

A DAUGHTER
OF JEHU
• LAURA • E • RICHARDS •

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Susanna Patterson Bryant
November 8th - 1918.

Los Angeles.

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A DAUGHTER OF JEHU

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“A daughter of Jehu, for behold she driveth furiously.”

[PAGE 50]

A DAUGHTER OF JEHU

BY

LAURA E. RICHARDS

AUTHOR OF "ABIGAIL ADAMS AND HER TIMES," "PIPIN," ETC.



ILLUSTRATED

THE DUKE OF LEE

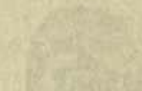


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A DAUGHTER
OF JEHU

Laura B. Richards



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TO
HENRIETTE AND MOLLY
WITH MUCH LOVE

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PROLOGUE

THE June sun, lighting up the yard of the big white house, lights up a pretty scene. To begin with, the yard is pretty in itself, with its stretch of emerald lawn, its trim gravel sweep, its linden tree, in which the bees are humming, its fragrant masses of purple lilac; but though one feels all these things, one looks at the people in the yard. Two ladies, in light summer dresses, sitting on the steps by the kitchen door; two children, riding a pony by turns, shrieking with glee. Both ladies are good to look at: one, she in the pale green muslin, is so lovely that it takes one's breath; like a dark lily, with her pale clear skin, her shadowy hair and eyes, her bending grace and languor. The other contrasts with her prettily enough: a tall, powerful young creature, vigor in every line of her, color flashing in her red-gold hair, in her dark blue eyes, in the shell-pink of her cheeks. She is in white, as befits her; this type should wear white always. A white dimity gown, made with absolute simplicity, this again contrasting with the green muslin, which is flounced and ruffled and lace-trimmed, as if the lily had clad herself in

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“And she shall go to the king’s levee,
And dance a minuet with his majestie;
And she shall the very finest be
Of all the great nobility!
Marry oo,” etc.*

“Oh! Eleanor, aren’t they darlings? Aren’t they *darlings*? They simply *are* the Duke and the Gentlewoman! What if—oh, Eleanor, dear!”

The little creatures dance sedately, tiptoeing here, pirouetting there. The young mothers clap their hands in time to the quaint, old-world tune. The pony stamps and whinnies, rather vexed at being left out of the fun after all. The June sun, shining through the linden branches, thinks, perhaps, that he has seen nothing prettier that day, nor for many days.

Dance, little Duke! Dance, fairy Duchess! Sing and clap your hands, sweet, dark lily-lady! It is June, in the world and in your hearts; dance and sing while yet you may!

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CHAPTER I

CYRUS

TO understand this story, you must know something of the topography of Cyrus, which is like no other town in the State. (But every town says that of itself!)

In the middle is the Common; square, green, with intersecting gravel paths, each with its marshaled rows of maples, which in summer are just trees, but in autumn turn to bowers and towers of scarlet and gold. On one side of the Common are the Churches, Congregational and Baptist; on two others the Houses, whereof anon; the fourth side, that fronting west, is mostly occupied by the Mallow House, where Mr. Marshall Mallow reigns as king and landlord. Under the hill runs the Street proper, where are the "stores": Abram Hanks's, where you may buy everything from pins to poplin, from buttons to bonnet-wire; the general store, kept by Orison and Aquila Wesley—peace to their memory! they are gone now, but one never forgets the large sign which gave their names in full, black on white, spelled over in wonder by generations of children; the "bookstore"—how proud we were of having a bookstore! Tinkham had none, nor Tupham. There were not many books in it,

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it is true; a selection of fifty-cent novels, chosen (it was always supposed) by Miss Almeria Bygood for their "tone." Parents were perfectly safe in buying a book for their children at Bygood's; "Bygones," Cissy Sharpe called them; some of the novels, the shopworn ones, were let out at two cents a day. My first novel, "John Halifax," came from Bygood's; I read "St. Elmo," too, and "Queechy," and learned from the latter that a heroine may weep on every page of two hundred and be none the worse for it. Mr. Bygood was very old even when I first remember him. He sat mostly in the back shop, reading the *Farmers' Almanac*; a venerable figure in a black frock coat with a high dickey. His blue eyes were full of kindness. If a child of his acquaintance (and what child was not?) came in to buy a paper or get a library book, he would utter a gentle bellow. Then Miss Almeria or Miss Egeria would give one a little push and say, "Go on, dear! Father wants to pass the time of day with you!"

One was not clear in one's mind as to what passing the time of day meant, but one went, and shook hands with Mr. Bygood—rather dreadful, this, because his hand shook, and the joints had chalk swellings—and said one was very well, thank you, and so was Father, and so was Mother. Then Mr. Bygood would say, "Do you mind your book, my dear? Always mind your book! Remember Goody Twoshoes!" The first part of this address was also puzzling, for to "mind" meant, in our vocabulary, *A*, to obey, as one's parents and elders, *B*, to dislike, as spiders and

large, smooth green caterpillars. (We were told that they were Beautiful Works of Nature, but we knew better!) However, when we came to Goody Twoshoes, we were on safe ground, and could say heartily and sincerely, "Please show me, Mr. Bygood!"

Then Mr. Bygood's mild blue eyes would brighten, and he would open a queer old desk and take out a queer little old book—*very* old, for he had had it when he was a little boy, he said—only one could hardly think printing was invented then!—and read aloud in his high quavering voice the immortal tale of the little school mistress.

"Nothing could have supported little Margery under the affliction she was in for the loss of her brother but the pleasure she took in her two shoes. She ran to Mrs. Smith as soon as they were put on, and stroking down her ragged apron, cried out: 'Two Shoes, Ma'am; see Two Shoes!' And so she behaved to all the people she met, and by that means obtained the name of Little Goody Twoshoes."

This was for little girls. Mr. Bygood did not care much for boys as a rule; but when Tom Lee came in he always produced "Marmaduke Multiply," which was even older than Goody Twoshoes, and read to him from that. Dear Mr. Bygood! how kind he was! He had peppermints, too, sometimes, but I fear we were not always grateful for these: they were apt to be fuzzy, from carrying in his blue cotton handkerchief; and besides, was not Cheeseman's next door? But we have not come to Cheeseman's yet.

Miss Almeria and Miss Egeria kept the shop, sold

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the daily paper (that came from Tinkham; Tinkham was larger, we had to admit that, though otherwise—well, no matter!) and the *Cyrus Centinel*, our own weekly; besides pens and paper and the above-described books. They were dear ladies, Miss Almeria and Miss Egeria: we loved them both, and much of the romance of old-time Cyrus—long before our own time, Kitty Ross's and mine—clustered about them. Miss Almeria was tall and handsome, with jet-black hair and eyes of brilliant Irish blue. She had a fine figure and great dignity, yet her laugh was as merry as Kitty's own. Apparently, half Cyrus had wanted to marry Miss Almeria: it was matter of common knowledge that Mr. Mallow had asked her five times, and Mr. Jordano three. Hannah Sullivan, who did our chores and waited at our parties, was a warm partisan of Mr. Mallow's, and could never meet Miss Almeria without crying, "He'll die but he'll have ye!" Mr. Mallow did not look as if he would die, but one never could tell.

Miss Egeria was gentle and quiet, a still brook where her sister was a flashing rapid. She had her father's mild eyes and kind, hesitating way. She never seemed quite sure of anything, dear Miss Egeria, but would always appeal to her sister. "I wouldn't wonder but it rained to-morrow, would you, Almy?" And if Miss Almeria said crisply, "Nonsense, Gerie! there isn't a cloud in the sky," Miss Egeria would nod her curls with a gentle, "I wouldn't wonder if 'twas pleasant, after all!"

Miss Egeria, if not such a belle as Miss Almeria,

had yet had her admirers. We all knew that the two gentlemen disrespectfully known as "Twinnies" had loved Miss Egeria and her alone, the greater part of their meek lives. They were not twins, not even brothers; but cousins and closest friends, Mr. Jason and Mr. Josiah Jebus. They kept the Crewel Shop: it had been opened under that name during the last craze for crewel work in the seventies, and had never changed. As Mr. Jason said, if they changed with every turn of fashion in fancy work, where would they be?

"Why not call it the Fancy Shop once for all, and stick to that?" Kitty Ross asked him once; but Mr. Jason shook his head. "That would sound frivolous, Katharine!" he said. "Josiah and I are not frivolous!"

They were not. They carried on their funny little business with a gravity and decorum that was all their own. Mr. Jason, as a rule, did the selling, matched the worsteds and yarns, advised the selection of patterns. Mr. Josiah embroidered. He had a club foot, and walked very lame, but his fingers were wonderfully nimble; we loved to watch him, as seated at his embroidery frame, half hidden by the green rep curtain which divided the front shop from the back (the latter was their living room), he sent his needle flying back and forth with what seemed to us miraculous speed.

The Crewel Shop was a tiny building, tucked in between Adams's and the Mallow House. A minute kitchen behind the back-shop-sitting-room, a bedroom

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above:—that was all, but it was enough for the little gentlemen. They never wanted to lose sight of each other; they had only one opinion between them on any subject. In this they differed from the Miss Bygoods. They did not appeal to each other; they simply said, "We think it will rain to-morrow." This was carried so far that one or the other might be heard, in "grippy" weather, to say, "We have a cold!" and Cissy Sharpe insisted—but one did not always believe Cissy implicitly—that she had seen Mr. Jason on several occasions try to walk lame like Mr. Josiah.

This being so, it was no more than natural that both gentlemen should have loved the same lady. Our theory (a knot of school girls gossiping over their noonday buns and pickled limes, we had a theory to fit everything in town) was that they had never told their love, for fear of interfering with each other. If this was true, it might have been hard on Miss Egeria, supposing her to have cared for either; but we somehow doubted if she ever had. They were so *very* mild, and their wigs (exactly alike, and dressed every month by Mr. Beard the barber—so appropriately named, we thought!) were such a peculiar shade of pinkish brown, and so palpably made of jute!

My mother, who detested gossip, put an end one fine day to all our romancing about still-remaining possibilities for "Miss Bygoods" by telling us the simple truth; that the dear ladies had both lost their lovers in the Civil War, and had never thought of matrimony since. She added that Kitty and I were a pair of silly girls, and would much better study our algebra lesson

than gossip about people who presumably knew their own affairs; Kitty and I went off with hanging heads, but more imbued than ever with sentimental melancholy.

We couldn't help it, we agreed: Cyrus certainly *was* a romantic place. There were so many interesting people; so many curious names! Mr. Very Jordano! How could a man be named Very Jordano and not be romantic? His mother was a Miss Very, but his father was—*must* be—of Italian descent. Look at Mr. Jordano's hair, and eyes, and the way he wore that picturesque cloak, such as no one else in Cyrus would ever think of wearing. Mr. Jordano had no objection to our looking at his hair and eyes and cloak: his Italian aspect was his joy and pride, and he cultivated it sedulously. "A poor scribbler!" he was wont to say of himself. "A poor country editor, sir; but in my veins flows the blood of—h'm! ha! *nimporto!*" and then he would glance over his shoulder mysteriously, as if to see whether he was being followed, and curl his long mustache, and hum "Santa Lucia" as fiercely as that plaintive air can be hummed. He edited the *Centinel*, as I have said, and signed his own articles "Italio." When, as sometimes happened, his spelling of *Centinel* was criticized, he would say: "It is the spelling used by Sir Walter Scott, sir! what is good enough for the Wizard of the North is good enough for me—tee! tee!"

I have left Cheeseman's till the last, but it was first in our hearts and our thoughts. Mr. Ivory Cheeseman's candy shop and kitchen was the delight and

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the despair of every child in Cyrus. We knew to a nicety the day each kind of candy was made. Monday was peppermint day, Tuesday was devoted to caramels, Wednesday to sticks, Thursday to drops, and so on. We timed our visits accordingly, and I fear we were shameless little beggars, for though we clutched our legitimate "nickel" tight, prepared to surrender it when we had made our choice, we knew very well that if we were "pretty-behaved," Uncle Ivory would probably ask us to taste those lemon drops or to see if that batch of cream ribbon wasn't a little mite better than common. Dear Uncle Ivory! how we loved him, spite of the sharp tongue that was the terror of "slack" or unmannerly children!

But this will never do. I am wandering all about Cyrus, shaking hands with everybody—I wish I could!—as if I still lived there, as if this were my own story; whereas, it is the story of Kitty Ross, and it is high time that I brought her in properly, instead of letting her whisk round an occasional corner, as she has hitherto been doing.

The story begins with Kitty's return to Cyrus after her mother's death. Her father had died two years before. Mrs. Ross—the gay, lovely, flower-like little lady, who had never felt a rough wind while he lived—could not stay long after him. She and Kitty went abroad, and wandered about here and there. Then came the panic, and most of the comfortable property Dr. Ross had left was swept away, I am not clear just how. Very little was left, and much of that little was invested in western railroads that paid no dividends. I

will hurry over this part. Mrs. Ross drooped like a broken flower; drooped and died, and Kitty was left alone.

If Tom Lee had been at home that year, this story would never have been written; but Tom was in China, building railways. So Kitty came back alone to Cyrus, where she was born and bred. Cyrus people are the kindest in the world, I believe. They may be fond of gossip (I don't find that a thousand miles away it is less popular) and they may be a trifle stiff-necked, like their Puritan ancestors before them, but kind they certainly are. Ever since the news of Mrs. Ross's death came, Cyrus had been asking, what *would* Kitty do? The money was gone, practically gone, Judge Peters said. There was enough for her clothes and fal-lals, but little more, sir, little more. Something must be thought of. Some—thing—must—be—thought—of. The judge looked and spoke cheerfully, because he had already thought of something. He was Dr. Ross's executor, and who had a better right, he would like to know?

The Miss Bygoods, talking together in low tones, while Father nodded over the fire, voiced the same sentiment. The dear child! they said. Of course she could not stay in that great house alone, even with Sarepta. Sarepta was good and faithful, of course, and an excellent cook, as everyone knew; but she was no companion for Kitty, even if her temper were not—well, uncertain.

"I think the little blue room, Sister!" said Miss Almeria. "There are bluebirds on the paper, you know,

and Kitty always made me think of a bluebird. Dear me! how pleasant to think of having a young creature in the house again!"

"And oh, sister!" Miss Egeria beamed softly over her tatting. "We can give her a little Society! Nothing elaborate, of course, only ice-cream and sponge-drops, but—wandering about the Continent as she has been—not that I mean a word in criticism of dear, sainted Mrs. Ross; no, indeed! but to meet Cyrus people, and have a little social life, will mean a great deal to dear Kitty. I mean when she puts on half mourning, of course."

Miss Almeria pondered.

"I wish there were more young people!" she said. "There is no better society than that of Cyrus, but—but we must acknowledge that most of our agreeable people are—a—mature, and Kitty is so young!"

"There is Wilson Wibird;" Miss Egeria spoke timidly. "Wilson is young."

Miss Almeria looked grave.

"Wilson is young!" she acknowledged with a dignified bend of her handsome head. "I fear there is little more to be said in his favor." She paused. Wilson Wibird had been in Egeria's Sunday School class, and she could not bear to think ill of him. Why give pain? thought Miss Almeria.

"I cannot think that Kitty would find him interesting!" she concluded.

Interesting, indeed! Miss Almeria had never heard Wilson Wibird shrieking from the gutter, "Ma! Ma! Kitty Ross knocked me down and tromped on me!"

"And there are the Chanters!" Miss Egeria spoke more confidently, as Miss Almeria's face lightened.

"Yes, there are the Chanters. They will be pleasant playmates for Kitty: they are young, and gay: I almost think—I fear—Zephine and Rodney may sometimes be a little *too* gay, sister, but perhaps not. Yes, the Chanters will certainly be a resource; still, my dear, we must acknowledge that there have been great changes in Cyrus. It is not what it was in our youth."

And Miss Egeria did acknowledge it meekly.

Mr. Marshall Mallow, at the Mallow House, made a careful examination of his rooms about this time; studying wall-papers, carpets and decorations, with meticulous care. One room, he decided, a pleasant corner room, facing south and west, could do with a new paper, and one or two nice "edgin's." "I don't care for these chromios," he said to Billy. (Billy was his clerk: if he had another name, I never knew it.) "They're too glarish. Give me a good edgin' or engravement!"

Mr. Mallow's English was all his own, but nobody minded, because he never said anything unkind in it. He overflowed with warmth, like the rising sun, which, indeed, he somewhat resembled, with his round, rosy face and polished head. He inherited the Mallow House from his father, who in turn had taken it from *his* father, who built it. It was a family affair. Since old Mrs. Mallow died, Mr. Marshall (known as "Marsh" among his intimates) had been his own housekeeper, major-domo and butler. "I don't want

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no woman gormineerin' over me!" he often said; but this was when youth was past, and with it all hope of Miss Almeria; or so we girls maintained.

The boarders at the Mallow House—but here I go wandering again. The boarders must wait.

CHAPTER II

ENTER KITTY

JUDGE PETERS, tall and spare, in glossy frock coat and tall hat, met Kitty at the station. Miss Almeria Bygood was there, too, and Mr. Mal- low. It was quite a getherin', the latter said: quite a getherin'. Gen'lly, he despised to see folks conjugating round the deepo, but this was an occasion, you see.

Mr. Very Jordano, notebook in hand, keeping a sharp lookout for the train, agreed with him.

"I expect Miss Kitty will be a distang young lady!" he said. "Traveled the world around; the world around. A select gathering is surely appropriate-tate-tate!"

It must not be supposed that Cyrus was a place of individual dialects. Most of us spoke ordinary English or good, strong, racy Yankee; it was only these two gentlemen who were peculiar in their speech. Mr. Jordano had formerly had an impediment; was, in fact, a confirmed stutterer, till he came to man's estate. The story went that one day, wishing to go to Tupham, he found himself wholly unable to ask for a ticket. He stood before the friendly station master, gasping, scarlet, but uttering no sound.

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“Come, Very!” said Mr. Tosh. “Put a name to it! Where do you want to go? Train’s due!”

“T-T-T-” stammered Mr. Very, “T-T-T- *Damn it!* I’ll walk to *Tupham!*”

After this experience, he set himself, carefully and methodically, to remedy the defect: labored, suffered, finally conquered. I know not what his method was: I only know that he was apt to repeat the final syllable of a word, sometimes with singular effect. When he said, “Business is looking up-pup-pup,” or “I fear I must be going now-wow-wow!” strangers were surprised. To us, it was as much a part of Mr. Jordano as his foreign idioms; foreign idiocies, Mrs. Sharpe called them. These were simply an assertion of his Italian descent. Nothing vexed him so much as to be addressed as “Jordan,” a thing that happened now and then. “Names ending in O,” he would say, “are invariably of Latin origin, Latin origin-gin-gin!”

He set great store by the letter “O,” and seemed to think that it could not fail to impart a Latin tinge to whatever word it adorned. His favorite exclamation, “Nimporto!” (pronounced as spelled) was an example of his method, if it could be called a method. He knew little of French vowel sounds, nothing of accents; *i* was English *i* to him, long or short as might be, except when it was mysteriously *a*. *Distingué* was “distang,” and so on. It is unlikely that he was acquainted with Mrs. Plornish, as he thought Dickens unrefined, and never read him; but his epithets sometimes rivaled those of that immortal lady.

Here is the train, and here is—a fine lady? a flounced



“Oh, Judge, I’ve come home! I’ve come home!”

Enter Kitty

and furbelowed Frenchwoman, as Mrs. Sharpe predicted? No! just Kitty! our own Kitty, rather pale, rather larger-eyed than usual (which was unreasonable!) sweet and simple in her dark gray dress.

"Very distang!" murmured Mr. Jordano, making a series of little bows over his note-book. "Oh, very distang, indeed!"

"Kitty! my dear child!" Miss Almeria had her in her arms, and the fair head drooped a moment on that kind black satin shoulder; but only for a moment; then Kitty was herself again.

"Dear Miss Almeria! how perfectly *darling* of you! Oh, Judge! Oh, Mr. Mallow, I *am* so glad to see you! And oh! if it isn't Mr. Jordano! How d'ye do, Mr. Jordano? Did you come to meet me, too? I do think you are the kindest people in the world! Oh, Judge, I've come home! I've come home!"

Kitty's voice quavered, and the tears came into her gray eyes, but she winked them away resolutely. Judge Peters blew his nose with a long, sonorous note. He had had a little speech of welcome all ready in the back of his head; nothing formal, just distinctive enough to mark the occasion; but all he found to say, and that gruffly, without an atom of his beautiful Court manner, was: "How are you, Kitty? How are you? Glad to see you!"

Mr. Jordano was hardly more fortunate, even though he had written down his remarks the night before, and committed them to memory while shaving that morning. But he began bravely:

"Miss Kitty, I bid you welcome to your native

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heath! This day—a—every inhabitant of Cyrus—a—will be marked with a white letter and a red stone—I—I would say a red letter and a white stone-tone-tone. The Graces—a—the Muses——” Mr. Jordano hesitated and was lost. “Nimporto!” he said hastily. “I am glad to see you, Miss Kitty; you are looking well, my dear young lady, considering everything-ting-ting!”

Mr. Jordano retired in confusion, flourishing his note-book nervously. Mr. Mallow’s turn had come. Taking both Kitty’s hands, he shook them up and down solemnly, as if working a double pump.

“How are you, Kitty?” he said huskily. “Pretty well, thank ye! My bronical tubes don’t conjingle, that’s all. Well! well! well! how about it? Lots of water in the ’Tlantic Ocean, eh? Treat you pretty well, did they? Find anything better than the Mallow House in them foreign caravans? Bet you didn’t!”

Here the Chanters swept round the corner, rosy, breathless, shouting, “Late, as usual!” and the reception was over. There could be no ceremony where the Chanters were. The three girls enveloped Kitty in exclamatory embraces: the three boys (well-grown youths, but always boys!) hovered about, as nearly embarrassed as Chanters could be, cracking their finger-joints and getting in a word when they could. It was something like this:

Trebles: “You dear, darling, delicious *Thing!* It is too simply heavenly to get you back! Oh, Kitty, it is so rapturous!”

Basses: “Great, Kitty! awf’lly glad!”

Enter Kitty

Trebles: "My *dear*, I can't believe it is you, though you *do* look so deliciously natural, you darling!"

Basses: "Corking, Kitty! looking awf'ly well!"

Trebles: "*Isn't* she? Only a *scrap* shadowy, but it makes her eyes all the bigger. *Kitty!* They are a mile round at *least!* I never saw—Oh, you *precious* Thing, I *must* kiss you again! Won't you give the boys just *one*—"

Basses: "Oh! I say!" *Exeunt*, blushing peony red.

It had been decided that Nelly Chanter should have tea that first night with Kitty. Miss Egeria Bygood had held an anxious consultation with Sarepta, the Ruler of Ross House. Miss Bygoods had hoped to have Kitty at their house this first evening; Miss Egeria advanced the proposition rather tremulously. What did Sarepta think? It would be *such* a pleasure to Father: Kitty had always been his favorite: there happened to be a sweetbread in the house—

Sarepta fixed her with an inscrutable pale blue eye.

"No'm! thankin' you all the same, but it can't be done. She's best off in her own home at the first of it. I've got everything provided. But it's real kind of you!" she added, relenting. "I'll tell her you asked her, and she'll be just as pleased."

"Oh!" Miss Egeria had been making little plaintive sounds, like a deprecating bird. "But do you think, Sarepta—won't it be sad for the dear child, all alone—not that you are not excellent company, Sarepta!"

"Ask Nelly Chanter!" Sarepta evidently had it all arranged in her mind. "I was goin' to send word to

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her, but if you would! She has the most sense of any of 'em. And she's young!"

Sarepta did not mean to be cruel, but the thing must be understood. It was understood: Miss Egeria bowed her head meekly.

John Tucker had waited till the first rush of Chanters was over. He now advanced quietly, and touching his hat with a twinkle of welcome, took possession of Kitty's bag.

"Glad to see you, Miss Kitty!" he said. "The checks, Miss? I'll see to your trunks. Pilot's round the corner."

"Oh, John!" Kitty's face broke into a wholly new combination of smiles. "Shake hands, John! Aren't you glad to see me? Oh, I am *so* glad to see you! How's Mary? And the children? Sarepta is well, of course! She wouldn't dare to be anything else, with me coming home: not that she ever was!"

Now, how exactly like John Tucker! All in a moment, with no word, with hardly a look, he had got Kitty away from the eager group of friends, each of whom was waiting for a little private word with her; had tucked her into the sleigh, given the checks to the expressman (who had rather hoped he might get a word and a glance, too), chirruped to Pilot, and whisked round the corner out of sight. Exactly like John Tucker!

"How mean of John!" cried Zephine Chanter. "Why, I hadn't time to see her dress, or anything!"

"John Tucker's movements are quick-wick-wick!" said Mr. Jordano. "We may as well be jogging, neigh-

Enter Kitty

bors. Miss Almeria, may I accommodate my steps to yours as far as the corner?"

The little group dispersed, Miss Bygood and Mr. Jordano departing first, a stately pair.

"Aren't they *too* delicious?" demanded Zephine Chanter, looking after them. "Don't you think they might hit it off after all, Lina? Hannah Sullivan says he'll die but he'll have her!"

"Hannah Sullivan has said that of Mr. Mallow for twenty-five years, mother says!" Lina, the eldest and quietest of the Chanters, spoke reprovingly, "and—and I wouldn't, Zephine, if I were you!"

"I know you wouldn't, Sobersides dear; but I would, you see! Where's Nelly? Nell, mind you notice every stitch she has on. *Disgusting* of Sarepta to ask you instead of me—but perfectly right, you darling thing! Come on, girls! The boys have gone. Weren't they *too* craven! when, of course, they were dying to!"

Speeding along the level, jogging up the hill, John Tucker kept his eyes fixed steadily between Pilot's sharp-pricked ears, and kept up a steady stream of cheerful talk which enabled Kitty to cry quietly into her muff and no harm done. Yes, they was all well, he guessed. Mary had had one of them spells last summer, but she was rugged now, and the children similar. Sarepty was in her usual health, fur as he knew: he never knew anything to ail Sarepty. He didn't know but 'twas because she was so poor of flesh: nothin' for sickness to take holt of, or so it appeared. Bones wasn't liable to ail any, he guessed. What say?

"John Tucker, how you talk!" Kitty was actually laughing, a quavering little laugh, but still—"As if bones didn't ache when people have rheumatism! Dear me! how is old Mrs. Tosh, John?"

"I couldn't say, Miss Kitty; that is, not precisely. She ain't livin', Mis' Tosh ain't—at the present time!" John added gravely, with an air of guarding his words carefully. "She passed away—yes'm! 'Twas about the time we lost old Victory."

"Is Victory dead? Oh, John! the dear old horse! Why, she was the first horse I ever drove. Don't you remember Father giving me the reins, and dear Mother being so frightened?"

"I do, Miss!" John Tucker's face, which had been carefully wooden till now, broke into curiously carved wrinkles of laughter. "I'll remember that, I guess, long as I remember anything. Little tyke you was—excuse me, Miss Kitty!"

"I certainly was! go on, John!"

"Six years old, warn't you? Or not more'n seven anyhow. 'You may drive round to the stable, Daughterkin!' says Doctor, and puts the reins in your little mites of hands. 'Yes, Doctor,' says you. 'I'll drive round!' and you took them reins, and before any one could so much as wink, you was out of the yard, cuttin' down the ro'd full chisel—gee whiminy! I can see you now. Your Ma hollered right out, and I don't wonder, fragile as she was. I know it took *my* breath away. Why, I never see anything go so quick. It appeared like you and Victory had got it fixed up between you, so to speak. Doctor himself was took

Enter Kitty

aback, I could see that, the way he winked his eyes, but he wouldn't let on.

“ ‘Don't be frightened, Mary,’ he says. ‘The little imp has a good grip, and Victory is as kind as kindness!’ he says. All the same, I noticed he was lookin' pretty sharp up the ro'd! And when he see the old mare's nose come round the corner, gee whiminy! he slaps his leg and hollers out, ‘A daughter of Jehu!’ he says, quotin' Scriptur', I believe, the way he did. ‘A daughter of Jehu, for behold she driveth furiously!’ ”

Kitty was laughing outright now.

“Dear Papa! I *was* a little imp, wasn't I, John?”

“Yes, Miss, you sure was. But yet—” John Tucker, cocking his head argumentatively, ventured for the first time to look at his companion, saw her face firm and cheerful, and went on with confidence—“but yet you knew what you was about well enough. You'd ben handlin' the ribbons a year or more goin' to and from the stable, 'longside o' me or your Pa: you was tough as hickory, and you was knowledgeable: there warn't nothing to be scared of. ‘A daughter of Jehu!’ says Doctor, ‘for behold she driveth furiously. Here she comes, Mary! she's all right!’ He laughed right out, and then he pulls his face straight, and looks mighty solemn, and you come lickety-split along the ro'd and turned in the gate as neat as a whistle, and pulls up front the door. I says to myself, ‘Wal!’ I says; ‘that young one,’ I says, ‘is all right!’ And so it has proved.”

“Nice John! Thank you, John! And we've been

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friends ever since, haven't we? But Papa scolded me, didn't he?"

"He did, Miss. 'You little imp,' he says, 'I told you to drive round to the stable!' 'Yes, Papa dear,' you says: I can hear you now. 'So I did, dear Papa; round the square!' He had to laugh then, would he or wouldn't he!"

"Victory could have made just as good a turn without me!" said honest Kitty. "She was as wise as three ordinary horses; and she knew the way round that turn as well as the way into her own stall. She was pretty old even then, John, wasn't she?"

"Victory," said John Tucker, slowly, "was thirty-five years old when she died this spring. I set out to write you, but I couldn't seem to. Kind o' broke me up, losin' her. She was the first hoss ever I come to know and care for. Lemme see! I come to work for Doctor thirty years ago this winter. Victory was five years old, and she was a pictur! prettiest hoss I ever see, bar none. Well! now you might be—?"

"Twenty!" said Kitty.

"That's right! And Vict'ry was twenty that time you driv her round the square. She kep' smart right along up to the last week, old mare did: I didn't drive her any last summer, only once in a while, so's her feelin's wouldn't be hurt, seein' the other hosses go out. She'd whinny out just as *askin'*! 'Why ain't I goin' out?' she'd say, plain as any person need to speak. Then I'd put her in the light sulky and drive her up and down the ro'd a piece, and she'd antic

Enter Kitty

round and toss up her head as if she was the President's wife goin' to meetin'."

"I hope she didn't suffer, John?"

"No'm! no! she died like a Christian, the old mare did. One night she wouldn't take her sugar; I allers gave her the sugar, like you told me, Miss Kitty—"

"Dear, good John! Thank you, John!"

"So I suspicioned what was comin', seein' her age and all. I told S'repty, and she brung out an extry good mash, but 'twas no use. Old mare laid down, and we set there with her. She looked at me real lovin', and put her nose in my hand, and I rubbed her, and S'repty rubbed her; and 'long about ten o'clock she just stretched out and passed away, same as if she was a person."

John Tucker cleared his throat and was silent for a few minutes; then he addressed Pilot, his present joy and pride, with some asperity:

"Git ap, you! No reason for *your* goin' to sleep that I know of. Miss Kitty—" he glanced sidelong at his companion—"the ro'd's first rate here on the level. I didn't know but you might like to drive a spell—"

"Oh, John!" Kitty looked down ruefully at the gray suède gloves which had seemed just the right thing for traveling. Pilot had a pretty solid mouth. "If I only had some decent gloves!" she sighed.

With a sheepish look, John Tucker fumbled in an outside pocket and pulled out a stout pair of leath^r gloves, fur-lined.

"S'repty wouldn't give 'em to me!" he chuckled; "but I remembered the drawer where you kep' 'em.

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You'll need 'em. I kep' him in yes'day a-puppose."

With a flashing, "Oh, John! You *are* a darling!" Kitty almost snatched the gloves from him. Another moment, and they were speeding along the level, a swallow-flight which brought the blood to the girl's pale cheeks and the light to her eyes.

"I tell ye!" chuckled John Tucker. "Gee whiminy! Go it, Miss Kitty, he's fresh: I kep' him in yes'day a-puppose."

Kitty chirruped; Pilot tossed his handsome head and sped on the faster.

"If I am a daughter of Jehu," said Kitty, "I might as well live up to my name, John Tucker!"

So it came to pass that when Kitty Ross came home to her father's house, it was with a rush and a swirl that brought Sarepta flying from the kitchen in a panic, dish-cloth in one hand, stove-lifter in the other.

"My land of the living!" cried Sarepta. "That John Tucker!"

CHAPTER III

ROSS HOUSE

THE Ross house stood—*stands*, thank heaven!—on the north side of the Common, between Judge Peters's and Madam Flynt's, its front windows facing due south. The main body of the house is of brick, the two wings and the portico with its Doric columns, of wood; all gleaming white, with blinds of exactly the right shade of green. The front fence (Cyrus has not done away with its fences; it would scorn to do so. "When I wish to move into my neighbor's yard," says Madam Flynt, "I shall ask his permission first." And Miss Almeria Bygood says, "I prefer to live *on* the street, not *in* it") is of iron, with chains and tassels elaborately looped; the posts of white brick, surmounted by wooden balls large enough for a child to sit on with some measure of comfort. The gate, a beautiful affair of hand-wrought iron (a testimonial to Dr. Ross from a grateful blacksmith) was made, one would think, to be swung on. Near the bottom were four grapevine circles, into which two pairs of small feet fitted perfectly; while the smooth bar across the top was manifestly intended for the resting of dimpled chins and the grasping of chubby hands. Then, its squeak! At the

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friendly sound, Kitty Ross glanced down, and all her childhood came flooding back.

"Ah, Tommy!" she sighed. "Ah, Duke! We are too big now, even if you were anywhere."

Then the door opened, and there stood Sarepta Darwin, just as she had stood at similar home-comings all Kitty's lifetime.

"Come in this minute, child!" she said. "You had the life nigh scared out of me. You, John Tucker, you'd ought to be ashamed of yourself, at your time of life!"

"That's just it, S'repty," chuckled John. "I've outgrown the sensation!"

"Don't scold, Sarepta dear!" said Kitty. "I've come home!"

Sarepta snorted, and turned her head away. No one had ever seen a tear in that wintry blue eye, and no one ever should. The idea!

"You're froze, I expect," she said severely, "speedin' like' that in this cold. Come in to the fire! Nelly Chanter's comin' to supper with you and spend the night, but I thought you'd want to get your things off first."

Home! After all the wandering, all the longing: home at last! Kitty had enjoyed much of the time abroad. Endless wonder, endless beauty; she rejoiced to have seen it; but the place where she was born, the countryside where she belonged, meant more to her than all the glories of Europe and Asia. So long as her mother was with her, so long as anything strange or fair could lift the languid head or bring a gleam

of light to the sad eyes, on they must go, wherever the brightest way seemed to point: but when it was over, and the weary body which held the gay, innocent, flower-like soul, was hid quietly in the churchyard at Vevey, there was but one thought in Kitty's mind. The English cousins, the kind Swiss friends, might plead as they would; they all wanted her; it would mean so much to them if she would make her home with them. Kitty thanked them all with tears, and took the next and swiftest steamer for home.

A plain square hall, with stairs going up at one side; old prints on the walls: Regulus and the Carthaginian Ambassadors, Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi:—Kitty had a loving glance for all: the very oilcloth felt friendly under her feet. Had not Grandfather Ross laid it down fifty years ago, when oilcloth was oilcloth, and not, as dear Father used to say, brown paper and fish glue?

It was late January, but the Christmas wreaths still hung in the windows, the fir boughs over the picture-frames. The mail-table, with its scales and weights, the barometer, the hanging shelf where garden baskets and implements slept the long winter away—Kitty's glance took them all in lovingly.

"Fire's in the settin' room!" said Sarepta.

Kitty turned to the right, and entered the room she loved best in the world. Shabby, Mrs. Sharpe called the sitting room of Ross House. If it was shabby, no one but Mrs. Sharpe knew it. The rugs were worn, it is true, the original patterns lost in a warm blending of reds and blues, but they were still thick and soft,

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and only Sarepta knew of the mended places. The wallpaper had not been changed since the memory of man. Why should it be, when it was in perfect condition? And how much of it was visible anyhow? Mellow, rich, warm: one sought for other kindred words, feeling the friendly harmony of everything from the Piranesi etchings to the books which lined half the walls and lay on every available flat surface. The fireplace occupied most of one side, the fire leaped and crackled behind the high fender—not so high as it used to be, Kitty, when you and Tom “stumped” each other to climb on it and grimace at your reflections in the round balls of the andirons. A leather sofa stood before the fireplace: well! I grant that the sofa was shabby, but who cared? Never was another, old or new, to compare with it in comfort. Kitty sank down on it now, and stretched her hands to the blaze, and made a little sound, half moan, half coo, of utter thankfulness. Sarepta, erect in the doorway, hands folded over her spotless apron, had the air of waiting for something. Presently Kitty spoke over her shoulder, her eyes still fixed on the fire.

“She didn’t suffer at all, Sarepta!”

Sarepta grunted.

“She just faded away quietly, like a flower. It was like—do you remember how I used to put the hollyhocks in the little black pool, under the trees? They didn’t wither or crumple up, they just grew more transparent, day by day, till at last they seemed almost to melt into the water: it was more like that than anything else.”

Sarepta grunted again. "Got your feet wet reg'lar every time you did it!" she said.

"She knew she was going," the clear lovely voice went on, as if repeating a lesson. "She asked me to— to leave her there, among the flowers: she was so tired, she thought it would trouble her in heaven to know that—it—was being carried about. And then—she said—'Go home, darling! Go home to—Sarepta and John Tucker: they will—take—care—'"

The clear voice faltered, broke: Sarepta Darwin threw her apron over her head and went away.

An hour later, a composed and cheerful Kitty was greeting Nelly Chanter, who came in rosy and breathless as usual, full of tender incoherence.

"Darling Kitty! so heavenly of Sarepta to ask me to come! I *didn't* mean to be—oh, Kitty, you are home again! I thought you *never*—what a perfectly delicious kitten!"

All the embarrassment was Nelly's, and she did not quite know what to make of the sensation, an unfamiliar one to Chanters; but she was, as Sarepta said, the most sensible of them, and followed Kitty's lead readily. The trunks had come, Kitty said; they wouldn't begin really to unpack, it was too near supper time, but she must just open the little leather one, and get out—come along!

Up the stairs they went, every step holding its greeting for Kitty, every touch of the carved rail sending its little thrill through her; round the turn, up to the landing, where the orange tree was in full fruitage— one, two, three,—*twelve* oranges!

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“Do look, Nelly! Sarepta is a wonder, isn’t she?”

Past the door from which the voice had always called as she went by, “Kitty my Pretty! is that you?”—silent now; the door open, of course, Sarepta knew enough for that, but not to be glanced at yet—not yet! So into her own room opposite, where the fire crackled as gayly as in the room below, and the curtains were drawn and the candles lighted.

The little leather trunk, being investigated, yielded up a lace blouse, the most exquisite dream of a thing, according to Nelly, that ever was seen. It couldn’t be for her! no! It wasn’t possible! Reassured on this point, Nelly was overwhelmed. How could she ever, ever, *ever* thank Kitty enough?

“Hush, Nelly! it isn’t half pretty enough for you. Tell me about everybody! Your mother is well, you say? How is Madam Flynt?”

“Very well, except for her rheumatism. I saw her this morning: she sent her best love, and hopes you will come in to-morrow. She can’t walk much in this slippery weather: she has been driving—” Nelly stopped suddenly, with a queer look: one would say a guilty look.

Kitty, now in her white wrapper, brushing out her long fair hair before the glass, and looking, Nelly thought, like a heavenly mermaid, did not see the look.

“Well, she wouldn’t be driving next door anyhow,” she said. “I’ll run over right after breakfast. Let me see! I’ve seen all the dearest people, except your mother and Madam Flynt. Wasn’t it darling of them

to come to meet me? How handsome Miss Almeria looked! How are the Wibirds, Nell?"

"Much as usual, I think. Melissa is poorly, but she keeps on at the Library. I don't think she's having a very good winter. Poor Melissa!"

Nelly's rosy face clouded slightly.

"Wilson?" Kitty spoke low.

"Yes! pretty bad this winter, I'm afraid. Mrs. Wibird can't control him, nor any one else except Mr. Mallow and Billy."

"How's Mr. Cheeseman?"

"Oh, just the same! all agog to see you, like every one else. I was in there yesterday, and he was making every kind of candy you had ever liked since you were a baby, so he'd be sure to have the right thing on hand. And Mr. Bygood was so excited about your coming he got no nap yesterday, and Miss Egeria was so worried! But Miss Almeria told her joy was the best thing for the aged, so she cheered up. My dear, I think you'll have to go and see them *all* to-morrow, or they will all pass away, and there will be no Cyrus left. *Kitty!*"

"Yes, dear!"

At Nelly's explosive utterance of her name, Kitty, whose toilet had been progressing while they talked, paused, slipper in hand.

"What is it, Nelly?"

"Oh, nothing! that is—well, Mother just wanted me to say that we hope you will come to live with us!"

"Why, Nelly!"

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Nelly went on with a rush. "I know the house is small and crowded, but just listen! The boys are *dying* to have you, simply dying! So they will sleep in the barn-chamber, and Zephine and I will take their room, and you will have ours. We've got it all planned out, and the boys have always wanted to have the barn-chamber, and they will fit it up themselves, so you see it will be the most convenient thing in the world, besides making us all so happy we want to dance whenever we think of it. Now, Kitty, say you'll think about it? Of course, you can't decide this moment, and of course the other houses are bigger, and you may say some of them are lonely—the people, not the houses!—but you *will* think about it, Kitty, won't you, and remember that we spoke first!"

Kitty's eyes were wide with astonishment, but full of affection.

"Of course I will, Nelly! Why, I never heard of anything so kind in my life. Thank your dear mother a thousand times, and tell her—but I shall tell her myself. There's the bell! Come along. I'm sure Sarepta has pop-overs for us!"

Sarepta had pop-overs for them, marvelous efflorescences of brown and gold, such as all Europe could not afford. Kitty exclaiming to this effect, Sarepta grimly supposed they hadn't the faculty, and drew attention to the creamed chicken and oysters, which were done the way Kitty used to like 'em, though Sarepta presumed she'd learned newer-fangled ways over there. Mebbe she wouldn't care. Reassured on this point, she handed the fried potatoes with a challenging air—she

knew no one could beat her there—and retired, to count over every word Kitty had said and store it away for future need.

The girls fell to their supper as healthy, hungry girls should, and for a time conversation was chiefly exclamatory, dealing with the wonders of Sarepta's cookery. By and by, however, over the ice-cream which made it a "party," as they exclaimed with delight, and later, sitting on the sofa before the singing, purring fire, they had much talk, Kitty telling of things she had seen abroad, Nelly wondering, admiring, exclaiming. But always the talk would come back to Cyrus, the home of their hearts, and to the people who lived there. Only two thousand, all told, this including the three French families and the two "Polanders" down by the little woolen mill which was our one "industry," so that between them the two girls knew or knew of almost every one within the village limits. It was a farming community, save for the comfortable store-keepers, and the half dozen "tony" families as Mrs. Sharpe called them, whose ample mansions, white or yellow, had stood about the Common since Colonial days. Cyrus, her people were wont to say, did not *grow*: she *remained*. I don't know just why they were proud of this stationary quality, but they certainly were. For fifty years, the population had hardly changed; or to be accurate, it had changed in so gradual and regular a fashion that it always seemed the same. An accurate observer like Judge Peters would tell you that once in about thirty years there were more children: the schools were fuller, the wave

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of youth crept slowly up till street and meeting house blossomed with youths and maidens. Then, still gradually, the wave would recede: some of the lads went away to work, some of the lasses married "out-of-towners"; the numbers dwindled again, till in another thirty years another vigorous generation would come shouting to the front.

"And *how* is Savory Bite?" asked Kitty. "Does he still live alone?" (This gentleman's real name was Avery Bright, but he was never called by it.)

"My dear, yes! No one goes near him: where is the use, when he won't let any one in? He did our garden last spring, and was just the same, snapping your head off if you spoke to him. I have never been in the house, though I have peeped in the window sometimes. It's always neat as wax, I'll say that for Savory."

Kitty gave a little sudden laugh.

"I've been in it!" she said. "Tom and I got in one day through the cellar; he had left the door unlocked. We got up into the kitchen, and had a wonderful time. You know everything is painted blue, floor, tables, chairs, everything? Well, naughty Tom had a piece of chalk in his pocket, and what does he do but write on the blue table in big letters,

"Savory Bite,
Why not paint it white?"

A silence fell: then Nelly asked the question which had been on her tongue twenty times, and twenty times kept back.

"Where is Tom, Kitty? Do you know?"

Kitty looked straight at her with honest eyes.

"I don't know, Nelly. I haven't heard one word from him. I wrote," she added, "when Father died—that was after Mrs. Lee's death, but I knew he was in Omaha, and I had his uncle's address—but I never had one word of answer."

If a writer could only tell all she knows! That letter, Kitty, in which you poured out your sad heart to the lad who had been brother, playmate and boy lover ever since you can remember, is in the pocket of his uncle's spring overcoat, now laid away in camphor, till the first of May, when he changes from winter to spring clothes, regardless of weather. His uncle is not a villain, far from it; he would gladly forward the letter, only he does not know it is there, nor will till the above date.

As for Tom's letter to you, Kitty, written about the same time, I don't know whose pocket that is in. He wrote it on board the steamer at San Francisco, and sent it back by the pilot: but it never reached you. It was a good letter, too. Tom knew nothing of Dr. Ross's death: full of his own recent loss of a beloved mother, he thought of you in your happy home with the two dear and delightful parents who seemed to belong almost equally to him—almost! He told you of his great "job"; he begged you to think of him whenever you had a minute to spare, but not to bother about writing, because he had no address to give beyond the Shanghai Bank, and he might not get back there for a year or two, from the way the job looked

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at this end. But you would know he was thinking about you, and you must be a good Cat and purr a great deal, and not scratch anybody except Wilson Wibird. And when he came back, Kitty—well, perhaps he'd better wait till then, but all the same you *knew* well enough, so he remained yours always, The Duke of Lee.

Yes, that letter would have comforted Kitty a great deal: it was a pity she did not get it.

Tom, meanwhile, building bridges in a remote province of northern China, supposed comfortably that she had got it, and thought of her daily with great contentment.

So things go—sometimes! And here is Sarepta with the bedroom candles.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOME GUARD

EARLY next morning, Nelly was off for her school. Kitty, after waving her good-bye from the gate, went back into the house; into the kitchen, where she knew Sarepta was expecting her. "You come out quick as you get shet of her!" had been the mandate, which Kitty would never have thought of disobeying.

"Dear kitchen!" she said. "I saw nothing like this, in Europe, Sarepta!"

"I expect not!" said Sarepta, with a lift of her chin. "Take a seat!"

Kitty sat down obediently in a Windsor chair, and looked about her with great content. Her eyes passed from the shining stove to the cupboard full of beautiful old blue crockery, the pride of Sarepta's heart; to the scarlet geraniums in the window, the yellow cat on her scarlet cushion. All good, all delightful. She had come home.

"But what is all this, Sarepta?" asked Kitty.

On the shining table sat a number of plump little bags, of stout unbleached cotton, bearing brief inscriptions in blackest ink. Kitty took them up one by one, and read in wonder: "Eggs," "Tomatoes," "Sarce."

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“What in the world, Sarepta?”

Sarepta, standing rigid, her hands folded in her apron, made austere reply.

“There was no reason as I know of why things should go to waste. Your Ma wasn’t fit to see to ’em before she went away. There wasn’t no need she should. I should hope I knew *something!* This—” she took up the stoutest bag, “is the egg and chicken money. The hens has done real well; I’ve sold eggs and broilers and roosters. You count that!” She named a sum. “I expect it’s right.”

“Sarepta! you dear, good soul! How could you—”

“This is sarce!” Sarepta continued, taking up another bag. “Sugar was low and fruit was high, so I done well there too. I made two hundred glasses of currant jell, and three hundred of grape, and—”

“But, Sarepta! What did you do with them all?”

“Sold ’em! Mis’ Flynt wasn’t puttin’ up, herself, this year, didn’t want to bother with it. No more did Miss Bygoods. And Mr. Mallow gi’ me the hull of his order, so you see—”

“I see!” Kitty became thoughtful. “Sarepta—”

“Well!” the answer was a snap, thrown backward over an uncompromising shoulder. Sarepta was suddenly very busy at the stove, rattling and raking with much commotion.

“Sarepta! You didn’t—you didn’t *ask* for these orders, did you?”

Sarepta turned round; her face was like an iceberg carved with a jackknife.

“Was your Pa satisfied with me?”

The Home Guard

"Sarepta! You know he adored you!"

"Was your Ma satisfied with me?"

"Sarepta dear! Don't be cantankerous!"

"*Was* your Ma satisfied with me?"

"Of course she was! How can you—"

"I made sarce before you was born or thought of!" Sarepta's tone expressed finality. "I've always made it—and I've never took it!" she added with a grim chuckle which splintered the iceberg in a singular way. "Anything else?" Sarepta's tone was amiable, but conveyed the idea that she had things to do, however it might be with other people.

"Just one thing, Sarepta dear, and then I'll go. Have you taken your wages out of this money? If not, hadn't we better settle it now?"

Sarepta made no immediate reply. Instead, she examined the draughts of the stove one by one, with meticulous care. Apparently satisfied with their condition, she next proceeded to brush the stove top (which did not need brushing) and to fill the kettle with ostentatious zeal. Kitty waited patiently, enjoying the kitchen and stroking the yellow cat. Finally, Sarepta washed her hands elaborately, rolled them in her apron, and turned round. So turning, she displayed the iceberg set again in rigid lines. The words appeared to freeze as they dropped from her lips. Sarepta had come to this house with Kitty's Ma, she intimated, when first she come here a bride.

"Sarepta," Mrs. Ross had said, "this is my home, and it is yours, too, as long as you live." Was that so, or wasn't it?

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"Yes, Sarepta, that is true."

"Well, then! I was offered a home, and I expect a home, long as I need it. When I want wages, I'll ask for 'em. It's likely I'd take 'em from a child like you."

"*But—*" cried Kitty.

"Butter!" replied Sarepta. Then they both felt better, for this was the give and take of Kitty's childhood.

"But I do wish you would be reasonable, Sarepta! John Tucker has always had his wages, hasn't he?"

"John Tucker has a wife and fam'ly. His wife has about as much gumption as a week-old guinea-pig, and the way that eldest boy of theirs is growin' up is enough to scare the feathers off a hen; he's got to have wages, of course. And I've had 'em, Kitty, all I wanted, and money in the bank. My uncle left me his farm and savin's, last year, if you *have* to know. And if I'm pestered any more—" Sarepta's voice dropped to an ominous note—"I'll go and live there!

"There!" she added in a different tone. "You just let me do the way I want to, Kitty, and we'll get along first rate. I'm crotchety, but yet I mean well; only I can't bear to be crossed. Run along now, child, and take your money. I'd put it in the bank if I was you. I'm busy now," she added abruptly, as Kitty tried to speak. "Besides, that John Tucker wanted you should come out to the stable right away. Dinner at one o'clock!"

"Dear me!" sighed Kitty, as she made her way toward the stable. "I feel just like Alice in Wonderland:

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I never was ordered about so in my life. Dear old thing! I shall always be ten to her, I suppose. But her name ought to be Pomona: she's right out of 'Rudder Grange'! Now for John Tucker! I hope *he* hasn't been making sarce!"

John Tucker was wont to say, Sarepty's kitchen was all right, but give him the harness-room! He was in the harness-room now, and it certainly was a pleasant place. A quaint little stove, of antiquated pattern, faced the door, and in front of the stove were two comfortable wooden arm-chairs, one for John and one for a visitor. John generally had visitors, in his few spare hours. People came to ask him everything—except in the medical way—that they used to ask Dr. Ross. The window of the little room looked out on the garden, the glazed upper half of the door gave a cheerful prospect of the stable, with its white-swathed vehicles—the doctor's buggy, the little phaeton, the old carry-all, rather past use, but a wonderful place to play house in. You could not see the two box-stalls from the harness-room, for they were on the same side of the stable; but you could hear Pilot and Dan stamping and talking to each other through the partition. Kitty had already visited them, and given them sugar, and rubbed their dear velvet noses, and wept a little on their sympathetic necks.

"Good morning, John! How cosy you look in here!"

"Good morning, Miss Kitty! Step in! step in! I'm pleased to see you. Take a seat, won't you?"

Kitty sat down obediently, as she had done in the

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kitchen. John's tone was not Sarepta's: he was never autocratic. When Kitty was three, he had advanced the opinion that "this filly must be druv with the snaffle!" and had regulated his words and ways accordingly.

"The horses look beautifully, John! Of course, they always do."

John expected the horses might look worse. He didn't know as they would be special easy to beat in this county—or State, either, come to that!

"What a beauty Pilot is! And dear old Dan is just as handsome in his way. I suppose they are quite valuable horses, John?"

"I s'pose they be!" John Tucker spoke gruffly, and turned his head away. Something in the girl's tone and wistful look made his eyes smart. He put too much pepper on that fur robe, he knowed he did when he done it. Thus John Tucker, muttering.

"I asked, John dear, because—" Kitty's hand was on his arm now, fingering his rough sleeve as she used to in the days when she sat on his knee and, being interrogated as to whose gal she was, replied, "Don Tutter's dal!"—"because—I suppose we ought to sell them, John Tucker, dear. There is very, very little money, you know. Was that what you wanted to see me about, John?"

"Miss Kitty!" John Tucker turned his rugged face toward her now, and it was aglow with feeling: "Don't sell them hosses! That was what I wanted to say to you, and I say it again. Don't sell them hosses! If money is needed, and I'm aware it is, there is more

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money to be made by keepin' them hosses than by sellin' 'em. Lemme tell you; don't be mad with me, Miss Kitty, for I done the best I knew how."

"Of course you did, John! As if you ever did anything else. Why do you look at me so strangely, John Tucker?"

"Miss Kitty, I say it again, I done the best I knew how. Now lemme tell you! You remember Flanagan?"

"Flanagan, the cab-driver? Of course I do! Why, I didn't see him at the station yesterday. Wasn't he there? He used to say he never missed a train."

"He's missed consid'ble many lately," said John Tucker grimly. "Flanagan's complaint is that he's dead. Yes, ma'am," in answer to Kitty's exclamation, "dropped off settin' right there in his team at the depot. Folks was surprised."

"I should think so! Why, Flanagan! Why, John, I should as soon think of the train's dying! What do people do without him?"

John Tucker cleared his throat elaborately.

"I happened to be there, and I drove the folks home that he'd come to fetch. That was the way it began."

"The way what began, John Tucker?"

John Tucker rose and looked out of the window.

"Wind's workin' round no'theast!" he muttered. "We shall have snow flyin' before night. Miss Kitty, you'll see it reasonable, I know you will. Take a look at it by and large!" He turned, and threw an appealing look at the girl. "Here was Flanagan dead, warn't he? And no insurance, so to speak. Hosses and cab

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sold to pay for the funeral and the board bill: hadn't no folks, Flanagan hadn't; boarded to Widow Peavey's. Well! there was the train to be met mornin' and night, and there was Madam Flynt to be took her airin', and Mr. Bygood sim'lar, to and from the store. The gals don't want him to walk up the hill, 'cause of his heart, and I dono as I blame 'em. Considerin' his age, you know. And—the hosses had to be exercised, no two ways about that."

He paused: Kitty's eyes were shining, and she took up the word eagerly.

"And you have been doing all this, John Tucker! You have been meeting the trains and taking the dear people to drive, while they are finding some one in Flanagan's place? You *clever* John! Why, I think it was a wonderful idea! Of course I am perfectly delighted. And have they found a new Flanagan yet? Because, of course, you'll go right on till they—"

John Tucker's face was almost as craggy as Sarepta's, as he faced Kitty again:

"Found?" he said gruffly. "They've found me. I'm Flanagan: you're Flanagan. Miss Kitty—" he lifted a newspaper from the little table, displaying sundry piles of silver coin, arranged in neat pyramids; the base "cart-wheels" dollars, the top dimes. "Here's your money!" said John. "All that's ben taken in this six months since Flanagan died. You can take out my wages, if you're a mind to, 'count of Mary and the children: the rest is yours, lawful money, well airned, if I say it. Don't—don't you cry, Miss Kitty!

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don't you now! I done the best I knew how. I talked it over with Judge Peters, and he said, 'Stu' boy'; 'twas the best I could do; Mis' Flynt the same, and Sarepty. Don't you cry, Miss Kitty!"

Kitty explained through her tears that she wasn't really crying; it was only because every one was so darling and kind, and—and—why did the tears come so easily? There had been none, until she came home; she had longed for them sometimes, when her head throbbed, and her eyes burned so hot and dry; now, the least thing brought them welling up, and every time some band seemed loosed from her heart.

"It seems very—very strange, John Tucker, dear, to be taking money from the neighbors!" Kitty dried her eyes and looked up. "I am going to be sensible, John, and I know you did the very best—but it does seem strange, John Tucker! do you think Father would like it?"

John Tucker's eyes were very blue and very bright.

"Miss Kitty, if there is one thing under the canopy that I am sure of, it's that Doctor would approve. Doctor, you see, was reasonable. He'd see right off that here on one side was hosses to be fed, and grain costin' thus and so; and hosses to be exercised, or they'd go lame and poor. And he'd see on the other side, here was folks needin' to be hauled, and no one to haul 'em. Well, then Doctor would say,—'pears like I could hear him, and have heard him right along, 'When you're dealin' with hosses,' he'd say, 'you need hoss sense.' And this is hoss sense, Miss Kitty, or I don't know it."

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Kitty rose and held out her little hand, to be engulfed in John Tucker's huge brown one.

"That's enough, John Tucker!" she said; and up went her chin. "I can hear him, too. We will be partners, John: Tucker and Ross! Only you will do all the work, John Tucker dear, I know you will."

John Tucker, looking at her, fell into such a glowing state that the stove was nowhere beside him.

"Now there!" he said. "What did I tell you? She's her Pa's own gal!"

"And now I *must* go and see Madam Flynt! You say she knows all about the Great Plan, John?"

"And approves! Madam Flynt is a real sensible woman."

He followed Kitty out of the harness-room, and they moved instinctively to the stalls, where two dark satin heads were thrust eagerly forward, two velvet noses sneezed and sniffed in eager greeting.

"You darlings!" cried Kitty. "No, Dan, no more sugar. You are not a pet lamb any more, dear: you are a Horse of Business, and must realize your responsibilities. I shall drive Madam Flynt myself, John, most days."

"I thought likely you would!" chuckled John. "You'll have to go keerful, though, Miss Kitty; it's slow and sure with Madam Flynt. None of your Bible doin's with her along!"

"Bible doings? What *do* you mean, John Tucker?"

John Tucker chuckled again.

"I was only thinkin' of Doctor!" he said. "'A daughter of Jehu, for behold she driveth furiously'."

CHAPTER V

THE NEIGHBORS

MADAM FLYNT was evidently expecting Kitty. She was ready dressed and in the drawing-room: the large, bright room with its hangings of apple green and gold brocade, its gilded cornices and fire screen. Dr. Ross used to say that the room was an apple-tree bower, and Madam Flynt the apple; indeed, she did look like one, a Bellefleur, say, or a rosy Porter. A woman of sixty, large, massive, fair. Her hair was faded from the bright gold of her girlhood, but was still yellow; her eyes were China blue, her cheeks apple red. The color was so set in them (no one had ever seen Madam Flynt pale, even in sickness) that a stranger might well think it clumsy art, instead of—what shall I say, over-zealous Nature? The story ran that one day in her youth, walking along the street, she heard a stranger say after passing her, "Painted, by God!" She turned instantly.

"Yes, sir," she said calmly, "*i am* painted by God!"

Of course this was not in Cyrus: Cyrus people knew.

"Well, Kitty!" Madam Flynt held out a large, plump white hand, amply be-ringed. She was dressed in flow-

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ing robes of green and white, a most un-negligent "*negligée*," and was a pleasant sight enough. "Well, Kitty! You have to come to me, you see. I couldn't go down with the rest of the town to meet you. I am glad to see you, my dear. We have been too long without you, Kitty."

"Dear Madam Flynt, I am so glad to get home! How is the rheumatism?"

"The rheumatism is very well, Kitty, it thanks you: it's more vigorous than I am; but I do very well, on the whole, very well. I get my airing, which is the principal thing. John Tucker told you of our little arrangement? A very good plan! John Tucker is a sensible man. He and Sarepta are really an able pair. Pity he didn't marry her, instead of that poor creature, Mary Spinney. You had a good voyage, my dear?"

She talked easily, Kitty following her lead.

"Glad to hear it! And now, Kitty, I hope you are going to be a sensible girl, and do as I wish."

"As you wish, Madam Flynt? About the driving? Oh, surely! I am only too grateful. It is so dear of you—"

"Nothing of the kind! A business arrangement, nothing more. Flanagan was dead—I didn't kill him, did I? What I wish, Kitty, is quite another thing. I want you to come and live with me."

"Oh, Madam Flynt!"

"There is everything to be said in favor of the plan," Madam Flynt swept on, "and nothing against it, so far as I can see. You can manage your home affairs,

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John and Sarepta, the house and so on, as well here as there; you've only to step across the yard. I need a companion, and so do you."

Kitty opened wide eyes of astonishment.

"Madam Flynt! Has Miss Croly left you?"

"Miss Croly left me? Certainly not. Why should she leave me? Cornelia Croly is as old as I am, or very near it; she needs a companion, too. She grows more set every day of her life. Just move that poker, will you, Kitty? To the left side of the fireplace! Cornelia Croly *will* always put it at the right; she does it to assert herself; she told me so, in so many words. We both need a young person to keep us from biting each other, Kitty, and you are the person."

At this point, Miss Croly entered the room, beaming welcome. Tall, thin, upright, hard-favored, with the kindest eyes and the most obstinate chin imaginable. Dressed in gray alpaca by day, in purple alpaca by night, with little benefit of fashion; such was Miss Cornelia Croly, Madam Flynt's quondam schoolmate—her companion now these many years of her widowhood. The two made a singular contrast, yet complemented each other oddly. Kitty could never think of one without the other. Corolla and calyx, Dr. Ross used to call them.

Miss Croly had to hear all about Kitty's voyage; the sea had a fascination for her, though she had never ventured upon it.

"A storm! how thrilling! the wonders of the deep!" sighed Miss Croly, all in one breath. "You make it

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all so real, Kitty. I can hear the roar of the elements and the dash of the breakers—”

As she spoke, Miss Croly had taken up the poker, and after making a dab at the fire, was gently replacing it at the right of the fireplace, when Madam Flynt interrupted her.

“There are no breakers in mid-ocean, Cornelia! And will you kindly leave the poker where it was, on the left side?”

“Excuse me, my dear Clarissa, it is far more convenient on the right side. As attending to the fire is one of my little duties—a very pleasant one, I am sure—it seems not unreasonable for me to have the poker where I can use it. You grant that?”

Seeing Argument throned on both brows, Kitty rose hastily and made her excuses. She had several other visits to make; she would run in this evening, or surely to-morrow morning. Madam Flynt was the kindest of the kind, as she always was: yes, Kitty would think over very carefully what she had said, and would let her know: she thanked her ever and ever so much: good-bye! “Good-bye, Miss Croly! So glad to see you!”

Kitty shut the door on a rather awful “Cornelia!” and fled, only stopping a moment in the kitchen to greet the two maids, friends of her childhood, and to steal a cooky from ‘under Sarah Cook’s nose, to the huge delight of that kindly mammoth.

Down the street sped Kitty: the dear, friendly street, where every house smiled a welcome, every window shed a friendly blink. The Common was on her left,

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a smooth field of snow, crossed by two intersecting board walks. Every tree was a friend too: the bare, graceful branches were moving in the crisp breeze, and each seemed to wave her a welcome. There was the Earliest Maple! Kitty wondered what children drove their spiles and hung their pails now for the sap. She and Tom used to be rather odious, she feared, about that tree. They assumed ownership of all rights in it, both tapping and climbing. She recalled a keen frosty morning like this, when Wilson Wibird had "cut in" early, pulled out her spile and driven in his own. Tom came like a flame of fire across the Common, tore out the spile and threw it away, then pummeled Wilson till he ran shrieking home. Wilson always shrieked when any one touched him.

Where next? Judge Peters would be at his office: she would go down there. He was so wise, he would tell her what to say to Madam Flynt. Resisting the call of many a friendly housefront, Kitty went down the hill and turned into "the Street." There were several streets in Cyrus, be it understood, but only one that began with a capital.

The first person she met was Wilson Wibird himself. He was on the opposite sidewalk, and came across, waving his hand with a familiar gesture.

"Weedy, seedy, needy, greedy!" naughty Tom! But Wilson looked exactly the same, only a man instead of a hobbledehoy.

"Katrine! my one thought since I opened my eyes

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this morning. Welcome! a hundred thousand welcomes!"

Kitty gave Wilson her hand readily enough, but she did not altogether like his looks. His eyes were bloodshot, his speech thick; he seemed to waver a little as he spoke.

"How do you do, Wilson? How is your mother, and Melissa?"

"Less well than I, for they have not seen you, Katrine! You are more beautiful than ever," murmured Mr. Wibird. He cast on Kitty what he would have called a burning glance. To Kitty it looked rather like a leer, but she must not be unkind. But there was no earthly reason why Wilson Wibird should hold her hand, so she removed it firmly.

"I am going to see Judge Peters," she said: her tone was cheerfully matter-of-fact. "Give my love at home, and say I'll run in soon to see your mother."

"My way is yours!" Mr. Wibird announced, and fell into step, to Kitty's great annoyance. Wilson Wibird had been the butt of her childhood and Tom's; what on earth did he mean by assuming this tone?

They were just outside the Mallow House; at this moment the door opened, and Mr. Very Jordano came out. He had been taking his leisurely breakfast and reading his New York paper, sitting in the office with Marshall Mallow; and seeing the meeting between the two young people had exchanged a word with his host and crony, and hastened out.

"Good morning, Miss Kitty!" he said urbanely. "The sight of you is a refreshment indeed. Good

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morning, Wilson. Mr. Mallow would like to see you a moment, if you have a moment to spare-pare-pare!"

Mr. Jordano's tone was faintly ironical, as he fell into step with Kitty on the other side. Wilson Wibird glared at him.

"I have not!" he said sullenly. "I am escorting Miss Ross."

"That shall be my privilege!" Mr. Jordano bowed blandly to Kitty. "Go away, Wilson!" he added in a lower and different tone. "Go quite away-tay-tay! Or I'll call Billy!"

Involuntarily, Kitty quickened her pace, Mr. Jordano beside her. The other stood glowering, irresolute: suddenly the hotel door opened again, revealing Mr. Mallow, massive and rosy.

"You come here, Wilson!" he commanded. "Don't stand dilatorin' there! Come on in, you hear me?"

Mr. Mallow was Wilson Wibird's uncle; Mrs. Wibird had been a Mallow: moreover, such work as Wilson did was done for him. The young man, after kicking the curbstone sullenly for a moment, obeyed the summons and turned into the hotel.

Kitty turned to Mr. Jordano with a breath of relief.

"Quite so!" returned that gentleman. "He meant no harm: Wilson meant no harm, but nimporto! Miss Kitty, I welcome this opportunity for a word with you. You have been much in my thoughts, both during your absence and since your return. Miss Kitty, I feel assured that you have much of the deepest interest to impart-tart-tart. You will allow me the priv-

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ilege of calling on you, I trust, some evening in the near future?"

"Oh, surely, Mr. Jordano! I shall be very glad indeed to see you."

"You have seen my country, Miss Kitty! Ah! counterio joyoso, would I might behold it! Italy, Miss Kitty! you have seen Italy?"

"Yes, Mr. Jordano, Mother and I spent last winter in Italy."

"Ah! happy, happy—that is—" Mr. Jordano recollected himself, and changed his look of rapture for one of sympathy—"tender reminiscences! tender is the word. I shall take great pleasure in waiting upon you, Miss Kitty. It has occurred to me that you might-tite-tite—that you might be willing to contribute some Sketches of Travel to the *Centinel*. They would be eagerly welcomed, eagerly welcomed, by all Cyrus and adjoining towns: the *Centinel*, you may be aware, has a considerable circulation. Our editorials are copied—nimporto! but if you could give me some sketches, Miss Kitty, I should regard it as a choice boon. No laborioso, you understand; nothing that would burden your—a—elegant leisure: a scratch of the pen, a scratch of the pen! the light feminine touch. It would indeed be a choice boon. The honorarium—we could arrange at a later date-tate-tate. I should wish to be lib——"

"Oh, Mr. Jordano," cried downright Kitty, "I never wrote a word in my life, except just letters, and very few of them. Why, I *couldn't!* and as for writing for a newspaper—you take my breath away! But it's just

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as kind of you!" she cried. "I am ever so much obliged, Mr. Jordano. I wish I could, but I truly could not. I know I couldn't."

"Not at all! not at all!" Mr. Jordano was still bland, in spite of his evident disappointment. "The modesty of the sex, Miss Kitty. Perhaps you will be good enough to think it over. A— here we are at Judge Peters's, and I will leave you. I shall give myself the pleasure of calling—ah! good day-tay-tay!" And the good gentleman bowed himself off, having, indeed, stolen precious minutes from what he called the Ideals of Italo, his special contribution to the weekly *Centinel*.

Judge Peters, like Madam Flynt, was evidently expecting Kitty: as if every one in Cyrus were not! The office windows were as dusty as ever—Kitty half expected to see an inscription on them in a round childish hand:

"Tom-mee,
Duke of Lee."

—but his desk was a miracle of tidiness. His own person was not more carefully attired than usual, because that would have been difficult: he was the picture of a dignified jurist as he sat with his hand in the breast of his coat, reading a law book of appalling size and weight.

His thin, somewhat austere countenance relaxed at sight of Kitty. He rose and came forward with extended hands, grasping hers cordially.

"My dear child! welcome again! My dear Kitty, I am heartily glad to see you."

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He was: they all were: never was such a welcome, thought Kitty; another band snapped, and she looked up into the kindly face with a smile that was almost merry.

“Dear Judge Peters! you are so good; everybody is so good. Never was such a home-coming—”

A little stumble here, but only for a moment. Soon they were seated comfortably, the Judge in his chair, Kitty on a certain stool which had been hers ever since she was big enough to visit the “Dudds” in his office, which was long before she could speak his name plain. Kitty told her sad little story to a running commentary of “H’m!” “ha!” or “tut, tut!” which conveyed a sympathy that needed no words. Then the Judge took up the thread, and they went through many matters carefully and thoroughly. Kitty was clear-headed; he knew that; she had to know just where she stood. Yes, yes! There was something left, only a little, but a little was very different from nothing. Now the question was how they were to add to that little. John and Sarepta—yes! yes! good souls! good souls! they had consulted him. Very right, very proper. A nice little nest-egg, and John Tucker could carry on the business perfectly. The question was about Kitty herself. She—ah—had not heard from any of her relatives? True! she had but one, and—they need not go into that at present. Now, the Judge had a proposition to make: a—a business proposition. Here was he, a lone man, sixty years old and not getting any younger. He was lonely, very lonely, in that big house. It was absurd that he should be lonely in one house and Kitty in

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another; "absurd, you see that. Too many lonely people in Cyrus, as it is. I want you to come and live with me, Kitty. There! now don't answer at once: think it over! I never had a daughter of my own, but you have always been like a daughter to me, my dear. I think we could be very comfortable together: very comfortable. Another thing! I need help here, in the office; a—a—in point of fact, secretary! now, if you could manage to give me two or three hours a day—not too much; not enough to fatigue you, or interfere with your getting plenty of fresh air and exercise—and amusement, too, my dear, amusement, too, of course!—why, it would be a great help and comfort to me, and the salary—" he named a substantial sum—"would help to get—gloves, you know; fal-lals, my dear—toggerly of various descriptions. Yes! well, my dear, how does it strike you?"

It struck Kitty as the kindest thought that ever was in the wide world. Why was every one so good to her? Why, Madam Flynt had asked her to come and live with her! but—

"*That,*" Judge Peters struck in with some heat: "that is unnecessary! Clarissa—Madam Flynt—has a companion already. Cornelia Croly is an excellent person; they have lived together for twenty years; she cannot think of discharging Cornelia Croly! Monstrous!"

"Oh, no! no, indeed, Judge! She only thought—she seemed to think—they both needed some one a little younger—but I—oh no, indeed! I only promised to think it over."

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"H'm!" the Judge was quite flushed: he rose and paced the floor. "The more you think it over, Kitty, the more unconscionable you will find it. Two women, used to each other for twenty years, fitting like ball and socket (I admit an occasional creak of the joint, but that only makes for variety): a young girl cooped up in that house, with two elderly women and a spaniel—monstrous, my dear! monstrous! Now my case——"

"*But!*" cried Kitty to herself, as she went down the stairs, after a solemn promise to think it over well, "the dear old darling things! not one of them seems to realize!"

Where next? Kitty looked up and down the street. One way was Cheeseman's, where one of her oldest friends would be looking for her, she knew: Mr. Cheeseman's, and the Twinnies: on the other—"Oh, I must see Miss Egeria and Mr. Bygood before any one else!" said Kitty, and turned back toward the Mallow House.

At Bygoods', she found the same air of happy expectation. Miss Egeria had been fluttering to the door every five minutes all the morning, looking up and down the street; now she came fluttering to meet Kitty, and folded her in a tender embrace, and wept over her. Mrs. Ross had been Miss Egeria's goddess, and for her sake, Kitty seemed to the dear lady only half mortal. She uttered little soft moans in which "Heaven," "saint," "crown of glory," and the like could be distinguished. It was Kitty who comforted her with

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soothing words and affectionate pats, and soon Miss Egeria collected herself and dried her eyes.

"Forgive me, dear child!" she said. "I am so glad, Kitty, so happy to see you! Sister is in back with Father; come right in, won't you dear? They are so eager——"

Here was Miss Almeria herself, stately and handsome, parting the curtains with a welcoming gesture: here was Mr. Bygood leaning forward in his armchair, his mild eyes shining, his lips trembling with eagerness. Such a welcome here, too, as never could be anywhere else except in dear Cyrus.

"Mr. Bygood, you have been growing younger!" Kitty spoke with decision. "I believe you have found the Fountain of Youth. I think you might give me a drop!"

"No, no, my dear!" Mr. Bygood quavered in high delight. "An old hulk, Kitty, left high and dry, high and dry.

"I came there again when the day was declining,
The bark was still there, but the waters were gone:

You remember the song, my dear?"

"Indeed I do, Mr. Bygood. You are going to sing it to me the very first I come to tea. When may I come to tea, Miss Almezeria?" This was her child name for the two sisters. "I want Banbury cakes, please, and apple sauce with whipped cream."

"And fried oysters!" Miss Almeria beamed; Miss Egeria cooed, "You shall come to-night, if you will, Kitty. To-night and—presently!" Miss Almeria cast

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a warning look at her sister, on whose lips something seemed to be trembling. "Presently, Sister! Father's turn now; ours can wait!"

"I have brought you a little present, Mr. Bygood!" Kitty was pulling something from her pocket; a little parcel, white tissue paper neatly tied with blue ribbon. The old gentleman opened it with trembling fingers. Only a bit of Derbyshire spar, Kitty explained, for the Collection; but he exclaimed delightedly at sight of the pretty thing, a golden egg darting rays as the sunlight struck it; surely, the Phoenix's egg, or as near it as mortal eyes may hope to see. Kitty was thanked, blessed, questioned, thanked again. Then she begged for a sight of Goody Twoshoes, and got it, and Marmaduke Multiply, too, because poor Tom had been so fond of it. Yes, poor Tom! Nobody heard from him, which was very sad. If he had only stayed in Cyrus, Mr. Bygood said, it would have been so much better: so much better! The old gentleman sighed, and shook his white head, fumbling meantime in his pockets for peppermint drops.

"You know," Miss Egeria whispered to Kitty, "Father offered Thomas a position in the store!" Her tone implied affairs of Rothschildic scope. "It would have been such an opportunity for Thomas!"

"Hush, sister!" Miss Almeria spoke with some severity. "Thomas had his own views; I am told he considered Cyrus slow! It is true I did not hear him say it!" she added more gently.

"Believe half that you see and nothing that you

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hear!" murmured Mr. Bygood gently. "Tom was a dear boy, Almeria!"

"Yes, Father dear! You set me right, as ever!" Miss Almeria patted his shoulder affectionately. "We must not judge!"

"Almy is impulsive!" Mr. Bygood smiled to Kitty. "Youth is apt to be. Do you find Cyrus changed, my dear?"

Presently he nodded, and on a sign from the ladies, Kitty stole into the front shop with them. Here they unfolded their great plan, which was just like all the rest. Kitty was to come and live with them: to be their—their younger sister, as it were. They had a little room—the blue room! Kitty remembered? She used to like it. It was never used, and it would be *such* a happiness to them! She could help in the store—it was so interesting, Kitty, and truly educational, with the Library and all.

"The gentlemen come in, too, for their morning paper, my dear, and discuss affairs of National Importance! I assure you, we feel that we have *great* opportunities, and I trust we are not ungrateful for them. Our gentlemen have such *sound* opinions! When I hear Judge Peters and Mr. Jordano exchange their views on public affairs, and dear Father adds his word of ripe experience, you know, Kitty, my dear, I feel that we are privileged, indeed!"

Thus Miss Almeria, bending her stately head in emphasis.

"So you *will* come, Kitty darling, won't you?" begged Miss Egeria; "at least think it over well; we

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feel that we have as much claim as any of the friends, and—perhaps—I cannot help feeling, my love, as if our dear departed Saint might have wished——”

“But!” cried Kitty, again, as after promising gratefully to think it over, she took her way to Cheeseman’s, “the dear, kind, darling things! Nobody seems to realize that I have come home, to my own house!”

CHAPTER VI

JOHANNA EX MACHINA

KITTY had her dinner alone, for Nelly Chanter's school was at some distance.

"Besides," said Sarepta, "I only asked her to come for breakfast and supper and nights. You'd want *some* time to yourself, I told her."

Sarepta stood in the doorway, her hands folded in her apron, while Kitty ate her excellent little dinner soberly and thoughtfully. She had no idea of slighting Sarepta's cookery; she had a good appetite, and even if she hadn't, there must be no hurting of feelings.

"Sarepta!"

"Well!"

"The pudding is delicious, Sarepta! And—they all want me to come and live with them!"

"H'm!" Sarepta's sniff was eloquent. Kitty went on, crumbling her bread thoughtfully:

"Madam Flynt, Judge Peters, the Miss Bygoods, the Chanters——"

She smiled, still hearing the affectionate shouts and shrieks of that friendly circle, still seeing the dining-room where she had found them all, Mrs. Chanter ladling out chowder, beaming on her clamorous brood,

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Mr. Chanter with half an eye on his plate, and one and a half on the dog's-eared Thucydides beside him. How affectionate they were; what good friends! "And Mr. Mallow wants me to keep house for him, Sarepta; think of it! Why, he has always said he wouldn't have any woman gormineering over him; ever since I can remember he has said that. And now he thinks he would be as comfortable as old Tilley if I would come and be his lady housekeeper! Who was old Tilley, Sarepta?"

"Some other old fool, I expect!" Sarepta was very grim. "If you asked me, I should say Marsh Mallow was a little wantin'. The idea!"

"The funny thing is, none of them seems to realize that I have a home of my own! Isn't it funny, Sarepta? So dear and kind, every one of them—why, I am so full of gratefulness I couldn't hold any more!—but how *can* they think I would leave my own dear darling home?"

Sarepta Darwin drew a long breath, and blinked fiercely. If it had been any one but Sarepta, one would have said there were tears in those pale blue eyes, but of course Sarepta never shed tears.

"Then you calc'late to stay on here!" she spoke dryly, but there was something in her tone that made Kitty look up quickly.

"Why, Sarepta, of course I do! What else should I do! Don't be a goose, Sarepta dear!"

She got up and gave Sarepta a little hug: she might as well have hugged the door for all outward response, but that did not matter.

"Who—*what* is that, Sarepta?" she demanded, as a figure came up the path. "It looks like a postman!"

"Is! we've had d'liv'ry for a year past!"

There was exultation in Sarepta's voice. Next to the well-being of Ross House and its inmates, she lived for the greater glory of Cyrus.

"Why, it's Bingo!"

Kitty was at the front door in a flash, greeting a highly embarrassed youth in gray uniform. "Bingo, how do you do? To think of your being postman! How splendid!"

"Pleased to see you!" muttered Adolphus Evander Byng, who had never had any benefit of his fine name, but was called Addy Evy for long and Bingo for short, as Tom used to say. "Hope I see you well. Letter for you! Goo'day!"

Thus Bingo, hurling himself away from the door, as if he had not been looking forward all day to this moment; as if he had not solemnly promised his Aunt Miny, who "dressmade" as we say in Cyrus, to notice every single thing Kitty Ross had on, coming straight from Paris that way. There was a painful scene that evening at the Byng cottage. Gray dress? Well, what kind of a gray dress? Was it silk, or wool, or melange? Did it do up behind? Was it made D'rectory? Was there gores in the skirt? Here Addy Evy fled to the barn, and his Aunt Miny did think he was real mean; she despised any one who hadn't eyes in his head, be he man or woman: there!

Kitty came back with her letter, turning it over, as

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people do, before opening it. A large square envelope, superscribed in a stiff, official-looking hand.

"From Aunt Johanna!" she said. "It is surely her hand. I wonder——"

She opened the letter; read it; looked up with a dazed expression at Sarepta, who was lingering by the door with an air of elaborate detachment.

"Why, Sarepta! why——"

"Well," Sarepta's tone was incisive, to say the least.

"It has been delayed!" Kitty looked at the envelope. "Missent to 'Cyrene'! I should think so. Why, Sarepta, this was written a week ago! She's coming to-day!"

"Who's comin'? Not Johanna Ross?"

"Yes!" Kitty rose in agitation and began instinctively straightening everything in the room.

"You no need to do *that!*" Sarepta spoke grimly, with looks to match. "I went to school with Johanna Ross. She comin' to-day, you say? How long she goin' to stay?"

"She says—I'll read it to you.

"MY DEAR KITTY,

"I am retiring from business and should like to make you a visit if agreeable. Ask Sarepta to find a young girl to take care of me. Unless otherwise advised, expect me at 2.30 Saturday P. M.

"Affectionately yours,

"JOHANNA ROSS."

"Sarepta, it's two o'clock now! What room shall we put her in? I can't think——"

Kitty's voice was trembling, her cheeks flushed. Seeing this, Sarepta assumed her dryest manner and tone.

"Put her in the Red Injun room. It's all ready: I cleaned it last week."

"Of course!" Kitty's brow lightened. "Clever Sarepta! The Red Indian room will be *just* the thing. Let's come up and look at it! Of course it's all right, but actually I haven't been in it. Why, I haven't been here two days, Sarepta!"

Her voice quivered again, but she mastered it, and hurried upstairs with Sarepta close behind her.

"I wouldn't let Johanna Ross put me out," Sarepta remarked, apparently addressing the stair-rail, "not for one quarter of a second."

Kitty made no reply. Sarepta, who certainly was "no canny," Kitty often thought, appeared to read her thought through the back of her head.

"But you needn't be scared," she went on. "I know my place. I'm just freein' my mind, so to speak. I went to school with Johanna, and I know her like a book. She's a fine woman in spots, and she's Doctor's sister. I know my place, and she knows hers; you no need to be scared."

Kitty turned and flashed such a look of mingled relief and thankfulness that Sarepta almost stumbled.

"Go on up!" she said austerely.

Before ever I saw the Red Indian room, I used to think—hearing it casually mentioned by Kitty or Tom—it was in some way connected with the North American Indians. I used to wonder about it: whether

it were shaped and furnished like a wigwam; whether Indians had ever lived in it; whether—dreadful thought, born of too-early reading of Parkman's histories—there had been a Massacre there! I remember that when Kitty proposed a visit to it one day, as being the most convenient way of attaining the barn roof, I inwardly shrank and cowered, dreading what might meet my eyes. The relief of the first glance is still with me.

Dr. Ross's grandfather had been a sea-captain, and had brought home from China a wonderful toilet set of Red India china. There it was, still perfect, not so much as a cover broken; there it is to-day, I trust. The room had been furnished to match the set, with hangings and cushions, bedspread, etcetera, of Eastern cotton, almost the exact shade of warm dull red; the chairs were lacquered in the same tint. An enchanting room! And its possibilities! Not only did one of its windows give access to the barn roof, but the little red-lacquered door beside the fireplace opened upon the Secret Staircase, the pride of Kitty's heart, the envy of every other child in Cyrus. A little winding, breakneck stair, burrowing down in the thickness of the chimney casing. You could come out in the sitting-room if you wished, but we never did; the staircase burrowed still further downward, and the cellar was far more exciting.

"'Twill suit with Johanna's looks!" said Sarepta, after a critical survey of the room. "Come to think of it, I believe she had this room when she was a gal. It'll be real handy for her, bathroom and all to

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herself, and no need to bother you. Yes, I expect she'll like it. Hark!"

The sound of wheels. Kitty fled down the stairs, Sarepta scuttling behind her as fast as dignity allowed, and threw open the front door.

"Aunt Johanna! Come in! come in! How good of you to come!"

"But you wish I hadn't, eh? Never mind, Kitty! Will John Tucker see to my trunks? How are you, Sarepta?"

Miss Johanna Ross might be forty-five, but looked younger. A tall, fine figure of a woman, with dark eyes and hair, the former of a singularly piercing quality. Kitty felt, she told Nelly Chanter afterward, as if at the first glance her spinal marrow had been investigated. She was handsomely and fashionably dressed, and carried a satchel of the latest mode. Her voice was deep-toned, her speech as incisive as Sarepta's own, her gestures and carriage impressive. Such was the lady who now confronted Kitty in the sitting room.

"You got my letter last week?" she said. "Has Sarepta got a young woman for me?"

"No, Aunt Johanna. The letter was missent, you see: it only came an hour ago."

"Missent? Inexcusable! I'll write to the Post Office Department. Well! I may as well explain matters at once, Kitty; Sarepta, you'd better wait a minute, as this concerns you also."

Miss Ross sat down on the leather sofa, and looked thoughtfully from Kitty to Sarepta, and back again.

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"I haven't been here for twenty years," she said. "I am actually glad I came!" She seemed surprised at this, and pondered a moment. Sarepta sniffed slightly: Kitty was silent, hardly knowing what to say.

"I have retired from business," Miss Ross went on in a clear, explanatory voice, "because I am tired. I intend to take to my bed—What is it?" She paused: Kitty had uttered a cry of surprise.

"Nothing, Aunt Johanna. Did I understand—are you ill, Aunt Johanna?"

"Not in the least. I have never been ill in my life, except for measles at the age of five. I tell you I am tired, and I intend to take to my bed. For twenty years," Miss Ross went on, still more explanatorily, "I have been Rug and Tapestry Expert for Kostly and Richmore:" she named one of the great houses of New York. "During these twenty years I have been on my feet all day, and often half the night. I have now retired—on a competence—and, as I said before, I intend to take to my bed. I am used to wholesale ways," she added with a smile. "I have worked in a wholesale way; now I mean to rest in a wholesale way. Have you found me a maid, Sarepta?"

"Land sakes!" cried Sarepta, throwing her hands out in indignant protest. "Why, it ain't an hour since we heard you was coming!"

"True!" Miss Ross paused and considered. "Well! I suppose you can find me one?"

"I dunno as I can, and I dunno *as* I can!" replied Sarepta cautiously. "What do you want of her, Miss Ross?"

Miss Ross laughed outright, a merry laugh which somehow transformed her rather sharp face.

"To take care of me, Miss Darwin! You don't suppose I expected you to take care of me, do you? Find me a young girl, whom I can order about, and send on errands and bully, and throw things at. I couldn't throw the bolster at you, Miss Darwin!"

"You might try!" Sarepta replied with a grim chuckle, and a distinct softening of the frosty manner which had been upon her ever since the visitor entered. She looked at Kitty. "Jenny Tucker might do!" she said doubtfully. "She's sixteen, and takes after her father more than the rest."

"Jenny! That's a good name to call," Miss Ross nodded approvingly. "John Tucker's daughter, is she? That's good, too. John and I were always friends. Is she pretty?"

"Pretty enough, I guess."

"Then send for her, will you? I won't go to bed now, Kitty. You shall come and help me unpack, and we'll have supper together—if Miss Darwin approves——" she threw a quizzical glance at Sarepta, who gave a snort and vanished—"and a cosy evening by the fire. You shall tell me everything you like, my dear, and nothing you don't like, and at ten o'clock I shall go to bed and stay there."

"Aunt Johanna——"

"Yes, my dear! How delightful this room is! What is it, Kitty?"

"Do you mean—do you think of taking a *long* rest, or only a few days?"

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"One year!" said Miss Ross crisply. Kitty gasped. "That is, if I find it suits me. Six months anyhow, to give it a full trial. That seems sensible, eh?" She looked up sharply. "Eh?" she repeated.

"Oh, I—suppose so!" stammered Kitty. "Only—it seems a very long time, Aunt Johanna. You see, I have never been ill."

"Nor tired!" Miss Ross spoke in short, sharp jerks, throwing up her chin with each remark. "You think you have been tired, but you haven't. I tell you, *the marrow is withered in my bones*. You say I don't look it, and I don't; every one says so. Last month, one of our partners asked me to open a branch in Nijninovgorod; said I looked strong enough for that or anything. Last week," this astonishing lady went on, "another of 'em asked me to marry him, because I looked as if I could take good care of him. That settled it! 'I'll take to my bed!' says I; and here I am. Well! that's enough about me. Now about you! Poor little White Rose couldn't stay any longer, could she? No! not to be expected. She couldn't live without John; she had merged her existence in his, you see. You did all you could, and the look you have of John probably kept her alive till now; but it couldn't last. No! So here you are, with Sarepta and John Tucker—and me!" she added with a sharp, quizzical glance. "What are your ideas? What are your plans? Is there any money left?"

Kitty told her quietly what there was: told, too, of Sarepta's and John Tucker's earnings and of the proposed partnership with the latter. She found it sin-

gularly easy to talk to this relative whom she had hitherto known so slightly and seen so seldom. Miss Ross sat bolt upright on the sofa, listening intently, nodding emphatic approval from time to time.

"Excellent!" she said, when Kitty had finished her story. "Admirable! With my board money and your earnings, you ought to be able to lay by, my dear."

"Oh, Aunt Johanna!" Kitty lifted a shocked face. "I couldn't—you mustn't think of such a thing. Why, this is your own home, where you were born! Why should you pay board here?"

"Little goose, why do you suppose I came here? Why didn't I go to a Rest Cure? 'Because,' I said, 'why pay good money to strangers and harpies when I can pay it to my own lawful niece in my own—not precisely lawful, because it belongs to her—but my natural home?' Enough about that. Besides, there was another reason. I wanted to *do what I wanted*, Kitty! For twenty years I have lived in a mold, worked in a mold, spoken in a mold, smiled in a mold. Now the mold is broken. I want to be able, if I feel like it, to fling open all the windows in this house—there are forty of them, I believe—and scream out of each one. Can you understand that?"

"Perfectly!" cried Kitty kindling.

"Exactly! You are a Ross, I see. Well! I shall not be likely to do that, because I shall be in my bed; but if I did, or whatever I might do, the neighbors would just say, 'Johanna! always peculiar!' and there would be an end of it."

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"Aunt Johanna!" Kitty came and sat down by her aunt. "Do you know what I think?"

"No, my dear, unless you think I am mad. I'm not, only a bit cracked, like most people."

"I think you are a dear! I think—I should like to give you a hug!"

Suiting the action to the word, Kitty threw her arms round her aunt, who returned the embrace heartily.

"Good little girl!" she said, and her clear emphatic voice was rather husky. "Nice little girl! We shall get on famously together."

"And—" Kitty's eyes were opening very wide, as they always did when a new idea dawned upon her. "Why, Aunt Johanna, you are just like all the rest, only reversed."

"What do you mean, Kitty? Speak English, child!"

"Why, every one in the village, all the dear friends and neighbors, want me to come and live with them. Madam Flynt, Judge Peters, Miss Bygoods, the Chanters—and Mr. Mallow"—Kitty broke into a little crow of laughter—"wants me to be his housekeeper and matron! Well! and now you come, with the same dear wish to help me, at the other end. And, *oh!*" Kitty, jumping up, clapped her hands and actually began to dance, "Don't you *see*, Aunt Johanna, here is my answer to them all. They were all *so* kind, and so urgent, I didn't know *what* to say to them, though of course nothing would have induced me to leave my dear darling home. But now, don't you see, I *can't* go to any of them, because of——"

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“Because of bedridden aunt! Precisely. *Johanna ex machina*. I learned my Latin of Mr. Bygood, my dear; he taught at the Academy when I was a girl. Well! so *that* is all settled. They all wanted my little niece, eh? And I’ve stolen a march on ’em. Ha! ha! and now, Kitty, I should like to see my room and unpack a bit. I thought possibly, my dear, you might spare me the Red Indian room, which used to be mine, but I can sleep anywhere.”

“It is all ready for you!” cried Kitty joyously. “Oh, Aunt Johanna, you *are* a dear, and you really belong, and I am so happy!”

The last band snapped from Kitty’s heart, and she led the way joyously upstairs.

CHAPTER VII

A SYMPOSIUM

IT was Wednesday, Ladies' Night at the Mallow House. For many years, Mrs. Wibird and Melissa, and the Misses Bygood had supped with Mr. Mallow on Wednesday evening. It was the "help's" evening out, and the boarders understood that they must sup elsewhere that night. Mr. Mallow invariably cooked the supper, the Wibirds assisting, Mrs. Wibird and Melissa eagerly, Wilson grudgingly. After the delightful little meal, always perfectly cooked and served, Mr. Mallow would take off his coat, roll up his immaculate shirtsleeves, and wash the dishes, the ladies wiping them daintily. Other neighbors would often drop in after supper; it was a pleasant and friendly occasion.

Supper was over now, the dishes washed and put away, and the company gathered in Mr. Mallow's sitting room, a cheerful apartment, with a general aspect of chenille and "tidies," further brightened by a crackling wood fire on the hearth. They were hemming what Mr. Mallow called "wipers," more generally known as dish or glass towels. Mr. Mallow sat in the middle, a large basket balanced on his knees. He sewed slowly and carefully, using a long thread, which

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Melissa threaded for him, as he was wont to explain that "he was no camel, and could not go through a needle's eye." This was a wonderful joke, and never failed to send a ripple of genteel mirth through the assembled ladies. Mrs. Wibird and Melissa worked with bird-like, darting motions, swift but irregular, dropping their work whenever they spoke, which was very often. The Misses Bygood worked even more swiftly, and with perfect steadiness and grace.

"This is an elegant piece of goods, Marsh!" said Mrs. Wibird. "Better than the last, 'pears to me."

"So fine and smooth!" Miss Egeria cooed softly. "It is a pleasure to work on it, Mr. Mallow."

"'Tis good goods!" Mr. Mallow assented. "Pure linen, not a fibre of cotton in it. I have to have my wipers good. Some things you can squinch on, others you can't; I am thrifty, but I do have to have my wipers good. And plenty!" he added. "A moisty wiper gives me the creeps, it so does. There! I should likc to have a clean one for every dish."

A gentle murmur arose, as of highly commending bees.

"Such a profusion!" said Miss Almeria.

"So agreeable," chimed in Miss Egeria, "to be able always to use a dry one. I assure you we greatly appreciate it, Mr. Mallow."

Mr. Mallow beamed and made a little bow over his "wiper," thereby pricking his finger: a crimson drop appeared and fell on the shining linen. Then what a commotion! Melissa flew for water and a "cot." Mrs. Wibird, who could not bear the sight of blood,

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prepared to faint, but thought better of it, the first red drop being also the last. Miss Almeria and Miss Egeria murmured sympathy, and proffered their own fine handkerchiefs. Mr. Mallow, with manly stoicism, declared that it was "Nothin' at all! nothin' at all! Gives a chance to show that my blood is good and red. None of these white corp'scles they talk about nowadays."

"I've heard of them!" said Mrs. Wibird. "Something to do with corpses, are they?"

"I presume likely!" Mr. Mallow replied, with reserve. "Ahem! not a subject for ladies, perhaps. Sorry I mentioned 'em."

"Have you seen our dear Kitty to-day, Mr. Mallow?" asked Miss Almeria, tactfully, seeing his brow clouded. He had a great deal of delicacy, Mr. Mallow; all Cyrus gentlemen had, she thought gratefully.

"Yes, 'm! yes, I have seen her. I hoped—I asked Kitty to join us this evening, but she was degaged. How are you, Very? Come in! come in! Take a seat! Glad to see you!"

Mr. Jordano entered, bowing right and left with his best Italian air.

"Grazier, Marshall!" he replied urbanely. "Grazier, I'm sure! Good-evening, ladies! Miss Bygood—Miss Egeria—Mrs. Wibird—Miss Melissa"—a separate bow for each lady, but Miss Almeria's was the lowest—"your humble servant!"

"We're having us a sewing-bee!" Mr. Mallow announced, beaming over his basket. "I don't know

as you'd care to join us, Very. I never saw you handle a needle. I've just wounded myself, long as I've ben at it."

"Oh, grazier! grazier!" fluttered Mr. Jordano. (This word was a new acquisition; the good gentleman could not resist flourishing it as if it were a specially fine and clean pocket handkerchief. If you had asked its meaning, he would have explained kindly that it was the Italian word for "thanks!") "I fear I should make but a poor hand at needlework, Marshall. A—a most graceful and feminine accomplishment," he bowed round the circle of ladies, "and one I always watch with delight-tite-tite: but I think I will remain a spectator."

He drew a chair into the circle, and took out his notebook.

"Any items for the Scribe?" he asked blandly. "After the excitement of last week—I allude to the return of Miss Katharine Ross to her native heath, if I may quote the Wizard of the North—the town has been unusually quiet, and promised to be equally so to-day-tay-tay; but—a—there was another arrival this afternoon."

"Indeed!" the ladies exclaimed. "Who——"

"I am not aware!" Mr. Jordano waved his notebook in some agitation. "I hoped to find information here, to tell the truth. A distang lady—oh, very distang indeed—quite unknown to me. I failed in my endeavor to interrogate John Tucker; his movements are so extremely quick-wick-wick!"

He looked anxiously from one face to another;

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the ladies returned his look with another equally anxious. Mr. Mallow, however, nodded importantly.

"Yes!" he said. "I was just goin' to tell the ladies when you come in, Very. I had asked Kitty to join us here this evening, but she is kept at home by a visitor. Ahem!"

Mr. Mallow was too human not to enjoy prolonging the suspense a moment; he was too kind to prolong it further.

"Johanna Ross!" he announced explosively. "I was surprised!"

"*Johanna Ross!*" all the ladies cried out in chorus.

"Well, I never did!" Mrs. Wibird further elucidated the situation.

"How unexpected!" said Miss Almeria gravely.

"Yet not unnatural, sister!" Miss Egeria murmured gently. "Kitty's own aunt, you know!"

"I am fully aware of that, my love!" Miss Almeria bent her head with dignity. "Nothing could be more natural, under ordinary circumstances; but Johanna is—peculiar, I am obliged to say."

"I never could get over her not comin' to Doctor's funeral!" Mrs. Wibird lamented. "I was brought up with Johanna, but I never could get over that. And that message she sent! They were takin' stock, and John would understand. I hope he did, for I'm sure nobody else did."

Mrs. Wibird gave a shiver of reprehension, and set her thin lips. She was a forlorn little lady, the opposite in every way of her brother. Marshall Mallow would have looked—and been—well nourished on

bread and cheese, if he had enough of it. Marcia Mallow had always looked, as Mrs. Sharpe expressed it, like the thin end of a pea-pod, and the most generous diet never added a pound to the ninety-nine she owned to. Melissa had tried more than once to "flesh her up," without success. But then, "they" said she gave all the nice things her brother sent her to "that Wilson." Melissa always looked hungry, too; even to-night, after that excellent lobster supper. Cyrus collectively hoped that that Wilson would get his come-uppance some day. Melissa Wibird would be a pretty girl if she didn't look starved.

"Has she come to stay, think?" asked Mrs. Wibird. "Did Kitty say, Marsh? What *did* she say?"

"She just said she was sorry she couldn't come, her Aunt Johanna had arrived."

"And you didn't *ask* her whether she was comin' to stay? Now, Marshall!"

"A—if I may venture a conjecture"—Mr. Jordano waved his notebook with a gesture expressive of deprecatory delicacy—"the lady in question would appear to intend to pass some time in our—shall I say midst? Her trunks—four of them—were of ample size. I should hardly suppose that for a brief sojourn——"

"She's come to stay!" Mrs. Wibird ejaculated positively; the Misses Bygood bent their heads and murmured, "she has doubtless come to stay!"

"So there's an end to my fine projectile!" said Mr. Mallow, with a sigh. Then in answer to inquiring looks:

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“A projectile—a plan I had. I thought maybe Kitty would come and keep house for me; asked her, in fact. She promised to think it over; but, of course, there’s an end of it now.”

“Why, Marshall!” Mrs. Wibird prepared to shed tears. “You know Melissa and I would come *any* time to keep house for you: you know I have offered to, over and over again, but you always said——”

“Never mind, mother!” Melissa broke in. “That was different! I understand entirely, Uncle Marsh.”

Mr. Mallow had been winking both eyes rapidly, a sign of embarrassment with him. He was very good to his sister, and really fond of Melissa, poor child, but—well, Lissy understood!

“A singular coincidence!” Miss Egeria fluttered into the breach. “Sister and I had also hoped—had asked dear Kitty to make her home with us, Mr. Mallow. Of course we had no idea——”

“Why,” cried Melissa, “the Chanters expected her to live with them, Zephine told me so this very morning. The boys are going to move into the barn chamber, and the girls into their room, so Kitty can have *their* room, the girls’. They spoke as if it were all settled.”

“Miss Kitty is in great demand: in great demand! Grando demando, as we say in Italy. I happen to know for a fact that Madam Flynt had made a similar plan for Miss Kitty’s future. I had the honor of calling upon that estimable lady this afternoon, and she said quite confidently that she expected our young friend to take up her abode—in short, to share her

elegant mansion with her. Miss Kitty had promised to think it over, but Madam Flynt appeared to have little doubt-tout-tout——”

“I must say I think Kitty has been rather sly!” said Mrs. Wibird, compressing her thin lips. “It’s all very well to keep your own counsel, but there is such a thing as being too close-mouthed, to *my* mind!”

“Oh, mother!” protested Melissa. “You’re entirely mistaken!”

“No doubt!” Mrs. Wibird folded her hands meekly. “I am usually mistaken, I admit; still I have my opinions, poor as they are.”

It was Miss Almeria who spoke now, with quiet dignity. “I do not understand, Marcia, that Kitty has done more in any case than agree to think over the invitation received by her. It seems to me in every way proper that she should do so. On the whole——” Miss Almeria paused, to give weight to her words, “on the whole, sadly as we are disappointed, my sister and I rejoice, I am sure, that matters have so arranged themselves that Kitty can remain in her own home. We have not intended to be selfish, friends and neighbors, but we may have been so unconsciously. Kitty is tenderly attached to her own home; I for one am surprised that I did not realize this more fully. It seemed—it would have been such a pleasure to have her——”

“Dear child!” murmured Miss Egeria. “It would indeed! but you are perfectly right, sister!”

“Doubtless Johanna realized this situation. I applaud, though I deplore in certain aspects, her action.”

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All through Miss Almeria's address, pronounced with much dignity, Mr. Jordano had been making little bows of admiring approbation. When she paused, he took up the word eagerly.

"Applause is doubtless indicated, Miss Almeria. I—a—heartily agree; heartily! A—would it be permissible for me to ask—I am not aware that Miss Ross has visited Cyrus during the years of my sojourn here—" (Mr. Jordano came from Tinkham, but, as every one said, he was not responsible for that, and he came away the very moment he was grown up)—"a—a—in short, are there any items that you would feel at liberty to communicate to the Scribe?"

There was a silence. Cyrus loves to talk, but there are some subjects on which it is reserved. Johanna Ross is one of them. All looked at Miss Almeria, who was turning a hem with exquisite nicety. She felt the look and responded, a slight flush rising to her smooth cheek.

"Miss Ross is a native of Cyrus," she said, "but has not lived here for many years. Twenty, I think, sister?"

"Twenty!" assented Miss Egeria; there was a general confirmatory murmur.

"She is a person of marked abilities, and has always felt—I believe—that Cyrus did not afford sufficient scope for these abilities. She has occupied a responsible position in a large establishment—wholesale—in the city of New York. This has absorbed all her time and energies; she has not felt—until now—that Cyrus

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had any claim upon them. May I trouble you for the eighty cotton, Mr. Mallow?"

"Certingly! certingly, Miss Bygood!" Mr. Mallow, in his haste to comply with the request, upset his big basket, and spools, tape, buttons, flew in every direction. How the ladies flew after them! How gracefully Miss Egeria glided in pursuit of the big spool of linen thread! how majestically Miss Almeria bent to capture the flood of buttons that poured into her silken lap! how Mrs. Wibird pounced, and Melissa hopped and fluttered! As for Mr. Jordano, he had an encounter with a skein of darning cotton, and entangled himself with it in a quite unbelievable way, and had to be rescued by Miss Egeria. It was a most exciting incident; they spoke of it for weeks after. Mr. Mallow, meantime, sat with the overturned basket still on his knees, grasping it tight, as if he feared it would follow the rest, and ejaculating, "My! my! I *am* surprised!"

"I make my 'pologies!" he said finally, when the last button had been restored to its place. "I make my 'pologies, ladies! I don't know as I ever did such a thing before. Quite a cat's trophy, I'm sure."

Flushed and breathless with agitation and vicarious exertion, the good gentleman took up his work again, but uttered an exclamation of discomfiture. "There! I've unthreaded my needle. Lissy, you know what I say; I'm no dromedary—I would say camel! Thread it for me, will you, dearie?"

While the threading was in process, Miss Almeria was advising with Mr. Jordano in low tones, as to

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the precise wording of the item which was to reveal to Cyrus at large the advent of Miss Johanna Ross. He had already, the evening before, submitted to her his account of Kitty's arrival, a piece of writing of which he was modestly proud. It began, "Flushed with oriflammes was the western sky, and Old Sol still shed his cheering ray over Cyrus and environs——"

At this moment the door flew open, and Mrs. Sharpe appeared, with Cissy close behind her. Well! they *did* look like an old vixen and a young one, there was no doubt about it, though of course Tom ought not to have said it.

"Good-evenin', all!" Mrs. Sharpe was panting, as if she had hurried. "I thought I'd make a run-in: I calc'lated I should find you here, Almeria 'n' Egeria. I want to know if you've heard——" her voice failed her, and she sat down, fanning herself with the "cloud" she had pulled off her head. "I hastened too much," she panted. "I got to get my breath!"

"I don't know as anybody's in a hurry, Mis' Sharpe!" Mr. Mallow's tone was less cordial than usual. He did not like Mrs. Sharpe, or her "run-ins." He didn't see, he had confided to Miss Egeria, why a person should have no privation just because he thought fit to keep a hotel. "It isn't as if she was a guest," he said, "paying or invited."

The rest of the company regarded the newcomers with mingled disfavor and curiosity.

"What is it, Cissy?" Mrs. Wibird asked, the latter sentiment overcoming the former.

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"Why," began Cissy, nothing loth; "Miss Johanna——"

"Now you hush up, Cissy!" said her mother, sharply. "You told over to Jebuses, and I'm going to tell here. Johanna Ross has come home!" she announced, with an air of dramatic triumph. "She came this afternoon. I saw her with these eyes." She indicated a pair—well, perhaps not exactly a pair—of yellowish eyes, decidedly too near together for beauty.

"We are aware of that!" replied Mr. Mallow majestically. Sitting with his needle poised in air, his knees rather wide apart, to support the big basket firmly and prevent further "cat's trophy," he looked like a mild and rosy Rhadamanthus about to give judgment.

"Oh, you are! Some one got ahead of me!"

Mrs. Sharpe darted a suspicious glance round the friendly circle.

"Well, do you know what she is up to? That—that *stay-away*—her that Cyrus isn't good enough for, that wouldn't attend her own brother's funeral because she was too stuck-up—do you know what has come to her in judgment? She has come back to Cyrus because she was *obliged* to! she has come back to saddle herself on her brother's child, that she has neglected ever since she was born; she has *taken to her bed*, and there she is to remain. Yes, Mr. Mallow! yes, girls! Mr. Jordano, you can put it in the paper, if you're a mind to. Miss Johanna Ross, the fine New York lady who shook the dust of Cyrus off her feet, is a *bedridden invalid!*"

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She gazed around with eager triumph, drinking in the looks of dismay like wine.

"A bedridden invalid!" she repeated. "What do you think of that?"

"Who told you this?" asked Marshall Mallow abruptly.

"A—precisely!" chimed in Mr. Jordano, in whom incredulity and good feeling were wrestling with the journalistic instinct. "What ground, so to speak, is there for this hypothesis-sis-sis?"

"Mother heard her say so!" Cissy hastened to put in. "Now, Mother, you might let me say a word! She heard the telephone, and——"

"I thought 'twas our ring!" cried Mrs. Sharpe. "I took up the receiver, and a *strange voice* was speakin'. I knew 'twas no one in Cyrus: I thought mebbe some-thin' was wrong and I ought to notify the marshal. And these words I heard: 'No, Madam Flynt, I'm sorry, but I can't come, because I am taking to my bed, there to remain.' And Madam Flynt said, 'Oh, Johanna! *Then I knew!*'"

Again, Mrs. Sharpe swept the circle with eager eyes. She had made the sensation of her life and was greedy of its sweets. But before any one could respond a rustle of skirts arose outside, a hubbub of voices, and in came The Boarders.

Some of the Boarders were ready enough to sup "outside" on Wednesday evening. Mrs. Scatter and her sister Miss Pringle went regularly to Judge Peters's, and looked forward, and back, to it all the week through. Not that the Judge's Mary was a

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“patch” upon Mr. Mallow’s Rosanna, but it made a change, and there was always a sense of distinction in supping with “my cousin, the Judge.” In the same way, the Misses Caddie (Miss Pearl in the Bank, Miss Ruby in the Telegraph Office) were glad and proud of their weekly evening with Madam Flynt. But it was hard on those who had no life-long ties with Cyrus. Mr. and Mrs. Bagley (he traveled in oil—mystic phrase—she worked in hair, and “chiro-podded,” as Mr. Mallow put it) had only been there a matter of ten years, and they had no resource but the Dew Drop Inn, a very inferior little hostelry down by the station. It was harder still on the “transients.” A tired bond salesman, let us say, just in from a long journey, and looking forward to one of the famous Mallow House suppers, was not pleased, after giving up his bag and taking his key, to be told, “No supper to-night, sir!” He might protest, in angry bewilderment, asking if this called itself a hotel, etc., etc. It made no difference: Billy had the one reply, “Wednesday: no supper, sir!” If the angry guest still protested, Mr. Mallow would come out of the office, smiling and urbane. Very sorry, but it was a Rule of the House. The Help, you see, their evening out; they had to be considered, times like these. Dew Drop Inn wasn’t but a step; Billy would go down with him and bespeak a good supper.

“We’ll make it up to you at breakfast!” the guest was cheerfully assured, as Mr. Mallow bowed him toward the door, and this assurance was amply fulfilled. Now and then a traveler called for his bag

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and went in a huff to spend the night at the Dew Drop Inn; but he never did it twice.

Now, as I said, the Boarders were back, and rustling in with a pleasant sense of home-coming. There were two or three salesmen to-night, old customers, who knew and accepted the Mallow House ways; they were not Cyrus people, however, and it would have been highly improper to continue the conversation recently begun. Even the Sharpes realized this.

"Come on, Mother!" whispered Cissy, pulling her mother's shawl. "You won't get another word in to-night! They are just as glad, too, I can see that."

Mother and daughter departed, and the others followed, after a suitable interchange of greetings with the newcomers. Wilson Wibird had come upstairs with the Sharpes, and had been hanging about the doorway, half curious, half sullen. He had been annoying Billy all the evening in the office, and had finally been dismissed by that apostle of silence, with "Go 'long! work to do!" He resented having to escort his mother and sister home, but there was no choice, with Mr. Mallow's eye upon him.

"Here's Wilson, all ready!" said the kindly potentate. "Wilse, you'll find a basket in the back entry that Rosanny packed for your Ma. Take it along, but be sure to bring it back in the morning; Rosanny wants it. Good-night, Marshy; good-night, Lissy! Sleep tighty, flea bitey!"

Mr. Jordano, as was his custom, offered his escort to the Misses Bygood, and they walked off together

in the fashion of other days, the gentleman giving an arm to each.

"A highly agreeable occasion!" he said. "Friend Mallow is the ideal host-tost-tost."

"He is indeed!" said Miss Egeria, "and it is so remarkable, Mr. Jordano, for a lone man, so to speak, to be such an excellent housekeeper. I am told that the Mallow House is known far and wide as an ideal hostelry. It is very gratifying to know that Cyrus institutions (for the Mallow House is surely an institution) rank so high throughout the State."

"Bello hotello! bello hotello," assented Mr. Jordano warmly. "House and host are well matched, well matched. May I ask, Miss Bygood, if you attach any—serious—a—importance to Mrs. Sharpe's—shall I say singular statement?"

Miss Almeria pondered. "It is hard to say!" she pronounced finally. "The method by which the information was obtained—but we will not speak of that!" she closed her eyes for a moment, as if to shut out an unlovely vision. "Miss Ross *is* peculiar: there is no gainsaying that. She has always gone her own way, with no guidance—that I am aware of—beyond her own wishes. But she is a woman of character and education, and I cannot for a moment believe that matters are as—as we have heard them represented. Doubtless we shall know all in good time. Meanwhile—may I ask if you were contemplating the possibility of altering or adding to your item, Mr. Jordano?"

Mr. Jordano fluttered perceptibly.

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“Not if it would appear in any way unsuitable to a lady—to ladies”—with a little bow to Miss Egeria, “whose exquisite refinement of taste is equal to their—ahem! shall I say, other characteristics? Not for worlds, Miss Bygood, if you advise against it. At the same time, if—if the information is to be—a—generally disseminated, it might—the official organ—it might be expected by the people—il Publico, you understand—tand—tand—I will do whatever you advise, Miss Bygood!” the poor gentleman concluded.

It was heroic, though none of the three fully realized it. To relinquish such a “story,” leave it to unofficial babblers and—Mr. Jordano feared—spiteful gossips, when it might be set down with gravity and ornamented with flowers of speech—yes, it was heroic. The two ladies thought it very nice of Mr. Jordano; but they thought no more than that, and Miss Almeria gave the *coup de grace* with unfaltering hand.

“It will be best, I am convinced,” she said, “to leave the item as it stood before Mrs. Sharpe’s entrance. I will say, her unseemly entrance. Your own instinctive delicacy is so well known, Mr. Jordano——”

“Oh! grazier! grazier!” murmured Mr. Jordano, trying to bow gracefully, a difficult thing with a lady on either arm—“too much, Miss Almeria!”

“So well known,” Miss Almeria repeated, with a gracious bend of her own stately head, “that all Cyrus will appreciate your motive for abstaining from comment upon what we have heard. If it proves true, we shall know it soon enough; if false——” Miss Al-

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meria's gesture was eloquent as well as dignified.

"If false," cried Mr. Jordano,—they were now at Mr. Bygood's door, and the ladies withdrew their arms, enabling him to fling his cloak over his left shoulder with a noble gesture—"if false, it has no place in the columns of the *Cyrus Centinel*."

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRIVIAL ROUND

THESE things and many more happened in the winter; in February, to be exact. A month later, when I came to make my annual visit in beloved Cyrus, things had "simpered down," as Mr. Mallow said. The excitement of Kitty's arrival, followed by the nine days' wonder of Miss Johanna Ross's return, were—not forgotten, no indeed! but laid away in spiritual camphor, as it were, to be aired and shaken out from time to time.

"My dear," said Madam Flynt (one's first visit was always to Madam Flynt, one's second to the Misses Bygood: it was a Propriety of Cyrus!)—"it is not only that we could not get along without Kitty: we have forgotten that we ever did get along without her. She drives too fast; I go in fear of my life when we turn a corner; but except for that, it is an ideal arrangement."

"The dear Doctor always drove fast!" Miss Croly looked up pensively from her knitting. "I suppose Kitty learned it naturally from him."

"I suppose she did; but the dear Doctor never broke my neck, Cornelia Croly."

"Kitty has not broken it, Clarissa, has she?"

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"Not yet, and I don't mean she shall. Where are you going, Cornelia?"

"To get your milk-posset!" Miss Croly was rolling up her knitting methodically. "It is four o'clock."

"I don't want milk-posset: get me some orange-juice!"

"The Doctor recommended milk-posset!" Miss Croly's tone was mild, but firm. "I will try to make it palatable, Clarissa."

"I tell you I won't have it! Whose house is this, I should like to know?"

"Yours, assuredly, Clarissa. I can leave it at any moment you desire, but while here I must do my duty as I see it."

"What a pretty scarf, Miss Croly!" I said hastily. How natural to be a buffer again! "Is it for a baby?"

Madam Flynt uttered something between a snort and a chuckle.

"Baby, indeed! I don't wonder you ask, my dear. Tell her what it's for, Cornelia Croly!"

"For the deep-sea fishermen, my love!" Miss Croly glowed softly. "Most people send them gray mufflers, you know, but I feel as if a little variety, a touch of color, in their dangerous lives, would be desirable. The ocean! so grand, but so fraught with peril!"

"In a storm, you understand," Madam Flynt actually snorted this time; "a pink, blue and yellow muffler would be more comforting than a gray one. Of course! Any one can see that!"

"You are pleased to be facetious, my dear Clarissa;" Miss Croly paused, her hand on the door;

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“but I conceive that in case of disaster, the attention of a—of a bark of rescue would be more readily attracted by the waving of a bright object than of a dull one!”

She slipped out quickly and shut the door quietly upon the last word. Madam Flynt looked after her with an air of exasperation.

“The most provoking woman—I have half a mind to call her back! What were you saying, my dear?”

I was saying as quickly as I could how very well Madam Flynt was looking. I hoped the rheumatism was fairly routed this time. The dear lady’s brow cleared at once.

“Much better! I am bound to say that it is much better than I ever expected it to be. Cornelia Croly, who has really more sense than you would give her credit for”—she cast another exasperated glance at the door—“says that I seem ten years younger, and I certainly do move much more freely than I have for years. It is partly the driving: Kitty is a delightful companion, you know, and she keeps me out a good part of the afternoon, instead of skimping the last ten minutes of the hour, as Flanagan did—old wretch! His carriage was uncomfortable, too, and as for his horses! Every day he would ask regularly whether I would have ‘the plain hoss or the double-speeder:’ the double-speeder went about four miles an hour; as for the other—well, he’s dead, and Flanagan, too, so no matter. John Tucker’s horses, and the cee springs, and Kitty and all, makes driving a very different matter, I can tell you. But besides that, my dear, I verily

believe"—Madam Flynt nodded this time, till her green cap ribbons quivered—"I verily believe Johanna has something to do with it!"

"Johanna?"

Well, I had only arrived the day before, and Kitty was out when I flew into Ross House on my way to Madam Flynt's: going to Kitty's did not count as a visit, of course!

"You don't mean you haven't heard? My dear!" Madam Flynt's handsome hands were trembling with eagerness, her lips began to shape the words before she could find voice to utter them. "You don't mean you haven't heard?" she repeated. Madam Flynt was no gossip, but she loved to talk, and going out so little, she had fewer opportunities than the Gadderenes, as Dr. Ross used to call some of his neighbors. One's first visit was made to her, as I have said: but ten to one Cissy Sharpe or her mother had waylaid one on the way from the station, with "Oh, howdy do! quite a stranger! Have you heard"—and before getting free one had heard.

"Johanna Ross—Kitty's aunt, the Doctor's only sister; very likely you never heard of her, my dear, just visiting as you do"—(Oh, Madam Flynt! as if I were not Cyrus born and bred, and exiled through no fault of mine!)"—"but—well, anyhow, she has come home after *twenty years* of absence; and what is more she has *taken to her bed*, and there she is!"

Madam Flynt drew herself up and nodded gravely: the green satin cap ribbons following suit.

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"Is she seriously ill?" I asked, wondering.

"My dear! she *says* there is nothing whatever the matter with her except fatigue. I can understand that!" she nodded again. "Perfectly. One doesn't always care to discuss chronic or deep-seated troubles. Sometimes when people say 'rheumatism' to me, I want to throw the fire-irons at them. I don't mean you, my dear; perfectly natural and right for you to ask; I should have been hurt if you hadn't. Well! there Johanna is, as I said. I go over to see her once a week—walk over, with the step of youth, Cornelia Croly says, and there I find her in her bed, looking as permanent as the Pyramids."

At this moment Miss Croly came in softly with the milk-posset. Madam Flynt took it with an absent-minded, "Thanks, Cornelia!" drank it off, then paused with a look of discomfiture.

"I told you I wouldn't take it!" she said sharply.

"Your natural good sense"—murmured Miss Croly with a glance at the empty cup—"the Doctor recommended——"

"Hang the Doctor! and you, too!" exclaimed Madam Flynt. "You—you—you—*go away*, Cornelia Croly! go and"—Miss Croly was already at the door, aggressive meekness in every line of face and figure—"and bring me my smelling-salts, if you will have the goodness!"

The last words were spoken with austere dignity: but, the door once closed, Madam Flynt's sense of humor was too much for her. Her lips began to twitch, her eyes to twinkle even under the bent brows

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of anger. She struggled for a moment, then burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"The old fox!" she cried. "She gets the better of me every time! every time, Mary! She's chuckling to herself now, but she'll come in as sober as—thank you, Cornelia! I hope you haven't over-exerted yourself!" as Miss Croly, still aggressively meek, retired to a corner with her rainbow scarf. Dear me! yes, she always sat in that uncomfortable chair when they had had a tiff.

"What was I saying, my dear?" Madam Flynt rubbed her nose with her silver spectacle-case, and threw a vexed glance toward the corner.

"Oh, yes, Johanna! like the Pyramids, my dear, I assure you! I don't mean in looks" (I had a moment's vision of Cheops with a nightcap tilted over his apex) "she looks like a picture—but in permanence. Sits up morning and evening to have her bed made: and, as Cornelia Croly says, in some mysterious way it makes me feel younger just to look at her. Cornelia, stop being ridiculous, and come out of that corner. I didn't really swear at you, though you are enough to make one."

Seeing reconciliation imminent, I slipped away, to find my Kitty in the stable. My Kitty! I was just as foolish about her as any one else. I had not seen her since all the happenings, but by and by we were quiet and comfortable, and combing out Pilot's beautiful mane, as if we had never been away, either of us. Kitty confided to me that she was awaiting John Tucker's return in trepidation, not to say terror. She

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had bought a new horse, bought it all by herself, without John Tucker's seeing it. That is, not actually bought it, but taken it on trial.

"How could I? Mary, I don't know! We had decided that we must have a third horse. The business is growing so, my dear! Mr. Chanter's horse is lame, and I have to take the dear man on his out-of-town calls. *Such* fun! well, this morning—oh! oh! Mary! here is John Tucker. Now I must confess to him. Stay by me, won't you?"

Dan and John Tucker came into the stable, a sturdy, handsome pair. I was warmly greeted (I, too, had been Don Tutter's Dal when time was) and allowed to lead Dan into his stall. I hurried to the harness room in time to hear Kitty's confession, she standing like a schoolgirl with her hands behind her, John Tucker in that state of glowing pride in her that he could hardly take in the situation.

"John Tucker, dear, I have bought a horse!"

"You have, Miss Kitty? You *have*? Well, to be sure! the spirit of you! I'll bet he's a good one."

"He's a miracle, John! A beautiful bright bay, with a star on his forehead, and four white stockings; you know I never could abide odd stockings."

"No, Miss! To be sure not. Where did you get him, if I may make so bold, Miss Kitty?"

"Don't talk about making bold, John Tucker. It's I who have been making bold. I am scared out of my wits, you know I am, but he *is* such a beauty! Let's sit down, John Tucker dear, and I'll tell you all about it.

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Perched sidewise on the arm of a chair, her hands clasped on her knee, her chin tilted up, Kitty was so enchanting an object that I could not wonder at John Tucker's fatuous expression. Probably if she had told him of the purchase of a giraffe or an elephant, he would have looked no less fatuous. As it was——

"You see, John," Kitty began slowly, taking out a hatpin and jabbing it into the arm of the chair to punctuate her remarks, "I took Mr. Chanter to see a poor old Thing who is sick, and in trouble besides; sad trouble, I'm afraid. Her son hasn't been doing well lately; but—well—he is a good son to her, only he has been unfortunate. He deals in horses——"

John Tucker looked up. "What was the name, did you say, Miss?"

"I didn't say, John Tucker dear, but the name is Boody; Mrs. L. M. Boody. Her son is L. M., too. I don't know——"

"Ellum Boody: Slippery Ellum!" murmured John Tucker. "Scuse me, Miss Kitty. Luke his name is, but he's known like I say. Scuse me, Miss Kitty!"

"Oh, I *hope* he isn't slippery, John Tucker, dear. Let me tell you! I was sitting out in Mr. Chanter's buggy, when he—Boody, I mean—drove into the yard with this horse. His name is Hero, John; good name, don't you think? I was taken with him at once; such a beautiful color, and holds his head so well! The man touched his hat, and was very civil; I said how handsome the horse was, and he was *most* enthusiastic. Said he had never had such a fine horse in his stable, and he wouldn't part with him for a gold

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mine if things weren't just as they were. So I asked was he thinking of selling him, because you know we decided we *had* to have one, John; and he said yes, if the right party could be found. 'For sell that hoss to the wrong party is what I couldn't do, not if he was the Angel Gable!' he said. Then I asked about him, you know; six years old, sound and kind, a lady's horse every inch of him, Boody said, and wouldn't I like to take a turn behind him while I waited. So I did, and he is a *good* roadster, John; eight or ten miles an hour, I should think; Boody says twelve, but I'm not sure——" I glanced at John Tucker and saw that he was not sure. "Good action! lifts his feet a *little* high, but Boody says that is his spirit; and as to his disposition, John, just *think* what he did one day! Some women hired him, Boody says, and put him in their own wagon, and *forgot to fasten the breeching*. They drove him seven miles over that rough road by Gambrel Hill, all ups and downs, you know, and he *never did a thing!* What do you think of that, John Tucker?"

"Sounds as if he might be some hoss!" said John Tucker cautiously. "You've took him on trial, you say, Miss Kitty?"

"Yes, John, a week. I thought in that time—why, here he is now, this very minute!"

A man was driving into the yard in a light trotting sulky. We all hastened out into the yard.

"You *were* quick, Mr. Boody!" cried Kitty. "This is Mr. Boody, John Tucker, and this is Hero: isn't he a beauty?"

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“Mornin’, Slip!”

“Mornin’, Tucker!”

Both men spoke gravely. Seeing that they knew each other, Kitty exchanged a glance with me, and we slipped back a pace. Followed remarks on the weather. It was seasonable, take it by and large, but dry. What we wanted was a nice warm rain. That was right; dry May made poor hay, no two ways to that. John Tucker, still grave, inquired for the health of Mr. Boody’s Ma; he trusted she was smart these days. It appeared that she was slim, Mr. Boody was obleeged to John Tucker for askin’. Her victuals didn’t nourish her: any one gettin’ on in years, they had to be nourished, you understand. John Tucker expected that was right, too. Upon this, both men pondered; John Tucker scrutinizing a wart on his left knuckle, Mr. Boody whistling through his teeth and looking up at the clouds. Presently:

“Got a new hoss, I see!” said John Tucker.

“Yep!” Mr. Boody’s gaze came down with alacrity. “The lady thought she’d like to try him. Best hoss ever I had in my stable, bar none. Pequot out of Lady Lansing: sound and kind anywhere; lady’s hoss every inch of him. Rising six, and not an out about him. You get that hoss and you’ll get——”

Boody paused abruptly. John Tucker had lifted one of the bay’s hind feet, and was examining it carefully. Presently he straightened himself and looked at Boody.

“I was to Rochester Fair last fall!” he said.

“You was?” A curious change came over Mr.

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Boody's countenance. It seemed to flatten itself in a singular way, while his mouth widened into an uneasy grin. "Pooty good show, wasn't it?" he said.

"Pooty fair! good truck, and middlin' stock. The most re-markable thing I see at that fair"—John Tucker spoke slowly, and there was a certain metallic quality in his voice that made Kitty look at him quickly—"the most re-markable was a young hoss; bright bay, as it might be this hoss: same color, same markin's; he was a pictur' to look at, he sure was. Well, sir, I see that hoss take and kick the wagon he was hitched to into pieces that the biggest of 'em wouldn't sell to a match factory. I was surprised!"

There was a silence. Then L. M. Boody spoke, a hint of bluster in his voice.

"Wal!" he said. "A kicker is a poor hoss, sure enough; but all kickers ain't bay, nor all bays ain't kickers. I brung this hoss for the lady to try, like she said for me to. Where shall I leave him? Is she boss here, or are you?"

His speech was insolent, his look craven. John Tucker stepped forward, his sixty years resting very lightly on him. His meditative drawl gave place to quick, ringing speech.

"Miss Ross is boss here," he said, "and that hoss shall go anywhere she tells me to put him. Before she gives her orders, she's going to hear what I have to say—if you have the time to spare, Miss—Miss Ross!" He turned to Kitty with a bow and gesture that would not have shamed a court. Kitty's cheeks were flushing and her eyes widening and darkening.

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One knew precisely what the Chanters meant by saying that her eyes were sometimes a mile round.

"If you please, John!" she said quietly.

Then John Tucker, standing very straight, thus delivered himself.

"Miss Kitty, I'm a common man, and I may be mistook; but if I know anything—anything *at all*, let alone hosses—this young hoss is that identical young hoss that I see kick that shay to slivers over to Rochester. How do I know? Well, his color is the same, his markin's is the same, his shape and his action is the same. But that ain't all! That young hoss over to Rochester, he was a pictur' fer looks, same as this one; but yet when I looked in his countenance, I felt someways or another as if I couldn't say nothin' favorable about him. Don't know how 'tis, but that feelin' 'll come over me, 'bout a hoss or 'bout a bein', 'cordin' to; and when it comes, *I know it's right*. Now that same feelin' has come over me about this young hoss. And why?" John Tucker's voice rose. "Because he is the same hoss! But that ain't all!" as Mr. Boody was about to speak. "You might say one bust don't set a hoss down a kicker. That is so, but I say this ain't a case of one bust; I say this hoss has been kickin' within twenty-four hours."

"Like to see you prove it!" said Boody. "Easy there, Hero! He knows you're slanderin' him. You can't fool this hoss. You'll get into trouble, John Tucker. I'll have the law of you if——"

The horse had laid back his ears, and was settling back in a curious way.

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“Look out!” said John Tucker sharply.

Boody, with a muttered curse and a savage look, laid his whip heavily over the horse's withers. The animal hesitated a moment, then sprang forward; another moment, and they had vanished round the corner in a cloud of dust.

John Tucker turned to Kitty with an apologetic air.

“I'm sorry, Miss Kitty!” he said. “I'm real sorry. I would of if I could——”

“Oh, John Tucker, don't!” Kitty was scarlet, her eyes flashing, her hands clenched. “The *horrid* man! Oh, I am so grateful to you, John! But how *did* you know?”

“Well, Miss Kitty, you see, 'twas easy enough, look at it one way. I'd seed the hoss before, seed him at his tricks, too. Yes'm: I'd seed him before, and——” a joke began to twinkle in John Tucker's eyes, and spread all over him till he became incandescent; you could have lighted a match at him; “and now I've seed him behind! haw! haw! You see me lift up his off hind foot? Well, why did I do that? Because when he shifted his footin' I see a spark of yeller. Come to look, and lo ye, his hoof was kind o' crushed in above the shoe, where he'd struck iron, and there was a flake of yellow paint on it big as my thumb nail.”

“And he knew that!” Kitty was pale now, not with fear but with anger. “The scoundrel!”

“Well!” John Tucker pulled out his jack-knife and made a thoughtful incision in the door-jamb. “I dono as I'd just say that; I dono as he's a scoundrel; he's a trader! I've heard it said,—I dono as it's so, and I

done *as* it is—but I've heard it said that there ain't no one, not even a minister of the Gospel, a holy man, but what he'll stretch the truth just a little grain in a hoss trade."

John Tucker closed his jack-knife with a snap. "Forget it, Miss Kitty!" he said, and his tone expressed finality. "You won't have no more trouble with Slippery Ellum. He thought he'd try it on, that's all, to keep his hand in, like; tradin' is like drink to him. Hark! there's that hen again!"

"What hen, John?"

John Tucker chuckled and made a gesture of caution.

"Now I'll show ye something curious, gals. I would say young ladies. You hear that hen cackle? Well, it's that little Brown Leghorn. She's made her nest in Dan's manger, and she won't lay nowhere else, not if the President was to ask her. Easy now! Don't let Dan see you!"

Cautiously, we followed him into the stable, flattening ourselves against the wall so that we could not be seen from the loose boxes; very cautiously we peeped round the window opening. Dan, wisest of horses since old Victory died, was standing in the middle of the box, every fibre of him alert, his eyes fixed on a corner of the manger. In this corner sat a Brown Leghorn hen, proclaiming to the world that she had laid an egg. Having made this perfectly clear, she rose slowly from her nest, clucked, cocked an approving eye at the egg, clapped her wings, said, "Scraw!" several times, finally hopped down to the

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barn floor and departed, presumably in search of corn. In a flash, Dan's velvet nose was in the nest. Carefully he lipped the egg, daintily he took it in his teeth; a crack, a gulp; luncheon was over, and Dan looked up as we advanced, with eyes of innocent welcome.

"Why, Dan!" cried Kitty. "You old fox! Do you mean that he does this regularly, John?"

"Reg'lar every day since she begun to lay. I'd ought to stop him, but honest, he's so cute, and so quick, I'd need to spend the mornin' watchin'!"

"Sugar, please!" said Dan. "I am very hungry!"

"You really ought to be ashamed, Dan." Kitty was searching in her pocket. "You are extremely greedy, beloved. You shall have only one lump, and Pilot shall have two, because he has had no egg. Oh, me! there is the supper bell. We must run, Mary!"

Sarepta, at the kitchen door, bell in hand, addressed us with severity.

"Supper's ready, girls. Come in just as you are, Kitty, or the waffles will be leathery. Hasten, now!"

"Mary," said Kitty, as we scurried across the yard, "do you suppose I shall ever be more than ten years old, in blessed Cyrus?"

CHAPTER IX

THE SKELETON IN CYRUS' CUPBOARD

PERHAPS no one was enjoying Kitty and her horses more at this time than the Reverend Timothy Chanter. When he came to Cyrus, to replace the Reverend Holdfast Baxter, deceased after a pastorate of forty-seven years, he took over the parsonage as it stood, and with it Gudgeon the sexton, Felicity the cat and Podasokus the horse. The age of Podasokus might be anywhere from twenty to forty years. The children, who had known him all their lives, supposed him to be a hundred. He was a singular, moth-eaten old creature, seeming to slope all ways at once; I don't know how else to describe him. He could trot rather fast when he wished, but this was seldom; he preferred to jog or single-foot at a rate of three miles an hour. This had suited Mr. Baxter well enough, for he composed his sermons while driving; as for his parish calls, if he could not compass them, he was all the better pleased. But Mr. Chanter, deep in his heart, had an inborn love of good horses and fast driving. It was part of his simple creed to deny himself anything he specially liked; it was an affair between himself and his Maker—or so he thought. The neck of the fowl was al-

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ways his portion, till Mrs. Chanter took the carving into her own hands; he found the fireside too hot in winter, the shady corner too cool in summer. Much of his wife's time was devoted to circumventing "Pelican Pa," as he was disrespectfully called in the bosom of the family. Acting on this principle, Mr. Chanter had never thought of exchanging Podasokus for a better animal. He was there. If one could "live well in a palace," one could also drive a slow horse. So, when he was in a hurry, he walked, or borrowed the boys' bicycle. When he had plenty of time, he drove Podasokus.

When Podasokus felt that he must have a nap in the middle of the high road, Mr. Chanter hauled the wagon to the hedge, and read the works of the late R. J. Ingersoll, which he particularly disliked, till the steed woke up again and jogged along.

These things being so, Mr. Chanter found it hard to grieve deeply when "Pod" went lame, and he must call upon Kitty Ross for his longer expeditions. The parish was a straggling one; Cyrus itself is compact as a pie, but South, East and West Cyrus stretch far over hill and dale. What more delightful than to drive to South Cyrus behind Dan or Pilot, with Kitty holding the reins? Kitty was the perfect companion, Mr. Chanter said. She talked just enough and not too much; and she always seemed to know when one was inclined to meditate or—a—"or sleep!" assented Mrs. Chanter, who had "put Kitty wise" on certain points. "Exactly!"

On a pleasant April morning the two were thus

driving along the South Cyrus road. Pilot was in the shafts, and in high spirits. The day before had been rainy, and he had not been out; now he sped along the sun-dappled road as if every stride were a pleasure; now and then breaking into a canter of rejoicing, to be checked by Kitty with affectionate firmness. When they had climbed and dipped the intervening hills and the plain stretched before them like a floor, Mr. Chanter leaned back in his seat and rubbed his hands.

"This is delightful!" he said. "This is de-lightful, Kitty! ha! the poetry of motion.

" 'And thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing!'

A fine horse (and Pilot is a remarkably fine horse!) is after mankind, one of the noblest works of God."

"Isn't he?" said Kitty. "And not always such a long way after, do you think, Mr. Chanter? Compare Pilot, or Dan either, with—with some people! that horrid Boody man! Neither Pilot nor Dan would *think* of cheating in a horse trade!"

"Surely not! surely not!" Mr. Chanter acquiesced. "They would scorn such an action."

"To be sure, Dan does steal eggs!" Kitty continued meditatively. "But then—that seems a little different, don't you think? A hen is *such* a goose!"

"Surely not! surely not!" said the Reverend Timothy again in sonorous accent.

Kitty glanced at him: he was making a series of courteous bows to Pilot's glossy hindquarters; was in

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fact as nearly asleep as any one could be whose eyes were only half shut.

"Dear soul!" murmured Kitty to herself. "He was up half the night with that sick man, Mrs. Chanter said. He might as well take a good nap. Easy now, Pilot! easy, dear boy!"

Pilot, who had been dancing a bit in the joy of his heart, settled into a smooth trot, and conveyed to Kitty by a toss of his beautiful head that he could keep this up all day, though it was a trifle dull. "Never mind, darling!" said Kitty. "You shall rush all the way home if you like."

She fell into a muse, as the miles sped smoothly by. It was spring; really and truly, or almost really and truly, almost spring.

"Really spring, or nearly spring,
And, oh, I love you dearly, spring!"

she hummed under her breath. Kitty loved to think in rhyme. Sometimes for days together she and Tommy would hardly speak in prose. Tommy was far cleverer, of course: (he was not!) did he talk rhyme now, Kitty wondered, and if so, to whom? Something pricked her; she put the thought resolutely away.

"'Tis a month before the month of May,
And the spring comes slowly up this way."

What was the strange magic of those two lines? They simply *were* the New England spring, which Coleridge never saw. Ah! pussy willows! she must

get some—she half checked the horse, but chirruped to him again with a little sigh. Nobody to take pussy willows to, now. How Mother loved them! They were just like that gray velvet gown of hers. Little Mother! Aunt Johanna wouldn't care for pussy willows; as for Sarepta——! But how good they both were; what really interesting persons! and so bracing to live with! Kitty chuckled, recalling the after breakfast hour this morning.

She was making her customary call on Aunt Johanna, and that lady, erect amid her pillows, resplendent in sapphire blue and Mechlin (she had a different jacket for every morning; the bedridden, she maintained, must make variety for themselves!) was holding forth on the subject of classes. "Keep people *in their place!*" said the lady. "It is my invariable rule. If a salesman is uppish with me, he takes his uppishness elsewhere within twenty-four hours. Whenever any one forgets his place, put him back in it *without delay.* Delay makes for uncertainty, and uncertainty is fatal in business and everywhere else. An instance, my dear! The day before I left New York, I took a friend, a nice young girl, who didn't have many friends, to the Ritz Carlton for lunch. They have good coffee there; not like Sarepta's, but good. Well, after the ice-cream I ordered peaches; the waiter brought me two. *Two peaches!* I looked at him. 'I ordered peaches!' I said. 'I did not specify the number.' He mumbled something, and I told him to speak up. 'Peaches is very expensive, Mum!' said the creature."

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Kitty burst into a ripple of laughter. "I wish I had been there, Aunt Johanna. What did you say?"

"Say? I said, 'Trot along, Nancy! Do I look as if I couldn't pay for 'em?' He trotted."

Kitty's laughter rippled again as she recalled her aunt's gesture.

"Speaking of trotting, Pilot dear," she said, "we might as well—quiet, boy! quiet!"

Pilot had shied, a thing almost unheard of. They were passing a tall dark hedge; something rustled in it, and startled the horse. As Kitty soothed him, a figure half emerged from a gap in the hedge; she was aware of a thin, dark, haggard face, of two burning eyes, which fixed her for an instant with a piercing gaze; then the figure slunk back again and the branches closed over it.

"Surely not! surely not!" said the Reverend Timothy Chanter, in a tone of profound conviction. "You were speaking of the good horse, my dear; has anything annoyed him? I think I lost myself a moment."

"He was startled, and I don't wonder; I was startled too. A man came out of the hedge: such a strange-looking man, Mr. Chanter."

"Hedge? Man?" Mr. Chanter glanced around him and his face changed. "What kind of man, Kitty?"

"A wild, ragged man. He looked sick, and—I had just a glimpse, but he looked—all wrong, somehow. It's the old Gaylord place, you know. I never saw any living creature about it before,—but once! Have you ever seen any one there, Mr. Chanter?"

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Mr. Chanter cleared his throat with some elaboration.

"I believe it has not been inhabited for some years," he replied. There was a shade on his candid countenance. He was not in the habit of evading the direct answer.

"It is a fine place, spite of its neglected condition."

Kitty glanced back at the dark hedge, with the dark chimneys rising above it, and shivered a little. "I have always been afraid of the place, somehow!" she said. "I had a fright there once, when I was a child."

"Had you so, my love? No one should ever frighten a child. Very remiss: very wrong, if intentional."

"Oh, no, no one meant to frighten me. It was just an accident. We used to go there for nuts, Tom Lee and I. There was a huge chestnut tree—I suppose it is still there—by the side door of the house. It bore the biggest chestnuts I ever saw, and Tom and I went there regularly every October. There was something terrifying about the great dark shuttered house; (to me, that is: Tom was never afraid of anything;) and that always made it an exciting expedition. You know there is a round hole in every shutter, near the top? We used to make believe we saw eyes looking at us out of those holes; and then—one day—" Kitty shivered again: "well, one day, there *were* eyes!"

"My child! my child! a—a—lively imagination, no doubt! The young——"

"No, Mr. Chanter, the eyes were there: we saw them wink. And then—we used to call that little side

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door the postern, and imagine all kinds of people coming out of it, knights and giants and princesses—well; all of a sudden the door did open, and a man came out—why!” Kitty stopped short and turned a pale face on her companion. “Why, Mr. Chanter, I believe—it was—the—same man!”

“The same man, my dear?”

“The man I saw just now! He wasn’t so thin or so haggard then: he wasn’t ragged; but—the wild look, the burning eyes—oh, Mr. Chanter, it all comes back to me. It was the same man!”

Mr. Chanter was silent for some time: then—“And whom did you suppose the man to be, my love? Did he speak to you?”

“No! I think he might have, but we ran away. We were trespassing, of course, and I was frightened out of my wits. We supposed”—her voice dropped: “we told Father, and he said it was probably the owner of the house, and bade us say nothing about it to any one.”

Mr. Chanter’s face cleared a little.

“Very sound advice!” he said. “Excellent advice, my dear. Do you know, Kitty, my child, I believe you cannot do better than to follow it in this case also.”

Villages as well as houses have their skeleton cupboards. The Gaylord place was Cyrus’ cupboard. Built in the middle of the eighteenth century, it had been inhabited by one generation after another of Gaylords; all people of the same stripe as their neighbors, gentle, cultivated, a little passive, a little inclined

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to smile and let the world go by. They farmed their wide acres; they loved their books, they caught trout at one season and shot woodcock at another, they spent certain weeks or months in the City. So things went for a hundred years and more. Then one Gaylord, more enterprising than his forebears, made money: copper, I think it was, in the early Calumet days. The money did him no special harm. He refurnished the house rather more splendidly than Cyrus thought in quite good taste, but his wife came from the City, and what could one expect? He bought a good many books, and some pictures, and enjoyed himself immensely: then he died, a few weeks after his City wife, and their son inherited.

Kitty and I were babies when Russell Gaylord was running his race to perdition. In our childhood we used to hear a good deal about him; never from our parents, nor from Sarepta Darwin, but I am afraid we did listen to Cissy Sharpe, who knew all about it, or thought she did. He threw the money right and left. He drove four-in-hand through Cyrus streets with his college mates, to the scandal of the community; he held revels in the old house, with a hundred wax candles in each room, and flowers and music such as had never been dreamed of in the quiet village. People shook their heads, but indulgently: they were proud of the handsome, open-hearted boy. He had such pleasant ways! He loved to put a dime in the contribution box at church, and then slyly, after service, to pile it high with anonymous gold pieces. He loved to send preposterous Christmas boxes to every-

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body he knew, and to pile up loads of wood by night in lean woodsheds. People said he would learn in time; his heart was in the right place. He was the most brilliant scholar in his class, could stand at the head if he would only study; when he had sown his wild oats, he would settle down in Cyrus and be a credit to all. Even when he ran over their dogs and in a tipsy frolic smashed the post office windows, they forgave him and loved him. He was a Gaylord, and could not really do anything much out of the way.

Then came the crash. A riotous houseparty of men from the City (poor City! it had to bear the sins of many a village like Cyrus!); a quarrel over the gaming table; an insult; a blow, a knife-thrust; a young man slain in his folly, and blood on Russell Gaylord's white hands.

They had all been drinking; the verdict brought in was manslaughter, the sentence ten years' imprisonment. No sooner was the trial over than the creditors came flocking like vultures. Judge Peters— young Lawyer Peters, he was then,—who had charge of the estate, paid and paid and paid; debts of honor, so called, contracted in dishonor; bills for horses, for carriages, for rich wines and costly jewelry: he set his teeth and paid them all. The last bill took practically the last dollar; the house was closed, and for many a day Russell Gaylord's name was spoken no more in Cyrus.

It must have been soon after his release from prison that Kitty and Tom saw him. It began to be whispered about, not among the gossips, but quietly, among

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those who had been friends of the family, that Russell had been back; that Marshall Mallow had seen him and spoken with him; that he was a wreck of his former self, his one idea to forget his troubles in drink.

Mrs. Sharpe never heard this, though she knew something was going on. She knew that one night Judge Peters was out till midnight, *no one knew where*; she saw him come home and she *thought* he didn't put his latch key in any too easy: and that she had met Marsh Mallow and Very Jordano at *ten o'clock*, when she was hastening home to her bed, having taken some gruel to those Jessups who were never thankful for anything, and she met those two men walking in the street, with their faces turned *away from their homes*, they best knew why. This was all she knew: she made the most of it, and succeeded in impressing Mrs. Scatter and Mrs. Wibird with a sense of impending calamity; but when the latter went to her brother with a face of woe, and "Oh, Marshall! what *is* going on in Cyrus Village? Is Satan abroad in our midst, think? I do feel a trembling like in my inside!" she was met with a calm, "Take a dose of rhubarb, Marshy! that'll drive Satan out if he *has* got into your cistern!"

Mr. Mallow meant "system" presumably: anyhow he was pleased with his remark, and repeated it to Mrs. Wibird's indignant back as she left the room.

"The idea!" he said to the fire-irons. "Nine o'clock bell's a good thing, and I allus stand for it; but a man might stay up till half past or so once in a while, you'd

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think, 'thout every woman in the place gettin' all frustrated up!"

All this was ten years ago, be it remembered. The whispers had died away; silence had spread and deepened about the deserted house; all was as it had been.

Kitty took Mr. Chanter's hint, and said no more about the stranger who had startled her and Pilot. Late that afternoon we two went for a walk, as we were apt to do when she was at liberty, and I turned naturally into what we always called Sunset Road, because the sun seemed to go down at the end of it. Kitty hesitated a moment at the corner, as if she would suggest another direction; then turned with a little shrug of self-rebuke and walked beside me. She was rather silent; we usually babbled like twin brooks towards the close of the day. When we passed the Gaylord house, I looked up and to my amazement saw a thin blue thread stealing up from one of the chimneys.

"Kitty!" I said. "Look! do you see the smoke? Some one is in the Gaylord house!"

Kitty told no one but me and Judge Peters; I am very sure Mr. Chanter told no one else: but little by little the knowledge sifted through Cyrus that Russell Gaylord had come back once more. That he was living in a corner of his great house, with not even a dog to bear him company. That there was no use in any one's trying to see him, as he would not open the door, even to the Messrs. Jebus, his old schoolmates, who had wished to show that they were prepared to

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let bygones be bygones and welcome the prodigal back to their kindly shop. Lastly, that he was a wreck, and no one knew how he lived or where he got bread to put in his mouth.

This last statement was false; some one did know. Mr. Mallow sat up long after curfew these spring nights; long after his staid "help" were snugly tucked in their beds. Usually his bedroom light went out at ten punctually; now it might be midnight when, nodding by the kitchen fire, he would hear, or think he heard, a shuffling step on the walk outside the back door. Then he would open the door and stand in the cold, holding it wide open so that the red fire-light would shine out on the darkness.

"Russ," he would whisper, "that you? Come in, won't you? Step in, and set with me a spell! what say? I'm rill lon'some!"

Usually no answer came; then he would say, "Basket's behind the door, Russ! Call again when 'tis empty! Good-night, old chap!" and shut the door with a sigh, and so to bed. Usually, I say: but if now and then a bent, shivering figure crept in and sat for half an hour by the fire, warming its hands and listening dumbly to the friendly pleadings, the kindly offers, why, no one but Marshall Mallow ever knew it.

CHAPTER X

THE PARTY

GOING?" said Miss Johanna Ross: "of course I'm not going, Gerie; bed-ridden folks don't go to parties—except in novels. I might be carried in like that woman in 'Barchester Towers,' in a white velvet gown on a red silk sofa—or was it a red shawl thrown over the sofa? Well, I have no white velvet gown, but I think I could get up a fancy rig. Imagine Madam Flynt's face! Do you advise it, Gerie?"

Miss Egeria looked troubled: she never knew how far to take Johanna seriously.

"You always look charming, dear Johanna," she said. "I hardly think—of course you know far more than I about social functions: it is so long since we had a large party in Cyrus——"

"Cheer up! I'll stay at home to please you!" Miss Johanna settled herself comfortably among her pillows.

"Now let me look at you!"

In some trepidation, Miss Egeria removed her shawl (that, at least, was all right; a camel's hair shawl was always in good taste!) and felt the keen dark eyes take in and appraise every item of her apparel; the dove-

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colored *moiré* of antiquated cut, the mosaic jewelry, the "bertha" of splendid Honiton.

"It is so long since we had a party in Cyrus!" Miss Egeria repeated; her voice faltered a little; Johanna's eyes were really—she felt quite—"quite undressed, my love!" as she told Kitty afterward, "as if I were in my—my underwear!"

"Anne Peace took it in a little," she said, "but she thought it best not to alter the style: the lines were good, she thought——"

"If Anne Peace had altered it I'd have whipped her. You are perfect, Gerie: a perfect 'Keepsake'! I wouldn't change you for any model on Fifth Avenue. Where's Almeria? I don't believe she's a patch on you!"

"Oh, my dear! Almeria has the Velvet: you remember the Velvet, surely! You always thought it elegant: Aunt Vanderscholt, for whom it was made, employed the best dressmaker in New York, I have always understood. Sister is downstairs in the parlor with Father: so kind of you and Kitty to help us out in this way. Kitty is in *such* demand this evening! Would you like to see Sister, Johanna? She charged me to say—she felt that you would probably feel able to see only one person at a time——"

"Gammon!" Miss Johanna's eyes twinkled. "Trot her up, Gerie, and your father, too! Don't look like that! I am perfectly proper: it won't hurt him to see a bed at his time of life."

"My dear Johanna!" Miss Egeria gasped. "Not for worlds would Father intrude—a lady's chamber——"

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"Mr. Bygood!" Miss Johanna raised a clear, high-pitched voice. "Come up, won't you, and bring Almy? I want to see you!"

Miss Egeria faded away with a little moan of protest; a moment later entered Miss Almeria, superb in black velvet, with a magnificent lace scarf on her admirable shoulders.

"Ah!" said Miss Johanna under her breath. "I knew there was more Honiton. That's the flounce!"

"Good evening, Almy!" she said aloud. "Where's your father? Oh, how do you do, Mr. Bygood? I *am* glad to see you! shake hands! Are you shocked? Gerie was too shocked to stay in the room. How do you like my jacket? You look perfectly lovely! I'd marry you to-morrow if you'd ask me. Now I've shocked Almeria!"

If Miss Almeria was shocked, she knew better than to give Johanna the satisfaction of knowing it. She drew up a chair for her father and settled herself in another, smoothing her velvet skirt composedly. Mr. Bygood was in a flutter. To be going to a party was exciting enough: to be called suddenly to wait upon an invalid lady of distinction was even more thrilling.

"My dear Miss Ross——" he began, with a tremulous bow.

"If you call me 'Miss', I'll throw the pillow at you and spoil your lovely necktie!" said the lady.

"Oh! oh!—te-hee! te-hee!" tittered Mr. Bygood.

"I used to be Jo," Miss Ross went on; and her sharp eyes softened. "Little naughty Jo, coming to play with little proper Almy and little saintly Gerie, and

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getting them both into hot water. Have you any peppermints in your pocket, Mr. Bygood? How many generations of children have you supplied with peppermints, my dear soul?"

"Well, Johanna!" Mr. Bygood twinkled; "several, I suppose; several! Yours was the first, though, my dear. You were a very good child, a very good child. All my little friends have been good children. You—you—you look extremely well, Johanna, for a—a sufferer! I trust——"

"I *am* extremely well!" said Miss Johanna calmly. "Bedridden, but well. Gerie wanted me to be carried to the party in my bed—" an agonized cough from the hall announced that Miss Egeria was within hearing; "at least we spoke of it. Cheer up, Gerie! Nobody would lay it to your door. 'Johanna! always peculiar!'" (She shot a wicked glance at Miss Almeria, who maintained her dignity, but could not suppress her blush.) "Can't you hear them say it? But I've decided not to go. I really think I am having the cream of the party here. This was my idea, Almy; you must allow I am clever, as well as peculiar. There's some one else coming in."

It *was* a clever idea; Madam Flynt was giving a party for Kitty and me; it was so kind of her to tuck me in! Of course everybody was going, and as it was a snowy evening in early April, Kitty and John Tucker were engaged ten deep, to transport the guests. It was necessary to begin early, and at Miss Johanna's suggestion, Kitty had asked a few special friends to be ready half an hour before the time set in the invi-

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tations. These favored ones were brought to Ross House, and deposited with instructions to walk right in (Sarepta was at Madam Flynt's, of course, helping Sarah and Abby Ann) and make Aunt Johanna a call, and then make themselves comfy in the parlor till called for.

Mr. Bygood was the only gentleman who went upstairs, but the Chanters and several other parties of ladies rustled up to the Red Indian room and were passed in review by the invalid Arbitress. Last of all came Kitty herself; first rosy and breathless, in fur coat and cap, to summon Miss Johanna's last caller; then, half an hour later, still rosy, but calm and demure, to show herself to her aunt. I was with her, in what male writers call "something white and filmy"; I called it chiffon; Miss Johanna had forbidden filminess for Kitty.

"When you've got lines, show 'em!" was her dictum. How different from Miss Egeria, who was always troubled if one sat down without shaking out one's skirts thoroughly. "My dear!" she would whisper. "You show your shape!"

Kitty had rummaged the ancestral trunks in the attic and had found a thick, heavy pale green satin, over which Miss Johanna had waved the scissors of a necromancer, Miss Anne Peace, as her attendant sprite (dear, meek little brown sprite! she was at Madam Flynt's, too, "taking off" for the ladies upstairs), translating her magic into terms of needle and thread. The soft gleaming fabric clung round as lovely a figure, I thought, as ever entered a ballroom.

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There was just enough lace at the neck, not an inch too much: wonderful Rose Point. The Bygoods were not the only people who had lace, Miss Johanna said with a friendly sniff: and there was the Beryl Necklace, for which, the same lady pointed out, the satin had probably been woven and dyed. Certainly they were an astonishing match, and anything more beautiful than the combination of necklace and gown and Kitty cannot possibly be imagined. This is not just my enthusiasm—everybody said the same thing—except Miss Johanna; but her nod, and “H’m! you’ll do!” was fully as emphatic.

So we went to the Party; our Party, given for us! two proud and happy girls.

Madam Flynt’s spacious double parlors looked more ample than usual from the removal of most of the furniture. The tables were gone, the big sofa, all the armchairs except Madam Flynt’s own; the Sheraton chairs shrugging their shoulders against the wall took up little room. The Turkey carpet was up, the polished floor gleamed in the light of numberless wax candles. Madam Flynt sat at the upper end of the long room, stately and handsome in lilac brocade with cascades of creamy Venetian Point. (I seem to be saying a great deal about lace: I can’t help it: it is one of the pleasantest things I know!) Kitty and I stood by her, one on either side; Miss Croly, her purple alpaca exchanged for a silk of the same hue, hovered in the background, beaming welcome on the guests, but casting an occasional anxious glance at her friend and patroness. On her arm she carried

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a white Canton crape shawl, heavily embroidered, with long fringe. Occasionally she would bend over Madam Flynt and murmur something, with a gesture toward the shawl, but the hostess seemed unaware of her existence.

The Bygoods were the first arrivals. "Father" must have a chance to see the rooms, and to find a comfortable seat, before the crowd came. Next came the Messrs. Jebus, very nervous, very neat in their claret-colored frock coats. Why did they wear claret-colored frock coats? Everybody in Cyrus knows! Twenty-five years ago Russell Gaylord had had one made for a frolic, or a wager, I forget which; and after wearing it once, had given to Mr. Jason. Even then, the two cousins always dressed alike: Russell Gaylord was the glass of fashion and the mold of form; Mr. Josiah had the coat copied as exactly as might be; that is all the story.

The little gentlemen had their plan of campaign carefully laid out. They stepped through the long rooms as quickly as Mr. Josiah's lameness allowed, casting bird-like glances around them; they made their bows as Meltiah Torrence had taught them in their youth. "Two steps forward, to first position; bend from the hips, bob from the neck, recover; two steps back! Dismiss!" They delivered their speeches—not quite as they intended, be it said.

"We congratulate you, Madam Flynt, on this festal occasion!" said Mr. Josiah. "We thank you for the honor of your invitation."

"We have enjoyed ourselves extremely, we are

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obliged to you," chimed in Mr. Jason, "and we gratefully take our leave."

Fortunately neither gentleman perceived that Mr. Jason had said this instead of "We are prepared to enjoy ourselves extremely, and we gladly join the gay circle!" Madam Flynt heard, understood, and appreciated. Their acknowledgments made, the Jebusites, as Dr. Ross used to call them, proceeded to explore the rooms, apparently with some special object in view. Their bird-like glances flitted from side to side, growing more and more anxious; they began to utter noises as of mice in peril. Miss Croly came to the rescue. "The beautiful screen," she said, "has been moved into the hall, Mr. Jebuses. (One always addressed them thus!) Madam Flynt feared that it might inconvenience—I would say feared that the dancers might injure it. It shows well in the hall!" she added kindly. The partners, with sounds as of mice relieved, fled to the hall, where the object of their search stood against the wall: a tall screen, covered with exquisite embroidery. This they considered with minute and anxious care.

"There is less light here!" said Mr. Josiah.

"But everybody will see it!" Mr. Jason consoled him.

Finally, they spent the greater part of the evening hovered about Mr. Josiah's *chef d'œuvre* and enjoyed themselves, as they had predicted, immensely.

Mr. Mallow and Mr. Jordano approached side by side, and were welcomed with dignified cordiality. They bent low before Madam Flynt; they gave sepa-

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rate and very special bows to Kitty and me: hers were the best, but I was not jealous.

"You've got an elegant party, Madam!" Mr. Mallow glowed with civic and neighborly pride. "I don't know as any place but Cyrus could show such a conjugation of pretty gals and handsome ladies."

"A galaxy!" exclaimed Mr. Jordano. "A golden galaxy! 'They walk in beauty like the night-tite-tite—' the second line escapes me! the poet Byron! Miss Kitty, boona sarah, as we say in beautiful Italy. Bella Italia, Miss Kitty! Bella Kitterina, also, if an old friend may take the liberty. Very elegante, I must say."

"*Grazie tante*, Signor Jordano!" Kitty smiled and dimpled, and sent Mr. Jordano straight to the seventh heaven. He did not follow the words, but that did not matter; he was hearing Italian spoken by lovely lips, and his gentle spirit soared ecstatic. He stepped aside to make room for the Chanter girls who swept in, like a white muslin billow, and after breaking in curtseys to Madam Flynt, surged round Kitty and me in shouting chorus. Mr. and Mrs. Chanter came next, beaming good will on all; the three boys brought up the rear. Bobby and Rodney had come over from their college town on purpose; Aristides was in the High School; all three were in love with Kitty, in varying degrees of intensity, but Bobby's prior claim was silently conceded by the other two. He was the eldest; he had the Dress Suit (a gift from a distant uncle whose inches could no longer be clipped within it); he was captain of the college football team. He

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had been in love with Kitty as long as he could remember. Of course, while Tom was "round," Bobby never had any hope, not even when his enchantress used to call him "Pretty Bobby Shafto," and sing a little song, derisive but not unfriendly, about his being fat and fair, which he was, and about his combing down his yellow hair, which he might with advantage have done oftener, and about his going to sea, silver buckles at his knee, which was preposterous. When Kitty, perched on top of the fence, would trill in her silver voice,

"He'll come back and marry me,
Pretty Bobby Shafto!"

the boy's honest heart thumped at his ribs, and his cheeks grew redder, if that were possible. She was Tommy's girl; he was perfectly loyal to Tommy; still—but now that Tom was gone and no one ever heard a word from him, Bobby saw no reason why his own modest hopes might not soar; so soar they did.

Rodney and Aristides (the latter a chronic sufferer from his name, which he loathed equally in its entirety and in its customary abbreviation of "Sty") after making their bows, waited cheerfully for Bobby to ask Kitty for the first dance, which he promptly did. Rodney was just sidling up to claim the second when Wilson Wibird, leaning over Kitty from behind, laid a hand on the dance-card which hung from her fan.

"The rest are mine, Katrine!" he murmured.

Kitty, turning, spoke crisply. "Certainly not, Wil-

son! Why should they be? Did you ask for the second, Rodney? And you the third, Sty? I promised Mr. Jordano one; you can have the fifth, Wilson, if you like."

"If I like! cruel Katrine!" murmured Mr. Wibird. He folded his arms and glared savagely at the three Chanters, who smiled cheerfully at him and said in chorus, "Hello, Wilse! h'are ye?" Then he retired to the wall, where he stood, his arms folded in a Napoleonic attitude, his brows bent, his eyes following Kitty as she glided about the room.

Wilson Wibird had made up his mind to marry Kitty Ross, even before her return from Europe. There was no other mate for him in Cyrus, he confided to his one intimate, the greenish mirror that hung over his dressing table. She was lovely; she was accomplished; she had Mind and Taste; she could appreciate him, and on her the name of Wibird might be bestowed without derogation from its high descent. He saw himself in fancy—Wilson lived largely in fancy—the master of Ross House, welcoming his guests (and Kitty's) with the stately courtesy of a gentleman of the old school.

"Katrine and I bid you welcome!" he would say to the mirror. "The simple comforts of our home are yours as long as you care to share them!"

His air was very noble, he thought, as he waved his guests in. Now, Wilson was forced to acknowledge that up to this time Kitty had shown little sense of the honor he proposed to do her. He had met her several times, and walked with her along the street,

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but whenever he bestowed on her what he called a flower of speech, he found that she had an errand in the store they were passing. Sometimes he waited for her, and she never came out, being indeed well acquainted with the back door of every store on the street—sometimes he “punished” her by stalking on with bended brows. (Wilson loved bended brows; he sometimes bended them so far that his little eyes could hardly be seen; but this is by the way.) When he called in the evening, Kitty was apt to be busy waiting on her aunt, or else those Chanter girls were there. Altogether, Wilson felt that his suit was not prospering as it should: this, he told the mirror, must cease. She would set her will to his, forsooth! pretty birdling! She should see what it meant to thwart a man with a chin like that. He motioned toward his image. He must assert himself. Some lines of poetry came to his mind; lines which he had felt, the first time he read them, to describe himself:

“He was a strong man from the north,
Light-locked, with eyes of dangerous gray.”

The poem went on to tell how the strong man took the lady in his strong white arms and bore her on his horse away. It was a fine poem. That, Wilson felt, was the attitude for him; he had been too gentle, too *debonair*; now she must feel his power. He had thought to impress it upon her by dancing with her through the entire evening. He had seen himself folding her in his strong white arms (decently hid in conventional black) floating through the glittering

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halls to the sound of voluptuous music. Now the music was sounding; old Meltiah Torrence scraping away at his old fiddle, his son Jabez squeaking on the cornet. It was our own, our only "music"; we loved it, but voluptuous is hardly the word for it. The music was sounding, and Wilson Wibird, instead of carrying out his program, was standing against the wall with folded arms and bended brows.

Mr. Mallow saw him and crossed the room to where he stood. "Why ain't you dancin', Wilse?" he inquired; and without waiting for a reply: "Go and take Lissy out for a turn! Nobody's asked her, and she admires dancin'. Ain't enough boys to go round. You go and take her out! Oh! hemp! nothin' at all, Very! nothin' at all!"

Mr. Jordano, backing down the room with Miss Almeria Bygood, had come to the end of it sooner than he expected, and his heel had come down with some force on Mr. Mallow's toe. Wilson took advantage of his uncle's momentary anguish to slip away, but he did not take Melissa out. He folded his arms and bended his brows against another part of the wall, where Kitty could not fail to see him as she passed. It was good Bobby Chanter who took Melissa out; I rather think he would have done it even without Kitty's breathless little, "Oh, no, Bobby; I must stop now. Do take out Melissa, there's a dear!" Bobby was a kind boy, and Melissa's face had been very wistful as she watched the dancing. A pretty face, if it could be filled out a little; the thin cheeks were

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flushed to-night, and the hazel eyes sparkled above the pretty pink challis, Uncle Marshall's gift.

"You make it tasty!" he bade Anne Peace. "Make it as tasty as any of 'em! put on plenty of gimp, or galloon, or whatever the style is. I want Lissy dressed as nice as any gal there. You make her look like Venus Dimeci, that travelin' man was talkin' about. He said she was great."

Mr. Mallow's rendering of the title of Venus made every *i* long. Miss Peace had her own opinion of Venus, but reserved it, and promised to do her best; which she certainly had done.

People came and came, and came. All Cyrus, of course, in its shining best: Mrs. Scatter in green poplin, Miss Pringle in blue; the Misses Caddie dressed alike in "that brown silk that was so fashionable one season—don't you remember? And then went out so sudden, and Hanks has been trying to get rid of the piece ever since. He put it down to half price directly Madam Flynt's invitations were out, and the Caddies took it and made it up themselves. There was four yards more than the pattern called for, but they took it all, so they could make over; and then if they didn't put every scrap of it into the skirt so 'twould fade alike! They stand out like penwipers, don't they?"

Thus Mrs. Bagley to her husband, who said, "Yes! yes! very tasty! very tasty!" being absorbed in the problem of how much "Acme astral" it would take to light these rooms, and what possibility there might be of persuading Madam Flynt to try it instead of candles.

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Tinkham and Tupham came, in long barges: the former a little amused, a little patronizing as usual: patronizing not of Madam Flynt, but of Cyrus in general and Kitty in particular.

"Drives a cab, or so I understand. Yes! a sad come-down for an old family. I understand the aunt has come on to give countenance to it: you remember her; Johanna Ross; always peculiar!"

This attitude, whispered in the dressing room (to the silent rage of Miss Anne Peace, who longed to stick into Tinkham the pins she drew from its skirts and veils) rustled down the stairs and into the drawing-room, but appeared to evaporate at sight of Kitty and the beryl necklace.

Tupham was, as usual, hearty and friendly; pleased at being asked, and eager to "take in the whole show" for the benefit of those at home. Thus female Tupham managed to slide an appraising thumb and finger over Kitty's satin, "thick as a board, my dear, and soft—well, there!" while male Tupham made a point of sampling every item of food and drink with strict impartiality.

Corona College arrived rather late, in a somewhat superior, if not Tinkhamesque frame of mind. Madam Flynt, ever thoughtful, had bidden Bobby Chanter pick out ten nice boys for her, which he had done with anxious care. They had had a merry drive over, and were under the impression that they had come partly to please good old Bagpipes (a subtle rendering of Bobby's name), partly, perhaps unconsciously, to

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amuse themselves with the would-be graces of a rustic community.

A fragment of triologue, overheard near the drawing-room door, conveys the attitude of these young gentlemen:

A. "Pink muslin one rather neat: what?"

B. "So-so; not too! blue one has more go to her. P'raps she's the lady cab-driver: they have one here, I'm told. Trot her out, what say? Put her through her paces!"

C. "Get on to the little thing with curls! She's quite a daisy. Think I must give her a turn." (Thank you, sir! This was my humble self.)

"Jerusalem!

A. B. C. in sudden trio. "Great Scott! *Who is that*
"By George!

ripping

perfectly stunning girl in green? I say, Bobs! Bags!

screaming

Pipes! CHANTER! Won't you introduce me? Oh, I say, Bobby! I'm your friend! Don't go back on me!" etc., etc. Thus Corona in frantic whispers, plucking at Bobby Chanter, who swelled in serene pride, and was entirely kind to his friends, knowing Kitty's next dance to be his.

Kitty was kind to them too, and gave them an "extra" when she could, but mostly had to meet their impassioned pleadings with a smile and "So sorry! I am engaged, but do let me find you a partner!"

The collegians were nice, gentlemanly boys; we all had a delightful time, and I truly think they did.

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But here I may note a curious little by-product of the Party. For weeks after, Corona College had much business to transact in Cyrus. It came by train, one by one, and was observed to look eagerly about it on arrival, and to make hurried inquiry for a cab. Confronted by John Tucker, serenely yet critically observant, it suddenly decided it would walk, and proceeded to stroll about the village, investigating the shops and making aimless purchases, till the return train. Corona rarely met Kitty; the between-trains hour was just when she was taking Madam Flynt for her airing. Now and then, however, say on a rainy day, some happy youth would chance upon her, and walk home with her, and perhaps be asked in for a cup of tea, and return to Corona in a state of rapturous distraction very trying to his mates who had been dutifully practising football.

But here is a long digression: let us hurry back to the Party.

Among the revolving couples, none attracted more attention than Miss Almeria and Mr. Jordano, already mentioned. They danced the Boston Dip, seldom seen in these degenerate days. It is a slow, graceful waltz, very becoming to tall figures and sweeping velvet skirts. Mr. Jordano held his chin high; his eyes were nearly closed, a narrow slit only enabling him to pilot his partner safely through the dance; his expression, which totally belied him, was one of haughty arrogance. His lips moved constantly; one would have supposed he was murmuring caustic comments on the other dancers; instead, he was say-

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ing, "One, two, three, *one*, two, three!" in time, if not in tune, with the music. Miss Almeria's glossy braids bent gracefully over her partner's shoulder: her look was benign; she wore a slight, indulgent smile, as who should say, "Dancing is not what it was, but perhaps it is well for people to see occasionally what it can be."

Madam Flynt was enjoying her party immensely. Her eyes followed the dancers continuously. Kitty, of course, was the most delightful person to watch, but they all looked happy, and youth was not everything. Almeria held her own as well as anybody, and Egeria was hardly less graceful. Now if Johanna Ross hadn't a bee in her bonnet, she might be dancing with Edward Peters. She did not suggest this to the Judge, who was sitting beside her; she received his congratulations amiably. She was glad he thought it a pretty party; yes, the rooms did light up well. People with good rooms had a responsibility to Society—Madam Flynt leaned nearer the Judge, and her voice dropped.

"Of course, Edward, in a City, one might have thought—it might not have seemed proper to give Kitty a party so soon after—you understand! But everybody in Cyrus knows just how it is; and her not wearing black and all; but—well, if you must know, it was the Doctor made me do it."

"Dr. Pettijohn?" naming the Tinkham practitioner who had ministered to Cyrus' few ailments since Dr. Ross's death.

"No! no! our own Doctor—Dr. Ross, of course!

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I don't mean—I am no spiritualist, Edward, if that is why you are raising your left eyebrow!"

Judge Peters blushed and lowered the eyebrow.

"But it really is curious. Let me tell you! Several years ago, a young cousin came to visit me: Selina Hazelton: you may remember her. Her father had been ill, she may have had troubles of her own; in fact—but you shall hear. Anyhow, she drooped and drooped. I couldn't make her eat, and she didn't seem to care for anything; dreadful state she was in, and getting worse. So I sent for Dr. Ross, and he looked her over. Then I sent her out on an errand, and asked what he would advise. Would he give her a tonic? 'Give her a dance!' he said. 'Why Doctor!' I said. 'She can hardly walk, much less dance. Just to cross the street seems to tire her out. I think iron and wine is what she needs.' I always told him what I thought; he called me his consulting physician, you know: dear Doctor! Well, he said again, 'Give her a dance!' insisted on it, saying he got the idea out of Charles Reade. You know he was daft about Charles Reade. Well, my dear—friend, I *did* give her a dance. Invited all the college boys I knew; and they all came, and one beside. Georgie Hathaway asked if he might bring a friend, and I said yes, of course. Friend came; nice-looking lad; Porter, his name was. Well, when I saw the color he and Selina went, one white, the other greenish-purple, I knew what had been the matter with the child. They danced every dance together but two, and those they sat out on the woodbox in the upper hall. And I giving the party for her!

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Next day they were engaged—I was *so* surprised, of course! In two months they were married, and now they have three children and are as happy as June crickets. Well! so—now I come to the curious thing. You know how gay Kitty is—a gallant kind of gayety that makes me cry sometimes!”

The Judge nodded. Kitty passed at that moment, dancing with Mr. Mallow, who handed her about as if she were a cream tart on a gold dish. The Judge’s eyes rested very tenderly on the girl.

“Well!” Madam Flynt bent still nearer till her lilac cap ribbons touched the Judge’s fine gray hair. “I was thinking about her one evening, about ten days ago; and all of a sudden I seemed to hear Doctor speaking, as plain as I hear you to-night. ‘Give her a dance!’ he said. ‘Give her a dance!’ Now I am no spiritualist, Edward, but—what do you want, Cornelia Croly? I have told you that I will *not* be hovered over. You may be a hen turkey, but I am *not*—what is it?”

Miss Croly set her thin lips and advanced with a look of humble resolution. “Clarissa,” she said firmly, “there *is* a draught!” and she folded the crape shawl round Madam Flynt’s ample shoulders. Madam Flynt is a large woman, usually deliberate in her movements; but in the twinkling of an eye the shawl was whisked off, rolled in a ball, and handed to Judge Peters.

“Put that under my chair, will you, Edward?” said the lady. “*Well* under, so that nobody can get at it.

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Cornelia, I shall be obliged if you will go and see about supper. Time it was announced!"

Madam Flynt's supper ought to have a whole chapter to itself, but that may not be. It was a wonderful and delightful supper, and never was feast more thoroughly enjoyed. Kitty and I sat with the Chanters; such a merry time as we had! Sarepta had made the chicken salad, Sarah the croquettes, Abby Ann the coffee and rolls: as for the ice-cream, Bobby insisted that all the good fairies in the Fairy Book must have taken a turn at it; it was too good to be the work of earthly hands. Bobby glowed till you could have warmed your hands at him. His radiance was not lessened by the sight of Wilson Wibird glowering across the room.

"Poor Wilse!" he chuckled. "Supper doesn't seem to agree with him! Gee! it does with me, though! This salad suits my complaint first-rate: I wouldn't wonder but I got well now. Let me get you some more, Kitty!"

Kitty's kind heart smote her a little at sight of Wilson's tragic face. Had she been *too* horrid to him? She was almost sorry she hadn't another dance, though it was odious to be held so tight, and he *would* bump into one with his knees.

There were no more dances for Kitty that night. Her own party though it was, she had firmly refused to let it interfere with business. Directly after supper she slipped away, after a whisper in Madam Flynt's ear that brought the tears to the good lady's eyes, and made her even speak mildly when Miss Croly

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thought more ice-cream would not be good for her.

"I can get it myself, Cornelia," she said, "if you don't feel equal to the exertion. Or here is Mr. Jordano. Mr. Jordano, will you be so kind as to bring me some more ice-cream? Thank you! on the whole I'll have frozen pudding!"

Kitty, I say, slipped away, and in twenty minutes was back in her fur coat and cap, nodding brightly to the first departing guests. These were the Bygoods, who feared Father had already been up too long beyond his usual time; it was long since he had passed so delightful an evening.

"The gay, the gay and festive throng,
The halls, the halls of dazzling light!"

he quoted happily.

"But you never asked me to dance, Mr. Bygood!" said Kitty. "If *you* had asked me for the reel, I'd have stayed!"

"Oh! oh, te-hee! te-hee!" quavered Mr. Bygood. "I fear I might have reeled more than I should, Kitty, —though sober, my dear, though sober! New cider never hurt any one, and our amiable hostess assured me it was not twenty-four hours old."

Where had Wilson Wibird got hold of something stronger than new cider? Not at Madam Flynt's, certainly; yet this is what Kitty told me next day. Coming back from her last trip, at her own corner she came upon Wilson standing on the curbstone balancing himself and looking very forlorn. He called to her. He had lost his overshoes, and the snow was

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deep. "Could you give me a lift, Katrine?" he asked plaintively, the conqueror in him subdued by wet feet, which he hated as a cat does.

"If you'll promise not to call me 'Katrine'!" was on Kitty's lips; but she checked herself. She *had* been horrid to him; at her own party, too, when she ought to have been nice to everybody. "Weedy, seedy, needy—" "Think shame of yourself!" said Kitty to Kitty. Then aloud, "Very well, Wilson! I'll take you, though it's pretty late. Jump in!"

The weather had cleared, and the night was so glorious that for the latest guests, all young and vigorous, Kitty had insisted on shifting over to Pilot and the open sleigh, and sending John Tucker home to his Mary, who had chosen this evening to have a "spell." Pilot thought it was time for a warm mash and bed; he sped swiftly through the white silent streets, where only an upper window here and there twinkled its assurance that the event of the season was over. The Wibirds lived at the other end of the village; Mrs. Wibird and Melissa had been among the early departures in the warm hooded sleigh behind Dan.

Seated beside Kitty, wrapped in the same fur robe, Wilson felt the strong man from the north revive within him. The keen frosty air went to his head; or had something else gone there before? When Kitty, wishing to be kind to this forlornity, turned to him with "Hasn't it been a delightful evening, Wilson?" she was met by a burning glance (again, she would have called it a leer!) and a husky voice ex-

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claiming, "Now, this moment, the evening begins! Katrine! my hour dawns!"

"Don't be silly, Wilson!" she said curtly, but Wilson swept on,

"You are beside me. I feel your presence, your gaze intoss-toxicates, Katrine! Together, thus, let us speed on through the night"——

"Kitty!" I cried, "you frighten me! What *did* you do?"

"My dear, it was perfectly simple. You know there is rather a sharp corner at the end of the street? We were near it. I cut it a little sharper, that's all. Up went one runner, out went Master Wilson into a nice soft drift. I was sorry to lower Pilot's opinion of my driving, but it was really the only thing to do. But that is the last time I shall be sorry for Wilson Wibird. Odious little atomy!"

Which shows that even strong men from the north do not always see themselves as others see them.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE RIALTO

CYRUS rises early as a rule, though the definition of the adverb varies. Six is my hour; I hold it a good one, winter and summer. But if I have ever mentioned this to City friends who get up at eight, with the purring contentment that early risers feel and that late risers scorn, I do so no more, since hearing the following fragment of dialogue between two Cyrus women:

Mrs. A.: "What time did it happen?"

Mrs. B.: "Oh! we was all up. 'Twas four or five o'clock; 'twas late!"

Collective Cyrus, that part of it at least that went to Madam Flynt's party, allowed itself an extra half hour the following morning; all but two people. With the earliest morning red, Mrs. Sharpe and Cissy leaped from their beds, prepared and swallowed a hasty breakfast, flung on their "things," and rushed out into the street. They wasted no time in speech beyond a few exclamatory remarks while dressing. No words were needed between them: they knew what they knew. Behooved that the World should know. In the street they separated, one going north, one

south. Since we cannot follow both, let us take the mother.

The first person Mrs. Sharpe met was Jim Ruff, the one-armed milkman, whistling his way cheerily along. Jim was born with one arm, and never could for the life of him see what folks wanted of two. In his off hours he was a nurse, and in great demand among old gentlemen of rheumatic tendencies who liked to have "a rub and a lift" at bed-time. Mrs. Sharpe leapt into the roadway, beckoning: Jim checked his horse.

"Good morning, Jim! Only a pint this morning, please; we've had breakfast. Leave it inside the storm door, will you? Have you heard the news?"

"Not a word!" Jim leaned over the dasher sociably. "Nice party, was it? The cream was all right anyway, I bet!"

"Very nice! very nice!" Mrs. Sharpe waved the cream away hastily. "But what is the outcome, I ask you? What comes of dancing and jiggling and feasting? *Destruction!* Kitty Ross has eloped with Wilson Wibird!"

"*What!*" People did not, as a rule, pay much attention to Mrs. Sharpe, but the milkman was startled out of his usual calm.

"What you say, Mis' Sharpe?"

"They have *eloped!*" she repeated. "Kitty Ross and Wilson Wibird! I saw them with these eyes. Isn't it awful? What did I always say? But I won't keep you, Jim!"

She waved her hand as if stricken speechless; in

reality, she had spied Mr. Cheeseman, stumping along to take down his shutters and open shop. Him she attacked with such suddenness that he almost dropped his pipe.

"Let me prepare you for a shock!" cried the lady. "You are an aged man, Mr. Cheeseman, and your nerves are easy shook. What I have to tell might strike an aged person into palsy, I wouldn't wonder. There has been an *elopement* in Cyrus! a wicked, terrible elopement! Oh! what I say is, shall we ever hold up our heads again? When I think of what Tinkham will say!"

(Mrs. Sharpe came from Tinkham; we were too polite as a rule to say that that accounted for her.)

"I don't know what Tinkham will say," snapped Mr. Cheeseman, "nor I don't care. Cyrus will most likely say it ain't so. Who's eloped, I'd like to know!"

"Kitty Ross and Wilson Wibird!" The lady's thin neck shot forward, serpent-wise, as she hissed out the names. Mr. Cheeseman received the shock calmly.

"Don't believe a word of it!" he said.

"You don't! You don't believe the witness of these eyes? I tell you I *saw* them, the two of them, after midnight, in a sleigh, dashing through Cyrus Street, like—like flames of fire. The hoss was gallopin': they was fairly rushin' to their doom. Don't say you don't believe me, Mr. Cheeseman, because sight is sight, and I am not blind."

"No, nor dumb!" Mr. Cheeseman was not a patient man. "Likely the hoss got roused up, waitin' in the cold. I always tell Kitty she drives too tar-

nal fast. Wish you good mornin', Mis' Sharpe." And he stumped on, resuming his interrupted pipe in short, irritated puffs.

Mrs. Sharpe looked after him with a snort, half pitying, half contemptuous, and sped on her way. By this time the male part of Cyrus was trooping down to business. In half an hour every man in the street had heard with varying emotions that Kitty Ross had eloped with Wilson Wibird. I don't know that anybody exactly believed it; at least, no one was found who confessed afterward to having done so, but the Street certainly had an uncomfortable half hour till the counter report reached it; namely, that Wilson Wibird was lying in his bed, wounded and bleeding from a frightful accident with one of them wild hosses of Kitty Ross's. He had been hove out, and the hoss had gone off at a tearing gallop, and where Kitty was this minute no human being prob'ly knew. Likely she had been dragged to her death, and they would track her by the blood——

You see, Cissy had gone straight to the Wibirds', secretly determined for once to "get ahead of Mumma." Mrs. Wibird had been naturally perturbed at seeing her son "hove out" (it was at their own corner that the incident occurred) and at his stumbling into the house some minutes later, bleeding profusely, and in a savage humor. It was no wonder perhaps that she made the most of what she had seen, but she ought to have made it clear, as Melissa did afterward, that Wilson's bleeding was from the nose. The two reports met at Bygood's, like the two halves

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of a chemical formula. The gentlemen had just come in for their morning papers, and it seethed and bubbled around them. Judge Peters said "Pish!" Mr. Mallow said "Bosh!" Mr. Jordano waved his notebook in a composite frenzy of anxiety, incredulity and professional excitement, and murmured unintelligible sounds ending in "O". Italian, he always maintained, was the natural language of the emotions. The result of all this was that by eleven o'clock ("Earlier than that would not be decent, sir! not decent, after a party! The child is probably in bed, and the best place for her!" thus Judge Peters, very erect over his black satin stock), by eleven o'clock, I say, the Judge and Mr. Mallow were posting up the hill toward Ross House. Wholly improbable that anything was out of the way; those women ought to get thirty days, sir, and learn to govern their tongues! But if there *were* anything, these two, as old family friends, were manifestly the ones to look into it.

"We'll let you know, Very," said Mr. Mallow kindly, "if there's anything for you in it."

Mr. Jordano, still waving his notebook, thanked him, fervently, and turned to minister to Mr. Bygood, to whom the effervescence had penetrated, causing him great alarm. The ladies had not yet appeared: Mr. Jordano hovered about the old gentleman, adjuring him to be calm and murmuring, "No perilosio! no dangerouso! Cheer up-pup-pup, my venerable friend; all will be right-tite-tite!" in a manner equally agitated and agitating.

The Judge and "the Mine Host," as the *Centinel*

loved to call him, were not the first callers at Ross House. Bobby Chanter, speeding down the hill to his morning train, met Cissy's half of the chemical formula on the way; threw Education to the dogs, and sped back up the hill at a rate that brought him to Ross House crimson and breathless. His furious ring producing Sarepta Darwin in a state of high tension, he could only gape at her, and gasp, "All right?"

Now this was no morning to gape at Sarepta. In the first place, she had slaved like three niggers, as she expressed it, the day before, had got to bed long after midnight, and been kept awake long after that, recalling the way Kitty had looked and the way "the folks" had looked at her. In the second place, she had already been bothered enough by Jim Ruff, who had no business that she knew of to inquire minutely into the state of Kitty's health, wanting to know if Sarepta had seen her this morning, and what time she got home. He got a flea in *his* ear all right, Sarepta reflected comfortably; now she was fully ready for the next intruder.

"All right?" she said with acerbity. "All wrong, I should say, from the looks of you! Ain't you ashamed, Bobby Chanter, at this time in the morning? Go home and tell your Pa, and see what he'll say to you! The idea! You're a disgrace!"

She was shutting the door, but Bobby was not a football player for nothing. An adroit foot checked the door in its closing, and the next moment a broad shoulder pressed through the opening, followed by the whole person of a very vigorous young man. Bobby

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shut the door and stood against it: he had got his breath by this time; also, it was evident from Sarepta's aspect that no disaster had come to the house.

"Don't be crusty, Sarepta!" he said coaxingly. "Tell me how Kitty is after the party! There's nothing the matter with me!" he added, "and I'm your friend, you know, Sarepta! I always was."

Sarepta's iron face relaxed: it was true. With the sole exception of Kitty, she thought little of girls, had been heard to say that she wouldn't be bothered raisin' 'em: but she liked a good-looking boy, and Bobby was undeniably good-looking. Before she could speak, however, a clear voice sounded from the stairway.

"How Kitty is? Very well, I thank you, Bobby Shafto!" and there was Kitty herself coming downstairs, so distractingly pretty in her brown corduroy suit that Bobby's feelings flew "all ways to once't," like Huldy's in "The Courtin'." She was too adorable! Bobby wanted to go down on his knees then and there, among the walking-sticks and the Christmas greens, and cry out that she was his queen, and that he would rather be under her little lovely feet than on a king's throne. But Bobby was twenty-three years old and a senior at Corona College.

"All right, are you, Kitty?" he asked. "I—I thought I'd just inquire as I went to the train."

"Bobby! the train has gone! I heard it whistle just as you rang the bell. Won't you catch it from the dean? Come into the sitting-room!"

Muttering that he couldn't stop, Bobby came in;

would not sit down, but leaned against the door with an air of elaborate detachment.

"Got home all right, Kitty? It was mean of you not to let me see you home."

"Don't you think I had earned a little solitude, Bobby? I didn't get it though!" Kitty's eyes twinkled.

"What do you mean? We were the last load, you said."

"Yes, you were! but I met Wilson, and he had lost his rubbers, and looked so forlorn, I *had* to take him home, Bobby, when he asked me."

"He didn't!" Bobby's cheek flushed. "The impudent shrimp!"

"Impudent shrimpudent!" said Kitty, and then remembered that she had never played rhymes with Bobby.

"I—I didn't take him quite all the way!" she began, and then broke into a peal of laughter so clear and joyous that Sarepta had to make a special errand—a stick of wood, it was, which the fire did not need—to see what was up.

"Glad you didn't! of all the cheek I ever heard of! I wish I'd been there. How did you get rid of him, Kitty?"

"Why—I ought not to tell, Bobby. Promise never to tell anybody! Promise, Sarepta! Well—Wilson felt a little sentimental after the party and all, and I—I—tipped him out, going round the corner!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Bobby Shafto.

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"He! he! he!" tittered Sarepta, and fled, her bread being in the oven.

Kitty held out her hands with a sudden gesture, Bobby grasped them, and the two danced up and down, holding hands and laughing like two children. Kitty ought to have known better. There are so many psycho-chemical formulæ; they combine so easily, especially with certain cardiac conditions. She knew perfectly well that Bobby had been sighing and looking and sighing again, ever since she came back. I am afraid she was rather used to sighs and looks. She had spoken casually of "people" in Switzerland and Italy who had been "rather foolish." She knew, or she ought to have known, that it was one thing to dance with a lad at the party, one revolving unit among many, and a wholly different thing to take hands with that lad and dance child-fashion, just the two of them in all the world. What wonder that poor Bobby Shafto was swept out to sea in good earnest? He could not know that the girl was not really thinking of him at all, that she was dancing with Tommy Lee, as she always had danced, ever since she could toddle.

Kitty saw the look in Bobby's eyes, and a cold wave swept over her. She would have withdrawn her hands, but Bobby held them tight.

"Kitty!" The laughter died out of his rosy face.

"Kitty, dear!"

"Yes, Bobby! we must stop now, and you must run along; I have my housekeeping to see to."

"Kitty, dear! wait just a minute. I—I want—I wish I might hold these little hands all the time!"

Kitty tried to laugh. "Can't be done, Bobby," she said, "it would interfere with my driving. Let me go, please, there's a good Bobby Shafto!"

But Bobby could not be stopped now. "I must tell you!" he cried. "I *have* to! I love you so, Kitty, I can't think of anything else. And it isn't all selfishness, dear. I want to take care of you. I won't have you exposed to insults from a miserable chump like Wilson Wibird. I shall be out of college next year, Kitty, and I have a good job promised me; won't you—won't you let me take care of you, my dear?"

Kitty was grave enough now. Her gray eyes were full of tender kindness, as they looked straight into the boy's burning blue ones; but at that kind look, the cold wave swept over him, too.

"Dear Bobby! dear, good friend! no! it can never, never be. No! don't say any more. Let me go, *please*, my dear!"

He dropped her hands, and turned away with a little broken sound. It was not quite a sob, but it went straight to Kitty's heart. Cruel, wicked girl that she had been! This was her friend, Tommy's friend, from petticoat-days. Was this the best she could do for him?

"Bobby," she said quietly, "come into the sitting-room a minute! I have something to say to you."

Bobby followed her mutely, with hanging head. She beckoned him to a seat beside her on the leather

sofa. She was trembling, but she managed with an effort to steady her voice.

"We have been friends all our lives, Bobby!" she said. "I am going to be honest with you; it is the least thing I can do, and the only thing. If you think a little, Bobby Shafto, perhaps—you will see why I cannot—cannot care in the way you mean, my poorest Bobby. Think back a little! There—there used to be three of us; don't you remember?"

Her voice sank almost to a whisper, but her eyes were brave and honest. Bobby looked into them: then he hung his head: the comely red ebbed out of his face, leaving it very pale.

"I—I wouldn't have spoken at all if he had been here!" he muttered. "Of course I wouldn't! but——"

"I know you wouldn't, dear! And, oh, Bobby, I may never see him again. He may be dead, or—or—he may never think about me at all, he may care for somebody else: think of all the girls he has met since he went away! but—but you see, Bobby, there will never be any one else for me."

When Bobby had gone away sadly down the hill, Kitty ran up to her room and had a good solid cry, a thing she rarely indulged in.

"Tommy!" sobbed the girl, and she stretched out her young lonely arms to the empty air. "Tommy, I do want you so! Aren't you ever coming? Don't you really care? I want my Duke of Lee! Oh, how happy would this gentlewoman be, to be blessed with her Duke's good company! Oh! oh!"

By and by she got the better of herself, dried her

eyes, washed her face, and was cheerful Kitty again. Then she did an absurd thing: Kitty *was* absurd, there was no denying that. She went to the long glass and curtsied to her image: then, gravely and formally, she proceeded to dance the "Duke of Lee," stepping high, stepping low, tossing her pretty head, waving her pretty arms, all as carefully and precisely as if a partner had been bowing and pirouetting opposite her. While she danced, she sang the song from end to end; sang it so clear and sweet (barring one little sob in the middle) that Aunt Johanna, in her bed, wiped her eyes and thanked goodness some one was happy in the world; and Sarepta Darwin in the kitchen sniffed, and forgot for the moment the dreadful fact of her having got too deep a bake on them loaves, l'iterin' in the parlor with them triflin' children.

As the last "Marry oo, diddy goo, diddy goo!" died away, the doorbell rang, and Kitty went down, cheerfully, to receive Judge Peters and Mr. Mallow.

The gentlemen had just called in passing to ask how Kitty found herself after the party: quite unnecessary to ask, on seeing her, said the Judge, but they thought they would call. What a delightful party! Madam Flynt always did things well. That was so! Mr. Mallow opined. She had a genius for soci'ty, no two ways about that. Used to entertain a great deal in the Colonel's time; Colonel was social, too. Great thing to have the house open again.

"Got home all right, did you, Kitty?" Mr. Mallow bolted from the carefully circuitous path laid down by the Judge.

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"All right, thank you, Mr. Mallow! It cleared off fine, you know, and I took Pilot and the open sleigh for the last few loads. It was such fun!"

"Pilot is a fine horse!" the Judge nodded the approval of a connoisseur. "A spirited animal! a trifle hard-bitted, is he, Kitty?"

"Kind o' fresh last night, was he? Cold night and all; don't blame him a mite!" chimed in Mr. Mallow.

Kitty looked from one to the other; her eyes began to twinkle.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Did I drive too fast for somebody? You know Father always called me a daughter of Jehu, Judge. Have you come to arrest me for fast driving? Is it to be fine or imprisonment?"

The Judge laughed outright. "You are too sharp for me, Kitty; or Brother Mallow is too impatient for diplomatic procedure. Well! nothing of any consequence, my dear; we gather that your last trip was rather speedy, and that there was a little—a trifling accident toward the end of it. We—a—passing by, you understand—thought we would inquire—we wanted to make sure that you were not hurt, my dear."

"Wilse Wibird was hove out, they claim!" Mr. Mallow could not abide what he called "snangles" in conversation. Give him a fack and he could handle it, but he wouldn't have no snangles.

"His Ma says the hoss was runnin' away; how about it, Kitty?"

Kitty broke into a sudden laugh; then suddenly looked grave.

"Pilot never ran away in his life, Mr. Mallow! Don't let John Tucker know that he was ever suspected of such a thing. I was to blame, Judge. I—wanted to get home; I cut the corner too sharp, and Wilson rolled out, that's all! I suppose I ought to have stopped," she added. "I never thought of his being hurt, I truly didn't. There was a nice fat drift, and he went into it so comfortably, I thought! I do hope he isn't hurt, Mr. Mallow!"

Here Kitty looked up at the two gentlemen with such a penitent expression that they both laughed again.

"No serious injury, I gather!" said Judge Peters.

"Hurt his pride and made his nose bleed," said Mr. Mallow. "That's all, Kitty. Don't you worry about him!"

Something in her face made him add impulsively, "Wilse hadn't been pesterin' you, had he, Kitty?"

Kitty turned scarlet and jumped up hastily.

"Oh, no!" she said. At least she was sure Wilson had not meant to annoy her. She was so glad he was not hurt, and now she wanted to show the Judge her Dutch bulbs. He knew all about bulbs, and she thought some of them looked queer.

"Bulbs, eh? Good business!" Mr. Mallow rose also. "While you're showin' him the bulbs, I'll step into the kitchen if you've no projection, Kitty, and ask S'repty for her receipt for them narracoons of

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hers. She promised it to me. Talk of Dutch, they beat any Dutch ever I see!"

The bulbs pronounced upon, and Mr. Mallow lingering in fervent consultation over the "marracoons," the Judge inquired for Miss Johanna. He trusted she was gaining steadily. It was hard for so active a person to be deprived of liberty of locomotion even for a time. Was she—a—interested in the bulbs? Fond of flowers, perhaps?

"Oh, yes, indeed, Judge! She enjoys them as much as I do. I take every pot up to her room as soon as it begins to bud. She isn't really ill, you know, just tired and resting. Speaking of flowers, do you know, some unknown friend sends her the most wonderful violets, every week! They scent the whole house! Don't you smell them, Judge Peters?"

The Judge sniffed gravely and thought he did perceive a fragrance: highly agreeable. Miss Ross was fond of violets?

"They are her favorite flowers; and just think," Kitty rippled on, "they have come to her every week for twenty years, and she has *never* known who sent them. Did you ever hear of anything so romantic?"

"Quite so!" the Judge rose and looked about for his hat. "Very pleasant, very agreeable. Probably the sender enjoys the blossoms fully as much as the recipient. Present my kindest regards to your aunt, will you, Kitty? Tell her I trust it will not be long before her old friends may enjoy the privilege of her society. Ahem! Brother Mallow, we should be step-

ping. Good-bye, my dear! Happy to find you so well!"

Going down the hill, the two gentlemen came to a conclusion which was less than just to the unfortunate Wilson. He was not drunk, only slightly "elevated," to use an obsolescent slang phrase. But Mr. Mallow knew his nephew well, and if there was a doubt, Wilson received no benefit of it. Wilson had been drunk, they decided, and had annoyed Kitty, who had "speeded up" the only-too-ready Pilot in order to escape his importunities. Young cub had ought to be horsewhipped, Mr. Mallow thought; the Judge urged a severe reprimand instead. Kitty must be kept out of this so far as might be, he said. A different impression must be created from either of the two which had been—unfortunately—put about early in the day. Yes! highly injudicious.

"Pair o' darned patterin' chetticoats!" interjected Mr. Mallow, and neither he nor the Judge noticed the transposition of consonants.

Gravely consulting, the two gentlemen repaired to the office of the *Centinel*, where "Itelio" had already begun a fervid eulogy of the Party. As a result, the following paragraph appeared next morning in the paper:

"Among those who ministered to the enjoyment of Cyrus in connection with the delightful festivity of last evening, not least was our talented and accomplished young equestrienne, Miss Katharine Ross, who with the valuable assistance of Mr. John Tucker transported all the guests to and from the ball with equal

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skill and celerity. The gallant steeds which Mr. Tucker keeps in such prime condition partook of the gayety of the occasion, and doubtless in their equine fashion enjoyed the evening as much as the fortunate bipeds whom they furnished with the means of speedy locomotion. The Scribe is informed that an unexpected burst of playful speed on the part of the justly-celebrated black thoroughbred, Pilot, was the cause of one of our young gallants' receiving a morning bath of snow earlier than his accustomed hour. Hard luck, Wilson! Itatio is glad you got off with a nosebleed!"

So Pilot had to bear the blame after all, and John Tucker was furious.

CHAPTER XII

WILSON WIMBERLEY WIBIRD

MRS. WIBIRD and Melissa had a hard time of it for the next few days. No part of Wilson's bodily frame had been hurt, except his nose, which had encountered something hard and was swollen to the size and shape of a potato; but his feelings in general and his pride in particular had suffered grievous injury. After one glance in the mirror, the morning after the party, he fled back to his bed, and remained there for some hours; but his room was cold, and by afternoon he was downstairs in the sitting-room, with his back to the light, and his feet on the baseburner stove. No one was to be let in, he informed his mother peremptorily. He wouldn't be seen by any one, a sight like this. Mrs. Wibird, suggesting a flaxseed poultice, was waved away angrily. All he asked, he announced, was to be left alone. This meant that his mother must sit either in the kitchen or in a cold bedroom: she chose the former alternative, and repaired thither meekly with her sewing, leaving her son to nurse his injuries in solitude.

His nose! if it had been anything else! A gash on the brow, or a cut on the cheek, which might look, when healed, like a Scar of Battle: either of them

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might have been displayed with equanimity, even with pride; might be accounted for in a dozen ways. But a swollen and crimson nose! Wilson groaned and clenched his teeth. He was proud of his nose, which was of the beak variety: he called it his commanding feature. He often, in fancy, read descriptions of his appearance in the leading journals of the country. "A glance at this eminent man shows a commanding nose and an indomitable chin." All great men had large noses; his nose was large; the conclusion was not far to seek.

As a matter of fact, Wilson Wibird was a degenerate shoot from a stock once good. In Colonial days the Wibirds had been prominent among public-spirited citizens; had fought at Bunker Hill, valiantly enough; had held responsible positions, and been commemorated in sounding epitaphs. Little by little the race had dwindled, peaked and pined to its present state. Wilson's father had been postmaster, a meek, sandy little man whom everybody liked and was sorry for, because he had no "faculty." In the son, Nature had played one of her freaks, endowing him with the ambitions (and the features, if you will! it certainly was a good big nose, and his chin was, as Mr. Mallow said, as stubborn as a mule's jaw!) of a Tamburlane, and the abilities of a grocer's clerk in a very small way. The ability of a hotel clerk he did not possess, in Mr. Mallow's opinion.

Deeply as he felt the injury to his commanding feature, deeper injuries still rankled in Wilson's breast. He knew perfectly well that Kitty had tipped

him out on purpose. He resented it bitterly. Some twisted fibre of his once hard-bitted race was in him, making him cling like a limpet to any idea he once took up. Instead of relinquishing his quest, he was all the more intent upon it. He would show the proud girl what it meant to spurn a Wibird. She should be his none the less, but he would subdue her will to his. She should fly to him like a fondling bird, fawn upon him like a spaniel. Once humbled, he would take her to his heart, would raise her to his side. "Ha!" he would say. Wilson loved to say, "Ha!" "You sought to escape me, little one! You fluttered in the net, you pecked at the strong hand that held you; but all the time your fate was here, your fate was here, where it has always been!"

Wilson had recently read "Lorna Doone," and been much struck by some of Carver Doone's expressions.

The day passed heavily for both mother and son. Toward evening, Melissa entered, fresh from the Library. She had had a happy day; all the girls had been in, and they had talked over the party to their hearts' content. Everybody told Melissa how well she looked, and how pretty her dress was. When Nelly Chanter added that Bobby had said she looked "out of sight," Melissa's little cup overflowed, and she—hush! never let it be told—but Nelly took out a new book before it had been listed! Melissa being as a rule a most conscientious little soul, and moreover a librarian "not trained, but gifted," this action was eloquent, if unjustifiable. She came home full of compassion for Wilson, and with a bag of the

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cinnamon buns he specially liked, to "liven up" his supper.

"Poor Wilson!" she said, "how is your poor nose? Have you had a tiresome day? I brought you the second volume of 'The Maid of Sker.'"

Wilson growled something unintelligible and hunched his shoulders over the stove.

"My! it's stuffy here!" Melissa went on. "Shan't I open the window for a minute? It's real warm out!"

"You shall not! If you find the room stuffy, you needn't stay in it. It does seem as if a man might have a little peace in his own house. Shut the door, will you?"

Melissa retired to the kitchen; her mother looked up anxiously.

"How does he seem, Lissy? I haven't been in. I thought he might be asleep."

"He's awful cross!" pouted Lissy. "Snapped me up like I was a bone!"

"I expect he's feeling mean!" Mrs. Wibird spoke depreciatingly. "His nose must be dreadful sore; and his feelings—he is so sensitive! I do think Kitty Ross ought to be had up for driving that way!"

"Now, mother! Don't you say a word against Kitty! Wilson oughtn't to have asked her to bring him home, tired as she was, and after midnight, too. He ought to have walked, as the other boys did. I hear Bobby Chanter said——"

Here the door opened, and Wilson appeared, his

Wilson Wimberley Wibird

small eyes glaring fiercely, though inadequately, over his crimson potato-nose.

"I am going to bed!" he announced. "My head aches, and this chattering drives me distracted."

"So do, dear!" his mother soothed him. "So do! I'll light the oil stove, and bring your supper up to you soon as it's ready."

"I brought you some cinnamon buns, Wilson!" said Melissa, who could not harbor irritation more than two minutes. "I hope your head'll be better in the morning, dear!"

Wilson flung away with no other answer than a snarl. He ate the buns, though, when they came up hot in a napkin; made a very good supper on the whole. The tray disposed of, he locked his door, and then proceeded to unlock a cupboard and take out a bottle and glass. Poor Wilson! we liked to think it was not his fault entirely, that some of his ancestors had been hard drinking as well as hard-bitted; but that made it no easier for Mrs. Wibird and Melissa.

When putting back the bottle and glass, his hand touched something else in the cupboard, something hard and smooth and cold. He muttered under his breath; groped for the object, and brought it out. A pistol! not of the newest make or deadliest calibre, but still a practical weapon, capable of being loaded and fired. Wilson's face cleared as he looked at it. Here was a friend for a desperate man! He nodded darkly several times; stepped to the mirror to see how he looked when performing this act, but recoiled with a groan. He should, properly speaking, have thrust

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the pistol in his bosom, but pajamas have no bosoms: besides, the steel was cold. Finally, he put it under his pillow, and went to sleep to the tune of murder, suicide, and three columns in the City newspaper.

Youth and sleep can do much, even for the foolish and befuddled. By morning Wilson was once more the master of Ross House, waving in his guests (and Kitty's) with courtly gesture. He was roused from this happy dream by the untimely entrance of Billy, the clerk of the Mallow House. Billy had just looked in on his way down town, at 6:45, to find Melissa preparing breakfast, Wilson in bed, and likely to remain there. Billy guessed he would go up and say howdy. Melissa protested: Billy grinned cheerfully, and went up.

"Morn'n, Wilse! h'are'y?" (I find the last word cannot be spelled. It is chiefly H and broad A, but the other letters are there, somehow.) Wilson grunted and turned a striped shoulder pointedly on the intruder.

"Better get up!" said Billy amicably. "Better come down!"

"I can't! I'm sick! Can't you see I'm sick? Get out, Billy!"

"Can't see anything but your pyjammer shirt," said Billy. "Better get up; better come down. Boss told me to fetch you."

Wilson expressed his opinion of the Boss and of Billy, too, in no flattering terms.

"Better get up! better come down!" Billy chanted monotonously. "Lose your job if you don't. Boss



Filling his pockets with gold, Tom strolled happily through the streets of Peking, looking in at all the bazaars. . . .

says he's most as sick of you as he wants to be: Jim Shute's been seekin' round for the job the past month. Better get up! here's your pants! better come down! here's your shirt! I'll wait downstairs."

It was thus that Billy won his battles; he never lost one. Everybody did what Billy told him to. Nobody could analyze his power; Mr. Mallow opined that it was because he didn't open his head except when there was something doin'. "His gun's always lo'ded, but he don't pull it more'n once or twice a year." I think it was really because of his ignoring opposition. He never seemed to hear anything that was said on the other side; he simply went ahead and did what he had to do. Destiny in checks, Kitty called him. His weakness seemed to be for the largest and loudest checks imaginable, especially in his trousers. I always fancied he was in love with Melissa, but—well, no matter!

I feel as if I ought to pause here to apologize for this utterly one-sided story, with hardly a sound, much less a sight of the hero. Of course every reader who knows anything at all knows that Tom Lee is neither dead nor false, and that he is bound to appear at some point. But Cyrus could not know this; even Kitty could not be sure of it, at least not always, when she was tired. So far as I can make out, Tom at about this time, the time of Madam Flynt's party, was taking leave of the Emperor of China (there were emperors in those days) and receiving from certain officers of that potentate large sums of gold. Filling his pockets with a small proportion of this gold, Tom

strolled happily through the streets of Peking, looking in at all the bazaars, and buying everything he thought Kitty might like. Oh! the pale green kimono with the gold dragons! ah! the rose-colored crape showered over with cherry blossoms! How Cyrus was to sigh and clasp its hands over them! And the *parure* of moonstones and aquamarines, which only a princess or Kitty in her bloom could possibly wear! And then, if that boy did not think of everybody in Cyrus, or almost everybody! and buy pink coral for Miss Egeria and red coral for Miss Almeria (coral was "in" then!) and tortoise-shell for Sarepta, and ebony and sandalwood boxes for all the rest of us, till his trunks could hold no more! Then he sat down and wrote to Kitty out of his faithful heart; saying it was a dog's age since he had heard from her, but the mails were rum in these parts, too rum for him, so he was coming home, coming for keeps. This had been a big job, and he had got big pay for it. In fact, he had made his pile, Kitty: not that he would ever stop working, she wouldn't have anything to say to him if he did that; but he meant to settle down and take expert jobs as they came along. They wanted him in —, but he would rather live in dear old Cyrus, if Kitty was agreeable, and he fancied she would be. If the dear Lady wanted them to live with her, that would suit him all right; (alas! he did not know!) he loved her dearly, and he loved every nail in Ross House, Kitty knew that. If not, his own house was only let from year to year, and they would move right into that.

“Kitty, you see I am taking it for granted that you have waited for me. What should I do if—but I *know* you have! that is, I know it almost always, except when I’m dog-tired or the grub has given out. Once or twice, up in the mountains, I got a bit down, but it never lasted. Because, of course, you know how every hour and every minute I am thinking of you, my darling. You must have felt it, Kitty, even when you didn’t get my letters, and I’m afraid they didn’t always get through, but I hope so. You must have realized that it has been you, standing right beside me, going with me through everything, that has carried me over the rough places; and there have been some pretty rough ones, darling, but all that is over now, and in about two weeks I shall be sailing for home, the happiest man in the wide world, for you are at the other end, waiting for me—aren’t you, Kitty?”

Kitty got that letter. It arrived about a month after another arrival, to be chronicled in due time.

Meantime the days came and went, and it was now late April. Not yet quite spring with us, but so near that one could hear her whispering over the hill-tops. Mother Earth was making ready to receive her. There was a vast deal of house-cleaning going on. Great rains sluiced out the roads, and filled the streams to overflowing; they rushed along, brown and foaming, carrying with them the unsightly leavings of winter, who had hurried off, as usual, without “redding up” in any way. The river flowed broad and swift, dotted with floating ice-cakes; the willows along the bank

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showed brown smoke touched with green. Here and there were bushes with blood-red stems, vivid as coral. In the woods, snow lingered in blackish patches; almost touching these patches, ferns were unrolling, hepaticas taking off their gray furs, blood-root opening its lovely white cups.

"And oh!" cried Kitty. "Don't speak to me, any one! I believe it's an anemone!"

Kitty was having a holiday. Madam Flynt was not going out that afternoon; John Tucker would never let her, Kitty, meet the trains; Aunt Johanna had pronounced her pale, and bidden her walk five miles and bring back a color. She had meant to be back in time for one o'clock dinner, but as she came downstairs Sarepta appeared with a neat tin box and the announcement, "Here's a snack! You can have your dinner with your supper!"

She vanished. Kitty peeped, saw chicken sandwiches and an apple turnover, and departed joyful.

"Dear Sarepta," she murmured. "If one must have a tyrant, how nice to have one who can make turnovers!"

It was a day of days. Not warm; one was not ready for warmth yet; but every breath was a delight, the air so tingled with wakening life. Kitty walked not five miles, but ten, if she had known it. She took no count of miles, swinging along over hill and dale, her quick eyes taking in every sign of promise; here a catkin waving, there a little host of green spears pushing up through the brown earth. She sat on a huge silvered root in a stump fence to

eat her luncheon. A chipmunk came to make inquiries and received crumbs; a bluebird sang in a cherry tree near by. It was a delightful feast. This was on top of the Great Hill, from which one saw all the kingdoms of the earth, more or less. Kitty saw and rejoiced in all: the kingdom of pines, stretching dark and velvety along its waving miles; the kingdom of hills, bare and ruddy in the sunlight; the kingdom of streams and ponds, a great necklace of sapphires flung across the countryside. Kitty saw, and sighed with delight; then slipped her empty box in her pocket and set her face homeward. Already the sunbeams came slanting through the pines on the crest; she had a long way to go. "And I must and will go back through Lancaster Woods!" said Kitty. "Perhaps I'll make a call on Savory Bite; similarly, perhaps I won't. I wonder if his paint is blue still. Naughty Tom!"

Down the hillside went Kitty, across lots; through steep pastures of slippery russet grass, where the huddled rocks looked like flocks of gray sheep, browsing; through hanging copses, the outlying pickets of the kingdom of pines; so down at last to the kingdom itself, the long stretch of woodland, bordered on one side by the river, on the other by that shy, pleasant thoroughfare known as Lancaster Road. It was near the edge of the road that Kitty was wandering happily along, about five o'clock, when she should have been nearer home; it was here that she found the first anemone. She was bending over it in rapture, when she heard a name pronounced; not her

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own name, but a perversion of it to which she was now only too well accustomed.

“Katrine!” cried Wilson Wibird. “Can it be? Fate is kind for once!”

Wilson had been to Tinkham: I fear on no profitable errand. He was on his homeward way, walking with a rather uncertain step, wavering from side to side of the road. Catching sight of a figure through the trees, his half-tipsy fancy prompted him to see who it was. Here he was now, balancing himself on unsteady feet, leering at Kitty in a way which he felt to be irresistible. Wilson’s nose had long since resumed its normal appearance. He had by a happy inspiration put on his good suit; a necktie of undeniable brilliancy flaunted beneath the high collar which partly sheltered his long bird-like neck. He felt that the occasion was a fortunate one.

“Well met by sunlight, proud Titania!” was his greeting to Kitty.

“How d’ye do, Wilson!” Kitty nodded, and stepped past him toward the open: he, however, stepped with her.

“Don’t hurry, Katrine! it is a sweet evening: let us stroll home together! Fate has not lightly brought about this meeting.”

“I haven’t time to stroll, Wilson! I must walk fast. Don’t let me hurry you, though! Good evening!”

She stepped aside to pass him, but again he stepped with her; tried for a space to keep pace with her, and finding this difficult, planted himself squarely in front of her.

"Not so fast, sweet one!" he said. "I have a word to say to thee. We have not met since the dance, Katrine. A long month ago!"

"I believe not!" Kitty spoke coolly, but she gave a quick glance up and down the road. No one was in sight: there was no house near except Savory Bite's cottage, and that was out of sight round the next corner.

"Katrine was cruel that night!" Wilson went on, still balancing himself from side to side. He could not seem to stand still and straight at the same time. "Katrine was cruel indeed. She flung her Fate from her; tipped me out in the snow, didn't she? But her Fate came back." He laughed. "Here's Fate, Katrine! Can't escape it; here is Fate! Fate is here!"

He tapped himself on the breast, and assumed an attitude of command.

"What *are* you talking about, Wilson?" exclaimed Kitty impatiently. "Please let me pass, and don't be silly."

"Silly! she calls me silly!"

Wilson nodded thrice solemnly and tried to take Kitty's hand; failing in which, he waved his own and then leveled a wavering forefinger at her.

"Katrine, it is time we came to an unshand—undershand—understanding! I feel—I have long felt—that we were born for each other. Why blink the fact?"

This struck Wilson as a strong expression; he repeated it—"Why blink the fact! Let us hail it, joy-

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fully, Katrine. Two hearts that beat as one! You are mine, little bird: mine!"

Now, however much Wilson Wibird might indulge in remarks of this kind to his crony, the mirror, he would not have dared to make them to Kitty when sober, and Kitty knew it. After that swift glance up and down the road, she drew out a long steel hatpin and held it in her hand.

"Wilson," she said briefly, "what do you mean? What are you talking about, and what do you want?"

"Want—you!" Wilson opened his arms with a dramatic gesture. "You are mine, I say! I have an iron will, Katrine, and that will claims you. Come, little bird! Let us seal our union with a k——"

"If you come one step nearer," said Kitty quietly, "I'll run this pin into you."

She displayed the pin, really a formidable weapon.

Wilson, who had taken a step forward, paused.

"I have an iron will!" he protested. "'Wibird hath iron will;' did you never hear that, Katrine? 'Tis the motto of our House. I am the tenth and perhaps the last Wilson Wimberley Wibird. In me meet the features——" he indicated his nose and chin—"and the forces of my ancestors. Don't be obstinate, Katrine!"

Here his mood changed suddenly; his eyes filled with tears.

"Don't be cruel, Kitty!" he implored. "You've always been cruel, Kitty, and I've always loved you. Don't be cruel to the tenth and perhaps the last Wilson Wimberley Wibird! Be kind, not cruel! They

Wilson Wimberley Wibird

both begin with—at least the sound is the same. I am your Fate, Kitty—I mean Katrine! I should think you would be kind to your Fate.”

Here the gentleman wept bitterly.

Kitty spoke kindly and distinctly.

“I would go home now, Wilson, if I were you!” she said. “You are not yourself. Forget this foolishness, and go home to your mother. If you will walk ahead, I will follow you.”

But Wilson’s mood changed again. “Never!” he said. “I am desh—desperate! deshperate man! If you won’t be mine, I won’t be—I mean, I’ll put an end to myself! Blow my brains ‘out, here’s minute. Then you’ll know what it is to spurn a Wibird! ha! You mock me!” He pulled out the pistol and flourished it in the air.

Kitty stepped quickly forward and took it from him.

“Now,” she said quietly, “if you will walk ahead, Wilson, I will follow you.”

While these things were going on, Mr. Very Jordano had been making his annual call on Avery Bright, the hermit. This call was made at no regular time or season. When news was scarce, or the pulse of Cyrus seemed to beat feebly, the editor of the *Centinel* was wont to cast about him for legitimate subjects of possible interest from which a “story” might be extracted. His native delicacy being perpetually at war with his professional instinct, he could not bring himself to take advantage of any occurrence the mention of which might cause any “feeling” in any quarter of

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the neighborhood. This warfare hampered him sadly. But "Savory Bite" never read a newspaper; he had no relations; there seemed no reason why he should not be exploited, if only he could be brought to unfold his tale. He never yet had unfolded his tale, but hope sprang eternal in Mr. Jordano's breast, and once a year, as I say, he would try his fortune. His zealous questions were met alternately by "Yep" and "Nope," with "I d'no!" as an occasional variant. As a matter of fact, Savory had no tale to unfold. He was not in any way an interesting or mysterious person, save to the young or the newcomer in Cyrus. The elders knew that he lived alone merely because his parents had died and left him so. There he was, and there he stayed. He had lost the habit of talking after twenty years of a stone-deaf mother; also, he had nothing special to say. So much for our hermit!

On this occasion Mr. Jordano was in great need of a "story" to fill a certain column for this week's *Centinel*, already half set up. There had been no arrivals in Cyrus since the last issue; people had not begun to shingle their barns or plant their gardens: it was a dry time for editors. His success with Mr. Bright had been no more marked than usual, but as he left the house he was already composing a paragraph which could not, he modestly thought, fail to interest the public.

"The Scribe made a neighborly call yesterday on our isolated but ever courteous fellow-townsmen Mr. Avery Bright, in his domicile on the Lancaster Road. The gentle hermit received me in his commodious

kitchen, which he would appear to use also as a sitting room. It is painted of a cerulean blue, and is as tasty an apartment as any housewife could desire. Mr. Bright is a man of few words, and may be said to cultivate the golden flower of silence: yet Italo received from him some valuable information, which he feels at liberty to impart to his readers. Spring will be late, in Mr. Bright's opinion. The breast of that useful and (when roasted with the seasonable adjuncts of sage, onion and applesauce) toothsome feathered biped, the goose, which hangs beside his well-polished stove, displays large patches of white. This shows that the winter has been a hard one, which, indeed, we know to have been the case: it also foretells, the weatherwise anchorite intimated, that the spring will be backward. On the Scribe's venturing a pleasantry to the effect that spring, like other good things, was worth waiting for, Mr. Bright signified his assent to the proposition by a sagacious nod. As to the woodchuck——"

Mr. Jordano got no farther with the woodchuck. Lifting his eyes as he closed the gate of the hermitage behind him, he saw a sight that made him start and almost drop his notebook. Up the road came Wilson Wibird, plodding sullenly along with bent head and muttering lips; behind him walked Kitty Ross, holding a pistol in her hand. After the first petrified glance, Mr. Jordano hastened forward, calling Kitty's name; she and her convoy looked up at the same moment.

"Damn!" said Wilson.

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"Oh, Mr. Jordano!" cried Kitty. "I am *so* glad to see you! Are you—are you going my way?"

"Absolutely! absolutely!" cried Mr. Jordano, seizing the first word that came to his bewildered mind. "I should esteem it a high privilege, Miss Kitty. Permit me, my—my dear young lady!"

He motioned toward the pistol; Kitty gladly relinquished it, and he drew a breath of relief.

"Periloso!" he murmured. "Extremely periloso! If your foot should slip-pip-pip—step out, Wilson!"

His tone changed from that of anxious courtesy to imperious command. The unhappy Wilson, feeling the impact of the pistol muzzle between his shoulders, stepped out. Beginning to mutter curses, he was sternly bidden to hold his tongue-pung-pung! Thus they proceeded along the Lancaster Road, where fortunately the houses are few and far between; a tragi-comic little procession. Mr. Jordano was fairly snorting with chivalrous indignation. His dark eyes flashed real fire; his cloak was thrown superbly over his shoulder. Could the dear gentleman have known it, he really looked for the nonce like one of the Italian patriots on whom he so desired to form himself. Presently he became aware that Kitty was trembling. Bending anxiously toward her, she turned on him a face of suppressed and remorseful laughter.

"Put it away!" she whispered. "We are coming to a house. He won't give any more trouble, I am sure."

Mr. Jordano nodded and slipped the pistol into his pocket. Soon after, they came to a crossroad which

Wilson Wimberley Wibird

led by a short cut to the Common and Ross House. Seeing Kitty about to turn aside, Mr. Jordano made as if to accompany her, but she checked him with a decided shake of her head. As he hesitated, she laid her finger on her lips, kissed it toward him with an adorable gesture of gratitude and affection, and, turning, sped away in the gathering dusk. Mr. Jordano looked after her with a sigh; he felt that kiss warm at his heart. He would lay down his life, if necessary, for that sweet young lady. Anger sweeping him again as he turned to the shambling figure before him, he addressed it with asperity.

“Come, Wilson! wake up-pup-pup! Step out-tout-tout! You ought to be lighting the lamps this minute.”

But I ask you, was it not hard that the real “story” which had dropped for him out of a clear sky, as it were, was one that Mr. Jordano’s knightly soul could not for an instant think of as matter for publication?

What a paragraph it would have made!

CHAPTER XIII

PILOT

DEAR Dan! but you don't think it is anything serious, John?"

"Oh, no, Miss Kitty. He'll be fit as a fiddle in two-three days. All I mean, he give himself a little wrinch, like, and I thought let him rest up a day or two, that's all. Anybody has to rest once in a while; any hoss, I would say."

"Well!" Kitty gave Dan another lump of sugar. "I believe all he wants is more sugar, John Tucker. Just look at him! You are an angelic humbug, Dan dear, and you aren't to have another scrap. So—you'll take Old Crummies to the station, I suppose, John. And I'll take Madam Flynt with Pilot."

Kitty did not look at John Tucker as she said this; they both looked a little conscious. Old Crummies, the third horse, bought by John Tucker (Kitty vowed she would never attempt another horse trade!) was eminently safe and sound, but a trifle dull. Neither Kitty nor John Tucker specially enjoyed driving him.

"Yes, Miss!" said John Tucker. "Three o'clock, I suppose."

Immediately Kitty's heart began to smite her.

"You are as angelic as Dan, John Tucker," she

Pilot

cried. "And I am a selfish Thing! and wicked, too," she added: "I know Madam Flynt is dreadfully afraid of Pilot. She has only driven behind him once, and then she felt that her life hung on the dasher, she told me afterward. So I'll take Old Crummies, John Tucker, dear."

But John Tucker was up in arms at once in defense of his favorite.

"Madam Flynt has no call to be afraid of Pilot," he said gruffly. "Pilot is as clever a hoss as is in this State; and as stiddy, for a young hoss. What I mean, you don't expect a young hoss to reason things out the way an old one does. Take Dan now, or even Crummies, though he hasn't much more sense than a meal-tub; what I mean, you couldn't scare either one on 'em; not if you said 'Boo!' right in their count'nance. They'd toss their head, at least Dan would, and think, 'Well, I ain't a jackass, anyway!' But take a young, spirited hoss like Pilot, and he hasn't had the experience, Miss Kitty, that's all there is to it. You meet a thrashing-machine, say, with Pilot, or an elephant, or something else that it don't *belong* there, what I mean is. Well, he'll antic up a mite, to express surprise, same as a person would. 'My land!' he says: 'what's that?' Only he says it with his head and his four legs, not havin' language, as you may say."

"John Tucker! you never met an elephant with Pilot!"

"I did, Miss! not one, but three elephants: 'twas that circus used to go through North Cyrus to the City.

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Well! Pilot warn't only three years old then. He co't sight of them elephants, and he was all over the ro'd, all over the lot, all over the county, in a minute, but he never meant no harm. He was only wonderin', that was all. No, Miss Kitty!" John Tucker shut his jack-knife with a decided snap, and turned away from the stall.

"You take Pilot for Madam Flynt. He'll do anything in creation you tell him, and she'll have a real nice ride. I ain't any too fond of takin' him to the trains anyway," he added. "He gets real annoyed if he has to stand round waitin', and I don't know as I blame him."

So at three o'clock, after a confidential talk with Pilot, in which she explained the situation to him, and told him he was going to be just as saintly as Dan, and not so much as wink if they met a whole caravan of elephants (which was most unlikely at this season), Kitty drove up to Madam Flynt's door. Pilot stood like a rock while the two ladies got in. They were engaged in a rather acrimonious discussion as to the quality and thickness of an extra wrap carried by Miss Croly, and did not notice the horse; Kitty thought it unnecessary to call attention to him, and off they went. The day was perfect; so was Pilot. He settled down almost at once into the long smooth trot that covered twelve miles an hour and seemed absolutely effortless. "I can keep this up all day," he signified to Kitty with one ear, "if this is what you want. A trifle dull, what?"

"Yes, darling!" replied Kitty with the slightest

movement of the reins; "but it is precisely right, and you are a Cherry Pie, and shall have the most *delicious* mash for your precious supper!"

There is a State Road to South Cyrus, good even in early spring. Pilot sped along over hill and dale, now and then tossing his beautiful head from sheer joy, but otherwise behaving with absolute decorum. Madam Flynt's irritation about the cloak subsiding, she began to enjoy herself thoroughly.

"How delightful the air is!" she said. "The tang is really gone: I call this positively balmy. Aren't you driving very fast, Kitty?"

"It's just his usual gait, Madam Flynt," replied Kitty craftily. "It's partly the road. Don't you think one always seems to be going faster on a smooth road?"

"That may be so!" said Madam Flynt sagaciously. "The road is certainly excellent. What are you doing, Cornelia?"

"I was tucking your feet in, Clarissa. One of them was protruding beyond the robe!"

"I protruded it on purpose!" Madam Flynt spoke with decision. "It was too warm. They are my feet, Cornelia: I suppose you will grant that?"

"Willingly, my dear Clarissa!"

Seldom, almost never, did Miss Croly allow any tinge of malice to color speech or even thought. She knew her duty and intended to do it, but her firmness was almost invariably gentle. This time, however, there was the slightest suspicion of meaning in her "willingly!" Her feet were her one beauty: long,

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narrow, high of instep. Madam Flynt's were flat and pudgy.

"Very well!" said Madam Flynt, fully appreciating the shade of tone. "Then perhaps you will let me manage them myself. We'll turn round at the heater piece, Kitty, and come back over this same good road. I am enjoying this air so! The motion is really exhilarating!"

They turned at the heater piece, and Pilot's stride quickened automatically. (Does every one know that a heater piece is the triangular space between two branching roads?) He was still behaving perfectly, he assured Kitty, but it was not in nature not to go a little faster when one's head was turned toward home and supper. Kitty explained this to Madam Flynt, who replied that she had never observed it before. Dan was one of those rare horses who can resist the call of the stable and keep the same untroubled pace whichever way their head is turned.

"Can you check the animal, my love?" quavered Miss Croly, who had been secretly alarmed all through the drive. "Nervousness is very bad for our dear friend; it induces sleeplessness."

"Nothing of the sort, Cornelia Croly!" Madam Flynt became majestic. "I have every confidence in Kitty's driving, I am sure. What—what is the matter, my dear?"

Kitty had said a word and Pilot stopped suddenly, almost too suddenly for the equilibrium of the two passengers. They were passing the Gaylord place: Kitty was aware of two figures standing by the gap in

the hedge, one of which beckoned to her: Judge Peters and Mr. Mallow. The Judge spoke.

"You, Kitty? And with Pilot? Thank God! Madam Flynt, Miss Croly, your most obedient servant! do not be alarmed, ladies, but this is a case of emergency. Mr. Gaylord is here, seriously ill. Dr. Pettijohn must come at once. Mr. Mallow was about to set out on foot, but if you could go, Kitty?"

"Of course!" cried Kitty. "That is, if Madam Flynt——"

"Of course!" exclaimed Madam Flynt in turn. "Need you ask, Edward? Is he very ill?"

"Dying, we fear!" The Judge spoke low. "I must go back to him. Kitty, my child, do the best you——"

"Drive like *hemp*, will you, Kitty?" cried Mr. Mallow, down whose rosy cheeks the tears were streaming. ("Hemp" was Mr. Mallow's strongest expression: most people spelled it with *ll* instead of *mp*.)

"Oh, yes! yes! *Drive as fast as you can*, Kitty!" cried Madam Flynt. Russell Gaylord had been in her Sunday school class, and she loved him.

Kitty flashed a glance back.

"Do you mean it?" she cried. "You do? Oh, you darling Thing! Sit tight, then!"

She bent forward and gave a long, low, clear whistle. It was her private signal to Pilot; it meant that there was a stretch of good road ahead and no one in sight to be shocked or frightened. The black horse whinnied a response, quivered, then sprang forward literally like an arrow from a bow. The Judge looked

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after him as he shot down the road at a three-minute gait. A momentary smile lightened his sad face.

"Poor Madam Flynt!" he said. "Poor Miss Croly! Come, Marshall!" and they went back into the house.

Remember that for many years Madam Flynt and her companion had been accustomed to Flanagan's horses, whose best speed never exceeded four miles an hour. Dan's steady eight had terrified them at first; though they were now used to it, and felt a certain pride in his swiftness as he trotted sturdily along, never quickening, never slackening, his comfortable stride. Fancy, then, their emotions when, as Miss Croly afterward expressed it in her fervent way, "the lightning was unchained, and they flew with the bolt of Heaven!"

It was three good miles to Dr. Pettijohn's house. Before one mile was passed, the two ladies were perfectly sure that Kitty had lost control of the horse; that he was *running away!* They had heard the fatal word "Pilot!" Each clutched a side of the carriage with one hand; the other clasped that of her friend.

"Clarissa," murmured Miss Croly, "we are together in death as in life."

"Don't be—oh!" Madam Flynt had meant to say "absurd," but at this moment they turned off the smooth State road into one which led directly past Dr. Pettijohn's house. This road was an ordinary country thoroughfare, which, in our State, in the month of April, is not smooth.

"Oh!" cried Madam Flynt, as they encountered the first "honeypot." (A honeypot is a spot where the

frost, coming out of the ground, leaves behind it unplumbed depths of liquid mud.) Down went one wheel, up went the other.

"Steady, darling!" said Kitty.

"Pooh!" said Pilot with one ear, and was out and away before one could say "Oats," much less "Jack Robinson." Madam Flynt's bonnet was over one eye, Miss Croly's dangled from the back of her head.

"Cornelia," said Madam Flynt, "I have left you an annuity!"

"Oh, Clarissa!" moaned Miss Croly, "I have sometimes opposed your wishes; with the best intent, but perhaps mistakenly. Forgive me! We will die together!"

"An annuity," repeated Madam Flynt; "sufficient to keep you and Sarah in the house—*oh!* as long as you live. Abby Ann has her brother. The rest goes to Kitty—*Ah!*"

Another "honeypot." This time any one but Kitty and Pilot would have thought they *must* go over.

"It is coming!" gasped Miss Croly. "Clarissa, *fall on me!* My body will break the fall: you may escape——"

Even in this crisis, Madam Flynt's sense of humor did not desert her. "I don't know that bones are any better than rocks to fall on!" she whispered. "Hold on tight, Cornelia! *hold on——*"

But now, a miracle! They whirled round a corner, whirled up a driveway: a touch on the reins, a word, and Pilot stood, breathing quickly, but otherwise statue-like, before Dr. Pettijohn's door. He had *not*

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been running away! Kitty had had him in control all the time! In one thought-flash, Miss Croly removed Joan of Arc and Mary Stuart from their pedestals and set up Kitty Ross as her Heroine for all time.

Three minutes more, and they were speeding back, still at arrow-flight. Dr. Pettijohn knew Pilot and Kitty, and leaned back comfortably on the front seat, reflecting that it was criminal for such a horse as that to be owned by any one but a doctor. Madam Flynt resumed her dignity, and cast a quelling glance at Miss Croly, who was now making ineffective dabs at her patroness's bonnet with a view to straightening it.

"Let me alone!" said the lady. "I prefer it as it is. And *hold on*, you ridiculous woman! We are going faster than ever, even if the animal is under control."

Kitty was very sorry about poor Mr. Gaylord, but she could not help realizing that Pilot was in wonderful condition to-day. She quoted under her breath, for Dr. Pettijohn's benefit:

"I would not have the horse I drive
So fast that folks should stop and stare;
An easy gait,—two-forty-five—
Suits me; I do not care.
Perhaps, *just for a single spurt*,
Some seconds less would do no hurt!"

The doctor nodded.

"Trouble is, Miss Kitty, your track is too short!" he said, as the Gaylord chimneys rose above the next turn of the road.

"I know!" Kitty nodded regretfully. "He's just got warmed up to his work, and here we are!"

Here they were; turning in at the great gateway; crunching over the gravel; stopping at the gaunt front door, which had not been opened in twenty years. It opened now, and Judge Peters stood on the steps.

"Well done, Kitty!" he exclaimed. "Yes, you are in time. Come in, Dr. Pettijohn. One moment!" he bent to whisper in Kitty's ear. "One more errand for you, my dear brave child! Providence sent you to-night, I am confident of it. Our poor friend desires greatly to see your Aunt Johanna. Yes!" as Kitty uttered a cry of surprise. "They were friends in youth; perhaps more than friends. He wishes to take leave of her. Is she able to come, do you think, Kitty? Not for worlds would I have her do herself an injury!"

"Perfectly able, I am sure! I'll just take the ladies home; thank you, Judge dear!"

Pilot did very well, Kitty thought, to slacken his pace so cheerfully the rest of the way to Madam Flynt's house; even so, they were two shaken and disheveled ladies who dismounted at the stone steps, and Abby Ann, hurrying out with the foot-stool, exclaimed in dismay at their appearance.

"For the goodness gracious sake, Madam!" she cried. "Whatever has happened to your bonnet?"

Madam Flynt waved her aside with dignity and addressed Kitty.

"We have had a *most interesting* drive!" she said. "I congratulate you, Kitty, on your skill; and I am

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deeply thankful to have been able—you understand, my dear! Good evening! Cornelia, you are treading on my skirt. If you *have* pretty feet, it is not necessary to trample——There! don't mind me! it was my fault, I dare say."

Every moment of this evening was bitten into Kitty's mind, an ineffaceable impression: sharpest and clearest of all, the moment when she stood faltering in the doorway of the Red Indian Room.

Miss Johanna Ross (in rose-color this time) was sitting erect among her pillows, reading "Framley Parsonage." She was going through the whole Trollope fleet of "old three-deckers" with infinite enjoyment. Her firm, rather sharp countenance was relaxed in lines of leisurely amusement. Looking up, and meeting Kitty's eyes, it waked into vivid attention.

"What's the matter?" demanded Miss Johanna. "Sickness or accident?"

She had dropped her book, and was gathering her draperies about her.

"Sickness!" Kitty spoke quietly, trying to keep all hurry out of her voice.

"An old friend of yours, Aunt Johanna, has come back and is—is very ill, I fear. He would like to see you. It is——"

"Russell Gaylord!" said Johanna Ross.

The Rosses all move quickly. "Medicated lightning," people used to call Dr. Ross, when he was summoned to an emergency case. Kitty could only think of this, as without another word her aunt flashed

from her pillows, rustled into her clothes, and with a shake of her shoulders stood alert, able, prepared.

"Now, child!" she pinned on her veil with a steady hand. "I am ready. Who sent you? Judge Peters? Good! and you have Pilot? Good again! we need lose no time. I dreamed last night—come!"

Pilot may have wondered where his promised mash was; why he was carefully blanketed for ten minutes, then taken out once more, and once more given the signal for full speed; but beyond a whinny of surprise, and a toss of his head, he gave no sign. Kitty's word was Pilot's law. Again the miles sped by; this time the passenger took no heed of them; the pace was all too slow for her. Again the flying turn, the crunching gravel; again the door opening, the grave figure hastening down the steps.

"Alive! still conscious! yes! asking for you. Thank God you are come! The end is near, prepare for a great change, my friend!"

Shall we go in with Johanna Ross to that room where the love of her youth lies gasping his last hour away? Shall we look upon her, kneeling by the bedside, holding the skeleton hands, looking tenderly into the hollow eyes? No! we have no business there. We will come away, with the two faithful friends, who went, one to stand outside the chamber door, in case of need, the other on the steps, smoothing Pilot's glossy neck and exchanging brief snatches of talk with Kitty; she, wondering, pitying, yet dreading to touch upon the mystery that had outlasted her young life.

They were all at school together, Mr. Mallow said.

Russ was an elegant boy. "Him and Johanna was always together, same as you and——" Here Mr. Mallow was seized with a prolonged fit of coughing.

"Anybody ask you about Russ Gaylord," cried the hotel keeper, "and you say he was nobody's enemy but his own. Nobody's but his own! Your father knew that. Doctor knew it. 'Russ,' he'd say, 'Stop *now!* stop to-day! *you can!*' but he couldn't; he couldn't. The peth was dead in him, like a dozy log. Yes! Poor Russ! too bad, ain't it?"

"Has he been ill long, Mr. Mallow?" asked Kitty timidly.

"He's ben ailin' ever sence he come. Lemme see! March wasn't it? Yes, March, and here we are in May. He's ben jest wastin' away, poor Russ has."

"Not—he hasn't been all alone, has he?" with a glance at the dark, shuttered house, the tall firs pointing spectral fingers at it, and the great chestnut tree, tossing its bare arms as if in grief or horror.

"Me and Ned—I would say the Jedge—has ben here all we could. He wouldn't have no one else! We was boon companions in primary school, and we kep' right on. Not in all ways, is what I would say; there was p'int—no need to go into that! His heart was right in his boosum all the time, Russ's was. Now he lays there."

Mr. Mallow drew out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes simply.

All Cyrus came to Russell Gaylord's funeral. Tink-curiosity, idle or worse, to see the great house open ham, too, and Tupham. Some, no doubt, came from

once more, the long windows thrown wide, the sunlight gilding the mouldered furniture and moth-eaten tapestries. These would be outsiders. Cyrus people were full of sorrow and compassion. They came in their best clothes, Madam Flynt in her ermine and velvet, Anne Peace in her brown Sunday gown; it was all they could do. With bowed heads they entered the door. How jovially the gay young host used to welcome them to these long drawing-rooms! How shining and scented they used to be, with lights and flowers! There were flowers now. Kitty and Nelly Chanter had found enough early blossoms in the neglected garden to make a wreath—only Forsythia and Japanese pear, but it was gay and cheerful—and some one had sent a splendid wreath of passion flowers. At the last Johanna Ross, who stood at the head of the coffin, while Mr. Chanter read the service, took the bunch of violets from her bosom, and laid it over the dead man's heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOHANNA REDIVIVA

MISS JOHANNA did not go back to bed. She had had six months of rest, she said, and that was enough.

"Besides," she added, "I must show myself for poor Russell's sake. I can't have people saying that he ruined my health for life, as well as destroyed my reason."

She spoke frankly to Kitty, as they sat together on the leather sofa, the evening after the funeral.

"That was why I went away!" said Miss Johanna. "We were very much in love with each other, but it was no use. He couldn't keep straight; and I am not a fool, Kitty. He wouldn't give me up, so I went away. Wrongly, your little mother thought; John knew I was right. So there is all about that!" Thus Miss Johanna, very erect on the sofa. Kitty, moving close beside her, put her arm round her and laid her fair head against her shoulder.

"Thank you, my dear! yes, it was hard; almost as hard to have Mary disapprove of me as to lose him." Miss Johanna brushed away a tear, and frowned at the spot on her handkerchief.

"She asked me—little romantic goose of a white

rose!—if I thought she would leave John if *he*—
'My child,' I said, 'John would leave you! John would allow nothing of that kind to come within sight or sound of you. If he found he *had* to drink, he would go and drink in the Mammoth Cave, and drop the bottles into the bottomless pit.' It was true!

"But mind you, Kitty!" Miss Johanna spoke incisively, after a silence, during which both had gazed into the fire with tear-bright eyes. "You must not think I have mourned for twenty years. People don't do that, not even women. I mourned for a good while, as long as was reasonable; perhaps longer. Otherwise, I have been a busy and on the whole a contented woman. Why shouldn't I be? I have friends all over the country; I have had many pleasures; now, thanks to you, my dear child, I have a home, the home of my own childhood. Considering humanity in the aggregate, I have done extremely well. Extremely well! A single woman can be happy enough, Kitty," Miss Johanna did not look at her niece as she spoke, "happy enough if she has *sense*. I have known spinsters who had twice as many children as if they had borne 'em; and I've known mothers, dozens of 'em, with hearts and arms as empty as their heads. And if Sarepta Darwin wants anything," added Miss Johanna, "I'll thank her to put a name to it, instead of clucking and scuttling out there in the hall."

Sarepta appeared, and fixed the speaker with a wintry eye. "*I don't want anything!*" she said austerely. "I was comin' to ask whether *you* wanted any supper; that's all. Bell rang ten minutes ago;

don't make no odds to me whether it's hot or cold."

It did make odds to Miss Johanna, however, that Sarepta had prepared for supper all her little favorite delicacies, down to the dash of cinnamon on the buttered toast, with which she usually "couldn't bother." Late that evening, when Kitty was in bed, the stately lady crept down the back stairs to the kitchen, and had a comfortable little cry with her old grammar-school mate, who in her grim fashion had worshiped Russell Gaylord ever since, at the age of twelve, he gave her a bite of his apple.

The next thing, Miss Johanna announced, was the Visits. People had left cards for her when she came: sympathetic cards, inquisitive cards, scandalized cards, as the case might be. Now, for the sake of things in general (and Kitty in particular, it may be confessed between author and reader), Miss Johanna determined to "make her manners," and prove her sanity of mind and body. These were exciting days for Cyrus. One hardly dared leave the house for fear of missing The Call.

"Has she been to see you? She has? Well! how did she appear? Was she flighty, or what you would call reasonable? Stylish? Well, you would expect that! she was always one to dress. What did she—oh! broadcloth! Well! that is always ladylike. They claim basket-weaves are all the style now, but I don't know. Anyhow, it's something for her to be in her right mind."

Mrs. Wibird was openly disturbed about the influence that Johanna was likely to exert over Kitty.

"While she was in her bed," said the lady, "it was another matter; but now, the two of them together, and like that, it's my *fear* we shall see things that we are not used to them in Cyrus."

Melissa was on fire instantly.

"I don't know what you mean, Mother! What kind of things?"

"No, you don't know, my child;" Mrs. Wibird shook a melancholy head over the bowl in which she was mixing gingerbread. "You don't know, and it is far from my wish that you should." (N. B. The good lady had no idea herself what she meant, but Lissy shouldn't speak back like that.) "I say nothing; nothing at all! I never do say anything, as is well known. But take the way Kitty Ross drives, which is in itself a scandal, be the other who it may; and add to it a person who has *always* been peculiar, and now little better than a lunatic, if all one hears—hand me the spice-box, will you, Lissy? You've kned that dough enough; you'll take the courage all out of it—all I say is, I *hope* Cyrus will not rue the day that either one of them—My *gracious*, Lissy! they're driving up to the door this minute! Here, take my apron! No! You go to the door—no, I'll go to the door and keep 'em back while you pull up the parlor curt—"

"*Johanna* Ross! do not tell me this is you! well! well! well! you *are* a stranger! Kitty comin' in? No! the wild animal wouldn't stand, of course. Terrible!" as Kitty and Pilot whisked round the corner. "I expect to see her dashed in fragments any day: *any* day! My son Wilson nearly met his death the night of

Madam Flynt's party. Well, if this isn't a sight for sore eyes. Come in! Come *right* in, Johanna! I never thought to be welcoming you into my humble sitting-room in *this* world!"

The Misses Bygood had made fitting preparations to receive their old friend and schoolmate. The covers were taken off Aunt Messenger's Chair (embroidered by that lady seventy-five years ago, and as fresh as the day it was finished, owing to the covers; there were three, one basted, one tied, and the third buttoned on); the tidies and the frilled tassel-bags were done up—I met some one the other day who had never heard of a tassel-bag!—an extra touch given to the shining silver and crystal. And after all this, Miss Johanna made her call in the shop! One might have known she would! Miss Almeria reflected; there was a shade of austerity on her smooth brow as she advanced to greet her guest. Miss Johanna was buoyant.

"Howdy? howdy?" she cried. "Second call, you see, Almy! First call on Madam Flynt, second on Miss Bygoods: Proprieties of Cyrus, volume 1, chapter 1. Father down yet?"

Father not down; it was early for him. Egeria usually brought him down at ten o'clock. It was now but——

"I know! half-past nine. I came early on purpose. To-morrow Kitty and I are coming to the house to tea, if you will have us, Almy. We want the Chair taken out, and the tassel-bags done up, and the Lowestoft cups. I'll wear my best dress, which

is a beauty. But now—may I help you dust? You used to let me—thanks! Best of Almys!”

Miss Almeria proffered a silk duster with fingers that trembled slightly. She and Johanna Ross had been intimates in girlhood; she had found it hard to forgive the slight put upon Cyrus by her friend in leaving it with no word of explanation. She now felt that there had been extenuating circumstances. She had never thought to have Johanna dusting with her again.

For some minutes they plied their delicate task in silence; then:

“*My stars!*” cried Miss Johanna. She turned with shining eyes, holding up a book. “Almeria! here is ‘Guy Livingstone’ behind the Manila envelopes, where I dropped him twenty years ago when you wanted to burn him. Precious tome! untidy girl! Where is your housekeeping?”

Her laugh rang out triumphantly; a delightful laugh, clear and bell-like as Kitty’s own.

Miss Almeria laughed, too. “I think you will find no dust on the volume, Johanna!” she said demurely. “I never thought it suitable for general circulation, as you are aware, but——”

Miss Johanna gave her a kind glance.

“But you kept it for naughty Johanna’s sake! That was very sweet of you, Almy. I’ll take it with me now, if you don’t mind. Ah! ‘I know men who would have given five years of life for the whisper that glided into his ear as he gave Miss Bellasys her candle on retiring, ten for the Parthian glance that shot its ar-

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row home.' Now *that* is the way to write, Almeria Bygood! Nobody writes like that nowadays."

Then with an abrupt change of tone, "I wanted to ask you one or two things, Almy. You have sense, even if you don't appreciate 'Guy Livingstone.' People like my Kitty, do they, Almeria?"

"Can you doubt it, Johanna? She is the idol of Cyrus. I express myself too strongly!" Miss Almeria corrected herself: "idolatry is not a—sentiment which—everybody loves her, Johanna! Who could possibly help it? She is the light of the place!"

The touch of frost melted away, and Miss Almeria glowed with tenderness.

"Good!" Miss Johanna nodded approbation. "She ought to be! She is a blessed little Christmas candle! And—a—about the driving, Almy! It hasn't—eh? People don't think—you know what I mean!"

"Perfectly!" Miss Almeria bent her stately head in comprehension. "At first, Johanna, there were a few criticisms; only a few, and those not from persons whose opinions carry any weight in the community. In general, Kitty has had from the first the respect as well as the affection of Cyrus. Her course was unusual, but the circumstances were unusual. You need have no fear, Johanna!"

"Because of course," Miss Johanna paused to straighten a calendar which was hanging awry; "of course there is no *need* of her driving, you know, Almy!"

"No need?" repeated Miss Almeria.

"None in the world! I have done very well; I

have plenty for both of us. But it was so good for her, and she was enjoying it so, I hadn't the heart to say 'Stop! Sit down, fold your hands, be a Young Lady of Cyrus'—Beg pardon, Almy! You know I always loved it, if it did stifle me!—when she was so gallant and having such a wonderful time. I pay enough to make it easy for her, *with* the business, you see. A single woman without a trade is a dog without a tail, my dear; you know that! What are you flashing at, Almeria Bygood? Have people been saying—*they have!* Transparency, thy name is Almy! They have been saying that I am—I suppose you would never speak to me again if I should say 'bumming' on Kitty!"

"The expression is new to me!" Miss Almeria stiffened for an instant, then flashed again.

"Of course, Josie—" the diminutive slipped out unaware—"Egeria and I—in fact, all your friends knew it was absurd to suppose for a moment that—that you would think of any such thing; but—well, you know there are persons, even in Cyrus, of suspicious nature; in short, my dear, I am glad to be able to make a positive statement to the effect——"

"Ah, but you aren't!" Johanna Ross turned a face a-twinkle with mischief.

"You aren't able to make any statement at all, Almy. I don't authorize it! No!" as Miss Almeria exclaimed, protesting. "You are not to say a single word. Let Cyrus sup full on my iniquities! My dear soul, when I say Cyrus in this sense, of course I mean the Sharpes, and I know as well as you that they are

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really Tinkham. So—Ah! here is Mr. Bygood! Good morning, Mr. Bygood! What can I offer you this morning? Something in the fancy line, my dear Sir? A looking-glass is what you need, to see how handsome you are. Oh! oh! if here is not Marsh Mal-low! Marshall, how *do you do?* How do you spell 'fish' nowadays? Do you remember, Almy? He thought 'Psyche' was the queerest way of spelling 'fish' that ever *he* saw. Ha! ha!"

Judge Peters was late that morning. He had been detained by various petty annoyances. First he had cut his chin while shaving; then Mary wanted to talk about the price of eggs, which was a scandal, and to explain at length why there had been a button off his shirt last week. A client had come blundering to the house instead of the office—*most* annoying!—with a flood of questions about stumpage and flowage, and a torrent of asseverations that he wasn't goin' to be put upon, nobody needn't think he was. No l'ywer had ever got the better of him yet, his teeth was all eye-teeth, and he didn't cut 'em yesterday neither, no, sir! Etc., etc., etc. Altogether the Judge had been tried, and was in great need of his morning paper, and a few minutes of sedate chat at Bygoods' before going to his office. On entering the familiar door he started; absolutely started! the quiet place was a-bubble with laughter. Mr. Bygood's high "Te-hee! oh, very neat! very neat! te-hee!" quavered above the rest, but they were all laughing. Miss Almeria's blue eyes were flashing with merriment, Miss Egeria's beaming softly, as she murmured, "*Most* diverting, I

am sure!" Mr. Jordano was waving his notebook in a state of excited rapture, while Mr. Mallow, his head thrown back, uttered sonorous bellows of laughter. Miss Johanna was telling stories. Standing erect, her back against the counter, trim and elegant in her purple broadcloth, she held them all spellbound. Her dark eyes shot sparkles of mirth; her whole countenance was alight with fun and mischief. At sight of the Judge's grave face in the doorway, a shadow swept over her own for a moment; their looks crossed gravely, not like swords; say, like heralds' staves! Next moment the lady was laughing again.

"Come in, Judge!" she cried. "Come in, Edward! Here I am, *Johanna rediviva!* We are having a Bygood reunion. There is one new boy!" she flashed a smile at Mr. Jordano, reducing him to the verge of fatuous idiocy; "the rest of us are all Bygood children, and Mr. Bygood is going to call the spelling class this minute. Go away, Kitty!" as Kitty's wondering face peeped in at the door. "This isn't the infant class. You are not born or thought of yet. Drive up and down the street a couple of times, will you, my dear? Or—say you meet me at Cheeseman's in fifteen minutes! I want some lemon drops."

Kitty, with a nod of comprehension, sped away; a little lonely at heart, seeing them all so merry. Youth was a sad time, it seemed; when one was entirely used to it, it would be different, she supposed. Then she caught sight of Lissy Wibird and Nelly Chanter posting along the street, laden with parcels from the General Store (Adamses' had no delivery; if

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folks wanted things, they could come and get 'em, was their view). Joyously signaling, Kitty drew up at the curbstone; swept the girls and their parcels into the wagon, and took them for a "perfectly delirious spin," as Nelly called it, along the Topham Causeway. It was nearer half an hour than fifteen minutes before she drew up at Cheeseman's, her pocket full of apologies for keeping her aunt waiting; when, behold, the said aunt coming slowly down the street, Judge Peters beside her. The laughter had died out of Miss Johanna's face; she looked gravely downward, listening to her companion, whose face was equally grave. Kitty wondered; might have wondered more, had she overheard their words.

"I shall come very soon!" said the Judge. "You will find me unchanged, Johanna, in every respect."

"I am glad to hear it, Edward!" Miss Johanna gave a glance half sad, half quizzical, at the Judge's handsome iron-gray hair; "I have never found the Fountain of Youth; I am an old woman, simply and frankly."

"You are pleased to say so!" the Judge bowed courteously. "I have never measured sentiment by the calendar; nor do I find," the Judge's deep voice trembled slightly, "that Memory has lost any of her charm. With your permission, Johanna, I will call to-morrow evening."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Miss Johanna. "Yes, do, Edward; I shall be delighted to see you, and so will Kitty. Here I am, child! Had you given me up? We had to recite our history lesson, as well as spelling.

Johanna Rediviva

'King Canute reproved his flatterers and bade them perceive that he was unable to keep back the rising tide——' "

"*Quite so!*" said the Judge. "I wish you good morning, Johanna. Kitty, my love, your most obedient!"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Miss Johanna again as they entered the shop. "What is it Peggotty says? 'Drat the man!' Oh, how do you do, Mr. Cheeseman? You have been growing steadily younger for twenty years, I do believe!"

CHAPTER XV

LARGELY LITERARY

PEOPLE do!" said Kitty
"Do what?" asked Dan in an affectionate sniff. "Give a person an apple?"

"Yes, my Angel Poppet!"

Kitty reached for an apple—John Tucker kept a shelf of them handy by the stalls—gave it to Dan and ate one herself for company.

(There should be a digression here on Kitty eating an apple; how she succeeded in looking prettier than usual during the—as a rule—unbecoming process; how daintily she set her teeth into it, taking little pretty bites; how well her teeth matched the clear white as it broke crisply from the red. If Dan were writing this story, he would make such digression!)

"There is no need of snorting and sneezing over *every* crunch, Beloved! I know it is good: apples in May! John Tucker is very extravagant. But I meant matchmaking, Daniel dear. Do you think it is *ever* allowable?"

Daniel refused to commit himself; hinted delicately that another apple might aid him in forming an opinion.

"You see—" Kitty did not speak aloud; she was

sure Dan understood pats just as well—"you see, Beloved, there is no sense in Bobby's going about looking sorrowful, when there is a perfectly dear, sweet girl, worth three of me, who—well, I know what I *think*, Dan dear! and I won't say I am probably mistaken as her mother does—and *is!*—and they are both *just* as nice as they can be, you know they are, and just the right age for each other, and he two inches taller and all; and I do think she has a rather horrid time at home, Dan dear! Just *think* of having to live perpetually with the tenth and last Wilson Wimberley Wibird! Poor creature; I wonder *what* Mr. Jordano said to him that day! He has not been near me since. And Mrs. Wibird is pretty lamenting, somehow; oh dear! and I'm afraid they haven't much to do with, Dan dear!"

Dan nodded thrice at this, whereupon Kitty told him he was a gossip, and she wondered at him; kissed his velvet nose and departed, thoughtful. She was on her way to the Library, to get books for Aunt Johanna, that lady being in frivolous mood, and demanding certain mid-Victorian novels which, when published, had caused Shudders. It was natural to step into the stable; she almost always did, whenever she was going out, in whatever direction. It seemed also natural (at least it had grown to be no uncommon thing) that Bobby Chanter should join her at the corner and be going to the Library, too. Wednesday, he explained, looking rather sheepish; funny thing, but there were some books they had here that the college library did not possess. They paced along

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together, the two young creatures, talking quietly of books. Bobby did not care much for books, but Kitty liked them, he knew. What had he been reading? she asked. Besides study books, of course! They took most of his time, no doubt, but one had always to have a book on hand.

“Oh, yes!” said Bobby rather forlornly. “I’ve got a book; Mother gave it to me at Christmas. I’ve read quite a lot of it. I don’t remember its name. I’m not sure who wrote it; think it was a chap—oh! here we are!”

Could it be possible that Bobby felt for once the slightest shade of relief on arriving at the Library? Kitty knew such an awful lot! he reflected ruefully, and he was such a duffer!

At sight of the pair, Melissa looked up, and blushed as pink as the ribbon at her neat collar. Melissa was very pretty when she blushed, Kitty thought; a little color was all she needed; how unreasonable that one could not paint without immediately adding “Jezebel” to one’s name!

“‘Breaking a Butterfly,’ Lissy, please! Now don’t tell me you never heard of it, because I am perfectly sure Bobby never did, and that makes three of us.”

“I never did, Kitty, honestly I didn’t. I don’t believe it’s in the library, unless it is one of those old, *old* ones that haven’t been catalogued yet. Old Mrs. Spooner left them to us, you know. They are in the inner room, waiting to be catalogued. I can’t seem to get time——”

“I’ll go look; may I? And, oh, Bobby, do you

want to be a *perfect* angel and look up *Orchis Spectabilis* in Gray? We had such a dispute last night, Aunt Johanna and I! She says its habitat is—well, find out for me, there's a dear!"

Kitty vanished into the inner room, leaving the other two staring blankly at each other.

"Spec—*what* did she say, Bobby?"

"*Spectabilis!*" Bobby spoke hardily, as became a Corona senior, though he had not "taken" Latin since his first year in High School. "Respectable, I think it means; something bound in gray, she said. Let's see what there is in gray, Lissy! Here's the Life of Hannah More; that would be respectable, what?"

"I don't believe she means that!"

Melissa was fluttering very prettily. It was a most wonderful thing to be alone with Bobby in the Library, where she so often dreamed of him, little wistful gray dreams with only here and there a gleam of rose-color! How tall he was, how handsome, how strong! how like that beautiful bust! and Melissa glanced at the Olympian Hermes. Well, Bobby's hair did curl, but otherwise—

"I don't believe she means that," Melissa repeated. "Nobody has ever taken that out since I've been here. I looked into it once, dusting, you know; it looked awfully poky. Perhaps——" Melissa put forth the suggestion timidly, "she meant Gray was the person who wrote it. There's the *Elegy*, you know!"

"Of course!" Bobby responded heartily. "Sure thing! 'Curfew shall not ring to-night!' We learned that at High School, didn't we, Lissy?" He smiled

kindly on the girl. "Gray's the chap; trot him out!"

Melissa had not the heart to correct him. How could she? Why should she? Men didn't have to know poetry, except ministers, she supposed, and the like of that. She meekly brought the works of Thomas Gray, and they looked through them together, making a very pretty picture, Kitty thought, as she peeped through the crack of the door. Bobby's fair hair—all men ought to have fair hair, of course—was bent over Melissa's little dark head, both looking at the same page. He sighed, which Kitty thought distinctly encouraging.

"Seems rather piffle, doesn't it?" asked the youth dolefully, looking up from "The Progress of Poesy." "Kitty knows an awful lot about books, doesn't she, Lissy? I suppose you do, too!"

"Oh, *no!*" Melissa replaced Gray with a look of relief. "I ought to, Bobby, but I don't. I love a good story, and I read travels some, and the like of that, but—oh, no! I don't begin—why, Kitty ought to be librarian here, by good rights. She knows an *awful* lot, simply awful. Why, she takes out books that no one else ever looks at, and reads 'em same as she would a detective story. Have you read 'The Hollow Needle,' Bobby?"

"Yes! Great, isn't it? Say, have you got any of his stuff? You never can get hold of one at Corona; they're out all the time. That chap is top-hole, no mistake."

When Kitty next peeped out, the two were surrounded by the works of a certain popular author.

Bobby was discoursing upon their various merits, Melissa hanging on his words. Should she slip away and leave them together? Perhaps hardly, the first time. A glance at the clock showed that it was nearly closing time; at the same moment voices were heard in the entrance hall. Kitty slipped back into the main room and joined her two companions in time to greet Nelly Chanter and an attendant swain, also a Corona student, who came in quest of "something good to read!" Nelly fell instantly into what Kitty and I called Chanterics, embracing her friend with an ardor which made the two youths blink and blush.

"You darling *Thing!* I haven't seen you for forty years! Between my teaching and your driving, Kitty, I *never* see you! Except when you pick me up and give me a delicious turn, like an Angel, as you did the other day. How do, Lissy? How do, Bobby? Kitty, this is Mr. Myers, Bobby's roommate. He was at the Party, you know. Oh, and let me introduce Miss Wibird, Joe! I never *do* know how to introduce, do you? he! he! I should have introduced him to her, shouldn't I, Kitty?"

"We might all begin over again," said Kitty. "I am sure Mr. Chanter has never been introduced to me! Mr. Chanter, I am glad to have the honor of making your acquaintance!"

It takes little to amuse Youth. The Library, fortunately empty of readers, rang with shouts of glee.

"Isn't she killing?" whispered Nelly to her companion. "She's just as witty as she can be, *all* the time. She knows a most terrible lot, too, but you'd

never know it, she's so darling and nice. Kitty, do tell us something good to read! Not deep things, you know. Mr. Myers has to read enough deep things at Corona, don't you, Mr. Myers? Ha! ha!"

Kitty laughed bravely with them, wondering why she was not amused. She must be growing old. She named at random the latest work of a great English novelist. Nelly exclaimed in dismay.

"Oh, Kitty, that's awfully deep, you know it is. Why, it's just *full* of religion and politics. Isn't there anything of Summer Sweeting's in? Don't you *love* her books? I cried *quarts* over 'My Burnished Dove': perfect *quarts*! Do you think Summer Sweeting is her own name or a *nom de plume*?"

"Too much sweetening for me!" said Bobby gruffly: one didn't have to make believe when it was one's sister. "I wouldn't give one of Sherlock Holmes for all she ever wrote."

"That's right!" chimed in Mr. Myers. "I don't stand for crying when you don't have to, what?"

"Oh, Joe! I *love* a sweet, sad book! Don't you love a sweet, sad book, Kitty? Who is your *favorite* author, Joe? I've often meant to ask you."

Unconsciously, Nelly's voice dropped a little; her blue eyes rested tenderly on the open countenance of Mr. Myers, known to his mates as "Jometry Joe," owing to certain exploits of his in the region of higher mathematics. Mr. Myers looked thoughtful.

"Of course, Ralph Henry Barbour used to be," he said, "and they're ripping good books still, but I suppose I read more novels now. I guess there's no one

to beat old Sherlock, though Fu Manchu runs him close."

The talk ranged far and wide through the realm of "Thrillers." At five o'clock, Kitty proposed that they should all come home with her for a cup of tea and some of Sarepta's scones, which she had just been baking.

Accordingly, they closed the Library, with much merriment of mock formality and many friendly gibes from the lads at the Learned Ladies of Cyrus. Nelly's swain understood that Miss Wibird read the Encyclopedia through every year; was that so? Yes, Bobby assured him; but Miss Ross went her one better, and read it in French. Haw! haw! New shouts of mirth from both gentlemen at these subtle witticisms; tinkling peals of laughter from Melissa and Nelly. Kitty laughed, too, feeling motherly and benignant. What babes they were!

"But I keep my accounts in Russian," she said gravely, "and say my prayers in Siamese."

"Haw, haw! Oh, I *say!*" gasped the collegians. "That is rich! Russian and Siamese! I bet she does, what?"

Crossing the Common, the path narrowed, so that only two could walk abreast. Half consciously, Kitty stepped ahead; the others followed, two by two. This being seen of John Tucker, who chanced to be exercising Pilot at the moment, that calm personage straightway seemed to fall into a rage. He muttered a pious execration and unconsciously tightened the

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reins; Pilot shot ahead like a rocket, demanding with ears and voice to know what was the matter.

"Stiddy, boy! stiddy!" muttered John Tucker. "Ca'm down, now. I didn't mean to rouse ye up. Them young idjits! lettin' her walk alone, and struttin' an' gigglin' along with Lissy Wibird and Nell Chanter—great hemlock! Well, stretch out a bit if you're a mind to; do us both good, I expect."

Sarepta Darwin, paring apples at the kitchen window, saw the little procession coming across the Common. A spark crept into her pale blue eyes; she dropped her knife and hastened to the front of the house. When Kitty, still motherly and benignant, led her guests up the front garden path, the door opened; Sarepta stood there, erect, austere, as if she opened the door invariably, instead of on the rare occasions when she happened to feel like it.

"Why, Sarepta, how nice of you!" said Kitty, surprised "Did you see us coming? This way, boys and girls!"

She was about to enter the sitting-room, but Sarepta intervened.

"*This way!*" she said briefly, and indicated the Other Parlor, across the hall. Now the Other Parlor was a charming room in itself: with delicate moldings, and hangings of rose-color and pale gray; with cases of family miniatures, and delightful old pastels; but somehow, one did not sit there often; it was just a shade formal, a trifle austere. And after all, why should one ever sit anywhere except in the Sitting Room? Kitty opened her eyes wide with, "*Why,*

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Sarepta?" but encountered a glance of such icy command that as she told Nelly afterward, she could hear the ice crackling in her spinal marrow.

"This way!" repeated Sarepta. "Your aunt has company in there!" And as Kitty, wondering more and more, shepherded the young people meekly into the Other Parlor, a steely whisper hissed in her ear, "Judge Peters—on business!"

CHAPTER XVI

PSYCHO-CARDIAC PROCESSES

KITTY was so pleased with her little party, and so interested in seeing how many cheesecakes and hot scones the boys could eat ("There were four dozen of them cakes, I counted as I laid them out," Sarepta announced grimly at supper. "There's one apiece left for you two folks, and that's *all* there is. If I was their Mas, I'd give 'em a portion of physic and put 'em to bed!") that she hardly noticed Judge Peters's quiet departure. When the young people reluctantly followed a little later, Kitty stood at the window of the Other Parlor, watching them with shining eyes. Melissa and Bobby walked together; well, they had to, of course, with that nice Myers boy so wrapped up in Nelly; dear Nelly! Kitty was *so* glad! But Bobby's back was really interested, his shoulders *most* attentive; and he did not once turn round to see if she were standing at the window. He always had, up to now, though of course she never let him see her. Now—of course he would walk home with Lissy; and then—there was no train back to Corona before the eight-thirty—if Lissy would only ask him in to supper!

"Because," said Kitty aloud, "you see, if one could

make some one else—some *two* else—happy, perhaps it would not hurt so much; do you think?"

Lissy *did* ask him in to supper, in a rapture of wishfulness, in an anguish of terror lest there should not be enough, lest he should not like creamed fish and baked potatoes. Bobby hesitated, guessed the folks were expecting him at home; caught the glance of the sweet brown eyes, and yielded. There *was* enough; the simple refecton proved to be his favorite supper. He ate as if cheesecakes and scones had never existed for him; ate till Lissy glowed with delight over her own humming-bird's portion; till even Mrs. Wibird felt a thin stream of cordiality stealing through her poor chilly little heart, and fetched the plateful set aside for Wilson, mentally promising him "a good scramble," which he really liked better.

"Gee!" said Master Bobby, surveying the total residue of two prunes and one molasses cooky, as he pushed his chair back; "I hope Wilse gets supper with Uncle Marsh, Mrs. Wibird. I don't seem to have left much, do I? Mother always says my legs are hollow!"

Still with that thread of warmth curling about her heart, Mrs. Wibird hesitated a moment after leaving the table. For the first time (except a brief space when Lissy had croup) her house of maternal instinct was divided against itself. She had always sacrificed Lissy, as she had herself, to every wish of her son's. Wilson was so particular, he had to have things just so, or it went to his liver, and made him bilious! He commonly occupied the sitting-room in

the evening; he let her and Melissa creep in with their sewing, and sit in the corner, but callers disturbed him. Could she—*how* could she?

She glanced at Bobby, cheerfully unconscious; then at her daughter, flushing, fluttering, the meek little drudge transfigured for the moment. Her own youth rose up within her and struck.

“You take Robert into the sitting-room, Lissy!” she said. “You can light the stove if it’s chilly. I’ll wash the dishes; you go right along!”

Oh, blissful hour in the little stuffy sitting-room, which yet was chilly this May evening! Oh, friendly blinking of that one red eye of the baseburner stove! Bobby, comforted by supper, conscious of tender sympathy fluttering by his side in the low rocking chair, waxed confidential; told of college pranks, of contests on ball fields and on the river. Lissy hung on his lips: her own were parted, her breath came quick; she thought he must hear the beating of her heart. Her cries of wonder and admiration warmed him still further. His voice dropped to a lower note. It was awfully nice of Lissy to care. It was ripping to have some one to talk to; he was awfully lonely sometimes! Bobby! Bobby! with three sisters, all a-quiver to share the treasure of your heart—never mind! These things must be.

“I’ve been awfully unhappy, too, lately!” said Bobby. “Nobody knows, but——”

Out it all came! His love, his hopes, “seeing Tom was out of the running, or so everybody said,” his bitter disappointment. Out it all poured in a flood;

and little Lissy heard it all with tear-brimmed eyes, with clasped hands, and soft ejaculations of pity, of sympathy, of wonder that was almost anger. How could Kitty? How *could* she?

"But it is all over now!" Bobby rose and straightened his shoulders manfully. "Of course there will never be any one like her in the world, but I promised I would never say anything more, and I never will. As she says, there's lots to life even if one isn't happy; and she thinks we ought not to stand for kicking because things are the way they are: not that she put it just that way. And I shall be real glad to have you for a sister, Lissy, and I'll tell you everything. You must tell me things, too!" Mr. Chanter added as an afterthought, reaching for his hat. "I'm sure you must have lots of things; good-night, Lissy!"

He took her hand; hesitated a moment, and then took the other.

"Good-night, Sister Lissy! What soft little hands you have! What makes them shake so? I mustn't keep you standing here in the cold!"

Still he hesitated, holding the little hands in his. How they trembled! How they seemed to nestle in his! Kitty shook hands like another chap: her wrists were like steel. Well, of course, driving that way, she had to be strong. It was very pleasant to hold the little trembling hands; if they were to be brother and sister—perhaps? The girls were always bothering him to kiss them—Bobby decided it would be "too cheeky for the first time," and finally departed,

warmer about the heart than he had felt since Madam Flynt's party.

And Melissa? I believe her little cold attic glowed that night with all the warmth and light of paradise, and that she went to sleep lulled by the sound of silver bells.

Kitty turned away happily from her window, and crossed the hall to the sitting-room, humming under her breath.

"What *is* that tune you are forever humming, child?" Miss Johanna looked up from her knitting.

"The Duke of Lee?" Oh, it's an old, old English song and dance. Mother used to sing it, don't you remember? And Tommy and I used to dance it: he was the Duke of Lee, and I was the gentlewoman of high qualitee. Surely you remember! How handsome you look, Aunt Johanna!"

"Fiddlededee!" said Aunt Johanna; she got up and poked the fire. It was true none the less. The lady was slightly flushed; her dark eyes were very bright; the purple broadcloth, with touches of gold about the bodice, was extremely becoming; certainly she was a handsome woman.

"It's true!" said Kitty. "Just look in the glass and see if it isn't! I wonder the dear Judge managed to go at all, with you looking so, and the violets smelling so, and the fire crackling so, and—he might have waited to see me!" Kitty was hovering over the bowl of violets, drawing deep breaths of fragrance. "Business, Sarepta said. Nothing wrong, I hope, Auntie?"

"N-no!" said Miss Johanna, slowly and medita-

tively. "Nothing precisely wrong that I know of. Nothing half as wrong as this knitting!" she added briskly. "Come here, child! You and Sarepta Darwin together having accomplished this atrocity of teaching me to knit, are bound to see me through. I seem to have done something queer here!"

Kitty sat down beside her on the leather sofa, and for some minutes both were absorbed in the mysteries of purling, compared with which, Miss Johanna declared, those of Eleusis were kindergarten play.

"That's a ridiculous tune!" she remarked presently. "It keeps jiggling through my head so, I can't keep my feet still. So you used to dance it with Tommy Lee. Tommy was a nice boy; I always liked him. Do you ever hear from him, Kitty?"

"No," said Kitty quietly. "I believe he is doing very well—Mr. Chanter heard of him last winter from a friend who had met him in the West—but I don't know that any one has heard directly."

She did not add that, according to Cissy Sharpe, "they claimed" that Tom Lee had married the widow of a cattle king, and was spending millions on a marble palace overlooking the Golden Gate; she did not believe this, but it hurt, somehow. If he would only write a line; a postal card even! Cissy had heard it in Tinkham; she fixed greedy eyes on Kitty as she spoke. Millions of money, they claimed! A handsome woman, ten years older than what he was. She presumed Kitty knew more about it than what she did; ha! ha!

"There!" Kitty handed Miss Johanna her knitting

and took up her own. "That's all clear, dear. Now knit straight on, ten rows, and then I'll show you about the neck."

A long silence followed, broken only by clicking needles and purring fire. Presently Miss Johanna spoke, abruptly:

"Elderly marriages are *ridiculous!* Grandpa Westcott to the contrary notwithstanding. *Ridiculous!*"

Kitty started, then looked up wondering. "Are they?" she said vaguely. "And what about Grandpa Westcott, Aunt Johanna?"

Miss Johanna looked a little confused. "My dear," she said, "I was just thinking aloud. I was in a referee, as old Mr. Weller says. Nothing of importance; and then I thought of Grandpa Westcott; that's all!"

"Did he elderly marry?" Kitty roused herself with a little effort. *If it were true, what did anything else matter?* But that was no reason why she should be an unsociable curmudgeon.

"Tell me about him, Aunt Jo! dear Father never had time to tell me family stories, and blessed Mother didn't know them, I suppose. Let's have a good tell now!"

She looked up brightly. Miss Johanna returned the smile, not quite with her usual crisp composure. Her fine eyebrows lifted and knitted in a curious little way they had when she was disturbed; her laugh rang not wholly clear.

"I certainly cannot leave you in ignorance about Grandpa Westcott's third marriage!" she said. "I wonder at John; but he never cared about Family.

Little White Lily didn't know, of course. *Her* grandfather was an archangel and her grandmother a seraph; good gracious! Suppose Egeria should hear me! Well, my dear, you shall have your 'tell'; I have brought it upon myself."

Miss Johanna paused to pick up a brand with the tongs and lay it carefully on top of the back-log. Kitty, turning the heel of her stocking, prepared for a pleasant season. She loved "tells," and Aunt Johanna was the ideal story-teller.

"Grandpa Westcott," the lady began, "my great, your great-great, was one of the best men that ever lived. I remember him well; tall, dignified, handsome: the only person I ever saw in a queue. He had had two wives, both patterns in every way. The first—she was a Siddall of Trimount, and a Beauty—the Stuart portrait—had no children and died young. The second was my grandmother, Katharine Turner; you are named for her, of course, and you look like her. She was not altogether plain, either," said Miss Johanna dryly, with a glance at the lovely face that smiled down from the wall in an exquisite pastel. "She had four children and lived to see them all grown up and settled in life, and to be the delight of her grandchildren's hearts. Then, when she was sixty and Grandpa seventy, she died quite suddenly, and Grandpa went all to pieces. Naturally! he was a very affectionate man, and for fifty years he had been told every day what to eat, drink and avoid, what shirt to put on, and where his socks were. More than that, he had been *listened to*, which is the most neces-

sary thing for a man. He mourned and he moaned, he moaned and he mourned, till at last old Delia, who had been with him thirty of the fifty years, sent to the City for Uncle Doctor. I can just remember old Delia. She had large white teeth, and used to let me scribble on them with a pencil: *horrid* child! She sang old Irish songs as no one else ever did: I wish you could have heard her sing, 'Irish Molly O!'"

Miss Johanna broke off to sing, in a high, clear little voice:

"'She's galliant, she's beautiful,
She's the fairest one I know;
She's the primrose of Ireland,
All for my guinea, oh!
And the only one entices me
Is Irish Molly O,
Molly O!'"

"Well! So Delia sent for Uncle Doctor, and he came. 'Mr. Doctor,' she said, 'your Da is looking for his dead clo'es. If you don't find a woman for him to marry, I'll have to marry him myself, and fine I'd look cocking in the parlor, d'ye see?'"

"'Bless my soul!' says Uncle Doctor, 'I see. I'll attend to it, Delia.'"

"So Delia went back to her pots and pans, and Uncle Doctor, after thinking a little, went down the street and called on Aunt Elizabeth. Aunt Elizabeth was Grandma's sister; they were like a pair of gloves, only she was a single woman.

"'Auntie,'" says Uncle Doctor, 'would you mind marrying Father?'"

"'Bless my soul, Nathaniel!' says Aunt Elizabeth. So he told her what Delia said, and they talked it over. She was a sensible woman and fond of Grandpa. By and by, back he goes to Grandpa. 'Father,' he says, 'I want you to put on your hat and go down street and ask Aunt Elizabeth to marry you.'

"'Bless my soul!' says Grandpa. 'She wouldn't have me, Nathaniel!'

"'I think she would,' says Uncle Doctor.

"'And what would Katharine say?' says Grandpa.

"'She would say, "Put on your hat, and *don't forget your muffler.*"'

"So Uncle Doctor put on the hat and muffler for him and saw him out of the door, headed down street; and he and Aunt Elizabeth were married next day, and had ten happy years together. So there is *that.*"

Miss Johanna rolled up her knitting briskly, and rose from her seat. "But one swallow doesn't make a summer, Kitty, and one pair of old f— of dear old things doesn't make folly the less foolish. I am going upstairs, my dear. If you are watering the plants, you might just change the water for those violets: they are drooping a little."

"Dear things! so they are!" Kitty rose, too, and bent lovingly over the bowl. "The new ones are due to-morrow, aren't they, Auntie?"

"I don't know anything about the new ones!"

Miss Johanna spoke rather snappishly from the door.

"We may all be dead to-morrow, and very likely the best thing for us. They would be nice for our

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funerals!" she added rather enigmatically from the stairs: and the door of the Red Indian Room closed shortly behind her.

Judge Peters seemed to have a good deal of business to transact with Miss Johanna. He came regularly once a week, almost always during the hour of Madam Flynt's drive. This puzzled Kitty, used all her life to being the Judge's pet and playmate. He could not be vexed with her, for his smile and greeting when they met was as affectionate as ever, even more so perhaps. He pressed her hand very tenderly on the steps one day, and said, "God bless you, my dear child!" in a way that brought the tears to Kitty's eyes. Yet he never came to see *her* nowadays!

"I do hope Aunt Johanna's business is all right!" she said to Madam Flynt one day, when that lady had brought her in after the drive for a little visit.

"I hope so!" said Madam Flynt. "Why shouldn't it be? Johanna is an excellent woman of business, I have always heard."

"Oh, it's only—well, Judge Peters comes pretty often, and—it may be all my imagination, but she seems rather troubled sometimes after he is gone. I ought not to speak of this, perhaps, but—Mother always used to come to you, didn't she, Madam Flynt?"

Madam Flynt took off her gold spectacles to wipe her eyes.

"She did, my dear. That sweetest flower of all the world used to bring her little troubles to me: she never had any big ones, bless her! she didn't like to

bother John about the price of butter, she said. She called me her Cousin Confessor; as if she ever had anything to confess! But about Johanna—wait a moment, my dear!”

The door opened, and Miss Croly appeared with the inevitable milk posset.

“I will take it in ten minutes, Cornelia. I am busy now.”

“It is the regular hour——” Miss Croly began mildly; but she was cut short.

“I will take it in ten minutes!” Madam Flynt raised her voice, a rare thing with her. “There is a gazelle in the garden, Cornelia!”

Miss Croly vanished without a word. Kitty opened wondering eyes; Madam Flynt waved her hand.

“She understands. We have our private code, my dear. Though exasperating at times, Cornelia Croly is no fool. She will be back in ten minutes. Kitty, my child——” Madam Flynt spoke with kindly emphasis—“don’t be disturbed about your Aunt Johanna and the Judge. They know each other like two old shoes.”

“Of course! I was only afraid——”

“You needn’t be afraid. You would be glad, I should think, wouldn’t you? Edward Peters is the very salt of the earth, and he has been in love with her all his life. It’s the Cyrus way!” Madam Flynt added rather pettishly. “One-idea’d people: that’s why they are mostly spinsters and bachelors. *Well*, Kitty! What is it?”

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Kitty had risen from her low stool, pale and wide-eyed.

"You don't mean," she faltered; "Madam Flynt, you cannot mean that they——"

Madam Flynt nodded her cap-ribbons into a perfect dance of triumph. "I mean that they are probably going to marry each other," she announced. "I certainly hope they are! Why upon earth shouldn't they? Kitty, do you suppose the affections run down like a clock if they are not wound up in the early twenties? Nothing of the sort! A man of sixty needs a wife as much as a boy of twenty; more, in many cases! And if ever," she added emphatically, "a woman needed a sensible man to take care of her, and keep the bees out of her bonnet, that woman is Johanna Ross! There! Give me a kiss, my dear, and then run along, and tell Cornelia Croly, as you go, that she may bring in her noxious draught. She doesn't sleep at night if I don't take it regularly. Most exasperating woman—and, Kitty!" she called the girl back to add impressively; "if you meet your Uncle Edward on the steps to-day give *him* a kiss, and tell him you are thankful for your mercies!"

Was Madam Flynt in league with Occult Powers? An already sufficiently bewildered Kitty did meet Judge Peters on the steps, just coming out of Ross House. Some strong emotion had broken up his usual courtly calm; his face was suffused, his eyes shone.

"Kitty!" he cried. "Kitty, I——" He bent and kissed her forehead. "She will tell you!" he murmured, with a gesture toward the house. "Blessed,—

blessed——” He waved his hand, almost (poor Kitty thought) like Mr. Jordano, and departed with long, hasty strides.

Kitty hesitated a moment at the sitting-room door, dreading she hardly knew what. Strong emotions shook her like a leaf in these days, she did not ask herself why.

“Foolish creature!” she murmured.

She need have had no fear; Miss Johanna was pale, and her eyes showed traces of tears, but she was entirely calm.

“Sit down, Kitty, my dear!” she said. “Here, by me, on the sofa. I have something to tell you. Do you remember my quoting Peggotty the other day? Barkis was willin’, you know, and David didn’t understand the message; ‘Drat the man! he wants to marry me,’ said Peggotty. Well, my child, drat the Judge, he wants to marry me! I haven’t spoken of it before, because if I had decided to say no, there would have been no occasion; but he is the most obstinate man I ever saw, in his quiet way; so—I have said yes, Kitty. I told you, didn’t I, it is he who has sent the violets all these years? You needn’t smother me, my dear!”

Kitty had her in her arms, exclaiming, caressing, laughing and crying, all at once.

“Auntie! Darling, wicked, deceitful Auntie! What a blind bat I have been! I was afraid—oh! I am so glad, so glad! But you always said you didn’t know who sent them.”

“I didn’t—exactly—*know!* I only felt at the back

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of my head that it was probably Edward; he is that kind of faithful, doggy person. It's perfectly ridiculous, as I said. And—*my stars!*” Miss Johanna was all in a moment her crispest, most incisive self. “There is no possible thing that a woman of fifty can be married in except gray or lavender, and I look like a blown-out tallow dip in either of 'em. Run after him, Kitty, and tell him I've changed my mind!”

CHAPTER XVII

KITTY SINGS

MISS JOHANNA decided finally on moss-green.

"It's emblematic, you see!" she explained to the Misses Bygood, who had come in state and their best summer silks ("a *little* early for them," Miss Almeria admitted, "but something festal—Johanna will appreciate our motive!") to offer their best wishes.

"Our congratulations," Miss Almeria said impressively, "are for Edward."

Miss Johanna raised her eyebrows. "Poor Edward!" she said. "Do you remember John's remark to Mrs. Pringle when Emmy was engaged? 'I congratulate you, ma'am, on this auspicious and desolating event!' As I was saying, girls, moss-green is not only becoming to me, it is also emblematic. Green is for hope, which springs eternal, you know; moss is appropriate for age. Velvet, because Edward swears he won't marry me in anything else—*no*, Gerie; *don't* look like that! because he likes it, and I may as well do *something* to please him while I can. I am sorry for Edward, but he has brought it upon himself."

"Johanna is jesting, sister!" Miss Almeria explained

kindly. "We consider Edward an exceptionally fortunate man, Johanna!"

"You are dears, both of you!" Miss Johanna's eyes softened, and she spoke in a different tone from her usual half-gibing utterance. "I am very happy, girls, and very thankful, as I ought to be. And—don't tell, but, when we come back, I am going to *try* not to be peculiar any more. Only everybody will say I was changed at marriage!" she added ruefully. "Do you suppose Cyrus will think me all the more peculiar for trying not to be?" (As a matter of fact, this is precisely what Cyrus did think; but this is to anticipate.)

It was a very quiet wedding, only the few old friends who had stood by Johanna Ross through all her wayward years, and one new one. Mr. Jordano, the bride insisted, must be present. She felt like a criminal in not having a Real Wedding for Cyrus, but Edward could not abide weddings; you would think he had had a dozen already. The least they could do was to have it written up in style, and that this Delicious Creature was sure to do. Mr. Jordano did not know that he was a Delicious Creature, but he did know that Opportunity beckoned, and he rose to it. Fortunately the wedding took place the day before the weekly appearance of the *Centinel*, and Cyrus read over its breakfast with mingled feelings, of the Event which only a "select party of choice spirits," as Mr. Jordano put it, had the privilege of attending. (Not that Mrs. Sharpe wondered; far from it. Marrying at that age, Johanna Ross naturally would not wish to have any more witnesses than were absolutely neces-

sary: Mrs. Sharpe for one was thankful to be spared such a spectacle.) The Scribe had been one of the fortunate few bidden to attend the nuptials of Miss Johanna Ross, a lady who, though long absent from our midst, was admired and revered by all who had the privilege of her acquaintance, and our highly-esteemed and justly celebrated fellow citizen and jurist, the Hon. Edward Peters, Justice of the Supreme Bench. The ceremony had taken place in the elegant and commodious mansion of the late Dr. Ross, now the abode of his charming and talented daughter, Miss Katharine Ross, whose reputation as an equestrienne of the highest order had spread far beyond the limits of Cyrus and environs. The spacious parlors of Ross House were tastily adorned with ferns, emerald moss (to which, it appeared, the bride was specially addicted) and violets, the latter in such profusion as to lade the ambient air with perfumes of Araby the blest. The bride, a superb brunette, wore a confection of moss-green velvet with gold garniture, and resembled, if Italio might take the liberty, a rare jewel in an emerald chalice. (Mr. Jordano had written "cup" at first; but he liked to murmur his copy aloud as he wrote; and "cup-pup-pup" struck harshly on his ear. He was in sensitive mood; a tail seemed to wag in the corner of his eye. "Chalice" came as a happy and satisfying inspiration.)

"The bride (we read over the shoulder of Cyrus, which is letting its coffee grow cold!) "was attended only by her niece, Miss Katharine Ross, who was indeed a vision for the Poet's eye. Simply gowned in

filmy white, and which enclosed as fair a form as ever endowed nymph or grace, the effect was *distingué* beyond the simple pen of the Scribe to relate. The ceremony (with ring) was performed by the Reverend Timothy Chanter, who appeared in full regalia of black silk, and was accompanied by Mrs. Chanter in brown poplin with self trimmings of velvet. The Misses Bygood wore flowered silk, with a profusion of priceless lace, and were as ever the peers of grace and beauty; no eye could gaze on them unmoved." (Mr. Jordano sighed heavily after writing this, and murmured, "Almeria, to thee!" in unconscious imitation of Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton.) "Madam Flynt was sumptuously attired in lilac brocade and diamonds, Miss Croly in purple silk. Mr. Marshall Mallow, the genial Mine Host of the Mallow House, and the humble Scribe who pens this tribute from a feeling heart, made up a party which must ever esteem itself fortunate in having been chosen to participate in an Event which, though characterized by chaste severity and exclusiveness, will ever dwell in the mind as an Acme of elegance. At the conclusion of the ceremony, exquisite refreshments were served in receptacles of priceless porcelain and cut glass. It was whispered in the ear of the Scribe that everything was made in the house. Cyrus is, indeed, fortunate in possessing a culinary artist of such dimensions as Miss Sarepta Darwin, to whom, if Italio were rightly informed, is due the credit of the truly superlative repast enjoyed by the guests."

Sarepta read this next morning, and sniffed.

"What did the man expect?" she asked of Kitty, who had brought the paper out to her. "What d'he think I'd been doin' for forty years? The idea!" but she cut the item out none the less, and pasted it in her scrapbook.

So Judge Peters won the lady of his faithful heart, and carried her off for a summer in Europe: (there was a Europe in those days, not yet become a place of blood and tears!) "And now," said Cyrus hopefully, "perhaps Kitty will come and live with us!"

To be exact, it was only the Chanter girls and Mr. Mallow who said this. Madam Flynt and the Misses Bygood knew better; so did the bride, who checked her Edward's affectionate hope, expressed to Kitty at parting, with "Nonsense, Ned! Kitty will stay in her own house. She would be a great fool if she didn't."

Kitty cried a good deal after her aunt left. She missed the brusque, incisive speech, the odd, kindly ways. The house seemed very lonely, very silent; though of course it was just as dear. She was so glad they were going to be happy together, those two dear people! There would be no more violets now, she supposed. Ridiculous that here an absurd crystal tear dropped on the shining leaf of the orange-tree Kitty was watering: tears came so easily nowadays, when she was not really sad at all, only—only——

If Tom were really married, what did anything else matter? If he were! Kitty did not actually believe it. There were many people who did not write letters; but to marry, without a word or a line, after—she

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caught her breath, seeing his face as he took leave of her that day, so long—oh, so long ago!

“I shall find you here when I come back, Kitty? You—you’ll wait——”

Some one came in: next moment he was gone. That was all. *If he were really married——*

The curious thing was, songs came as easily as tears. She had not sung since her mother’s death, till just lately; but now, for all her sadness, which of course was not really sadness, song bubbled within her like a fountain. “The Duke of Lee” was on her lips all day long: it possessed her; she could not drive it away. She tried to do so by a severe course of scales, singing her *solfeggi* twice a day religiously; taking up, too, the Italian arias and *canzonetti* that her mother had loved to hear her sing, and the Scotch ballads she used to croon to her father when he came in from a long drive and sat on the leather sofa before the sitting-room fire. There was nothing wonderful about Kitty’s voice, but it was very sweet, and had a harp-like quality that thrilled one strangely somehow.

She set herself a stiff little course of reading for the evening, when of course she would miss Aunt Johanna most. Plato to begin with; she had always meant to read Plato; then she would take Herodotus, and Josephus, and all the things she had never “got round to.” It would be wonderful! she thought. If she kept at it steadily, by the time she was fifty, she might really begin to know just a scrap, “instead of

being a Pit of Ignorance, Pilot, as I always have been; just like you, my lamb; heigh ho!

“And she shall have silks and satins for to wear,
And a coach and six for to take the air——”

“*I will not* sing that again to-day!”

You see, Kitty did not know, could not possibly know, psychical processes being in their present veiled condition, that currents were flowing, wireless messages flashing, between her subliminal self and another; that Tom Lee, striding up and down the deck of his steamer, was crying all day long in his heart, “Kitty! Kitty! Kitty! I am coming! *Wait for me!*” Had “Psychic Wireless, Unlimited,” informed Tom that there were other aspirants for the hand he had so confidently thought his? Who can tell? Certainly, he told Kitty afterward, the voyage was “H. E. Double,” and ten times a day he thought of jumping overboard and swimming the Pacific Ocean, as likely to make better time.

John Tucker emerged from the harness-room, in leather apron and gloves.

“It’s good to hear you singin’ round the place, Miss Kitty,” he said: “it is so! I enjoy it, and I expect they do as well, if they could speak.”

He nodded toward Dan and Pilot, who were certainly pictures of attention, as they stood with shining eyes, ears pricked forward, and delicate nostrils dilated.

“Bless them!” said Kitty. “It’s sugar they want, the darlings, not singing. Pilot, stop! You cannot

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get your head into my pocket, you greedy cherub, and it is Dan's turn, anyhow. Here, Dan! Don't slobber, darling! Eat like a gentleman, because you know you are one, a Perfect Pattern, except for just a shade of gluttony. Now, Pilot!"

John Tucker stood in the doorway, gazing at her with delight. She was the "very moral" of a picture that hung in his own sitting-room; a steel engraving, neatly framed. It was labeled "Thoroughbred," and showed a fair girl patting a noble horse. John Tucker had seen it in the window of a print shop in the city and had bought it, refusing steadfastly to tell his Mary what it cost. Miss Kitty and Pilot might have sat for the two portraits, he maintained, except for Pilot's being black, which was all a Pilot colt *could* be.

The horses fed and petted—not to their hearts' content, but as near it as the passing nature of time would allow—John Tucker turned back into the harness-room with a backward jerk of his head which said as plainly as one of Pilot's gestures, "Aren't you coming to see *me* now?"

Kitty followed him into the pleasant little leather-scented room and perched on the arm of a chair as was her wont.

"What was that tune you was singin' just now, Miss Kitty?" asked John.

"It is called the 'Duke of Lee,' " said Kitty. "It's an old English song, John, and there's a dance that goes with it."

"Didn't your Ma used to sing it now and then? 'Pears to me I remember of her singin' it."

"Of course she did! You clever John Tucker to remember! She used to sing it when I was a tiny tot, and I used to dance. Tommy and I," she added bravely.

John Tucker nodded a slow confirmation. "I remember!" he said. "I ricollect one day—summer day it was, later in the season than this, and warm—I ricollect your Ma settin' on the kitchen steps, an' Mis' Lee settin' beside her. I couldn't but notice what a pictur' they made, kind of showin' of each other off, as you might say. What I mean, your Ma was dark, you understand, leastways her hair and eyes, though she had that kind of soft whiteness that you'd thought there was a light inside, if you see what I mean, Miss Kitty——"

Kitty nodded silently.

"An' Mis' Lee," John Tucker went on, "was more like a red and white setter pup. No offense to her mem'ry in sayin' so, for she sure was a handsome lady, and I thought the world of her—and Tommy, too!"

John Tucker's eyes were bent studiously on the buckle he was polishing.

"But what I mean, there they sot, and honest, Miss Kitty, I never go by that kitchen door but I see them two—well, beautiful women is what I would say—settin' there side by each, and your Ma singin' that song, and you two little shavers dancin'. I—gorry! I wish't they was all back, Miss Kitty."

John Tucker dashed the back of his hand across his eyes, and gave a single portentous sniff.

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"Dear John!" Kitty's eyes were brimming, too. She stroked John's blue shirt sleeve very tenderly.

"Dear John Tucker, I am so glad you remember. It's a pleasant picture to remember, isn't it, John?"

"You bet it is!"

John Tucker very gruff with himself, and polishing away like mad.

"Mis' Lee, she's gone, too, ain't she, Miss Kitty? Too bad!"

"Yes, John, she died three years ago. But Tom is alive," she added cheerfully, "and doing finely, I believe. Don't you want me to sing your own song for you, John? The one you taught me when I was a tiny? I have plenty of time before I go for Mr. Chanter. Do you believe Podasokus will ever get well, John Tucker, dear?"

"No'm, I do not; not as long as you and Pilot are handy by!" John Tucker looked up with a twinkle. "What I mean, 't isn't to be expected, though I don't suppose Mr. Chanter senses how it is. That hoss ought to be put away, Miss Kitty. He ain't fit to drive, no more than an old buff'ler that the moths has got into it. Yes'm, I'd be tickled to death to hear that song, if you feel like singin' it. It's a long time since I've heard that song, Miss Kitty."

"I know, John! I haven't sung it since—I haven't sung at all since Mother went, till just these last few days. I don't know why I sing now, but somehow—now listen, John Tucker!"

Still perched on the arm of the chair, Kitty lifted up her voice and sang "Cockles and Mussels" till the

stable rang with silver sound, and Dan and Pilot stamped and whinnied with excitement, while even Old Crummles, dozing in the farthest stall, raised his sleepy head and wondered what was going on. As for John Tucker, he wept with pleasure, openly and unashamed; those honest blue eyes of his were always ready for tears when he was moved.

"That's great!" he cried. "That certainly is great, Miss Kitty. I thank you for that!" he flourished a clean blue cotton handkerchief, and blew his nose sonorously. "You weren't more than knee-high to a grasshopper first time you sang that to old John Tucker. Your Ma sang it, too!" he added. "I remember of her singin' it that same day we was speakin' of. Miss Kitty——"

"Yes, John Tucker!" as he stopped abruptly.

"I was thinkin' I'd take Crummles to the station this afternoon. He ain't been out to-day."

"Yes, John Tucker. What else were you going to say?"

John gave a short embarrassed laugh. "I dunno as I ought to say it, Miss Kitty. Wal! if you will have it—there was something Mis' Ross said that day has stayed by me, kind of. Something—what I mean—well, 'twas this way. Those two ladies was talkin' together, and I no business to hear what they was sayin', but yet I couldn't *but* hear, bein' as I was holdin' the pony. Old Rosy Nanty! he was gettin' on in years, and he liked to lay down once in a while, and take a roll. He didn't mean no harm, he'd just antic a mite. So they was talkin', 'bout the children:

they were both wropped up in 'em. Mis' Lee, she said something about young uns learnin' to know all sorts, kind of mix in, like, with folks in general: thought 'twas good for 'em and like that. And your Ma, she bust right out: 'No!' she says: 'my Kitty shall never know anything but what is lovely!' she says: and she went on, quoted the 'postle Paul and like that. I never forgot it. It kind o' sunk in. You weren't never to touch, or know, or think of, anything that wasn't just *so*, just—well, lovely, and good report, and that. You understand, Miss Kitty?"

Kitty nodded brightly. "I understand, John Tucker. Go on!"

"Wal! I dunno—I set here sometimes and mull over that, Miss Kitty, and wonder if we're doin' just what's right by your Ma. There! I guess it's got to come right out. I thought the first of it, takin' Madam Flynt for her ride and like that, 'twould be all right: of course you wouldn't be let to go to no trains nor nothin' of that sort. But come to see you kitin' round with tag rag and bobtail—what I mean,—I dunno as your Ma would *like* it, Miss Kitty. Of course 't isn't for me to say, but——"

Kitty's eyes were dancing. She slipped from the arm of the chair, and stood before John Tucker, accusatory forefinger leveled.

"John Tucker," she said slowly, "you—are—a—snob!"

"Now, Miss Kitty, don't you——"

"A snob!" Kitty repeated with withering emphasis. "I know perfectly well what you mean. You saw

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me pick up poor old Mrs. Flanagan and take her home. John Tucker, Mrs. Flanagan is eighty if she is a day; and that basket weighed half a ton, I am *sure*. Would you have let her carry it, if you had been prancing past with Pilot? I ask you, John Tucker!"

John Tucker looked uncomfortable.

"Mis' Flanagan has four children of her own," he said, "and ten grandchildren. She'd oughter let them carry her baskets."

"Yes, but they weren't there, and I was. *Try* to have a *little* sense, John! as for the children on Saturday mornings—Yes! I saw you look at us, you snobbish John; you were coming out of Adams's: you gave us a Gorgon glare, and I was ashamed of you! As for the children, they are my joy and delight. I wouldn't miss the Saturday morning drive for *anything*, John Tucker. The lambs! didn't you see how they were enjoying it?"

"I saw they was awful dirty! Took me 'most an hour to get the wagon clean, all the mud they tracked in."

"They had been playing in the mud. What should they be doing on Saturday morning? I don't suppose you noticed," she added demurely, "that one of the boys was named Tucker, did you, John?"

"I did," said John Tucker grimly. "I told him I'd lick him out of his boots, if ever he took such a liberty again."

"Are you sure it was Jimmy who took the liberty, John?"

Kitty spoke very quietly, but there was a ring of

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steel in her voice. "There!" said John Tucker, describing the scene to Sarepta that night. "If it wasn't her Pa, lookin' straight at me, and lettin' me have it between the eyes, call me a juggins!"

"I will!" said Sarepta. "It's what you are! The idea!"

Kitty's vexation passed like summer lightning before John Tucker's abject penitence.

"I know!" she said, cheering and soothing him at once. "I know, dear John! It's all your goodness and faithfulness, and I love you for it. But don't you see, I cannot 'sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam, and feast upon strawberries, sugar and cream.' That is what blessed Mother would have liked for me, because she *could*, you know, and because I was her baby, and—oh, I understand so well! But I am a different kind, you see, John. I am mostly Ross, I suppose, at least, so Aunt Johanna says; and I don't like cushions, and I'm afraid I am not *very* fond of sewing fine seams. When one isn't driving or walking, it seems rather terrible not to be reading, don't you think?"

"Yes, Miss!" said John Tucker, submissively. His reading was confined to the *State Farmer*, but never again would he differ from his idol in any particular.

"And as for what is lovely, and so on—" Kitty's eyes and voice softened to the look and tone that were specially for her mother—"I think—John, would it be good for Pilot to live entirely on oats, and to trot always on a perfectly level State road? No? I thought

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not! And if he never did anything but speed in a trotting sulky, you wouldn't say he was being of any great use in the world? No, I thought not! And now it is half-past ten, John Tucker, and if you don't put Pilot into the beach wagon, I must."

CHAPTER XVIII

OLD LOVE AND NEW

WHY was Pilot put into the beach wagon instead of the buggy? Because it was the wedding anniversary of the Reverend Timothy Chanter and his Susan, and they were going on their annual picnic together. Unlike the Gilpin pair of immortal memory, they did not take the children with them. The children saw them off at the door, with many injunctions to be good, and to have a wonderful time, and not to get lost, as they did two years ago.

"Kitty," cried Lina, "*do blaze a tree* at the place where you leave them, won't you? They are not to be trusted *in the least*."

On this one day of the year, the minister and his wife cast care to the winds, locked duty up in the cupboard, and even shut the door on parental responsibility. They were no longer Drudge and Drudgess, as the girls, exasperated at the vanity of efforts to "save Pa and Ma," sometimes called them: they were Tim and Sue off on their holiday. They were to be taken first for a spin behind Pilot, because that was the greatest treat the Reverend Timothy could offer his faithful partner; then they were to be left at a cer-

tain place near the Lancaster Road, where the wood dipped sharply to a cup, enclosing a round pool, with a waterfall above it, and a ribbon of streamlet winding away at either end. Here they would sit and eat their luncheon, carefully prepared by Daughters; cold chicken (dear Madam Flynt always sent them a chicken the day before, one of her own prize Rhode Island Reds!), nut bread (Zephine's specialty), coffee and sponge cake (which no one could make like Lina), and some of dear Nelly's cream peppermints to top off with.

These cates disposed of, the Reverend Timothy would light his pipe, and lean back against a sun-warmed boulder, at peace with the world, while Mrs. Chanter read aloud a certain chapter of "Prue and I" which had been the precipitating drop in their cup of happiness twenty-three years before. Then he would go to sleep, dear man, and she would knit, and think what a happy woman she was, and wonder if there was enough mutton for to-morrow, or if she must have a vegetable chowder. By and by, when the sunbeams began to slant through the firs, she would wake her lord, who would fear he had missed that last sentence, my love! and the two would wander happily through the wood and along the elm-shaded road, and so home in time for the wonderful supper the girls would have ready, and the glorified table round which all six children would be gathered. A golden day, for two golden hearts! May their fiftieth anniversary find them hale and vigorous as their twenty-third!

This was Mrs. Chanter's first spin behind Pilot; it

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should be her last, she resolved, as she clung terrified to the low railing of the beach wagon. It was a bright June morning, and Pilot was "feelin' extry good," as John Tucker had intimated to Kitty; he flung the miles behind him in a nonchalant rapture that was all his own. Once Mrs. Chanter opened her lips to cry out, but a glance at her husband's face of delight closed them again. After all, the children were all grown!

"Thank you, Kitty!" cried Mr. Chanter, as they dismounted at the edge of the Lancaston woods. "*Thank* you, my dear! this has been a wonderful, *wonderful* treat; hasn't it, Susan?"

"Wonderful!" echoed Mrs. Chanter, dryly. "Next time I'll have Podasokus, please, Kitty; or if he has left us, then that nice old woolly thing: Crummles, is he? No more Pilot for me, my dear!"

Kitty laughed and sped away, leaving the worthy couple to gaze admiringly after her for a moment before they turned into the wood, hand in hand.

"Glorious girl!" said the Reverend Timothy. "Glorious horse!"

"He'll break her neck some day!" said his Susan.

Joy of the road on a June morning! Elms arching overhead, in long feathery arcades, or giving way to groups of singing pines, and clusters of white birches that rustled and whispered together like Nausicaa and her maidens. Under these, stretches of gray stone wall along which the chipmunks whisked, trying in vain to keep pace with Pilot's flying feet; stretches, again, of stump fence, the silver-bleached bones of ancient giants, with sturdy new growth of fir and

hemlock pushing up between their locked skeleton-arms. Between fence or wall and the white ribbon of road, a strip of green a few yards wide, sown thick with the jewels of early summer. Ferns of every variety, from the lady-fern which Kitty always thought so like Mother, in the pale green dresses she loved, to towering plumes of ostrich fern and tumbled masses of *Osmunda regalis*. There was maiden-hair, too, Kitty knew, hiding in the crannies of the stone wall, but that could not be seen from the road. The cinnamon roses were out, sweet and untidy as Her-ric's tempestuously-petticoated girl; "Virgin's Bower" flung its white-starred veil over rock and tangle. Kitty, flashing quick glances, as she sped along, saw and loved it all. The world held no tears any more; how should it, on a day like this?

"My heart leaps up when I behold, Pilot!" cried the girl. "Can't you hear it, Beloved? And oh—and oh—and *Oh!* pearl of Poppets, *do* you see whom we are overhauling? Do you *see*, Pilot? If my middle name is not Clotho"—

Melissa and Bobby were walking slowly along the road. Bobby had come over for the Anniversary Supper, of course. It was one of Melissa's free aftermoons (the library was open only three days in the week); it was all perfectly simple. Bobby came pretty often nowadays, and Sister Lissy happened to be passing the station about train time. They were near the village now. The two were deep in talk, and paid no heed to the approaching wheels. Melissa, who hardly knew a baseball from a football, was listening with

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bated breath and kindling eyes to a highly technical description of yesterday's game.

"Binks got base on balls, you see, and walked; then Joyce threw to third to put out Bacon, but Hodges fumbled, so Bacon ran home, and Binks went to second, and then I got in a three-bagger and made a home-run."

"Oh, Bobby! how *splendid!* What a wonderful game! I wish I could see one!"

"You can!" said Bobby kindly. "I'll make one of the girls bring you over next time. And I'll get you a Corona banner!" he added. "A sister ought to wear her brother's colors, what, Lissy?"

It is not stated whose color it was that flamed in Lissy's cheeks as she looked up with shining eyes; it was very pretty anyhow, Bobby thought. He had never realized till lately what a pretty girl Lissy was. Hazel eyes were warmer, somehow, than gray, though of course——

"Hilo!" cried Kitty, checking Pilot with a touch.

No living horse, she always maintained, not even Angel Dan, made such a beautiful stop as Pilot.

"Hilo, folks! Don't you want a lift?" Glancing at Lissy's face, she added quickly, "I don't mean just home. I'm going to give this Lamb a little speed along the State Road. Will you come?"

"Gee! Won't we?" cried Bobby. A speed behind Pilot was a thing rarely offered, and not to be refused by any Cyrus youth. "Come on, Lissy!"

Melissa hung back. She was mortally afraid of Pilot, and of Kitty's reckless driving. Besides——ought

she not to leave them? Would he not rather—A little cold snake seemed to creep about the girl's heart. It wasn't fair! Kitty didn't want him till she saw some one else—oh, Lissy! Lissy!

"Jump in, Lissy!" cried Bobby joyously. "You scared of Pilot? I believe she is, Kitty! now, then! In you go!"

In Lissy went, Bobby following; off went Pilot, at a three minute clip. Past fled the landscape, a blur of green, blue and white. Melissa, all in a moment her mother's daughter, sat crouched on the seat, clutching the rail. Bobby, in a state of high delight, glanced at her for sympathy, and saw her pale and trembling, her eyes brimming with frightened tears.

"Why, Lissy!" he said. Involuntarily he held out his hand; a little cold trembling hand slid instantly into it and was warmly grasped. Poor little hand! it quivered like a frightened bird, yet nestled close in his, as a bird would not.

"Don't be scared!" cried Bobby. "Pilot's steady as a rock, isn't he, Kitty? Perhaps," he added, "you might slow down just a scrap, though, Kitty. I hate to, but——"

This was heroic of Bobby, who loved fast driving as his father did.

Kitty said a word to Pilot, who cocked an indulgent ear, and slowed down to four minutes.

"Why, Lissy," she laughed over her shoulder, "rocks are flighty compared to Pilot; positively flighty! You saw how he stopped. I can stop him any instant, just like that. Lean back and enjoy yourself!"

Absorbed in her rôle of the youngest Fate, and used to fast driving from her cradle, Kitty could not realize the state of mind of an extremely timid girl, assailed by mingled pangs of terror and jealousy. It was not till they had reached the spot she had in mind for the development of her plan that, glancing round, she comprehended how for pleasure she was giving on the one hand anguish, and on the other embarrassment, if not distress. Melissa was leaning against her companion's shoulder with closed eyes and compressed lips: Bobby, red-faced and round-eyed, was holding her hand. His eyes met Kitty's with an expression of mingled deprecation, admiration and reprobation, which was too much for that young woman's composure.

"Ha! ha! ha!" her laughter broke out bell-like; then she checked herself.

"Oh! I am so sorry! Lissy, you poor child, I never thought—I never dreamed—Sst, Pilot!"

Pilot stopped, and stood like the least flighty of rocks.

"I am *so* sorry!" Kitty repeated penitently. "Bobby, why didn't you tell me? Are you going to give me in charge for fast driving?"

"Oh, I say!" cried a distracted Bobby. "Gee, Kitty, it was perfectly *great*, as far as I am concerned, but I do suppose we were going a pretty good clip, what? Poor little Lissy!"

"Now, I'll tell you what!"

Clotho Kitty advanced to her second parallel.

"This is where I really meant to stop. I want you

both to see the view from that high rock!" she nodded toward a huge boulder that frowned from the hillside above the road. "It's really beautiful, and you said the other day you had never climbed the rock, Lissy. It's only a minute's climb, with a good strong paw like Bobby's to pull you up. It will shake your crinkles out, and steady your nerves; and we will *crawl* home, Lissy dear!" said penitent Kitty.

Lissy dismounted and stretched her cramped limbs. Bobby followed, with a doubtful glance at Kitty. Was she sure Pilot would stand? Sure she didn't want him to——? Reassured on that point by her laughing shake of the head, he turned to the big rock. It was a brief, but a stiff little climb; all his energies were required to pilot Melissa, timid and unused to climbing. Neither of them heard the low, clear whistle, or saw the black horse toss his head in reply, then settle down in the shafts like a cat settling to her spring. They gained the top, prepared to enjoy the view, which really was fine; when Melissa uttered a cry,

"Oh! oh, Bobby, look! Kitty!"

Pilot was off. Had something startled him, or was it the inherent viciousness of which Melissa had always felt sure? Off down the road like an arrow.

"He is running away!" cried Melissa. "She can't hold him any more than she could the wind. Oh, what shall we do? What shall we do?"

"Sit down!" commanded Bobby. "Sit still, Lissy, till I come back!" With the word, he slithered down the rock and set out running along the road at his best pace. It was a good pace; Bobby Chanter was the best

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runner in Corona. Even in her terror, Melissa noticed how beautifully he ran, how nobly he threw his head back, how splendid——what horse could cope with a Marathon runner? Then a new pang assailed her. She crouched on the rock and wrung her hands in an ecstasy of terror. He might be hurt, trying to stop the mad creature. He might be *trampled on!* Wicked, hateful horse! wicked girl to drive such a creature, risking lives that were more precious——

Bobby, reaching a curve in the road, saw Pilot skimming swallow-like along the next reach. At that moment, Kitty turned in her seat, and saw him. A flash, a smile, a wave of the hand——she shot round a second curve and vanished. Bobby Chanter stopped abruptly.

“She’s got him under!” he muttered. “She’s going to turn and come back.”

He waited for some minutes, but in vain. No one came. Sorely puzzled, Bobby retraced his steps, looking over his shoulder from time to time. That horse wasn’t bolting. She had him under control all right. What upon earth——Bobby positively scowled in his perplexity. Had Kitty *meant* to leave them behind? And why? *Why?* It was freakish; Kitty never used to be freakish. It was hardly even kind; poor little Lissy, scared to death there up on the rock. She would never have played Kitty a trick like that. She was very sweet. How her little hand trembled as it rested in his! A girl ought not to be *too* independent, though of course Kitty was the finest——

Bobby Chanter stopped short; the blood rushed singing up into his ears, and he stood in the middle of

the road, as if he had been struck. What was that Kitty said to him, the last time he tried—A strange thing to say, he thought at the moment.

“Bobby, how *foolish* you are! I really wonder at you. You are like the man that lighted his lantern, a beautiful, clear, bright, little lantern, and then put it down and went after a will-o'-the-wisp.”

“I don't in the least understand you, Kitty!” he had said ruefully, for her tone was almost sharp.

“No more did the bat; I mean the man!” snapped Kitty, and she turned her back and left him. It was at the Library door, and Melissa was just coming out. How pretty she looked that day, too; her eyes seemed to light up when she looked at a fellow! Was——was *that* what Kitty meant? He was walking again, faster now; thinking hard as he went, putting two and two together in a fashion new to his simple, objective mind.

Was that what Kitty meant? Other words of hers came flocking back to him.

“I *want* you to be happy, Bobby! You might be so happy, if you weren't just a little stupid, Bobby dear!”

That seemed rather cruel at the time, when he *had* pulled through those rotten exams. What if she hadn't meant that at all? What if——she was awfully fond of Lissy, he knew; and he knew she liked him, too, she said she did, though she never offered to be a sister to him, as Lissy did. Lissy had a rotten time at home, he guessed, with that Wilse, and her mother always putting him first. She was too soft and gentle to stand up for herself. What was that Kitty said again? He ought to have a sweet, gentle, feminine

girl, not a daughter of Jehu, who drove furiously. He hadn't understood that, either. Had he been a Nut all this time? Hark! what was that?

A sound came to his ears; a breathless, sobbing wail.

"Bobby! oh! Bobby!! oh, my heart!"

A great clump of lilacs hid the road ahead. Hastening round it, he saw Melissa running toward him, crimson, panting, the tears rolling down her cheeks as she sobbed and ran and sobbed again.

"Allow two minutes!" says Mr. Ezra Barkley in an immortal Tale. Bobby did not allow one. In ten seconds he had gathered his little sweetheart in his arms, pulled her in behind the big lilac bush, and was soothing, comforting, pouring tender words into her ear.

"There, dear; there, Lissy! there, my little girl! You are my little girl, aren't you? My own dear little girl! Don't cry, sweetheart! What frightened you, Lissy?"

"Oh! oh!" sobbed Lissy. "I thought he would trample on you. I thought you would be lying on the road all dead and bleeding. Oh, Bobby! Bobby! Did he hurt you?"

"Did who hurt me, darling? Here! let's sit down! Put your dear little head on my shoulder; so! comfy? Did who hurt me, Lissy?"

"The dreadful horse! I thought he would trample on you! oh! oh!"

She started at Bobby's shout of laughter.

"Lissy! *honestly!* you didn't think I could catch Pilot? Gee! that is a good one!"

The great lilac bush had seen lovers in its day; sheltered them, too. A generation ago, it had marked a gateway; the cellar hole of the house still yawned in the field, half filled with wild raspberry bushes. If not Jemmy and Jessamy, at least Zekle and Huldry, or their prototypes, had sauntered down the lawn with arms linked, and had sat under the great bush, sheltered from lane and road by tossing, purple plumes. Yes, the lilac bush knew all about it, and bent kindly over Bobby and Lissy as they sat in their turn, hand in hand, pouring out the wonderful new story that had never, never, never been told before.

By and by (for not even new love could make Bobby unconscious of Dinner Time!) they walked home, and the road was paved with gold, and the skies above were diamond and sapphire, and the world was very fair.

And Kitty? If the truth must be told, they did not once think of Kitty till they reached the Wibird door. Then Melissa, with a conscience-stricken blush, wondered if Kitty was all right, and Bobby, with another, guessed she was. Then his honest heart smote him, and after one last look and handclasp, he went straight off to Ross House and told Kitty all about it. Then who so happy as Clotho Kitty? She took Bobby's hands and danced up and down the hall with him. She had not been so happy, she vowed, since she was probably arboreal. Never mind what she meant! She was just sitting down to dinner, all alone, and Bobby must and should sit down with her. They would have a feast, the Feast of Friendship. There was chicken pie!

"Come on, Bobby! we'll drink all our healths in

pineapple lemonade. Sarepta! Sarepta! Put another plate, will you? Bobby is stopping to dinner!"

Sarepta laid another plate, outwardly grim, inwardly rejoicing. Men folks seemed to have more real understanding of pastry than what women-folks did, some way of it. She thawed visibly with every crunch of Bobby's enraptured teeth. She brought ham and tongue and little crisp home-made sausages the size of Bobby's little finger, over which he fairly groaned with delight.

"Honestly, Sarepta!" he kept saying. "Honestly! On the square now, I never *did!*"

When it came to fruit jelly with whipped cream, Bobby sighed deeply, and Kitty had an inspiration. She caught up the pretty dish and rose from table.

"You are to take this straight down to Lissy and eat it with her!" she commanded. "Hush! not a word! Sarepta, a fringed doily, please! Bobby is going to take this to——may I Bobby? Sarepta is a *tomb* of secrecy!——to his dear, sweet, darling Melissa, and eat it with her. One more glass, Bobby! Sarepta must have one too! To the health of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Chanter! Hip! hip! hooray!"

"Honestly, Kitty!" Bobby's voice faltered and broke. "Honestly! You are the greatest girl in the world—bar one, I'll have to say now, won't I? Good-bye! God bless you, Kitty!"

"Well, of all the Actions!" said Sarepta Darwin.

CHAPTER XIX

“THE TRIVIAL ROUND”

I THINK the next month was the hardest that Kitty had to encounter in what she used afterward to call her Woful Waiting. Of course she missed Miss Johanna—I beg her pardon!—Mrs. Peters, wofully. Ever since she came back (after the first few days, that is) she had had this bright, sharp, cheery person to go to, to talk and take counsel with. I always supposed that one reason for Miss Johanna’s taking to her bed was her wish to let Kitty live her own life. Indeed, she said as much one day while I was sitting with her.

“Yes!” she said, with her little brisk snap. “I see just as much of Kitty as she likes. I don’t poke about in her house; I wouldn’t have anybody poking about in mine. When she wants me, I am here, delighted to see her. When she doesn’t—well, I am here just the same, and not downstairs under her feet. Blessings of the Bedridden, my dear. Appreciated by few, but tangible none the less.”

My visit in beloved Cyrus had ended long before this, but Kitty had dropped a word now and then in her letters; and Nelly Chanter wrote me that they were all worried about her.

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"She is as gay and cheery as ever, but she doesn't *look right*. I am perfectly sure she has lost *pounds*, though of course nothing would persuade her to be weighed. You see, that cat Cissy Sharpe got hold of a western paper somehow in Tinkham, with the account of the marriage of *Thomas Leigh* to a rich widow, millions, marble palaces, that kind of thing. She didn't *show* Kitty the paper, just told her about it in the street, and she said Kitty went white as milk and didn't say a word, just walked away, looking as if she were blind. Then she—Cissy—came to Lina and me, open-mouthed, as you can imagine: I tell you we *gave* it to her! And Lina, in her quiet way, cross-examined her and got out of her that it was *Leigh* and not *Lee*. Did you *ever*, Mary? Well, the next time I saw Kitty, I managed to lead up to it—talking about Bobby and Lissy (yes, we are all *very* fond of Lissy, and it is *all right*, though, of course, it was a blow *at first*, after all our hopes; but Bobby is so happy, of course we are too!) well, and so I spoke of the report, about Tom and the different spelling, said I didn't believe it was our Tom at all, and so forth and so on. She just listened, that little quiet way she has when she doesn't agree with you,—you know—her head a little on one side, looking down: and said yes, very likely. That was all I could get out of her; but, Mary, I think she has made up her mind that he *isn't coming back*; and I think her heart is breaking, and all ours are breaking for her."

This was partly true. Kitty did at this time make up her mind that Tom was not likely to come into her

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life again; she has told me that since, and that she was very unhappy for a while; but as to breaking her heart—Nelly always was sentimental. Kitty is not. She just looked the thing straight in the face—that reminds me of something she said, that puts it all in a nutshell. It was on my first visit after her marriage, and we were talking over our sewing, sitting on the old leather sofa. She spoke of the Woful Waiting.

"It wasn't really so bad!" she said. "It was—do you remember that verse in the 'Ancient Mariner' that always frightened me so?"

"Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round, walks on,
And turns no more his head,
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread."

"That used to come to me in the long passages upstairs, and I would run—oh, how I ran! Well, Mary, it was like that. Ever since I came back and found no word from Tom, I had felt this behind me. I had just seen it over my shoulder and I wouldn't turn round and look at it: I was afraid. But when I heard—that, you know; something definite, whether it was true or not—I turned square round and looked at it, and I found it wasn't so frightful after all. I wanted Tom to be happy, didn't I? I didn't want him back if he didn't want to come. I saw all the dear neighbors, so many of them living single—really *most* of them, Mary! Cyrus is the most unmarried place that ever was, I

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do believe! and all so good, and so happy and busy—why, I said, ‘Goose! do try to have a *little* sense!’ That helped me ever so much, Mary. I don’t say I liked it, you know, but—well, it was easier because it was harder, if you see what I mean. And then—I began to do things, and that helped too.”

I had heard of some of the things she began to do at this time. It was then that she began the Saturday picnics for the school children, taking a wagonload of them out with Old Crummies to some lovely pasture or woodpiece, and frolicking with them all the morning. Then would come the feast: always chicken pie, because Kitty thought children liked that better than anything else (except icecream, which was sloppy to take on picnics) currant buns and raspberry tartlets and lemonade in a stone jug. What times those children did have! Then, too, little by little, she found out all the “poor things” for miles around. Half-invalids, who needed carriage exercise; tired country women who had no horse and could not walk so far as the village for their errands; sad people with few “privileges,” to whom a cheery call, a book or magazine or nosegay would change the hue of a whole day from drab to rose-color. Kitty found them all out, and took them “buggy-riding,” or sat on their steps and told them gay little stories. Every child for ten miles round Cyrus knew her, and set up a shout of “Miskitty! Miskitty!” (the first syllable strongly accented!) “gimme a ride!” She loved them all, but John Tucker often wished there was no such a thing as young uns in the endurin’ world.

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She told me of a pleasant happening.

One day she brought old Mrs. Grieven in to do some shopping, and waited outside Cheeseman's while the old lady pottered in and out of the various stores. Just in front of her stood a peddler's wagon, very neat and trim, with a brown horse attached to it. A bag was attached to the horse's nose, and he was asleep. Kitty looked him over approvingly. A good horse; a bit cobby and stocky; no speed, she judged, but much steadiness, and—she added mentally, as the horse waked and turned an appraising eye on Dan—some intelligence. At this moment Mr. Cheeseman's door opened and a man came out; a tall, loose-jointed brown man, with a sea-going air about him. A new face to Kitty: she loved a new face; a good one, too. Their eyes met; the brown man made a little gesture, as friendly as it was courteous. His arms were full of glass jars, small and large, containing bright-hued candies; these he proceeded to stow away carefully on the shelves of the neat cupboard at the back of his wagon. Over the shelves were drawers, labeled "Lozenges," "Jujubes," etc., etc. These he filled with neat rolls and parcels produced from various pockets. As he worked he hummed and whistled under his breath, and presently broke into song, in a mellow baritone voice.

"'Now Renzo caught a fever,
That's what Renzo caught, tiddy hi!
It sot him all a-queever,
So haul the bowline, haul!

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He took to his bed and the doctor come,
And give him a dose that sure was some,
For it h'isted him off to Kingdom Come,
So haul the bowline, haul!"

Kitty was reserved enough in some ways, but she never could restrain her laughter; she gave a little crow at the fate of "Renzo," the conclusion, had she but known it, of an eventful life. The brown man turned with a responsive chuckle.

"There!" he said. "I was warblin', warn't I? You must excuse me, lady; I'm a sea-farin' man, and I have to warble, 'pears though: I b'lieve I warble in my sleep."

"It was so funny, I couldn't help laughing!" said Kitty. "Poor Renzo! is there any more about him?"

"Oh, my, yes! old Renzo! There's more songs and chanteys about him than you could shake a stick at. Renzo or Ranzo—I've heard much as a dozen of 'em. This one's the only one I know clear'n through, though."

"Oh! please! won't you sing it all for me?" Kitty leaned forward, her eyes aglow.

"Why, it ain't nothin' but an old sailor song, you understand, but you're welcome to it, such as 'tis."

Leaning comfortably against the back of his wagon, his brown gaze wandering placidly up and down the street, the brown man sang as follows:

"Now Renzo was a sailor;
That's what Renzo was, tiddy hi!
He surely warn't a tailor,
So haul the bowline, haul!"

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He went adrift in Casco Bay,
Mate to a mud-scow haulin' hay,
And he come home late for his weddin' day,
So haul the bowline, haul!

"Now Renzo had a feedle,
That's what Renzo had, tiddy hi!
'Twas humped up in the meedle,
So haul the bowline, haul!
He played a tune, and the old cow died,
And the skipper and crew jumped over the side,
And swum away on the slack of the tide,
So haul the bowline, haul!

"Now Renzo had a parrot,
That's what Renzo had, tiddy hi!
He liked a piece of carrot,
So haul the bowline, haul!
They gave him a turnip once instead,
And he swore so loud he bust his head,
And when he come to he was di-dum-dead,
So haul the bowline, haul!

"Now Renzo went a-clammin',
That's what Renzo did, tiddy hi!
His boots they kep' a-jammin',
So haul the bowline, haul!
They jammed so hard that he gave up beat,
And went back home in his stockin' feet,
And the woman she dressed him down complete,
So haul the bowline, haul!

"Now Renzo went a-smeltin',
That's what Renzo did, tiddy hi!
The ice was just a-meltin',
So haul the bowline, haul!

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He sot clear'n through, and he froze his toes,
And a foot-long ice-kittle hung to his nose,
And he says, 'Gol darn these oil-skin clo'es!'
So haul the bowline, haul!

"Now Renzo caught a fever,
That's what Renzo caught, tiddy hi!
It sot him all a-queuever,
So haul the bowline, haul!
He took to his bed and the doctor come,
And give him a dose that sure was some,
For it h'isted him off to Kingdom Come.
So haul the bowline, haul!"

"Oh! thank you!" cried Kitty. "Thank you ever so much!"

"I thank you," replied the brown man, "for listenin'. I expect you've had the hardest job of the two, if all was known."

He stepped to the head of the brown horse, felt of the bag and shook his head; the brown horse shook his.

"Hossy," he spoke slowly, in a singularly cordial, pleasant tone, "you ain't eat your dinner!"

The horse shook his head again and sneezed.

"You no call to sneeze!" said the brown man. "It's good feed, and you've had time enough. I can't wag your jaws for you! If you expect that, Hossy, you're liable to be disappointed right away! Sam'll be in forty conniptions now because I'm late!"

He took off the nose-bag and folded it deliberately, the brown horse continuing to sneeze protest. Look-

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ing up, he met Kitty's interested eyes again, and his face broke into a delightful smile.

"He's a mite choosy to-day!" he said, nodding toward the animal. "Sometimes he forgets he isn't a bein'. I expect I make of him more'n I should, but you know how 'tis. That's a fine hoss you're drivin', lady. A No. 1, I should rate him, clipper-built and copper—what I would say, he's an elegant hoss. Might I take the liberty of offerin' you a pep'mint, Miss? No offense, I hope; they're just out o' the pan."

The two talked horse happily for five minutes; then the brown man climbed somewhat laboriously into his wagon, and with "Good day! Pleased to have met up with you!" drove off. Kitty sprang down and ran into the shop.

"Uncle Ivory," she cried, "who is that nice man? Isn't he a perfect duck? Do tell me who he is!"

Mr. Cheeseman had watched the interview, and his eyes were twinkling.

"As to bein' a duck," he said slowly, "I couldn't say. I never see him without his stockin's. Feet may be web, for all I know. That's Calvin Parks," he added in a different tone. "He's what I might call, if I was put to it, the best man in this world. If he wasn't a gump, he'd be an angel. He peddles candy. I supply him reg'lar, and I tell ye, Kitty, I fairly look forward to the day he comes, once a week."

"I should think you would! Where does he live? Not in any Cyrus, surely?"

"He lives over yonder!" Mr. Cheeseman nodded

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toward a point of the compass. "Drives a candy route, and looks out for the Sill boys, him and his wife. Awful nice woman she is, too. You'd like Mary Parks. Try that pineapple ribbin; I expect it's good!"

At this point Mrs. Grieven appeared, lamenting. "Wesleys" had no yellow flannel, and it was a living shame, she must say, if she was to go without a flannel petticoat at her time of life.

"But he has other colors, Mrs. Grieven!" Kitty tried to console her. "I know he has red flannel, for I bought some the other day; and white he has too, and I think gray."

"I've worn yellow flannel for seventy-seven years," Mrs. Grieven replied; "and I'm not going to change at my time of life. Yellow flannel is healin' to the bones, and keeps off rheumatism; 'tis well known, and Orison Wesley ought to be ashamed to call himself a general store, and not keep——"

"We'll talk about it as we drive!" said Kitty brightly. "I think we must start now, Mrs. Grieven. The 'ribbon' is delicious, Mr. Cheeseman; thank you so much! Let me know when you expect Mr. Parks again, won't you?"

Uncle Ivory Cheeseman watched her as she drove off.

"Now she'll sup yellow flannel all the way to North Cyrus!" he commented; "and take it as if 'twas butter scotch. Them kind of folks, you sympathize with them, and they're all over you in a minute, like a wet

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dog on a cold day. It's one thing to be friendly, but, —well, the Bible says to suffer fools gladly, but it don't say to encourage 'em, and so I tell Calvin!"

He turned, and gave his mind to the molasses peppermints.

CHAPTER XX

THE PAN-AMERICAN

IF little has been said hitherto of Miss Ruby Caddie, it is not because she was not an Institution of Cyrus; far from it! She was even more than that, though that would be enough for most people; she was a National Institution; she was the Pan-American! Miss Ruby spent her days in a box measuring eight feet by ten, glazed on two sides; one window giving on the street, the other on a small and dingy space which she called the Outer Office. The other two sides were profusely adorned with illuminated texts, of cheerful and admonitory nature. Miss Ruby's visitors were advised that this was Her Busy Day; that it was proper to Smile While You Wait: that

"When Time is withdrawn,
Will Eternity dawn!"

etc., etc. The latter sentiment was also inscribed in letters of gold (decalcomania!) on a manuscript book which lay on Miss Ruby's desk, and which was further labeled "Timely Texts for Troublous Telegrams." This volume (a birthday present from Miss Pearl, who had spent a happy year in its compilation)

was a constant help to Miss Ruby in discharging the responsibilities of her position, of which she was acutely conscious. The electric telegraph was to her sensitive nature no mere affair of keys, wires and switches: no, indeed! "It is a *Mighty Force*," the little lady was wont to say, shaking her flaxen ringlets impressively, "which through my agency raises the heart to the summit of joy or plunges it in the gulf of despair."

Holding these views, Miss Ruby felt it her duty to wing the joyful message with special shafts of cheer, and to prepare the way for the sorrowful one with remarks of a fortifying nature. She invariably began, "Good morning! (or afternoon, as the case might be). This is the Pan-American Telegraph Company." Then would follow, "Do not be alarmed! the news is of a cheering nature." And then the listener would learn that her Aunt Maria was coming that evening by the 8:30 train, or that John Henry had passed his college examinations. But were the message one of sorrowful import, Miss Ruby before delivering it would open the manuscript volume and select an appropriate sentence: then we might hear "Trouble is often benefit in disguise. Permit me to express my sympathy before delivering the following message. 'Your Aunt Maria passed away last night; a blessed release.'"

With these lofty views of her responsibilities, it need not be said that Miss Ruby was the soul of conscientiousness in regard to the winged words of which she was the transmitter. Not even to Miss Pearl, her

twin sister and other self, would she breathe a whisper of what passed over the wires. Miss Pearl, equally conscientious, respected her sister's reserve. If questioned by some thoughtless neighbor, she would say, "My sister has her business, and I have mine. I should no more think of asking her about the messages she receives than she would ask me the amount of your bank deposit. We are in positions of Public Trust!"

Once only, in all the years of her service, was Miss Ruby tempted to break her rule of silence; that was on a certain June evening, not long after the events narrated in the last chapter. Miss Pearl had not visited the office that afternoon; it was "the birthday of Sister and Self," as she happily announced to all she met on her way home, and she must prepare for the Treat. The Treat consisted of creamcakes, bought at the bakery, as she hastened homeward; large pale yellow shells of brittle crust, irregularly paneled like alligator-skin, filled with a glutinous semi-liquid substance of irresistibly flowing nature. There were other delicacies of home manufacture; stuffed eggs, and what Miss Pearl called "lion's potatoes," with buttered toast and pickles; but the creamcakes were the real Treat, as they had been ever since the little Twins earned their first five cents apiece by picking berries for Madam Flynt. There were three creamcakes; two apiece would be too much; on the other hand, one was not quite enough; so the third was cut in two, with astonishing results in the way of swift pursuit and skillful capture (with spoons) of the glutinous substance

before mentioned. The cakes were displayed upon a beautiful old platter of "flowed blue," the pride of the ladies' hearts. Have I said too much about the Treat? I always thought it so dear and funny! and I never can forget how I chanced in on an errand one Birthday evening, and found the Twins half way through their whole cakes. They held them in their hands, and darted from edge to edge as the custard threatened to overflow here or there. They offered me the third cake; dear little ladies!

On the evening in question, Miss Ruby was not in her usual spirits. She praised the "lovely supper," which Sister had prepared, and joined in the annual duet of admiration for and joy in the flowed blue platter, the pink lustre jug, and the sprigged tea-set. The sisters found it convenient, as I have said, to spend their winters at the Mallow House. It was economical, Mr. Mallow being more than liberal in his rates for "permanents"; it was also social, and saved much time in getting to and from their business, for their cottage was quite at the end of the village; but perhaps the happiest day of the year for the sisters was that on which they "got back to their dishes!"

"For there is nothing like *your own!*" said Miss Pearl, shaking her curls. "Not but what Mr. Mallow's pattern is handsome; it *is*, for them that likes a band. But when you have grown up with a sprig, nothing else is quite the same, seems as though."

Miss Ruby, as I say, joined in the duet, but not, her observant twin thought, with her customary heartiness. Neither did she show her usual keen enjoy-

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ment of the eggs (scrambled this time, with crisp curls of bacon surrounding them) and the lion's potatoes. She was absent-minded and took little notice even of the Sally Luns. All this might have passed as the result of fatigue, or an exceptionally busy day; but when, on finishing her creamcake, Miss Ruby refused, positively refused, her half of the odd one, Miss Pearl spoke with conviction.

"Sister," she said, "you have something on your mind; do not deny it!"

"Sister," replied Miss Ruby, "I *have*. Do not press me! I cannot eat another morsel."

A troubled silence ensued. The table was cleared, the dishes washed and put away, but not to the customary accompaniment of cheerful babble. Miss Ruby sighed deeply over her "wiper," one of a set presented by Mr. Mallow as a birthday gift. Miss Pearl, the elder by half an hour in this world, and with all her maternal instinct centred in her sister, yearned to comfort her; but the bond of discretion and custom kept her silent. Anything that Sister felt at liberty to communicate, she would; far be it from Miss Pearl to intrude upon the sanctity of Office!

Miss Ruby was the first to break the silence.

"Let's we come out on the stoop!" she said. (The Misses Caddie never forgot that their father, the late lamented Cassius M. Caddie, had been a New York Merchant. They were only ten years old when he died, and their mother brought them back to her native Cyrus, but they said "stoop" for "porch" and

“aquascutum” for “waterproof,” as long as they lived.)

The sisters went out on the porch—I beg their pardon! the stoop!—and sat down on a bench at the side. It was a lovely evening; the air was full of peace and silence, broken now and then by a low call from some nesting bird. Miss Ruby sighed again.

“Sister,” Miss Pearl spoke timidly; “could you feel to free your mind? You know that anything you might say would be sacred——”

“I know it well!” Miss Ruby touched her twin’s shoulder lightly; it was in the nature of a caress; they had not been brought up to kiss.

“I will own this much to you, Sister, that never, in the course of my professional career, have I been so tempted to speak as I am this night.”

She paused; Miss Pearl made a little sound expressive of sympathy and concern.

“It is not only,” Miss Ruby went on, “the extraordinary nature of the message itself, though—well, Sister, you really *never did!*—but it is the feeling—” Miss Ruby glanced around her in the dusk and lowered her voice—“the feeling that the sanctity of the Office has been *already violated.*”

“Sister Ruby! how *could*——”

“I feel it so to be! this much I can say, and will. Pearl, the message was for Kitty Ross, from California. I delivered it by telephone as usual. ‘Kitty,’ I said, ‘do not be alarmed; the message, though *most unusual*, is not otherwise than cheerful, if correctly transmitted, though of course at that distance it is im-

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possible to be sure.' Then I gave her the words of the message——”

“Yes, Sister!” Miss Pearl’s voice was tense with eagerness.

“The words of the message!” Miss Ruby seemed to be holding herself in forcible restraint. “I then asked her if it was clear, and she made answer that it was. To make quite sure, I asked her to repeat it, and she so did. Then she hung up; and—Sister, at that living moment of time, *some one else hung up!* I cannot be deceived;” as Miss Pearl uttered a cry of amazement, “and it is not the first time that it has happened, but I am resolved it shall be the last. That——”

“Good evening, girls!” a high-pitched voice broke in on Miss Ruby’s low, impressive tones. Mrs. Sharpe appeared, slightly out of breath as usual.

“I thought I’d make a run in, and wish you joy; not that birthdays is all joy in this world, especially when you’re on in years. You’re gettin’ quite gray, ain’t you? Well, Ruby, *what* do you make of that message?”

Miss Ruby grew rigid. “To what do you allude, Sophia?” she asked.

Mrs. Sharpe laughed, a high excited titter. “That telephone!” she cried: “it is the beat! I keep tellin’ and tellin’ Jonas Chamberlain, and he doesn’t do a thing about it. Everything that goes to Kitty Ross’s goes *right through* my house. I s’posed you knew, of course. It’s real annoying; I should think they would stop it. But—well, if that is *so*, girls, we shall see great times in Cyrus, what say, Pearlie?”

"I do not understand you!" Miss Pearl spoke stiffly.

"What!" Mrs. Sharpe bent forward eagerly, trying through the twilight to scrutinize the features of the twins. "You don't mean to say—you don't mean Ruby *hasn't told* you? Well! It's *my* belief that such things should be made public. The idea! is this a Republic, I ask you, or a Monarchy? '*Coming, coach and six. Duke.*' Did you ever? If that isn't English Aristocracy trying to lord it over——"

She stopped. The twin sisters had risen to their feet; their round spectacles glistened through the dim twilight.

"Sophia Sharpe!" Miss Ruby spoke slowly, her curls nodding emphasis. "Sophia Sharpe, you have tampered with the sanctity of Public Office. *I forbid* you to repeat what you have criminally—I repeat, *criminally* overheard!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" piped Miss Pearl, her bird-like voice shrill with indignation. "To cast reflection upon Sister's faithfulness in office!"

"Oh!" Mrs. Sharpe's tone was shriller yet. "I've come here to be instructed, have I? By two old maids, too, who have never had any encouragement that *I* know of to change their state! This is what I get by coming out of my way to wish you joy on your *birthday!* a precious day it is! so *important* to everybody! One sure thing, you've had *enough* of 'em, te hee! I guess my run-in will be a run-off, though you *are* so pleasant and hospitable, I'm sure!"

"Do not darken these doors again!" said Miss Pearl.

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“Do not speak to me in the street!” said Miss Ruby. “The acquaintance is at an end!”

“I thank you for the favor!” the visitor flung back over her departing shoulder. “Of course it’s been a *great privilege* to come traipsing out here to the other end of nowhere, but it’s one I *can* dispense with, if I try hard; and as for *speaking* to two poor mildewed little old maids that stick to their jobs like seaweed to a rock, and that’s kept there out of *pity*—out of *pity!*——”

The sound of the closing door checked her flow of eloquence; she departed.

This is the true story of the quarrel between the Misses Caddie, “two ladies as highly respected in our midst for their ability and discretion as beloved for their many endearing social qualities,” as Mr. Jordano took occasion to say in the next *Centinel*, and one who from this time on was commonly spoken of as “that *mean* Sophia Sharpe!”

But the deed was done. Before morning all Cyrus knew that Kitty Ross was about to receive a visit from an English Nobleman, and that: A, he expected to be met by a coach and six horses, or, B, that his arrival by such conveyance was to be anticipated.

Before considering the effect of this news upon Cyrus, let us glance for a moment into Madam Flynt’s parlor on the evening of the day just past. Madam Flynt was receiving a visitor; alone, Miss Croly having gone for the quiet stroll which was her delight on summer evenings. “With Nature!” the good lady would explain. “I love to stroll hand in hand with

Nature: so vast, yet so benignant, in her gentler aspects." She recited poetry as she strolled, finding it most beneficial.

Madam Flynt's visitor stood by the door, declining a proffered seat; an apron thrown over her head announced in some subtle way that her visit was one of urgency; she spoke in low, emphatic tones.

"No'm! no! she wasn't feverish that I could see; I couldn't feel her pult, but her skin felt natural. She acted more like she was out of her mind. I thought I'd step over!"

"You were quite right, Sarepta! Tell me again just how it was, will you? I didn't quite take it in the first time."

Evidently nothing loth, Sarepta spoke as follows:

"It was five o'clock, or thereabouts. She had just come in from the stable; she feeds too much sugar to them hosses, and so I tell John Tucker, but of course he knew all about hosses before they was created. The telephone rang and she went. It was Ruby Caddie's voice. I could tell by the cackle; she sounds for all the world like our Black Spanish hen; of course I couldn't hear what she said. 'Yes,' says Kitty. 'Yes, quite clear! Yes, I understand entirely.' Then I judge Ruby asked her to repeat the message, for she says, kind o' singin' it, Madam Flynt, the way I never heard her speak before since she *could* speak: '*Comin', coach and six. Duke!*'

"Well: Kitty covered her face with her two hands and stood there a spell: if you'll excuse me mentionin' it, as if she was *brayin'*! Then she hung up, and

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swung round, and see me standin' there. I had no idea of listenin', you understand, Madam Flynt. I would scorn the action. I was just passin' through the hall, and the sound of her voice—well, it was so *peculiar*, I just stopped in my steps. First of it when she looked up, she was white as my apurn: then, all in a flash, the child's face was like she was afire, so to express it; her eyes were shinin', and her cheeks—well, there! I expected to hear the flames cracklin'. She rushes up to me and takes my two hands. 'Dance, Sarepta!' she says, wild as a hawk. 'Dance! you *must* dance!' and she drags me up and down that hall—you know the stren'th of her wrists, drivin' like she does—till the breath was out of my body; and all the time she was singin', a crazy kind of jig tune she's ben singin' about the house this two weeks past till I thought I should *fly*. 'Do for the land's sake,' I'd say, 'sing something that has some *sense* to it!' It don't begin nor end anywhere, goes round and round like a cat's cradle—well, it's crazy, that's all there is to it! She sang and danced till *her* breath gave out; I was past speech or cry by that time. Then she throws her arms round me and hugs me till—well, I *hadn't* any breath, but if I had, I wouldn't of, if you understand what I mean: and then off she flings out the back door, and I heard her routin' round in the stable, and next thing out she comes with Pilot in the light wagon and off they go down the ro'd like Job's cat after a fish. That was two hours ago, and she ain't come back yet. I thought I'd step over——"

"Where is John Tucker?" asked Madam Flynt.

“Home sick, with the rheumatism. If he’d ben there, I don’t know as I need to have troubled you; not that he has much sense, but still he has *some*. Hark! there! I do believe—yes’m, there she is; just turnin’ into the yard. Thanks be! I must hasten back.”

“You are a good soul, Sarepta Darwin!” Madam Flynt spoke with feeling. “You were very right to come over. Get Kitty to come in and see me in the morning, will you? Make some errand, so she won’t know——”

“Yes’m, I will! I’ll borry an egg or something; thank *you*, Madam Flynt! Good-night!”

Kitty, dancing into the kitchen half an hour later, found a grim figure sitting bolt upright, reading a religious paper of austere appearance. Her gay “Supper, please, Sarepta!” was rewarded with the information that there was no supper that Sarepta knew of. Supper was at six o’clock; if folks were here, they’d get it; if they preferred to get their victuals elsewhere, it was no concern of hers that she knew of. Kitty opened wide eyes.

“Oh! Excuse me for living!” she said. “Am I so *very* late? The moonlight is so heavenly, Sarepta, I think I was very good to come in at all; and of course I had to see to those Lambs before I had my own supper. John Tucker wanted to send Timmy over, but I wouldn’t let him; I love to put them to bed once in a while. But no matter, Sarepta. I’ll find a doughnut and some milk; don’t bother. I’m not really hungry!”

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Kitty's hand was on the buttery door when Sarepta intervened with a truly awful aspect.

"When you wish me to go, Kitty Ross, you can say so and I will. While I stay, I calc'late to attend to things in this kitchen. You go into the sittin'-room and I'll bring you a tray."

The tray, when brought, displayed a most tempting little meal: creamed chicken, buttered scones, cocoa and strawberry jam; but for once Kitty seemed hardly conscious of the good things. She looked up as if in a dream, her eyes soft and dewy.

"Are you very cross, Sarepta?" she asked. "I'm sorry I was late."

"Humph!" Sarepta apparently extremely cross, and busy setting down the tray.

"Don't you love me?" asked the girl, as she had been used to ask when she was six and wanted an extra cooky. No answer being returned, Kitty came out of her dream, her own alert, thoughtful self; looked and saw the grim lips quivering, the workworn hands trembling as they hovered about the tray.

"Sarepta!" Kitty sprang up, threw her arms round the neck of her faithful friend, and whispered three words in her ear.

"So you see!" she said.

Sarepta Darwin threw her apron over her head and departed, to hurry up to her room and lock her door. For this time, Sarepta *was* crying, and no one must ever know it. The idea!

CHAPTER XXI

THE TRIBULATIONS OF CYRUS

THE matter came up at Bygoods', next morning, and was discussed with due gravity and decorum: present, Miss Almeria behind the counter, Messrs. Mallow and Jordano in front of it; Mr. Bygood in his wheel-chair, enjoying a little Society in the front shop, before retiring to the slumbrous calm of the back. To these were soon added the Messrs. Jebus, who had been alarmed by a sudden incursion of Sharpes the night before, heralding the proximate over-running of Cyrus by dissolute nobles "cracking their whips round our ears and driving their wheels *over our bodies* if something isn't done about it!"

Mr. Josiah, in anxious squeaks, wanted to know what all this *meant*; hey? He was all upset; he didn't know as he could match his silks, this kind of thing going on; his hand fairly shook. They claimed Ruby Caddie had taken to her bed: was that so?

"It is so!" Miss Almeria inclined her head gravely. "Ruby is quite prostrated. My sister is with her, Pearl, of course, being unable to leave the Bank. It is very unfortunate, Mr. Jebus. The sanctity of the Office has been violated, you see, and Ruby feels it

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keenly. It was not in any way her fault: an unpardonable indiscretion——”

“What I say is,” Mr. Mallow broke in,—“excuse me for interruptin’, Miss Bygood; what I say is, that woman ought to be taken and *ducked*, sir! ducked in the hoss-pond for a common cormorant! She is a dirigo, that’s what she is! a dirigo, sir!” (Mr. Mallow meant termagant and virago, but it did not matter; everybody understood.)

“Doubtless! doubtless!” Mr. Jordano waved his note-book anxiously. “Most ill-judged! most unfortunate-tate-tate! But as to the—if I may borrow a legal expression, the *corpus delicti*; as to the alleged message itself. Is that, does Miss Bygood consider, correctly reported? No indiscreeto, I beg to assure you! But if it *has* been made public—there seem to be two reports current, which in a measure conflict-tict-tict. Is it permissible to ask which is the correct—a—version?”

Miss Almeria pondered a moment, conscious that all eyes were fixed eagerly upon her.

“As the message *has* been made public,” she said at last, “though feloniously so, feloniously so, I must consider——” she bowed to a general murmur of assent from the company—“it is perhaps best to be sure that it is correctly given. The words of the message were these: ‘*Coming; coach and six: Duke.*’ So much our friend, Miss Caddie, admits. As to the precise meaning of the message, she declines to express an opinion; very properly, in my judgment.”

“Oh, quite so! quite so!” murmured Mr. Jordano.

The Tribulations of Cyrus

“Very discreeto, I am sure. Hers not to reason why, hers but to do and—which we sincerely hope that estimable lady will refrain from—” Mr. Jordano became involved, and flourished the note-book nervously.

“Question is, what in hemp does it *mean?*” broke in Mr. Mallow again. “I beg you’ll excuse me, Miss Bygood; that darned tattle-tale has got me all worked up; but I want to get to the bottom of this. Does it mean that the feller is *comin’* that way, drivin’ six hosses—three pair, that would be, I presume—he wouldn’t drive that number tantrum, most likely—because if it does, I’d have to get extry help, you see, Miss Almery. Or would he bring his own help with him, think? A Dook is next to a king, isn’t he? Did you ever see a Dook, Mr. Bygood?”

Mr. Bygood, as was well known, had made several voyages in his early manhood, in the mystic character of ship’s husband, and had visited Foreign Parts. All eyes turned on the old gentleman, who beamed gently through his spectacles. No, he had never seen a duke; that is, never in life, sir! He had seen the statue of the Duke of Wellington, in Hyde Park, London, England; it was considered very fine, he believed: very fine. A work of art, sir!

Mr. Jason Jebus, whose contribution to the conversation had been hitherto a running commentary of squeaks, now became articulate.

“I was in to Abram Hanks’s just now to get me some lahstic for my boots—” (have I said that the partners wore elastic-sided Congress boots? They did; the difference between right and left was less

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obvious in these than in other boots, and Mr. Jason always wore out Mr. Josiah's left boots, which did not fit the club foot)—“and *he* claimed the—individual—was comin' by rail, and wanted some one should meet him at the deepo with a coach and six horses. Cissy Sharpe told him, he said.”

“Good reason for believin' 'tain't so!” snorted Mr. Mallow.

“Abram didn't let on he felt anyways sure of it,” Mr. Jason continued. “He thought mebbe he'd dress up his window a mite on the chance—strangers, you know—and I didn't know but what I would. Like to have 'em see a tasty window, if they *should* come. Like to have Cyrus stores make as good appearance as any. Josiah has a handsome centrepiece just com——”

“Now! now!” Mr. Josiah put in testily. “Don't you go runnin' away with no notions, Jason! I ain't said I was willin' to put that piece in the winder, and I don't know as I am. There's consid'able blue in it, and blue won't stand a winder light, it perishes right out. Come on! we must be goin'. Give you good mornin', neighbors!”

Mr. Josiah stumped off, Mr. Jason twittering at his heels. Mr. Mallow looked after them with a tolerant smile.

“Now Jason will put in the day,” he said, “publishin' up that winder. Start him and Abram Hanks, and we shall have the whole Street dandied up like Decoration Day. I guess the Mallow House will stay pretty much as it is, Dook or no Dook.” (Oh, Mr. Mallow!

Mr. Mallow! as if Hannah Sullivan were not at work at this moment "cleaning" your spotless paint, while Billy polishes the shining silver!) "I guess what suits the Boarders'll do for him, what say?"

"Indeed, yes, Mr. Mallow!" Miss Almeria cast a kind glance on "the Mine Host." "The Mallow House is always the perfection of order and taste. You would put him in the Bird of Paradise Room, I presume?"

"Yes'm; that is, I think so!" Mr. Mallow's brow was thoughtful. "It's the largest room, and the handsomest, most think. Me and Billy was lookin' things over this mornin'. He didn't know but the Castle Room would be the most suitable;" (the Mallow House rooms were named from the patterns of their wall-paper) "you know I put a *resource* in there last fall, kind o' balcove like, and he thought set the bed inside that, 'twould have the look of two rooms; but I don't know! Nor I don't know as we've got this matter rightly settled," he added with a laugh, "which way this feller is comin', if he *is* comin'. It may be all folderido, some fool kid monkeyin' with the telegraph, thinkin' he's all-fired smart. How 'bout that, Very?"

Mr. Jordano, on reflection, thought that improbable. The message was not such as a boy would be likely to invent: besides, the distance—he understood California was the source——

At this point Mr. Bygood, who had been dozing in his chair, looked up. "What does Kitty say?" he asked calmly.

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The others looked at each other.

"Dear Father," said Miss Almeria gently; "under all the circumstances, it would be hardly suitable, I fear, to——"

Mr. Mallow colored high and cleared his throat nervously. "That's right!" he said. "That's right, Miss Bygood. I—I met Kitty this mornin', on my way down: I forgot to mention it. I didn't *say* anything, you understand: I only just threw it off, jokin' like. 'Well, Kitty,' I says. 'How's the British this mornin'?' She looks at me, Doctor all over; astonishin' the way she'll call him up sometimes. 'Pretty well, Mr. Mallow,' she says. 'As well as can be expected after Bunker Hill,' she says. We shan't get anything out of Kitty."

It was finally decided, Miss Almeria voicing the general opinion, that the less said about the momentous telegram the better. The dignity of Cyrus would be compromised by taking any notice of tidings received in a manner "equally irregular and reprehensible." Miss Almeria bent her handsome head at its severest angle.

"I am confident, dear friends," she concluded, "that silence is the only—shall I say attitude?—worthy of Cyrus in this emergency."

"Oh, quite so! quite so!" murmured Mr. Jordano with forlorn nobility. "You point us the skyward way, Miss Almeria, as ever!"

"That's right!" said Mr. Mallow. "Silence and Cyrus: both begin with C. Guess we can get along, even if he don't come at all, what say? Shall we tod-

The Tribulations of Cyrus

dle, Very? Good mornin', Mr. Bygood! mornin', Miss Bygood, and thank you kindly!"

John Tucker was perhaps the only person in Cyrus who knew nothing of the fateful telegram. He was having a suffering time, poor John, with rheumatism. He had struggled valiantly against it through the long winter and the perilous combination of extremes that we call spring in New England. He had managed to keep the knowledge of his ailment from Kitty, and had gone to the station in all weathers, steadfastly refusing to allow her to meet "them pesky trains." Now, however, when "the season of snows and sins" was over, and summer was here with her lap full of roses, the enemy clutched John Tucker in an iron grip and held him fast. He struggled out every day, and crept over to Ross House, where he sat, in stable or harness room, directing his son Tim, who did his fourteen-year-old best, but found "Pa" hard to satisfy. Tim felt fully equal to driving Old Crummles, or even Dan, to meet the trains, but was bidden briefly to "shut up" when he volunteered to do so. Kitty was all eagerness to drive herself, but John's face of misery at the suggestion smote her heart, and she engaged Amos Barrell, the blacksmith's stalwart son, to perform this duty, and to help in the stable when more help was needed. Amos was usually a silent youth, with little more to say than "Yep" and "Nope" and "That so?" but about this time he became conversational, not to say inquisitive. He wanted to know if they was any coaches in town. What was that big wagon there all kivered up? Was that a coach?

Warn't? Well, he didn't hardly think—some said there was a coach in the stable out to Gaylords'. Was it sold, think, or was it there yet? Gramp said there used to be one to the Maller House when he was a boy, but he never heard of their puttin' more'n four hosses to it, Gramp said. Gramp allowed mebbe—

“Shut up!” said John Tucker. “Know what that means?”

Visitors came to the harness room, as usual; more than usual, in fact. John Tucker, his bones like red-hot iron within him, thought they came like grasshoppers in a hayfield. Orison Wesley sidled in, lank and lantern-jawed; sat upon a keg and sympathized with John's sufferings. He knew what 'twas; ketched you in the small of your back—gorry! he guessed he'd used a case of Carter's Chlorodyne Liniment last winter. The woman just slabbed it on; slabbed it on, sir. That was right; you wanted something that s'arched your vitals.

“How many hosses you drivin' now, Tucker?”

“I ain't drivin' none!” growled John, one eye on the clock.

“That's right! but I mean when you have your health? Lemme see! You've got three here, ain't you?”

John grunted assent.

“Drive 'em single mostly, do ye? Ever hitch 'em up together?”

“What ye mean? Three hosses together? No! did ever you go up to the Asylum? Well, I wouldn't if I was you; they mightn't let you out again.”

The Tribulations of Cyrus

Mr. Wesley swayed to and fro on the keg, chuckling slowly. He could make allowances for a man's being a mite crotchety with the rheumatiz. Besides, he had not got the information he sought.

"Ever drive more than three?" he droned on. "Ever drive six hosses, Tucker?"

John Tucker rose slowly and painfully, creaking in every joint.

"I've drove six jackasses," he said. "I drove 'em out of this stable. S'pose you foller 'em, Orison, and see where they've got to by this time! I'm goin' home to supper."

At the "Chantry," great excitement prevailed. The girls were all a-twitter, speculating on the probable age of the expected nobleman, his appearance—"He ought to be dark, of course, to contrast; and dark is so much more aristo——." "My *dear!* how absurd! every duke I ever *read* of was pure Saxon, with blue or gray eyes and fair hair swept back from a marble——")—the probable date of his advent.

"My *dear!* he may be here to-morrow; just *think!* what *shall* we say to him? Will he expect us to curtsey, do you suppose?"

Thus Zephine, the least sensible of the girls.

"Well, we won't!" said Nelly stoutly. Nelly was engaged to Joe Myers now, and was not afraid of all the Dukes in creation. "I'll tell you what, girls! Kitty is coming to supper to-night: I asked her this morning. Mother, you said there would be plenty, didn't you? We'll ask her right out. I'm sure we know her well enough!"

A Daughter of Jehu

"Ask what?" Mr. Chanter spoke abruptly, looking up from his *Congregationalist*. That was the most singular thing about Pa; you never could tell when he wouldn't hear, though generally you might discuss the most thrilling events in the (Cyrus) world without his taking the slightest notice.

"Ask what?" repeated the Reverend Timothy.

"Lor, Pa! how you startled us! Ask Kitty about this duke, or whatever he is, who is coming to see her. She is coming to supper to-night, and Nelly is going to ask her all about him, right straight out, and about the coach and six, and all."

"Nelly will do nothing of the sort." Mr. Chanter spoke with calm decision. "Kitty knows her own affairs; if she has anything to tell us, she will; if not, it is none of our business."

"Quite right!" nodded Mrs. Chanter over her basket. "Suppose we finish the stockings, girls! you will each want a whole pair to receive the Duke in, you know; perhaps Pa will read us a chapter of 'Pickwick' while we work."

What was to be done with parents like these? "Wax nine times out of ten," whispered Zephine to Lina, "and the tenth time cast iron with a twinkle!"

Kitty came to supper, looking so lovely that even these friends, who knew and loved her beauty so well, marveled at it. The girls worshiped openly; Rodney and Aristides heaved furtive sighs and cast shy glances over their cocoa-cups. The elders noticed with silent joy that a little pallor, a little drawn look about the sweet mouth, a little dark line under the eyes,

The Tribulations of Cyrus

that had troubled their kind hearts, was gone from the girl's face. She bloomed like one of her own June roses; her eyes shot gay sparkles; her laughter sounded every note of joyous mirth—but alas! for the girls! she said no word of dukes or coaches. At parting she kissed Mrs. Chanter with special warmth, and lingered a moment at the door looking at her host with shining eyes. "Would you mind if I kissed you, too?" she asked: and Mr. Chanter went back to his books with blurred spectacles and a lump in his throat. But Kitty made Rodney, her proud escort, race her all the way home, and honestly, he had no idea a girl could sprint like that.

Madam Flynt? That lady kept her own counsel in these days. She refused a visit from Mrs. Sharpe, sending word that she was specially engaged. So she was, up in her room, looking over her jewel-case, selecting certain emeralds, and being very short with Miss Croly, who deemed it her duty to touch lightly on the un wisdom (she did not say folly: the word would be discourteous!) of persons in later life wearing other than the simpler forms of jewelry. A chaste gold brooch, now——

It was intimated that when the lady's opinion was desired it would be asked for, and the friends parted—for half an hour.

Mrs. Sharpe, failing of entrance at Madam Flynt's, rang at the door of Ross House; continued to ring at intervals, for fifteen minutes, Kitty being out; finally went round to the back door and knocked. The door

A Daughter of Jehu

was opened three inches by Sarepta, a figure of granite.

"Oh, how do you do, Sarepta?" thus Mrs. Sharpe in honeyed tones. "I think the front door bell must be out of order. I've been ringing and ringing! Kitty at home?"

Kitty out: not likely to return before night. Sarepta attempted to close the door, but the visitor slipped an adroit foot into the opening.

"How well you're looking, Sarepta! I declare I think I must come in and make *you* a little visit, he! he!"

She tried to push the door, wider, but it was held in an iron grip; Sarepta, apparently, had not heard her remark.

"Ahem!" Mrs. Sharpe tried a new tack. "Expecting visitors, are you, Sarepta?"

"Not as I know of!"

"Oh, I understand! *a* visitor, I should have said. It's always well to be exact. Well, all I called for was to say, if you wanted to *borrow* anything, silver or the like of that, I hope you'll come to me, Sarepta. Mr. Sharpe was part English, you know; his grandfather came from the Provinces, and of course I'm acquainted with English ways. Perhaps I'd better come in and talk it over——"

"Excuse me! *My bread is in the oven!*" said Sarepta Darwin.

The door closed on a shriek.

"I scrouged her toe *good!*" Sarepta told Madam

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Flynt that night. "She bellered right out, and I was glad."

Perhaps the most complete summing up of the situation was given that evening by Miss Almeria Bygood as she sat with her sister over nine o'clock supper, that pleasant meal that still lingers in blessed Cyrus, where we dine at half-past twelve and sup at five or six. Molly had brought in the tray and drawn up the little round table between the two ladies as they sat with their feet on the embroidered fender-stool. (There was no fire, but they always sat there in the evening.) Pretty Molly, crisp and trim in her light print dress! Miss Bygoods did not hold with putting maids in black, especially young maids. "Why should they be made to ape the semblance of sorrow?" Miss Almeria asked with dignity. "We trust our service is not so arduous as to cause them the reality!"

They were talking of the duke, of course, over their cocoa and sponge drops: who, save Kitty and John Tucker, talked of anything else in this week of the Tribulations of Cyrus? They wondered, hoped, feared, wondered again. Would they lose their Kitty, the rose and jewel of their little world? Would this great nobleman carry her off, if not on his horse (Miss Egeria knew nothing of strong men from the north!) at least in his coach and six? Thus Miss Egeria, trembling, romantic.

Surely not, Miss Almeria replied gravely. A sense of propriety would assuredly not be wanting in a person of such lofty position. At the same time, it was

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most unfortunate that Johanna and Edward were absent.

“Most unfortunate!” Miss Egeria sighed. “Not only for the—the suitability of it, of course, in every way, but—well, Sister, Johanna has such an air, such knowledge of the world; and Edward is such an elegant man! I am sure the duke would not anywhere meet finer manners, and we would wish him to see Cyrus at its best!”

“Dear Sister!” Miss Almeria laid her slender hand, with its antique but costly rings, gently on Miss Egeria’s cashmere sleeve; “have no fears on *that* score! there at least, if nowhere else, we may feel secure. In matters of courtesy and breeding—with one or two exceptions——” Miss Almeria closed her eyes; “Cyrus is *always* at its best!”

CHAPTER XXII

THE DUKE OF LEE

DURING the week that followed Cyrus was deeply impressed by the importance of fresh air and exercise. It walked abroad, at all hours of the day. Young Cyrus scoured the six roads that centred in the happy village, hung over fences, scanning the countryside, loitered about the station at train time. Mature Cyrus was genteelly busy in its front garden, tying up rose-bushes and removing (in gloves!) rose-beetles. Young and old alike found much business to be done in the Street. Abram Hanks drove a brisk trade in spools of thread and other small wares. Now and then something unusual was asked for, as when Nelly Chanter wanted some white mull, for a purpose unspecified.

"No, I ain't got any!" Mr. Hanks's tone expressed injury. "I had some, but them folks that was at the hotel last summer bought it all out on me!"

There was a positive run on Cheeseman's candy store; Uncle Ivory was almost annoyed by it. "Look at here, Sty!" he said one morning. "'Pears to me you've eat all the toffee that's likely to agree with you real good. That pan was full yesterday, and now look at it! I can't make it every day, you know.

A Daughter of Jehu

You ask the girls to make you up a pan of molasses at home, if you *have* to have any more!"

Aristides Chanter did feel that he needed special sustenance in the way of sweets. He knew, in his sixteen-year-old heart, that no one loved Kitty as he did; and now that Bobby was engaged to Melissa—well, Rod was only two years older; he didn't see but he had full as good a right—and anyhow, Rod was at college, and if this fellow was coming, Kitty's friends ought to be on the lookout for him; he might be an impostor, like the Ducal Decoy in that bloodhound yarn. Anyhow, it was awful poky hanging about the station, waiting for every train. Pa wouldn't let a fellow smoke, and a fellow must do *something!*

There was one person who haunted the station even more persistently than Aristides; this was Wilson Wibold. Wilson had become a rather deplorable figure in these days. He had resented bitterly Kitty's treatment of him on the occasion described in a previous chapter; he had also been badly frightened. Mr. Jordano might be a thought fantastic in certain aspects, but he was not a man to be trifled with; the stern admonition with which he had dismissed Wilson that day still rang in the ears of the rejected lover.

"Keep out of that lady's way-tay-tay, or it will be the worse for you-too-too!"

Wilson cowered under "Italio's" fiery glance, and slunk away, muttering curses that he dared not breathe aloud.

Uncle Marshall had been equally severe, on hearing from his friend of the occurrence. He told his nephew

plainly that if ever he heard of his pestering Kitty Ross again he would not only discharge him on the spot, but would flounce (trounce) him till he couldn't tell whether he was a bluenette or a blondin.

Nor were these threats the only ones that rankled in Wilson's mind. Bobby Chanter, now one of the family, disapproved entirely of his manners and customs in the bosom of that family, especially of his bearing toward his sister. Kind soul that Bobby was, he would not make trouble for poor Mrs. Wibird: he knew what mothers were; his blue eyes softened at the thought. He merely intimated to Wilson "on the quiet" that from now on he, Wilson, would be civil and pleasant-spoken to Melissa, and would bring in coal and kindling wood for his mother, or he, Bobby, would know the reason why.

Smarting under these manifold injuries, Wilson sought consolation where—alas! he was in the habit of seeking it; but the cupboard bottle held no exhilaration for him nowadays. He grew more and more sullen, more and more morose, brooding over his wrongs. With limpet tenacity—I beg his pardon! with Iron Will—he still clung to the idea of marriage with Kitty, of the mastership of Ross House; but now he conjured up lurid pictures of the methods by which the conquest was to be obtained. His path might lie through Blood!

"I would wade through seas of it to conquer you, proud woman!" he hissed through his teeth, scowling desperately at the mirror. He thought he looked rather like Lucifer. He saw his uncle and that "das-

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tard scribbler," as he mentally termed Mr. Jordano, lying with faces turned to the sky, a ghastly wound in their temples, from which the life blood welled. As for Billy—Wilson ground his teeth. Billy had "held him up" only that morning: held him by the collar with one hand and searched him with the other, confiscating the pocket-lurking bottle, and dismissing him with a friendly kick and "Better look out! better give up! goin' to the dogs, and no decent pup would look at you!"

The news of the expected advent of the "Duke," coming like a thunderclap, caused Wilson's cup of bitterness to overflow. On hearing it (Lissy came in full of the tidings. Wasn't it wonderful? Kitty deserved *everything*, of course, though Lissy understood the Aristocracy was commonly small and plain-looking. She didn't believe he would wear a coronet outside his hat, like they said; the idea!), Wilson retired to his room and locked the door. He would have double-locked it, as they did in stories, but did not know how.

This was the end! he intimated to the mirror. To live defeated, disgraced, robbed of his rights, or to pass in blood and flame, *perchance not alone!* He summoned up the scene. The train dashing into the station (Wilson leaned to the theory of arrival by train), the proud scion of an effete aristocracy alighting to find John Tucker perched on top of a "Tally Ho" with six spanking thoroughbreds tossing their heads and champing the bit. A fair, false face looks out of the coach window; a white, traitress hand waves. At that instant a slender Form springs for-

The Duke of Lee

ward with gesture of command. "Stay! one word—the last! Katrine, farewell! I go, but *not alone!*"

Two shots ring out. A shriek, a puff of smoke: two forms lie side by side, on the platform, and an agonizing woman flings herself on the bleeding breast of the last Wilson Wimberley Wibird—*too late!*

It sounds ludicrous: it was tragic. Weak minds can be desperate as well as strong ones, and poor Wilson, between drink and diseased vanity, was very near the edge of mania. So he hung about the station at every train hour; haggard, sodden, miserable; and really, the wonder is that no tragedy came of it. One might so easily have come, had it not been for that blessed rain.

The farmers had been saying for a month that what we wanted now was a nice warm rain. We got it, at the end of this week. It rained, and rained, and rained; one day, two days, three days. Not in showers or spurts, but in a steady, even downpour, without haste and without rest. For the first day, Cyrus held out bravely, tied up its roses and sped on its errands in waterproof and umbrella, hung about the station in mackintosh and rubber boots. The second day, the elders stayed indoors, looking anxiously out of window, listening eagerly for sound of hoofs or wheels; only young Cyrus patrolled the Street, and hung about the station. By evening of the third day, pretty much everybody had abandoned the Quest of the Duke, collective Cyrus expressing the opinion that no duke that ever was hatched was worth spoiling all your clothes and getting pneumonia for. It was on the

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evening of this third day that John Tucker gave up and took to his bed, his rheumatism taking an inflammatory turn. Kitty, alarmed at his condition, sent Amos Barrell off to Tinkham for Dr. Pettijohn, with rash orders not to come back without him. Amos found the doctor out of town, not to return till nine o'clock; obeyed orders, bestowed Dan in the livery-stable, and went to the "Movies." Briefly, when the 8:30 train was due, it was Kitty and Pilot who met it.

Number 47 was an express train, the pride of the Road; it was making its usual speed, and confidently expected to arrive "on the dot" at Cyrus and every other station on the line; nevertheless, to one passenger on board, Number 47 seemed the very limit of slowness. The tall broad-shouldered young man who sat in the furthest seat forward, elbows on knees, chin in hands, was deep in thought through most of the journey, but as eight o'clock drew near he waxed impatient. Call this an express train? If he ever let an accommodation—or a freight for that matter—crawl at this rate over any road *he* had anything to do with—good-night! Stopping at every back yard! to pick up the milk cans, he supposed! He fumed, looked at his watch (front and back: the latter seemed to interest him most, though the bright face that smiled at him from a kodak print had little to say about time), then plunged in thought again. Did she look like that now? he wondered. Had she changed much in these three years? Three years! it was a breath—it was an eternity!

“My soul! What if she—what if somebody else——”

He sprang up as if something had stung him; recollected himself, with a startled glance around him; met the interested gaze of a Vassar freshman across the aisle; sat down and with a shrug of his broad shoulders settled into his reverie again. Nonsense! that kind of girl—there was only one of the kind—wouldn't forget in three years, nor in thirteen. That last look she gave him, standing at the gate—he paused, letting the thought of it curl warm about his heart, sent the blood pulsing up into his ears. Beautiful ears, the Vassar freshman thought; they were all she could see now over his coat collar, except the thick crop of hay-colored hair. Kitty used to say that when the Cyrus hay-crop failed they could fall back on Tom's hair, and then she would quote with her own delicious twinkle, “Good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow!”

If she had changed, Tom told himself severely, it could only be for the better. She was a woman now, his little girl: his little dancing gentlewoman of high quality. He hummed a tune between his teeth; whistled it; hummed it again. A quaint tune, with no special beginning or ending. A gentleman in the seat behind him became restive, shot irritated glances in his direction; was on the point of remonstrating when the tune ceased. The young man, glancing up, had caught a glimpse of himself in a wall mirror. Talk about change! what would Kitty say to him?

He stared straight into the wide-apart gray-blue

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eyes with their thick short lashes like a black fringe; noted the three deep lines ruled straight across the broad forehead; scrutinized the curious scar on the left cheek. "Well, you *are* a show!" muttered Tom.

Of course he couldn't help the scar; well, he couldn't help any of it, for that matter; but she might like to know about the scar. They almost got him that time! It was rum, that particular tribe taking a round piece out of an enemy's cheek and stringing 'em on a necklace to hang round the joss's neck. Gee! that was a close shave! His eyes narrowed, seeing strange things through their thick lashes. A camp in a mountain pass, snowbound; food gone, water low. Lowering faces of yellow men, huddled round a fire, casting evil looks at the two, the white man and his faithful "boy," guarding the water skin. Then the rush, five against two; the daggers gleaming, the wild cries, the shots—how the echoes went battering back and forth between the rock walls! then the shriek, the fall—Tom shut his eyes, and drew a quick breath. He was a kindly man. It was an ugly sight, that figure pitching headlong over the edge, its yellow robes fluttering back like the wings of some great swooping bird—bah!

"*I had* to kill him!" said Tom. "He almost got me, and anyway we couldn't have managed but four. All the same," he added, his eyes still on the bronzed face in the glass, "it is not precisely a ducal countenance that will greet you, Kitty my dear. Will you mind very much? You shall have the silks and satins all right, little girl.

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“‘And she shall have silks and satins for to wear,
And a coach and six for to take the air.’

(I wonder what I shall find at the station: Flanagan, I suppose, with the ‘speed hoss.’ I’ll walk, if it holds up a bit.)

“‘And she shall drive in St. James’s Square,
And no lady in the city shall with her compare—’”

“*Oxcuse me, sair!*”

Tom started, and turned in his seat, to behold a bearded and spectacled person of studious appearance, quivering with some strong emotion.

“I beg pardon?”

The gentleman’s aspect relaxed slightly: Tom’s speaking voice was of delightful quality, cordial and musical.

“Oxcuse me, sair!” the bearded one repeated. “I am a musician!”

Tom bowed slightly. “Awfully jolly, I’m sure!” he murmured. “Must be an interesting profession.”

“Zat air zat you sing,” the gentleman continued, “it is *nossing*: but *nossing* at all! it is no *composeetion*! *ça m’agace les nerfs, jusqu’ à la frénésie*——”

“*Mille pardons, Monsieur!*”

Tom spoke excellent French. He was extremely sorry to have offended a musical ear; he was humming unconsciously. He explained that the air was an ancient one: an old English folk-song and dance.

“Ah!” the clouded brow cleared instantly. English! that explained itself. A great nation, but unmusical.

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Still, the song of the people, that revealed the heart; he in return asked a thousand pardons. Let Monsieur, he begged, continue to carol the artless chant of our Saxon neighbor highly respected. He begged, he insisted. Come, then! Let us hear the little air! it might—who knew?—be arranged——

“Tinkham!” shouted the brakeman.

The musician rose precipitately. His station! he was desolated to conclude an acquaintance so auspiciously begun. He gave piano lessons in Tinkham! His card: M. Anatole Beaulieu. *Peut-être*——

“*Au plaisir, Monsieur!*”

Tom sat down laughing. “Five minutes more, and we should have been swearing eternal friendship and singing the ‘Marseillaise.’ Nice little fellow! give me the Caucasian every time! Only ten minutes now! I wonder if she’ll like——”

Mr. Lee cast a surreptitious glance around him. There were very few people in the car now, and nobody was paying any attention to him. (The Vassar freshman had got out, with a backward glance.) He furtively drew from an inside pocket a small case, and inspected its contents. It certainly was a good stone: *vieille roche*, the Peking jeweler assured him, and he believed it. The setting was good, too; he thought she would like the setting. Of course nothing was good enough for Kitty, but——

“Ticket, please!”

Tom started, and looked up to meet the keen, quiz-zical gaze of a pair of extremely intelligent brown eyes.

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"Some ring!" said the conductor. "Likely to give satisfaction, I should judge. Coming events cast their shadows before, what? Getting out at Cyrus, ain't you?"

Blushing absurdly for such a big brown creature, Tom handed over his ticket and pocketed the ring.

"I dare say you know how it is yourself!" he said with a half-laugh.

"Bet your life! married mine last fall. Wish you—*suffering Moses!* if this isn't Tom Lee, you may toast and butter me and I won't say one word. Well, well, well! you *are* a stranger! 'Member Bunty Jackson over to Tupham? That's me!"

Amid mutual greetings, friendly reminiscences, laughter and chaff, the train drew into Cyrus station, and Tom was bundled off, rather bewildered, with "Good luck, Tommy! see that you get her, and when you've got her——"

Exit train: *manet* Thomas Lee, portmanteau in hand, looking about him through a curtain of rain.

It was raining harder than it had all day; the rain came sluicing down in torrents; it flowed like a stream along the gleaming platform: it poured off the sou'-wester of the oil-skin clad figure standing with one hand on the neck of a mighty good horse, Tom observed. No Flanagan there! Flanagan must be dead. "Cab?" he asked. The boy—looked like a boy: might be anything, muffled like that: Flanagan's son, perhaps?—for all reply opened the door of the carryall. Tom was about to step in, when a man, appearing sud-

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denly from nowhere, jostled rudely against him, and tried to thrust past him into the carriage.

"Here!" said Tom Lee. "Get out, will you? Where were you brought up?"

He had a glimpse of a white, furious face, that was somehow familiar; of eyes glaring at him in what looked like insane rage: what had he run into? Next moment his nostrils dilated; he sniffed, inhaling a pungent odor. Whiskey! That explained all.

"Poor devil thinks he's struck the patrol wagon!" he laughed. "Nothing like water to sober up on!" He put out his foot in a certain way he had learned in Japan; the intruder staggered and fell with a loud splash into the rain pool that had formed beside the platform.

"Drive on!" said Tom Lee. "He's all right! Dr. Ross's, please!"

It was a silent drive. Tom, full of his own thoughts, did not care to talk to Flanagan's boy or any other boy; his thoughts flew ahead on bright wings. Yet still his eyes took note through the dusk of rain of familiar objects. The full moon was behind the clouds, and mid-June evenings are never very dark. Here was the Street, empty and silent: who was night-watchman now, he wondered? What pranks he and Bobby Chanter used to play on big Andy Doolan! Bobby was a good sort. Tom hoped he was here still. Ah! was that Cheeseman's? "Just wait, Uncle Ivory! I'll be down to-morrow, sure pop! What price molasses peppermints?"

Up the hill now; ah! there was the Common! Tom's

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heart was beating fast. Those lights, straight across, were hers. Ah! here was his own house, dark and shuttered. Poor mother! dearest mother! she would be glad he was coming home, even if she was not here to welcome him. She loved Kitty like her own daughter. She knew the hope of his heart; it was her own, too, she told him so the night before she went away. The sweet Lady would be pleased, too: the lovely dark-lily lady, his second mother. Everybody would be pleased, he thought; if only Kitty herself could put up with a brown, wrinkled, carved-up anatomy like himself. "Kitty! Kitty, do you hear? I am coming!"

The carriage stopped. The silent figure on the front seat swung lightly to the ground: the door was opened. A trembling voice spoke.

"Will your Grace step out, or shall I bring a footstool? Tom! *Tom! don't!* not in the street, my dear! my dear!"

CHAPTER XXIII

HASTE TO THE WEDDING!

WELL! that is really all. Tom had come home: those four little words hold the rest of Kitty Ross's story.

"The Duke of Lee
Would married be
To a gentlewoman of high quality."

And

"How happy would that gentlewoman be
To be blessed with the Duke's good company!"

But—the refrain begins with "Marry!" Will you hear about the wedding? I came on for it, of course: I would have come ten times as far. Of course, too, if Tom had had his way, the way of his first masculine dash for possession, he and Kitty would have been married the morning after his arrival, with Sarepta for sole witness; but Kitty was firm. It would never do: Cyrus's feelings would be hurt.

"You don't know, darling, how perfectly angelic everybody has been to me, from the very moment I arrived. Why, Tom,—don't, dear! how *can* I talk when you—why, all these angel people wanted me to

come and *live* with them!" Kitty very large-eyed with affectionate gratitude.

Tom opined it was like their impudence! and promptly repeated a manœuvre considered by him highly original, which resulted in the total eclipse of Kitty, all except the top of her little fair head. They were sitting on the old leather sofa in the sitting-room. It was a short sofa, and Kitty now decreed that Tom was to sit at the further end, and stay there, unless he would behave and listen to her. He couldn't hear unless he held her hand—both hands? What nonsense! Well, then——

"You see, dear! Cyrus is the blessedest place in the world, and the *only* place to live in; but there aren't many—many *occasions*, you see, Tom. Now a wedding is an occasion! Aunt Johanna's was delightful, but it had to be very small, because the Judge—I mean Uncle Edward—can't *abide* occasions."

"No more can I," said Tom.

"You'll have to abide them, sir! what are you a duke for, I should like to know? For me? That is no answer. Well—so—when I saw how disappointed they were—the Twinnies, and dear Miss Caddies, and the Chanter girls, and—oh, everybody except just the few people who *had* to be asked—I said then that if ever I *should* be married—though I never expected to be then—I would have a Real Wedding, and ask Everybody! Oh, Tommy! you know I heard——" Here followed an account of Tom's reported marriage to the cattle king's widow, marble palace and all. Tom shouted with laughter.

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“Good old Mother Harris! Sixty years old, and weighs two hundred pounds; that is rich! She’s married a Leigh all right: Tim, her head stockman. She’s a good friend of mine, though, Kitty. Darling—Well, I *have* to have just one, after being married to Aunt Harris. Go on, you little precious, precious——”

“That’s all!” said Kitty, demurely. “I want to have a Real Wedding, and to ask Everybody: Savory Bite and all, Tommy!”

So she had, and so she did. Some of the neighbors thought they would wait for the return of Judge and Mrs. Peters in September: but these did not know Tom Lee. Tom sent a cable the morning after his arrival. “Marry Kitty. When? Lee.” The answer flashed back: “To-morrow. Joy. Peters.” So *that* was all right.

It was the Reallest Wedding that ever was. The day was made on purpose, of diamond and sapphire and much fine gold of June sunshine. The church—I beg its pardon! the meeting-house; the beloved white box with its beautiful spire, its square pews, its towering pulpit, its everything that a meeting-house should have—was trimmed with masses of white lilac and spiræa, till, as the *Centinel* said next day, it was a Palace of Purity and a Temple of Troth. Madam Flynt gave the bride away; the dear bride, more lovely in her simple white gown than words can say. The bridegroom looked like Cortez the Conqueror, Miss Croly said: “So majestic, yet so affable, my love!” There were six bridesmaids in pink muslin; I myself,

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the three Chanters, Lissy Wibird, who was to be married next month, and—I wonder if anybody in the world except Kitty Ross would have asked Cissy Sharpe to stand up with her! We all protested, I am rather ashamed to remember; but Kitty said Cissy was a schoolmate just as much as the rest of us, and it would be unkind to leave her out; and I am bound to say it was the making over of Cissy, who really was pathetic in her adoration of Kitty ever after.

Mr. Jordano was head usher, cloak and all, very superb; the others were Mr. Mallow and Billy and the three Chanters. I don't know which was prouder, the eldest usher, or the youngest. Each thought it preposterous for the other to figure in "such a caparison," as Mr. Mallow put it, but that did not matter. Sixty and sixteen, Kitty loved them both: loved everybody, and Tom loved them because she did. They even had qualms of conscience about Wilson Wibird: but Wilson had left town shortly before.

Miss Croly played the wedding march, shedding so many happy tears that the notes were not all exactly right, but nobody minded; the choir sang, "The Voice That Breathed": Mr. Chanter kissed the bride; it was over, and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Lee came down the aisle, smiling greetings on either hand. Then who so glorious as John Tucker, sitting on the box of the barouche (the only one in Cyrus!) holding the reins over Dan and Pilot, who wondered why they were harnessed together, but comported themselves with perfect dignity? White cockade in his hat, white bow on his whip, white rosettes on the horses' ears, brand

new white reins—who so glorious as John Tucker? Rheumatism? He never heard of such a thing!

“Don’t sit too straight, John!” said Tom. “You might strain your back!”

Roars of laughter from John Tucker at this subtle jest. So, through the Street (in case anybody had not been able to get to the church; but apparently everybody had!) up the hill, round the Common in state, to the door of Ross House.

And the door was opened by Sarepta, the faithful retainer, in her best dress, with tears in her faithful eyes? Nothing of the sort! If any one thought Sarepta could bother with doors to-day—no, Jenny couldn’t either! Jenny could set the door open and then set down and beat them eggs. If folks didn’t know enough to come in, they could stay out. The idea!

So the door stood wide open, as indeed was its summer habit, and in came the happy pair, and after them trooped Cyrus, which had walked across the Common while they were driving round through the Street. *All* Cyrus! except dear Miss Anne Peace, who had whipped up the back stairs so as to be ready to “help off” in the ladies’ dressing-room. Why, would any one have believed it? Savory Bite came! Tom had called on him, it afterward transpired, and told him that if he didn’t come, he would find his kitchen painted green some fine morning. So here he was, to the amazement of all, in decent black, cracking his finger-joints, sidling off if any one spoke to him, but evidently enjoying himself in his way. He spent much

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of the time in the upper room where the presents were displayed: the most delightful presents that any one ever had, Kitty thought. Madam Flynt's emeralds were perhaps the most valuable, from a pecuniary point of view (if one excepted the jewels that Tom had been producing at intervals ever since his return) but just as precious in Kitty's eyes was the Lowestoft tea-set, hitherto the pride of "Miss Bygoods'" china cupboard; the pink lustre jug over which the Misses Caddie shed tears at parting (yet which they gave so gladly!) the unparalleled collection of "wipers," roller-towels, and dusters, all hemmed by Mr. Mallow's own hands and tied up in dozens with pink ribbons: the centrepiece which Mr. Josiah Jebus regarded as the "shay-dove" of his professional life.

"But meanwhile in the kitchen
Great deeds of arms were wrought;
There S'repta the Dictator,
And there Cheesemanius fought!"

as Tom said. Uncle Ivory Cheeseman had asked the privilege of frosting the cakes; asked it of Sarepta as one potentate of another, conferring and asking honor. Sarepta, who had hitherto refused all offers of assistance save from Sarah and Abby Ann, accepted this: royalty received royalty; Uncle Ivory ranged through the kitchen like the Frost King in person. According to Sarepta, he frosted everything he could lay hands on.

"My land!" she said. "I had to ketch him by the

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coat-tails to stop him from frosting the boned turkey! why, the man was fairly loony!"

Mr. Cheeseman was not so "loony" but that he could appreciate the triumphs of a fellow-artist. I fancy he did not really mean to frost the boned turkey: he certainly hung over it in fervent admiration, pronouncing it a work of art, sir! When it came to the *café mousse*, words failed him. He cast several thoughtful glances at Sarepta and finally asked in a casual way if she had ever thought of changing her state.

"No, I ain't!" said Sarepta.

After another glance, he didn't know but she was wise, and expected a single life was more handy like when one was used to it.

Well! the Olympian Banquet—I should say the wedding breakfast—was served, and was enjoyed as I cannot think any banquet ever was before. Mr. Mallow and Mr. Jordano made speeches, each in his own vein. The former said well! well! well! how about it? He expected if Kitty and Tom conjingled as well as what we and this dandy spread did, there wouldn't any *divorcee* lawyer make his fortune out of *them*, what say? He, Mr. Mallow, wasn't no hand at speechifyin', we all knew that, but he wished 'em joy—here the good man's voice quavered a little—and he looked to Mr. Jordano to speak up for him and the rest of us.

Mr. Jordano rose with dignity, his cloak thrown back over one shoulder in his best style. (Yes, it *was* funny to wear it at table, but he wanted to so dread-



—then the Duke of Lee took his bride away.

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fully, I had not the heart to say "No!" when he consulted me!)

"Ladies and gentlemen-ten-ten!" He swept a splendid circular bow. "On this auspicious occasion, when the ashes—I would say the spirits of our fathers look down from the azure empyrean to hallow this union; when I gaze upon the countenances of the bride in her radiant youth-tooth-tooth, and of the groom in the—a—stalwart pride of his manhood; when I see highly esteemed neighbors—I will venture to say *friends*—" ("Hear! Hear!" and applause) gathered in festal garb-barb-barb about a banquet so, so—*sumptuoso*, if I may use the language of sunny Italy, as to impart a truly Olympian flavor to the occasion; I cannot but feel, in the words of the poet, the heart in my dumb breast flutter and sing-ting-ting. No poet, but a humble worshiper at the shrine of the Muses, I have ventured to—a—shall I say crystallize these flutterings—into——" Mr. Jordano produced a paper from beneath his cloak—"into the following brief roundelay." And clearing his throat nervously, the paper trembling in his fingers, the dear gentleman read as follows:

"A simple scribe, I yet imbibe
Of Helicon a draught,
And pray that doom o'er bride and groom
The airs of Eden waft!
Ayl may they capture of wedded rapture
A homogeneous whole,
Good angels shedding upon their wedding
The blessings of the soul!"

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This effusion was received with wild applause, and Mr. Jordano sat down very happy. Tom, his eyes dancing, replied briefly, making us all laugh. Then Kitty spoke a few tremulous words that made us all cry, herself included. Then she floated up the stairs, a white cloud (throwing back her bouquet, which dear Miss Croly caught!) and floated down a gray one, touched with morning rose; and then—then the Duke of Lee took his bride away, while we all waved our handkerchiefs and cried and laughed and showered blessings after them. And by and by he brought her back to live in blessed Cyrus, which really *is* the only place to live in, “and no lady in the City could with her compare!”



“Marry oo, diddy glu,
Diddy glu, glu, glu:
Diddy oo, oo, oo,
Diddy goo, goo, goo!
Marry oo, diddy goo,
Diddy goo, goo, goo!
Marry oo, diddy goo, diddy goo!”

THE END

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