, I will go; for in despite of my common sense, I am getting nervously anxious to understand her failure."

Yet when, in due time, her footman rang the bell at the new home of her protégée, it was an almost distracted woman who answered the summons.

Even before the door was opened one could hear her eager cry :

“Oh! Delight! my darling! has thee come?”

But at sight of the liveried servant she would have closed it in his face, so frantic was her disappointment.

“Is Miss Roloson at home?” he demanded, just in time.

“No! no! and only the Lord knows where she is!”

## CHAPTER XIX

### A CHANCE MEETING

DELIGHT walked briskly away from the Vanderhagens' home, her face bright with anticipation of little Bertrand's pleasure at sight of his gifts, and her heart aglow with pride in her own success.

"How splendid it will be to earn money, really earn it, by my own industry. So that I can help my poor cousins a little. Then they will be quite, quite glad to have me, and they will believe that I do love them and want them to love me. I'm sure they do, though, more than at first. Well, it has been a happy Christmas day, after all; even despite the troubles which came with it. Wait! I forget, while I'm thinking so fast, which way Mrs. Vanderhagen told me to go. Was it that corner yonder? Or this? It was a yellow car, she said. I will stop and watch for one, for there's a car-track on that further street."

But while she paused, considering, an easy way out of her quandary seemed opened. For a voice that was familiar called eagerly, yet with



a sort of hesitation, too, had Delight been keen enough to observe this—as if the summons were given almost against the speaker's will.

“Miss Roloson! Oh! Miss Roloson!”

Delight was getting accustomed to hearing herself addressed as “Miss,” though she felt she should never like it; but she recognized the voice and turned eagerly, as to meet an old friend:

“Why, Dalton! Thee here?”

“Yes, indeed. I saw you go to Mrs. Vanderhagen's and followed you there. I waited for you to come out but you were so swift I couldn't catch up with you as you ran down the steps and along the block. My! I've fairly lost my breath!”

“Why, did I run? I didn't know it, for Cousin Hannah would be quite shocked to find so large a girl as I could do so unladylike a thing. But I was anxious to get back to them all and it is growing late. Is thee going my way?”

“No; but I want—I want—you—to go mine,” half gasped the woman.

“What a pity thee hurried so; if thee had called to me sooner I would have stopped.”

“I did. But ——” Dalton cut short her own speech and regarded the girl with a curious scrutiny.

Delight had never appeared more winning and innocent. Her eyes sparkled with happiness, her cheeks glowed with the color which her

rapid movement in the crisp air had given them, and her sunny hair framed her face beneath her little grey bonnet, as with a crown of gold. How could anybody—anybody, even evil, bring harm and distress to so bonny a creature, thought poor Dalton, who was herself pale as well as breathless.

Then, meeting the questioning look in those bright eyes, her own expression hardened. What she had come to do she must do and quickly. Else would worse befall herself, and she shivered, slightly, remembering this.

Delight was swift with sympathy :

“Why, Dalton, how cold thee seems! and thee certainly looks ill. Has thee been in trouble since thee left my cousin’s?”

“I’m always in trouble. I’m used to that.”

Delight’s surprise increased. Dalton had seemed the brightest and best of all the servants at Argyle Terrace. Always neat and capable, ready with aid and apparent sympathy for each member of the household, they had learned to depend upon her; and although she had lived with them but a short time, they felt a real regret when their own poverty had compelled them to dismiss her. The alteration in her appearance now was painful to the warm-hearted Delight.

“Of course, I’ll go home with thee if I can. If it isn’t so far that I will be after dark getting

back to my cousin's. I didn't tell them where I was going because my errand was —— Well, I didn't want them to be disappointed in case it failed. But it hasn't. So now I'm impatient to be at home and explain. Why does thee wish me to go? Wouldn't another time do as well? I'm sure Bertrand would love to go with me to visit his Dalton."

"No. Another time will not answer. It must be to-night. It—it must be!" she finished, as if encouraging her own determination.

"Does thee not live at service now, then?"

"No. No. I haven't taken another place yet. I suppose I will soon, though;" and she sighed, drearily.

Then she roused herself to be more cheerful, and smiling, asked:

"Miss Delight, do you know a man named Enoch Legg?"

"Why, yes! Surely. Does thee?"

At that distance from him even the disagreeable old sailor seemed like a cherished friend to the absent girl, because he was of her beloved "Seabury township."

"No. But my father-in—I mean, there is a man at our house who does know him. He was a fellow-sailor, years ago. It is he who wants to see you, and right away. He can't go to you, so you must needs go to him."

Something in Dalton's tone jarred upon Delight's pride. Even the most good natured of mortals may dislike to be commanded, and by an unknown, presumably obscure man. However, Delight tried to overlook the "must" and recalled the fact that any shipmate of old Enoch's must himself be old and therefore worthy of her respect.

"Then will he talk to me of the sea? Oh! how I love it! What would I not give just for a whiff of its salt breath this Christmas night!"

They were now walking rapidly along the street but at the corner of an alley which cut the block in two Dalton turned and, as if to guide her, laid her hand upon the girl's sleeve. This, too, was out of the common and Delight wondered that the woman should take such exceeding care of her. She laughed and remarked:

"Thee needn't try to hold me up. I'm sure-footed, even if it is slippery. They haven't shovelled the sidewalk in here, have they?"

"Humph. The folks who live in alleys don't bother much to keep their paths clean. They've troubles of deeper sort than that. But, walk slower. There's something I'd like to ask. How did the Hudsons pass this day? Had they a good dinner? and who cooked it for them?"

Indeed, Dalton was so eager in this inquiry

that she stopped short and made Delight do so by the hold upon her arm.

“Dinner! I should say so. I don’t suppose it is betraying secrets to tell thee who lived with them all about it;” so, with an eagerness which soon awoke an answering enthusiasm in her listener, Delight explained how the mysterious basket had been left at the house in Harmony street; how opportunely Maria had arrived; and that although Mr. Hudson had been so suddenly stricken down this blow had not so greatly depressed any of the household.

“For thee must see, Dalton, that now he is at rest. He sleeps nearly all the time, and when he is awake his eyes have a contented look in them. He is so glad to have my Cousin Hannah up and caring for him, and every one of them has been so lovely ever since. If only we all had some way of earning money to keep things going I believe all would be as happy, or happier even, than in the old rich home.”

Dalton listened with more and more interest. She twisted her clasped hands with a nervous gesture and a bright spot began to glow on her thin cheeks. When the recital was finished and the girl looked again questioningly down the alley, as if wondering how far Dalton’s home was, the woman exclaimed:

“To think that they should come to that! To

be thankful for a basket of food, like any low-down family! What a change! But I'm glad that woman, Maria, had sense enough to keep the things, and I'm more glad than I can tell to think I sent them."

Delight halted, and again her pride was humbled.

"Thee—sent it? Thee—their servant! What would my Cousin Hannah say? But she mustn't know it. Ever. Please, Dalton! Though it was beautiful of thee to do it, and most generous. Indeed, it was too much. But when I earn enough I will make it up to thee, indeed I will. It isn't right that thee, who has to work for a living, should spend so much for other folks—just to eat up."

But Dalton's face had again hardened and a bitter smile played about her lips.

"So, even you despise a 'servant,' do you? Well. All right. Tables turn, you know, and it's not so odd that I should have my chance, too. However it's all as it should be: but the next time I'm tempted to do a kind or a right thing to any of the 'upper-crust'—just let me know it, will you?"

Nor, for the short distance further that they walked, did she speak again. So Delight, also, plodded along in a miserable silence that she was ignorant how to break; and she felt it a

relief when her offended guide stopped before a small brick tenement and climbed a short flight of wooden stairs which ran across its face to a room half-way up.

At the head of the stairs she knocked, in a peculiar manner, and waited. The knock was thrice repeated and after each time a similar pause was made.

Finally, a low whistle sounded from within the house and to this Dalton answered by another. At this the door was cautiously opened by some person concealed behind it, and pushing Delight gently before her, yet with a firmness not easily withstood, the two entered the building and the door was closed.

## CHAPTER XX

### DEMAND AND REFUSAL

THE interior of the little house seemed close and stuffy after the frosty clearness of the outer air, but Delight was surprised by its evident comfort. Indeed, the furnishings were of a sort oddly out of keeping with the cheap tenement, and the one window that opened into the alley was curtained by a tasteful hanging. Only the drapery looked heavy enough to serve the purpose of a screen and it certainly did exclude the daylight as well as prevent ventilation. The carpet was padded so that their footfalls made no echo and the visitor rapidly altered her opinion that Dalton could not afford to give away a dinner if she chose.

“Why, Dalton! I did not dream thee were so well off! I was afraid that thee had taken what thee needed for thyself. That was all. Of course, I understand it well now. It is like Maria; only thee is so much younger than she that I wonder thee could save so much already.”

“What do you mean?”



“Maria had all the savings of all the years she had lived at service in her, or my, little trunk. I suppose thee has saved, too. I’m sorry I spoke as I did. How nice it all is. Who lives here with thee? and where is the mate of old Enoch Legg? I must make my visit a short one—it seems to have grown darker suddenly. I must get home, thee knows.”

“Don’t worry, child. I will tell my—the man.”

With that she left the room, passing into another at the back and closing the door behind her. To Delight the atmosphere became presently unbearable and, to let out some of the heat as well as let in some of the daylight and fresh air, she crossed to again open the outer door. To her surprise she could not accomplish this and a flash of fear turned her cold.

“How silly I am! That’s only the habit of all the Chester folks, I think. I know Cousin Hannah will always keep her doors locked, and I suppose Dalton does, too. I wish she’d hurry back, though. It does seem queer in here and I’ll be glad to get away.”

But she had waited for some moments before the woman reappeared; and during the interval she had heard voices in that inner room which seemed to be discussing something very seriously. Men’s voices and Dalton’s shrill treble—that she

had been so quick to recognize upon the street—the latter evidently pleading for some favor which the others refused to grant.

Delight tried not to listen, even when she caught the sound of her own name; and to keep herself from doing so she walked about the little apartment, examining with idle curiosity the articles heaped on its tables and mantel. To her astonishment, she saw upon the latter a silver frame for photographs; such, in exact reproduction, as she had seen upon Gwendolyn's dressing table at Argyle Terrace. She stood with it in her hand as the door opened from the back room and her hostess reëntered.

There was no mistaking the angry flash of the woman's eyes, as she noticed what the girl had picked up, and before the latter could speak she exclaimed:

“Don't you suppose there can be two such frames in Chester city? Haven't I a right to pretty things as well as other folks? Aren't we all of the same flesh and blood? All human? A body must look out for herself, in this world. If she doesn't nobody else will.”

This outburst so surprised Delight that she did not at once reply. When she did it was with a vague awakening memory that she had heard her young cousin lamenting the loss of just such a trinket as Dalton possessed, and with a re-

newed sensation of fear. But her words were quiet enough:

"I merely thought it odd that thee should have a frame like Gwendolyn's. I am sure she would not begrudge it to thee. She was very fond of thee I think, for often, nowadays, she wishes thee was back to live with them."

Dalton's own face softened again. She was fretted and anxious, and evidently under constraint to do that which she did not approve.

"Well. Conscience knows, Miss Roloson, I'd a deal rather live at respectable service than not. If so be I was free to follow my own will. I'm not, though. Nobody seems to be in this world."

"But where is Enoch Legg's friend? If he wants to see me why doesn't he come?"

"You are to see him now. Come with me."

Delight followed the woman into that inner room, where she had overheard the voices, and found herself in the presence of two men. One was old and crouched in a chair before a grate fire, the other was about Dalton's own age and had a face from which the girl instinctively recoiled. It was brutal, despite its comeliness, and its expression terrified her so that she moved close to Dalton and unconsciously clasped the woman's arm.

The younger man laughed, observing this, but he said nothing, save to the old man beyond:

“Well, dad, here she is.”

“Hmm. I hear her. Shut the door, can’t you? It’s cold. It’s awful cold. My very bones are frozen.”

The younger man put a fresh shovel of coals upon the fire and remarked:

“It’s keeping so still ails you. If you’d stir ’round more you’d warm up.”

All three of the household laughed at this, as if it had been an excellent joke; but Delight saw nothing funny in it and felt her courage sink still further, for a change had come over Dalton’s manner, with her entrance into the presence of these others. Her face took on an expression almost as hard and evil as that of the man she called “Pete,” and she ignored the half-pleading touch upon her sleeve. But she placed a chair for the visitor before the grate, and somewhat too near the hideous old man for Delight’s enjoyment.

As she sat down she pushed the chair away and the action was speedily commented upon:

“Oh! you needn’t be afraid, sissy. I’m an old friend of yours. Leastwise, of your folks. I knew your father well.”

“Thee knew my father!” cried the girl, forgetting everything else. “When did thee know him and where? Dalton only told me that thee knew Enoch Legg.”

The old sailor scowled. "Aye, aye. I know him, too. To my own damage. Time that scoundrel sailed into his last port years ago. The world won't be the worse off when Enoch Legg's out of it."

"He is almost out of it now, I fear. He is bed-ridden, I suppose thee knows."

"Hmm. Yes. I've seen him. Since you have, too."

"Since I have? Then thee must have been to Seabury township very lately."

"I saw him last Wednesday. And that grenadier wife of his, too. She asked after you and sent the good word. She's a tartar, she is."

"She's one of the grandest women ever lived," said Delight warmly, and in defending her friend she quite forgot her own fear.

This was exactly what the speaker intended. He had, truly, but recently returned from a fruitless visit to Captain Harriet's home; and he had used her name for purposes of his own.

"Tell me all about her, please," demanded Delight, eagerly. "How did she look? Was she well? Did thee see anybody else there?"

"I saw nobody else, and she looked well, as much like a weather-beaten old 'salt,' as a woman. She's tall as a mainmast, near like; and as straight. She's as much man as woman, struck me; and powerful short spoke. What

she said, though, was worth listening to. It was a message to you."

"A message to me? What is it?"

The man assumed an air of carelessness; affecting but dimly to recall the matter, and finally exclaiming:

"Aye, I recollect. I wanted to get it all right. It was about some paper or other 't old Enoch had given you. Or parchment, near like. Not much account, I reckon, but he's been sorry he parted with it and asked me—as a favor—being's I was likely to touch land there soon again to fetch it back to him. You was to give it to me and I'd take care of it till such time as I see him."

Unfortunately for himself, as he finished, the speaker turned toward the younger man and winked: at which the other burst into a guffaw, exclaiming:

"Hi, dad! you'll do! Good enough, good enough."

The wink and the explanation were both observed by Delight, and that intuition which serves many as an additional sense warned her that here was treachery of some sort. Her answer was simple:

"I haven't the paper with me."

"Oh! no. I didn't reckon you had. But Sally here, my daughter-in-law, will go with you

and fetch it back. You know her. You can trust her, can't you?"

"I—I thought I could."

There was utter silence after she had said this. Then the woman broke in, sharply :

"Can't you trust me now?"

"I—don't—know. It seems ——"

"How? What seems?" demanded the younger man, fixing his keen eyes upon Delight's face.

"As if there were something about this that I do not understand. Even if I had the paper I would not like to give it up. It was an important one, I think. I was to take the greatest care of it."

"Pooh! It didn't amount to anything. One of Enoch's cranky notions. Nothing else. Even his wife said that."

"Did Captain Harriet say that it was of no value?"

The old sailor hesitated. Then answered boldly: "Yes. She did. She was glad to be rid of it."

"Then why does she want it back?"

"Say! You're not so simple as you look. Let's quit fooling and get down to business. It's getting late and I want that paper to-night. Dad may be starting for Enoch Legg's to-morrow. Sally can see you home and fetch it; or I will."

Delight waited till the man called "Pete" had finished, then quietly rose.

"I am sorry to seem disobliging and I came here to learn something of old Seabury friends. I must go now and I should be glad to have Dalton's company—if she is the 'Sally' thee means—but I shall not give her the paper. I must keep that till I understand more about it."

"Pete" rose, also. His manner had now become as quiet as her own but with a calmness which boded evil to herself.

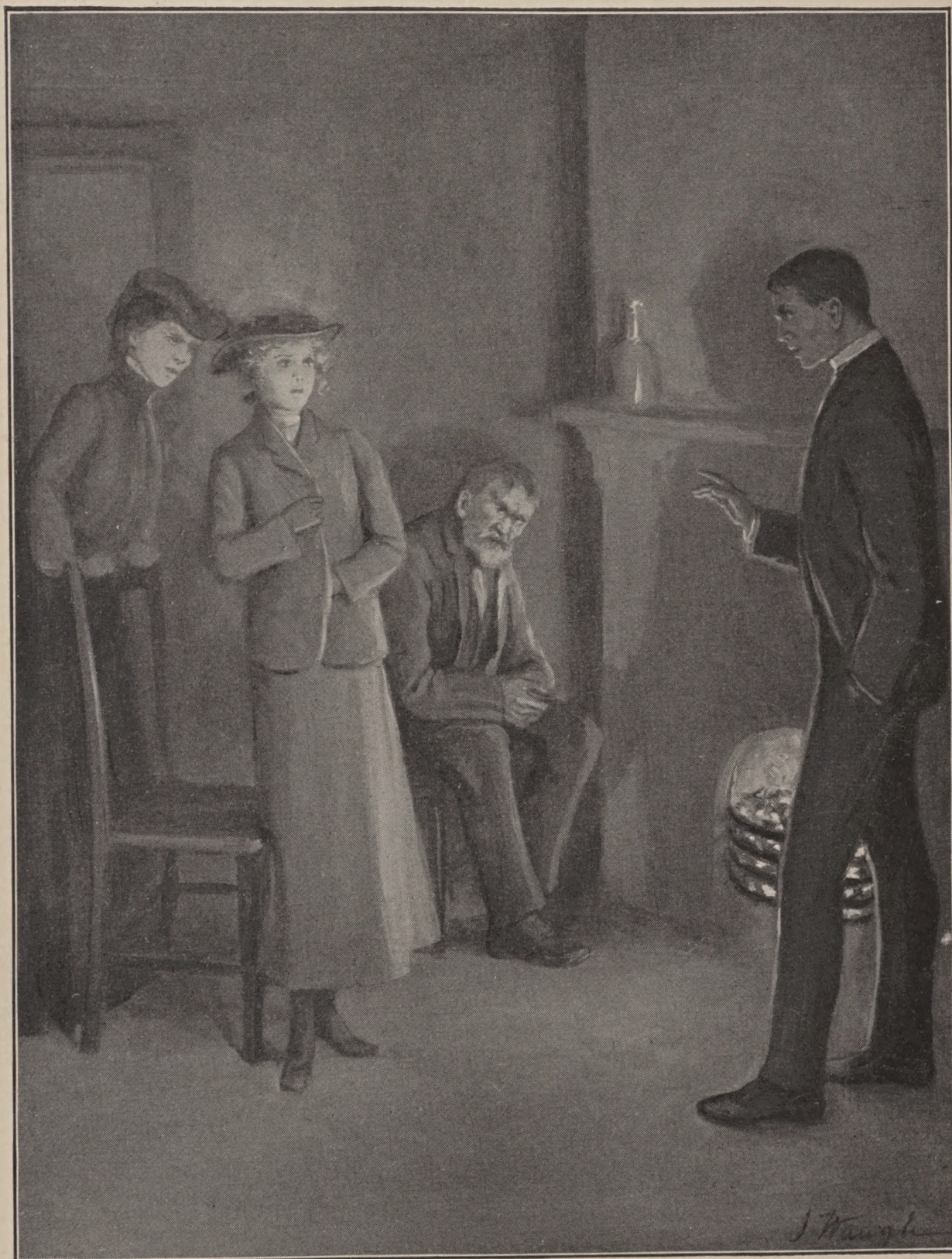
"Look here, young woman. You may not know where you are, but I can tell you. You are in the power of two men who stick at nothing which hinders their purpose. You have a paper in your possession which must come into ours. Until you promise to give it to me, or my wife here, you cannot leave this house. That's as sure as you live and you had better believe it."

He felt certain that he had taken the shortest course to bring her to terms but he did not know the girl with whom he had to deal. She forgot her fear in her indignation and followed his departure from the scene with a glance of contempt.

Then she heard Dalton's voice, cajoling and warning :

"Don't anger him, miss. Far better not. Say yes, dearie, and I'll take you straight home. I





"YOU CANNOT LEAVE THIS HOUSE"



can trust you if you can't trust me. Just pass your word, for I've heard that a Quaker never lies."

"I can't say yes, but I'm going home at once."

Yet when she tried the doors, again and again, and found herself a prisoner her heart sank within her.

## CHAPTER XXI

### PEACH ALLEY

"PEACH ALLEY, madam," said the driver of a hansom, addressing the lady within the cab.

"Very well. Number 927 is the house I want. Is that far down the alley?"

"A matter of some blocks. It's a rough place."

"Can't you drive over it?"

"Yes, madam. It's not the cobble stones I was meaning, though they're like to shake you up a goodish bit. It's a neighborhood the police don't like. I know that, 'cause my own brother's on the force. I thought maybe——"

The lady smiled.

"Thank you for your caution, Mr. Waters. But I am not afraid. The woman I am after has such high recommendations that wherever she lives must be safe enough. Besides, I'm used to visiting much poorer districts than this."

Mrs. Lester smiled cordially upon her temporary coachman, and he again gathered up his reins to proceed down the alley. He always acted as driver for the lady, during her frequent visits to Chester, and as he had married an old nurse

once attached to her mother's household he had the privilege of freer speech than a stranger. He knew the city well and, despite its fairly decent appearance, knew also, as he had stated, that this locality was obnoxious to the police. Many offenders against law had been traced to the "Peaches," though but few arrests had been accomplished there. The tenants of the low row of houses seemed banded together to protect each other and elude detection.

However, Mr. Waters had said his say and now returned to his immediate duty of safely driving his good horse down an ill-paved road; and after a shaky passage Mrs. Lester's eyes rested upon the desired number—927.

"You ring for me, Mr. Waters, please. If the woman is at home I will get out and go in."

"Dalton, is it, madam?"

"Yes. Ann, or Sally, Dalton. Advertised in this morning's *Herald*."

Dalton was at home. Yes, it was she who had advertised. Would the lady come in? It was cold talking outside.

Mrs. Lester alighted and entered the small house which was so much more shabby without than within. It was unusual to find so much comfort, almost elegance, in the home of a person applying for the position that Dalton had, and the visitor scrutinized her rather closely.

Dalton's speech and behavior were, however, perfectly correct and in keeping with her lot in life, and Mrs. Lester reproached herself for so instant dislike to her. But the dislike was real, and she almost regretted that there was no reasonable excuse for not engaging the woman's services.

"You say that you have served in the capacity of lady's maid?"

"Yes, madam. Though at the last place I acted as a sort of housekeeper."

"Where was that place? I am engaging you for my sister, who is an invalid, and I must be extra careful to secure somebody whom she can thoroughly trust. I might see your late mistress ——"

Dalton bridled. "I'm sure your sister can trust me. I've never lived in a place where I have not given perfect satisfaction."

"Hmm. Where did you say you lived last?"

Dalton hesitated, then replied, evasively:

"I lived on Argyle Terrace. I was there until the family broke up and removed to another neighborhood. You see, ma'am, I have an old father depending on me and I must live near enough to him to run home now and again of a night to make him comfortable. I'm sure your sister wouldn't be minding that, would she? Because, if she would, there's another ——"

Mrs. Lester reflected that "references" were not often more satisfactory than troublesome, and that a good servant was difficult to find. She really had no reason for her dislike of this one before her and a maid her sister did require, and at once. So she closed with this opportunity, and on satisfactory terms to both sides. Or, apparently such.

"When will you come?"

Again Dalton hesitated and, turning, cast a suspicious glance over the front of the house. Then she replied:

"I can't come before to-morrow morning. Maybe not so soon ——"

"But I wanted you at once."

"I couldn't come before then, ma'am. But at seven o'clock I will be there. What is the number, please?"

Mrs. Lester gave it and left the house. As she did so she stepped into a throng of little children, unkempt and forlorn, who were quarrelling over some trifling possession and who paid little heed to the stranger, in their eagerness about their own affairs.

Now little children, of whatever age and condition, were precious to the soul of gentle Mrs. Lester, whose name was a household word in more than one big city. It was impossible for her to pass these without a cheery bit of talk,

question and answer, nor was her good heart ever more touched than by a certain air of neglect which hung over the entire group.

“Ma’am? Well, we mostly takes care of ourselves, we do. Folks? Some of us has, some hasn’t. No. Never go to school. Ain’t no kindergarten, as I knows of. Couldn’t go if there was.”

“Why not? This isn’t such a poor place. I’ve seen much worse. Surely your people would let you go if you wished.”

“No. Never go out the alley. None of us. ’Tain’t safe.”

“Not safe? Why?”

A shrill voice from further down the row interrupted whatever answer might have been given.

“Jim! Jimmy Smith! you come a-here. Keep your mouth shut, I tell you!”

Not only “Jimmy Smith” but the whole group vanished. The summons had evidently frightened the little ones; and, with a renewed compassion for their ignorance and squalor, Mrs. Lester re-entered her cab. But she meant to return at no distant day and see if something could not be done to brighten the lives of these little creatures.

Meanwhile, Mr. Waters, from his elevated seat at the back of his vehicle, had been curiously scanning the houses in Peach alley. When his



glance came back and rested upon the upper part of No. 927 he saw, or fancied that he did, a white finger push through the slats of a blind. The hand to which the finger belonged was evidently trying to force the shutter open ; but it failed in this attempt and the finger disappeared.

In another locality, Mr. Waters would have paid no attention to this trifling incident ; but he had something of a detective's nature and hoped some day to be, like his brother, employed upon "the force."

So while he waited for his "fare" to conclude her business within the house he kept a watchful eye upon that faded green blind. Nor was his labor without reward ; for, after a brief delay, a tiny white object was pushed downward through the slats and fell to the ground.

It had scarcely touched it before Mr. Waters had stepped down and secured it. But, still with that detective instinct upon him, he slipped it into his pocket very quietly and resumed his attitude of waiting.

He did not notice the children as they drew near, nor when Mrs. Lester reappeared did he mention what had occurred ; but as he drove out of the alley he cast one backward glance toward the shuttered window. There was nothing altered ; yet as the wheels rolled forward he distinctly heard a girlish voice crying shrilly :

“Help! Somebody let me out!”

Mrs. Lester also heard the cry:

“What was that, Mr. Waters? Did the woman call after me?”

“Not the woman, I think, ma’am. Sounded like a body in trouble. I’ve heard there’s a deal of dark doings in Peach alley.”

“Somebody in trouble? Do you suppose we could help her if we turned back?”

“No, ma’am, I’m sure we couldn’t. Not as we are. No authority, ma’am.”

“Well, then, drive on. Let’s get away from here. I don’t like the place and your talk has made me positively fidgety, which is a new thing for me.”

With that he answered “All right, ma’am,” touched his good horse to as fast a speed as it could make over so rough a pavement, and heard, as they rolled onward, once again that appeal for: “Help! I want to get out!”

But neither he nor his fare made further comment on the matter which he, at least, did not forget.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A VISITOR TO HARMONY STREET

“WELL?” demanded Mrs. Vanderhagen, with some impatience, as the footman returned from making inquiries at the Hudsons’ home. “What did the woman say?”

“That the young lady was not in, ma’am.”

“Wasn’t it more than that? I thought she looked very much disturbed.”

“She said, ma’am, that ‘only the Lord knows where she is,’ ma’am.”

“Open the door. I will get out.”

The man obeyed and the lady stepped to the pavement, then walked swiftly to the low stoop of the house. She could not help comparing this, in her memory, with the pretentious mansion on Argyle Terrace, and she pitied the inmates for the misfortunes they had suffered. But even before she could again ring the bell a curious thumping sound echoed along the passage, and the same grey-haired person who had responded to the man’s summons appeared before her.

“Oh! ma’am, you’re the same lady who brought my girl to the hospital. Have you seen her now? Do you know where she is?”

“And you are, indeed, Maria. I am glad to see you again, though sorry to say ‘no’ to your question. Delight was at my house on Christmas day just before nightfall. She left me in plenty of time to reach here before dark, and I gave her plain directions. Indeed, I wrote them on my visiting card, so that she should make no mistake. She was to have come back to me at nine o’clock the next morning; and as she did not come then, nor since, I drove out to see why she did not. What is this the footman tells me? Has something happened to her?”

Even as she put the question Mrs. Vanderhagen was surprised by the depth of her own anxiety.

“Come in, ma’am. Do come in. Let’s talk it over and see what it means—if we can. But I fear—— Oh! what do I not fear!”

The visitor followed her guide as far as the sitting-room, where Gladys was making ineffectual gestures to the careless Maria to: “Take her into the front drawing-room”; then finding herself obliged to come forward and receive this caller with as good a grace as she could.

“My good Maria, why are you doing that?” asked Mrs. Vanderhagen, quite ignoring Gladys’ perturbed manner, and with a half-smile at the old servant’s unique method of progress.

“Why, you see, ma’am, that I can’t manage the crutches at all. And if I go creeping all around

that takes all my hands. I mean—— Well, by strapping my lame leg in a chair and pushing it along so, using my sound leg, I'm free with both hands and find it quite convenient. I creep up the stairs well enough, and I generally get one of them to take the chair up for me. If I can't get them, I manage. 'Needs must is a good driver,' ma'am. But—Delight! Where can she be? What can have happened to her?"

With a sigh Maria deftly whirled her chair-crutch about and restored it to its original purpose of a seat and, though she even was able to smile at the guest's astonishment over this feat, the lines of her face showed keenest anxiety. So they plunged at once into a discussion of Delight's possible whereabouts; and one after another of the household joined them, till, in absorption in their mutual trouble, the Hudsons forgot their shame in their altered circumstances and appeared naturally, therefore at their best. Indeed, by that one brief call, Mrs. Vanderhagen had come nearer to their real hearts than she could ever have done during many "society" visits.

In Delight both sides found a mutual ground of interest; and, now that she was gone, both found how necessary to their happiness she had become.

"Well, the best thing is to publish her disappearance in the evening papers, if there is still

time to get the item in," said the lady, glancing toward George, as if this were his affair; and with an intuition that even a small sum might be wanting she quietly handed him a bill.

"Please have the advertisement inserted for me. Go first to the *News*, since that has the largest circulation, then the other papers in succession, and—lose no time. I would send you in the carriage but I will use that in another way for the same purpose."

George hesitated slightly and was reluctant to accept the proffered bill; but the lady's next words banished all this feeling as well as roused an equal amazement.

"You are surely doing it for me, and my husband; for it is my hope, my warmest desire, when our missing girl is found—to adopt her as my own daughter. Indeed I made her a proposal to that effect, on Christmas, when she came to see me."

George stared, seized his hat, bowed politely to this new and powerful friend of the once despised "country cousin," and hurried away.

Mrs. Hudson was the first to find her voice, for she had left her husband for a bit that she might meet their visitor.

"You want to adopt—adopt—my Cousin Delight?"

"I most certainly do. Though, in justice to

her, I must add that she is not half as anxious to be adopted. Wait. I will tell you the whole matter, though she might not quite like to have me. But since you are the real stumbling stones in the way of my success"—she smiled pleasantly upon the astonished matron—"I will explain. The child's visit to me was made in order to secure some sort of work by which she could earn money to help you. She could not desert you while you were in trouble. Of course, what she could earn, really earn, at any sort of labor she could do would not go far toward the support of a family. 'Still it would help' was her argument, and her endeavor is quite as noble as if her rewards would be much larger."

Mrs. Vanderhagen was not unkind, but she could not refrain from firing this shot into the enemy's camp, so to speak; and she was determined they should fully realize something of the unselfishness and devotion to duty which animated the girl they had been so unwilling to receive.

"She wanted—to earn money—for us!" exclaimed Mrs. Hudson, after a telling pause.

"Yes. And I had engaged her to begin her labors the next morning."

"At what?"

"Darning fine laces, first. At what might come up, afterward; always providing she still

declined to accept the offer we had made her. I need scarcely add that this offer will remain open indefinitely; so that when she is found—as she *must be*—she will have two homes awaiting her presence, her sunshiny presence, in them.”

Then the lady rose, and Maria who had been sitting, silent for the most part, rose also. But so suddenly and with such entire forgetfulness of her own lameness that she tottered, struggled, and finally collapsed in an ignominious heap at the visitor's feet.

“‘Pride must have a fall,’ but I allow I didn't reckon it meant that kind of pride. For I am right set up, ma'am, to know my little Delight—God bless her!—has been able of her own sweet self to make such a friend as you are! But she's worthy. She's worthy, if ever a body was in this world. She's Roloson from the head to the foot of her—there's no better anywhere. Now—will somebody help me up?”

The laughter which her accident provoked came welcomely. In it all forgot the constraint which had followed Mrs. Vanderhagen's statement concerning her wishes in regard to Delight; and when Maria was once more securely strapped to her chair, or her bent knee so strapped—the lady took her departure.

“I will drive down town at once and consult my husband. If young Mr. Hudson gets the ad-



vertisements out to-night, and we get the police notified, our dear child should be back among us before many hours. If she has met somebody she knew, and is forgetting that we would be anxious, the notices will remind her, or her friends, and she will return. If not — Well, it isn't such a very big city. The police will get upon some track of her, I am positive. By the way, whoever hears of her first, must let the others know. If I do, I will send you a message immediately; if you do, please notify me."

Then she went; and, despite the sorrowful mystery that engrossed them all, her manner had been so cordial, she had so thoroughly identified herself with their interest in Delight, that she left behind her such a sentiment of cheerfulness and good feeling that each was loud in her praises.

"That's what I call a real gentlewoman," said Gwendolyn, earnestly. "Simple, unaffected, going straight to the root of the matter; and how plainly she was dressed! I will make her my model, see if I don't."

"Yes, she was plainly enough dressed; but that unadorned costume was the perfection of fit and quality, and came, I do not doubt, from the most fashionable tailor in the country," remarked her mother.

"Well, she wasn't 'sot up,' as Maria says, even

if it did. She wore it as if it were made for her, not she for it; which was the way I used to feel, when I first put on some of my fancy clothes. Oh! it's nice to be rich, isn't it!" sighed the girl Gladys.

"Yes. But I'm learning that there is something better than riches; and that's—unselfishness," answered Gwendolyn, softly, as she went upstairs to her father's sick room.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### BEGINNING THE SEARCH

GEORGE HUDSON lost no time in reaching the office of the *Evening News*, but the clerk assured him that the paper had already been "made up," and that it was quite too late to insert any advertisement that night, even one of so urgent a nature as this.

"However, we can put it in the morning edition and you will really lose but a few hours."

"Yet those few hours mean a great deal of anxiety to some, and possible suffering to the missing girl."

"I'm sorry, I'm sure," remarked the other, politely.

"Besides, Mrs. Vanderhagen will be so disappointed. She was almost positive that you would stretch a point to oblige her. You see, this girl—— Well, the lady wished to adopt her, and——" but just there George reflected that he might be betraying too much of private affairs.

His discretion came too late. There is nobody so keen for an "item" as a newspaper man and the clerk scented a bit of really fresh material.

“Vanderhagen? Vanderhagen, did you say? Mr. Blasius Vanderhagen, of ours?”

“He may be of yours, or anybody’s, for aught I know,” answered George, hastily. “At any rate I’m going to try the *Telegram* and see what they’ll do about it.”

He turned to leave, but the employee behind the desk waved his hand.

“Hold on! I’ll take the blank you’ve made out and consult.”

“I can’t waste time.”

“You will save it, perhaps,” returned the other. “I’ll be back immediately.”

He was. This time his manner was quite as eager for the “Ad” as George’s had been to bestow it. A reporter accompanied the receiving clerk, and George’s business was soon arranged.

“You may not know, young man, but this Mr. Vanderhagen holds a controlling interest in the *News Company*. I think you will be satisfied with the notice we give you. More than that, we shall put a ‘special’ on the case and promise to unravel the mystery very speedily. The *Telegram*, you say? Well, that’s needless, *now*. If I were you I’d just confine the matter to our paper and——”

But the anxious lad was already disappearing into the street, and, regardless of the reporter’s advice, was almost running to the office of an-

other evening paper. So that, within a very brief time, both had inserted an inquiry concerning Delight; while one of them described the matter under flaring headlines and with all the sensational *éclat* possible.

One copy found its way into the pretty house where, having finished dinner, Mrs. Lester sat down in her sister's room to read to that invalid all the local happenings of the day.

"I do enjoy handling a freshly printed newspaper. I like the odor of the new ink on the damp sheets," remarked the reader, impulsively, and holding her *News* so close to her nose that she smutted it with the black imprint.

Which caused her sister to laugh, and even provoked a smile from that scrupulously exact person, in cap and apron, who was none other than the new maid and our old acquaintance, Dalton.

Almost at the first glance Mrs. Lester's eye rested upon the startling headlines :

"MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF A YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL GIRL—WAS SOON TO BE LEGALLY ADOPTED BY OUR HONORED CITIZENS; THE VANDERHAGENS—MISS DELIGHT ROLOSON PAYS A VISIT TO HER FUTURE MOTHER AND AFTER LEAVING HER HOUSE IS SEEN NO MORE. THE NEWS ALREADY HAS ITS SCOUTS UPON THE TRAIL AND PROMISES SOON TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM."

Mrs. Lester read these to herself, springing up and holding the paper at arm's length, as if by so doing she could disprove the startling story.

She finished her silent perusal with a little cry, and exclaimed :

“Don't you remember, Helena, that sweet faced little Friend who travelled with me once, last autumn? She was coming here to find unknown relatives and I parted with her at the Junction. Ever since I came I've been thinking I would hunt her up and renew acquaintance but have always delayed. Well—listen!” and she read rapidly, yet with telling effect, the rather high-colored newspaper narrative which had been manufactured from the very meagre facts that George had communicated.

When she had gone through the article she looked up and her gaze happened to rest upon Dalton, who had paused in the preparation of her mistress' bed for the night and now stood leaning against the head-board, as if suddenly stricken by faintness.

“Why, Dalton! What's the matter? Are you ill?”

“No. No, ma'am, thank you. It's a bit of a headache, ma'am. I'm all right directly, ma'am.”

“What a pity! Are you subject to such attacks, Dalton?” asked Mrs. Lester, who felt the responsibility of engaging the woman and of

leaving her frail sister in incompetent hands, when her own visit should have expired.

“No, ma’am. Not at all subject, ma’am. This is the first turn I ever took like it. I shan’t be taken again, ma’am.”

There was a trace of acerbity in the answer, and Mrs. Lester forbore to press the subject; but she resolved to keep a watchful eye upon the maid and to replace her by another, if need be, before she herself left Chester.

Then she discussed the news concerning Delight with profound interest and felt a personal desire to aid in tracing the lost one.

“The trouble is that she is such an innocent, guileless girl, that she would walk unsuspectingly into any trap laid for her. How she can have an enemy I fail to understand. It seemed to me that anybody must love her who saw her.”

Meanwhile, Dalton worked about mechanically. That she was still nervous and shaken her rather uncertain movements and abstracted gaze testified; but she fulfilled all that was required of her, even undressing her mistress and assisting her to bed at the early hour which her delicacy rendered necessary.

But when all was done that must be she preferred her request to “go home for a bit, ma’am, if you can spare me.”

“Why, but Dalton, you did not ask to go out

*every* night; and yet you have been since you came.”

“No, ma’am, I’m not so intending, ma’am. But I told Mrs. Lester about my old father and the care I must take of him. After a little that will be all over, most like.”

“What do you mean? That he will get well or—or die?”

“He may—may have to go away, ma’am,” replied the maid, slowly. “Leastwise, if you please, ma’am, I’d like to get off at once, ma’am. I’ll be back in the morning, early, if I can’t get here to-night ——”

“But, Dalton, this is an imposition! I engaged you to attend my sister constantly, save when some of us preferred to relieve you. I promised you, for her, much higher wages than ordinary, and you promised, in return, to do your best.”

“I know, ma’am, and I’m sorry. Truly I am. She’s a pleasant lady and I’m glad to have the place. But even them that live at service have their relations to look out for, same’s yourself.”

Mrs. Lester was obliged to smile, though she was indignant at the frequent opportunities the new servant found for apparently shirking her duties.

“And, ma’am, can you say I don’t suit you? Because if you’re not pleased, it’s not long I’d be out of a situation, I’m proud to say. Of all I’ve



lived with not a lady has ever found fault with my work, ma'am."

This was probably true. Certainly, Dalton was a model maid and Mrs. Lester reluctantly agreed:

"Very well. You may go but I wish you to come back to-night, if possible. I want you to learn exactly all Mrs. Percival's ways and requirements, while I am here."

Then she resumed her paper and re-read the article about Delight; while Dalton, far more anxious than she dared betray, slipped out of the house and hurried away.

As she left it by the servants' entrance she nearly ran into a man who stood beside the steps, about to ascend them and ring for admission. He eyed her keenly, though she paid no attention to him, and he even followed her for a short distance to convince himself that he was not mistaken in her identity. His impulse was to lay a restraining hand upon her shoulder, then he reflected that he was not yet "upon the force" and refrained his ambition.

So he retraced his footsteps to the door, moving with a buoyant tread as if already he heard the commendations of the "chief" for an especially brilliant piece of work; and he rang the bell with such eagerness that the girl who answered it inquired, sharply:

“Who’s there? Pulling the handle off in such a hurry?”

“It’s me. Mr. Waters, please. And will you say to the lady, Mrs. Lester, that I’m below and most anxious to speak with her?”

“Oh! it’s you, is it? I thought it was that new woman, Dalton, who’s always going out and coming in and so top-lofty by reason of her being a lady’s maid that she can’t consort with us of the kitchen and laundry. Come in, I’m sure, Mr. Waters, and I’ll give your message immediate.”

“But I’ll just take a seat in the hall and wait for her. Be kind enough to say my message is private, please, and likely she’ll understand.”

Mrs. Lester did not “understand” though she responded readily enough to the summons of her old acquaintance, asking pleasantly:

“Well, Mr. Waters, what has brought you here to-night? No trouble has come to your family, I hope.”

“No, ma’am. Thank the Lord, we’re all well and hearty. But—are we quite alone, ma’am?” assuming an air of great secrecy.

“Quite,” answered the lady, inwardly amused; for the cabman’s detective aspirations were well known to the household.

With a little needless flourish Mr. Waters extracted from an inner pocket a rather soiled bit

of pasteboard, originally a fashionable visiting card. By the gaslight Mrs. Lester deciph-ered, underneath a few pencil scrawls, the en-graved superscription: "Mrs. Blasius Vanderhagen."

"Mrs. Vanderhagen's card! In this condition? What about it, Mr. Waters?"

"There's other writing on it, ma'am."

"Yes. It is covered. But the marks are so faint I can't make them out."

"I can, ma'am, if you please," remarked the cabman earnestly. "Fact, I've studied them till I know 'em by heart. This is what it says:

"'Please, good anybody who gets this, come and let me out. I'm locked up because I won't give up the paper. Come quick. I'm getting afraid of the men.'"

"I do not understand. Is there no name signed? Surely, Mrs. Vanderhagen had nothing to do with any such message for I saw her out driving this very afternoon. Tell me what you think or know about this and what you want. Mrs. Percival is alone, for her maid has gone out. Mr. Percival out of town, as you know—I don't like to leave her."

By experience, Mrs. Lester knew that good Waters was long winded. "He's over fond of a deal of words," his wife declared; so she meant to hurry his speech, if she could.

To her surprise she succeeded. Pulling a *News* from his hat he laid the card upon it.

"Two and two makes four, ma'am," he remarked sententiously.

"Of course. Well?"

"That card and that paper belongs together, ma'am. Else I'm mistook."

She smiled. It seemed to her a very probable thing that this astute fellow *should* be mistaken, and she was yet wholly in the dark as to his meaning.

"Please explain," she requested as patiently as she could.

"You said the woman, Dalton, had gone out. I know that. I saw her go."

"Easily enough. Anybody might. She's always out, it seems to me."

"You know where we found her."

"Of course. Peach alley."

He lifted the card from the folded paper and held it significantly between his thumb and forefinger. He fancied he had never known anybody so slow of comprehension as this lady and she, on her part, considered that she had never known a person to be so dully, stupidly mysterious as he.

When no glimmer of suspicion appeared in her face, he observed :

“That card came from there. From the house of the woman, Dalton.”

“Indeed? How did you get it? What about it?”

“This about it;” and he narrated all that had occurred during his wait in the alley while she had been within doors, engaging Dalton. The scribbled card was the tiny white object that had been slipped between the slats of the blind. The blind, or shutter, was, like all others in the row, made of iron and painted a dull green. Landlords had found that wooden blinds were too easily destroyed to be of any use in the tenements, and for similar purposes of economy the slats had been fixed at a certain angle and so fastened. This suited the tenants well enough, being practically fireproof and enabling them to see out into the alley without themselves being seen. Yet it was this that had made the opening of the slats impossible to the girl who had slipped the card through them.

“But the card is unsigned. That penciling was never done by Mrs. Vanderhagen. Explain—at once, please, what you do mean.”

Mr. Waters held up the newspaper so that the headlines announcing Delight’s disappearance stared boldly forth. Instant comprehension now flashed into Mrs. Lester’s mind.

“You mean that it is this girl—this Delight—

who is shut up in Dalton's home, who dropped you the card?"

"Yes, ma'am. That's my opinion."

"But why? If it is she, and she wrote that much, why not sign it?"

"Maybe she was interrupted. Maybe she forgot. Anywise, I think it is she."

"Then hurry and rescue her! I'll go with you! I'll tell Helena, and one of the other maids must stay with her."

"It mightn't be an over safe place at night, ma'am."

"If that dear child's shut up there—safe for me as for her. Far safer. But—why should it be she? It's too much like melodrama, here in these days."

"The paper is full of stranger things than that, ma'am; and I came to ask advice. My brother's off duty to-night and this might be a chance for him to get a 'beat' on the others. If I had a hand in it, it might give me a show to get appointed. But I was going to say: Would I better go to this Mrs. Vanderhagen and see if she'd help me identify the prisoner, if so be there is one? Or what would you advise, ma'am? the wife insisting that I come and see you, ma'am, and not start on a wild goose chase that might kill my chance of appointment instead of helping it."

“No. Do not disturb Mrs. Vanderhagen. If, as this article states, she intended to adopt the missing girl, she must be greatly wrought up over the whole affair. We’ll not raise any false hopes. If it is this Delight Roloson I shall certainly recognize her and I believe she will me, although I saw her but once. However, you go for your brother. See that he has the proper authority for arresting—anybody needing arrest—and, maybe, some other good strong man. I’ll tell Helena and put on a street dress. I’ll ring up a messenger boy, too, to go with us. He’ll be useful, if we discover anything.”

“Indeed, ma’am, it is yourself that has the head for the business. What an ornament you’d be to the ‘force’ if you was eligible, ma’am. But whist’s the word. It won’t do to let the news out till we’re ready, ma’am.”

“No fear, Mr. Waters. How soon will you have the cab here?”

“In fifteen minutes, ma’am. Exact.”

“I will meet it at the door.”

She did. She had with her a basket of restoratives and nourishments of various sorts, suggested by Mrs. Percival, who had herself become deeply interested in the affair, though neither knew just why these were provided.

They drove away very quietly. The rubber tires made little sound upon the pavement and

even the good horse stepped as lightly as if he realized that his master's reputation was at stake. Mrs. Lester sat erect in the cab, longing to yet refraining from betraying the object of their trip to the wondering messenger lad beside her, and feeling as if she were the heroine of a modern melodrama. Yet, beneath all this excitement, with a profound anxiety concerning the girl she had come to seek. The policeman and his ally followed the cab on foot, and noiselessly.

When the house in Peach alley was reached it looked as deserted as if it had never been occupied. To the most authoritative summons no response was accorded and when, finally, the door was forced and officer Waters turned his lantern about the interior it was silent and empty.

Nor did the most thorough search through the few rooms reveal anything further than the fact that the tenants of No. 927 had departed, and had left no trace behind them to tell whither they went.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### WHEN ALL THE WORLD WAS STILL

THEY found the sash raised, of that window in the front upper room from which Mr. Waters had seen the card dropped. The fresh night air rushed through the slats of the blind and sent a whistling draft up the narrow chimney, fanning to life again the coals dying in the grate.

It seemed as if the person who occupied the apartment must return at any moment. There was a small bed in one corner, and this was neatly made. Indeed, the whole place was scrupulously clean and comfortable; even in the tiny bath-room, opening out of the chamber, well laundered towels were hung, ready for use.

Yet when they tried to open the shutters, as appeared easy enough, they found the fastening to be not an ordinary hasp but an intricate padlock of finely tempered steel.

“Humph! This certainly looks queer,” admitted the policeman, in a low tone, to his brother, “though it’s the first thing I’ve seen yet that gives any sort of likelihood to your story. I’ll look further and closer.”

But the most critical search elicited no more information than the first hurried one had done, and with great reluctance the party left the premises, completely baffled. Indeed, the policeman, Waters, was far more angry than pleased at his aspiring brother's having "stirred up all this fuss for nothing," and Mrs. Lester, herself, was the only one who still sympathized and believed in him.

She comforted him as he left her at her sister's house, with the remark :

"I am more sure now than I was at first that there has been somebody locked up in that place. I am more convinced that it was our Delight. Though I don't at all understand the matter, I will myself pay you handsomely to go on spying, and if you succeed in tracing her, in a quiet, modest way, I believe your name will go in with honor to whoever has the appointment you desire."

"Thank you, ma'am. I'm sure you're kind, ma'am. In any case, pay or no pay, I'm bound to work it up and see what comes. Good-night, ma'am. I'm sorry I disturbed you, but I think I should do it again, under like case."

Mrs. Lester went up to the sitting-room adjoining her sister's bedroom, pondering so deeply over the incidents of the evening that she scarcely noticed a woman sitting quietly sewing

by the shaded lamp in the corner. When she did look up, questioningly and to give the attendant leave to retire, she saw—Dalton.

“What? You here, Dalton?”

“Yes, ma’am. Why not?” asked the maid, coolly, though there was a queer, startled look in her eyes and a bright flush on her commonly pale face.

“Oh! Nothing. I thought you had gone home for the night.”

“So I did, ma’am. But I’m thankful to say my poor father wasn’t needing me, so I came back to my other duty. I thought you’d be pleased, ma’am, being so unwilling I should have gone at all.”

“That is sufficient.” Mrs. Lester was the kindest of mistresses, yet she had never come near this employee without growing stern and reserved. With a dignity which effectually stemmed Dalton’s flow of talk she passed into the inner room where Mrs. Percival awaited her.

“Haven’t you had any sleep, dear Helena?”

“How could I sleep, Constance, when I’m so excited over this affair of Waters? Besides—do you know that Dalton has come back?”

“I’ve just seen and dismissed her for the night. How long has she been here?”

“Only a very short time. I didn’t expect her,

Did you? Did you go to her house? Tell me all about it."

Mrs. Lester recited what had happened and their failure to find Delight; then asked:

"Did Dalton appear just as usual when she did come in?"

"No. She did not. She was breathless and more from some excitement than from haste, I think. She was confused in her replies to my questions and at one moment seemed inclined to some burst of confidence, yet the next to think better—or worse—of it. I am glad you are back. The woman is certainly queer. I don't think I shall keep her, though I hate to send away so good a servant, as far as her work goes, and one that you have taken so much trouble to secure."

"Well, I think that would be better. There is positively no fault to find with her, concerning her duties. She is the most capable person in her position I ever knew. I don't wonder that whoever she has lived with has endorsed her cordially, and hated to part with her as all seem to have done. But now, my dear, it's high time an invalid went to sleep. I'll look around and see if everything is right; then we must both forget all excitement for a few hours, at least. By morning I hope there will be good news in the papers concerning that poor lost girl."

An hour later the Percival household was asleep. Dalton, who had been the last one up, coming again to her mistress' room and peeping in, almost over-zealously anxious to fulfil to the last degree her duties to that lady. Then she sought her own small bedroom, within call of the invalid, and sank, apparently, into a profound slumber.

But she did not lose consciousness for one moment, though she lay as motionless as a log; and when toward three o'clock, the hour when all the world is quiet, she heard a soft scraping sound upon the side stoop she merely covered her face with her hands and moaned once.

The house was a corner one and the stoop upon the side street, directly under Dalton's window. None save herself heard that dull, ominous scraping, as of a sash cautiously forced upward; and why at sound of it should she cover her face in an agony of self-torture?

"What I would be—and what I am!" thought the unhappy creature, despairingly. "Too late—too late."

For, more weak than wicked by choice, she felt that the meshes of her own evil doing were slowly but surely closing about her and that, at any moment, her affected respectability would be known to everybody as a screen only for another, less reputable life.

## CHAPTER XXV

### DELIGHT'S CAPTIVITY

DELIGHT could not remember how long she had been shut up in that room to which Dalton had conveyed her on her arrival at Peach alley. She had counted the days and nights only to forget them in the utter monotony of her existence.

She was not unkindly treated. She had every comfort needful save liberty; and the want of that dwarfed all the rest into nothingness. Dalton had come to her the next morning after her imprisonment began and besought the girl not only to give up the "worthless paper" that "my men want" but to promise she would not betray the means they had used to secure it.

"I'll go home with you to Harmony street and explain to your folks that I met you, and invited you to visit me. That it was near night, and you afraid to go through the streets alone, so you consented. That you had overstaid your time, not realizing any wrong in so doing; and that for any blame in the matter, or for any uneasiness any of them might suffer—though I

reckon they'd not be worrying much after one they were so unwilling to have come—she, Dalton, would be responsible. Say yes, dearie, and make an end of it.”

Delight knew but little of evil. All her friends had been honest and upright, with lives as open as the day. This suggestion of Dalton's astonished but did not, in the least, impress her.

“Why, Dalton, how silly that would be! and how wicked. I think it would be worse, even, to let another person tell a lie on my account than to tell one myself. If anything could be worse. And about that paper. My Aunt Delight would have none of it; but Captain Harriet, who loves me faithfully, bade me keep it safe until a right time seemed to come when I should show it to somebody I could trust. She said it might be worthless, as thee claims, but I begin to think it must be very valuable, from the fuss that is made over it. I should think thee would be ashamed to treat anybody as thee is treating me. Please, Dalton, let me go?”

The woman laughed.

“Ashamed! Maybe I am. Maybe it is a long time since I have known that feeling. It's only innocent folks who are ever ashamed. But, indeed, I am not so bad as you think. I may as well tell you that the men you saw are my husband, Pete, and his father. The father is exactly

what he claims to be, an old shipmate of Enoch Legg's. The paper is something those two old codgers have had more than one fight over and isn't worth the parchment it's written on. I really think so. But that doesn't alter the case. You don't know, you can't possibly guess, what it is to be in the power of two men who stick at nothing, as I am. What would you say if I told you that I have been beaten by them, many times, because I refused to help them in their schemes? I ought not to tell you this, but I do it for my own sake as well as yours. I am sometimes afraid of my life."

"Why, Dalton! Yet thee has such a pretty home here. Even if it is small it is far more fully furnished than my Cousin Hannah's is, now since the failure."

"You might not admire it so much if you knew how — But there's no need you should know. The question is: *Will* you give up the paper to me or my father-in-law if I will take you home?"

All the firmness, perhaps stubbornness, of the Roloson blood was in Delight's answer.

"No. I will not. What I give, I give of my free will. Not because I am afraid. This much only I will say. If thee will let me free I will go straight back to Harmony street and look that miserable paper over. If the family does not



think it worth anything I might be tempted to give it to thee—though I don't promise, understand—but I might possibly, if by so giving—the men on their parts would promise not to abuse thee any more. I am very sorry for thee, Dalton, but I must do right first."

"How could it be wrong," asked the other with a sneer, "to give away that trifle?"

"Because it may not concern me alone. I don't know what it is; but if it is of use to my cousins it must be kept for them. That is, if it is about any money, I must look out for them first."

"What makes you think it is about money, if you have never seen it?"

Delight regarded the woman keenly, then laughed lightly:

"Now, I know it must be. Something in thy face tells me so. But though I won't promise to give that up I will promise not to tell my cousins how thee kept me here against my will. I will tell them I have been here, and I must tell Mrs. Vanderhagen, my dear friend, because I was to have gone to work for her this very morning."

"You? Go to work—for anybody!" exclaimed Dalton, amazed.

"Yes, indeed. Why not?"

For a moment the better nature of the woman almost prevailed. She was tempted to face what-

ever consequences might follow and release this innocent and unselfish girl then and there. If she had done so she would have been much better off in the future, and thus even her dim ideas of right and wrong been strengthened. But she moved her head slightly and the pain which the action caused was quite sufficient to alter her inclination. There was a bruise upon her neck which had been given by rough fingers; fingers which would inflict still greater personal sufferings if she betrayed her present trust.

“Well, then, if you are determined to be stubborn it isn’t my fault. I’ll see that you have all you need to eat and drink until you make up your mind to give in to my father-in-law’s whim. As soon as you do, and agree to keep silence concerning us, you will be free. I am advertising for a new place, and as soon as I secure one that suits—*that suits*—I shall go away. If you haven’t got over your wilfulness by then you will be alone with my men. How *they’ll* treat you I don’t promise.”

Delight’s heart sank. Again she was tempted to make concession, if by so doing she could protect Dalton and regain her own freedom; and again there came to her mind the reflection that if this much desired bit of parchment were valuable to one it should be to another and might mean a great deal to the impoverished Hudsons,

toward whose assistance her ambitions were all now turned.

So she kept silence, and Dalton, seeing no sign of yielding in the calm girlish face, sighed deeply and went away. But she saw to it that the steel shutters were securely locked and at the foot of the stairs turned another key, then shot a bolt noisily.

“If that doesn't fetch her, nothing will!”

By wretched personal experience the poor woman knew what it meant to be deprived of one's liberty, and it was by such means as these that, early in her married life, she had been brought to consent to aid her husband's nefarious schemes.

Delight heard the bolt shoved and was able then to smile.

“It's so silly for them to try that way. The more they torment me the less likely I will be to say yes. And I mustn't say it. I mustn't, surely, until I know what it is they're so eager for. I wonder what is in old Enoch's paper! And why couldn't this sailor below have told me something about my father, if he knew him, instead of acting this way! Well, it's all a muddle; but I believe that long before noon they will have let me out. Hark! There are some little children down below in the alley. Snowballing, I guess. Well, one good thing; even if

I can't get the blinds open I can look down between the slats. A good thing more, that those slats slant downward instead of upward. Hmm. I see a lot of little children, but how forlorn and ragged they are! How dirty, too, beside the white snow. My! but wouldn't I just love to give them all a sea bath! If I had them down at Seabury, and it wasn't winter! If—if—if! Anyway, it's fun to watch them and I had a good breakfast. It's not cold in here, with that nice grate; and if I am to be an 'imprisoned princess,' like 'Bachelor Jim's' tales, I'm well cared for. I'll make the best of it—and won't it be a real, truly, romantic story for little Bertrand to hear!"

With her happy innocence and ignorance of evil Delight bore her confinement cheerfully. Or it was cheerfully at first. After awhile, when Dalton had come to say that she was going away to service and that only the "men" would look after her, her heart failed her. But her determination not to yield up the mysterious paper never wavered. Nobody should ever get that until she knew whether it was of use to her friends.

She watched the children as long as they stayed in sight, and they were often beneath her window; and when they strolled elsewhere she looked about for something else to do.

“If I only had a book!”

But there were no books anywhere about; so Delight was forced to find all her amusement from the neglected little alley children. She soon learned to distinguish them by name, hearing their mates calling; and for one child in especial she formed a great liking. This was lame Amy, whose home was next to Dalton's, and who had, apparently, nobody belonging to her save an old and feeble woman.

But these two seemed of a better sort than their neighbors and Delight pondered more and more about them. Oddly enough, in the appearance of the aged woman who now and again hobbled from her door, on some needful errand, there was a slight resemblance to the stalwart and well beloved “Captain Harriet.”

Delight could not decide in what this likeness lay, but the fact remained that she never saw one woman, through the slats of her blind, but she instantly recalled the other.

The girl's meals were regularly brought to her, and were civilly served at first, though always with the question:

“Are you ready yet to give up the paper?”

Her answer never varied. It was always “No”; but as the time wore on and the civility of “Pete,” who brought her food, changed to incivility, even ugliness, her “No” was given

with less and less decision. This fact her jailer was not slow to perceive and he reflected, grimly :

“It’s only a question of time. She’ll give in soon. If she doesn’t ——”

But what his ominous silence indicated only he knew.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### CAPTAIN HARRIET AGAIN

As the evening fell, on the night when De-light's disappearance was so widely advertised, a tall figure entered Peach alley and made its uncertain way over the rough stones.

In the dim light, for the lamps are few in Chester alleys, one could hardly tell whether this were man or woman; but when at last it paused before the door of a house, which opened to the sturdy knock, one could see that it was a woman, wearing in some sort a man's attire. A rough hat, like a sailor's, covered the tall grey head and around the broad shoulders was fastened an oil-skin cape. Beneath this showed the fringe of a red shawl; but the old woman who opened the door saw little of the apparel because of the face of its wearer.

At the first ray of light upon this both the visitor and the hostess exclaimed in one glad breath:

“My sister!”

“Harriet—you've come!”

“Aye, Rachel. At last!”

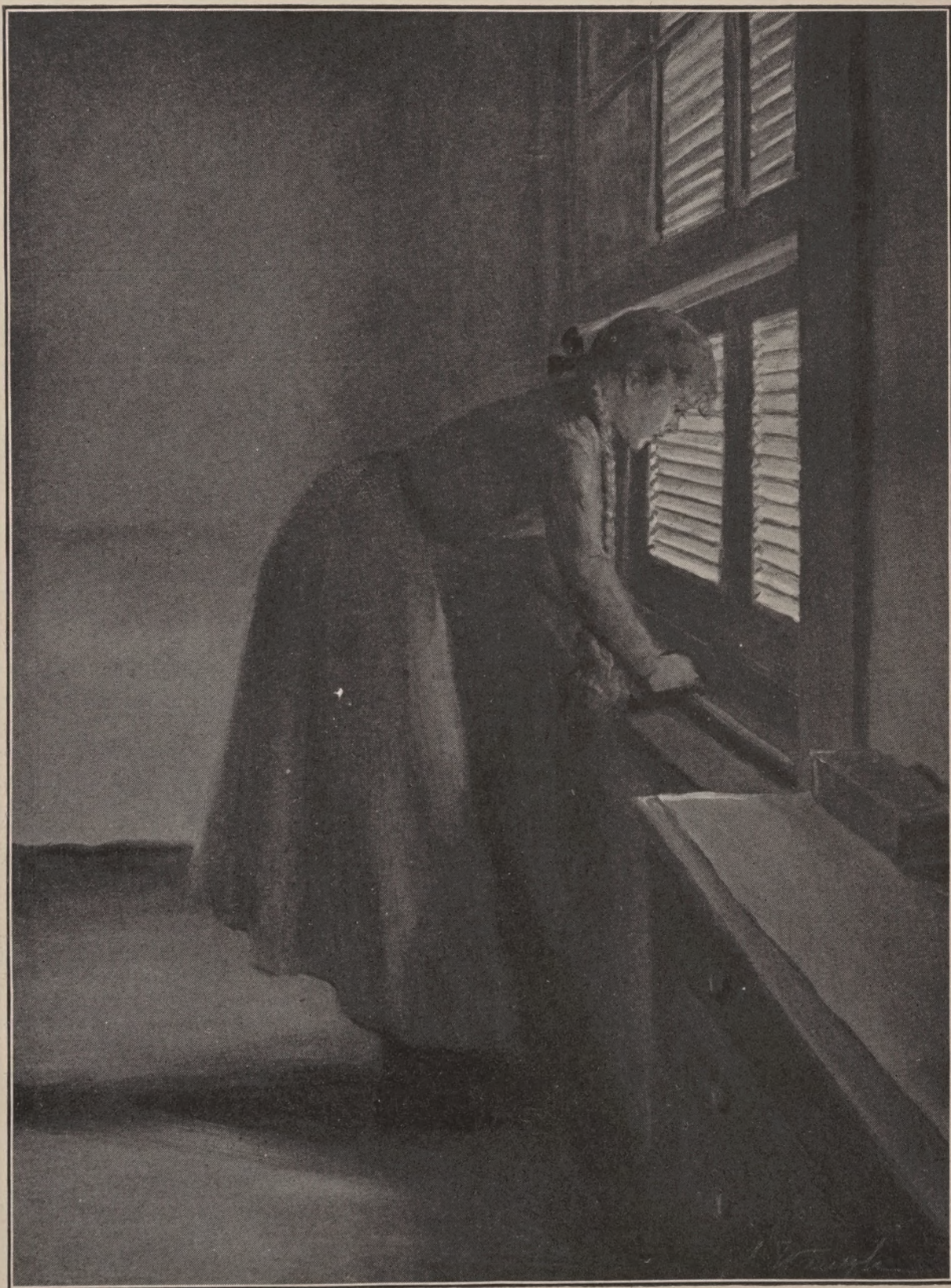
Then the door closed and the alley was again a dark, uncanny place.

But Delight, through her shutter's slats, had been idly watching and fearing. She had now become utterly terrified at her position. "Pete's" manner had grown more and more menacing and her long solitude had told upon even her healthy nerves. She felt as if she must give up this uneven contest of wills and face the chances of its working ill to others. For herself it was surely ill enough and her courage was at low ebb.

But it was unusually still in the house below. She had seen the old sailor father depart, some hours since, and from the silence she hoped that his son had also gone; though, in truth, neither ever visited her unless compelled, in order to bring her food. Indeed, of late, that had been merely shoved in to her, upon a tray, and after the invariable question: "Will you give up?" no further speech was vouchsafed. Once each day Dalton appeared; generally at evening, and though Delight felt that the woman was powerless to help her, yet she still welcomed these visits as an agreeable break to those hard days of solitude.

She was watching now, partly to see Dalton come home, partly to learn if "Pete" had gone or was going out, when that strange figure came down the alley.





"HARRIETT! CAPTAIN—CAPTAIN HARRIETT!"



Before the door had opened to receive it she had recognized it and been turned breathless by the fact. But so soon as the voices reached her through her open window she rallied and screamed.

Screamed as only a young, healthy, and thoroughly frightened girl can scream.

More than one head came out of windows thereabout, and all soon knew that the noise proceeded from the Daltons' number. But nobody could understand the meaning of the cry:

"Captain Harriet! Oh, Captain, Captain Harriet!"

"What's that?" demanded the stranger, of old Rachel.

"Nought, lass, but some wretched soul in torment."

"Hist. Your wits are addled, living alone here so long. How came it that you never wrote to let me know where your bark had stranded these twenty years? Hark! There it is again! And, if the wind's right, it's a ship of my own name is saluted."

"Oh!" cried old Rachel, "but it's good to hear the half-sailor speech again. It's the breath of the sea in my nostrils. And you're breezy, too, like the ocean, even yet. You bear your years well, Harriet, lass."

"Far better than you, sister, and that's true.

Why not? Since I live in God's open and not in one of men's dirty side-lanes like this. Faugh! If this is the city, how'll my bonny Delight fare here, indeed."

"Delight? That's a Roloson name, I trow."

"Right. And this Delight, like all the others gone before, the very bonniest sort of woman-flesh the Lord ever made. Somewhere in this Chester city she is this minute and it's part to find her that I answered your letter in person. It was uncommon rough to leave old Enoch, for he's as contrary as ever, multiplied by ten. But 'Bachelor Jim'—you mind him, Rachel? He's set to sail his craft till I go home. Which must be to-morrow, and you and the little one with me. How happens it, I say, that you never wrote before?"

"Well, I never was in such need. But they're all gone. All. Only Amy, here, who was my own Amy's child. I've had friends, of course, and as long as I could work well, I was not so badly off. Now, it's so little I can do; and this winter the rheumatism worse than ever. The child, too, I can't die and leave her to grow up in Peach alley."

The woman shivered, and in the silence there came again and again that lusty scream:

"Harriet! Captain—Captain Harriet!"

She who was called was out of the place in a jiffy.

“Who calls? Here am I! Harriet Legg, of Seabury township. Who wants her?”

“I! I! Thy own ‘little Delight’!”

“Aye! Aye! It’s Delight’s voice! Where from? Up there? Come down to me!—quick! Till I get my old arms about your bonny neck! To think of stumbling on her here!” she murmured, striding to the door of No. 927 and trying to open it.

But it resisted all her efforts, and by this time many dwellers of the alley had come outside their own houses and stood watching the outcome of the matter with an idle curiosity. But it wasn’t for them to interfere. There was very little meddling with the affairs of others by the alleyites. It was a locality where it was safest to know nothing and to literally mind one’s own business.

So, though Captain Harriet turned toward some of these staring neighbors for help to open this closed door not one of them volunteered it.

“Come down and let me in, child!”

“I can’t. I’m locked in. Oh! captain—my captain!” This time the cry ended in a hysterical burst of tears. Help had come and so unexpectedly, and of such a heaven-sent sort it seemed to the prisoner, that her self-control gave way entirely.

Then she heard her old friend demanding:

“By all the red herring! Why can't you? and I so wild to reach you.”

So she rallied and replied:

“Because I'm locked in, I tell thee!”

“Locked—in! I didn't believe it. Who dared? Is it a Hudson?”

It was little lame Amy who solved the riddle.

“She's a girl. She won't do something 'Pete' and old Uncle Dan want. So they won't let her out till she will. Wait. There *she* comes.”

The child pointed down the alley where a woman was rapidly approaching. At sight of her all the other residents slunk within their own doors and closed them carefully. Dalton in herself was not a person to fear; but her husband and father were ill to offend. Besides, few of them knew how soon a mutual good turn might be needed for themselves, so they forbore either to make or mar, and quietly, if sneakingly, retreated.

Dalton came up just as Captain Harriet was laying her strong hand against the panel with evident intent to smash it in.

“Hold on there, woman. What's doing?”

“Who are you?”

“The mistress of this house.”

“Open it, then.”

“At whose orders?”

“Mine.”

“Why should I?”

“Because you have shut up my Delight Roloson in it. So she tells me from the window.”

“Your Delight Roloson? Who may she be, pray? and who are you?”

“I am Harriet Legg, wife of Captain Enoch Legg, if you please. I reckon you know who Delight Roloson is even if you don't know me.”

Now the name of Enoch Legg had never been famous in history but it was sufficient just then to turn Anne Dalton cold. How many unforeseen complications were arising and how was she, were they who belonged to her, to meet them?

For a few seconds she stood still, reflecting. She had been in tight places before; she had had to “turn many sharp corners” at a reckless pace. She now decided her course almost instantly and laying a hand that trembled, indeed, but was not unkind in its touch upon Captain Harriet's wrist, she said very quietly:

“Wait, good woman. There is no occasion for this violence. If Delight Roloson is in this house now and wishes to come out of it to you, she shall do so within five minutes and—*of her own free will.*”

With this she produced a key, unfastened the outer door and disappeared within the premises; leaving Captain Harriet tapping her heavy foot impatiently without.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### AN EVENTFUL MORNING

TIME was when Mrs. Vanderhagen had found her days almost monotonously peaceful and quiet. But that time was past. After a night of sleepless anxiety concerning Delight's fate she came down to breakfast only to be disturbed by a fresh calamity.

Mr. Vanderhagen passed her his own paper, folded so that she might see at once the article he had himself promptly discovered. Indeed, could not fail to discover since it was printed with the same sort of catching headlines as had been the notices of Delight's disappearance.

"There, my dear, is something that will interest you and give you somebody to think about, besides that poor girl."

"What's this? Robbery? The handsome residence of our distinguished citizen and famous attorney, Pulaski Percival, looted by burglars. During the absence of the noted jurist thieves break into and rifle the judge's home, carrying off his most elegant plate and bric-a-brac. Heirlooms that cannot be replaced among the missing



plunder. The robbery accomplished, probably, in the early morning and without arousing any of the family. Detectives now at work. Results promised soon."

Mrs. Vanderhagen read the sensational news in silence, exclaiming after she had finished:

"Poor Helena! Poor Constance! What an awful experience."

"Bad enough, of course. But if, as the paper says, they passed through the affair unconsciously they have been spared something."

"Well. I used to think that Chester was a quiet and safe city to dwell in."

"Quite as safe as ever, my dear. There have been such disappearances and robberies constantly occurring in our midst and we have never heeded them. It's only when things come home to ourselves that we ever notice them much. It's a rather selfish world, I fear. But, one thing I thought of last night yet did not mention. How did the fact, which we had hardly acknowledged to ourselves, leak out—about our desire to adopt the girl, Delight?"

"Oh! easily enough. Didn't I tell you? I spoke of it at the Hudsons' house and that young fellow, George, must have thought it an item to influence the paper to print the advertisement, even though so late. I felt that it would do them good to know the child they had lost, and

had not been too fond of, had found new and admiring friends. Nothing succeeds like success, you know—and Delight must be a success, Blasius—and I fancied it did tell. But about this robbery. I must go around and see the ‘girls,’ directly after breakfast. Mary,” turning to the waitress, “ring and order the carriage to be ready at nine o’clock.”

“There’s nothing new in this edition about Delight. Hark! What’s that? Somebody to see me? So early?”

“You’re a woman of affairs, nowadays, Henrietta,” laughed the husband, as another servant came to say that there was a young person below who wished to speak with the mistress on business most important.

“What sort of business did she say?”

“She didn’t say, ma’am. A young girl, and was most impatient to be let in.”

“A beggar?”

“Oh! no, ma’am. Not a beggar, but a—a young lady, I should say. Quite young.”

“Well, let her come in. But I can’t be hindered long. I’m in a hurry to get off and if her business is something she can tell you, I’d rather she did.”

A moment later a light footstep came tripping along the tiled hallway and a clear voice asked:

“Is this the room? This one?”

“Delight! It’s Delight!” cried both the Vanderhagens in one breath; and as the portière lifted, showing a girlish figure in the aperture, Mrs. Vanderhagen rushed forward with a joyful cry:

“Oh! you precious child! So you’ve found yourself!”

Delight laughed gaily, yet tears sprang to her eyes at this loving greeting from her new friends and she touched the lady’s cheek with her lips, impulsively, again and again.

“No, no, indeed! I didn’t find myself. It was darling Captain Harriet who found me. See. Here she is, and George, to keep us in sight for fear we’d lose the way and oh! I am so glad to be here again!”

“Darling Captain Harriet” was so unique in appearance that the fashionable lady half caught her breath before she could go forward and give a hand of welcome to the gaunt stranger. Yet one look into the gravedigger’s honest eyes was sufficient to prove that Delight had not over-rated the woman’s good qualities, as she had described them during their first interview.

“So this is ‘Captain Harriet,’ of ‘Seabury township.’ We are very glad to see you; and you, too, Mr. Hudson. I never before knew an advertisement to bring about such speedy and happy results. You are to be congratulated,

young sir, and I advise you to follow the newspaper business, you've made such a hit already!" said Mr. Vanderhagen, his own genial face beaming with pleasure at this turn of affairs.

"But come. Come to breakfast, everybody. We can talk over our coffee, and this child here must explain how and why she has given us all so much anxiety."

An instant change came over Delight's bonny face and she unclasped her arms from Mrs. Vanderhagen's, with a grave motion.

"Indeed, thee mustn't ask me to do that. I can't. I can't. I would, if I could. But I've promised. I could not help giving everybody all this trouble yet I can't tell where I have been; or, rather, why I have been where I have. The place was Peach alley. Captain Harriet found me there. At the house of Anne Dalton who used to live with George's family. She was good to me. I had plenty to eat; only—I could not go home, very well."

"No, ma'am, I should say she couldn't! Being kept under lock and key, as she was. But that's all I can get out of her, or anybody can. Here she sails, in clear sight of all hands, yet what it all means that's happened she'll tell no more than a fish. Yet it was her screaming from the window, and me going to see my sister, next door, that settled the business. I'll admit

the woman was pleasant enough, saving a bit of sharpness, at my trying to break in her door. But she said, like this: 'In five minutes Delight Roloson shall come down to you of her own free will,' and she did. But as mum as an oyster what it all means. Though I've my suspicions, all the same. However it's nor yes nor no to them will the child say."

"Delight, come to breakfast. A cup of mother's coffee—she makes it right here on the table herself—will loosen the most stubborn tongue," urged the host.

She laughed and declined:

"Why, we had breakfast long ago, in Harmony street. It's—it must be ever so late."

"Yes, so it is; for workaday folks. Though it's not so bad after all. But come. Take a second bit. It will convince us that you're really here in the body if we see you eat."

So, though none required it and Captain Harriet would greatly have preferred not, the visitors grouped themselves around the table, and the talk flowed merrily on. In her happiness at the restoration of the girl to whom her childless heart had gone out so warmly Mrs. Vanderhagen almost forgot the trouble of her other friends, who had suffered robbery.

It was not till the carriage was announced that she remembered and rose from the table.

“My dear! I don’t know what to do with you. Some old schoolmates of mine, one of them an invalid, had their home broken into last night. It’s in this morning’s paper. I must go to see them but—I’m almost as much afraid to take you with me as to leave you here. You’re such an elusive little girl ——”

“Please leave me here, then. I will begin that mending right away, if thee pleases. Captain Harriet would like to stay with me, too, for she says she doesn’t want to lose me from her sight, having come away here half on purpose to see me.”

“Half on purpose? Why the rest, if I may ask.”

“To look after her old sister and maybe take her back to dear Seabury, where she was born—oh! how glad she will be to get there! after living in that dirty alley.”

“Child, I hate to go. But you’ll promise to stay till I come back.”

“Yes, indeed. Haven’t I the lace to mend? If thee will tell me where to find it.”

“Mary will show you. It is in a basket in my sitting-room. I had it all ready for you that morning after Christmas, even to the thimble and needles.”

“But I’ve brought my own thimble, see? It’s one that auntie darling gave me. I can sew bet-

ter with this on, I fancy. And one thing more. We have brought something else. I would like to ask Mr. Vanderhagen about it. A paper, or a parchment. I don't understand what it means but George says it is wonderful, and even Captain Harriet thinks some wise body ought to see it and explain. So I fetched it to thee, Mr. Vanderhagen, if thee has time."

"I shall always have time for you, dear girl," answered the gentleman, cordially, and secretly pleased by her confidence in him.

"Well—I *must* just wait to know about that!" cried the lady; then added: "Only—the horses have been clipped. They ought not to stand in the cold. So I suppose; and I'll have to go. If it's good news it will keep; and if it's bad, I'm in no hurry."

Kissing Delight, and allowing the maid to put on her wraps, Mrs. Vanderhagen departed. Mr. Vanderhagen accompanied her to the carriage and saw her comfortably started on her errand of sympathy, then returned to his guests. Not because he was growing old and they had been long married did he ever in the least relax in the small courtesies of life toward his faithful wife; and even Captain Harriet was moved to admiration by this fact.

"He's as like a Roloson as can be, Delight. That was always their way with women. Rough

and ready on the sea, but honoring every woman like a queen. That's a gentleman, little Delight. Learn the signs of one in time."

"I will," laughed the happy girl, as their host returned.

He invited them into the library and there spread out upon the table the yellowed parchment which at Delight's request, he drew from the old Roloson wallet. He began its silent perusal with little expectation of finding any great matter contained therein; but he had not proceeded far before his expression so altered that George nodded his head significantly toward his cousin, as if to say: "I told you so!"

The gentleman read the whole document once, and then a second time, with utmost care. After which he looked up at Delight and remarked:

"If this is genuine—if it is genuine, I say—this is a very astonishing, and probably, a most valuable document."



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE AMATEUR DETECTIVE

AFTER leaving Mrs. Lester at her sister's house, Mr. Waters went home, put up his horse, and, still possessed by that detective ambition, returned on foot to Peach alley.

He had learned from the servant who admitted Mrs. Lester that Dalton had come back to her post, and this greatly surprised him. He had not believed that she would ever again be seen there.

"But, all the same, that don't lessen the fact that things are crooked. I can't sleep, I'm that disappointed," the cabman had remarked to his wife upon his second departure for the scene of his "mystery."

"And I will say you're a fool for your pains, man alive. How any decent, respectable body can't be contented to do a day's honest work and leave the rest to others, beats me," she had expostulated, but in vain.

"It's borne in on me, woman, that this thing will be the making of us. Think! What would be your feelings to see your husband's name in

the daily newspapers as a great, smart officer, that has beat all the others in the city of Chester?"

"My feelings would be that this same city of Chester must be chock full of fools when they set a plain, no-scholar-cabby to be the top of the heap. So there you have my sentiments in a nutshell, and be off, if you're going, so a body that has sense may get a wink of sleep."

With this cold sympathy the aspiring jehu was forced to be content; but he went away more than ever resolved that not only his wife but all his townsmen should yet acknowledge his wonderful powers of penetration.

"Sure it's a fine thing the folks in Peach alley don't shovel their paths. This snow is as good as a feather bed to deaden the sound of a man's foot; besides I was that wise I put on my arctics to more soften any noise there might be."

With this cogitation Mr. Waters reached the neighborhood of his "quarry."

The house stood silent and dim, exactly as he had seen it on his previous visit with Mrs. Lester. Indeed, an almost unnatural stillness hung over the whole neighborhood. Every house was dark, save that in the kitchen of No. 925 a dim light glowed through the glass above the door; yet even here the shutters were fastened and Mr. Waters hesitated a while before he decided

to knock and arouse the inmates. For an excuse he remembered that he had lost a lap robe from the cab, when he had driven here before, and was now rather glad of the accident.

So he put a bold face on the matter and rapped smartly upon the dingy door.

For a while there was no answer; then, as he kept up his demands for admittance, a sharp voice called from behind the latch:

“Who’s there?”

“A man looking for a lost robe.”

“Ha! Lost things are ill to find in Peach alley. I’ve seen no robe, anyway.”

“Is anybody living next door?”

There was a moment’s hesitation; then the reply: “I’m not bothering with who lives anywhere.”

“You needn’t be afraid. It’s all right, but I’ll just mention there’s a reward of five dollars going to the one that finds it.”

“Five—dollars! For a bit of blanket? Well, I’ve seen none, though if that’s true I wish I had.”

By this time the woman, Rachel, had opened the door a crack and peered out at her visitor. Five-dollar bills were mines of wealth to such as lived in Peach alley and the mention of one acted like magic. Besides, at that moment, a shrill little treble piped up:

“Say, granny, I seen it!”

“You never!”

“But, granny, I did. I know where it is now.”

Rachel was honest. She naturally believed others to be, save that long residence among doubtful neighbors had rendered her suspicious. At her grandchild's assertion she opened the door widely.

“Come in, man, and hear what the child can tell. I've seen no blanket and if you've come to rob me you'll like have your trouble for your pains. There's naught left in my poor home to be worth carrying away.”

Mr. Waters entered and closed the door. Whereupon small Amy hobbled forward, dragging her useless limb behind her. “Show us the five dollars,” said she, with the shrewdness which her poverty, and intercourse with alleyites, had taught her.

Old Rachel laughed. “Aye, but she's a canny child!”

Mr. Waters smiled in his blandest manner, and with a great flourish drew forth a fresh green bill and held it up to view.

“I'm showing you the money; now you show me the robe. When we can match each other we'll change hands.”

The child beamed with delight. “That'll buy us coals and potatoes, granny!”

"Where's the blanket, Amy?" demanded the old woman, trembling with eagerness.

"In the shed behind."

"How came it there?"

"We found it. We children. We kept it to play under. It gets cold sometimes. We was going to make a house out of it. We hid it, though, 'cause it was ours and we found it."

"Who besides you, child?"

"Only Jimmy Smith. He's lame, too, you know. We hid it. 'Cause if we hadn't somebody'd a hooked it. He's a coming in the morning and we didn't tell the rest. They'd all gone in. It was dark and we was the last ones out, and—we didn't want to."

The old woman interrupted the child's glib talk.

"Show the man the place, Amy."

"He needn't. I'll fetch it."

The little creature limped through a rear doorway into a bit of a court, common to several tenements, and presently returned, dragging the heavy plush robe behind her. Her face glowed and her eyes shone, though her breath was short from her exertion.

"My! But it's a beauty! You found that, child, and never told granny?"

"Well, I was going. But you was all fussed up 'bout that Harriet woman coming, and the

girl, too, out of Mis' Dalton's, and you didn't pay no attention when I pulled you and said the man dropped it. For I did say that. Only, you kept sitting still and acting queer talking that 'bout 'She's come at last,' and 'My sister, Harriet!' You didn't mind me much, after they went off together; and we wanted it ourselves, 'cause we'd found it. I didn't mean no naughty, granny, 'deed I didn't. Only, it's so soft and warm;" and down she dropped upon it with a delicious sense of comfort and content.

As he looked upon her, pleased at her enjoyment, a sudden inspiration flooded the recesses of Mr. Waters' brain. The idea was so brilliant that it startled even himself; and it was also hazardous. Yet it was simply—to make a confidante, to a certain degree, of this old woman (a dweller on the very spot), of his beliefs concerning the house next door.

His face assumed a preternatural gravity and, as if trying to read the inmost secrets of her simple soul, he fixed a stern glance upon the aged householder and stared at her for a full minute without speaking a word.

At first Rachel was frightened; then she rallied. She was of the same stock from which Captain Harriet came and she was conscious of no evil doing which entitled her to such a fearful scrutiny. She lost her temper, which proved

to be a good thing for all concerned and brought Mr. Waters' imagination down to the level of common sense.

"Hoot, man! What's taken you? That you stare at a body as if you never set eyes on an old woman before. Hmm. There's your blanket, and the sooner you take it and be off, the better. I'm not so unfriended as I look, nowadays," she concluded, with a proud recollection of her sister's visit, and presence in the town.

"It's because I see at a glance, at a glance, ma'am, that you're the honestest soul ever walked the earth, that I'm going to tell you the truth. It's a fact that the robe is mine—here's the number of my cab, a licensed man of business, ma'am—and I lost it in this alley, as I said. But I didn't come seeking that so much as something else. And that's information, ma'am. Which you can give me, better most like than any other person, and for which I'm willing to pay liberal. Liberal, ma'am. Not such a trumpery bit of money as this;" and he coolly flipped the bank note to the child, as if it were of but trifling value.

"Hold, you silly! Any man, any man, rich or poor, that goes tossing good bills about such a way can't be right in his head. Money's money, and the stuff to take care of. By your looks you're not a millionaire, yourself. So get down

off your high horse and quit your airs and talk business. Say your say, first, all through; then I'll say mine. Quite like, betwixt us, we'll hit the same subject, and square."

Thus adjured, Mr. Waters "said his say"; with the result that a complete understanding was arrived at, and that when old Rachel extinguished her light, a few minutes later, Mr. Waters was left in sole possession of the small kitchen and of a conveniently broken partition wall of whose existence the tenants of the next house had had no knowledge.



## CHAPTER XXIX

### MR. WATERS' OPINION

By midnight Mr. Waters had become so assured of his own success, and his pride in himself so intense, that he could scarcely contain himself. Only by reminding himself that absolute silence was necessary to his scheme did he refrain from executing a sort of triumphal dance, there in old Rachel's kitchen, and on her rickety boards.

For exactly what he had hoped for happened.

When all the alley was at its quietest, there stole along in the shadow of the high board fence which bordered it, first one and a few moments later, a second, cautiously creeping man.

They entered, still with utmost caution, the empty tenement, next door; and after a little descended to its kitchen which corresponded in size and position to that occupied by the embryo detective.

The two kitchens were separated by a thin wall, as has been said, and under other circumstances the men—old Daniel and Pete—might have been less careless of being overheard. As it was, they had lived long and safely beside old

Rachel and knew her to be the least meddling of neighbors, and probably the least suspicious. Besides, they did not dream that words spoken on their side the wall, which there appeared sound, could be heard upon the other.

Almost the first thing they did, after striking a light, was to quarrel. The window of their kitchen was heavily boarded up, and the glass above its outer door was also boarded; so that they knew no ray of light could escape from it into the outer world; whereas over old Rachel's the glass was open to the day.

They were angry over the course their affairs had taken, and each blamed the other for some mismanagement in regard to Delight.

"If you'd have tried coaxing, 'stead of bullying, she'd a given the paper without trouble," said old Daniel. "But you had to go spoil all with your goings on. Them Rolosons, I know 'em, are stubborn as mules. You can lead but can't drive 'em. And now, nobody knows ——"

"Hold your tongue," ordered the disrespectful son. "I'm not the only one blundered. If Sally'd ——"

"Hmm. I reckon *she's* got her hands full."

"Well, so *I* mean to have before morning. Hark. We've got this other matter on. It must be done to-night and Sally's gone back to get ready. Get out the padded bags and let's fix up."

Whereupon, Mr. Waters, with his eye glued to the hole in the wall, watched operations which made his blood boil at the same time that they rendered him almost frantic with suppressed excitement.

These preparations need not be explained at length ; but they were such as professional house-breakers make for one of their nefarious attempts.

The men ceased to quarrel, as they became absorbed in this later interest, and very shortly they left the house.

Almost at the same moment Mr. Waters emerged from that of old Rachel, to do his first "shadowing" of suspicious characters. Again and again he blessed his own forethought in wearing the arctics, whose rubber soles softened his footsteps ; though, indeed, the two men whose winding road he tracked had grown alarmed at their own tardiness and hurried to their rendezvous with little thought of what lay behind them.

There followed a long and wearisome tramp for Mr. Waters, who was much more accustomed to riding than to walking, and who found this especial exercise most difficult. He had often to pause to hide, while the men crossed some wide, well lighted space, lest they should turn about and discover that they were being pursued.

Then there were sudden and frequent turnings of corners which perplexed the good cabman not a little.

But always, after each delay, he would be able again to trace them ; and so by devious twistings and cross directions, they came at last to a pretty park in a locality familiar to him. Into this park they entered and disappeared among some mighty spruces whose branches swept the ground.

Then did Mr. Waters rub his hands with glee, and yet with anxiety :

“I thought so ! I thought so !”

But what he thought he did not say ; and he, likewise, hid himself and waited in the gathering intensity of cold with what patience he might for their reappearance.

“It’s reappear they will, indeed. And it’s to the house of our own young ladies”—(Mrs. Lester and Mrs. Percival)—“that those villains are set. Dalton’s the one ! Dalton’s the one ! For there’s ever a woman at the bottom of things and ——”

## CHAPTER XXX

### MASTER IN HIS OWN HOUSE

SOME hours later, in the warm security of his own sunlighted bedroom, Mr. Waters completed his sentence. The last idea in his mind, before he was stunned into unconsciousness, was the first to reënter it when that consciousness was regained.

“—Always a woman, and the woman in this case is—Dalton.”

“Oh! she is, is she? And who, pray, may this bottommost ‘Dalton’ be?” demanded a delighted feminine voice, though with an affectation of sternness.

The amateur detective opened his eyes and saw his wife. It slowly dawned upon him that he had overslept and been dreaming and that she had gone crazy. For she was holding a bowl of some hot, steaming liquid in a hand that trembled so it spilled the contents in his face. Moreover she was actually—kissing him!

“For the land’s sake! What’s all—this?” he gasped.

“So you would go play detective, would you? Go and gad about the streets at an hour when

honest men are in their beds. Well it was for you that you've been known to have lived decent, and your own brother found you. Him and another officer happened to walk that beat, or only conscience knows whether you'd have frozen to death there on the ground. How came you in the park? What happened you, anyway? Who knocked you on the head, if that was it?"

That Mrs. Waters should talk "a blue streak" was quite natural; and for once her stream of words had the most soothing effect upon her husband. They tided over a space of time, during which he obediently drank the broth she held to his lips, and let his scattered wits recover themselves.

Then he went to sleep again, and when he awoke this time it was in full possession of his faculties, and with the consciousness that he was a rather badly injured person. For he could not move his head without much suffering, and his whole body seemed as stiff "as if it had been pounded."

"Which it may have been for aught we know. But there! the doctor said I wasn't to talk too much nor let you. Only I know you'll be glad to hear that the Percivals have been robbed—awful. And Miss Constance has telegraphed the judge and he's telegraphed back and they haven't let Miss Helena know, on account of her nerves,

and he's coming by the next train. May be here now, for aught I know, and Miss Constance, that's Mis' Lester, won't talk at all to anybody till the judge comes. I mean won't tell a word she thinks and they haven't the least idea and no trace where to look for the thieves. All that's in the papers and where I read it myself. And what, Mr. Waters, was you a doing in that park at that time of night? It's a long call from Peach alley, where you started for, to the spot where your brother picked you up. And for men that don't tell their own wives their business they generally comes to trouble soon or late. Say, where was you?"

"Wife—shut up!"

"W-h-a-t!" she gasped.

"Your tongue runs like a mill race and I want to think. If you say another word I'll—I'll—thrash you!"

This was so amazing that it had the desired effect. Mr. Waters was the meekest of men, in the presence of his wife and on ordinary occasions, but this he felt to be something quite out of ordinary and requiring the utmost consideration on his part. Else, maybe, he had scarcely dared to so command his better half. She was going away, really more afraid concerning his sanity than from any offence taken, when he suddenly recalled her.

“Put on your bonnet.”

“What—for?”

“Because I tell you!” he roared.

She obeyed.

“Now go straight to the Percivals’ house. Tell the judge to come to me.”

“Sakes alive! Now I’m sure you’re clean daft. The idea! It’s one thing to order *me* to put my bonnet on, which is no great matter, but it’s quite another to order Judge Percival to come to you. Him maybe not in Chester city yet, at all. Hmm. You poor, poor suffering creature!”

“You do as I say! You put your shawl on, too. Then you go for the judge. Immediate. If he isn’t there you tell Mrs. Lester. Tell her it’s most important to the matter she and I had in hand. Tell her them words and ask no questions. In good time I’ll tell you, and for once you’ll find it maybe pays to sometimes hold your tongue.”

“And leave you? Sick and smashed up as you be?”

“Leave me—yes. I’ll be thankful to be left so’s I can get my thoughts into some sort of shape before the judge comes. He’s a man that don’t talk but just acts. Hurry up, I tell you.”

“All right. I guess a man as cross as you be isn’t in no great danger of suffering nor dying, if



he *is* left! And I won't ask you another question. *Never*. See if I do!"

With which dire threat Mrs. Waters departed, closing the door behind her with some needless energy.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### MR. WATERS' THEORY

FROM her familiarity with it Mrs. Waters found no difficulty in effecting an entrance to the Percival house, though it had now been locked against all comers.

“For,” as Mrs. Lester explained to her old nurse, “I’m trying to keep it from Helena, and she had her suspicions roused, early in the day, by the excitement in the servants’ quarters and the continual ringing of the bell. I’m hoping for the judge to arrive at any moment and he may decide it is best for her to be informed. Indeed, I suppose she must be, sooner or later, but I would rather he told her himself. Oh! Waters, it is terrible! All my sister’s plate, all our grandmother’s jewels, which came to Helena, you remember—— But there! I dare not think about it. I must keep calm, or as calm as I can.”

“Miss Helena doesn’t know it *yet*? My sakes!”

“No. But she would have found out, except for that Dalton, the maid. I don’t like the

woman ; I have every reason to mistrust and dislike her, but I must in all justice admit that she has been invaluable during this crisis. But where is your husband ? I've been wishing he would come, all morning. I should have sent for him, directly. I want to see him."

At this Mrs. Waters burst into a wail, that would have penetrated even to Mrs. Percival's well-guarded apartments, had not Mrs. Lester promptly risen and shut the door.

"Why, woman ! What's wrong ? Nothing has happened to him, I hope."

"Nothing happened, Miss Constance ! and him that broke and smashed up the doctor says it will be weeks before he's out of the house, if he is again this winter, and we depending on his trade for our daily bread."

"Come, Waters. Tell me. What is it ?"

The old familiar tone of command stemmed for an instant the overflow of the wife's grief, and she told her story as briefly as it was possible for her to tell any story :

"I was just taking my morning nap for reason of my lying awake half the night a waiting for Waters to come in and him not coming and my getting more and more worried all the time. And along about then comes a dreadful thumping on the door and there was Waters' brother, that's on the 'force' a rapping like he'd burst

the panels in. So I gets up as soon as I could put on my clothes and opened it and there was him and another policeman a fetching in my poor man all stunneded like and his head cut open with something and him as stiff as a stark. The doctor sewed him up and left stuff and he's come to and demanding to see you or Judge Percival instant. And me here a sitting gossiping and him all alone in the house. Unless one of the neighbors might have stuck her head in to inquire and if she had he'd a thrown something at her he's that cross and so dreadfully 'wanting to think.' It all comes of him trying to play detective and his not knowing any more about it than a child unborn. And I hope it will be a lesson to ——”

“Where was he found?” finally Mrs. Lester succeeded in interrupting.

“In the park. Not far from here. But what in the name of Waters he was a doing there beats me. And him a starting for Peach alley which is clean the other side the town. And there's a woman in the case, and —— Oh! my land!”

Mrs. Waters herself, for once, cut short the flow of her own language, and stared into vacancy as if she saw ghosts. Her mouth gaped and her eyes snapped, and fearing the woman was going into a fit of some sort Mrs. Lester rose, laid a

firm hand upon the nurse's shoulder and shook her slightly.

"Waters, what *is* it?"

"What—what—was the name of that—that woman you're finding so capable, Miss Constance?"

"Dalton. Why?"

"Please put on your bonnet and come with me. No. You go and I'll stay. Oh! my land! I don't know what to do!"

Mrs. Lester spoke, and sternly:

"Waters, are you out of your mind? What ails you? Is the trouble about your husband so great?"

"Trouble enough everywhere, it seems to me. And you all may be murdered in your beds, I mean in your chairs, seeing you're up and dressed saving Miss Helena, who shouldn't be in the clutches of that horrid creature not another instant——"

"Look here, old friend. Was it anything about Dalton that your husband wished to see me, or the judge?"

"How can I say? and him not telling his own lawful wife that's served him faithful year in and year out."

"Surely. As *any* good wife should," commented Mrs. Lester, quietly. "But I begin to understand. You're afraid to have me go with

you and leave Helena alone with this person. Yet you're afraid to leave your husband. Well, I'll settle it. You stay here. Take off your things and go up to sister's room, just as you are accustomed to do, when you come to spend a morning with her, looking after her little affairs that she still thinks nobody can attend to as well as her old Waters. Put off any questions till the judge comes in ; I mean don't answer, unless you are compelled. I will go to see your husband, immediately, for it may be most important. It may—I do not say that it will—but he may need me on a business that will yet lead to his appointment on ' the force. ' ”

This argument was effective. Besides, in her heart Mrs. Waters held the sisters, Constance and Helena, as her own daughters, though she stood rather more in awe of them than she might of such ; and she was to be trusted to be silent in this case, when so ordered.

So in a very short time Mrs. Lester reached the cottage of her “coachman,” and with a feeling that her sister had been left in safer hands than those of the efficient Dalton.

Mr. Waters was awaiting her coming, and growing feverish with impatience. But his brain was clear and the relief of confiding in this sympathetic friend a great one. His first words, in answer to her knock upon the door, were to the point :

“Come in, Mis’ Lester, don’t hinder me no more. If I can’t tell you quick, I don’t know what will happen me!”

“Tell, then. All you know and suspect.”

“That Dalton woman is at the bottom of it. Or, she’s mixed up in it and works to orders, I don’t know which. Anywise, she opened the door to them robbers and they’re her own husband and father-in-law. The men that robbed you are the men that had that girl, Delight, locked up. They’re a bad lot.”

“What? you connect *them* with *this* affair?”

“Sure. Her, too. That woman, Dalton. I’ve thought it out. Wherever there’s been a big steal, in a long while back, it’s been at a house where that woman has been taking service. Besides, I went there. I followed them to the park near the judge’s. They must have seen me, or I blundered and made a noise, being so excited. Anyway it was one, or both, of them that fixed me—and left me till my brother and his mate found me. She, Dalton, let them in or left the doors unlocked—locking them again inside, as they were found, so my wife tells me. She told ’em where to lay their hands on everything they wanted. That old safe where the diamonds were hadn’t any new-fashioned locks, had it?”

“No. It was one that used to be down in the

judge's office. It was fireproof but not burglar-proof. Its key is a big, steel affair."

"She found that and gave it to 'em. You tell the judge. He better watch that house in Peach alley. Or have it searched: it would pay—though *his* stuff ain't there yet. Keep your eye on Dalton. Sooner or later she and the men will have to meet and confab. You can track them through her. They'll not be hard to find. If I was sound again! *Why*—should I have had to go and get fixed this way just now! It's hard lines, ain't it?"

"It may not be as bad as you think. Of course, it is exceedingly unfortunate that you have to suffer; still, I believe that this information of yours will eventually put you on the 'force' where you desire to be. I will hurry home now and hope the judge has come, so he can put the matter into motion at once. I want to watch Dalton, too, *for myself*. You know I'm a sort of assistant to you," said the lady, merrily, and in the hope of cheering the injured man. "So, good-bye, for the present. Mrs. Waters will come home right away; and if I were you I wouldn't tell her what you think just yet—not just yet."

"Catch me! Thank you, ma'am. It's done me a power of good."

Yet when Mrs. Lester returned to her sister's



house she found that fresh complications had arisen. Dalton had gone out, immediately after her own departure, and ostensibly taking advantage of Mrs. Waters' presence in the invalid's room—"Who knows so well how to take care of you, dear Mrs. Percival," she had remarked—and promising to return within a few minutes. But she had not kept her word.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### CAPTAIN HARRIET'S LETTER

IT is not often that the arrest of the culprits follow so fast upon the commission of their crime as it did in the case of the Daltons.

Judge Percival was a man of wide experience and influence; and, acting upon the information rendered by Mr. Waters, he had promptly put forces to work on the case which resulted most satisfactorily to the cause of justice.

One thing, only, perplexed him. The woman, Dalton.

On her behalf, Delight Roloson had gone to him and pleaded pardon and indulgence.

“ Oh! sir, if thee knew what it was to live in terror of thy life, continually, as she does! She has had no training to do right. Ever. In her babyhood she was left at a foundling hospital, and she grew up—anyhow. She doesn't want to be wicked. I don't believe she does. It will be terrible—terrible—to shut her up behind iron bars for more years than she will probably live. If she promises to do right for always, after this, will thee not let her off? ”

“ We cannot very well 'let off' anybody who

has not yet been taken. The two men are, I am thankful to say, safe behind bolt and bar; and my property has all been recovered. So far so good." Then the judge set himself to explain, reason, and as he fancied, convince the distressed girl, how much wiser it was to punish evil doers than to let the innocent suffer because of them.

"For every crime condoned or pardoned gives encouragement to future crimes. Besides, I cannot, even if I would, interfere with the course of the law whose majesty I am pledged to uphold."

With this the girl was obliged to be content; and she hardly knew how strongly she hoped that the missing accomplice of her captors would never be found.

"It seems to me that I should never know another happy moment if I thought of her shut up in a prison for life," she complained to Mrs. Vanderhagen, as they sat quietly sewing in the lady's pretty sitting-room.

"Well, I don't see any great sense of crying over something that isn't—*yet*. Time enough to worry over that worthless creature when—they catch her," said Maria, who had come to spend the day at the "great lady's who's taken our little Delight like a daughter;" and who, having ridden there "in a carriage and pair," now felt more "set up" than she had ever done, even at the "Snuggery" in the old peaceful days.

So they dropped the subject of the unhappy fugitive, Dalton, and struck into that which was now uppermost in Maria's mind, if not of Delight's.

"If that paper parchment is true. Well! I guess! What'll be the first thing thee does with the money, little Delight?"

"How can I tell, Maria? Do the most good I can, I hope. But it's like poor Dalton. It isn't—caught, yet!"

Mrs. Vanderhagen laughed; then sighed.

"I almost hope it isn't true. Not that I wish anything but the greatest good to you, dear child; only if that is what it may be I will have to lose you. 'Thee,' I had almost said, for you have made the plain speech so dear to me."

Delight laid down her needle and folded her hands. She had grown to love this lonely rich woman with all her heart. It seemed to her, very often, as if God had sent her especially to make a daughter's sunshine in this childless home; for even she could see that the great mansion was a different place from what it was when first she entered it.

The weeks that had gone had but revealed to the Vanderhagens all the beauty and strength of the girl's unspoiled nature, and they had let all their love flow out toward her; though, it must be confessed, with little hope that she would ever

take the fixed place in their home that they still desired.

The arrangement made between the lady and the ambitious girl still continued. Daily, Delight came at the hour appointed and though the delicate laces had long since been repaired there had always been found some fresh tasks to be accomplished and for which she would take payment.

More than that, Mrs. Vanderhagen had found other homes in which Delight could be similarly employed; so that her earnings were now of considerable value to the household in Harmony street.

“May be, dear Mrs. Vanderhagen, it will be the very thing will make the other thing easy. And did Mr. Vanderhagen say he would have time to talk with me on—business, if we stay till he comes in to-night?”

“Yes, dear. He not only will have time, he especially desires it. Indeed, there's a lot of interesting facts come to light since you saw him last. So I've sent word to Harmony street, myself, that you would remain; and maybe George will himself come for you. I hope so. I like the lad.”

“Thee couldn't help it if thee knew him really. He used to seem so silly but it was because he didn't see the need of being anything else.”

“Not a flattering compliment, Delight. Even

if a fellow does think he's rich I don't see why that need make him a fool," declared Maria.

"Oh! Maria! Thee always puts things so oddly."

"Humph. Hope I can call a spade a spade as long as I live. If they weren't the simplest, foolishest lot of young folks, them Hudsons, when I first cast eyes on them, I'll lose my guess. Say, Delight, did you tell, or show Mrs. Vanderhagen that letter of Captain Harriet's?"

"Oh! no. Strange that I should forget it. But I did. However, here it is, at last. Will thee read it, Mrs. Vanderhagen?"

"I'd rather 'thee'd' read it to me," smiled the lady.

So Delight began:

"DEAR AND RESPECTED MISS, MY LITTLE DELIGHT:—We anchored at the old port all safe and sound. My sister Rachel is like a bird let out of a cage, for she forgets she's rheumatically and goes out roaming about the hilltop and down to the shore, and in and out of the houses she knew when she was a lass, and before she sailed away along of a man that used her none too well. However, let the dead rest.

"Which reminds me to say that the iron fence about Aunt Delight's grave is as trig a piece of work as you ever dreamed of. It's hard waiting for you to come home and see it, and all the folks who love you. But, in good time. All in good

time. So be if that paper is as valuable as Dominie Babcock has read to me out of the paper as may be, I wonder my mate ever consented to give it up. But he knew that he could never do aught with it himself. And I write these lines to let you know, and all concerned, that if his testimony is ever wanted to clear up the mystery *he'll give it*. He says no but I say yes; for though I don't worry his steps I know that one sight of a lawyer will scare the truth out of him prompt.

“Little Amy is as happy as the day is long. Everybody here takes to her, and the more because she is so full of talk about “the pretty girl what got shut up and kept.” That made all Seabury boil like water on unslaked lime. I had a to-do to keep dominie from setting off instant to fetch you home again; but I held him back, because when you do come we want it shall be of your own will and not no force. Come to stay. For it may be, it may be, as things are turning, that the “Snuggery” will yet shelter a Roloson again. God speed it.

“About the testimony; it will be ready when it's wanted. All Seabury township sends its best love, and no more at present from

“Your most obedient servant to command,  
“HARRIET LEGG, Gravedigger.””

“That's a fine letter for such an unlearned woman to write. I'd like Blasius to see it.”

“So he shall. Ah! but it makes me hungry for old Seabury.”

“Aye, so it does!” echoed Maria.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### GEORGE EXPLAINS SOME THINGS

“ISN’T it just like a story book!” exclaimed Gladys, resting her elbows on the table and her chin in her palms, while she gazed reflectively upon the others in the group.

It was the same group and the same room, into whose gloomy discontent Maria had hobbled on that Christmas eve, which now seemed so far in the past. Unlike then, the gas lights were cheerily blazing, there was the merry chatter of happy voices all around, and though the furniture was unchanged there had been gathered into the dull apartment the various personal trifles which gave it quite the air of a “home room.”

Through the now opened folding doors into the front parlor one could catch a glimpse of Mr. and Mrs. Hudson, with Maria peacefully rocking near them and talking glibly of old Seabury days; a sort of talk that seemed to hold great interest for the world-weary invalid. He had so far recovered as to go about the house, and even, on fair days, to walk a few blocks out of doors.



But he would "never again be the same man," he complained; and the doctor reluctantly agreed with this opinion.

"If you could get into the country to live I believe you would recover much of your former strength," said the faithful physician, whose services had thus far been without remuneration but who relaxed them not one whit because of that.

"As well say that if I could go to the moon!" returned Mr. Hudson, fretfully.

"Well, well, we must do the best we can, and you have still a deal to be thankful for."

"Indeed, we have," agreed Mrs. Hudson; and on this evening there was, in truth, upon her own face an expression of far greater content than there had used to be when she had endured a ceaseless strain of living beyond her means, her strength, and her ability to "keep up with society."

"Well," said George, in that little back room; "I used to get very angry with you, Delight, and think you were a meddlesome body because you wouldn't let me do—the only thing it seemed to me I could ever do. Do you remember that Christmas eve when things looked so black for us all? Not even a decent dinner provided, and how I started and you followed ——"

"George Hudson, you ought to tell us all, now,

what that meant. Delight never would and it seemed so queer that you and she should have any secrets between you, you were so unlike. What was it?"

"Hmm. Shall I tell, Delight?"

"That's for thee to say," she replied, but her cheek flushed and her head bent a bit lower over the bit of dainty embroidery she was doing.

"Well, I'll out with it. Girls, do you know that your brother was once a gambler?"

"George—Hudson!" both sisters exclaimed in one horrified breath.

"You take it that way, too, do you? I'm glad to know it; rather surprised, maybe, because in the old days before the failure we had *all* been 'gamblers.'"

"George!" again expostulated Gwendolyn, a frown gathering on her pretty face. "I think it's an odd subject you've chosen to jest upon."

"But, my dear Gwen, I am not jesting. I was never more serious in my life. Never. I tell you I've done a deal of thinking lately, and it was truly just that. To live as we lived was gambling, though it might have been unconscious gambling on our parts. Yet it ought not to have been on mine. If I'd had half a spark of manhood then, in time—I might, I don't say that I *could*—but I might have helped avert that failure. If I had seen what I ought to have seen,

and said to father that I would put my own shoulder to the wheel and help; and shown mamma just how things were going; we might have stopped in time. Before we swamped not only ourselves but many others. Not the least of these—our ‘little Delight,’ here. God bless her!”

A silence such as does not often fall upon a circle of lively young folks fell now upon these; and it was not till some moments had passed that Gladys again spoke:

“Tell us all about it, brother, please.”

“All right. A lot of us young fellows used to meet and play for stakes. Sometimes with cards, sometimes with dominoes—anything will answer to gamble with, for those who have the reckless craze of ‘risk.’”

“Did you win?”

“Once in a while. Twice in a while, I lost; however there was always the fascination of hoping to get something for nothing, or much for little. Fortunately, for me, Delight had a clearer vision than any of us. I suppose it may have been because she had lived more simply, but black never looked white to her. Not once. The way she used to talk to me, those first days after the failure, were enough——”

“George, I remember that I said very little. Thee is forgetting.”

“You said enough, in all conscience. One of your glances had a whole volume of sermons in it; and the intense surprise you showed that anybody, no matter how they had been brought up, could wish to ‘live dishonestly’—for that was the flattering way you put it!—made me feel about as small as a fellow could feel. Then that night when you got ahead of me, remember?”

“Hmm. It seems to me that thy memory is much stronger than mine.”

“All right. I’m glad it is. Well, once you caught me unawares and made me promise I would never do so again. I was breaking my promise then, girls, when she ran after me and shamed me into coming back. ‘Better all of us go dinnerless for all our lives,’ she said— Ah! I recall every single word!—‘Better go dinnerless all our lives than for thee to soil thy soul with a lie, a dishonored promise, or gamble. If thee is half the man thee ought to be at twenty thee’ll go out and earn thy dinner honestly, with spade and shovel if need be, rather than turn thy God-given manhood into that despicable thing—a gambler!’ Those were her very words, girls; but the flash of her eyes and the upward tilt of her expressive nose—I leave those to your imagination.”

Gwendolyn’s answer was to run and throw her

arms about her cousin's neck, crying and laughing all together; but in an impulse of gratitude for the influence Delight had used for her brother's good.

"Hmm. There's one thing about Delight that I've observed," added Gladys, equally grateful though less demonstrative. "If she stops your going ahead in the wrong direction she gives you a good strong push in the right. Just as soon as she got free from that dreadful Dalton gang she gets Mr. Vanderhagen to give you a regular position in his warehouse, at a decent salary. She works, too, every day and gives mamma the money, and between you two we are very comfortable; but—I wish I could help, too."

"So thee does, Gladys, darling!" cried Delight, warmly. "If it weren't for thee what sort of comfort should we have here?"

"And now, young people, father and mother, too; as well as Maria the Great. Attention! I've a wonderful piece of news for you! Hear ye, hear ye! Do ye hear?"

"Fire ahead, George!"

"All right, Master Bertrand. It's about that astonishing document that Delight has kept so securely in her hidden drawer of the famous Chest of Drawers! Judge Percival, Mr. Vanderhagen, and others—including me—believe that there is so much probability of the paper being a

genuine chart to a genuine fortune that they are actually going to fit out a small vessel and send it to explore! Fact.”

“Really? Really!”

“Really. Truly. Undoubtedly. Oh! I’m as excited as you are. More; because Mr. Vanderhagen says he wants a scribe, a secretary, whom he can trust to accompany the expedition—consisting of one sloop, the *Emily Jane*, Danforth, skipper, and a crew of no matter how few. So I am to go, and write up the marvellous story; and if it’s true and if I write it well—— Ah! my dears! behold in your despised brother the Coming Journalist of the Twentieth Century!”

“Hurray!” cried Bertrand, suddenly.

“Hurray!” echoed Gladys, catching her little brother and whirling him about. “What if we find a gold mine? What if—— But I forget. Whatever is found will be, of course, Delight’s. Well, I congratulate her.”

“And what is mine but thine?” asked the girl, gaily. “Only—does thee suppose they will really find it?”

“Time will tell.”

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### MARIA GETS A NEW TIN OVEN

“DELIGHT, do you know that I think there is a wonderful deal of quiet strength about that girl, Gwendolyn? And womanliness. Yet my niece, Bessie Hooper, tells me that she used to be considered a very silly girl.”

Delight looked up, suspended her needle in the air, and tossed her head gaily.

“Bessie Hooper knew dear Gwen before she was developed.”

“What do you mean, child?”

Mrs. Vanderhagen also paused from her sewing to gaze upon the bright face uplifted towards her own. A face which grew daily and even hourly, more dear to her.

“Why, thee sees, that Gwen is a real kindergarten in spirit. Even though she may never have the chance to be one in reality. She believes in development. She says that every soul is put into the world to grow. It's God's will that it should grow upward and outward like a beautiful plant, to perfection. A plant may not have room to grow, because it is crowded by

other things, and that was the way with her. She was born to live straight and fair, but for a time she was bent down by too much—Pshaw! A plant doesn't wear clothes, does it, so that simile had better be dropped. But Gwen wore clothes. Such a lot of them, and they requiring so much time and thought, they made her grow lop-sided. Also, there were late hours, social ambitions, nonsense of every sort. Then came the trouble, which she now says was the greatest blessing of her life. That brushed away all the hindering things and gave her light and room to grow upright, as was meant for her to do. Oh! I can tell thee that there is a *lot*—in our Gwendolyn; and she is so beautiful in her home, now. Bertrand almost adores her, for since she had time to 'bother with him' she finds herself in such close sympathy with his child-heart that he is never so happy as in her society. If she weren't his own sister and so entitled to his best love I should be jealous. In those first days at Argyle Terrace he was my own especial pet."

It was not often that Delight talked at such length. But Gwendolyn was now a favorite theme. She added, after a moment's silence:

"I do wish, I do hope, she will have a chance, sometime, to take a regular course at a training school, so that she can fit herself wholly to 'direct' a kindergarten of her own. If—my



ship comes back laden with gold! Oh! how much there is to do with money in this world!"

"Yes, my dear. Well, I've been thinking. If Gwendolyn wishes to take this course, I will advance the means for her to do so. That, too, without waiting for any gold mines to be discovered. By the way, it's a long time since we heard about our adventurers."

"No news is good news, Maria says. But, Mrs. Vanderhagen! Please. Does thee think it would be right, right, for Gwen to run in debt in order to take that course? That is if I am never able to help her?"

"Wouldn't it be debt, still, if you did help her?"

"Indeed, no. What do I want of money except for them and—everybody who needs it?"

"Then I can say, decidedly, that there are times in our lives when it is not only right but most desirable that a debt should be incurred. Even in ordinary business affairs men are obliged to do this; although, as far as may be, one should avoid debt as an almost crime. So with Gwendolyn. I would wholly disapprove of her running in debt for her clothes or her furniture, anything of that sort; but if she is helped now to begin this course it would be wise for her to do so. Her life will be broadened, her usefulness increased, and this mortgage on her future per-

fectly legitimate. When she is through and attains a paying position as director she can refund the expenditure easily enough. I wish you would suggest this to her, to-night. And now, my darling, are you not ready yet to say you will come and be our daughter?"

"I wish I could."

"Supposing this ship comes home to you, bringing good tidings? then what?"

"Would it be my own money, if they find it? My very own to do with as I chose?"

"Yes, dear. Your very, very own. You are the last of your race, the only heir to this 'Captain Kidd' fortune—if it *is*! I do not think any of your friends would oppose your doing all the good with it that you desire, provided that you yourself were not impoverished by it. You couldn't be impoverished, you know, if you came to us. Besides, it is time, it is time, that your own education was proceeding regularly. Not in this haphazard, over-wearing way of night study by yourself or with your equally untrained cousins."

"Ah! thee good, dear friend! Thee knows the weak spot, doesn't thee?"

"I can make no impression on it if I do."

"But thee can. Thee has. I haven't even dared to let myself think about it, for it is too—wonderful and fascinating. Yet if the time does

come when I can see that neither Maria, nor any of the Hudsons, needs me then I'll ——"

"Hurrah! Hurrah! The Arabian Nights isn't in it with our modern fairy tale! For ——" cried a lad's voice, triumphantly, and forgetting ceremony in his excitement, as he burst into the bright room where Delight was doing her daily "stint" of needlework for Mrs. Vanderhagen.

"George! Thee here?"

"Nowhere else!"

Delight had sprung to greet her cousin, just returned, it seemed, from that strange voyage of his in pursuit of her unknown treasures, but as her hand touched his shoulder she saw behind him, approaching more slowly, a face she could remember from her very babyhood.

"Captain Danforth! Captain Danforth!"

She flew to him and clasped his weather-beaten face between her soft young palms, and not till then, with this home-friend restored to her, did she quite know how homesick she had been.

"Seabury! Thee's straight from Seabury! I smell the sea in thy hair, thy clothes! I do—I do!"

"From Seabury, sure enough, but I've travelled far enough inland, 'pears, to get salt water out o' my beard. No? Well, trust a Roloson to scent the brine, forever and a day! And, lass, you've grown. Grown powerful. Strong and fine, but

—older, is it? Well. How the folks will laugh when the *Emily Jane* sails home again with you on board! For you'll go back by the sea-way, won't you, lass?"

"Aye! but I will? If—I may?" looking doubtfully around upon the company gathering there. Mr. Vanderhagen, beaming and genial, even beyond his wont. Judge Percival, the sweet "woman in grey," Gwendolyn, Gladys—My! what a goodly company.

And on every face a smile for the girl who stood among them. Not because, by a romantic whirl of fortune, she was now an heiress in her own right, but because they loved her and rejoiced in her joy, since now she would be free to live out to the full the tender, generous impulses of her pure heart.

"Has the *Emily Jane* come home, then? Successful?" she demanded, at length, holding the captain off and scrutinizing his honest face again and again.

"Come home, my dear, with a freight I'd rather have aboard than that old chest of drawers she carried away, along with you. Hello! What's this? I've heard about this accident, but I never dreamt she'd get around so lively on her crutches as she does. Hello, Maria!"

"Hello, Stephen! What's the good word?"

"The last good word I heard," said this hearty

and unabashed sailor, "was that Captain Stephen Danforth had bought himself as good a new tin oven as he could find in Billstown. He's set it up in his kitchen, but he can't navigate it no-how. No more can Laddie. So that old salt has steered straight to Chester city in pursuit of a body that can. There ain't but one on this terrestrial fit to handle such a tin oven as that is. She's the one whose salt-rising bread beat all her neighbors' and whose mince pies—umm. Say, Maria, when a woman is so faithful that she falls down and breaks herself into pieces, on behalf of her 'family,' I 'low it's time she started in on a family of her own. How'd Seabury township look to you, Maria, about now?"

"Prime."

"And the oven? With Laddie and his daddy thrown in?"

"To the oven? No, thank you. I'd rather throw in some of those pies you're so hungry for."

"Will you, then?"

"Yes; because my little Delight needs me no more."

Nobody had heard this dialogue, save its beginning and now its ending, which floated to Delight's ears like the minor chord in some jubilant music.

"She will need thee forever and always, dear

Maria; but go thee back to Seabury with the captain and *me!* There I may have to leave thee, for a time, but there thee will always keep a home for the 'last of the Rolosons,' will thee not?"

"Aye, aye. So she shall. And now, lad, you, or somebody who's had so much to say on our strange journey, tell the girl for whom it was undertaken, what's happened. From first to last, tell it straight and short. And not the least marvellous thing about it is that it was Cap'n Steve Danforth and his *Emily Jane* that was hired to make the voyage. Glad to do it, he was! Free and willin', and no wage paid 'cept to the crew, who ain't forehanded, or even they'd never touched a cent."

## CHAPTER XXXV

### IN CAP AND GOWN.—CONCLUSION

ONE late summer afternoon "Bachelor Jim" had gone across to Esther Marlow's little shop to talk it over once more, and for—nobody knows how many times.

"Seabury township doesn't know itself. She's gone clean crazy over all the wonderful happenings."

"Wonderful, indeed. You were right, Jim. We didn't need to go away from our old homes to have exciting things about us. Seems like I can't half believe it all yet."

"'Tis hard, I allow. But some of it's too good for my deserts; and that's the part that's bringing Delight Roloson back to the home of her fathers."

"Isn't it just grand? Well, she may be the last, but she's by no means the least. Here comes old Margaret. I opine we'll have to tell her the whole story from beginning to end. She said she'd heard 'smitches' of it but the next time she saw you sitting in my front window she'd come across, straight. So I guess you're in for a good bit of gossip, now."

“It’s not I who minds gossiping on such a subject. Good-day, Margaret.”

“James Waterbury, what’s all this about a fortune coming to our Delight right out of the sea?”

“Out of the ground, Margaret. Out of a cave, in that ground.”

“Who put it there?”

“Her grandfather. Robert Roloson, son of Robert Roloson, skipper of the *Fair Delight*. Being in shipwreck and bringing home from a far port a store of gold, and a lot of papers that were worth much more than the gold. Indeed, there was less of *that* than folks hoped to find. Not so much, as folks count riches nowadays. But the papers more than make up. Deeds they are to unclaimed lands in the heart—it is now—of old Chester city. Worth their weight in gold, and more. Ten times more, I reckon. Worth enough, anyhow, to make our girl rich for life.”

“Couldn’t fall into better hands, young though she is. No, it couldn’t. I’ve known her from a babe.”

“Right, Margaret.”

“But how comes Enoch Legg, and that rascal sailor Dan Dalton mixed up in it?”

“They were part of the crew of the *Fair Delight*. They helped the old captain to bury the box with the money and papers on that tiny



island off the east coast. So small, that island is, that it isn't down on any chart going. Indeed, it was by accident the *Fair Delight* was washed against it and went to pieces there. They left her stranded and set off in the small boats, but only one of them ever reached port. The other, with Captain Robert aboard, was never seen again. This one that had Legg and Dalton came safe to land."

"Of course. Rogues always prosper."

"Not always, Margaret. Think over and see. After that shipwreck, there was nothing left in either of those sailors' minds but finding the island again and stealing the money. Did they find it? You know, never. For years and years old Enoch sailed and sailed, but never touched its shore. He never had any luck either. Lost his ship and his child in the same business. Finally, cast anchor up on the hill, and will die in his bed—a deal too good a fortune for such a scamp."

"But he didn't steal the money?"

"No. He stole the *parchment* that told where it was, though. Which the captain made a map on and gave him when they parted company after the shipwreck. If he lived to get home the captain would not need the map. He could find and take care of his own, for he was a scholar and a navigator from way back. If Enoch came

out all right and the captain didn't, he was to hand the property over to the Rolosons, and help them all he could. There were dark suspicions about him. Some say he helped to keep the small boat with Captain Robert in it from ever reaching home. Be that as it may, Aunt Delight would never touch the parchment when he offered it to her, toward the last. But I suppose his conscience wouldn't let him rest, so he thrust it upon little Delight."

"And a good thing he did!" interjected Esther.

"What about Dan Dalton? Where was he all this time? That he didn't make Enoch some trouble before the last?"

"That's easier asked than answered. Most likely, somewhere that he couldn't help himself. He saw the insides of more prisons than one, I reckon. Maybe he forgot or had no means of searching. Most likely the last; but his son, Pete, who is as bad as his sire, or worse, had been more successful. The police say he has robbed more houses than any other man in the country, and he almost always got off well. Didn't this last time, though?"

"Was it his wife that was found wandering in the street? that took such a cold she died from it?"

"Yes. Died in hospital, they say. Of pneu-

monia. And made as clean a confession as she had breath to make. A good thing for her she died as she did; else she'd likely have spent her life in jail."

"They say our little Delight actually cried over her."

"So she did. She'd cry over anybody that had one single streak of good in them. Even me!" laughed the happy cobbler.

"Dominie Babcock was saying there'd be great changes here soon."

"Sure to be. Sure to be. Why, that Judge Percival, that held the mortgage on the 'Snuggery,' enough and more than to cover it, has given it to his wife to give to Delight, for them two to make a sort of children's home for little things out of the slums of Chester city. Odd! Part of Delight's own land is that Peach alley where she was kept prisoner by old Dalton."

"You don't mean it! Delight Roloson would never part with her old home while she could keep it!" exclaimed old Margaret, incredulously.

"Right you are, granny. She wouldn't. 'No,' says she, 'that must always be in the family as it has always been. I'm going to get my cousins, the Hudsons, those of them who can, to move down there and live while I am at college. But there's lots of land in Seabury township, Mrs. Percival,' says she; 'and it would be doing a

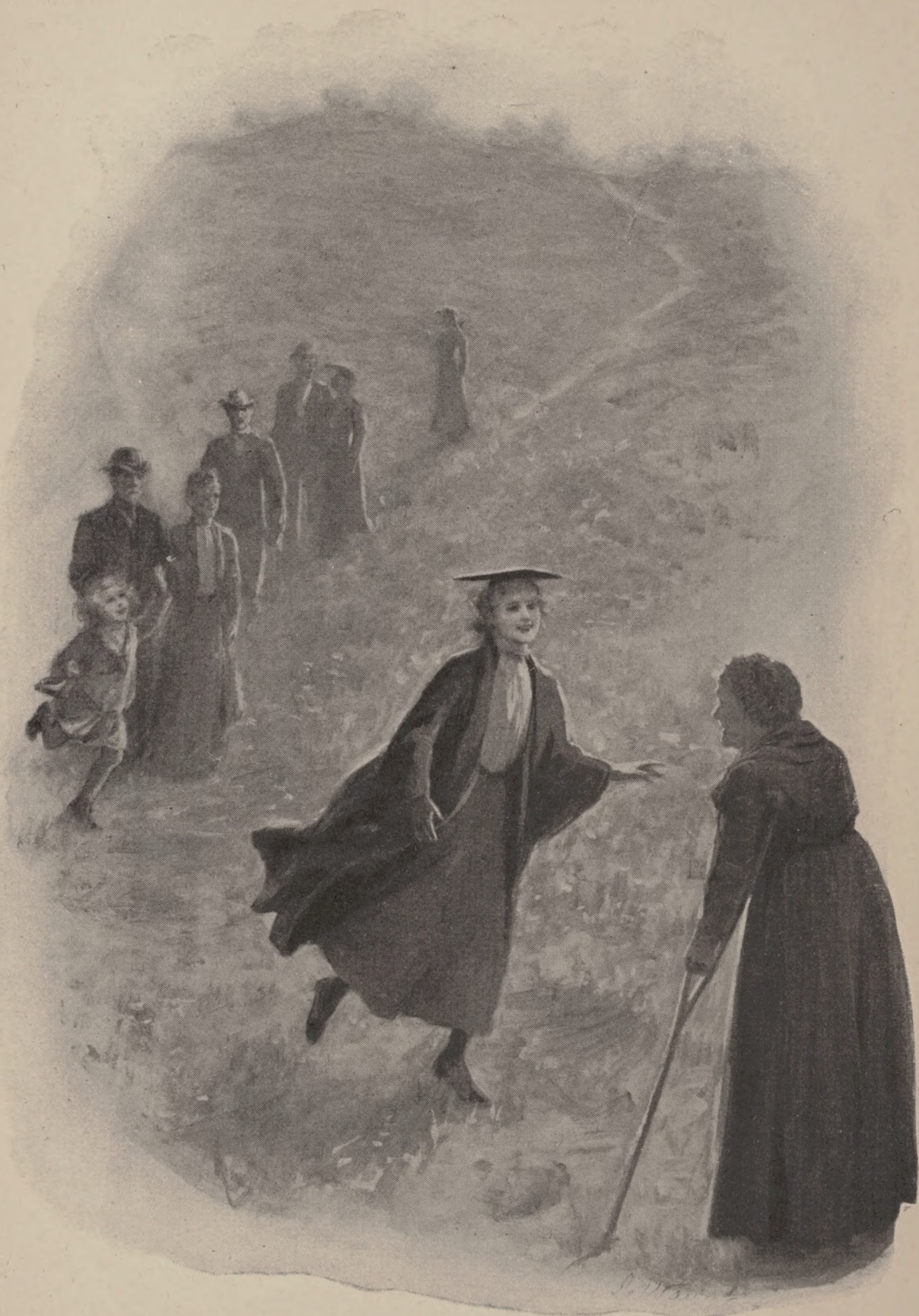
good deed if thee made the home just the same, if on another piece of ground.' ”

“That’s good sense. Delight couldn’t but be sensible, coming of sensible stock as she does.”

“That’s the way it struck her city friends. And they do say that Seabury is going to be made all over. It’s been ‘discovered,’ so to speak. The Vanderhagens are going to build here, and put up a ‘college annex’ where over-worked students can have a real good time. There’s to be a school and kindergarten for the poor children out of Chester; a hotel, the judge’s own house, a ‘Sailors’ Rest,’ in memory of her sailor forefathers, built by Delight’s money; and—— Well, no end of all the glory to come.”

“Ah! but the old days are gone,” sighed Esther, who had been touched into a bit of sentiment by all this wonderful discourse.

“Let them go! Let them go, I say. Look you! Do you see? Why marvel and lament at any change that still leaves us our Delight? Why not up and follow in her progress? See? The darling. I begged her and she promised and she has kept her promise. That she would put on that strange garb she calls her ‘cap and gown,’ that she wears at that woman’s college, where she has begun to study. See her? Coming down the hill, from the old ‘God’s Acre,’ where her kinsfolk sleep—all, even to the last. Is she



SHE RAN DOWN THE LAST SLOPE



the less brave and bonny for all that? No, I tell you. That's little Delight. As true a type of an American girl as lives."

So they turned their faces upward toward their well-loved girl and saw her at the head of that rich company of her city friends who had come on a summer visit to the township where they hoped to make their homes, at least for a goodly part of each year.

With her student's cap set jauntily upon her golden curls, and her silk student's gown swaying to the motion of her buoyant step, she smiles and advances to greet her poorer, yet even dearer, friends; as simple, as true, as sincerely ambitious to make her name a synonym for her life as she was in the old days before all their great changes had come.

She even runs down the last slope, with extended hands, to meet old Margaret, leaning on her crutch.

"I was just thinking, Grandmother Margaret, how much better God knows than we do; just as auntie darling used to say. We thought it was the very wofullest thing that could be when I had to go away; but He saw it was all for the best. I went with empty hands but I bring them back full, and all for those I love. I'll tell thee one thing more, Grandmother Margaret. That is this: Not all the goodness nor lowliness be-

longs to the poor. There are as many gentle, unselfish, simple hearts in the big houses as in the cottages; and so thee'll find out when thee comes to know my new friends as well as thee does my old. I want Seabury to make them happy, and give them the peace which is its charm. So, face thee about, grandmother, bob thy best courtesy, and say: 'God bless everybody!'"

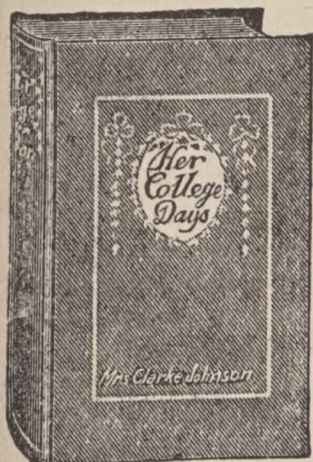
**THE END.**



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# *True to His Trust*

*By Edward S. Ellis, A. M. Illustrated by J. Steeple Davis*

The hero of this story will win his way at once into the heart of every one, and his pluck and perseverance will carry the sympathy of every reader through his many adventures, struggles, and singular experiences. Like all of the author's works, the incidents teach in the most convincing manner that true manliness and sturdy integrity are the only principles through which happiness and success in life are possible.

# Comrades True

By *Edward S. Ellis, A. M.*

*Illustrated*

In following the career of two friends from youth to manhood, the author weaves a narrative of intense interest. This story is more realistic than is usual, as the two heroes pass through the calamitous forest fires in Northern Minnesota and barely escape with their lives. They have other thrilling adventures and experiences in which the characteristics of each are finely portrayed.

“Among juveniles there is not one of greater interest, or more wholesome influence than ‘Comrades True.’”—*Sentinel*, Milwaukee, Wis.

# Among the Esquimaux

By *Edward S. Ellis, A. M.*

*Illustrated*

The scenes of this story are laid in the Arctic region, the central characters being two sturdy boys whose adventurous spirit often leads them into dangerous positions. They visit Greenland; go on a hunting expedition, have a number of stirring adventures, but ultimately reach home safe and sound.

“A capital and instructive book for boys.”—*Post*, Boston, Mass.

# The Campers Out

By *Edward S. Ellis, A. M.*

*Illustrated*

Many of the scenes are so vividly described that the reader can, in his imagination, enjoy the excitement of the chase and all the pleasures of a good camping tour. In addition to the vivid descriptions of many exciting adventures, this story teaches a lesson in morals that cannot fail to prove helpful to every reader.

“Well planned and well written. Full of adventure of just the right sort.”—*Mid-Continent*, St. Louis, Mo.

# *The Young Gold Seekers*

*By Edward S. Ellis, A. M. Illustrated by F. A. Carter*

A thrilling account of the experiences of two boys during a trip to the gold fields of Alaska. The hardships that they endure, the disappointments they suffer, the courage and perseverance that they manifest in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and their eventual success in their undertaking, are all most graphically portrayed.

## *Andy's Ward*

*By James Otis*

*Illustrated*

A fascinating narrative of the life and experiences of "Museum Marvels." They dwell in a house owned by a sword-swallower, whose wife, the "Original Circassian," is entrusted with its management. The rest of the household includes a dwarf, nick-named the "Major," a fat lady, a giant, and a snake-charmer. The private life of the marvels forms a story full of incident, and one that possesses that peculiar simplicity of style which has won for this author such a host of readers.

## *Chasing a Yacht*

*By James Otis*

*Illustrated*

A semi-nautical tale of adventure about boys, written for boys, and will certainly be appreciated by boys wherever they may be found. The story of how the heroes, two bright, manly fellows, built a steam yacht, how she was stolen from them, and how they eventually regained possession of her, is full of life and is replete with exciting and interesting incident.

"Boys who do not read this volume with real pleasure must be hard to suit."—*Journal*, Minneapolis, Minn.

# *The Braganza Diamond*

*By James Otis*

*Illustrated*

A volume that will hold its readers spell-bound as they follow the two boy characters and the bright, courageous girl in their search for the famous diamond. Much useful information is incidentally conveyed and many things with which few persons are familiar are explained.

“It will rivet the attention of young readers as much as Robinson Crusoe.”—*Call*, San Francisco, Cal.

# *The Lost Galleon*

*By W. Bert Foster*

*Illustrated by J. Steeple Davis*

The search for a lost treasure ship and her eventual discovery form the basis of this very dramatic story. The plot is intensely interesting, and rivets the attention throughout the entire narrative. The story possesses a great deal of originality, and is free from the conventional incidents that usually characterize stories of this description. Incidentally, much valuable information is afforded the reader by the insight that is given into the ship-chandlery business, in which the young hero engages as the means of earning a livelihood.

# *Exiled to Siberia*

*By William Murray Graydon* *Illustrated by F. A. Carter*

This is one of the most thrilling stories ever written. The heroes, two American boys, become involved in a political plot that nearly costs them their lives. As nearly all the action occurs in the mines and military prisons of frozen Siberia it can readily be imagined that in the midst of such dramatic surroundings the interest is most intense. The plot is absorbing, the adventure exciting, the movement rapid, and the style unsurpassed.

# *The Lost Gold Mine*

*By Frank H. Converse*

*Illustrated*

At the opening of this story, the hero, by a singular circumstance, finds himself in possession of certain papers relating to a gold mine in the far West, and he and his chum conclude to make a search for it. Their untiring efforts are eventually crowned with success, but not until the party has suffered many privations and escaped numerous impending dangers such as characterized the early days of the gold fever.

# *A Cape Cod Boy*

*By Sophie Swett*

*Illustrated by P. T. Hoyt*

A realistic story of the New England coast, in which are vividly depicted the manly efforts of a Portuguese castaway who attempts to assist a family in return for kindness shown him. A pronounced sea atmosphere pervades the whole story, which contains many thrilling adventures by water and hardships on land. A performing bear, escaped from a traveling menagerie, is quite an interesting figure and affords much amusement and excitement.

# *A Moonshiner's Son*

*By Will Allen Dromgoole*

*Illustrated by F. A. Carter*

The scene of this dramatic story is laid in the mountains of Tennessee amid the haunts of the illicit distillers. The hero is made to suffer many hardships as a result of his father's unlawful business, but after the latter's tragic death, the boy is afforded an opportunity of going to a large city, where his sterling merit soon brings him into prominence. The story is full of the most thrilling incidents, and the tone is wholesome and elevating.

# *The Moncasket Mystery*

*By Sidney Marlow*

*Illustrated*

Wise indeed is that teacher or parent who provides his children with such healthful and entertaining reading as this book will prove to be. It is a pleasing story, full of base-ball and fishing experiences, with just sufficient "mystery" to add zest to the tale. The principal character is not called upon to perform any impossible feats, but he exemplifies his character in the pursuits of daily life and always proves faithful to the confidence reposed in him.

## *Harry Ambler*

*By Sidney Marlow*

*Illustrated*

A charming story of a bright boy, that is full of exciting incidents and is told in a pleasing style. It is interesting without being sensational, and incidentally shows that courage and honesty are the sure roads to success. The characteristics displayed by the hero can be emulated with profit by boys generally. The book points out a moral without making that the "reason of being" of the story.

## *Making His Mark*

*By Horatio Alger, Jr. Illustrated by Robert L. Mason*

A manly, resourceful lad, left to the care of an unscrupulous stepmother, finds his home unbearable, and starts out in the world, determined to make a place for himself. Naturally, he encounters many obstacles and meets with numerous discouragements, but his courage and perseverance enable him to push steadily on until he attains a glorious success. The book will prove not only intensely interesting but also helpful to every boy who reads it.













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