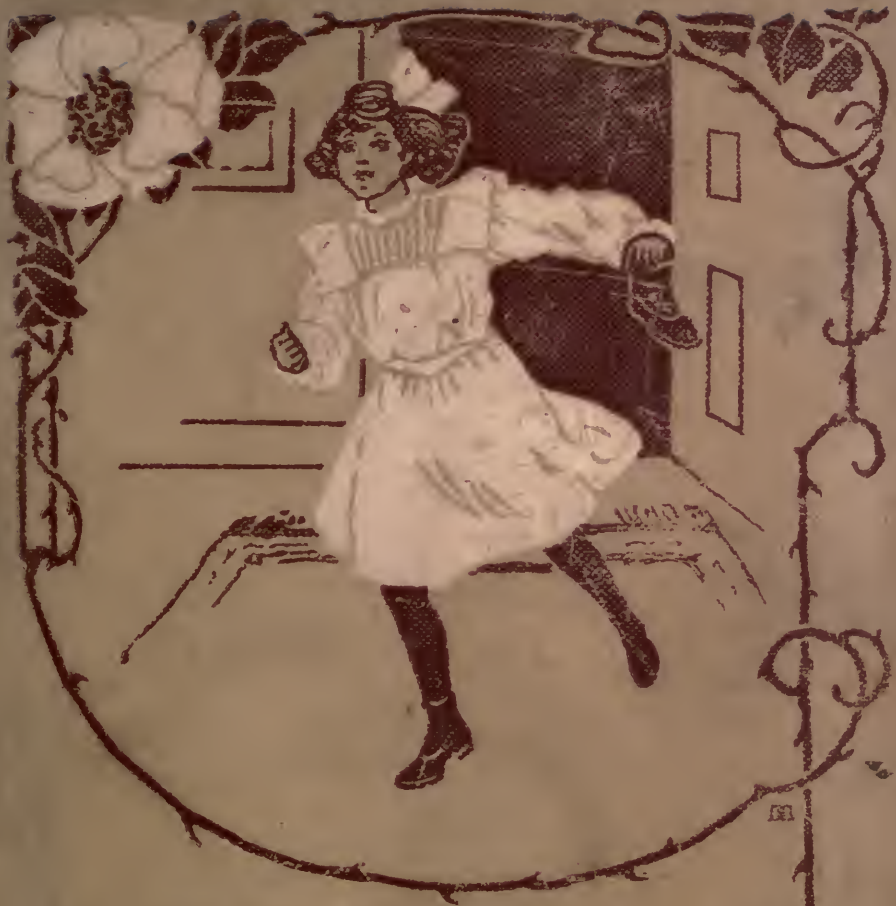
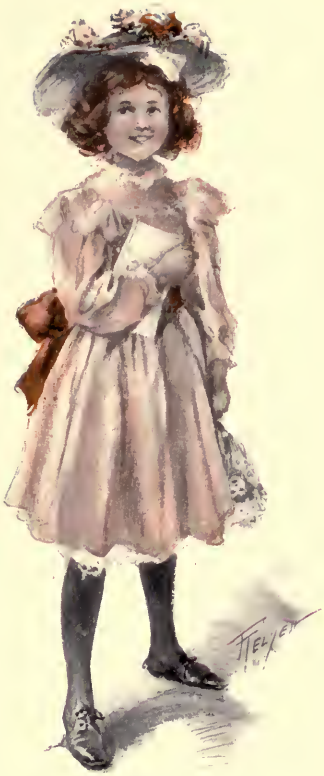


ABBIE ANN

GEORGE
MADDEN
MARTIN

Abbie Ann



Abbie Ann

Abbie Ann

BY
GEORGE MADDEN MARTIN
AUTHOR OF "EMMY LOU"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY C. M. RELYEA

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Abbie Ann

Abbie Ann

I

 BBIE ANN, as she skipped along the platform of the little railroad station by her father's side, turned her head to see her new sash. Perhaps she was wishing there was some one beside herself to admire it; but the tracks, the switches, the station, made Coal City, as it was some twenty years ago. Beyond the bend, nearer the coke ovens, were the rows of frame houses occupied by the miners and their families.

Abbie Ann's father was tall and close-bearded and he looked pre-occupied; he was leading her along by the hand as if

he had forgotten entirely that she was there, and she was skipping, not only because the general tune of life is one to skip to, but because he went so fast.

He paused at the open door of the station and Mr. McEwan the agent, within, looked up. Next to her father, Abbie Ann who was nine years old, long ago had decided she cared for Mr. McEwan more than for any one else in the world. Now her world, beside father and Mr. McEwan, consisted of Coal City and its inhabitants, the miners and their families.

He looked up as they darkened the doorway, and the telegraph instrument clicked on under his rapid fingers.

"May I leave Abbie with you for an hour or more?" asked her father, stepping into the room.

Mr. McEwan looked at Abbie Ann. He wore glasses and when he opened his eyes wide and blinked them quick, the glasses winked. They winked at Abbie now.

"Why not?" said he.

Another thing about Mr. McEwan was, that when he raised his eyebrows interrogatively, it lifted his hair too, which was red and which stood up like a brush. When his glasses winked and his hair lifted, Abbie had come, long ago, to know that he was pleased.

This being the case now, and his little daughter provided for, Abbie Ann's father turned hastily and went back to the wagonette where the gentlemen who had come to see the mine, were waiting. When money is being sought to further develop a coal mine, would-be investors are to be given undivided attention. So Abbie Ann was left behind and father and the gentlemen drove off.

She went over to the desk and stood beside Mr. McEwan who, looking up, surveyed her with a speculative air. Then he shook his head dubiously.

"You really don't look it," he said.

"What?" asked Abbie Ann.

"A young barbarian."

Abbie grew violently red. Mr. McEwan was quoting the lady who had gone off on the evening train the night before last. She had been engaged to come to Coal City in the interests of Abbie Ann and her general welfare and education and had departed after making a discouragingly short trial of the situation and therefore Abbie now grew red

But here the telegraph instrument, which never had stopped, began to click frantically, and Mr. McEwan transferred his attention from her to it.

Abbie was used to every one being busy; her father was always pre-occupied, being a part owner, and the superintendent of the mine; everybody in Coal City was busy, the miners, their wives, the children, all, it would seem, but Abbie Ann and the babies.

It was hot in the telegraph office and it

proved just as hot in the waiting room. Also the benches around the walls were hard, and she knew the old faded railroad posters by heart, so she tried to see her new sash in the cheap little looking-glass which hung, tilted, opposite the ticket window. She had bought the sash herself, that morning, at the store, her father allowing her to choose anything she preferred, for staying behind with Mr. McEwan. It was a rich magenta and the great amount of linen in its composition gave it a stiff and elegant gloss indeed. Abbie considered the effect against her pink gingham dress very fine.

She had a fear that her father had not tied it right, though it had taken him some time, but the glass hung too high for her to get a view of it. She could see her face however and since it was smiling at her, she smiled back at it, then tipped her hat a little to observe the effect that way.

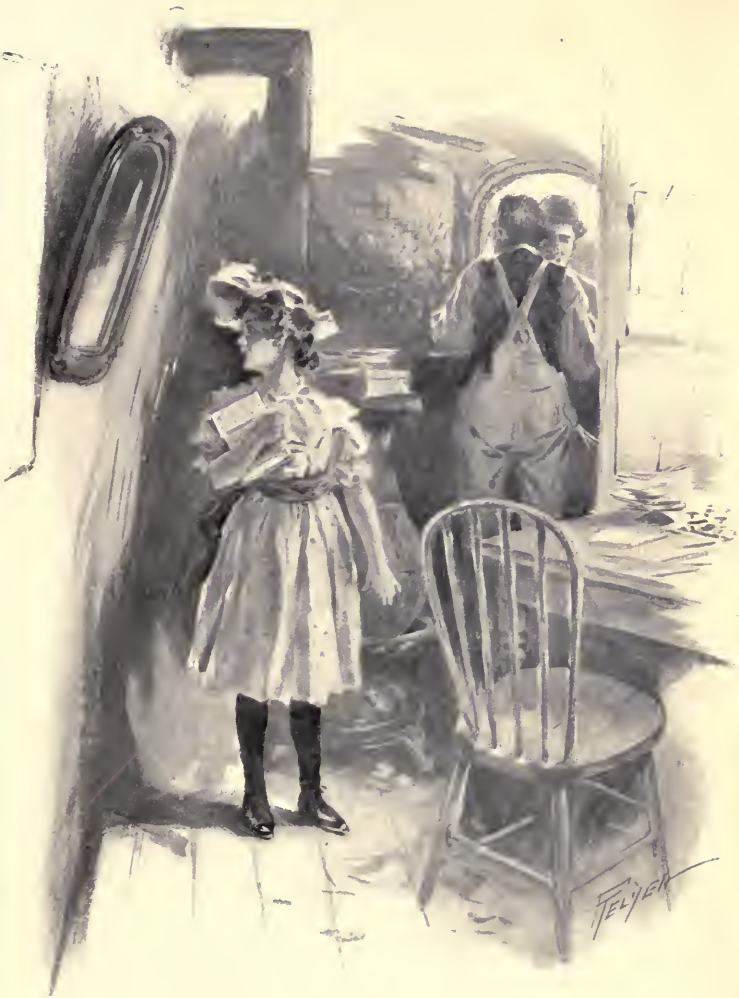
She was obliged to admit that her hair

was red; Mr. McEwan always told her so, but then it was not the red of *his,* and it was not straight. Abbie Ann called hers "brown red" and she called his "red red," and she consoled herself further with the fact that hers curled.

When Mr. McEwan wanted to tease he told her that her temper was the color of her hair, at which for a long time she used to stamp her foot, but lately she had stopped, since he asked if that did not prove what he said?

The glass tilted on the wall also showed Abbie's cheeks to be red, and her eyes brown. She felt she would hate not to be as pretty as she was, but she felt also, she would feel worse to have Mr. McEwan know she thought she was pretty. He declared even now that when she wore a new dress or a new hat she strutted. On all such occasions he was used to drawl:

"How loves the little Abbie Ann
To dress so fine each hour,



"She tried to see her new sash"

And spend her money for a fan
Or artificial flower."

When Abbie found that any way she tiptoed, she could not see her sash, she went out on the platform. She had her new August magazine, but the platform was reeking and resinous even in this early morning sun, so fierce was the day. Across the main tracks on a switch, upon which the shadow of Black Diamond Mountain still fell, stood a flat-car. A few tarpaulins lay together on it. That Abbie was forbidden to play on the tracks or to walk on the switches was true enough, but there are always reasons to apply to the especial case at hand. It looked cool and shady and inviting on the flat-car, and the tarpaulins offered a comfortable nook. It was n't a flat-car suddenly, as she looked over at it, it was a house, her own little house in which she lived and looked out on the rest of the world.

And here Abbie jumped down off the

platform and ran across and clambered up on it.

It was snug, and cosy, and far-off, even as she had pictured, and crouching down on the other side of the tarpaulins she laughed to think what a hunt Mr. McEwan would have when he came to look for her.

She would not let him hunt too long, because there was sure to be an apple for her, or maybe a candy pipe if he had been to the Junction lately, or perhaps a chocolate mouse. Once it had been popcorn, and in the box with it was a ring set with a green diamond. Mr. McEwan said it was a rare thing, a green diamond, a rare gem, he called it. Next to her father, Abbie was sure she cared most for him.

While Mr. McEwan had been at college, he became sick. Later he came to Coal City, away off in the Allegheny Mountains because he could get a job and get well, too. At first he used to say he meant to go back to college.

"When?" Abbie Ann had asked him, for even that long ago she hated to spare him.

"Some time," he always assured her.

"Why some time," Abbie had worried him to know, "Why not *what* time?"

"Because time 's money," Mr. McEwan always said.

But later on he stopped saying he was going. Abbie asked him why again.

"Because I 'm finding time is n't," said he.

"Is n't what?" queried Abbie.

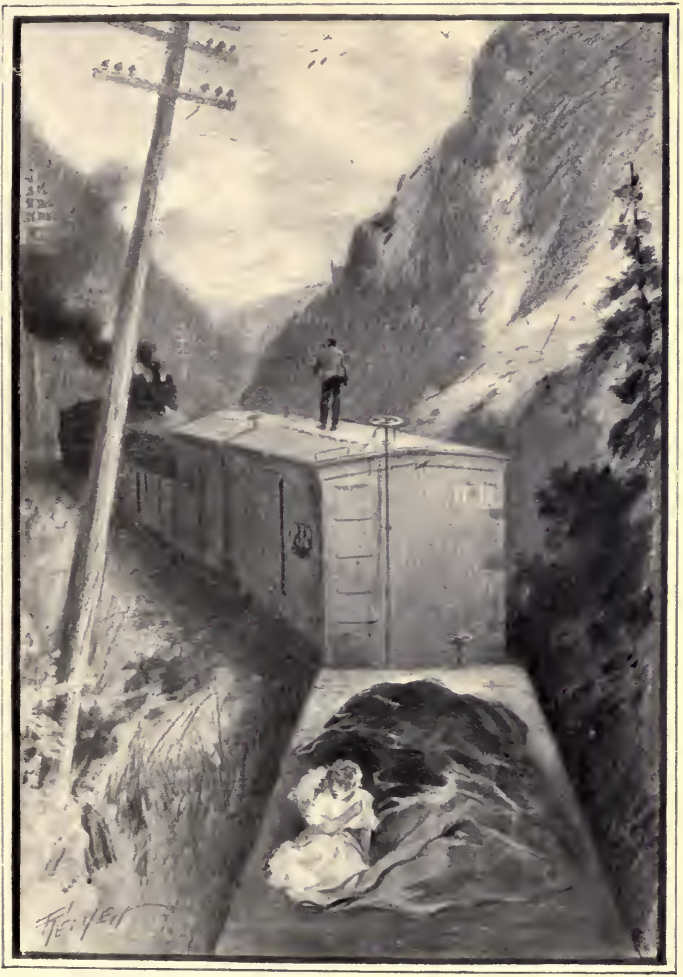
"Money."

It was very hard to follow Mr. McEwan sometimes. Abbie did not try to that day. While she waited for him to come hunting her, she read her magazine. There was a discouraging number of words she had to spell. Her father one day said she was backward in her reading, but she told him he was wrong, that she always spelled right ahead.

Somehow, to-day, the reading seemed harder than ever, and Abbie found it warmer than it had looked in the car; the click, click, click, of the telegraph instrument reached her far off and faint, and—presently her head fell over against the piled up tarpaulins and she forgot to lift it,—and——

A BUMP, a rush of air, the noise of a locomotive waked her. Scrambling from the tarpaulin little Abbie Ann stood up, but lost her balance and sat down again. The flat-car was one of a long train leaving the switch, Coal City already behind, its little square station gleaming yellow against the mountainous background, and growing smaller every moment. A brakeman was walking the long line of cars ahead. Abbie screamed to him, but her voice was lost in the bumping and grinding of the brakes.

Had the train been going westward to-



"A bump, a rush of air, the noise of a locomotive waked her"

ward the Junction, she knew she could have gotten off in an hour and waited for the afternoon train back to Coal City, but they were rushing in the opposite direction. The mountains loomed strange and dark, it was somber in this defile and chill and tunnel-like. The flat-car jerked and bumped.

Abbie Ann swallowed tears and lumps and sulphur smoke all together. Ever after she never knew whether terror meant a sulphur taste on the tongue, or whether a sulphur taste brought back terror. Or does a falling-away at the pit of the stomach mean both?

She screamed, and screamed again to the vanishing station, and choked between times. It was as if, across the increasing space, she yet clung with desperate little fingers to father, to Mr. McEwan, to the known, the familiar, the habitual, and one by one the fingers were being torn from their hold.

She screamed, and screamed again, then with a sudden sense of futility such as can come even to a baby, the little red-headed girl in the pink dress and magenta sash, with the grim fir-clad Alleghenies looming either side over her, threw herself on the gritty car floor and clung to the tarpaulins and cried and beat with her feet against the boards. It was rage. Abbie Ann was one to shake furious little fists in the face of contrary Fortune.

After how long she did not know, little Abbie clinging to the tarpaulins for very terror of this swaying, rocking fury of the rush through space, sat up.

Not long before, in the night, her father had wrapped her in a blanket and carried her to the window. It was a red-eyed monster, with a fiery trail behind, speeding through the skies, she looked out on, called a comet. Herself a mere speck on the trail of this rushing thing, Abbie found herself thinking of that monster

now. Yet seeing trains go by Coal City every day, ordinarily Abbie Ann called them locomotives and freight cars. She even knew their numbers and the names of the engineers.

With a gone feeling everywhere, the small object on the flat-car gazed at the flying scene, a brawling river churning itself to foam on one side, steep walls and dark-clad slopes of mountains on the other, and each moment of it carrying her away from father.

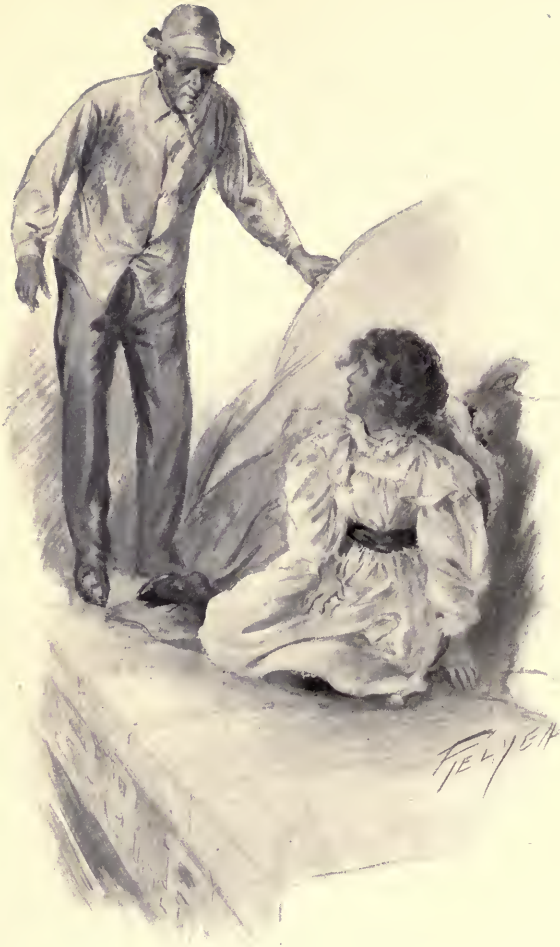
She even thought of jumping, but she was afraid. The cinders fell thick, the rush thundered back upon her in the echo. And on they went, over bridges, the brawling river beneath, through tunnels where the smoke blinded and choked and strangled the little numbed soul clutching at safety and the tarpaulins, in and out of the gloom and somber grandeur.

At last when rage and terror and the numb despair all had died away to apathy,

when she could not even cry, as the train took a curve Abbie Ann saw the brakeman traveling over his route, from car to car. Do things always begin to come our way when once we have given in? This time the brakeman was traveling backward over the train. He reached the rear end of the box-car next to her flat-car. It was Jim, a trainman Abbie had talked to often, on the switch at Coal City. He used to smile when he talked and his eyes and teeth, all shiny white, would look funny out of the grime of his face.

"Jim," she cried, "Jim, oh Jim!" Her little voice, naturally, was lost, but since in her joy to see him, she had crawled out to the middle of the swaying flat-car, why, Jim as he climbed down saw her. Now one is not looking for red-headed little girls to roll out of tarpaulins on a freight train.

"Great Scott!" he roared, almost losing his balance in the suddenness of his sur-



Jim, the brakeman, finds Abbie Ann on the flat-car

prise. Abbie Ann smiled through tears. It was different now Jim had come.

"It 's the little Coal City kid," he gasped.

Abbie Ann explained in hysterical screams. His face of mingled grime and concern made her laugh.

Jim bent to speak to her. "Hold on," he roared, "wait here till I come back."

As if she could do anything else, Jim was so funny, but everything was all right now, and with an amazing sudden sense of light-heartedness, she watched him go on his clambering way. It was Jim's responsibility now. Even the mountains seemed lower. Or were they foothills along here?

But she had time to think that terrible things had befallen him before he returned. He did n't come, and he did n't come. Had Jim forgotten her? Had he fallen off the train? Never, never would she see her father again.

Just then he came clambering back, and

reaching her, sat down on the tarpaulin and wiped the smoke and grime from his face.

"We 're going to put you on the passenger we meet at Lynn, at five-ten. We 're side-tracked there. That 'll get you at Coal City at eleven. We 'll telegraph your father our next stop. It 's three now. I reckon he 's about crazy."

"But it will be all right when I get there," said the now cheerful Abbie Ann hopefully.

At Lynn, two hours later, Jim carried her off, and took her over to the hotel and got her some supper, but first he asked a girl there to wash her face. Abbie Ann caught a glimpse of it in a gilt-framed mirror on the wall. Her eyes and her little teeth gleamed white through grime, but she did not laugh as she had when it was Jim's face. It was a nice girl he asked this favor of, a girl with red cheeks, and she

even stayed while Abbie Ann, perched on a high stool at a counter, ate supper. Jim asked her how she would like a ring on the order of Abbie Ann's. She laughed. "Go 'long," she said. When the express thundered in, Jim boarded it with Abbie Ann. His own train was puffing on the switch. He explained the matter to the conductor, to whom Abbie had often nodded from the Coal City platform.

"Richardson of the Black Diamond? I 'll see she reaches him," he said, and off into the night the Express thundered westward. They reached Coal City at eleven where the conductor handed off a plump, red-headed little girl half asleep. In her arms were a bag of candy, one of fruit, a toy puzzle, and a picture paper, given her by the conductor, the porter, the butcher boy, and a lady on the sleeper. Abbie Ann had quite enjoyed the trip.

She saw Mr. McEwan first. His hair was standing up brushier than ever, and

he looked strange and wild. When he grabbed her from the conductor, the clutch of his hand hurt.

"She 's here!—and safe!—" he called. And then his breath seemed to catch. And as the Express rushed on into the darkness, he handed her over to her father next behind him. The whole of Coal City seemed to be there too, men, women, visiting gentlemen and all. They had been hunting Abbie from noon until the telegram came in the afternoon.

Generally her father was pre-occupied. Now he held her close.

"My little girl,—my little girl," he kept saying under his breath, all the way up the cinder road, while the strange gentlemen followed after, past the coke ovens, throwing their deep glow out into the darkness, to the big house next the store, where she and her father lived. And when for answer, Abbie Ann rubbed her cheek against his, she found his was wet.

II

 HE next evening shortly before Abbie Ann's bedtime, her father pushed his books aside and wheeling his chair around from the desk, took her on his knee. He had his office at home, and the two generally spent their evenings here, he at work, she with her dolls.

There was a space between the wall and the end of the desk that almost seemed to have been meant for a doll-house, and moreover her father let her use a drawer of the desk for her playthings.

Once a lady came to Coal City with her husband who had business at the mine, and they stayed over night, and she kept saying "poor child," and every time she said it she stroked Abbie Ann's hair. Then while the two gentlemen were out, she

brushed up the office hearth, and put things around in the places where she said they ought to be. The office being at home, there was no covering except a coat of paint on the floor, or on the floor of the hall. The color of the soil of Coal City is red, and red clay foot-prints on a painted floor show discouragingly. After the lady had brushed around for a while, she gave up, and saying "poor child" some more, bade Abbie Ann bring all her stockings that she might darn them.

Afterward Abbie asked her father why the lady said "poor child," but he only looked out of the window across the valley and did not reply. Unless she was in a temper, whenever she saw her father glance in that way out across the valley, Abbie Ann changed the subject, for something seemed to tell her then that father was worried. So she saved the question, and later asked Mr. McEwan why the lady had said "poor child."

That person, surveying small Abbie Ann, lifted his forehead in ridges and gazed debatingly. Her hair was in tangle, one shoe-string was broken and the tongue of the shoe hung loose; there was red clay on her stockings, and a long scratch on her face, results of a scramble up the mountain side for blackberries; also there was a slit in her dress skirt where a briar had caught it.

"Because," said Mr. McEwan solemnly, "there is so little demand on the market for young savages."

But this had been some time before, in one of the intervals between teachers.

This evening Abbie Ann's father, pushing his ledger away, lifted her to his knee. Now her father was that sort of person who, a dripping umbrella in his hand, stands in a doorway and looks helplessly around until the women folk rush to him and take it. But there were no women folk to take care of him and Abbie Ann.

Her father loved the small bundle of herself, tears, smudges, and all, better even than he himself knew, better than all else in the world, but he did n't know what to do with her. His attitude with Abbie Ann was very like that of himself with the umbrella.

He lifted her to his knee now and stroked her hair awkwardly. It made her think of the lady. She endured it, hopeful that it would n't last long. Perhaps it was because it was not natural to her father that it made her embarrassed. She was right. It stopped.

"How brave to do her duty is my wilful offspring?" suddenly he inquired.

Now wilful offspring meant Abbie Ann. It was what still another lady brought to Coal City to teach her, had called her.

She had no idea what wilful offspring meant, but she did know that the lady had not meant it to be complimentary.

"How brave?" father was repeating.

Abbie Ann thought of the day before on the freight train.

"Not so brave," she concluded.

Which evidently was disconcerting. Her father began to stroke her hair again, and Abbie to endure it. "But brave enough, I am sure, to stand by her duty?" he suggested.

He spoke so uneasily, and it sounded so conciliatory that Abbie Ann grew dubious. His voice sounded solemn too, almost as if they were in church, which in itself was an alarming sensation, Coal City having Church at the most, perhaps three times a year, when a minister could be secured.

"Brave enough, I am sure," said father, "to stand by her duty."

"I,—I don't know," faltered Abbie Ann.

"For father has made up his mind to be brave enough to show his little daughter her duty," he continued. But here he paused so long, and appeared to be pondering so hard that Abbie Ann to show how

entirely at ease and free from embarrassment she was began to twist his mustache to stand out, a sharp point each side above his pointed beard. Then when he looked at her so earnestly above the fierce mustache, Abbie forgot she was embarrassed and laughed.

"Such a little girl," said her father, hopelessly, "such a little child."

"I was only pretending," she hastened to assure him, "I 'm listening."

"And it is only for a few years at most," her father then said, as if continuing a former thought; was he talking to her or to himself?

"What 's for a few years?" asked Abbie Ann.

At this he seemed to come back to her and hastened to stroke her hair. "I have been meditating it for some time," he confessed, even guiltily, "and yesterday's happening determined me."

But it was to be seen that Abbie Ann's

tall bearded parent viewed the inquiring-eyed object on his knee with considerable apprehension. He also continued to stroke her hair vigorously.

"I am going to take you away from Coal City and put you at school," he told her.

There was a pause, during which there seemed to be no support under Abbie Ann; there was a singing in her ears and a dryness in her mouth. Coal City meant all she knew. "Away" meant that unknown void and desolation the cars were rushing toward yesterday, and its inhabitants were summed up in the lady who called her "poor child" and made her uncomfortable.

"But I don't want to go to school," she rejoined, and her voice sounded so far off, even to herself, and strange, that she threw herself upon him and clung to him suddenly and fiercely, "I don't want to go to school, I don't want to."

Father said nothing. The silence was

alarming. She burrowed her head deeper into his coat collar, "Why can't I have a teacher here?" came up in muffled tones from Abbie Ann.

"We have tried it, and how long have they stayed?"

It sounded as if it meant what it said, his voice this time.

"They stayed longer than the cooks," came up from Abbie Ann, sulkily, and unwisely; for the number of cooks brought to Coal City for the superintendent's household, from all points far and near, had become a jocular matter up and down the railroad; none could or would stand the isolation of the life. Her father had grown as sensitive about cooks as was Abbie about teachers.

So at this he spoke decidedly. Perhaps the allusion nettled him.

"The teaching is not all," he said, "you need to be with other children," he was quoting the words of the lady, "and you

need to have what only different surroundings can give you."

"I don't," said Abbie Ann. There was no doubt as to the finality of her utterance. She had slipped down from his knee and stood, firm planted on the floor. A red spot was burning on either cheek. Suddenly she stamped her foot, and stamped again; then she seized the nearest thing, which chanced to be her youngest child, and flung the luckless infant across the room. This done, simultaneously, as it were, with the dull thud of its unhappy head against the wall, Abbie Ann threw herself upon the floor, prone, and beat with her small hands and feet thereon.

It was not the first time this big man had watched his little daughter thus, nor yet the first time he had wondered what he ought to do about it; he had met a mine disaster with a promptness that saved his men's lives; he had averted a strike by a just grasp of the situation; he had quelled

a riot in a neighboring district during the miseries of actual strike there; but these things were a matter of course, in mere line with a man's work, and he thought no more about them. But what to do with one small daughter who flung herself on the floor and beat with her fists and feet thereon, this big man did not know.

Meanwhile the heap of red tangles, skirts, arms and legs, there before him, began to be shaken by sobs. Abbie Ann usually grew more reasonable at the weeping stage. Her father gazed down upon her. Those small moaned "ohs," on his little daughter's lips hurt him surprisingly. He would try reason. He offered it somewhat diffidently, seeing that Abbie Ann had a disconcerting way of rejecting it.

"Suppose," he said, "that I failed in my duty to you now, and lived to feel my own and your reproaches?"

His little girl, sitting up at this to listen,

here shook her head violently, so violently the red curls flung about wildly. She was hazy as to what it was he might some day feel, but from her position, it was safest to combat everything. "That would n't never, never be,—" she stated, with general vagueness of statement, but much decision.

But her father thought differently, and said moreover that she was too young to know.

"And further," he added, "it is my daughter's duty to help father to do his." He spoke so solemnly it might have been Church again. Abbie Ann hugged her knees. It would never do to weaken now.

But he went on. The words seemed to come with effort at first, but later, something came into them that made them easier. Was it tenderness? Or was it sad laughter?

"Once Abbie Ann—there was a little girl with hair and eyes like yours. She

lived in a city, and used to come by a certain gate every day, the last little girl in the procession coming from a neighboring boarding-school for the daily walk. There was a boy generally hanging on that gate, who in time that little girl came to nod to. Perhaps,—some day,—you may be shown some medals and some prize books laid away by persons who loved this little girl, that will prove to you how faithfully she did her duty."

Abbie Ann had wriggled along the floor, still embracing her knees, the better to hear. Now she got up and leaned against her father's knee. The story rather than the moral of it, had seized her.

"Who was she, the little girl, father?"

"Your mother, Abbie."

There was a silence. Nobody spoke. Little as she had been, Abbie Ann seemed to herself to remember,—

Therefore she rose up and flung herself upon him and wetted his poor collar with

"Once, Abbie Ann—there was a little girl with hair and eyes like yours"

a fresh burst of tears; "I 'll be good, I 'll be good,—" she whispered.

"I know, I know,—" said father, in return, gathering her up, and this time forgetting to stroke her hair.

Then Abbie Ann sat up. Had she known her little nose was puffed like a ripe red cherry, she might have been disconcerted.

"Who was the little boy?" she asked. She liked that story.

"His name in those days, was, Johnnie, Johnnie Richardson."

Abbie Ann laughed delightedly. It was father himself, that boy; father's name was John Richardson!

He was saying more: "And I have chosen to send you to this same school, because the same teacher is there who taught your mother? Will this help you to go and try to be happy?"

He never had talked just this way to her before. She felt solemn, and began to

cry a little again, but sobbed her willingness to try.

And it was settled, and big, bearded John Richardson drew a breath.

III

THERE were other reasons why Abbie Ann's father had concluded she would be better at school; indeed, he could have found very, very good ones happening almost any day. She remembered several herself, or, rather, would like *not* to have remembered them.

For instance, there was the time the Bishop came to hold service. It is not often such a thing happens to miners as having a Bishop come, but this one had been doing so at intervals since the men built themselves a church.

His stay over night was with Mr. Richardson and Abbie Ann, and even with limitations as to cooks and available sources of marketing supplies, a household

is driven to make preparations for a Bishop, or at least into trying to do so. It was winter and there was mountain mutton secured from a farmer, and a wild turkey and what Mr. McEwan called trimmings. Unfortunately there was damson-plum preserves too, with the seeds left in, which the wife of one of the miners had sent up with pride for the occasion, and which was put on the table in a glass dish as a trimming also.

Now damson preserve with the seed left in, is an insidious thing, as Abbie Ann saw it; it is a game, and you win or not, according to the generous instincts of the person helping you. The damsons, and the saucers for them, were near the Bishop and he kindly served them.

He was a bearded little man, genial and kindly, and helping Abbie, as the lady, first, he helped her genially which means generously. Then he and her father and Mr. McEwan returned to their talk of im-

ported foreign labor and scabs, and topics common to mining-town conversation.

The game based on damson preserves is this: having separated the fruit, once it is in your mouth, from the seed by means of your tongue, you swallow the delicacy and store the other away in the pouch of your cheek, squirrel-fashion, and repeat the operation, the game being to empty the saucer without at all removing a seed from your cheek pouches. Do you succeed in thus retaining all to the last spoonful, you *win,* and you thereupon retire from the table and, seeking isolation, proceed to count how many plums the saucer contained. Should the distribution of the delicacy have been very liberal, the cheeks of the gamester gradually assume a distension alarmingly suggestive of mumps, while the eyes above them seem to imply asphyxiation or strangulation. Still, it is a beautiful game.

The Bishop helped Abbie liberally, oh,

quite liberally, and then went on with his talking. If he had only *kept* on with it, all might have ended well, but he did not. Having exhausted the subjects of union men and scabs, and being a kindly gentleman, he turned to say a pleasant and playful word to his host's little daughter.

"Heaven bless my soul," cried the startled Bishop, not at all meaning to be undevout. It was that critical stage in the plum game, you see, preceding the last spoonful, and suggestive of strained eyeballs and strangulation, for the Bishop had helped liberally.

"Heaven bless my soul," he cried in alarm, "Richardson, look at your child!"

And then it happened. Whether she tried to speak and choked, or to cry and strangled, Abbie could n't decide, even afterward. But whichever it may have been, it had all the effect of an explosion. Plum seeds shot everywhere! Mr. McEwan says it was a plum seed that fractured the

outer edge of his spectacle glass. It was funny, oh, very funny! that is, to every one but Abbie Ann and her father, he being overly sensitive about matters concerning his little daughter's deportment. Between them, damson preserves were not mentioned by one to the other for days to come.

Then there was the episode with Aunt Venus's Willyum. Aunt Venus was elderly and colored, and had been induced to come up from Huntington to cook, agreeing to do so, provided she might bring one of her daughter's children for company. Willyum was the one she brought. You 'd have gathered from this she had pleasure in the society of her grandchild, a small person with deferentially rolling eyes and an agility in dodging cuffs and heavy-handed slaps, unbelievable.

The chief fault Aunt Venus seemed to find in him, now that she had him here, was that he got under her feet, and her remedy for the same was curdling.

"Keep outen f'om under my way," she would direfully adjure him, at intervals through the day, "or I 'll slap the taste clean outen yo' mouf!"

And if Aunt Venus threatened him, Abbie Ann brow-beat the undersized Willyum to a degree of servile docility. Mr. McEwan told her she did.

"What 's servile docility?" she asked him, interested.

"The result of the other person wanting everything *her* own way," Mr. McEwan assured her. She gathered from this, he meant *the other person* to be her. But all Abbie Ann could recall that she did, was to decide what games they should play, after which Willyum meekly played them.

One of the natural avocations of Willyum's race is to barber. Abbie had seen them doing it down at Hinton. To barber, the operator stands in a white jacket behind a velvet chair, and in time the person in the chair arises shorn.

Father's chair could be made to answer as the velvet one for the game purpose, and an outgrown piqué coat of Abbie's would serve for the jacket, and Mr. McEwan, now the weather was so warm, had lately been using an instrument he called a clipper, on the long-haired coat of father's old dog, Wolf. As has been set forth, Abbie Ann was a moderately long-haired small creature herself, her curls being fine and tangly and abundant.

Now whether it was innocence on the hounded Willyum's part, or zeal in playing the game, or revenge sweetly born in him at the moment and direfully executed, none can say. Willyum was a silent, or at best a monosyllabic creature. But, being mounted on a box and told to barber, he barbered, apparently with no knowledge of a distinction between scalp and hair. And clippers once enmeshed in a tousled tangle of curly fine hair, hang enwebbed and pulling by their own weight

even after the operator has been compelled by the shrieks of the victim to desist, and the victim wails lustily.

The results were considerable. To be sure, father could strip the several scalp wounds with court plaster, but it takes a real, not a play, barber, which means a trip down to Hinton to find one, to properly reduce a partially chewed-off head of curls to a uniformity of evenly clipped fleece. *And Abbie Ann was n't near so pretty as she had decided she was,* seen with a clipped fleece and court-plaster strips paralleling her crown.

There were other regrettable occurrences recorded of Abbie Ann, too. Father's Wolf was not the only pet, for Abbie had several herself, yapping puppies and lame and decrepit roosters and such. Whenever the miners' children met a point in the parental humor where their pets were threatened or forbidden, they brought them to Abbie for presents. And,

owing to her obliging disposition, so Mr. McEwan put it, *she* took everything of all natures anybody brought, from lame dogs and sick cats, land terrapins and young screech-owls, to the measles. He said the only thing she drew the line at taking, was precautions.

The sick cat which she accepted, in time recovered; that is, in all but its nerves, which remained uncertain. The cat could hardly be blamed, therefore, when Abbie, on tip-toe, and feeling along the mantel above her head for one thing, knocked another, which chanced to be a tall, quart, stone-ware jug affair of ink—uncorked, of course—off the mantel-shelf and on to the arm-chair wherein the nervous cat was slumbering. The cat wildly fled, true, but not before the descending inky flood had considerably deluged and endyed it, making in a straight line for the nearest exit, an indelible path of flight left behind, which means it went right up on and

across the bed whereon the week's clean laundry, brought home by a miner's wife, lay outspread. It was a pity, too, that father's shirts and handkerchiefs and the tablecloths should have been uppermost. The flight of an inky cat across such things is unmistakable.

It was bad, too, when Abbie Ann took the measles, though it fortunately was one of those times when a teacher was temporarily residing with them, who could take care of her. But since this person's attitude seemed to be that the sick person was somehow to blame in the matter and in disgrace accordingly, it was not a pleasant time to look back upon. The lady's frame of mind also seemed to be that Abbie could have helped taking measles if she had wanted to. And then *she* took them herself! Whereupon her attitude of mind promptly veered to where it held Abbie Ann again responsible for that! And when she got better, she indignantly went.

And so from these things, you can see that Abbie Ann's father had a right to feel it was better that his little daughter should be taken away to school.

Once before when the subject had been partially broached, Mr. McEwan said if he were not so busy, he would teach her himself! He always had had ideas, he said, on proper methods in teaching. In spelling, for instance, he said, always emphasize the lesson by use of the object spelled. If b, o, x was put forward successfully by the pupil as the spelling of the same, Mr. McEwan's idea was, as teacher, to produce the box. The pupil next advancing the claim that g, u, m spelled gum, and d, r, o, p spelled drop, the lid should then be lifted to disclose rows of 'em inside, pink and white, to be consumed thoughtfully and earnestly while the teacher gave a lesson on the cohesive and resistant properties of gum.

Abbie Ann agreed that his ideas were

prepossessing. She fetched her reader, with the page corner turned down at the last list of spelling words preceding the attack of measles.

"How would you do *them?*" she asked him, interestedly.

He looked at the list, and then he looked at her, hurt. He said it would take time, of course, to plan his ideas in detail, but she ought not to have showed lack of faith.

She assured him that it was not lack of faith, and *it was n't,* though the list began with cherubim and ended with Himalaya, and had such words as *would, could,* and *should,* amidways. Her faith in Mr. McEwan was far larger than such a mild test of it as that!

There was country school for three months in the winter for the miners' children, and the term opening just after the retirement of the private teacher, Abbie, for the time being, went there. She came

home with a lesson in penmanship copied on her slate over which Mr. McEwan shook his head. Perhaps he was jealous of country-school methods. The teacher had set the copy, which said:

"Old King Coal was a merry old soul."

Mr. McEwan objected to the spelling of the name, but then, of course, he allowed, you had to remember the young man teacher, in his off times, was a miner, and was to be excused for evident prejudice on the subject.

But now all these familiar affairs of every day were to be left behind and Abbie Ann was to go away to school, having agreed with father to do so.

IV

UT the going did not seem possible by the next day, and Abbie Ann kept her face swollen by weeping afresh every time she thought about it, feeling herself to be a mistreated little girl sent off into the great, terrifying world with no one caring, a little girl gotten rid of by being put at a terrible place called a school. Very well, she would go, since she had promised, she would go, but once there she would cry herself ill, oh, very ill, and perhaps die, and—

At this point Abbie Ann burst into tears again.

Mr. McEwan came up that evening to supper as he often did, in order he said, to help them out.

This was because of a peculiarity of Fabe, the cook, whom Mr. McEwan had brought from Washington on returning from his vacation some time before. Fabe having hitherto officiated in restaurants and boarding-houses, said he did not know how to cook for two, and true enough, when he made for instance a pudding, it was so liberal an affair that Mr. Richardson and Abbie Ann continued to eat pudding day after day until it was gone. In a way it might have been said to save Fabe trouble, and it was owing to this peculiarity that Mr. McEwan said he came to meals to help them out.

This evening after supper they sat on the side porch. One did not see the station from here, or the chutes, or the coke ovens, only the anvil-shaped valley with the enclosing mountains making a purple rim around. Across on the opposite slope of the valley stood the church, ugly, it is true, but the miners had built it them-

selves; there was a graveyard by the side of the church and in it a tall white shaft. Abbie Ann's young mother lay beneath that shaft; it was while she was among them that the miners had built the church.

Out on the porch this evening Abbie Ann told Mr. McEwan about her going away for he had been talking business to her father all through supper, and she had had no opportunity to tell him before; her father, cigar in hand, listened, too, and very cruel, and very terrible it sounded, the way she stated it. Somehow, by the time she reached the end, she felt ashamed.

But Mr. McEwan was making notes on the back of an envelop. "Albemarle County pippins, maple sugar, hickory nuts,—" he was muttering.

"What?" Abbie Ann asked him.

"H'm," he was still jotting down, "did you speak,—oh,—to be sure, I was planning for the Thanksgiving box; but that

is proceeding too fast, you have n't gone yet,—"

"Box?" asked Abbie.

Mr. McEwan blinked, and his red head nodded across at her red head confidentially. "At Thanksgiving," said he, "and at Christmas, and on birthdays, and at Easter; what else did you suppose boarding-schools were for? And you lock your door, having admitted six or more of your really bosom friends, and stealthily opening the box, you feast as the clock tells the midnight hour—"

This was a new phase of things. "Really?" asked Abbie Ann.

Mr. McEwan turned his head; he was sitting on the porch railing smoking. "Oh, Fabe," he called.

That person came out from the dining-room; he was very black and very shiny and he wore a paper cap. When he first arrived at Coal City he said his name was Fabe Winbush; but Mr. McEwan said

that he was too modest to tell it all, that the whole of it was Fabacious Vespucious McGruder Daniel Winbush.

Abbie Ann asked Fabe if it really was, whereupon he showed all his teeth, but he never said.

When he came to the door Mr. McEwan demanded, "How about a cake, Fabe? None of your little miching measurements, either, but an ample, sizable, cake-walking article, pink and white perhaps, and fruity, and say, nutty, within?"

Fabe grinned, as indeed he always did at Mr. McEwan. "Th' ain't no trouble 'bout its being sizable, if it 's a *big* cake you want,—"

"And candy," said he, "the real thing in Allegheny maple sugar with hickory nut meats through. I mean to scour the mountains for the nuts myself."

But after Mr. McEwan had gone, the shamed feeling came back upon Abbie that she had not been honest. She went slowly

"Mr. McEwan was making notes on the back of an envelop"

and stood by her father who was on the settee, his arm stretched along the railing.

"I won't," she said, "I won't any more," and she touched his hand on the baluster. His closed on hers. Then he lifted her to the bench by him.

In the valley below them a mist was floating over the low lands. The young moon shining down upon it made it a moving silver sea. But above the mists, on the opposite slope across the valley, stood the shaft, tall and gleaming. Abbie sat very still, she had no idea why. The sheep bells from some hillside tinkled faintly. It hurt, not that she knew that it did, she only knew something made her creep closer to father.

It is a question if Abbie even rightly understood that she and her father in their time must come to cross the valley also to where that shaft stood; it was not that kind of fear, for only vaguely did Abbie Ann know what the shaft meant. Yet the

beauty of the evening, and the young moon on the mists, and the shaft across the valley, stayed on the little heart. It is good that it should have; The Star stayed with Dickens' child.

Not that Abbie thought these things, she only sat close within the circle of her father's arm, while Fabe's voice, mellow and low, came crooningly out from the kitchen, that kitchen which had so shocked the strange lady, to the rattle of his pots and pans.

V

HEN Mr. Richardson and Abbie Ann left Coal City in September, the whole community was at the station to see them off, the miners, their wives, the older children, the babies, Mr. McEwan and Fabe.

Abbie felt important. She even had a trunk of her own and on one end of it, it read:

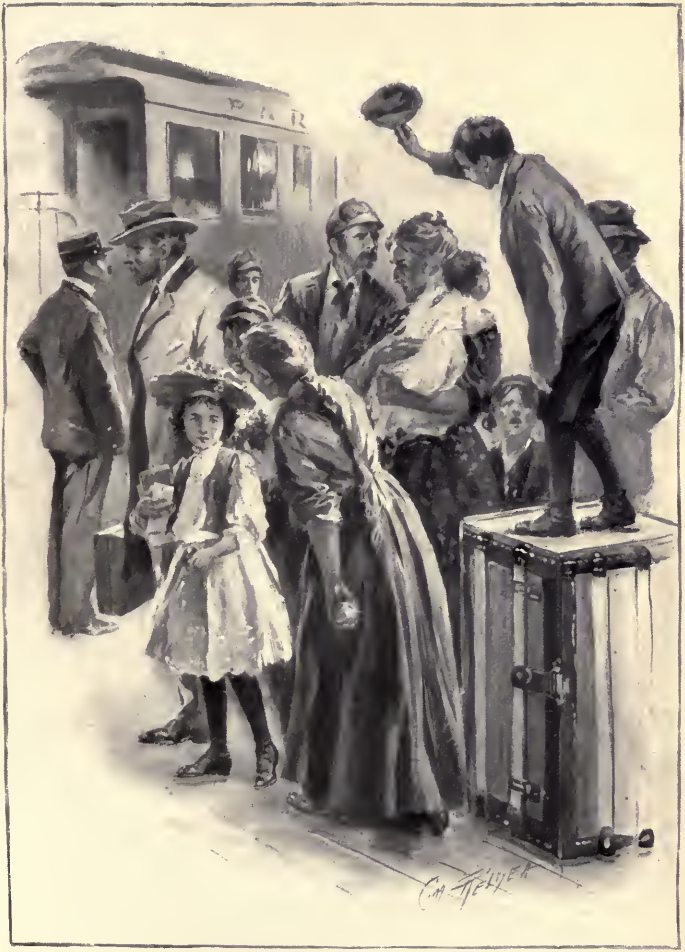
Abbie Ann Richardson.

Down at the junction lived a lady who sewed and who had made Abbie's new clothes after the two had studied the fashion papers together, and the lady had sent down to Cincinnati for the patterns and the materials. Mr. Richardson seemed doubtful at the results but said if Abbie

and the lady were satisfied, they were the ones to know. Mr. McEwan said all was too plain, that mere *gilt* braid did well enough for Coal City, but for metropolitan purposes, it ought to be at least 14 carat quality, since which Abbie had been a little troubled in her mind.

Each one had brought her something for a "good-by"; indeed she could not take them all, the peach pie and the pet squirrel, for instance. Mr. McEwan said he would take care of the pie.

Everybody waved until the train, eastward bound, was rounding the curve and Abbie hanging out the window, while her father clutched her skirts, waved too. It made her new ring glisten. Mr. McEwan had given her that. The green diamond in the other one had chipped off in discouraging fashion, and finally had fallen out, while this new one had for a setting a little, clear, dark-blue stone that glistened.



"Each one had brought her something for a 'good-by'"

"Not so rare a gem, perhaps," Mr. McEwan had explained, "but with better wearing qualities. And blue, you know, is true."

Abbie Ann, gazing at her ring, resolved she would be true. A verse had accompanied the ring. It read:

"I knew by her hair that so gracefully curled
Around her pink ears, that she ringlets held dear,
And I said,' Of all natural things in the world,
A ring let me give her before she leaves here.' "

Abbie Ann gave Mr. McEwan a pin, which originally had a black bead for head until she dipped it in sealing wax. He had it on at the station in his tie, a green and blue necktie, where it showed beautifully.

That night Mr. Richardson and Abbie Ann reached the city, going to a hotel. The next day they went to the school.

It was a large, square house of red brick, with white shutters, and the door

knob and the door bell shone. The maid who answered the ring and who showed them into a parlor, was square herself, and staid and neat and noiseless. Everything in the room seemed to shine too, the furniture, the fender, the mirror between the windows, the chandeliers. Straight back mahogany chairs sat straight back against the walls.

Abbie felt her heart sinking. The truth was though she did not know it, in the midst of this depressing propriety she felt herself a very small somebody indeed, and she resented the feeling.

Then a lady came in whom Mr. Richardson rising to meet addressed as Miss Owsley.

VI

MISS OWSLEY, whom Abbie's father, after the first greeting called Miss Henrietta, was of medium height and plump, and shook comfortably when she laughed. She had white hair under a square of lace and her silk dress rustled when she moved.

Abbie Ann felt smaller, yet nobody had done a thing.

"And this is Abbie," said the lady, holding out a plump, well kept hand with good, old fashioned rings on it, a capable, resolute old hand, with a movement of decision about it that suggested sway and authority. Not that the small girl read this in it, she merely stood up and came and took it. She was very miserable.

Then they all sat down.

"Do you know," said the lady, "she is very like her mother? And while we are on the subject,—Abbie, child, see if you can find a book on the table there—"

Abbie Ann got down and went to the table on which were books neatly placed. She took one because she was told to. Within its red and gold cover, which was somewhat faded, were colored pictures of little boys in queer short jackets and long trousers. The name on the book was "Sanford and Merton." It had been on that table many years, for things did not change at Miss Owsley's school until that lady was convinced it was for the better.

Although Abbie began dutifully to read at the book, she never after asked for it that she might finish it; also, though she did not mean to listen, the conversation now and then, reached her.

"No place for a child," she heard her father say. What was no place for a child, Abbie wondered.

Abbie's last days with her father

"—Could not leave then, nor can I now," father was saying; "my duty to the miners who have stood by me and to Abbie as well, is to stick it out until it pays."

She also heard "Miss Abbie," used several times on Miss Henrietta's lips. Did it mean herself? It was very awing to hear herself called "Miss."

Then her father spoke again. His voice was decided. "Well, Miss Owsley, it is your plan; I have no right, I suppose, to object; indeed, I suppose I ought to hope you may succeed, though I may as well confess, it was because of this very thing, and the thought that such a construction of my motive might be put upon it, that I have not brought her to you sooner. I had no right to oppose Evelyn's efforts, but I naturally have made none since she,—" He broke off, then added as he rose,—"it was her dearest wish it might be so, though myself, I see no especial good to come from it now."

Evelyn was the name of Abbie's mother. She wondered what it all meant.

Then her father, leaning down, kissed her abruptly and went away, the quicker that he felt uncertain what she was going to do. He was to remain in the city a week, so this was not good-by, but still, he went in a hurry.

She stood where he had left her, plucking at the fingers of the little cotton gloves she had put on so proudly. Mr. McEwan had said they wore gloves in cities. Then she began to swallow hard.

When Miss Owsley returned from seeing Mr. Richardson to the door, she bade Abbie Ann come with her. She was very cheery and chatty and talked briskly of many things and if she saw the tears she gave no sign.

They went out into the hall and up the stairs which were painted white with a dark red baluster and had a strip of red carpet on them held down by brass rails

that shone. So did the room up-stairs shine into which Miss Owsley led the new pupil. There were two white beds, two chests of drawers, one bureau, and a wash-stand behind a blue screen. All looked straight and precise and lonesome. At home Abbie had fashion-plate ladies and pictures cut from the papers pasted over her walls, and the drawers of her bureau sat in a corner so that she might have the bureau for a three-storied play-house. It was when the strange lady had looked in at that room, that she said, "poor child!" in accents of keenest suffering.

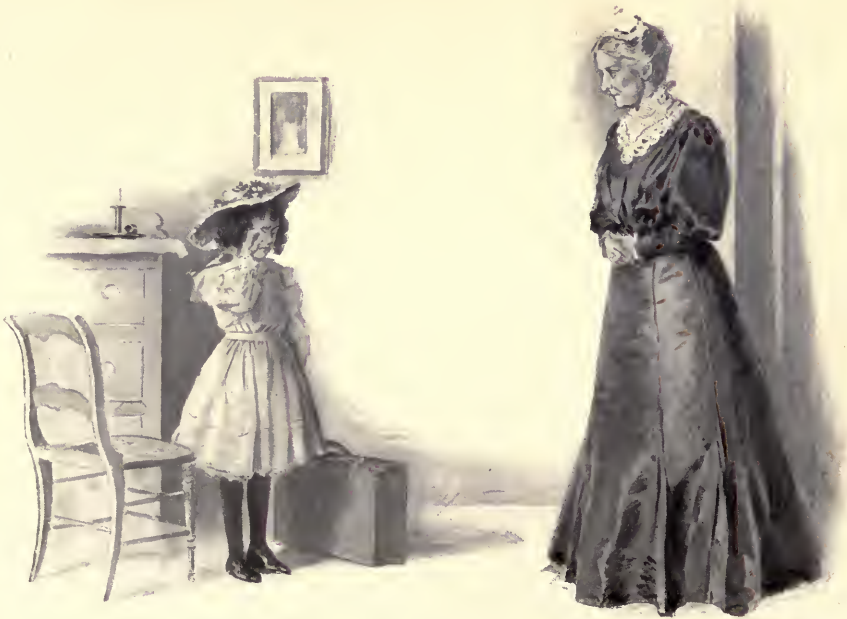
Miss Owsley was speaking with business-like briskness. "This is to be your room, near mine, as your father asked. You will share it with one other girl. Neither pupils nor teachers have returned yet. School opens on Wednesday of next week. In the meantime your father wishes me to look over your clothes to see if anything is wanting."

Abbie Ann, standing forlornly in the center of the lonesome room, began to sob. She tried to stop but could not.

"Dear, dear, dearie me," said Miss Owsley, for, truth to tell, she was nonplussed. This was not generally her department of the school, it was in executive ability that Miss Owsley was strong. She rubbed her handsome nose debatingly with a finger tip and gazed at the new pupil. Abbie Ann was plump like a young robin, and her red curls were abundant. Her little zouave jacket, sporting gilt braid with alarming elaboration, seemed rather to have burst to allow her healthy little waist to obtrude between it and the skirt, than to have been curtailed by intention, and little Abbie's brand-new hat blossomed like a flower and seed catalogue.

Planted there in the middle of the floor, she sobbed on.

"Dear, dear me," said the embarrassed Miss Owsley. The new pupil was younger by a year than any boarder ever received



"Abbie Ann, standing forlornly in the center of the lonesome room, began to sob"

before and the lady was quite perplexed, but she led her by the hand out to the hall and into another room. Perhaps she felt the bare lonesomeness of the first one too. A canary was singing here, and a fire burned in the grate.

Miss Owsley was reflecting. What had she seen the primary teacher do under such circumstances? Pupils were brought to this head of the school, as a rule, when in need of sterner methods than comforting.

Meanwhile she took off Abbie Ann's hat at which the new pupil, as if interpreting the attention as kindly, groped about for some part of this comforter's person to hold to and her hand closed on a fold of that lady's dress.

Miss Owsley, forgetting about the possible method of the primary teacher, sat down and took her in her lap while Abbie Ann sobbed against her shoulder.

"Dear me, dear me," said Miss Henrietta, and patted the little shoulder and

rocked. Abbie cried on, but the sobs were not so wild. Now and then they began to check themselves. The canary sang. She stopped to listen. Then she sat up and felt better.

Miss Owsley laughed as if to find herself in this position was amusing. Abbie, feeling better, laughed too, and suddenly did not feel strange any more, and sat up and began to talk. She showed Miss Henrietta her ring, and after that told her about Mr. McEwan, and about Fabe, and about Coal City.

Miss Owsley asked her if she had ever been to school and Abbie told her about the teachers. It is doubtful if this principal, for all her years at schooling, ever got so much of the pupil's point of view before. Her plump shoulders shook, while, one would say, she somewhat adroitly led the new pupil to tell about the teachers.

One who had come to Coal City, had been named Miss Jane Livermore. There

had been an advertisement put in the Church paper, Abbie related, and it said, "Wanted, an elderly teacher to take entire charge of a little girl." Father and Mr. McEwan chose Miss Jane Livermore from among the answers, on account of her name which they thought sounded elderly and experienced, but when she came she was seventeen and she cried so they had to let her go right back. She said she had thought it would be romantic, whereas it was only lonesome and her name was not Jane at all—they had read her writing wrong—it was Jean.

Miss Henrietta gathered even more about the last teacher of all; Miss Sallie Briscom, Abbie said was her name. She kept a row of medicine bottles on the sideboard, and a row of pill boxes on the mantel. She said she could n't stand Fabe's cooking, that there was no sense in roasting a whole quarter of a beast at once, and then eating on it until it was gone.

She said too, so Abbie told Miss Henrietta, that the look of the house was scandalous, that Abbie Ann ought to be made to pick her things up, and her father and Mr. McEwan to wipe their feet before they came in. She said too, that Abbie Ann's possessions, overflowing the house, were trash.

" 'Concentrate,' was what she said," related Abbie Ann, repeating it with great care, " 'concentrate and get rid of.' "

"And Fabe did," explained Abbie; "he poured all the bottles into one, when he was cleaning the dining-room, and he put all the pills into one box, and she got mad. She said he might have killed her. So she went."

And Miss Henrietta Owsley laughed and laughed. She had had Miss Sallie Briscoms for teachers in her day too, and even Miss Jean Livermores. And the canary sang, and the fire crackled, and Abbie Ann laughed too, with no very clear idea why, but feeling comfortable within herself.

VII

MISS OWSLEY came into the new pupil's room that afternoon to direct the maid in unpacking, and to show Abbie Ann how to put her clothes away. This relationship with a pupil was a new one and grew out of the unexpectedness of the situation. For small Abbie it was beautifully ordered, else how would she have known Miss Henrietta? Neither teachers nor other pupils had arrived yet, and Miss Owsley and the little girl had eaten dinner in the big dining-room together, waited on by the square and silent maid, whose name was Martha Lunn. Later Abbie found the girls all called her Sally.

There was something on the new pupil's

mind beside the unpacking of her trunk when Miss Owsley and Martha arrived.

"Will she be little or big, Miss Henrietta?" promptly she inquired.

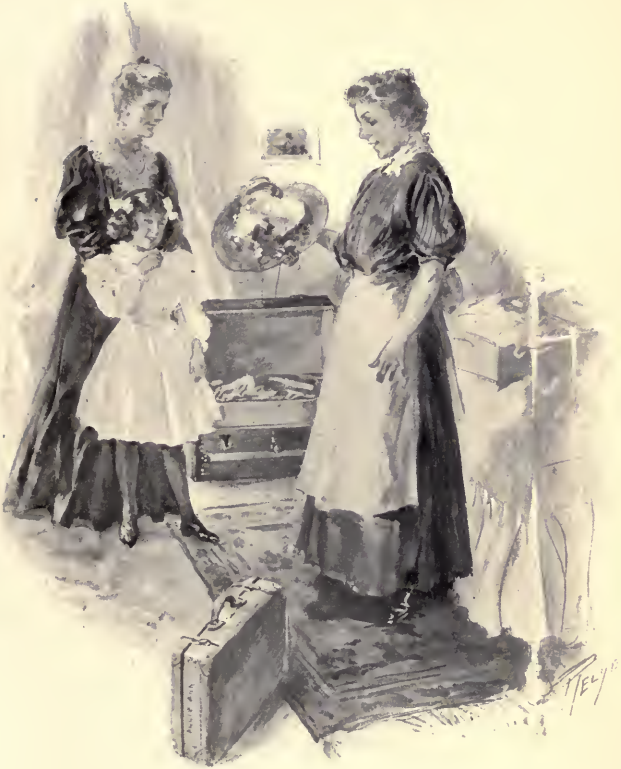
"Who?" replied Miss Owsley, contemplating the array of dresses made by the Junction lady, and now laid out by Martha on the bed. There was a plaid silk among them, a Scotch costume; a "fancy dress," the fashion paper had called it, Abbie explained, which, indeed, was exactly why she had chosen it. There were others equally gay if less elaborate, but this, it could be seen, was her favorite.

Miss Henrietta was smiling to herself over something; Abbie Ann wondered what, but repeated her question.

"Will who be little or big?" returned Miss Owsley, rousing from her own thoughts.

"The other girl in this room?"

Martha Lunn was lifting a hat from the tray. It was the new pupil's best, that was



Martha Lunn inspecting Abbie Ann's new hat

plain to be seen, and it bore a wreath of many-colored flowers made of feathers. Abbie Ann had persuaded her father to let her buy it of a man, peddling at Coal City, and she considered it very beautiful. So evidently did Martha Lunn who lifted it carefully and viewed it admiringly from all sides.

"Queer now, how they come to make such of feathers," observed Martha, examining; "my cousin's mother-in-law keeps hers like it under glass."

Miss Henrietta was indulging in her silent laugh again, and it was such a comfortable laugh that Abbie Ann laughed too, wonderingly but sociably.

Martha Lunn smiled too, in *her* way, which was grimly. She was still rubbing a forefinger investigatingly along a feathered edge. One would say all three were enjoying themselves, each in her own fashion.

"The room-mate?" then said Miss Ows-

ley, "To be sure. I will tell you the names of the ones I had thought of, and suppose I let you choose for yourself?"

Miss Henrietta Owsley grown playful! Martha Lunn again chuckled grimly as she bent over into the depths of the trunk.

"There are three girls to come back who have lost their room-mates," Miss Owsley was saying, "any one of whom I had thought of for you."

The new pupil approached close and looked at her.

"One is named Mary Dressel."

Mary Dressel, pale, neat, eminently proper. Abbie Ann had an instantaneous vision of her. Her mind was made up. "No," she said, "she 's good, I would n't like her."

Miss Owsley smiled. "Katherine Van Antwerp."

Abbie's face showed equally quick prejudice. "She would n't like me, she 's fine," she declared.

"Maria Mason."

"Oh, Maria," decided Abbie Ann, for Maria did not sound too fine, nor yet too good, "I want it to be Maria."

Miss Owsley, seeming well satisfied, laughed some more, then turned back to the now emptied trunk and then to the bed. "Nothing is marked, I see. Did you bring a work basket? No? Nor thimble? Nor darning materials?"

Abbie Ann, feeling crestfallen, said no.

The questioner seemed to make a mental note of it, then added, "Have you rubbers? Nor raincoat? Napkin ring? Nor warmer flannels than these? Nor any school dresses?"

"Those," said Abbie Ann, doubtfully, looking to the bed, "and this," fingering the dress she was then wearing. She had thought Mr. McEwan was joking when he said her clothes lacked trimming.

Miss Owsley said nothing further, but before school began, a week later, to the

bewilderment of the new pupil, the Coal City outfit was laid away, and in the closet were hung two new dresses fresh from the hands of Martha Lunn's seamstress cousin. One was a dark blue for every day, the other a brown for Sunday, and with these came a supply of white aprons, fine, long, full, with ruffles over the shoulders. There was a blue hat, and a brown one, with ribbons, but not a feather. Perhaps Miss Henrietta was something of an extremist the other way.

Abbie Ann cried, and in her room stamped her foot. It was the first time she had done so since leaving home. Martha, who had brought the new clothes home from her cousin's, witnessed it, gazing as if a little fascinated. "I thought you did n't have that red hair for nothing," finally she said.

Abbie stopped suddenly.

But she told her father about it that afternoon in the park, for he came and

took her some place every day. They were sitting under a big tree supposedly watching the ducks and swans on the lake; but she, concerned with her own troubles, was telling about the dresses.

Her father laughed. "What 's bred in the bone, Pollykins,—" he began. Then he laughed again. Abbie Ann had no idea what about.

Later his voice changed. "I had a letter from home to-day," he said, "I go back to-night instead of to-morrow."

His little daughter held on to the bench. It was as if something had stopped inside her. She could not see the lake, nor the ducks, nor the swans for a moment, only a blur of them all. As this cleared away, the sun was slanting long in under the trees, and touching the grass. Children's laughter, from afar, reached them faintly.

Why should it hurt? Why should there rush on little Abbie, because the sun slanted long and golden, the picture of a

valley, misty like a silver sea, with a white shaft beyond and a young, young moon above? Is it because all beautiful things hurt?

She put her hand in her father's, and winked the rebellious tears back somewhere. It was an uncertain little attempt, yet still it was an attempt.

But we like to have our efforts appreciated. Abbie was afraid he had n't understood. "I 'm being good, you know," she explained, looking up to be sure he comprehended it. "I could have,—" with a general implication he understood fully, "but I would n't."

Her father looked a little queer, perhaps a little sheepish too. Then he laughed. The truth was, when it came to having her cry because he was going back, that was another thing. He was a little chagrined perhaps that she did not.

But they held each other's hand on the car all the way back to the school.

VIII

BY Monday the teachers had come, and on Tuesday the pupils began returning. All day there were arrivals, and trunks being carried in, and laughter and greetings in the halls.

These days Miss Henrietta had time but for passing notice, and that of the briefest, of Abbie Ann, now become but one little girl in a girls' school of many, and Abbie, so quick to note, and so quick also to resent, hung around gloomily and watched the arrivals. She regarded these newcomers furtively. Their laughter made her feel left out, and the old intimacies and companionships everywhere in evidence, made her jealous. For comfort, she began

to coax up embers of self-pity. Miss Henrietta liked the others better, Miss Henrietta greeted them pleasantly and never noticed *her* standing there! She would go up to her room, she would write to her father and tell him to come and take her home, she would, she would so, yet,—

Abbie Ann lingered on in the hall.

She told herself it was because another girl was just then arriving but she lingered on even after the several girls standing around rushed to greet the new-comer. She was a dark-haired girl, and her cheeks were rich with crimson; she kissed everybody rapturously, then seeing Miss Owsley coming through the hall, she dropped satchel and umbrella and flew to greet her. The new-comer made one think of breeziness and laughter and excitement, and Miss Owsley, shaking hands with her, called her Mary,—Mary Dressel. Abbie Ann felt as if Mary Dressel had purposely deceived her.

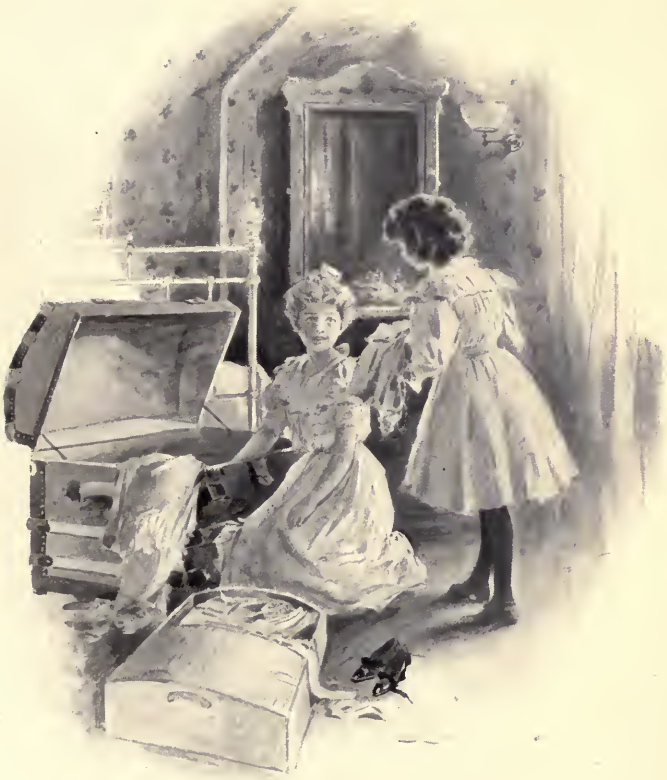
At the one o'clock dinner hour she heard another girl called Katherine Van Antwerp, a tall, thin girl who wore eyeglasses, and whose aunt, it seemed, was a teacher in the school.

Abbie Ann felt queerer; what would Maria be?

She was still hanging around in the hall, full of interest and not honest enough to admit it, when Maria Mason came. Miss Owsley called to Abbie at once, who went self-consciously to greet her. Maria was small, almost as small as Abbie herself, and her hair was smooth and tied in looped-up plaits behind her ears. Her cheeks were pink and grew pinker when she was spoken to. When she took off her jacket, she was as neat and straight as though she had not just come that afternoon from Washington. It turned out that Maria's father was an army officer, and he and her mother had been ordered too far away for her to be taken. She

spent her vacations, so Abbie learned in time, with her aunt and her grandmother in Washington, and this was her second year at the school. She was eleven, whereas Mary Dressel and Katherine were older. Abbie Ann was glad.

That afternoon she helped Maria unpack, taking the things from her as she lifted them out of her trunk, and carrying them to the bed. Maria's petticoats and little undergarments were fine as fine and the scallops on them were done by hand. Abbie had never thought about undergarments needing to be fine before. And Maria's aprons seemed as if they were for parties. She said her grandma and her auntie made them, and her mama made and sent the scalloped rufflings in her letters by mail. Maria had a work-box, and a bag for her laundry, and bags to hang for her shoes. When she had unpacked her pin-cushion and sofa pillow and her photographs, and she and Abbie Ann had



"That afternoon she helped Maria unpack"

put them around, the room looked dressed up.

Then Abbie said, "Let 's rest."

But Maria could n't. "I 've got to finish. Auntie told me to."

She laughed and her cheeks grew pink, but she did it; that was Maria's way, she always did it; perhaps being an army officer's daughter had something to do with it.

Soon Abbie Ann wondered what she would have done without Maria, who told her what was expected of her, and the names of the teachers, and of the girls, and what she must do and must not do. The bedrooms were all in the big house, together with the reception rooms and parlor and dining-room, but the schoolrooms were in a frame building in the yard behind.

In a week it was as if she might always have known Maria, who even showed Abbie her letters from her mother and her father. The latter sent her a beautiful silk

American flag on his birthday, and they put it above his picture over the table.

Abbie showed Maria the letters which came from her father and Mr. McEwan. One from the latter had a verse in it which Maria memorized and when she said it she would get to laughing. Abbie Ann would giggle too, for when Maria laughed she could not stop, and Miss Ingram, the primary teacher whose room was next, would rap on the wall and they would have to put their faces in the pillows to hush. Abbie, in her letter to Mr. McEwan, had written about the school and Miss Henrietta and Martha Lunn.

"The girls call her Sally," she had written about Martha, "she fell down the other day, she was Heavy, the Ladder broak, she could not get up."

It was to this letter that Mr. McEwan was replying. In his answer were, "Lines to Miss Sally Lunn Upon Her Fall From a Ladder." The verses read:

Abbie Ann

"O Sally Lunn, how sad to tell
That you, who should be light,
Did prove so heavy that you fell
From such a risen height!

"They tell me that you could not rise
After you fell, and yet
Should you not rise in lighter guise
For having thus been set?

"O Sally Lunn, O Sally Lunn,
That you should fall was bad;
But lest you should be worse undone
Don't let it make you sad!"

IX

THE youngest pupil began to like school well enough—that is, all but the weekly attendance at church. Ministers came seldom indeed to Coal City and even on these occasions Abbie's father let her go home before sermon time, and carried peppermint drops in his vest pocket for her during the time she was there, but there is no one at boarding-school to remember she was such a very, very little girl—how would there be?

Every Sunday the girls were taken in procession, two by two, to Miss Owsley's own church where they occupied a number of pews reserved for them.

One very warm Sunday morning in late October, Abbie Ann took her place in the

rear of the procession unwillingly enough, walking with Maria, they being the smallest.

The sun was hot and Abbie followed the line in with a sigh of relief. Being the last, she and Maria sat in the last row of the school pews.

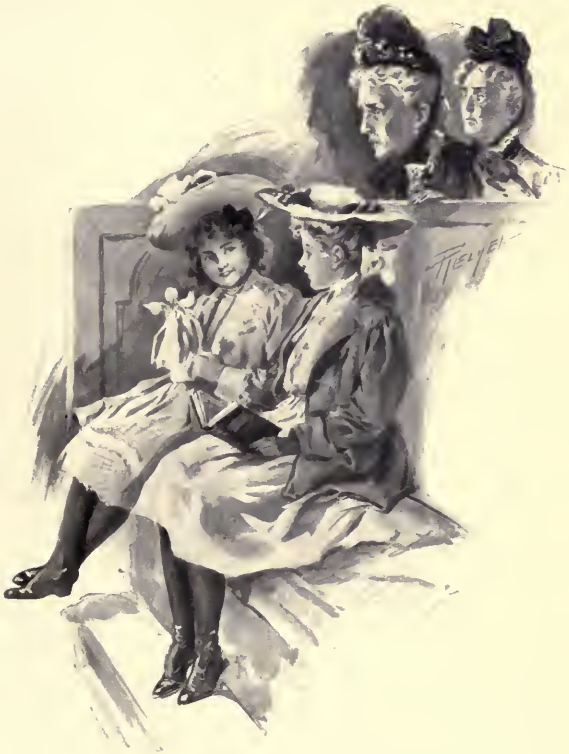
It all seemed long to the youngest pupil. She yawned, she stretched her small legs which dangled wearily between seat and floor, she thought of the mountains, and of father and Mr. McEwan, and of the merry day they might be having together.

Wriggling, she twisted her handkerchief in her hands, which brought to mind a game she and Mr. McEwan sometimes played. With some labor, for Abbie Ann was not dexterous with her fingers, she knotted one of the corners of the handkerchief, then thrusting her small finger into the knot and adjusting the skirts around about her little fist, forthwith the miniature puppet began to nod and dance.

Abbie Ann looked at Maria, who, following the glance down to her hand, shook her head and looked shocked. The solemn puppet nodded wickedly, and Maria gave a giggle.

Suddenly the puppet became a ghost and came stalking stiffly toward Maria who gave a little shriek, hastily muffled, it is true, but not before whack! came something on Abbie Ann's head, and both looked hastily round into the faces of two old ladies, two pompous and fine old ladies, two very well-dressed old ladies who were eyeing Abbie Ann severely, while the one who had tapped her on the head with a fan, shook that article in a threatening manner.

Abbie, startled, met this person's gaze. With her glowing cheeks, her wealth of hair, her flashes of smile and storm, her brown eyes, roving, speculating, wondering, Abbie was more than pretty, though she did not know this. Had any one ever



"Suddenly the puppet became a ghost"

seen a little girl anything in appearance like her before, that person would have been apt to remember it.

As Abbie turned, the old lady with the fan straightened herself suddenly, and looked at this youngest of Miss Owsley's pupils strangely. Indeed, the pupil could feel the look going through her, as it were, and also she knew she had been naughty, and was being reprimanded, in church, and by strangers. Maria's face, too, was crimson and she looked as though she might be going to cry.

Abbie feeling a sudden hatred of every one around her, of school and of everything connected with it, for she could not stand it to be in the wrong, buried her face in the cushioned pew back and began to sob.

Maria pulled her. "Miss Walsh is looking," she whispered. Now Miss Walsh, the head teacher, was tall and sparing of her words, so that a mere look on her part

was generally effective. Indeed that part of boarding-school consisting of Miss Walsh was all tradition had made it out to be. Abbie turned about hastily, to find that everybody seemed to be looking at her, that even the girls in front had turned around solicitously.

She hated to be looked at, she hated to be pitied, and she gave a sudden sob of rage.

Miss Walsh, turning again, looked at little Miss Ingram, and little Miss Ingram, on whom all unpleasant tasks seemed to fall, perhaps because she let them, rose and beckoned to the youngest pupil.

Eyed by her neighbors, that small person stood up, and Maria, tearful herself, handed her her prayer-book, and, disgraced and overwhelmed, small Abbie Ann crept out of the pew, and was led down the long aisle and out of the church.

It is something of an ordeal to walk down an aisle like that. When they got

out, little Miss Ingram's face was scarlet, and her lips were pressed tightly, and she turned the youngest pupil in the right direction by rather a sharp grasp on her shoulder. The small person looked up, startled, but Miss Ingram made no remarks and the walk was in silence.

Miss Henrietta, who had remained at home because of a cold, looked grave when Abbie Ann was led in. It was at times such as this that she generally came in touch with her pupils.

Miss Ingram tried to explain, having guessed at what had happened from the little she had seen.

"Abbie," she reported, "mistreated Maria Mason in church."

Abbie Ann could n't believe her ears; she turned on little Miss Ingram like a fury. She stamped her foot, she tore her hat off and flung it across the room and that the elastic snapped and stung her chin did not help things either. "I did n't!"

she raved, "I did n't! I hate school! I 'm going home to my father—" And brought to a finish only because she choked, she flung herself on the floor and burst into tears.

Miss Henrietta motioning the horrified Miss Ingram out, waited until she was gone. Then she spoke, and her voice was changed so that it made Abbie, even in her rage, look up. Miss Henrietta's face, too, was as changed as her voice.

"I shall not try to talk to you until you can act like a human being. Does rage convert you into something lower than human that you should grovel? Get up and go to your room." And she turned about to the window while Abbie Ann crept out.

Only that little soul knew what the next hours in her room meant. Miss Henrietta had shown Abbie Ann to herself. All the rest was forgotten in the memory of that question: "Does rage convert you into

something lower than a human, that you should grovel?"

Small Abbie had never heard the word grovel before, but somehow she knew what it meant. Nor do the Abbie Anns have to be older than nine to know when a thing is true. She had been blessed with a large and comfortable opinion of herself, and this view was upsetting. Perhaps the statements made by the lady visitor to Coal City were true too, which was what made them also unpleasant.

The day passed; no one came near her except Martha, who at dinner time entered, put a tray on the table silently, took a look around, and went out.

What of Maria? Abbie Ann's heart yearned for Maria, her comforter and counselor, the steady-going Maria. The last she had seen of Maria, her pink little cheeks were wet with tears for Abbie, who, remembering, wept less violently, and even got up and investigated the tray.

There was turkey and cranberries, and—yes, chocolate pudding. Abbie Ann's heart softened to the bigness of Miss Henrietta in the matter and she wept some more. Not that she meant to touch it! The fitness of things showed even Abbie Ann the incongruity of turkey to tragedy. She was resolved that Martha Lunn should carry that tray out untouched, exactly as it came in.

She looked a little shamefaced when later Martha Lunn came for the tray, and it was empty. We hate to acknowledge to ourselves that we are not built for the bigger rôles in life.

Martha, having met some Abbie Anns in her time before, smiled grimly, which hardened that little person's heart again, so that she felt she hated them all, even—yes, even Maria.

But late in the afternoon the sun streamed in, low and level, a moment before setting, and oddly enough it made the

youngest pupil cry some more, but with no rage in the tears now.

A moment later there came a tap, and then the door opened to Maria's touch. Now she might have had her own cause for grievance, having been shut out of her room for no shortcomings of her own, but she only looked concerned.

"Abbie," she said, and the very tones of her anxious little voice brought comfort, "Miss Owsley says you are to come out,— it 's supper."

A disheveled little figure arose from the bed and flung itself upon Maria. "Oh," said Abbie Ann, steeped in repentance, as it were, "I 'll never take more than my share of the pegs, Maria, never any more."

Then, before Maria could reply, she was gone.

Miss Henrietta was reading. Now it is to be noted that the stout, portly lady capped with the lace square upon her white

hair was "Miss Henrietta" to but one person in her school, and to the rest she represented Miss Owsley.

There came a tap at her door, and a panting Abbie Ann burst in and flung herself upon the portly bosom of Miss Henrietta. "I 'm sorry, I 'm sorry," she sobbed.

Doubtless Miss Owsley should have reprimanded such impulsiveness, but instead, she lifted the plump little person up to her lap and let her cry there. Who knows but secretly it was dear to her to comfort the repentant youngest pupil?

When Martha Lunn came in a moment later, Miss Owsley put the youngest pupil down a little hastily, with something of the same shamefaced look on her face, that had been known to be on Abbie's parent's, when, for instance, he tip-toed up to his little daughter's room to see what she was doing, after he had punished her. Also Miss Owsley hastily suggested that

the youngest pupil owed something to Miss Ingram. Abbie went slowly out; she would go to Miss Ingram because Miss Henrietta said so, but she did n't love Miss Ingram.

Martha Lunn made pretense of brushing up the already immaculate hearth.

"They 've got a tempestuous, stormy road to travel, I 've al'ays noticed—redheads have," remarked Martha, incidentally.

X

ON the following Friday, Miss Owsley sent for Abbie Ann.

"Instead of walking with the school this afternoon," she said to the inquiring little girl who appeared, "I wish you to go with me to call upon some ladies who knew your mother."

"Yes 'm," said Abbie, virtuously, for the repentant uplift was still upon her. She wondered who the ladies might be, but it was not hers, this proper little girl's part, to ask. One almost might have looked to see her little hands folded, so chastened was the deportment of the youngest pupil.

Miss Henrietta, noticing the air of virtuous attention, turned away; was it because of sudden laughter that shook her shoulders?

Abbie Ann, departing, put on her best cashmere with the aid of Martha Lunn, but not without a sigh, chastened though she was, for the glories of a banished wardrobe that she knew of. This done, and hat and cloak on, she went and knocked at Miss Henrietta's door.

That lady viewed her critically. "Tell Martha to bring your brush," she said. And when that soul came, she had her brush Abbie's hair all over again. Now Martha had an artist's pride in her handiwork; she did n't see anything wanting as it was, but good-naturedly plied the brush with vigorous hand again, then slipped a forefinger in a curl and displayed it. "Ekal to a good brass polish, that shine is," she commented.

At last Miss Henrietta seemed satisfied and they went down the steps together, but she seemed quite nervous and unlike herself all the way. It was not far, half a dozen squares perhaps, into the older

part of the city, but Miss Owsley had settled Abbie's hat, and retouched her curls several times, perhaps because of the freakish wind of the bleak November day, before they stopped at a red brick house with white trimmings and heavy white shutters.

"Now, Abbie," she said, "try to be a little lady."

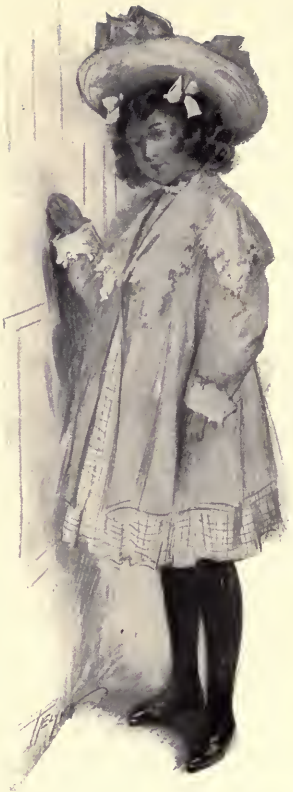
This remark was disconcerting, it put Abbie Ann out of conceit with her recent efforts and made her a little sulky. They went up the steps together, the stout old lady and the plump little girl.

An elderly woman in cap and apron opened the door.

"Well, Eliza," said Miss Owsley.

"How do you do, ma'am," said Eliza, but it was at the little girl with the burnished curls she was looking. Eliza seemed nervous too. "In the library, please," she said.

"Very well, Eliza. Now, my dear," this



Abbie Ann knocking at Miss Henrietta's door

to Abbie Ann, "try to behave prettily," which again was an unfortunate way of putting it.

Miss Henrietta led the way and vaguely wondering what was expected of her, Abbie Ann followed down the hall and through a curtained doorway.

Two tall figures arose in the half gloom and, the first greetings over, Miss Henrietta Owsley drew a little girl with burnished curls from behind her with the remark, "I have brought her, you see."

Tall, imposing, bewilderingly bedecked, there stood the two old ladies who had frowned on Abbie Ann and had witnessed her disgrace in church.

If there was room for any thought in that overwhelmed little sinner's heart, it was that she might not be remembered.

The tallest and straightest of the old ladies spoke. "So it is the child I was obliged to correct in church last Sunday."

The three elderly dames gazed down on the one little girl.

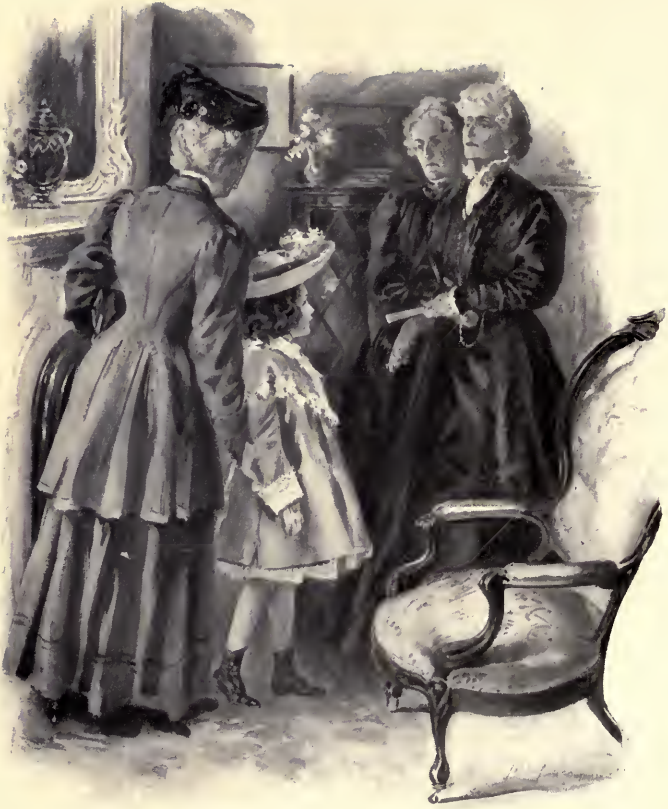
"Of all disappointing things—" the little girl heard Miss Owsley say, then saw her turn to the other, the more kindly-looking lady. "Well, Ann, and have you no word of welcome for Evelyn's child, either?"

That lady had been standing in the shadow of the other. She came forward, her fineries rustling like the wind through the dry-leafed boughs at end of autumn and took the little girl's hand. "What is your name, my dear?" she asked, somewhat timidly.

"Abbie Ann Richardson," said the owner of the name, faintly, and in a voice she certainly never had heard before.

At that the lady dropped her hand suddenly, and the other old lady said, quite fiercely, "Where did you get your name?"

"My sponsors," actually trembled on the dazed youngest pupil's lips, she having



"'I have brought her, you see'"

newly reached that point in a recently introduced thing called catechism, but Miss Owsley's hand upon her shoulder recalled her in time and she said she did not know.

"Do you not know for whom you are named?" persisted the old lady, eyeing the plump little girl keenly.

"No, ma'am," said Abbie Ann, swallowing hard.

"I told you that the child knows nothing," said Miss Owsley, tartly.

The lady frowned. "You are named for *me,*" she announced abruptly, "for me and for this lady," and she brought the other old lady, who had melted away behind her again, forward by a tap with her fan. "We are your great-aunts. I am your great-aunt, Abbie Norris, and this is your great-aunt, Ann Norris."

She paused and seemed to wait for the effect of her words. She could not have been disappointed. The little girl gasped and turned toward Miss Owsley help-

lessly. She remembered afterward wondering if they were *great* aunts because they were so tall and so terrifying.

Miss Owsley looked flushed and annoyed. "What is the use—" she began.

"Exactly," interrupted Aunt Abbie Norris. "What is the use of all this mystery?"

"Oh, sister!" said Aunt Ann Norris. Then she turned to Miss Owsley. She looked frightened and fluttered. "Sit down, dear Henrietta," she begged, for everybody had been standing.

"I knew who she was when she looked up in church," announced Aunt Abbie Norris. "She has every Norris feature. It is of no use to lay plots for me, Henrietta, I did not know she was in the city, but the moment she looked up, I knew her."

"Sister!" cried Aunt Ann. "And you did not say a word when Henrietta came to ask if she might bring her!"

Aunt Abbie looked a trifle disconcerted, if her severe countenance *could* look such a thing. "I did not want to spoil Henrietta's plans," she said, and turned on her little niece suddenly.

That small person was sitting uneasily on the edge of her chair and at Aunt Abbie's sudden movement she almost fell off.

"How did you happen to come here to school?" Aunt Abbie demanded, and she said it with the air of one who announces, "I have you now."

Abbie Ann caught her breath. Miss Henrietta gave her a little touch. "It was on account of the flat-car," said Abbie Ann in a high voice, desperately.

"What?" demanded Aunt Abbie.

"The flat-car," said Abbie Ann, trying not to cry.

The door opened and Eliza came in with a tray on which were glasses and a plate of cakes.

"You may take a cake, Abbie Ann,"

said Miss Henrietta, when the tray was passed. The small person took one and held to it miserably.

"Now what was that about a flat-car?" demanded Aunt Abbie.

But Aunt Ann, interposing in a fluttered way, timidly called the little niece to her. One almost would have said *she,* too, was afraid of Aunt Abbie.

Little Abbie went to Aunt Ann's side. She even looked up timidly after Aunt Abbie turned and went on talking to Miss Henrietta. *This* great-aunt's hair was soft gray, where Aunt Abbie's was hard gray, though both wore it alike, much waved and crimped.

Aunt Ann bent and took off the niece's hat, and drew her against her knee. "Now, my dear," she said, with a sudden little authority, "tell me what it was about a flat-car."

Thus encouraged, Abbie Ann told of her adventures on that object, and of Jim

and the girl at the hotel, and of the ring, and of how she and father had agreed to do their duty, and so she had come to Miss Henrietta to school, and forgetting the terrifying Aunt Abbie, who fortunately was behind her, Abbie Ann told it to Aunt Ann quite naturally and at the end began to eat her cake.

But here Miss Henrietta, who had been talking with Miss Abbie, arose. "Tell your aunts good-by," she said.

Abbie Ann knowing but one meaning of the command, put her plump little face up to Aunt Ann willingly enough, but went over to Aunt Abbie with visible reluctance, while that person stooped and touched the little forehead with a hasty, "There, there."

Eliza saw them to the door, but as they stepped out into the vestibule there came a rustle behind them, and there was Aunt Ann looking flurried and unhappy. One would not have thought one old lady could

have had on so many chains and chatelaines and pins and rings and trinkets. Abbie Ann loved chains and rings and trinkets herself, and gazed upward at Aunt Ann's.

"You must not mind, dear Henrietta," Aunt Ann was saying in a hurried way; "you know how much she thinks of you behind it all."

"H'm," said Miss Henrietta. Perhaps she was wondering now why she had done it.

"H'm," said Miss Henrietta. Perhaps

"Humph," said a voice grimly, from within the hall, and as Miss Ann went in hastily, Miss Henrietta and the little girl with the burnished curls went down the steps. It would seem as if all that burnishing had been for naught.

Miss Henrietta seemed most decidedly put out over something. Abbie Ann had too guilty a fear it was connected with her behavior at church to gather courage to

open her mouth. They trudged along in silence.

After a long time Abbie Ann spoke. Much as there was she wanted to know, one thing lay nearest. "What is it," she asked, "a *feature?*"

"Feature?" repeated Miss Henrietta, a little sharply perhaps—"feature? What do you mean? Oh—to be sure,—it 's some part of your face, a person's nose perhaps,—mouth, forehead, hair,—"

Abbie Ann seemed to draw a relieved breath. "Aunt Abbie's hair is gray," she said.

"It used to be red," said Miss Henrietta.

The rest of the way was in heavy silence.

As they reached their own door, Miss Henrietta spoke again. "I prefer your father should explain why you have not known your aunts before, you may tell him of this visit when you write."

Then they went in.

Abbie Ann hurried to Maria, who lis-

tened to it all with eager interest. "Is an aunt a great-aunt when she gets old?" Abbie Ann wondered.

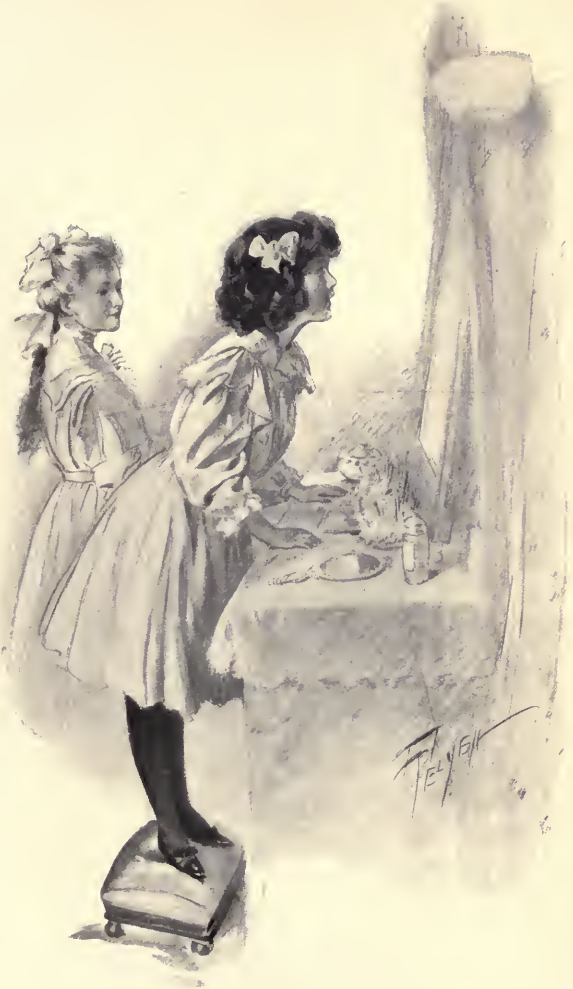
"I hope not," said Maria decidedly, for Maria had an auntie of her own.

"What made her so cross do you suppose?" queried the wondering Abbie Ann, still dwelling on great-aunt Abbie.

Maria had no idea.

"But so 's Miss Ingram," she reasoned; "some are and some ain't; 't ain't a reason —it 's *you.*"

But Abbie was studying her nose closely and critically in the glass of the bureau. "I don't care if she did say I had every Norris feature, I have n't; say it, Maria, say I have n't got a nose like great-aunt Abbie's."



"Abbie was studying her nose closely and critically"

XI

ITH considerable effort and much ink Abbie Ann wrote a letter to her father that very evening. Maria was downstairs practising, so the spelling was Abbie's own:

"Deer Father," she wrote, "we went to see Them. Aunt Ann is not so grate an Aunt as Aunt Abbie is but I like her the Best. I hope I will not Go to see them Anny more. Maria is well. I love her Next to you and Mr. McEwan. I sed I wode be glad not to have Them for my Aunts and she sed you cant be chewsers in kin its what you have got. Miss Henrietta said I might ask you about my aunts and so I do.

"Your true daughter
"Abbie Ann Richardson.

"Do you know what is a Norris feechur? Do you think I have Got them deer Father I do not think I have."

If Maria was well when Abbie so stated it in her letter, she was the reverse of it by the next day. On the afternoon's mail Abbie Ann received a postal card which looked businesslike and official and was signed "A. M. McEwan, Agent," and which stated:

"Box shipped to-day. B, o, x, box. Contents selected with view to midnight alarms. Nothing liable to crunch audibly included. Arranged in quantities for bosom friends in sixes. C, a, r, a, m, e, l, s, caramels."

Maria heard the news of the postal card listlessly, and the mention of the caramels seemed to make her unhappy.

"But Fabe uses cream and butter and chocolate, all, in *his* caramels, Maria, they are rich," attested Abbie anxiously.

Maria turned, anguished. "I wish you would n't roll it around in your mouth so, telling of it," she said; "it is as bad as if you were eating them!"

"Abbie Ann wrote a letter to her father"

A little later Maria's cheeks from being pale became sharply pink and being found thus by Martha Lunn, she was hastily removed to that top-floor room called the infirmary. They gave it even chances for a day to be measles, but, fortunately enough, since it was a large day- and boarding-school together, it was a false alarm, and proved to be Maria's poor stomach.

"It 's a weak digestion," Martha Lunn informed the solicitous Abbie Ann, "and she brought it with her"—it was as if Martha was jealous for the reputation of Miss Owsley's Select School—"but she 's brought *more too,* she 's brought a good disposition along with it and that 's saying a good deal when the seat of the trouble 's near the liver!"

Accordingly, cheered by messages from Maria, Abbie's mind could revert to the news of the postal card. From the first, she had grasped that a box from home is

a secret and confidential affair, yet she found herself rather embarrassed by that fact. How was she to keep it so? Yet she anxiously gathered that Mr. McEwan expected her to. She missed the sage counselings of Maria.

Her next claim for advice, after that on Maria, seemed to be with Mary Dressel, who might have been her room-mate if Maria had not. So might Katherine Van Antwerp, but Abbie felt that somehow Katherine never seemed to be sought by any one. Martha Lunn said the trouble was with herself.

"It 's a porkypine's own bristles keep a distance round it, not ours," declared Martha. "I don't call it pride that acts oncivil because a body 's here on its teacher aunt's bounty and a scholarship, and resents it. It 's a mighty poor pride that resents it after it 's taken it. I call it false shame, myself," said Martha.

At any rate, whatever the reason for it,

Abbie went for advice about her box to Mary Dressel and not to Katherine.

"He said Albemarle County pippins would be in it, and maple-sugar and hickory-nut candy," Abbie confided, "and a cake, maybe two, and Fabe, our cook, *he* promised there should be a turkey, roasted, and beaten biscuits. And Mr. McEwan, telling me about boxes, said you lock your door, after you 've asked your friends to come, and then you open the box—"

Mary Dressel's lively countenance grew livelier, the scarlet of her cheeks deepened, and her dimples came and went. "No?" she said, as one being informed. "And then?"

"Did n't *you* ever have a box?" Abbie asked, surprised.

"No, only pocket money," regretfully. "I have to do my treating in soda-water. Stupid, is n't it? But of course if your Mr. Mc——, what 's his name, says *his*

and your box is a secret, why, of course, it 's got to be a secret, and that settles it! Besides, it gives a box the flavor of the real thing, does n't it? I 'll tell you, Abbie Ann, you let me engineer this for you," and Mary's lively face grew livelier still. "Whom shall we ask to come?"

Miss Owsley's establishment was not so large a boarding-school as it was a day school, and it so happened that the boarding girls were all older than Abbie and Maria.

"Why," said Abbie Ann, a little at a loss, now that it came to the point, to know who were her bosom friends beyond Maria, "why—"

"You leave it to me," again said the lively Mary, "or, no, I 'll tell you whom to ask. I 'll see 'em first, that 's the best way, then you go and ask them. Rosina, and Bess, for a start, and Florry and Kitty next, we can have *more* than six, Abbie, a *whole* turkey, my goodness! Ask Henrietta Havering, too, and Clarice

Carr"—was it possible this lively Mary was suggesting all that set known as *her* particular friends?—"and, I suppose you ought, you 'll *have* to have Katherine Van Antwerp, seeing who *you* are, and who she is—"

Abbie did not at all understand. "Oh!" she said, with prejudice, "do we have to have her, Mary? Why do we have to?"

Mary looked surprised. "I supposed on account of the scholarship you would feel you had to," she said, "but if you don't want her, I am sure I don't, for we have all tried to be nice with her, and she—"

"The scholarship?" Abbie had no idea what Mary was talking about. Martha Lunn had mentioned this, too, but though Abbie was altogether hazy about what a scholarship was, she was not going to tell Mary Dressel so. The Abbies object to admitting they don't know.

"We won't have her," she declared, as the safest way of dismissing the subject.

"But won't Martha Lunn find out about the box when it comes, and won't she have to tell?"

"You leave it to me," said Mary, grown lively again. "I 've been here longer than you have." And accordingly Abbie left it, only inquiring about one thing further.

"Won't we have to dress up, since it is a party?" she asked.

Mary grew livelier and laughed as she met the anxious gaze of Abbie Ann. Perhaps she was wondering what Abbie would evolve to dress up in. "Why, yes," she said, "dress up, it 's just the thing."

All the guests accepted. There seemed to be a disposition among them to giggle when they did so. Indeed, they giggled all that next day. Miss Henrietta Owsley seemed amused over something, too, every time she noticed Abbie Richardson, and so, grimly, did Martha Lunn.

Mary Dressel seemed bubbling over with lively spirits, such as pirouetting

Abbie passes Katherine Van Antwerp in the hall

about the halls whenever Abbie chanced to see her.

At recess she sought Abbie. "It 's come," she whispered, with large secrecy; "it 's up-stairs and safely hid away in your room!"

She meant the box! Not even Maria could have been such a helper as this, though Abbie could not imagine how Mary could have managed it.

In going to and from classes that day, Abbie Ann Richardson seemed to do nothing but pass Katherine Van Antwerp going to her classes too, though it is just possible she noticed Katherine because it was on her mind that she had not included her. She wondered, too, what a scholarship was.

She went out of her way after school to seek Martha to ask about it, and found her counting laundry in the linen closet.

"What 's a scholarship, Martha?" she inquired.

"It 's what enables a person what 's proved she 's capable of taking a edycation, to get it," said Martha, promptly. " 'T ain't a case of money thrown away as with some of the rest of you. Some rich body arranges it, and some brainy body uses it. It 's a loan to be paid back in brains. Think you 'll aim to get one?"

"Martha," said Abbie, changing the subject as it became personal; "did *you* ever have a secret?" She asked it as if the weight of one were bothersome. "It 's a thing you have to *keep,* you know—"

"Then I 'd keep it," said Martha Lunn, promptly.

Mary Dressel said she would come to Abbie's room early that evening to help her dress, and to prepare matters. When she arrived she had hunted out a partyfied summer dress for herself, adorned with a sash and ribbons, but Abbie eclipsed her.

The box had been temporarily stored, by some remarkable machination on

Mary's part, in Abbie's closet for secret keeping, and in that same closet a trunk, also was stored for safe-keeping, the contents of which Abbie Ann had by no means forgotten. To-night she had gone into its treasured contents, and was donning part of the same when the lively Mary arrived.

They conversed in low and secret whispers. The skirt Abbie Ann was getting into, was tartan and kilted, and it was to be worn, as it developed, with a full white waist beneath an abbreviated jacket, the whole surmounted by a tartan sash diagonaling the wearer's person from one shoulder to the opposite hip. She explained to Mary that it was called a Scotch costume, and was also set down in the fashion paper as "a fancy dress." Perhaps Abbie had grown since it was made, or else the dressmaker's skill had been limited, for the tartan kilt was short even as kilts go, and the jacket part proved

filled to bursting. Mary Dressel seemed overcome as she viewed her young friend after she was in it.

Abbie, however, was concerned in pointing out how she had adorned the room with flowers in numerous bunches.

"I took them off my hats," she explained to Mary, "I never seemed to be using 'em that way!"

She also had pulled and shoved and pushed Mr. McEwan's box out from the closet to the middle of the floor in anticipation, and returning to examination of it again, she promptly burst the sleeve of her Scotch costume in stooping, but Mary kindly pinned it together.

The exigencies of hostess are disturbing if one is not used to them. "What have we got to cut a turkey with, Mary?" Abbie queried, anxiously, "and how are we ever to open the box? It 's nailed. Somebody 'll hear us!"

"Hush," said Mary, with lively caution;

"sh-h—, there, I knew it would come! It 's Martha, fly! There in the closet, latch the door, quick! Don't open it until everything is quiet!"

Abbie flew. And did the lights go down? Yes, she could witness through her closet transom that they did. But why did not Mary come in the closet too? Could she have waited to turn the lights low, and then gone under the bed?

And what then? Abbie held her breath. Was Martha Lunn choosing night, of all times, to do spring cleaning, in November, in Abbie Ann's room? She heard heavy articles moving, and heavy feet tramping, the roll of castors across the floor, and then hammering. And did she —yes, unquestionably, she seemed to hear suppressed laughter. And chuckles? Was it Martha Lunn's chuckles?

Abbie could not understand. She started to open the door despite injunctions, but tones of another voice she knew

arrested her, the tones of Miss Henrietta. Was she, too, laughing? Then came a sudden buzz and chatter of animated arrivals.

Abbie Ann walked out as the lights flared up. There were candles on the mantel in the usually empty candlesticks, and Martha was lighting them. The party was there in both senses, one part of it in festive dresses and ribbons, and the other part, the box, neatly placed on a paper and open. In the room sat a table, no, two cutting-tables, put together, with a cloth laid thereon to be spread upon them, and with implements thereon, too, such as knives, forks, paper-plates and other articles of attack and conveyance useful in food-matters. On a side-table were lemons, ice, sugar, glasses, and a bowl, Miss Owsley's contribution, so it developed later, to the party, though by now she and Martha Lunn had melted away, and vanished!

For Miss Owsley and Martha had known about it all along! Miss Henrietta had had a communication concerning the box too, her note being from Abbie Ann's father, asking if it might come; and later she had another note telling her that it had started!

Moreover, it was the expected thing in Miss Owsley's school for a party to follow, whenever a box came, and Mary Dressel knew it! Miss Henrietta's theory was, that the sooner the party was given, the quicker the box was gone, and the more of the school invited to partake of it, the less per young stomachs to go into them and the better chance of no after consequences for anybody! And grim Martha Lunn had entered into the joke with the lively Mary, and Miss Henrietta had smiled too, and let it go on.

Abbie Ann, coming out to this lively information and gay laughter, did not know whether to stamp her foot and be

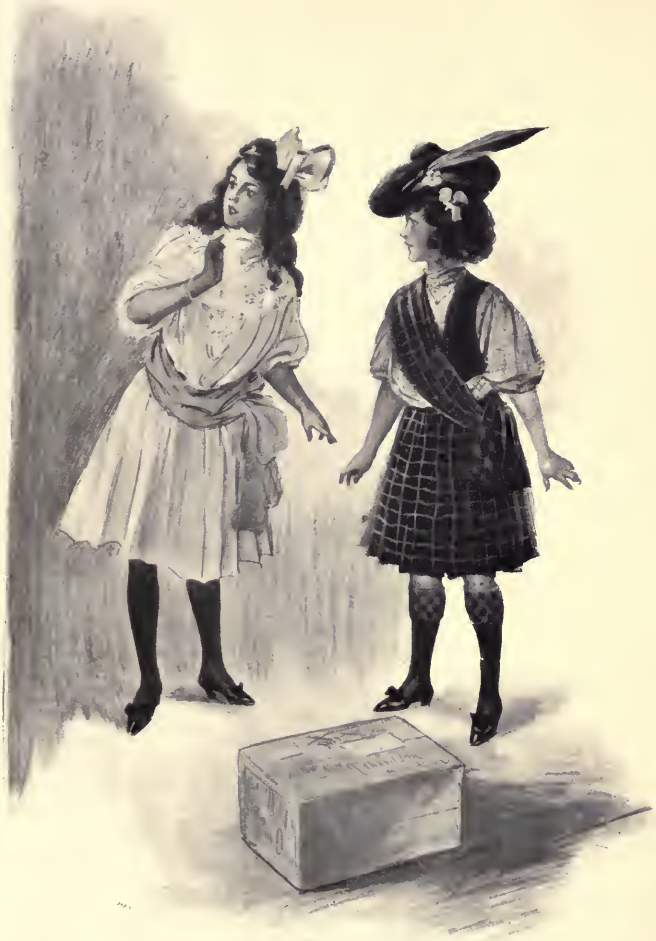
mad, or to take the matter as it was meant, and laughed too.

She stood there, in her Scotch skirts, deciding, while the party, breathless with laughter and the spectacle of the tartan splendor, waited, when the door opened again and Martha Lunn returned. She was bearing something in her big, strong arms, something wrapped in a blanket, which she deposited on the bed and which, suddenly discarding its wrappings and sitting up, pink with the joy of it, proved to be Maria.

"She can have a lemonade and a beat biscuit, since you say you got 'em in the box, but nary 'nother thing, mind that," said Martha.

And Abbie Ann, in her joy at beholding Maria, forgot the question of temper she was deciding, and flew to embrace her.

They left the opening of her box, all but the nailed cover which Martha had removed, to Abbie, while Mary and her as-



Abbie's box arrives

sistants spread the table, and the remainder made the lemonade. But before Abbie Ann had done more than fold back the upper layer of white paper, Florry Morton made a remark.

"It is as much fun as the Evelyn Norris scholarship treat at Easter," she announced.

Abbie Ann was so surprised she laid down the envelop she had found within the box, and looked around though the envelop did undoubtedly contain verses.

"What 's the Evelyn Norris scholarship treat?" she asked Florrie.

At this, the party all looked at Abbie oddly, that is all except Maria who evidently had not caught the connection up to now, either.

"We supposed *you* knew, it 's an 'in memory' endowment," said Florry, hesitatingly; "Katherine Van Antwerp has the scholarship and the treat is a party with music and flowers every spring in

memory of Evelyn Norris. Two old ladies named Norris established it."

Abbie Ann, who was on the floor by the box, hardly seemed at first to grasp what it meant. Yet Evelyn Norris was her own young mother, and the scholarship was proving to be something in memory of that mother! The old ladies' part in it hardly mattered! And as this much dawned on Abbie she dashed the envelop to the ground, darted up, and, tartan kilts and all, banged open the door and flew out of the room.

When she returned she was dragging Katherine Van Antwerp by the hand. Taken by storm and the impetuous onslaught of Abbie, something had moved Katherine to come; perhaps it was justice to that "In Memory of Evelyn Norris," together with the sudden and ardent embraces of the daughter of Evelyn that brought her. Moreover, her usually pale face was pink, and she could n't keep her

eye-glasses on, they were dangling on their cord, because of,—could it be, for laughter? Indeed, since it was her first view of her hostess in the scant kilt of a Scotch costume, one realized the most self-contained Katherine in the world could hardly have helped it had she wanted to. As it was, it broke the ice of her shy reserve.

"She 's my best friend now, Katherine is," said Abbie with emphasis, bringing her in. "Maria *was,* but I 'm *Abbie* Norris, and—and the other is—is *Evelyn* Norris, and—and so, you see, Katherine has got to let herself be."

Later, over the turkey and the lesser glories of the box,—for the turkey being Fabe's own affair, was bigger even than that mighty structure of his art, the cake, —they read the verses.

They were by Mr. McEwan, Abbie explained, and hospitably made the guests feel they had every right to their share,

though they were addressed to Miss Abbie Ann Richardson, and said:

"Believe me if all these digestion's sweet harms
Which I send thee so rashly to-day
Are devoured by thee only, 't is feared thy young charms
With abruptness will fade quite away.
There is here quite enough for all friends of thy heart,
Let thy appetite be as it will;
Else above the dire ruin of what thou then art
Pious warning will tell of thee still."

XII

THE next day, which was Friday, before an answer had time to come to Abbie's letter to her father, Miss Henrietta sent for the youngest pupil, who, truth to tell, went a little fearfully. She felt that she had a right to dread such summons since that last one resulting in the visit to her great-aunts. Nor was she wrong about it.

"Abbie," said Miss Henrietta briefly, "your aunts wish you to come and stay with them until Sunday afternoon. The carriage is waiting."

Miss Henrietta at her desk spoke shortly and also avoided looking at the youngest pupil. Perhaps she, like other peacemakers before her, was wishing she

had let well enough alone before setting this thing going. At any rate she spoke briefly, then took up her pen. The matter was ended.

But not so with the victim. For a moment she stood as if stunned, and then clutched Miss Owsley's sleeve. Some things are too appalling to be believed. Her intense little face might have been a masque of tragedy. "But I don't have to go, please say I don't have to go, Miss Henrietta!"

Some people are moved by sympathy one way, some another; it made Miss Owsley cross. "Now, Abbie," she said, "we want no scenes. Martha is packing your bag. Go and get ready." And Miss Henrietta, closing her lips firmly, returned to her writing.

Abbie Ann went out slowly. Martha was putting a little nightgown into the bag when the youngest pupil came in; that small person was crying.

"It 's dreadful swelling on the nose," remarked Martha, looking up, "which ain't to say becoming to red hair. What you been using this tooth brush on, anyhow?"

Abbie Ann mopped her eyes, "My overshoes," she said.

"I thought it could n't 'a' been your teeth," said Martha, gazing at the article dubiously.

But Abbie Ann was pulling her best buttoned shoes out of the closet. "I reckon you 'd cry too, Martha Lunn. I think Abbie Ann is an awful name, anyhow, and if they had n't been my aunts, I would n't have had to be it."

"You might 've been Samantha Ann," rejoined Martha, "I 've got a Aunt Samantha Simpson Sanders."

Abbie paused in the shoe buttoning. "Sometimes I think you 're right comforting, Martha," she acknowledged.

Perhaps Miss Henrietta was more con-

cerned than she cared to show. She was down-stairs—by chance, was it?—and came to the door to see the youngest pupil off. She had a letter too, for Abbie Ann.

"The postman just brought it in time," she said with a hand on the little shoulder. Then she called to the driver of the closed carriage at the curb:

"Jennings, are you to take Miss Abbie Ann straight home?"

"No, ma'am," came from out Jennings' furs, for the day was raw, "Miss Abbie and Miss Ann are waiting at the milliner's."

Now there are vehicles and there are equipages. Abbie Ann had never ridden in an equipage before, and a Jennings in furs is an imposing sight. She got in looking very small when the door was shut upon her.

With a little gloved fist, she rubbed fiercely at the tears that would come, and with the other hand held to her letter.

In time the carriage drew up before a store, and a plump little girl in brown, with loose burnished curls beneath a big brown hat and with a nose inclining to be pink at the tip, came forth. A young girl, waiting apparently at the door, took her little gloved hand and led her back through the store between cases of ribbons and feathers and artificial flowers to a space curtained off in the rear.

"Well," said a grim voice as they went in between the curtains, "she did let you come?"

It was Aunt Abbie Norris. Time had not softened the aspect of her.

But Aunt Ann Norris, who was sitting in a chair with a hand-glass before the mirror, called the little niece to her and bent to kiss her. Aunt Ann's face was very white for an old, old woman, except on the cheek bones, where it was very red. It made her look older, and it made Abbie Ann feel afraid. *"Old"* is prettier when

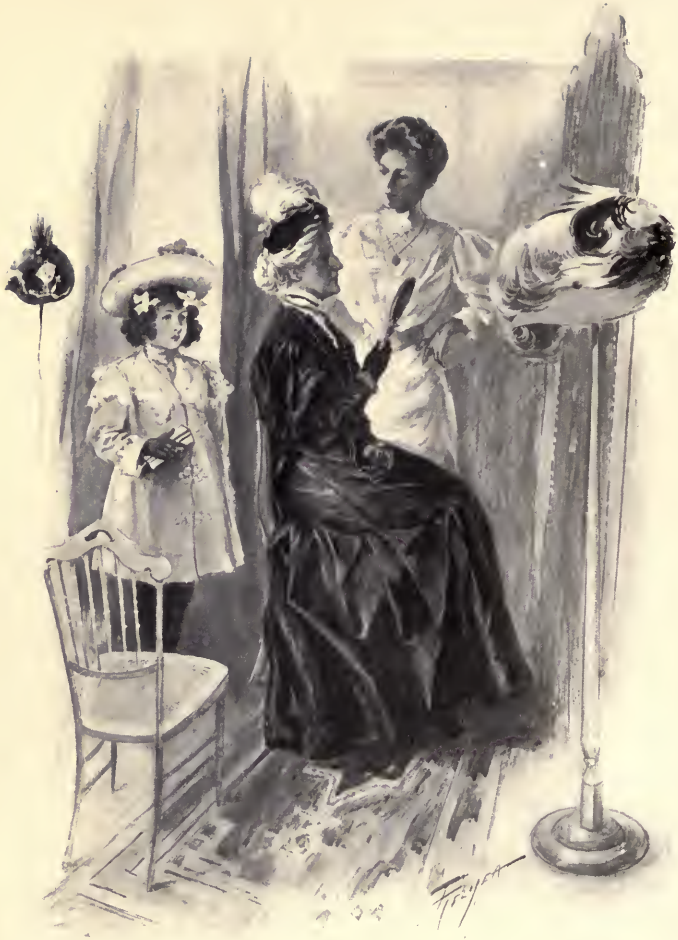
its wrinkles are allowed to show, than when it wears white and red upon its face to hide them.

Aunt Ann Norris, before the mirror holding a hand-glass, was getting a new bonnet. The little niece, having been kissed by her, was told to get upon a chair while she returned to the business.

The milliner lady, at this, held a spray of airy feathers, glittering with spangles, against the bonnet upon old Aunt Ann's head. Then she laid that aside and tried a bunch of purple flowers. Aunt Abbie favored the flowers, the lady was inclined to the feather.

Aunt Ann seemed to be gathering up her courage and then spoke a little uncertainly, "How would it do," she said timidly, "to use both?"

Aunt Abbie arose with abruptness. "It is unbelievable, your love of dress, Ann," she said, and the lace barbs on *her* headpiece and the bangles quivered with the



Aunt Abbie and Abbie at the milliner's

decision of it, "we will take the bonnet, Madame Breaux, and with the flowers. Good afternoon."

They were almost out of the store when something seemed to strike Aunt Abbie about the plump little niece preceding her. "Child," she said, "who selected that hat you have on? Is that your *best* bonnet?"

"Yes 'm, Miss Henrietta bought it."

Miss Henrietta and Aunt Abbie Norris seemed to be of two minds about most things.

"Madame Breaux," said Aunt Abbie, bringing the party to a halt, "show us hats suitable for this child."

And when Abbie Ann next entered the carriage, following behind the two old ladies, she bore upon her burnished red curls a great, soft-brimmed, feathered thing that might have been the ideal of her finery-loving little soul's own dream. Abbie Ann was a Norris in more ways

than in features. It even heartened her up for a time, and presently she followed the old ladies from the carriage into the house with a pretty fair grace.

But something depressing seemed to come upon her at dinner. Nobody talked, and Jennings presented things suddenly on a silver waiter.

Abbie felt forlorner; waves of misery, one after another, rose up out of the pit of her little stomach and enveloped her. She could not eat, lumps were in her throat until it ached. It was homesickness, but she had never heard it called that.

Presently Aunt Abbie spied the little guest's plate. "Sit up," she said, not more grimly than nature impelled all utterance from her to be; "sit up and eat your dinner."

Abbie Ann sat up and began swallowing pieces almost whole, though what they were, farther than food, she had small idea. In time the meal came to an end and she could get down.

It seemed a solemn house, heavy and subduing. Like the carriage that was an equipage, it made Abbie Ann feel small. Aunt Ann took her by the hand and led her into the room opening out of the dining room. Here she pointed to a chair, a chair one would almost naturally avoid, with a bony-like structure of spindles for a back, and with ungracefully spraddling legs. "This, Abbie Ann," she said with no little pride, "is the chair in which Benjamin Franklin sat when he called on our Grandmother Gwynne, and this," laying her beringed old wrinkled hand on the beveled edge of a table, "is where the Marquis de Lafayette—"

"Now Ann," it was the voice of Aunt Abbie coming in from the dining room, "you are mixing it up again—"

Aunt Ann looked put out. Her old voice grew quite decided. "Not at all, Sister Abbie, it was in this chair that—"

"—Lafayette sat," said Aunt Abbie, appearing in the doorway.

Aunt Ann looked quite flushed. "No, sister, Lafayette *wrote,* and *Franklin* sat—"

Aunt Abbie tapped the table smartly with her knuckles, "It was at this table, Ann, that Franklin wrote—"

—"but he did n't write, Sister, he *sat*—" poor Miss Ann Norris was almost tearful.

"—that Franklin wrote to his brother in Boston," stated Aunt Abbie firmly. "Try to remember these things as they are, Ann," and Aunt Abbie retired.

"Abbie Ann," said Aunt Ann Norris, recovering herself as she could, "do you know who the Marquis de Lafayette was?"

"No, ma'am," said Abbie Ann.

"Dear me," said the old lady; "but you know Benjamin Franklin?"

"No, ma'am," said the wretched Abbie.

After which they all three went into the parlor and Aunt Ann read aloud bits

"'This, is where the Marquis de Lafayette —'"

from the evening paper and Aunt Abbie made grim comments thereon.

"Dear me," reported Aunt Ann, "another burglary! It terrifies me to read of how—"

"Then I would n't read it," said Aunt Abbie, and Aunt Ann was silent for a time. But before long she revived.

"Some one named Smith is dead," she reported, "J. T. or J. F. I can't just make out, J. F., I believe—"

"Do you know anybody named either?" inquired Aunt Abbie briefly.

No, Aunt Ann confessed, she did n't know any Smiths at all, but—

"Then what matter?" snapped Aunt Abbie.

And all the while Abbie Ann sat on a square stool to which she had been directed and wondered why they had asked her to come. It did not occur to her that people sometimes do things because they think they ought. The two old ladies were pretty

near as ill at ease as the guest and evidently had no idea what to do with her now they had her with them and perhaps they were as relieved as Abbie Ann when Eliza came to take her to bed. They kissed her good night hastily.

All this while Abbie had not read her letter. She thought to do so now, but Eliza kept waiting and offering to unbutton her clothes, as if to get it through with and over. It is n't pleasant to undress with an Eliza waiting for you to get through, but Abbie Ann was subdued past any will of her own by this time, and it was in a meek voice, after she had been assisted in between cold linen sheets, that she asked if she might read her letter in bed.

Eliza flared up the gas with no very good grace, which further so disturbed Abbie that she found herself having to spell every other word. Finding this bid fair to take all night, Eliza offered to read it to her.

After various items of home news the letter ended with, "And now, my little girl, it is enough for you to know that Miss Abbie and Miss Ann are your aunts, and that it was your mother's wish that you should love them."

Eliza was deeply interested. She forgot to be in a hurry. "Did n't you always know they were your aunts?" she inquired.

"No," said Abbie Ann, "I did n't know anything about them."

"Dear, dear!" said Eliza, "Miss Evelyn's own child and never to have heard of Miss Abbie and Miss Ann!"

"Did she,—did my mother have to know them too, Eliza?" queried Abbie Ann, sitting up in bed in her interest.

"Did Miss Evelyn—" Eliza began, then broke off; "this was her own little bed, and her own room you are in this minute." Now it was a pretty room, smaller than the rest. Its walls and its rug were blue, and its pretty bed was carved, and had a

scrolled head and foot. A chest of drawers stood against the wall, and over a table hung an oval, gilt-framed glass. And it had been her mother's room!

"Oh, Eliza, did she have to come to stay here, too? How was it all, Eliza, why did n't I know about it before?"

But Eliza drew in. "It is n't for me to be talkin', I 'm thinkin'," she said abruptly. "Good night, Miss Abbie Ann."

Now whether the little girl in that bed dreamed it or not, she could not tell, but it seemed to her, the next morning, that in the night she had waked, and had seen Aunt Abbie standing by the bed and looking at her, but that as she opened her eyes, Aunt Abbie faded away and left her in the darkness.

Aunt Abbie appearing in Abbie's room at night

XIII

AT breakfast, Aunt Abbie was so grim that the little Abbie was overcome to think she even had dared to dream about her in the night. Aunt Ann asked her sister if she would have oatmeal? "Do I ever have it?" rejoined Aunt Abbie. Aunt Ann met this amiably. "It is said the Scotch have cultivated their literature on oatmeal," she observed. "Then when I am Scotch and cultivating literature, I will eat it, and not before," said Aunt Abbie. But the rest of the morning passed quickly, for Eliza, more amiable by day, and guessing many things, asked if Abbie Ann would like to go to market with the cook.

At luncheon Aunt Abbie did not appear,

confessing to a headache, it seemed. "A most unusual thing," Aunt Ann explained to Abbie Ann, "an almost unheard-of thing; I do not remember your Aunt Abbie to have had a headache in years."

"She says you are to take Miss Abbie Ann for a drive, Miss Ann," here explained Eliza, "and that she wishes to be left alone."

"Very well, Eliza," said Miss Ann meekly, and accordingly she and Abbie Ann, gorgeous in their new head-gear, went out for a drive.

For some reason Abbie felt able to talk with Aunt Ann and after a while ventured a remark about the thing puzzling her. "Did you always know there was a me, Aunt Ann?" she queried.

Aunt Ann looked troubled, and smoothed the fur tails to her stole with a hand that always trembled a little. "Your Aunt Abbie," she remarked with seeming irrelevance, after a little pause, "is a

strong character, and a person of great discretion and reserve; a person of singular reserve, my dear. And in the latter, I trust," added Aunt Ann hastily, "I resemble her."

Now Abbie Ann, listening, did not understand a word. Nor did she understand Aunt Ann herself, or she would have known there was more to follow.

"Neither am I without proper pride in family," declared Aunt Ann; "I 'm sure I 'm as proud of blood as ever Sister is: it is n't every one, my dear, who could be 'Daughters' through two lines, and 'Dames' through four. Not that I 'd have you think I objected to *shaving soap.* Why should n't a man's father make shaving soap? I 've been told it was very good soap. And I 'm sure, when you think about it, Benjamin Franklin's father made candles, not so different, you see? But Sister Abbie could n't seem to stand the family likeness on the soap wrappers.

But he 's dead now, and the business too, I 've been told, and John is in coal mines. But I would n't have you feel I consider soap as so different from whale oil, where ours came from, my dear."

Abbie Ann's countenance, as she gazed on her Aunt Ann, showed wonder and bewilderment; what was Aunt Ann talking about?

But the old lady had herself all wrought up; she pulled the strap and told Jennings, "home." But on the way, not far from Miss Owsley's Select School, she had Jennings check the horses, while she pointed out a house to Abbie Ann not unlike Miss Henrietta's own, though not so imposing a mansion as hers and Aunt Abbie's by any means. "This is where John Richardson, your father, lived," she said, "when we first came to hear of him."

Aunt Abbie appeared at dinner, but taller, straighter, grimmer, if possible, than before. Conversation died away, and

not even a frozen pudding, cream without and marvels of candied mysteries within to the uninitiated Abbie, could revive it.

Afterward, Abbie Ann was given a book and told to sit on the little stool and read; now the little stool was embarrassingly near to Aunt Abbie, who herself was reading a large volume bound in solemn leather.

Abbie Ann looked at the book given her which had a strangely familiar red and gold binding, somewhat faded. Its name, yes, its name was "Sandford and Merton." Do all old ladies keep "Sandford and Merton" on hand for little girls?

She opened the book listlessly, at any page that chanced and spelled along for a time concerning a little boy named Harry.

"Besides learning, with greatest readiness, everything that was taught him, little Harry"—so said the book—"was the most honest, obliging creature in the

world. He was never discontented, nor did he grumble, whatever he was desired to do. And then you might believe Harry in everything he said; for though he could have gained a plum cake by telling an untruth, and was sure the truth would expose him to a severe whipping, he never hesitated in declaring it. Nor was he like many other children who place their whole happiness in eating; for give him but a morsel of dry bread for his dinner and he would be satisfied, though you placed sweetmeats and fruit and every other nicety in his—"

Abbie Ann, fresh from the memory of that frozen pudding, hunted another place, feeling she could n't stand any more of Harry; we prefer to meet ordinary people like ourselves along the way. There was another boy named Tommy. She turned the pages, hunting something less appalling than the virtues of Harry. But alas!—

"'Dear heart!' said Tommy, 'what a

number of accidents people are subject to in this world!'

"'It is very true,'" answered a Mr. Barlow, "'but as that is the case, it is necessary to improve ourselves in every manner, that we may be able to struggle against them.'

"'That,'" said Tommy, on that page, or some other, it really did not matter to Abbie Ann which, as she turned them,"'I perfectly comprehend,'"—which, to tell the truth, was more than Abbie felt that she did.

She had had enough of "Sandford and Merton." She peeped up cautiously, to meet, however, Aunt Abbie's grim eye, and returned hastily to her book, too hastily in fact to know that Aunt Abbie returned to hers as abruptly and with something of the same guilty air of being caught. For, strangely enough, Aunt Abbie had not been reading at all, but gazing at her little niece. Shortly after

she arose and saying something about not being well, went up-stairs.

Eliza appeared soon after to escort the guest to bed.

It seemed hours after she was there, that Abbie Ann opened her eyes. It was no dream this time, there was Aunt Abbie, or—was it? With the fierceness gone, it was an old woman, whose hand, holding a candle, was tremulous; whose nose and chin, in silhouette on the wall, made grotesque shadows—

It frightened Abbie worse to have her tremble, to have her old, than to have her tall and stern and grim. What did she want? Why did n't she go? Would she never, never go? Would she stand there forever, forever, with that candle, looking down—

Abbie Ann, holding her little self rigid, felt she could n't stand it to have Aunt Abbie know that she was awake, she might lean over, she might touch her—

The grim old Aunt Abbies, do they reckon on these costs when they make themselves feared so?

But Aunt Abbie never knew; and perhaps too, little Abbie fell asleep without knowing it, for when she woke again, only the light from the hall was in the room, and Aunt Abbie with her candle was gone.

XIV

ISS HENRIETTA OWSLEY was invited for the next day to Sunday dinner. Aunt Abbie, Aunt Ann, and Abbie Ann were home from church when she arrived. The majestic array of the great-aunts in honor of Sunday was awing. Miss Owsley looked briskly handsome and comely.

Aunt Abbie's greeting was singular; on looking up and seeing the other in the doorway, she said, "Henrietta Owsley, I have been a wicked old woman."

Miss Henrietta Owsley did not move an eyelid of her strong, portly face. "I have been telling you so for some years," she said, cheerfully and promptly.

Aunt Abbie took this with surprising

meekness. "I know you have," she said with alarming humility, "but it seems that each must travel his own road to repentance. There are no short-cuts by way of another's experience."

Abbie Ann felt as if she were still in church; she had no idea what it was all about, but then that made it the more like church to poor Abbie.

But, promptly enough, Aunt Abbie's every-day manner returned.

"Henrietta," she said decidedly, "you must have this child's trunk packed to-morrow. It is the proper thing that she should come to live with us while here."

Abbie Ann understood this, and held her breath and clutched the seat of the chair she was on.

"Not at all," returned Miss Henrietta Owsley, who was just as decided. "You forget the child has a father. She was brought to me. I can allow no change unless ordered by him."

"H'm," said Aunt Abbie Norris.

"And you forget," went on the relentless Miss Henrietta, "that though you may be ready to forgive, it does not follow that you are forgiven."

Aunt Abbie's grim face changed but she held her own. "Henrietta Owsley," she said, "you are the only person on earth who would dare speak to me in that way, you know you are."

"I think we 've always been distinguished for plain speaking with each other, Abbie," said Miss Henrietta, good-humoredly. Then she laughed and went on: "However, I 've never seen that it has done either of us much good, as we seem to make a habit of never taking the other's advice."

"H'm," said Aunt Abbie again, and Aunt Ann coming in, she lapsed into silence, which, if violent tweakings of her great nose meant anything, was filled with inward thoughts of a disturbing nature.

At sundown Miss Henrietta and her youngest pupil, bag in hand, went home in the carriage.

But Abbie Ann was not to be left to her Maria long. School was not over the next day, when Aunt Ann Norris appeared, tearful and helpless.

She clung to the little niece, who was brought down by Miss Owsley, as to something of her own flesh and blood, but she handed a note to Miss Owsley.

"Read it, dear Henrietta," she begged, her bonnet all awry, her old hands tremulous, "read it and tell me what it means! I went down town, in fact, Henrietta, I may say, Sister Abbie sent me down in the carriage to match purple floss, and on my return,—read it—"

Miss Owsley took the proffered note and read it calmly.

"Dear Ann," it set forth, "I am going on a journey. Do not worry about me. I am fully

able to look after myself, but have taken Eliza to satisfy you. I cannot say just when I shall return. "Your affectionate sister,

"A. L. Norris."

"What does it mean?" begged poor Miss Ann.

"It means what it says," responded the practical Miss Henrietta.

"And what am I to do?" quavered the bewildered and forsaken Miss Ann.

"Go home and be comfortable," said the other. "Your sister can take care of herself."

"Dear Henrietta, am I to stay in that big house alone?" And the poor old Miss Ann, her eye-glasses dangling on their gold chain, had hasty recourse to her pocket handkerchief. "Sister Abbie," wept Miss Ann, "is most unkind; she has no right to treat me with so little confidence."

Miss Owsley gazed upon her lifelong friend, Ann Norris. Was it fair that the

sister's stronger will should have kept poor Ann dependent thus? But born preceptress that Miss Henrietta was, it was too late to begin on Ann now, and so, with a smile, she said:

"You may take Abbie back with you, if you wish, and send her to school each morning."

Abbie Ann accepted this willingly enough. She did not mind going with Aunt Ann, and when she came down ready to go, a little later, she brought Maria, that Aunt Ann might know her. And it was plain to be seen that Aunt Ann, even in her tearful state, liked the pink-cheeked Maria.

So, as Aunt Abbie failed to return that day, or the next, they invited Maria to drive with them in the afternoon and go home with them to dinner.

When they went for her, she came out in her best dress and hat, with a letter in her hand.

"It 's from my auntie," she told Miss Ann, her cheeks pinker with the pleasure of it, "and it 's about you."

Miss Ann's nerves were none of the best. "About me?" she returned, with alarm, "oh, Maria, what is it? I am quite prepared,—what has happened to Sister Abbie?"

Maria looked astonished. "It 's about you," she said. "My auntie says my grandma is glad I am rooming with Abbie Ann. She says that Miss Ann Norris and my grandma's brother, Mr. Chedson Dudley Rowley, were old friends."

Aunt Ann sat back in the carriage. Surely she had heard, but she did not say a word, only her gloved old hands closed on her lorgnette quite agitatedly and she looked off out of the carriage window.

Presently her gaze came in to the two little girls side by side on the seat opposite her. They looked uncomfortable.

"Miss Ann drew herself up"

What had Maria said, what had she done?

Miss Ann Norris smoothed her dress in a fluttered, timid way with her old hand. "Your Aunt Abbie, Abbie Ann," she then remarked, as she had once before, "is a strong character; a person of great discretion and reserve. In this latter, my dears, I hope I resemble her."

And Miss Ann drew herself up and looked from one small face to the other, wistfully. Was she only waiting for a little encouragement, to open her old heart to these two little girls?

But they did not know what to say; embarrassed, each held the other's hand and said nothing and on Miss Ann Norris's face a look wistful and troubled lingered all the way home.

She even forgot at dinner to worry, and talked a good deal of the time when she and Sister Abbie were young. Abbie and Maria also gathered from her, that Aunt

Ann and Aunt Abbie once were girls, and tripped about the shady streets neighboring this very house, with other pretty girls, all in short-waisted, scant-skirted hand-embroidered muslins, their slipper elastics crossed upon their pretty ankles, their faces looking out from big scoop Leghorn bonnets tied with bows under their pretty chins. And the poke of Aunt Ann's favorite Leghorn, they learned, was filled in around her little pink face with rosebuds in close profusion.

After dinner old Miss Ann, far along in her seventies, went to the piano. She seemed to forget her little niece and Maria.

Her playing was hesitating and low as if the old fingers were hunting their way, but it made little Abbie Ann and Maria seek each other's hands again,—they knew not why.

And presently Aunt Ann's old voice trembled above the gliding runs and mel-

ody and there was something left in the old tones still. It was years after that Abbie Ann came upon and remembered the words Aunt Ann Norris sang quaveringly:

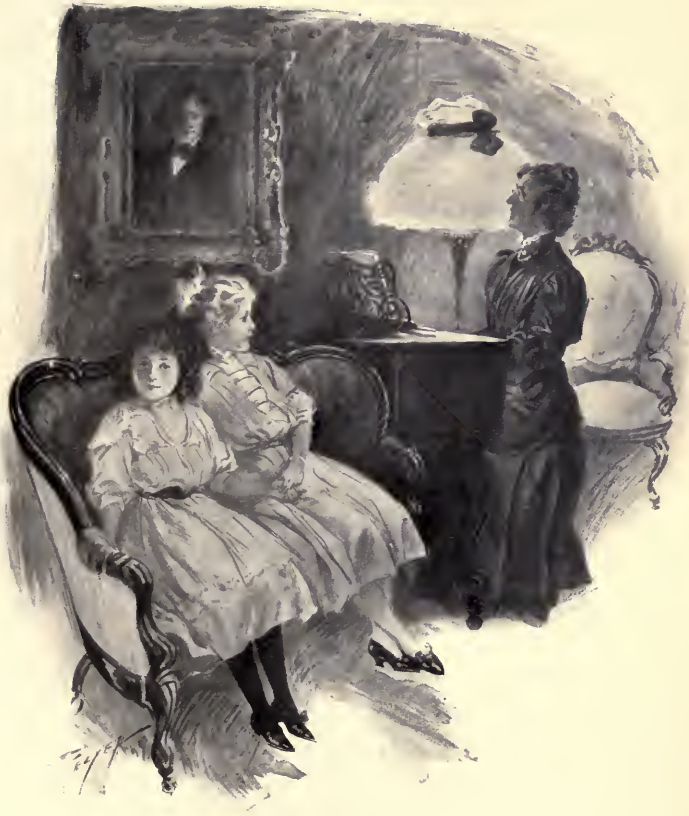
"No, the heart that has truly loved never forgets
But as truly loves on to the close,
As the sunflower turns on her god when he sets
The same look which she turned when he rose."

When Aunt Ann turned from the piano, she was just an old, old woman, older because of the fineries which bedecked her. She called Maria to her.

"Your Uncle Chedson," said Miss Ann to Maria, "died when we both were twenty."

Soon after Maria had to be sent home in the carriage, but the next afternoon they went for her again. Aunt Ann even held Maria's hand. It was plain to be seen

that she loved Maria. At first Abbie Ann felt queer, but she could not be jealous very long, for the very reason that she loved Maria too.



Aunt Ann playing the piano

XV

ABBIE, during this stay with her Aunt Ann, began to understand why elderly ladies offered a book called "Sandford and Merton" to their young friends for reading purposes. *Old ladies had known in the flesh such little boys as these!*

She made the discovery in this way. The second day Miss Henrietta agreed that Maria again might drive with them, and again go home with them to dinner, but Maria herself explained that to do so she would have to take her books along and in the hour between the drive and dinner, prepare her lessons.

"I 'll do mine then too," agreed Abbie, and it was so settled.

The thing which seemed to be oppress-

ing the conscientious Maria, when the hour came, was the composition hanging over her head. Abbie had one too, on "The Beaver," whereas the older Maria lamented over the more abstract proposition of "Spring." Abbie Ann tried to cheer her up about it.

"It is harder for me than it is for Abbie," Maria told Miss Ann, in her prettily anxious way. Maria was a little lady, every inch of her. "I like to sew and to straighten around our room and such things, but I don't seem to know *how* to write a composition."

Abbie Ann's concern was over another part of it. "I can *write* 'em easy enough," she claimed, "if I just did n't have to *spell* 'em."

"I have always found the pen to be a task, myself," confessed truthful Aunt Ann, "though we have not been without talent in the family that way. Your Aunt Abbie, Abbie Ann, wields a fluent pen

when she has a mind to, and our brother Joseph,—you have heard of your Uncle Joseph, Abbie Ann?"

"No, ma'am," from that person, apologetically.

Aunt Ann looked her concern. "Dear, dear, it is unbelievable you should not have heard of your Uncle Joseph. Had he lived to maturity we have always felt he would have brought great honor, even renown, to the family. Our brother *Charles* was *your* grandfather, Abbie Ann, but Joseph died young, the victim, I have always felt, of his own precocity. But you shall see what we have preserved of Joseph's; wait until I ring for Emma," —Emma was the second maid,—"though whether she will know how to get what I want like Eliza would, I am not sure."

"It is a small leather trunk," Aunt Ann explained to Emma when she appeared, "and it is in the closet between Sister Abbie's and my room, back on the shelf."

This seemed an odd place for a trunk to Maria and Abbie Ann! And, moreover, Emma seemed a slight, if willing young body, to fetch such a thing alone.

"Our mother laid everything of our brother Joseph's away in the trunk which had been hers as a bride," said old Miss Ann to the two little listeners, "and Sister Abbie and I have rarely disturbed them. This is it," as Emma returned, "the trunk, I mean, my dears, and you both may look over it together."

It was about two feet long by perhaps one and a half the other way, and of leather, nail-studded. Abbie and Maria felt *they* would have called it a box. But no, within its wall-paper lined top, on a small pasted label, one read a direct statement:

"1 Family Trunk.
"John Félix, Trunk Maker—27 Arch Street
"1790."

Judged by the contents of the trunk, Joseph had been prolific. The two little

girls were overawed. There were layers of copy-books, bearing Joseph's name, beginning with those filled with what Aunt Ann called pothooks, succeeded by stratas of thin paper-backed books bearing the explanation "Compositions."

The little girls opened one of these but without enthusiasm. They had a sudden prejudice against this all too perfect Joseph. For Abbie Ann's part, she knew that of all the family, so far, *she* preferred Aunt Ann!

They gazed at Joseph's perfect chirography with coldness! Moreover, on the opening page, within an enwreathing border of colored flowers encircling a scroll decoration, he had written:

"Learning is the ornament of youth and the comfort of age.

"Vanity and presumption ruin many a promising youth.

"Written by Joseph Norris,....6th moth, 11th, 1817.
"Select School."

Worse still, on the next page, behold, was what Joseph called in an embellished headline a

"PREFACE"

It read thus:

"The reader must excuse these pieces as they are made when I am a boy of but 11 years old. My master told me that at some future day I might see the advantage of having been put to writing compositions whilst a school boy; therefore I have composed a piece every seventh day."

Maria read this aloud, then passed the book for the next page to Abbie Ann.

"It 's poetry," she said, having examined it; "you read it."

"No, *you*," said Abbie, hastily.

"It 's *your* uncle," avowed Maria.

Abbie Ann took the book filled with the neat chirography and read with reluctance. Joseph made her feel small, and effaced and cross. She did n't like this

newly discovered relative at all, and her reading showed it as she announced:

"THE BEGGAR MAN

"There is a man both blind and poor,
Who begs a dinner at your door,
He of his wife was soon bereft
And also without children left;
He knows not where to lay his head
For he has got no downy bed;
Then do not send him from your door
For he is old, and very poor."

"Pooh," said Abbie, "that way of doing 'em is easier than *real* compositions. I could do that, could n't you, Maria?"

Maria was doubtful, but Aunt Ann took it literally. Her eye-glasses fell off and dangled on their chain, and she grew quite ambitious that they should try, especially Abbie Ann.

"Think of the gratification to your Aunt Abbie and to me, if we could think the mantle of our brother Joseph had fallen upon you, Abbie Ann."

That person looked as if she wished she had not claimed too much, but for the sake of the generation she belonged to, it would not do to back down now.

"I 'll do one and show you," she told Aunt Ann, grandly, "and I 'll send it to Mr. McEwan afterward. He 'll be pleased to see I can! I 'll do it now."

And abandoning Joseph, Abbie flew to get pad and pencil.

"There is another poem of our young brother's, called 'The Market Day,' " old Miss Ann told Maria, "which we of his family always esteemed highly. You might read it aloud, while Abbie Ann makes ready."

But Abbie Ann *was* ready—there was nothing leisurely in her generation—and she listened to any more of Joseph reluctantly. Yet before it was over, she liked him better, and so, one could see, did Maria who read to them:

"THE MARKET DAY

"Now the people come to town
Some from up and some from down.
Some bring meat and others honey
All to get a little money.
They also bring both corn and wheat
To buy some stockings for their feet;
Some raise rhy—"

("What?" for Abbie Ann was looking over Maria's shoulder, "Joseph *was* human then, after all? Nice, altogether different Joseph!")

"Some raise rhy and others flax
To make them linen for their backs."

Seeing that Joseph the paragon was weak in spelling, Abbie wondered if, after all, she was indeed to prove a Joseph to the family? At any rate, feeling relieved about her own failing that way she seized her paper and retired.

"You talk," she told the others.

They talked. Maria was sorry that Joseph died.

Miss Ann told her about it. "He died at twelve," she stated; "and, I have always felt, of his own precocity, though, more directly speaking, they attributed it to unripe gooseberries. They grew in a row, the bushes, I mean, in his master's back yard. He was a person full of liveliness and spirits too, was Joseph," testified dear Miss Ann, "as you will see, my dear, if you will turn to that poem called 'Snow.' But perhaps we disturb dear Abbie?"

But she did not hear them. She was chewing her pencil-end and gazing at that page in her geography bearing cut and text under title of "The Beaver."

So Maria read:

"SNOW

"Now the flakes are falling
And the leaves around us lay,
Now the boys for fire are calling
Because they in the snow do play.

"See, they kick the snow about
And throw at one another,
And when one party 's put to rout
It turns to chase the other.

"When some are wet and most are hurt
In school they take their places,
And there they worry, *tieze* and fret,
And make their crooked faces."

(Dear, rapidly becoming *adorable*, little Joseph!)

"It also was his part," said Miss Ann, "to attend our mother to service and carry her large prayer-book to and fro for her on the way. There were certain boys of the street who jeered him as he did so. And Joseph was a lad of spirit, my dear. Letting them gain courage by his lack of notice of them, and approach from behind quite close, suddenly he drew forth his pocket handkerchief, spread it on a convenient horse-block, laid his mother's prayer-book carefully thereon, and then advanced on the jeering street boys to such

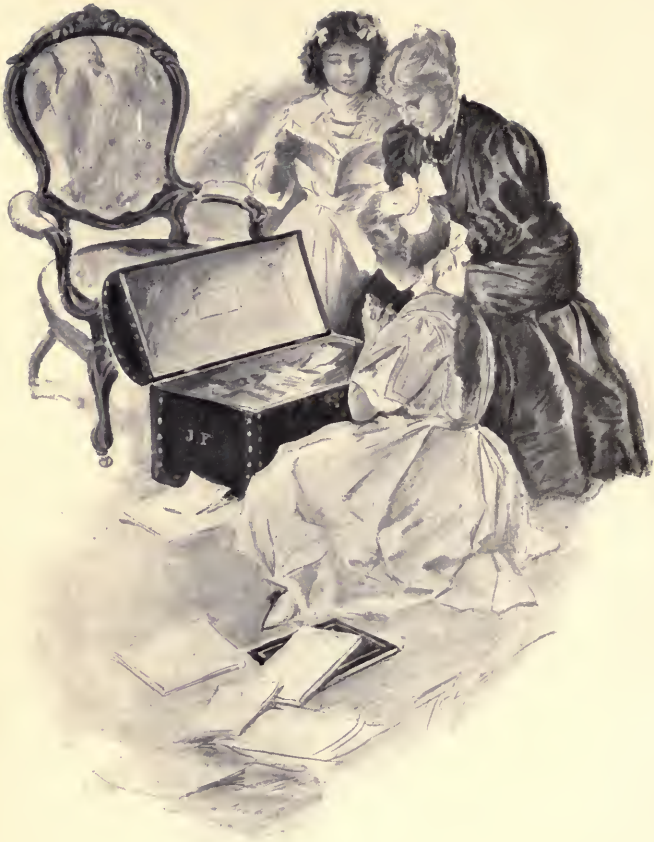
purpose they never again molested him, the while his mother, a person of spirit also, stood and awaited him. This done, Joseph rejoined our parent, resumed the prayer-book and they went on. I may say, with no feeling but rejoicing now that it was so," said dear Miss Ann, "that Joseph, of us all, was our mother's favorite child."

Abbie Ann was approaching. "It comes easy enough in your *mind*," she told them; "it is n't that! It 's the getting it down *out* of your mind that is hard. You try and you 'll see, Maria."

But Maria shook her head knowing her limitations, but she and Miss Ann both held out their loyal hands for Abbie's efforts. On a somewhat smeared and a considerably erased and interlined paper, what they read was this:

"THE BEAVER

"The beaver is like a rat,
It swims, and its tail is flat.



Maria, Abbie and Aunt Ann looking at the contents of the old leather trunk

Its teeth are very strong indeede
To saw trees.
It also is noted for damms.

"Its ears are short and the beaver is black
And it makes men's hats;
They are found in Europes, north hemisphere
And are useful in our arts.

"ABBIE ANN RICHARDSON, 11th Mo.
"Seleckt School."

Dear Miss Ann wept into her pocket handkerchief, and Maria's cheeks, too, were pink with honest admiration of her friend.

Then Aunt Ann grew anxious and reproached herself for having inspired her great-niece to this thing.

"We 'll lay it away until your father shall see it," she told Abbie, "and then, with the example of Joseph before us, let him say whether you shall be encouraged to continue in the matter."

"She will have to hand it in as a composition, first," explained Maria.

"To be sure," said Aunt Ann, who had forgotten.

But Miss Ingram was less enthusiastic about it than dear Miss Ann. In fact what little she said was laconic.

"Copy it out in plain English and correct your facts and spelling," was that person's comment to Abbie Ann.

XVI

IT was the evening of the next day. Aunt Ann and Abbie had gone up-stairs, more because the autocratic Jennings began turning the lights out than because it was late.

All the evening Aunt Ann's conversation had seemed to take a gloomy turn as if her mind were on Aunt Abbie. "There are tragedies in every family, my dear," she told her niece; "we had an uncle ourselves whose ship was scuttled by pirates."

Abbie Ann, preparing for bed, paused in unbuttoning her shoe. Evidently something direful had happened to the uncle. "What 's 'scuttled,' Aunt Ann?" she inquired.

"Dear me," said Aunt Ann, smoothing

her dress, "really, Abbie Ann, I don't know that I can exactly tell you. Sister Abbie would know. I should say myself it was a nautical way of sinking a vessel peculiar to pirates."

Abbie Ann pulled her shoe off. "What 's 'pirates,' Aunt Ann?"

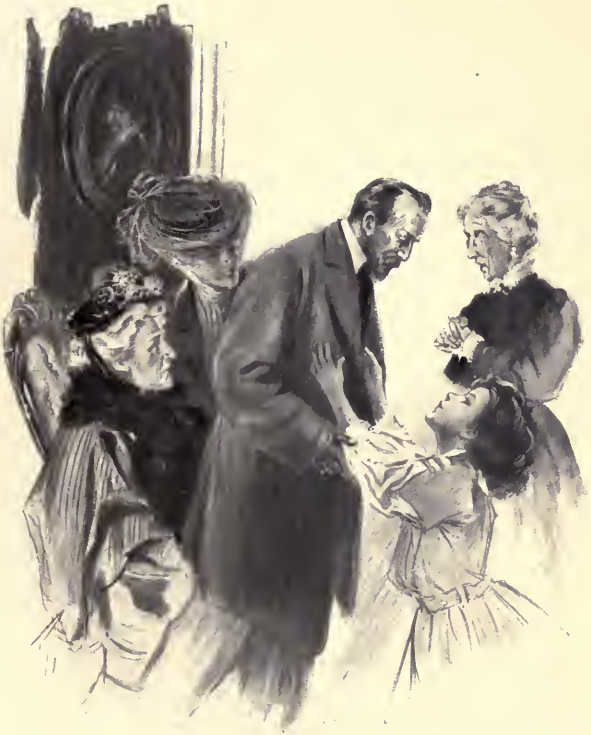
That soul was quite fluttered. "Pirates, my dear,—" but she never got farther than to say she had heard they generally wore ear-rings, when both paused—

They heard the front door opening, then heard voices.

Abbie Ann's ears were sharp, and with one shoe on, the other in her hand, she flew down-stairs, Aunt Ann coming behind, quite tottery from her week's anxieties.

"Father! Father! Father!" Abbie Ann went calling.

And it *was* her father and Eliza putting Aunt Abbie down into a chair very gently.



"Abbie Ann rushed, frantic with joy, to her father"

Abbie Ann rushed to her father, but Aunt Ann tearfully approached her sister.

"Now what is the use of any heroics, Ann?" Aunt Abbie, alarmingly erect, briefly demanded. "There, keep away, no, I prefer you would n't touch me, even a finger tip. It 's lumbago."

Poor Miss Ann, thus waved off, took Mr. Richardson's proffered hand meekly.

"I went to ask John Richardson's pardon," announced Aunt Abbie at this point, "and I took cold in his drafty house and he had to bring me home."

And Aunt Abbie made a motion as though to rise, and sank back.

"If he had not been an amiable man, he might have told me these were long-deferred tweaks of conscience," said Aunt Abbie with grim humor; "but it is n't that; it 's his drafty halls and that Fabe creature's cooking." But she was quite white about the lips nevertheless.

John Richardson, this time not at all

like the man with the dripping umbrella, set his little half-shod daughter down, and detached himself from Miss Ann.

"Get a glass of wine for Miss Norris, Eliza," he said.

"Not at all," said Aunt Abbie, decidedly, "that 's the last thing one needs in rheumatic tendencies."

"Get a glass of wine, Eliza," said John Richardson. "Please bring it immediately."

Eliza disappeared, hat and wraps yet on, but she came back with the wine.

"You need it. You are faint," said John Richardson, and held it to her lips. Aunt Abbie sat straight. She had no idea of drinking it. John Richardson held the wine, and looked at her. Suddenly Aunt Abbie opened her mouth and swallowed it meekly.

Then her eye fell on Abbie Ann, dangling one shoe, and looking on wonderingly.

"Child," she said, "come to me."

The niece went. Aunt Abbie's eyes ranged from the one-stockinged foot up to the tumbled hair.

"Abbie Ann," she said, almost gently, certainly with surprising meekness, "I was such a child as you once. John, if you 'll give me your arm to the top of the stairs, I 'll go to bed." Later, Abbie's father came down again, and took his little daughter on his knee. He had brought more than himself for her, he had a letter in his pocket from Mr. McEwan which she joyously proceeded to read.

"There 's a verse," she announced; "it says, 'Lines to Miss Abbie Ann Richardson on First Beholding Her Great-Aunt.' "

Her father looked doubtful, perhaps apprehensive too. It is only fair to this gentleman to say he did not know the lines were there when he brought the letter.

But Abbie was reading them:

"Shake not your glory locks at me
That in the great-aunt I should see
The why that little Abbie Ann
So loves a feather or a fan,
And why the little Abbie's head
And temper too, should blaze so...."

Abbie stopped suddenly. Her face was scarlet; so was her father's, but for a different reason. It never would have done to let his little daughter know, when she stopped reading, how near he came to supplying that rhyme.

"Abbie," he said, presently, "your Aunt Abbie is desirous that you should make your home here with her while going to school. I have told her that for this year I want you where you are. After that, I have promised to leave it to you, whether you shall stay here or not."

Abbie Ann listened. She even took it quite cheerfully. "Anyhow, that 's a long way off," she reasoned.

XVII

OAL CITY is in the heart of very beautiful mountains. In the summer-time, a wild little river dashes over giant boulders and churns itself to foam under rocky, laurel- and rhododendron-grown banks. The country is full of summer hotels and mineral springs.

One day in June a freight consignment was put off on the platform of Coal City. It seemed to consist of household comforts, screens as for drafty halls, footstools, carefully wrapped mattresses.

A day later, the westward bound morning sleeper drew up at Coal City. Mr. McEwan, station-agent, ahead even of Mr. John Richardson, owner of the Black Diamond Mines, received into his own

hands, the party handed off, one after another by the conductor; a party consisting of an old lady, a nodding bunch of mignonette in her bonnet, one maid, laden with bags and bundles and wearing the tolerant air of one conducting and humoring a consignment of irresponsibles, one little girl with pink, pink cheeks and a trim little person, and another little girl with eager eyes and red, red hair—

Aunt Ann and Maria had come to Coal City to pay a visit to Abbie Ann, and Eliza had come to look after the party.

Aunt Abbie had declined the invitation, hastily; she did not seem to care for the mode of life at Coal City; and Miss Henrietta had declined likewise, agreeing however, to go and stay with her old friend Miss Abbie, while Aunt Ann went.

"We have n't a bit of patience with each other's ways," stated Miss Owsley, "but it will be good discipline for us both."

Mr. McEwan, receiving the party from

the conductor, handed them on to Mr. Richardson, which brought him to Abbie Ann last.

As he lifted her off the step and set her on the platform, he surveyed her up and down. Now it chanced she had on a blue linen dress, and a flapping-brimmed, dark blue hat with flowers. Mr. McEwan surveyed her up and down. Then his eyebrows lifted and his glasses blinked and he shook hands.

"Blue," said Mr. McEwan, "is true."

She looked up and because of the sun blinked too.

"I have been true," said Abbie.

XVIII

MR. McEWAN called Eliza a zealous female, and contended that the unholy light of the crusader against disorder burned in her eye. He was on the porch sitting on an inverted clothes-basket for lack of any better article to sit on, when he said it.

Eliza after a day's sojourn at Coal City had gone to Mr. Richardson for consultation. Her manner toward her charges still had that tolerant air one accords to irresponsibles, only that now she included among these incompetents, Fabe, and also Aunt Venus, who had come up from Hinton for the summer as assistant, and in a way, Mr. Richardson and Mr. McEwan too.

She went, however, for consultation to Mr. Richardson.

"If Miss Ann is to be looked after and made comfortable," she announced "I 'll have to have permission to take hold."

Now Mr. Richardson had been doubtful about the advisability of that dear old person coming anyway.

"Then, for prudence' sake," he adjured Eliza, since Miss Ann *was* here, "take hold."

And this she proceeded to do. "Taking hold," moreover, is a strenuous proceeding as interpreted by an Eliza and is apparently both volcanic and disruptive in its nature. For instance, everything portable and movable in a house at such times seems to go galvanically out at windows and doors. The proceeding also includes brooms and scrubbing brushes, a cold and comfortless mid-day lunch, and it drives the other humans of a household

forth to the porches for refuge, since, in this case, showers prevented removal of themselves further afield.

Rugs, curtains, and other temporarily superfluous furnishings had been moved to the porches too. Maria sat on a fender, for want of any other unoccupied article to hold her, and Abbie Ann sat on a bucket. Maria's mama had sent the two little girls, from a post in the far, far Southwest, a pair each of elaborately beaded Indian moccasins which had just come by mail and which they were each holding for want of any safe place to lay them down.

Mr. McEwan arriving just here, turned a clothes-basket over, tried it carefully, and took a seat thereon.

"It is the way Sister Abbie and the servants have done me, all my life at home," said poor Miss Ann from her position in an armchair wedged against a hat-rack, with her old feet on a dictionary. "And

even when I get way off here, John goes and gives Eliza permission!"

"She says she found the pepper-box in the refrigerator, and the corn meal in the soup-tureen," reported Abbie; "and if there were n't women to take proper care of the men and children, Eliza says what would the world come to?"

The clothes-basket giving forth threatening sounds of imminent collapse, Mr. McEwan arose and sought the porch-rail, damp as it was from the recent shower. He ridged his brows too, so that it lifted his hair, and he blinked through his glasses and replied.

"Come to?" retorted Mr. McEwan. "Why," with conviction in his tone, "why, without the Elizas we would lapse right back into the Golden Age, and sit on flowery banks and shut our eyes to the weeds gradually crowding 'em out, and eat berries out of burdock leaves, and toss ripe grapes across into each other's mouths,

and chant chansons to the sun and canzonets to the moon and—"

"But who *would* weed the flowery banks?" queried Abbie, worried that these might disappear, since he himself had suggested it.

Mr. McEwan looked at her with incredulous amaze, and then shook his head sadly. Who could have believed, he remarked, that in their own Abbie they 'd ever come to see a juvenile Eliza undeveloped! "These things grow on one, too," he lamented anxiously. "The Elizas in time come to make pepper-pot mole-hills into mountains, with whole ranges of the real thing in mountains immediately outside. Besides," suggested Mr. McEwan, triumphantly, "if the pepper-pot habitually stays in the ice-box, would not one always know where to find it? What the Elizas need," declared Mr. McEwan, "is a broader view. I will get Mooney from the Junction to come up and spell me at the

office for a day, and we will get Fabe and a two-horse wagon and take our Abbie here and Eliza up to the top of old Sugar Loaf Mountain and let them get it."

He meant a broader view.

And while Mr. McEwan might be joking about the one part of it, he was not about the Sugar Loaf side of it.

Eliza however, on being consulted about it later, demurred. For herself she did not want to go and preferred to get the house in order according to her notions of order, and as for Miss Ann, Eliza said she was not used to such undertakings and it would be the death of her!

But Miss Ann was decided. "I 've sat on hotel porches at summer places all my life," she declared, "and watched everybody else go on the expeditions and excursions because Sister Abbie would not let me undertake them. I am going, Eliza."

And when the day came, Miss Ann went, sitting in an arm-chair installed in

place of the wagon's center cross-seat, the same chair having been lashed into security by Fabe and Mr. McEwan. Moreover, the only concession she would make to Eliza was in the carrying of a sunshade and the wearing of a large green veil, which she threw back with determination once they were beyond the eye of that person.

Fabe and Mr. McEwan sat on the front seat and drove, and Maria and Abbie sat together on the rear one. When they were two thirds of the way up Sugar Loaf, who came driving up behind them in the buckboard but father, who had found he could get off, after all!

The broad view had begun some while before, during the first stages of the winding ascent of Sugar Loaf, but now it was all one could ask for breadth. These long lines, one behind another, of mountains holding hands and stretching north and south, were the Alleghanies, but the

fainter azure ones so far away that they melted into the sky, were the Blue Ridge ranges.

At one's feet was home in the valley below, with Eliza sorting kitchen-tins from Fabe's providential reserve of empty tomato-cans he had stored away. Now Abbie Ann's father considered Eliza invaluable. He said if any one of the ladies who had come to teach Abbie had humanely taken hold as Eliza was doing, how grateful he would have been. The others found it hard to agree with him.

There was something else down there in the valley just now too, as pleasant to have escaped from as house-cleaning. From up here, as they wound around and emerged on the eyebrows of old Sugar Loaf, as Mr. McEwan called this high shelving platform, they could see storm clouds hanging low over the house and the valley, heavy with lightning and rolling with thunder. Then a bit later they saw a

rainbow bridging the valley, one end resting on a spur of the old King Coal Mountain, into whose center the mine dipped and burrowed, while the other end seemed to drop behind the yellow railroad station across the sidings and the tracks.

"My grandmamma always laughs and says there is a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow," said Maria.

Abbie had never heard of this. "Both ends?" she queried.

Father was close behind in the buckboard, old Royal's gray nose almost into the backs of Abbie and Maria.

"Why, of course," he called, "or how could the rainbow be balanced?"

Abbie Ann turned about on the seat of the wagon and studied the arch.

"Then one pot of gold is in our mine, father; will they find it, digging, do you s'pose?"

"They certainly will not find it if they don't dig," laughed father.

"And see! Maria look! Why the other end of the rainbow rests right on the station! Will there be a pot of gold there, too, for Mr. McEwan?"

"In the near course of time, I think there will be," said father.

"Time 's money, you remember," came back from Mr. McEwan on the front seat.

"But you said you had found it was n't," expostulated Abbie Ann.

"I was mistaken"; said Mr. McEwan, "time is, if you go at it right."

But it was after the travelers had passed over the eyebrows of old Sugar Loaf, and had left the horses unharnessed and tethered, munching their dinners of corn and hay, and had climbed on foot up the short pull to the bald, flat-topped crown of the mountain overlooking half a dozen villages beside their own, that Abbie and Maria and Aunt Ann heard the explanation of how time had proved to be money for Mr. McEwan.

There were many things to be done first though, before settling to conversation. Fabe had to bring the basket and the long-handled skillet and the coffee-pot, then the big can of drinking-water, up to the camp on Sugar Loaf's summit, and then he and Mr. McEwan had to find flat stones to build a sort of oven affair for the fire and then start the fire itself and get the kettle on and the water to boiling.

Then later, Fabe shucked young corn and cleaned it, and covered it again in its wet shuckings and buried it in the ashes to roast, just as he did the potatoes and the eggs, only these he rolled in wet leaves.

Meanwhile father and Mr. McEwan brought up the arm-chair, expecting to put Miss Ann in it amid sofa-pillows and shawls, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for an old lady in a silk dress and gold eye-glasses, with nodding mignonette in her bonnet, to sit in an up-

holstered arm-chair on a top peak of an Appalachian mountain.

But she declined to be put in the chair. Away from the insistent care of Sister Abbie and Eliza, Aunt Ann proved quite as brisk and capable as any younger one of them, and found the table-cloth and delightedly tottered around spreading it, and produced the salt and pepper and cups and saucers, and cut the cake and piled the fried chicken on the platter, and told Maria and Abbie Ann how she and little Joseph and her brother Charles once had packed a basket and slipped away and played picnic and camp in their own back yard.

"Myself, I have always longed for adventure," declared dear Miss Ann; "a taste perhaps in common with that ancestor whose ship was scuttled by pirates. Indeed I have often urged Sister Abbie to consider foreign travel. And I like doing things. If your Fabacious were not here I really should have begged to be allowed

a hand to-day in the cookery." Then hastily as if in defense of such great rashness Aunt Ann added, "I have frequently made jelly-cake in my day and also a syllabub that even Sister Abbie allowed to be delicious!"

Later, dear Miss Ann, finding herself as it were, the center of the occasion, told about some tarts she had made and not so very many years ago.

Fortunately by that time the party was seated about the table-cloth, munching hot corn on the cob, with sizzling bacon and roasted eggs and cold chicken on the tin plates before them; or, between her mention of the tarts and the odor of the boiling coffee which Fabe had on the fire, and the breezy exhilaration of Sugar Loaf's summit, their appetites could not have stood it.

"Peach tarts they were, filled into small squares of puff pastry and latticed across with pastry strips," related Miss Ann; "and when they were finished, I had Mary,

the cook, place them upon a napkin on a platter, and left her to carry them to the pantry. Which she did, setting them, for some reason,—her freshly baked bread being on the pantry table cooling, I believe,—on the pantry window-sill, also to cool. And this pantry window opened on a side street but being high and screened, the window was often left open. Then Mary went on to her affairs and I upstairs," continued Miss Ann; "and when we went back, she and I, to remove the tarts to their proper place an hour later, the screen window was raised and there were no tarts, only a few lines on a piece of paper pinned down to the board by the tines of one of our prized and crested silver forks. And it said," went on Aunt Ann,

" 'The old, old story :—
" The Queen of Hearts, she made some tarts
All on a summer's day,
The Knave of Hearts, he stole those
tarts . . .' "

"And the next day," continued Miss Ann, "if you will believe it, there came to the house brought by the kitchen way just as the supplies all are, a bushel basket of the most wonderful peaches even Sister Abbie could remember to have seen, and a card attached which said, '*More.*' Sister Abbie thinks it was some wayward college youth from the University not so many blocks from us. But, whoever it was, it has given me a new and more kindly feeling for burglars—"

"Still," said Mr. McEwan, "you cannot always count on the quality of your burglar. They would n't all leave the fork! From this, see how plainly you and Miss Abbie need a protector in the house! I am going back to the University myself next year. You might be good to me and take me."

"Really?" cried Abbie Ann.

And then Mr. McEwan explained. It was not altogether mere time that had

proved to be money, but, more directly, a hole in a piece of steel where nobody had chanced to think of a hole being useful before. It had something to do with machinery in the mines, and from indications the pot of gold was already waiting for Mr. McEwan.

"And you and I will be with Aunt Abbie and Aunt Ann together," cried Abbie; "and I won't mind so much not living at school as I would, because Maria won't be living there next year either!"

"But we will be together every day at Miss Henrietta's just the same way," explained Maria.

For Maria's father and mother were coming home to be stationed at the post just outside this very same city, and Maria could be with them, and with the flag and parade and the soldier men and the many things she talked so much about and loved so well, and yet could come to school and be with Abbie daily also.

LATE that evening the picnic party, homeward bound, checked the horses for a breathing spell on the last foot spur at the base of Sugar Loaf. Fabe was in the buckboard with the paraphernalia while father this time was in the wagon. Such is the effect of mountain air, they were all forgetting they ever had had dinner!

As they paused above the valley, the evening train was winding its yellow length in and out of the cuts and defiles that marked its way. Between the low hills to the west, the sun slanted in across the lowlands and the brawling, boulder-strewn little river and the miners' houses and the ovens, long and low and golden and gleamed against a white shaft on the valley's eastern slope. From some mountain side, the sheep-bells tinkled.

Abbie Ann and Maria held each other's hands close, they could not have said why. Then Abbie slipped down from the back seat and crept past Aunt Ann in her

stoutly lashed arm-chair, and reaching father, slipped a hand around that he might know hers was there and hold it. And since his fingers closed promptly on hers, it is to be gathered that he, too, was noting the sun slanting long and golden and low across the valley and was hearing the sheep-bells tinkling and understood.

Perhaps the Miss Anns feel the need of an understanding some one too, at evening when green fields and hills are touched by the sinking sun, for when Abbie next looked around, Maria was standing at Aunt Ann's old knee, and that person was holding Maria's little hand between both of hers.

But Mr. McEwan was gazing fixedly valley-ward perhaps because there was no hand for *him* to hold.

"If my glasses don't deceive me," said he peering downward, "there is smoke coming out of the kitchen chimney."

"It goes straight up, and it 's blue," said Maria.

"Blue is true," said Abbie and she turned her ring so that its small stone gleamed in the sun. For her part, she meant always to be true.

THE END