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Title: Three pretty maids

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Illustrator: Alice Barber Stephens

Release date: September 27, 2023 [eBook #71740]

Language: English

Original publication: Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1897

Credits: Bob Taylor, David Edwards and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net> (This book was produced from images made available by the HathiTrust Digital Library.)

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THREE PRETTY MAIDS ***



By Amy E. Blanchard.

Illustrated by IDA WAUGH.



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Persis was at that moment knitting her brows over some papers at a table in Annis's little attic room.

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THREE PRETTY MAIDS

BY
AMY E. BLANCHARD

AUTHOR OF "TWO GIRLS," "GIRLS TOGETHER,"
"BETTY OF WYE," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ALICE BARBER STEPHENS



PHILADELPHIA
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
1897

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TO THE DEAR SHARERS OF ALL MY JOYS
AND SORROWS,
MY WARMEST ADMIRERS, MY
LIFE-LONG LOVERS, MY MOST-CHERISHED
COMPANIONS,

MARY AND LUCY,

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED WITH
TENDER RETROSPECTION AND
DEEP AFFECTION BY
THEIR SISTER,

AMY E. BLANCHARD.

PHILADELPHIA, 1897.

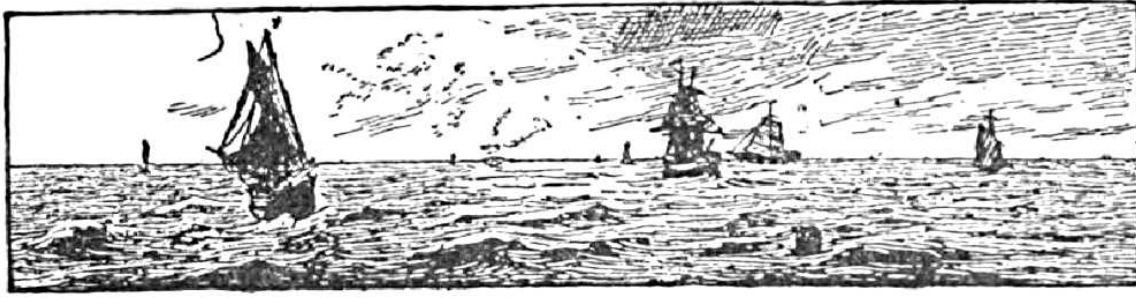
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THREE PRETTY MAIDS.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THEY LIVED.

It was in a comfortable-looking house, surrounded by a garden, in the most attractive part of a pleasant city not two hundred miles from the nation's capital, that the mother of the pretty maids sat sewing one day in early October. She was listening for the first footstep which should announce the return of her girls from school. And presently she heard the front door shut, then a quick, light step on the stair, and a voice coming nearer and nearer, singing,—

“Where are you going, my pretty maid?”

Then the door burst open and Persis Holmes appeared.

“Where are you going, my pretty maid?” Mrs. Holmes asked. “At the rate at which you are travelling I think you will go straight through the wall. Where are the others?”

Persis laughed. “I am going at something of a gait,” she replied. “I always do that way. I can't be stately to save me. Where are the others? Let me see. Lisa was too dignified to run home, and Mellicent is so daft about Audrey Vane that she must walk home with her every day, consequently I,—only I,—the unqueenly, the unsentimental, am here, as you see, to get the kiss you have all fresh for me.” And Persis gave her mother a vigorous hug.

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“I'm not sure but that you have more real sentiment than your sisters,” replied Mrs. Holmes, as she disengaged herself from the close hold of her daughter's arms.

“I?” exclaimed Persis, opening her eyes very wide. “Why, mamma, I am the most practical child you have. Don't I fly into the kitchen when Prue is out, and with real housewifely mind make gingerbread and 'other country messes,' like the neat-handed Phyllis in L'Allegro? And doesn't papa always send me to pay bills when he cannot go himself? And—why, mamma, I'm not queenly like Lisa, nor seraphic like Mellicent. I am just plain me, the least good-looking of your trio. I am the mortal, Lisa the queen, Mellicent the fairy. But a mortal can love you just as hard; can't she, mamma?”

“Very hard,” laughed her mother, as a kindling glance of Persis's eye showed signs of a second energetic attack.

“I spare you, mamma! I spare you,” began Persis. “Here comes Lisa. I must go and hunt up something to eat. I am half starved. Heigho, Miss Dignity! I beat you home, didn't I?”

“I should hope so, if it depended upon my making a tom-boy of myself in order to get here first,” replied Lisa, lifting her hat from off her well-set little head. “Mamma, you have no idea what a terror Persis is. She romps home like a great hulk of a peasant girl.”

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“Lisa was so mad because I tagged her ‘last,’” laughed Persis. “Lady Dignity was covered with confusion to that extent that you could scarcely see her.”

“Mamma, do make her behave properly,” entreated Lisa. “I shall choose some one else with whom to walk if this continues,” she said, imperiously, to her sister, who made a little grimace and escaped from the room.

“Persis is perfectly incorrigible,” continued Lisa, giving a gentle pat to the curling locks about her temples as she glanced toward the mirror.

“Oh, never mind her, dear,” advised her mother; “she is full of life and as spontaneous as the flowers that grow. I don’t believe in too much self-repression. How is Mellicent’s headache?”

“Headache! She trumped it up. I don’t believe she had any to speak of. It wasn’t so bad but what she could traipse all the way home in the sun with Audrey Vane.”

“My dear, you are in a very fault-finding humor, it seems to me,” gently reproved Mrs. Holmes. “You have been working too hard and are hungry. I think you will feel better when you are rested and have taken a bit of something to eat.”

“It is such a bother to go and get it. I hate fussing with food and that sort of thing,” grumbled Lisa, throwing herself on the lounge. [Pg 10]

“Well, lady fine, you don’t have to fuss,” said Persis, who had just entered the room with a tray in her hand. “Will your majesty deign to trifle with this humble fare which your cringing slave has brought you?” And Persis set the tray on a chair by her sister’s side.

“Oh, that looks good,” exclaimed Lisa, raising herself on her elbow. “What kind of preserves, Perse? Strawberry? That will be fine with biscuits and that glass of milk.” And she looked with appreciation at the dainty way in which Persis had prepared the modest luncheon. “Persis is a born housekeeper,” she said, graciously. “She has the most domestic turn of mind, mamma. I wonder that she has so good a record at school,” with a little air of superiority.

Persis’s eyes danced, and it was evident that a sharp rejoinder was on the tip of her tongue; but at a warning glance from her mother she refrained from answering Lisa, and turned to greet Mellicent, who now entered the room. She was the youngest of the three daughters, and many persons thought her the prettiest. Her delicate complexion, large blue eyes, and golden hair truly gave her a *spirituelle* appearance, upon which the little girl quite prided herself, and of which she was apt to make capital. She had been rather delicate as a small child, and never quite outgrew the idea that, in consequence, she must always be considered.

Lisa, the eldest, on her part, demanded with great exactness what she called “her rights.” She was a tall, handsome girl, with brilliant complexion, brown eyes, and soft curling chestnut hair. Her girl friends pronounced her “so stylish,” and envied her fine presence. [Pg 11]

Persis was quite aware of the superior claims of her two sisters, and when quite a little girl she was discovered by her grandmother looking very thoughtful and serious before her mirror. Grandmother Estabrook was a dear old lady, rather given to old-fashioned ideas of what was meet and proper for children to do, and on this occasion she spoke with decision.

“Persis, my child, have you nothing better to do than to sit there gazing at yourself. Take care, my child; beware of vanity!”

“But it isn’t vanity, grandma,” Persis had replied, looking up with tears in her eyes. “I wish I had to be vain, ’cause I couldn’t help it. Mellicent is the youngest and looks like an angel, and Lisa is the oldest and looks like a queen, and I’m just the middle sizedest and don’t look like anything.”

“Never mind, my child,” replied grandma, now quite softened, “you can always look like a lady.” And this Persis never forgot, although the acting like a lady was something she did not always remember. In secret she mourned over her dusky black hair and wished it were curly like Lisa’s or golden like Mellicent’s. Her mouth, she was wont to say, was like a buttonhole, and as for gray eyes, she hated them; the curling black lashes she did not consider worth a moment’s consideration, nor did she take into account the fact that the despised black hair grew in the “five artist points” upon a smooth, low, broad forehead. “I might as well have a lump of dough for a nose,” she complained. “Oh, mamma, why didn’t I inherit your nose! It is so beautifully straight, and Lisa’s is just like it.”

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“Your nose does very well,” said grandma, who overheard the remark. “Fortunately mere outline of feature is not everything; expression is much more.” And Persis was somewhat comforted, although she admired with the intenseness which was a distinctive characteristic of hers the beauty of her sisters. Nevertheless, her own simplicity and lack of consciousness gave her a charm which neither of the others possessed, and which won her more affection than she realized. She maintained, however, that Lisa was her mother’s pride, and that Mellicent was her father’s pet. There might have been some little truth in this; but it was quite as true that Grandma Estabrook and Persis thoroughly understood each other, and confidences passed between them of which the rest did not know. So, doubtless, it was a balance, so far as affections went.

“Now, my pretty maids,” said Mrs. Holmes, when Mellicent had laid aside her hat and books, “I have a piece of news to tell you. Sit there all in a row, so I can note the effect it will have upon you. Your father’s wards, Basil and Porter Phillips, arrived this morning very unexpectedly, and are to be with us all winter.” Then Mrs. Holmes laughed softly as she glanced from one to the other.

The girls caught sight of her merry face. “How did we look, mamma? Tell us. You took us so by surprise that we didn’t have a chance to put on politeness if we didn’t feel it,” said Persis. “How did we look?”

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“Lisa, complacent; you, slightly vexed; Mellicent, resigned.”

“Then there is no use in our pretending to any other feelings. So please tell us how it all happened,” said Mellicent.

“Your father had a telegram just as he was leaving the house, and the boys came an hour later. Mrs. Phillips was called upon suddenly to go to California with her invalid sister, and there had been, as you know, some talk of the boys preparing for the university, so it was decided that they should enter the Latin school at once, and they packed up and came. They are rather young to go alone into a boarding-house; moreover, your father feels responsible for them and thinks he should have them under his eye.”

“I think it’s rather a cool proceeding, myself,” ventured Persis, “without so much as saying by your leave, to come swooping down on us in this fashion. Oh, dear!”

“How old are they, mamma?” asked Lisa, whose interest had caused her to alter her recumbent position on the lounge to one of alert attention.

“Basil is in his seventeenth year and Porter in his fourteenth.”

“There! I knew it. The middle-sized one always gets left. Porter will tag after Mell’s golden curls, and Basil will do honor to Lady Dignity. A girl of fourteen never has a chance if there is a baby on one side and a sweet sixteen on the other,” declared Persis.

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“Why, Persis!” reproved her mother. “Don’t say such things. I do not want you to have such notions about these boys. You are to be sisters and brothers together, friends by selection. Now, don’t let me hear any such talk again. Go along, all of you; I have letters to write.” And the girls proceeded to gather up their books.

“I do wish people wouldn’t get ill, so that mothers must send their boys where they’re not wanted,” grumbled Persis to Lisa, when they had reached the seclusion of their own room.

“Oh, but you know it isn’t as if they had done that. You know papa himself suggested to Mrs. Phillips last summer that if the boys were to go to college it would be a good thing to send them to the Latin school this year. They talked it all over. Mamma told me so.”

“Well, it amounts to the same thing. We don’t want them; at least I don’t, whatever the rest of you may like.”

“But you know their board will be an item.”

“I hadn’t thought of that. Well, I suppose we are not such bloated bondholders but what a little windfall like that counts nowadays when times are hard. All the same, I wish they didn’t have to be here.”

“Oh, I don’t believe they will be in the way,” said Lisa. “They’ll be rather handy to send on errands and to go with us to parties and things.”

“Parties and things! How many do we attend, pray? You know mamma never allows us to go to night affairs except on the rarest occasions. Boys are such teases. They are always playing tricks on you and making personal remarks about your looks and catching up your words. I know how Margie Bancroft’s brothers do. I shall feel uncomfortable the whole winter long. They’ll be strewing the house from one end to the other with old balls and scrubby-looking caps and such things. Why, Margie told me the other day that she found the bath-tub half-full of water-snakes and turtles and the goodness knows what.” [Pg 15]

“Oh, Persis!” exclaimed Lisa, now quite alarmed. “Do you really mean it? I should have been terrified to death.”

“Well, it’s what you may expect,” returned Persis. And she left her sister in quite a perturbed condition. Nevertheless, it must be confessed that Lisa made an unusually careful toilet that evening, and Mellicent assumed her most languishing air, hoping that she looked pale and interesting. Persis appeared at the table quite as usual, having almost forgotten the presence of these prospective disturbers of her peace. It was an awkward moment for the five young people, and, although Mrs. Holmes’s tact and sweetness helped them through the worst of it, all felt a sense of relief when the dinner-hour was over.

Basil Phillips was a quiet, shy boy, who felt very ill at ease when Persis fixed her earnest gaze upon him. Mellicent drooped her lids over her blue eyes, only lifting them once or twice as she saw Porter looking at her admiringly. This latter boy was quite the least confused of the young people, being a lad afraid of absolutely nothing, not even a girl, and his bright, wide-awake manner and keen appreciation of fun made all three of the girls feel more at home with him than with his brother. [Pg 16]

After all, it was Persis who paved the way to a more easy footing, for, as they left the dining-room, she tossed an apple in Porter’s direction, and he dexterously caught it, sending it back to her, so that they were soon engaged in a merry game in which Basil presently joined, and they were all on good terms in a little while.

“Say, have you a wheel?” asked Porter.

“No,” replied Persis, regretfully. “I am just wild for one; but grandma thinks they are entirely too boyish for me, and mamma will not consent to my having one while grandma objects. I think maybe—just maybe—I’ll have one at Christmas.”

“I’ll tell you what,” said Porter: “you can learn on mine. We have new ones—beauties. Mamma gave them to us as a parting gift. I’ll teach you.”

Persis shook her head. “I couldn’t do that unless I knew mamma and papa consented, and I should hate to hurt grandma’s feelings. I’d rather wait till she comes around. You know girls are only beginning to ride in this town, and grandma isn’t quite used to the idea.”

Porter opened his eyes. “My!” he said; “you must think a heap of your grandmother.”

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“We do,” replied Persis. “She has always made her home with us ever since mamma and papa were married, and she does such lovely things for us that I should be ashamed to make her unhappy.”

“She’s awfully old-fashioned, I suppose,” rejoined Porter.

“Well, ye-es, rather so; but she tells us jolly stories about old times. You don’t know what exciting things she knows about our Revolutionary ancestors.”

“I’d like to hear about them,” replied Porter. “I just love fighting and adventures. Basil is so different; he fights if he has to like a regular corker, but he never is ready to pitch in at any time as I am.”

Persis laughed. “I shall have to look out for you then.”

“Ho! You don’t suppose I’d fight a girl, do you? What do you do with yourselves in the evening?”

“Oh, all sorts of things. To-night—why, to-night is Hallowe’en. We must do something wild and bold and giddy. I wish I knew some more boys, but I don’t,—that is, not any that I like,—so we’ll just have to do the best we can among ourselves. We’ll play tricks or something.”

Porter’s eyes sparkled. “I know a lot of tricks,” he replied. “I say, Baz, Persis is bang-up.”

Basil smiled and Persis blushed at the slangy compliment.

Then followed a whispered consultation, and the three, with suppressed mirth, stole quietly up-stairs with all the speed possible.



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CHAPTER II.

ALL-HALLOWE'EN.

"Where are those children?" Mrs. Holmes was saying when, in answer to a ring at the door, Prue announced two ladies to see "Mr. and Mrs. Holmes and the young ladies."

On going to the drawing-room the host and hostess were greeted by a tall, spare person in deep mourning, who remarked, in sepulchral tones, "We have come to see you on a matter of great importance." There was a little sound from the second visitor. Was it a laugh or a cough? This shorter individual wore a long cloak, while a black veil was tied closely over the face.

While Mr. Holmes was bowing politely and Mrs. Holmes was waiting expectantly for further remark, suddenly every light went out, and when the gas was relighted not a sign of the guests could be seen, but a chorus of unearthly groans and shrieks proceeded from no one knew where, to the terror of Mellicent, who cried, "Oh, mamma, what is it?"

Again the gas went out, and the groans and wails seemed directly in their ears. Then in the darkness three white figures glimmered ghostly, but a second relighting showed no one there.

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"This is really uncanny!" ejaculated Lisa.

"My dear," said grandma, who was smoothing Mellicent's golden head and calming the little girl's fears, "don't you know it is only those witchy children?"

"I'll warrant Persis is at the bottom of it," cried Lisa. "She was so down on the boys coming, and here she is the very first one to get them into mischief."

"I don't know what you mean," said a voice, plaintively. "You're always blaming me for everything." And Lisa turned, astonished to see Persis curled up in an arm-chair by the bay-window, as if she had been taking a nap there.

"Why, where did you come from?" And Lisa gave utterance to her question in tones of astonishment. "I know you haven't been there all this time."

"How do you know? Can you take your oath on it?"

"I don't take oaths; but I haven't the least recollection of seeing you since dinner, when you were playing with the boys in the hall."

"Well, your memory is not to be relied upon," observed Persis, jauntily. "If I should tell you how long I have been here you wouldn't believe it."

"I am going to light the lamp," Lisa remarked. "I don't want any more Stygian darkness. Why, where is it? I thought it was on the table. Prue must have forgotten to bring it back when she took it out to fill it." But, as she was in the act of leaving the room, again all was dark.

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"I'll catch those tricksters," said Mr. Holmes. "This is getting too much of a joke," and he secreted himself behind the door as the three white-sheeted forms appeared. The first two were too quick for him, but the last one was grabbed, and as Lisa brought in the lighted lamp Basil was discovered.

The poor boy was covered with confusion at being found the culprit, and Persis came to the rescue by saying, "Papa, it was not his fault; we coaxed him into it, Porter and I, and it was I who blew down the gas-pipes to put the lights out. It is All-Hallowe'en, you know."

A grim smile passed over Mr. Holmes's face. "Then I suppose you expect me to let you off," he replied.

"Oh, yes, papa, please. It is the boys' first evening here, and I don't want them to think just yet that you are an ogre."

This was too much for Mr. Holmes, and he laughed. "How much did that remark imply, I wonder, you sauce-box?" he said.

"Why? Oh, why, papa?" And Persis covered her face with both hands. "I believe I did insinuate that you were really ogrish at all times, and you aren't a bit ever. He isn't, boys; he is usually a dear; but once in a while, when we are very bad, he can be terrible. I warn you that when papa is seriously offended he is not savage exactly, but so 'way, 'way up—so stately and solemn—that he can scare you out of your wits."

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"Thank you for the reputation," returned Mr. Holmes. "I am glad you are ready to back me up in maintaining proper discipline. Now, no more tricks to-night."

"Not even apple-bobbing or meal balls?" said Mellicent, dolefully.

"Meal balls are silly," sniffed Persis. "Who wants to waste time on stupid names rolled up in a ball of chicken food? I'd rather run around the block with my mouth full of water."

"What's that for?" queried Porter.

"Oh, you hear your future husband's name called, they say. I like the fun of it. It is so hard to run and keep the water in your mouth at the same time. Then salt-cake is fun, too, only I always laugh and nearly always say something when I oughtn't to speak."

"I think apple-bobbing will do for to-night," said Mrs. Holmes. "You can go in the kitchen if you like."

"Oh! And mayn't we make some taffy, too, mamma?" pleaded Mellicent. "Grandma will help us; won't you grandma?"

"To be sure," was the ready response.

And so it was settled, while the tricksters congratulated themselves that they were let off so easily and that such a pleasant prospect was theirs.

Grandmamma Estabrook was a famous maker of taffy. "She always knows just when it is done," Persis informed Porter. "And it never gets burnt, and never is the least bit too soft. I am always in such a hurry that I am very apt to take it up before it is done, and it gets, oh, so sticky. This will be fine, I know. We will bob for apples while it is boiling."

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So, although Prue at first looked askance at seeing her kitchen invaded, she was soon ready to lend her services to the furnishing of amusement for "Holly Eve," and brought in a big tub, which the children filled half-full of water, and the merry game began. After much sputtering and splashing, Porter managed to grasp an apple with his teeth, and Mellicent followed suit.

"They are the slipperiest things I ever saw," declared Basil, lifting a dripping face from the tub. "Just as I think I have one sure over it rolls and I am cheated. I think I'll be more of a success at taffy-pulling. My, that looks good!" for Mrs. Estabrook was pouring the seething mass into pans, and the children carried them to the summer-kitchen to cool.

While the others were laughing and talking over their sticks of taffy, Basil was turning over in his mind the advisability of trying to win Mrs. Estabrook's approval of bicycle riding for girls. This amusement was at that time in the early stage of its popularity, and was looked upon with discredit by many persons. Basil's attentive, thoughtful ways

evidently produced a good impression upon grandma, and she talked cheerily to him of his coming work, of his life at home, and such topics as she thought might interest him.

"I hope you are not going to be homesick," she said.

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"I don't believe we shall be," answered Basil, cordially. "You're all so awfully jolly,—I mean so nice and homelike,—and you know Port and I never had sisters, so we'll learn a lot about girls, I expect."

Grandma smiled at the naïve speech. "Have you no girl cousins?" she asked.

"Yes, we have one who lives near us. She's awfully nice, too; and when we go out on our bikes very often she goes along."

"Oh, she rides a bicycle!" And Basil saw disapproval of this "nice" cousin written on Mrs. Estabrook's face.

"She's such a real good girl. She's the rector's daughter, you know," he hastened to say.

"What! Dr. Allison's daughter? He is your rector, I have heard your mother say."

"So he is, and he's one of the finest fellows you ever saw."

"Yes, that is what I have always been told," assented Mrs. Estabrook, "and therefore I can hardly reconcile my idea of his good judgment to the fact of his daughter's riding a bicycle."

"Why, don't you think it's good for girls? I wish you could see the difference it has made in Mabel Allison. She used to be so delicate. She had dyspepsia and all sorts of things, and now she looks like another girl. Say, Mrs. Estabrook, don't you think it would be nice for Persis?"

"I don't think Persis needs it."

"But it would be fun for her. You would not mind our teaching her, would you? It wouldn't do any harm for her to know how." [Pg 24]

"No, I suppose not. I know she is very anxious to learn; but I should dislike very much to see her in public mounted on a wheel."

"Oh, well, we won't let any one see her. We'll go into the side street, and you can watch us from your window."

Mrs. Estabrook did not reply, and Basil, taking silence for consent, went over to Persis and told her with great satisfaction that she was to learn to ride as soon as the boys' wheels should come.

The part of the city where the Holmes family lived was quite suburban, although only fifteen minutes' ride by trolley to the heart of the city and within a short distance of the university where Mr. Holmes held a professorship. Theirs was a corner house, and the quiet street which ran along the side of the garden was at times in the day almost deserted, and it was here that the boys intended to initiate Persis into the mysteries of bicycle riding.

A more excited girl than Persis was over the prospect could scarcely be found. "When once grandma sees how I can ride she'll not say a word against it," she confided to Lisa. "Then you'll learn, and we'll all go out together. Won't it be fine? I'm so glad Basil and Porter have come."

"You sang another song this morning," returned Lisa.

This was after the taffy had been pulled till it was a delicate straw-color, and the young people, having eaten all they could manage, had said their good-nights with much complacency, feeling that the evening had furnished them with all the amusement they could have expected. [Pg 25]

"Grandma, you're a dear, sweet darling. I love you to pieces," Persis said. "I'm so happy to think you don't mind my learning to ride."

“Who said I didn’t mind?”

“Why, Basil. Didn’t you mean it?” And for a moment Persis’s hopes fell. Grandma was too tender-hearted to declare she had never said anything of the kind, and so she only kissed the eager face and said, “Well, my child, I am old-fashioned, I suppose, but you will not go off the side street, will you? I can’t quite stand the thought of seeing you in a more public place.” And Persis’s hopes rose again.

“I think it has been a perfectly lovely Hallowe’en,” she avowed to Lisa, as she vigorously brushed her hair.

“Yes, it has been great fun for you. After all your talk about those boys coming, I notice you are the first one to be hand and glove with them. That’s just like you, always at one extreme or the other,” Lisa retorted. She could not entirely forgive Persis for having been the first to win the boys’ good graces.

“Well, I’d like to know if you didn’t have the same chance for a good time that I did. You should have made the most of your opportunities. That’s just like you, Lisa. You’re always complaining that I have good times, when you have exactly the same chances that I have. The only difference is, that I go and meet the chances, and you sit and wait for them to come to you, because you’re so terribly afraid that somehow you’ll be called upon to step down from your pedestal. If you didn’t cling so close to that pedestal of yours you’d have a better time. I don’t sit still all the time looking for homage. I’d have a pretty stupid time if I did.”

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“And precious little you’d get if you looked for it,” asserted Lisa, now more ruffled than before. “I am the eldest, and of course certain things are due me.”

“Oh, dear!” thought Persis. “I wish Lisa were not so terribly tenacious of her prerogatives. They are always getting in my way, and I get snubbed because I don’t regard them. I wonder if I would be so top-lofty and sniffy if I were the eldest. Maybe I would be.” And she suppressed a smile as Lisa threw her a haughty glance from under half-closed lids,—a glance which was meant to convey a sense of superiority.

“Lisa, you would surely have been a Pharisee if you had lived in Bible times,” remarked the irrepressible Persis.

“Then I suppose you would have been a publican and sinner. You don’t have to go back to those times to be the latter.”

Persis laughed, but she was inwardly annoyed, and, jumping up, she opened the door which led into Mellicent’s little room, leaving her elder sister alone.

“Mell, I’m going to sleep with you,” she announced. “Lisa is on her high horse to-night, and there’s not room for her to canter around while I am there.”

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Mellicent sleepily moved over to give Persis room. She was used to these little disturbances between her two sisters; and, although it was always Persis who left Lisa in possession, it was sometimes one and sometimes the other who received Mellicent’s sympathies. She was easily influenced, and any little appeal to her vanity, or a properly phrased remark as to the state of her health, generally won her favor. Therefore when Persis said, “I hope that taffy didn’t give you a headache,” she replied, “I had one this morning; but I’m quite used to them, you know.” This with a martyr-like air.

“So it’s a question of headache with or without taffy, isn’t it?” returned Persis, comfortably. “I’ll take mine with this time. Did you know, Mell, that I am going to ride a wheel? And if ever I get one of my own you shall share it with me for letting me share your bed, and Miss Lisa can whistle for a ride.”

“Audrey is going to get a wheel,” Mellicent informed her sister.

“Is she? Then of course you’ll want to ride with her. Well, I’ll teach you, and you shall use mine—when I get it. Oh, don’t you hope we can have one?”

“I didn’t care till Audrey made up her mind about it,” returned Mellicent.

“What a loyal little subject you are! What makes you like Audrey so much?”

“Why, Persis, she is so lovely, and you know she thinks she is descended from the same family of Vanes as that to which Sir Harry Vane belonged. Don’t you know, that dear Sir Harry whose statue we saw in the Boston Public Library last summer? It is so dreadful to think of his having been beheaded.” [Pg 28]

“Yes, so it is, but I don’t see that it adds anything special to Audrey’s attractions. I think I must hunt up a headless ancestor. I wonder if we haven’t one hanging somewhere on our family tree.”

“Oh, Persis! how could he hang on a tree without a head?”

“Sure enough, he couldn’t, could he? He’d have to perch there with his head under his arm like—who was it?—oh, yes, St. Denis, who carried his head in his hands after he was beheaded. I don’t believe I’d care, myself, for an ancestor who had to hang. I’ll tell you, Mell, who I think is a nice girl.”

“Who?”

“Annis Brown.”

“What! that quiet little thing? She hasn’t a bit of style; she’s as plain as a pipe-stem.”

“I know it, but I like her.”

“Audrey says she is a parvenu.”

“Humph! Just because her mother keeps boarders. That sounds like Audrey.”

“Now, Persis, I won’t have you run down Audrey.”

“I won’t, then. I’m not going to get into any more squabbles to-night. Audrey is an awfully nice girl, only she does brag a little too much.”

“She has something to brag about.”

“Well, I’m going to find out if some other people haven’t just as much. Never mind, Mell, Audrey’s all right, and so are you. Here we are talking ourselves wide-awake, and it will be morning before we’re ready for it. Let’s turn over and go to sleep,” which they proceeded to do. [Pg 29]



CHAPTER III.

WHAT WON A BICYCLE.

Despite bruises and sprains, skinned ankles and scraped knees, Persis overcame the difficulties of riding a bicycle in a comparatively short space of time, and really met with fewer mishaps than usually fall to the lot of the learner. This was largely due to the efforts of Porter and Basil, who were indefatigable teachers, and as Persis had no fear, and was a persistent young woman, it was not long before she could be seen skimming up and down the block with all the confidence in the world.

"Look here," said Porter, "I don't see why you don't coax your father to give you a bicycle. I shouldn't mind what your grandmother thinks. The idea of it! Old people like her are always fussing about new fashions."

Persis opened her eyes. "Why! but I couldn't enjoy having one if grandma felt bad about it. She has always been so good to us. She is the dearest grandma in the world."

"Well, I shouldn't let anybody's old out-of-date notions keep me from having a good time," was Porter's reply, as he walked away. [Pg 31]

Persis stood looking after him with a dawning sense of his being rather a selfish nature. "I suppose he'd be furious if he knew what I thought of him," she reflected. "I'll let him know some day," she inwardly continued, her wrath rising.

A tapping on the window called her into the house. It was Lisa who summoned.

"Mamma wants you, Persis," she said. "We are going to have a small family conclave." And Lisa's eyes danced.

"What is it now? This family has a way of springing surprises on a body which is confusing, to say the least," returned Persis, as she took her way down-stairs.

She and Lisa had long ago "made up." Indeed, their little squabbles were of almost daily occurrence and did not prevent them from being really devoted to each other. Persis was the more generous of the two, although possessed of more real strength of character. Lisa yielded her opinions easily; her pleasures she grasped more closely. With Persis it was directly the opposite, she could give up a prospective treat, but her convictions were her own, and these she could not forego, unless convinced, under pressure, of their error, and even then it was difficult for her to confess it, although tacitly she generally did so.

"Now, mamma, what is it this time?" inquired Persis, as she dropped on a hassock near the window.

"It is just this. Papa must be in Washington for a few days on business, and wants me to go with him. He is also willing to take one of you girls, and the question is, Which shall it be?" [Pg 32]

"Which shall it be? Which shall it be?
I looked at John, John looked at me,"

quoted Persis. "Oh, mamma, that is a terrible strain upon unselfishness." And she looked from one sister to the other.

"I've never been to Washington," began Mellicent, "and I believe it would do me the most good."

"I am the eldest, and I think it is my place," came from Lisa.

"And I. I have a friend there. You know Patty Peters is there this winter, mamma." And Persis turned an eager face to her mother.

"Such reasonable claims," laughed Mrs. Holmes. "I am afraid you must draw lots for it."

"So we will. That will be the fairest way," maintained Mellicent.

"Now, mamma, we won't even tell you which we decide it is to be, the longest or the shortest, so you cannot exert an undue influence," Lisa said.

Therefore, after a short conference in the corner, the girls gathered around to scan the slips of paper which Mrs. Holmes held in her hand.

"Lisa first, then Perse, then I, according to our ages," decided Mellicent, and with breathless interest the lots were drawn.

"The longest! The longest, we decided. Who has it?" exclaimed Lisa, holding up her slip.

"I! I! It is mine," Persis announced, joyfully. "Now I can go to see Patty Peters." And she executed a wild dance about the room. [Pg 33]

"Patty Peters!" Lisa repeated, disdainfully. "It always sounds so ridiculous, as if you were trying to say Peter Piper."

The joy faded out of Persis's face, and she stood curling the slip of paper around her finger, looking from Lisa to her mother. It may have been fancy, for Persis was keenly sensitive, but she thought she saw a shade of regret on her mother's face. "Of course mamma would most enjoy having Lisa," she said to herself. "She is so handsome, and mamma could show her off so finely to her Washington friends." Persis swallowed a lump in her throat, then went over to Lisa and said, with eyes shining, "I'll change with you."

"Oh, Perse, you don't mean it; you're joking!" responded Lisa.

Persis shook her head. "No. I happen to remember that you have a new coat this winter, and the most becoming hat you ever wore, so it seems a wicked waste of material for you not to go. So I'll stay at home and ride the boys' bikes."

"I believe you'd rather do it," returned Lisa, to ease her conscience.

"I think I ought not to consent to the exchange," began Mrs. Holmes; but Persis was firm, and, having her determination fixed, almost persuaded herself that the staying at home was the more desirable.

Mellicent felt herself out of the question, and went to grandma for sympathy, while one appreciative look from her father made Persis very happy over her sacrifice. [Pg 34]

It was, therefore, in high spirits that the party took leave. "Everything will go on much better than if I had been left at home," said Lisa, graciously. "You are such a fine manager, Perse, and I do hate marketing. Good-bye. I'll write as soon as I get there." And with a nod and a smile Lisa disappeared from view.

Matters went on smoothly for the first day or two. Persis was too busy with her lessons and her housewifely duties to think of much else. The housemaid had been with the family for several years and understood the routine of work, while the girls could not remember the time when old black Prue had not presided over the kitchen. Besides, there was grandma to decide upon important matters; so the responsibility upon Persis's shoulders was not very heavy.

The boys had been the chief source of anxiety; but they had proved themselves to be comparatively obedient, and, having been put upon their honor, were disposed to conduct themselves becomingly, especially as Mr. Holmes had told them they were expected to be the protectors of the household.

Therefore the absence of three important members of the family did not make such a material difference in the daily life as might be supposed, and everything went along smoothly for several days. But one afternoon when Prue was out, Lyddy the housemaid gone on an errand, and the boys were off at the base-ball grounds something occurred to ruffle the serene flow of events.

“Now we have the place all to ourselves, let’s make some gingerbread, Mell,” suggested Persis. “We’ll begin it before Lyddy comes back, and it will be done before dark. We’ll give grandma a surprise; she does enjoy warm gingerbread. Come on and let’s see if there is a good fire.” [Pg 35]

Mellicent heartily complied, and the two girls went down into the neat, quiet kitchen to begin operations. The fire was in rather a dubious state for baking, it was discovered. “We’ll get a little wood and start it up,” said Persis. “Suppose you go after the wood, Mellicent, while I get the other things together.” And Mellicent started for the cellar, while Persis went to the pantry. The latter was energetically sifting flour, when a clattering sound, a heavy fall, and a pitiful cry reached her ears.

Running to the head of the stairs leading to the cellar, she peered down into the dimness, calling, “Mell, Mellicent, where are you?” A moan was the only reply. “Oh, Mell!” reiterated Persis in alarm, as she hastily took her way down the steep steps. “What is the matter?”

At the foot of the steps Mellicent lay in a confused heap. “Oh, you dear child! Oh, Melly! Are you hurt?” And Persis tried to lift her sister.

“I feel queer,” replied Mellicent. “I believe I have done something to my arm, I can’t raise it.”

Persis helped the little girl to her feet, and then, half carrying her, she managed to get her up the stairway. Mellicent’s white face showed that something serious had really happened.

“Tell grandma,” she said, and then she fainted.

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Afraid to leave her, and yet hardly knowing what to do, Persis ran to the foot of the stairs and called, loudly, “Grandma! Grandma! come quick!”

To see the baby of the family lying on the kitchen floor, with closed eyes and looking so pale, terrified Mrs. Estabrook, and she cried, “Oh, my child! what is it? Run for the doctor.” And Persis flew out, forgetting that she still wore her floury apron.

The doctor who lived a block away was not at home, and back again ran Persis, out of breath.

By this time Mellicent’s consciousness was restored, and she was sitting in her grandmother’s lap. “I am afraid she has broken her arm,” announced Mrs. Estabrook, in distress. “The doctor ought to see her at once.”

“Dr. Wheeler isn’t at home,” informed Persis, distressedly. “Oh, dear! what shall we do?”

“We must have some doctor right away,” declared Mrs. Estabrook, and Persis darted out again. She could not think for a moment where she would find another physician, but she did remember that their family doctor lived about ten blocks off. It seemed a long way in her present state of perturbation. She could walk there as quickly as she could go by a roundabout car-route, she reflected. But here her eye caught sight of Porter’s bicycle leaning against the side of the porch. In another moment she had mounted and was flying like the wind along the street, being back again in less time than she could have dreamed,

breathless from her effort. "The doctor will be here right off," she made haste to notify. "I went to Dr. Armstrong's." [Pg 37]

Mrs. Estabrook looked amazed. "In this time?" she said.

"Oh, grandma! I didn't know any other way, and I went on Porter's wheel."

Grandma's only reply was, "I am thankful that you found him so quickly. We cannot tell what injury our little girl may have sustained."

The doctor, however, pronounced a simple fracture of the arm to be the only damage done, and when the broken member was skilfully set, and Mellicent was put to bed, Persis sat down and cried from sheer relief.

There was no gingerbread made that day, for Persis sat by the little sufferer all the evening, until grandma advised her to go to her lessons, saying that Mellicent did not need two nurses.

"Oh, dear!" said Persis, tearfully; "if I had only gone down-cellar myself, it would never have happened. I can never forgive myself."

"My dear child, you must not feel that way about it. We should not blame ourselves for accidents which are not the result of thoughtlessness nor wrong intention. Your intentions were all right, and no one was to blame. You were not giving Mellicent work to do beyond her strength. She was as likely to fall in going down for an apple, or to see the new kittens; so don't blame yourself." Thus grandma comforted.

Persis was much cheered by this; but she devoted every spare moment to entertaining the invalid.

It was thought best not to spoil the pleasure of the absent ones by telling them of this misfortune, since there was no real danger attending it, and after a few days Mellicent rather enjoyed being the object of commiseration, and thought she must look very interesting with her arm in a sling made of a large silk handkerchief. She was particular that the handkerchief should be a delicate blue, which contrasted becomingly with her golden curls and fair skin. She was, however, a patient little girl, and only by a pathetic expression showed when she suffered. [Pg 38]

The boys were most gallant, and did all manner of things to amuse her, so that probably she did not really regret the accident any more than Persis did.

The travellers returned in due time, and of course there was a great chatter to be heard when the three sisters met together. Lisa had enjoyed every minute of her visit,—so she expressed herself,—and she told wonderful tales of the social delights Washington had to offer.

It was the day after the return of the travellers that Mellicent, who was still housed, stood anxiously awaiting the appearance of Persis after school, and she greeted her sister with, "I know an awfully nice something, but I can't tell it. Oh, Persis, you'll be the gladdest girl. There! I'll let it out if I don't stop. I heard grandma talking to papa, and she said you had been so good and thoughtful and self-sacrificing." Persis was blushing furiously. "Yes, she did," continued Mellicent; "and then she told me a secret. No, I won't tell; that would spoil it all."

But a clattering up the steps and an excited summons from Porter took both the girls down-stairs. Porter was hopping around on one foot in a high state of glee, while Basil was critically examining the different parts of a shining new wheel which stood in the hall. [Pg 39]

"Look! Look!" cried Porter. "It's yours, Perse. See the tag, 'Miss Persis Holmes.' Hurrah for you!"

"What! What!" cried Persis. "For me?"

"Yes," certified Millicent. "And that is the secret. You can't guess who gave it to you—grandma."

“Grandma!” echoed Persis.

“Yes; when she found you went for the doctor, and got him here in such a jiffy, she gave in, I heard her say to papa; and she said you had given up your visit so generously, and were such a comfort while they were all away, that she wanted you to have a wheel. Isn’t it a beauty?”

“Oh, you dear, beautiful thing!” And Persis, in the exuberance of her joy, knelt on the floor, giving the wheel a rapturous hug. “And to think that grandma, of all people, should give it to me. Where is she? I must thank her for it right away.” And the happy girl sped up-stairs to where, at her sunny window filled with flowering plants, grandma sat.

Persis could hardly wait for the “come in” which answered her knock before she burst into the room. “Oh, grandma,” she cried, “I am the happiest girl in town! How did you come to be so dear? You don’t know how I thank you. I never dreamed of such a thing from you.”

Grandma smiled. “Well, my child,” she confessed, “I remind myself of my old grandfather, Judge Herrick, who used to insist that a horse and carriage were rapid enough for him, until it came to the matter of getting important testimony for a law-suit, and then the fastest express train couldn’t put on too much steam for him. I hope I have lived long enough to accept innovations gracefully when I am convinced of their value. Not to alter an opinion often indicates obstinacy rather than strength of character, and your grandma doesn’t want to be called an obstinate old woman.” And grandma laughed. But Persis felt that there was a little hint to herself hidden in the last remark, and it had its effect in a more persuasive way than could have resulted from any didactic lecture. [Pg 40]

“And you don’t care if I do go off the block?” said the girl, her speaking eyes full of happiness.

“No, dear; so long as you don’t go into the crowded streets I shall not veto your riding anywhere that is safe. I leave that part of it to your own good judgment. Grandma appreciates your consideration of her too much to hamper you; for I am convinced that your father would have given you a wheel long ago if you had been willing to set aside my feeling in the matter.” And grandma drew the grateful girl close to her with a gentle smile on the dear old face.



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CHAPTER IV.

THE CLUB.

It was Audrey Vane who first broached the plan of forming a special society among the girls at school. Knowing her own claims to distinguished ancestry, and being anxious to emphasize the fact, she proposed to a select few that they should follow the example of their elders and start a patriotic club. Audrey was almost the age of Persis; nevertheless, she and Mellicent were close friends, and to the latter she first unfolded her scheme. Mellicent admired Audrey exceedingly and was always ready to follow her lead. Audrey had many good traits, but she allowed herself to be influenced more by position and family than by character; in consequence she was called “stuck up” by many of the girls and was not the general favorite that Persis was.

After a talk with Mellicent upon the subject nearest her heart Audrey won her ready help in writing a number of little notes which were found one morning upon the desks of the special girls selected for favor, and when recess was called quite a flock of curious maidens congregated in one corner of the school-room. Audrey was full of enthusiasm, and was armed with arguments.

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“You see, girls,” she began, “we ought to try to guard all the history of the early days of our country. Mamma says so; and I think if we form a society that will make us take more interest in our studies, at the same time we are hunting up stories and dates about our ancestors, that it will be a great benefit to us. I think if we have a nice select number, —about a dozen to begin with—”

“How about the girls we don’t admit?” interrupted Persis between bites of a big apple. “It seems sort of mean not to give them the benefit of our researching.”

“Oh, but we can’t,” replied Audrey, in dismay; “that would destroy the whole intention; besides, they would feel very much cut up if they didn’t have any ancestors.”

“I have heard some awfully good monkey stories,” returned Persis, mischievously. “We might gain a great deal of useful information by the study of natural history.”

“Now, Perse, you’re always chaffing,” rejoined Audrey, “and you’re just the one to help us out if you only take hold in the right way. Your family is all right, and you needn’t pretend to be so democratic.”

“Oh, I’ll take hold fast enough,” continued Persis, “as soon as I know all the ins and outs, but I hate an ostentatious exclusiveness.”

“Whew! what big words!” laughed Nellie Hall. “Go on, Audrey; we want to know more of this. What do you propose to call your club?”

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“How would ‘Young Colonial Dames’ do?”

“Imagine our being dames,” criticised Nellie.

“Well, Ladies, then.”

“Sounds like a seminary,” objected Persis. “Colonial Youngsters is more concise.”

“How absurd! There’s no dignity about that.”

“Who wants to be dignified?” queried Persis, flippantly.

“You need to be,” put in Lisa.

“Well, just let’s leave the name for the present. Call a meeting for Saturday, Audrey, and in the mean time we can talk it over with our mothers, and see what we can do,” proposed Nellie.

This was agreed upon, and the girls went home full of the scheme.

“Don’t you think it’s a fine plan, mamma?” asked Lisa, who had worked herself up to quite a pitch of enthusiasm. “I never can remember dates and such things, and Audrey says her mother told her that the researching she has done has strengthened her memory wonderfully. Don’t you approve?”

“I do, with qualifications. I think you should not set yourselves apart from those of your school-mates who cannot lay claim to distinguished ancestry, although I do believe in preserving the records of those families whose forefathers helped to make our country. It depends much upon the spirit of the thing. If it is simply to form an exclusive coterie, I object seriously. If it is to emphasize your studies, and if you make good character your first consideration, I approve heartily.”

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The three sisters looked at each other. There was an uneasy feeling that Audrey’s purpose was the forming of an exclusive set, although she had not declared it.

“I think it would be a good plan to join, and then if we find it doesn’t turn out as it ought, we can withdraw,” said Lisa, slowly.

“Perhaps that will do,” agreed Mrs. Holmes. “I have no objection to that.”

“Good!” cried Persis. “Come, girls, let’s go and get grandma to help us dig up our forefathers.”

“What a ghastly way to put it,” laughed Lisa. “You know there is the judge, Persis, and the mandamus councillor.”

“And the governor. Don’t forget the governor,” put in Mellicent. “He is the most important of all.”

“Oh, yes,” returned Lisa; “but then he is so far back I nearly always forget him.”

“And the colonel,” interposed Persis.

“He wasn’t colonial; he was Revolutionary,” corrected Lisa.

“Sure enough. Well, grandma will straighten it all out.”

Therefore, armed with records and bristling with information, the girls set forth to attend the meeting on Saturday afternoon. They found a small though strictly select party gathered at Audrey’s home.

“We have concluded to adopt the same standard of eligibility which is required by the real Colonial Dames,” informed Audrey. “I will read off the list, and any of those who know they can join can put their names down to-day, and we’ll choose a committee to decide upon them.”

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There followed much mirthful laughter and many exclamations of, “Oh, I can’t remember! I’ll have to look that up.” But the few who had taken care to provide themselves with statistics were solemnly admitted. Among these were the Holmes girls, whose governor was highly approved.

“I don’t believe I can find any one but a miserable old member of assembly,” announced Kitty Carew. “I ought to have some one else. You Holmes girls have such a magnificent array that I feel so paltry. However, I haven’t half my forebears hunted up; so there is no knowing what superior sort of person I may unearth. I think I’ll wait till I have a better showing.”

“Now,” said Audrey, “when we have a club of ten we shall begin to admit others on the endorsement of the original members; but we must be very particular.”

“Oh, I want to hurry up and get some history out of it,” Persis contended. “Don’t let us waste all our time over the business part.”

“But we must at first,” responded Audrey. “I think we have made a very good beginning,—you three Holmes girls, Nellie Hall, Margaret Greene, and myself. We shall expect you, Kitty, and the others to be all ready with your records and papers next time.”

“Oh, and about the name,” said Lisa. “Grandma suggests Colonial Maids.”

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“I think that is fine,” acquiesced Nellie Hall. “Don’t you like it, Audrey?”

“Yes; it is the best yet. I move that we adopt it,” said Audrey.

“Seconded,” cried Nellie.

“Now, girls,” Audrey continued, “we must not forget to have some interesting facts for next time. Each must bring some bit of incident to tell.”

“And what about the time and place of meeting?” questioned Margaret Greene.

“I think it would be nice if we could meet on Friday afternoons in the school-room, if Miss Adams will let us.”

“Then I propose that a committee of two be appointed to ask her,—you, Audrey, and Lisa Holmes.” And Margaret looked around for some one to approve.

“Second the motion,” cried Persis. And the meeting broke up with congratulations upon its success from one to the other.

But, pleasant as the little club promised to be, what heart-burnings followed. Almost immediately there were bickerings and troubles. The Colonial Maids were looked upon as exclusive and disagreeable by those who were not members of the club, while these outsiders were regarded as open enemies by the “Maids.”

There were, of course, some girls who wisely showed no partisan spirit and were friendly to all; but these were few, not more than ten girls out of sixty pupils being of this class. The club soon increased to twenty members, and great were the boastings and lofty was the bearing of most of these.

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“It just suits Lisa,” Persis confided to her mother. “She holds her chin in the air higher than ever, and Mellicent thinks just as Audrey does; so I get terribly sat upon if I say there are as nice girls out of the club as in it. But I have a scheme, and I’m going to carry it through.”

“Now, don’t do anything disagreeable, Persis,” warned her mother.

“I’m not going to. I really am not, mamma, only I do think they ought to be taken down a peg or two. Miss Adams says, although she approves heartily of our having a club, and does not object to our using the school-room, she is very sorry to see this warlike element. And when one of the outsiders was asked to contribute to Miss Adams’s Christmas-gift she refused because she said it was taxation without representation. I think that was a good joke.”

Mrs. Holmes laughed. “It was rather hard on Miss Adams.”

“Yes, I know; but the outside girls think she favors the club because she allows us the use of the school-room, and not more than ten of them have given anything toward the Christmas gift. Oh, I tell you we’re in hot water.”

It is quite true that the pretentious bearing of the club members was very keenly felt by many of the girls, and by some of them was bitterly resented. Toward no one was a supercilious manner more visibly displayed than quiet little Annis Brown, who, however, never by word or look gave evidence that she noticed it.

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A vote had been carried by a majority of the club which provided for a rule prohibiting the members from visiting certain girls in the school, Annis among others. The Holmes girls, to their credit, were among those who voted against this high-handed measure, and

Persis hotly protested, threatening to send in her resignation if the rule should be enforced; and there promised to be rupture in the camp.

"I'd like to see any one choose my companions for me. My mother is the only one who has a right to do that," Persis angrily declared. And in open defiance she became a frequent visitor at Annis Brown's.

Annis lived in one of the unfashionable streets of the city. Her mother was a widow whose small means were eked out by the taking of boarders; and from Audrey's standpoint this was sufficient cause for ostracising little Annis. She regarded the quiet, unassuming little girl as far beneath her, and treated her accordingly. Persis, with her generous promptings, had always been specially kind to Annis, and now declared openly that she was the nicest girl in school. The club was in a state of great agitation. To ask Persis to resign meant offence to Lisa and Mellicent, who were far too important members to slight. To disregard Persis's action meant the sapping of the very foundations of club discipline, and therefore there were whispers and glances, retreats and advances, for two or three weeks, Persis, meantime, growing more and more devoted to Annis. [Pg 49]

"I don't see how your sister can be so very democratic," ventured Audrey to Mellicent. "I should think she would have more consideration for you and Lisa."

"Persis doesn't care," replied Mellicent, plaintively. "She is always that way. If she thinks a thing is right you might as well try to move a mountain. She will give up every one before she does Annis. You see if she doesn't."

"Well, I think it is a shame for her to upset everything in this way," complained Audrey, almost in tears.

Persis, however, gloated over the trouble she was causing, and on the day before the meeting which was to decide the action of the club regarding her defiance of rules she walked off with Annis after school, laughing at Audrey's look of dismay and Lisa's stern disapproval.

"I wish you would try your influence upon Persis," the latter said to her mother. "I think it is a shame for her to act so. I am sure, mamma, you, who are always so particular about our acquaintances, must see that Persis is at fault."

"Let Persis alone," returned Mrs. Holmes. "She is doing nothing wrong."

"But, mamma, what a position for us to be in. She will be asked to resign, and we can't stay in the club under such circumstances. It makes the most fearful muddle."

Mrs. Holmes sewed quietly on. "Leave the matter to adjust itself, Lisa, and don't worry over it," she advised. "I can assure you that it will all come out right." [Pg 50]

"Then Persis has told you what she means to do."

"Yes."

"Oh, well, I suppose she'll do something to astonish us to-morrow,—either resign of her own accord, or consent to abide by the rules."

But Persis did not mean to do either of these things. She was at that moment knitting her brows over some papers at a table in Annis's little attic room.

"Hoop-la!" she cried presently. "I've found the link, Annis. Here it is. You see John wasn't Jacob's son at all; he was Henry's son, and that makes you all right. Can't you imagine the surprise?" And Persis threw back her head and laughed heartily. "Give me those papers," she continued. "There, write down just what I tell you. I'm glad I can count on Nellie Hall. She must sign this before I go home."

"I don't see why you want to take so much trouble. You know I don't care anything at all about it," Annis certified. "I know I have nothing to be ashamed of, and that's enough."

"That is the best evidence in the world of your real claim: your quiet indifference. If you had turned up your nose and had flouted around and raged, as some of the girls have

done, I should have been inclined to turn aggressive myself. But you always were so—so ladylike.”

“Of course,” returned Annis with a little hauteur. “I leave wrangling and squabbling to kitchen-maids. My mother never descends to such things, why should I?”

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“That is just it,” answered Persis, admiringly. “I know you don’t care a rap about this club. You are doing this all on my account, so as to let me out of the trouble. You are just that dear, sweet kind of a thing.”

It had been only too evident to Annis that Persis’s stanch loyalty to her was the cause of difficulty, and she had therefore, after some hesitation, made known certain facts which resulted in the above conversation.

Curiosity as to the outcome of the next meeting of the club brought a full attendance, and there were many covert glances at Persis to see how she bore herself upon this particular occasion.

After the minutes of the last meeting had been read, the next business in order was the presenting of new names for membership, and every eye was turned upon Persis as she arose in her seat. It was the custom of the club to present the paper of each applicant with the signature of two of the members, these papers being read aloud by the one proposing the name of a friend. Therefore the proposition of a new member by Persis caused a little ripple of wonder to pass over the gathering.

“Mr.—I mean Miss President,” began Persis, a little confused, “I wish to present the name of my friend, Miss Annis Brown, for membership.”

There was a visible start from the president, Audrey Vane, astonished looks passed from one girl to another, and a dead silence followed as Persis proceeded to read the application setting forth the grounds upon which Annis was eligible.

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As she mentioned governor, provincial congressman, judge, signer of the declaration, general of provincial army, founder of college, and other officers, the girls looked from one to another in amazement. Then, after Persis had concluded her reading of the accurate and well-established record, with her own name and that of Nellie Hall as endorsers, she added, “I would like to remark that Miss Brown claims descent from one of the oldest and most aristocratic families in the country, and that her Revolutionary ancestry is as distinguished as her colonial; but I do not think she will find it necessary to add to the list of those already mentioned.” And Persis sat down with head erect and eyes sparkling.

All order was thrown aside when Margaret Greene called out, “Well, Persis Holmes, if you haven’t played a trick on us! Who could believe that quiet little thing was such an aristocrat?”

“I could,” replied Persis, triumphantly. “If you knew her as well as I do you would see there is no truer lady among us. The way she has acted all along proves it. You all thought she didn’t resent your high and mighty ways because she was a poor-spirited, meek, down-trodden worm, when it was only conscious superiority.” And no one contradicted Persis, who looked around with a keen appreciation of the situation.

The silence was broken by Audrey. “You might have told us before,” she said, in an aggrieved tone.

“I didn’t have all the proofs,” returned Persis, “and I knew nothing less than cast-iron documents would satisfy this belligerent crowd. *I* was satisfied that Annis was a lovely, refined girl long ago, and should never have questioned her inherited right to be called a lady; but she told me all these things just to set me right with the club, although it went against the grain for her to do it. Bless her dear heart!”

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“Of course we can’t refuse to admit her,” acknowledged Audrey, somewhat grudgingly. “There isn’t a loop-hole of escape, for her character is above reproach.”

"I should say so," sniffed Persis. "And now I think this thing has gone far enough, so I propose that we extend our limits, since every one knows by this time that we are all grandees." And she laughed good-humoredly. "I propose we let in any girls who have good, fiery, old Revolutionary stock to back them."

"But that will include nearly every one of the girls," objected Audrey.

"Suppose it does. What is it? the greatest good to the greatest number. If we make character the rock on which we split there will be no danger of our being contaminated."

Silence again fell upon the company.

"Miss Adams says we can't have the school-room to use if the club is going to cause so much dissension," presently ventured Nellie Hall.

"And," continued Persis, "my father says the Holmes girls are to resign in a body if the club is going to make them forget to be ladies and Christians."

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"Goodness!" cried Margaret Greene. "It's getting to look serious. We'll have to give in, girls. We'd better hold out the olive-branch. I second the motion for extending our limits and calling our club—what shall we call it?"

"Oh, dear! I don't know," replied Audrey, feeling that she had no ground to stand upon. "Just tack on Revolutionary and call ourselves Colonial and Revolutionary Maids. That will do." And this was agreed upon, to the intense satisfaction of Persis.

Consequently the club continued in existence, and to it were added many new members, while the interest extended and broadened. Miss Adams herself finally became president and directed the girls in such a helpful, delightful way that no event of the month was anticipated with more pleasure than the regular meeting of "the club."



CHAPTER V.

AN ERROR OF JUDGMENT.

Despite the fact that Persis triumphed in such decided measure over the members of the club, as well as her sisters, she was not always wise in her judgments.

"Persis is so awfully set up because Annis Brown turned out to be a lady of quality, that there is no living with her," Mellicent complained.

"She will be making all sorts of queer acquaintances after this, you see if she doesn't," remarked Lisa. "Now, I say that money and society bring certain refinements, and that we are bound to acknowledge it. But Persis pooh-poohs the whole thing, and is becoming a regular socialist."

"Socialist yourself," retorted Persis. "Mamma, I leave it to you if I am not a greater respecter of property than either Mell or Lisa. Why, mamma, they think nothing of helping themselves to my belongings, and half the time when I go to get a ribbon or a handkerchief I find that what I want has been taken. I think that it doesn't make any difference if we are sisters, that we have our individual rights, and I never know what is really my own, for they use my things as if they were common property. I believe they look upon a loan as an actual gift, for they never think of returning anything they borrow."

"I wouldn't be so selfish," Lisa retorted.

"I'm not selfish, I am perfectly willing to loan, or even to give you my things, but I do like to know what to depend upon; and you haven't any right to possess yourself of my property without so much as a by your leave."

"Persis is entirely right," Mrs. Holmes asserted, after a moment's reflection. "I think you, Lisa, and Mellicent too, do impose upon her generosity, and it is only fair that you should return her property promptly when you borrow it. It is a poor return, when she is kind enough to allow you the use of what is hers, for you to be ungracious in letting her have her own again. You should reflect that the obligation is on your side. I have seen you look as if Persis had offered you a personal injury when she asked you to return something of hers, when it was she who had a right to feel aggrieved by being deprived of the rightful use of her special possession."

Lisa did not look very well pleased at the turn the conversation was taking, and hastened to change the subject.

"Well, however that may be," she said, "to return to the subject of acquaintances, I heard Connie Steuart ask Persis to go home with her at Thanksgiving, and mamma, we don't know anything about those Steuarts. Connie is simply a boarding pupil, and no one knows how she lives or anything about her people."

"She is one of your fine Colonial Maids," returned Persis.

"Well, suppose she is; that doesn't alter the matter."

"I thought you were such an advocate of heredity that Connie's claim would give her a high seat in your opinion, on account of the colonel she has for a great-great-grandfather,

or whatever he is.”

“Girls! girls!” warned Mrs. Holmes. “How you do like to bicker! Sisters should not be always so ready to argue and contend.”

“But mamma, we have to, or else one of us would have no mind of her own,” maintained Persis. “And I do want to go home with Connie at Thanksgiving. Mayn’t I?”

“I shall have to think that over,” returned Mrs. Holmes. “Connie seems rather a nice girl, but it is true that we do not know her people, and I do not care to have you make acquaintances about whom I know nothing.”

“Connie knows the Dixons,” responded Persis, eagerly, “and I am sure they are nice people.”

“Yes, they are. How well does she know them?”

“Why, she must be quite intimate there; she visits the house often, and Mrs. Dixon gives her a lovely Christmas-gift every year.”

“Very well, we will leave the question for the present. I will think it over.”

In the end, however, Persis had her way, for after Connie had spent a couple of days with the Holmes girls, Mrs. Holmes yielded. [Pg 58]

“There is nothing to condemn in Connie that I can see,” she said to Mrs. Estabrook. “I do not see but that she is as well behaved as most girls; so, as Persis seems to have set her heart upon this visit, we may as well consent to her going. Any friends of Mrs. Dixon’s must be all right.”

“Now, dear,” she charged Persis, “remember one or two things: always be prompt to your meals; it is a discourtesy to your hostess to be otherwise. Do not expect to be entertained every moment. Have some consideration for the convenience of your entertainers, and help when you see that your assistance would be acceptable. Don’t demand of the maids more than is your share of service. You have never been away from home alone until now, and I want you to be as courteous and kind as you can, in return for the hospitality offered you. In other words, do as you would have others do to you; that, after all, is the best rule for etiquette.” And Persis set off in high glee.

It was late on Wednesday evening that she arrived with Connie Steuart at her home, something less than a hundred miles distant from where the Holmes family lived. It was bleak, chilly weather, and Persis looked forward to a cosy evening at a comfortable fireside. The house was one of a long row in a crowded street, the dreariness of which was increased by the season. A few leafless trees, sparse and unhealthy-looking, were seen along the sidewalk; the houses were dingy; dust-heaps were collected before the doors; bits of paper blew hither and thither upon the unswept pavement. Up the wooden steps, which showed signs of having needed paint for many a day, the two girls went. They were met in the hall by Mrs. Steuart in a rusty black dress, elaborately trimmed with what had once been showy jet trimming. Following her came Connie’s sisters, Imogene and Oriana. A fit of homesickness overcame Persis the moment she entered the house, and she felt as if she must rush out and take the next train home. [Pg 59]

They were ushered into a room full of odors of cooking, mingled with the faint remains of cheap perfume. It seemed to Persis that the place could not have been aired since summer. There was a perfect hodge-podge of trumpery ornamentation to be seen; gaudily upholstered furniture was crowded into the small space; an open piano was littered with music; the carpet showed the gayest colors, impossible flowers stiffly set upon a sickly yellow-green ground. The walls were adorned with low-priced lithographs in ornate frames, and the chairs were decked with coarse lace squares. Taking this all in at a glance, Persis turned her eyes curiously upon the family.

Mrs. Steuart stood with a welcoming smile upon her good-natured, florid face. By her side was Imogene, who looked “just like a hair-dresser’s dummy,” was Persie’s inward comment. The young woman’s bleached hair was arranged carefully; a light-blue silk waist, spotted and streaked, and trimmed plentifully with soiled lace, adorned her buxom

figure, while her skirt was of a cut intended to be fashionable, but so ill-hanging as to show only its pretence. Persis wondered at the strongly marked eyebrows, brilliant color, and white skin. "She uses cosmetics as though she were on the stage," she told herself, in disgust. "How vulgar her tastes must be!" And she turned to Miss Oriana, who was rather an improvement upon her elder sister, for she allowed her hair to retain its natural color, and her pretty dark eyes did not display a smeary black line under them. She, however, had not given proper attention to her teeth, and showed, as Persis said afterward, "a yawning chasm of darkness when she opened her mouth." She was attired scarcely less gaudily than her sister, in a frayed cheap silk. Both young women greeted Persis effusively, and in high-pitched nasal tones chattered on unceasingly.

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"Bud will be home directly," said Oriana. "Connie, you ought to see Bud: he has an up-to-date suit. My, but he's a swell! We've been teasing him about you, Miss Holmes, and he's all in a quiver over your coming. I hope you dance or sing. Bud's awfully fond of singing. He gets all the new songs, and we have lots of fun when the neighbors come in."

"Come, girls, help me get in the supper," interrupted Mrs. Steuart, getting up heavily. She had a ponderous tread, and as she walked from the room the floor of the unsubstantial dwelling trembled beneath her feet.

Persis looked at Connie. She could not understand how she could be so very different from the others. "For she is," decided Persis. "Oh, dear, I wish they'd let us go up-stairs by ourselves!" But, Miss Imogene having left the room, Miss Oriana kept up the conversation, relating all sorts of gossip, and evidently considering herself most agreeably entertaining.

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"There's Bud," cried Miss Oriana. "I hear his latch-key." And in a moment a young man entered. He was quite young,—not more than nineteen or twenty,—and was dressed in the style described as "loud." His entrance brought with it an overpowering odor of cheap perfume mixed with bad tobacco, and to Persis, who loathed such a combination, this was almost sickening.

"He has the manner of a floor-walker in a third-rate dry-goods shop," thought Persis. "Oh, dear, why did I come?" She hardly heard what young Stewart was saying, and waited anxiously the summons to supper, which was presently made by means of a clanging bell, rung vigorously by Imogene.

The meal was good, plentiful, and well cooked, and hungry Persis appreciated this fact. "Now, if Connie and I can only go up-stairs and be alone after supper, I shall not mind it so much," she thought. But she at once remembered that it was Connie's first evening at home, and of course she would want to remain with the family. Hearty laughter and unlimited jesting made the meal a merry one. Immediately after they all again adjourned to the drawing-room, where they were joined later by a party of young people from the neighborhood, themselves as frolicsome as the Stewarts.

Mr. Bud sang variety songs with more vigor than melody, while Oriana pounded out an accompaniment upon the piano, with her foot on the loud pedal. Then followed a romping game in which Bud insisted upon receiving a kiss as a forfeit, while Persis, with all her dignity so defied, vehemently protested.

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"Bud likes the girls," laughed Mrs. Steuart, to whom her guest finally appealed. And Persis, with one wild look around, fled from the room followed by Connie. As she sank, sobbing, upon the first chair she found in the nearest room her friend began to apologize.

"Don't, Persis," she said. "Bud didn't mean any harm."

"I don't care," replied Persis, between her sobs. "I won't stand such things. I can't help it, Connie, if he is your brother."

"He isn't," Connie answered, hesitatingly. "They don't like me to say so, but he is only my step-brother. He is used to romping about with the girls who come here; he had no idea of offending you. I'll go down and tell him that you are really angry."

“No, don’t do that. Just let me stay up here, and then they can have their game without me.”

Connie stood uncertain just what to do. She was vaguely conscious that although she and Persis met upon common ground where their studies were concerned, in some other matters they were far apart. “I want you to have a good time,” she said, regretfully. “I don’t want you to mope up here.”

“I won’t mope,” assured Persis, earnestly, twisting her damp handkerchief nervously around her fingers. “I can’t go down with these red eyes. You go, Connie. I shall not mind; indeed I shall not. I am tired, and would rather go to bed.” [Pg 63]

So Connie reluctantly piloted her to the room they were to share in company with Oriana, and there left her.

There was a lack of the little home comforts to which Persis had been accustomed, and this added to her homesick feeling. The dressing-bureau was littered with curl-papers and white with face-powder. Searching in vain for a match-safe, she finally discovered two or three matches in a pasteboard box on one end of the mantel. She did not know where to put her own little belongings or where to go for hot water, and with the feeling that in some way she had failed of acting as became a courteous guest Persis went heavy-hearted to bed.

In spite of her disturbed feelings, she soon fell asleep, but was awakened an hour later by the flaring up of a bright light, and turning over she saw that Connie and Oriana were preparing for bed. Then followed a long chatter of what “he” said and what “she” said, poor Persis, so unused to such disquiet, longing for a darkened room and solitude. How could she stand it till Monday? she questioned. What sort of people were these for the Dixons to know? What was she to do about that dreadful Bud, who reeked so of bad cologne and cigarettes, pared his nails in her presence, and walked out of the dining-room chewing a toothpick? What would Lisa say if she were to know of it? And in sober humility Persis hid her head in the pillow vainly longing for Monday to come.

“Mamma wanted me to be sure to see Mrs. Dixon,” she said to Connie the next day. [Pg 64]

Connie’s eyes fell. “We’ll see her at church,” she returned. “She—she is my Sunday-school teacher.” And Persis understood. Of course, then, she has received gifts from Mrs. Dixon, has been to entertainments at her house, she reflected. But I am sure Mrs. Dixon could never be a friend of Mrs. Steuart’s; yet Connie told me she was a friend of her mother’s.

There was much manœuvring on the part of Bud to walk to church with the guest. He was not altogether a bad fellow, although underbred and lacking in delicate sensibility. Persis, however, clung closely to Mrs. Steuart, and managed to keep Connie by her most of the way. But a little ingenuity on the part of the others threw Bud into her company, and she had to make the best of it.

“Tell me about that general who was your ancestor, Mr. Stewart,” she said, hoping to start up a congenial topic.

Bud stared. “I’ve no ancestor like that,” he replied. “He must be one of Con’s folks. Yes, I remember. I’ve heard ma speak of him.”

“Yes; but—why, wasn’t he on the Stewart side?”

“Yes; but you know Con’s no kin of ours, really. Ma was a widow with us three children when she married Con’s father, who was a widower with only Con. My father was named Stewart too, only we spell ours S-t-e-w and they spell theirs S-t-e-u. That’s the difference.”

“Oh!” replied Persis. She was solving several mysteries that morning. [Pg 65]

“And do you know the Dixons? Connie said Mrs. Dixon was a friend of her mother’s. Did she mean this mother?”

“No; she meant her own mother. Ma doesn’t know Mrs. Dixon at all. Mrs. Dixon used to know Con’s mother.”

“Her father is living?”

“Yes; he’s a travelling man, you know. He’s away most of the time. He failed in business before ma married him. He used to be right well off. We don’t see much of him nowadays. You know he boarded with ma, and he was sick with typhoid fever and ma nursed him. That’s how he got acquainted with her. I don’t believe he cares much for us; but we’re awful fond of Con,” he added, eagerly. And Persis began to feel more kindly disposed toward this youth, who had so jarred upon her at first.



CHAPTER VI.

MRS. DIXON'S INVITATION.

While Connie and Persis waited after service to speak to Mrs. Dixon, the others walked on.

"Let us stand here in the vestibule," said Connie, "and then we shall be sure not to miss her." And they waited till Mrs. Dixon appeared. She was surprised and glad to see the girls, but looked a little puzzled when Persis told where she was stopping. "I wish you could spend part of your time with me," she said, looking from one girl to another.

"Oh, I can't spare her," said Connie.

Mrs. Dixon smiled, but she looked thoughtful immediately after. "Couldn't you both come and spend Saturday and Sunday with me?" she presently asked. Persis's look of pleasure gave her answer, but Connie looked doubtful.

"I am sure your father would not object; and if Mrs. Steuart will consent, I shall be very glad to have you," continued Mrs. Dixon.

"If Persis likes, I shall enjoy coming," said Connie, "and I don't think there will be any difficulty about the consent." [Pg 67]

In consequence Persis returned from church with a lighter heart, and felt that she could eat her Thanksgiving dinner with a real sense of gratitude since her stay at the Steuarts' was to be shortened by two days.

"I will send the carriage for you early on Saturday," Mrs. Dixon had said, and Persis counted the hours. There was an honest intention on the part of the Steuarts to make the girl have a good time, but the entertainment provided was of such a different character from that to which Persis was accustomed that she shrank from it. She wondered how people who pleaded poverty could afford to buy so much confectionery, and could put such an amount of trimming on their frocks. She had never been used to dressing conspicuously and sitting at a front window in order to attract attention, and make remarks on passers by; to laugh and smirk if a young man chanced to look up; to romp with casual callers, or to go from shop to shop for the mere purpose of seeing the crowd and getting into conversation with the clerks. She was so full of wonder at all this behavior that she made a clean breast of it to Mrs. Dixon as soon as an opportunity came.

"My dear," said that lady, "I am so sorry it happened so. I wish your mother had written to me before you decided to go home with Connie. The Stewarts are not persons your parents would choose for your associates. I do not mean that they are bad people. The girls are simply silly, brainless creatures, who err because they have never been used to refined influences. Poor little Connie should have better surroundings. She is the daughter of a dear school-mate of mine who died when Connie was scarcely more than a baby. Connie's father married for his second wife a woman who was not his social equal. She has been very good to Connie in many ways, and while I regret the child's environment, there is nothing much that can be done. I think her school association will help her, and I hope some day she will be a fine woman. She has a small fortune left by her mother which will educate her and give her a little income when she is through

school. So she is not dependent upon her father. Help her all you can, Persis, without compromising yourself. It is a difficult case and one in which it is hard to do just right."

Persis looked immensely relieved. "Oh, Mrs. Dixon," she said, "you were so good to invite us here! I should have perished with homesickness if I had stayed there till Monday; and they really tried to be kind. I felt so ungrateful, and I didn't want to hurt their feelings."

"I know, dear; it was a hard position for you. Now, we must try to do our best for Constance. I am so glad you find her companionable, and I hope some day she will prove worthy of the sweet woman who was her mother. Mere pride of birth is a small matter. No doubt the Stewarts point to as fine ancestry as you or I, but we cannot help making social distinctions, and although Mrs. Steuart may be an honest, well-intentioned woman, she does not rear her daughters as judiciously as your mother does hers; moreover, you are apt to meet at her house persons of whom your parents would not approve; so this must be your last visit there."

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"Oh, Mrs. Dixon, you are such a comfort," returned Persis. "I am so glad not to give up Connie, for, I really like her, but I shall never again, never, insist upon carrying things with such a high hand. I was so indignant when Lisa suggested that I might make a mistake."

"We are all poor critters," laughed Mrs. Dixon. "Where did you leave Connie?"

"Curled up in the library with a book."

"Tell her we must get ready for a drive." And Persis danced out of the room very happy that all difficult questions were explained.

"What are you reading, Con?" she asked, as she peeped into the quiet room.

"Oh, such a lovely book!" sighed Connie. "Isn't it deliciously peaceful here, Persis? I mean to have just such a home when I grow up. I'm going to have shelves full of books, and an open fire, and a chair just like this,—it is a real sleepy hollow; and I'm going to have my bedroom facing the west, so I can always see the sunset, and all those pretty silver things Mrs. Dixon has on her dressing-bureau I'm going to have on mine."

"What will Mrs. Dixon do?"

"I don't mean I am going to have hers, goosey,—some just like them."

Persis was balancing herself on the arm of a big chair. "Did you know that we are to go to the cricket club this afternoon?"

"No. Are we really?"

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"Yes. Mrs. Dixon said we were to join Walter there; and we can play shuffleboard or roll tenpins or do anything like that if we choose. Isn't it fine?"

"I should say so. I have always been wild to go into that club-house on the cricket grounds, and I never had a chance before this. I have watched the girls play tennis there and did so wish I belonged to the club."

"Well, now's your chance. Come, get ready." And the two girls hastened up-stairs to prepare for the event.

"I wish I had a new coat," said Persis; "but it was Lisa's turn this winter. I don't generally mind having hand-me-downs, except when I am away from home, and then I like to be spick and span from head to foot. Never mind, I have two dollars' worth of elegance in the shape of a pair of fine new gloves that grandma gave me just before I came away. And I have a new hat; the Pigeon had to take mine. I believe, after all, I am going to be the shortest of the trio, and will have to wear Mell's frocks in a year or two. Won't that be horrid?"

"Who is the Pigeon?" asked Connie, laughing.

"Don't you know? Mell. We call her that for fun, because she is given to turning in her toes; and we tell her that sometimes she stands on the curb as if she had just alighted

there, and that she has a way of looking up and down the street as if she were making up her mind to which roof she would fly next; so we call her 'the Pigeon.' Lisa is called 'Lady Dignity,' or sometimes 'Dig,' for short." [Pg 71]

"And what do they call you?"

"Tommy," replied Persis, laughing. "You can easily guess why. Come, I hear the carriage. Don't you like Walter Dixon?"

"I never met him," confessed Connie. "I have often met Dr. Dixon, and I like him, he is so jolly."

"Walter is just like him," Persis informed her; "so you'll be sure to get along well with him." And the girls started down-stairs to meet Mrs. Dixon, who was waiting for them in the hall.

They returned from their expedition in high spirits. The girls had acquitted themselves fairly well at the shuffleboard, which they thought fine fun, and Walter had shown them over the pretty club-house, and had kept them laughing all the way home by his flow of nonsense.

"Now, children," Mrs. Dixon said, when, after a late dinner, all adjourned to the library, "what do you want to do,—read, play games, have some music, or what?"

"Let's get up an impromptu play," suggested Walter. "I am capable of taking half a dozen characters at once, and if one of the girls will help, we can have some fun."

"I'd much rather be audience," said Connie; "indeed I should."

Persis's eyes sparkled, for there was nothing she enjoyed more than just such a performance, which would give play to her imagination, and in which she could exercise her wit, and she nodded a ready assent when Walter looked at her inquiringly. [Pg 72]

"Then Connie and I can keep each other company," Mrs. Dixon said. "The doctor is a very uncertain quantity, and we can never depend upon having his society, although he may be in at any moment. You know, Walter, that you are welcome to any of the household possessions in reason, and you always have a pile of properties to draw upon, I know. He has a way of utilizing the most unusual articles," she informed the girls, "so you need not be surprised at anything he may produce."

Using the library as a stage, the players sent the audience to the adjoining room, and after many journeys to and from the stage were taken and sundry thuds were heard, the curtain rose upon the first scene. This discovered Persis as an old woman at a washtub, while Walter, as an antiquated specimen of rusticity, carried on a violent altercation with his partner upon the subject of taking summer boarders. The rosy Persis was such a very mirthful old woman, in spite of her queer cap and whitened hair, that the old man with the sheep-skin "chin-whiskers," old straw hat, and dejected-looking appearance generally, was obliged to frown down her merriment continually, while Mrs. Dixon and Connie laughed till the tears came.

The next scene presented Walter as the boarder, who was also the villain of the play, and pretended to be scheming to win the affection of a country maid—represented by Persis—in order to gain possession of the property belonging to the old people whose daughter Persis was supposed to be. After a dramatic interview, in which the villain vowed vengeance upon an unfortunate individual named Willie, who was the lover of the country maid, Walter in a monologue planned how he should get rid of the simple-hearted Willie, and decided that he would shoot him while the two were out hunting together, pretending that it should be considered an accident. The *dénouement* came when, after a startling report, Walter staggered in bearing the form of his victim. [Pg 73]

The appearance of the figure, far from causing tears from the audience, caused them to laugh uncontrolledly, for the cumbersome and unwieldy lay-figure which Walter had constructed out of brooms and pillows, dressed in a suit of old clothes, and surmounted with a false-face and a wig of astrachan cloth, was such a ludicrous object that Persis, as the broken-hearted maid, shook with laughter as she buried her face in her hands. She

recovered, however, and her simulated agony over such a ridiculous-looking creature nearly upset even Walter's gravity. So when the scene concluded with Persis propping up the luckless Willie and announcing in ecstatic tones that he still lived, while she gazed tenderly at the simpering false-face, such laughter ensued that the play was pronounced ended.

"My goodness! we've taken up nearly the whole evening," exclaimed Persis. "I'm all tired out with my agonizing. Did I do well, Mrs. Dixon?"

"Remarkably so, considering the object of your devotion," laughed Mrs. Dixon. "You are ready for some hot chocolate I hope. We'll have it with some cake in the library. [Pg 74] Where is Walter?"

"He has gone to remove his villany," said Persis, laughing. "Did you ever see such an evil-looking wretch as he made of himself with that fierce black moustache?"

"Where did he get it?" asked Connie.

"It's a piece of monkey fur," replied Persis. "I think Walter is very ingenious. I do wish you lived nearer us, Mrs. Dixon, we could all have such good times together; just like one family, for Walter, being Basil's cousin, would make him one of us."

"I sometimes wish so, too," returned Mrs. Dixon, "although we have many ties here, and Walter has some pleasant friends among his college-mates. I should be glad, however, if he had a sister. I think it would be better for him to be thrown more with nice girls, for, close friends as we two are, the society of young people is good for him, and I often think how pleasant it would have been for him if his little sister had lived, and they could have had the same circle of friends."

"And we three Holmes girls have no brother," said Persis. "Oh, yes; we count Basil and Porter as brothers now, so the family isn't so one-sided as it used to be. I like Basil better than Porter, but they are both nice boys, and we all have lively times at home, I can tell you."

Monday morning came all too soon, notwithstanding Persis's homesick attack of Thanksgiving-day. "I have had such a good time," she told Mrs. Dixon as she took her leave.

And yet she went back home in quite a subdued frame of mind. [Pg 75]

"I am wild to hear what sort of a time you had," said Lisa, on their way home from school, for an early train had given Connie and Persis barely time to reach school by nine o'clock.

"Oh, I had a nice time," said Persis, rather vaguely.

Lisa looked at her. "You aren't a bit enthusiastic."

"I was so glad to see Mrs. Dixon," returned Persis, with an increase of animation. "We had a lovely time at her house."

"Mrs. Dixon? Oh, yes; of course, we all love to be with her. Did you go to her house?"

"I spent Saturday and Sunday there; so did Connie."

"You did?" And Lisa looked curiously at her sister. "Perse, you're hedging. Tell me straight out about the Steuarts."

And Persis, too frank to conceal anything, told all.

"Then I was right," declared Lisa, triumphantly. "You'll believe me next time. I ought to know better, being older than you."

"Well, I don't care; Connie is a nice girl, and I am going to stand by her."

"Of course," rejoined Lisa, with her chin in the air.

Persis lost no time in relating her experiences to her mother, who listened thoughtfully. "Dear child," she said. "I am so glad you had the penetration to see just what was wrong,

and to shrink from joining in the actions you felt were not right. We withdraw ourselves from certain acquaintances because they are underbred, not because they are poor.”

“Annis Brown is poor.”

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“Exactly, but she has a refined gentlewoman for a mother, who is, moreover, a Christian in every sense of the word. Even though she might occupy the most humble position in the world, Mrs. Brown would always be a lady, and her character would always distinguish her as one of God’s chosen ones, while poor Connie’s step-mother cannot have refined instincts, and must either be a weak woman or one lacking in delicate perception; otherwise she would not permit her daughters to make themselves conspicuous by their questionable behavior. Innocent amusement is one thing and a bold seeking for notice is another. I am rather glad, after all, Persis, that you have had your lesson while you are so young.”

“Oh, dear, mamsey, it is so good to get back,” said Persis, fondling her mother’s hand. “I forgot to take my soap, and that dreadful strong-scented stuff the Stewart girls used nearly made me ill.”

Mrs. Holmes laughed. “I am very glad you are so pleased to get back to your soap.”

Persis laughed too. “Oh, mamsey, that was a most random sort of a remark. I wish there was some sign we could use when we mean parentheses,—so, for example,” and she described two curves with her hand. “It is you I am glad to see, soap or no soap.”

“That’s gross flattery,” responded Mrs. Holmes. And Persis answered the charge with a frantic kiss.



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CHAPTER VII.

THE TEA.

“Do hurry and come down to dinner,” said Lisa, imperiously, as she passed through the room where Persis was sitting absorbed in a book. It was what Persis called one of her sister’s “Lisa-osyncrasies,”—to make a great virtue of her promptness when she occasionally found herself punctual. It was the rarest thing in the world that Persis was ever behind time, and equally unusual for Lisa to be on the minute; nevertheless the latter always accentuated these occasions by assuming a highly virtuous air.

“What is the immediate rush?” returned Persis, lazily putting down the book. “Grandma hasn’t gone down yet. I’ll wait for her. I do hate to be prompted about meals, Lisa. I am not deaf, and I can hear the summons as well as you; certainly you never have to sit around half an hour waiting for me to come down in the morning, and I often do that for you.”

“Oh, you’re nothing if not a martyr,” responded Lisa, provokingly, as she sailed out of the room.

It was one of the mother’s griefs that these two elder daughters always roused each other’s aggressiveness. They were in reality devotedly attached to each other; but Persis chafed under Lisa’s imperious demands, and Lisa resented Persis’s strict appeals to justice, feeling that she as the oldest of the sisters had greater rights than either of the others. It is not an uncommon state of affairs, and is one that often adjusts itself to an accepted consideration and forbearance as young people mature and learn to respect the good points in one another.

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“Lisa always rubs me the wrong way,” pouted Persis to her grandmother.

“Patience, my dear, patience,” was grandma’s reply. “What is wrong now?”

This was when dinner was over, and Persis, after a hot argument with Lisa, had fled to grandma’s quiet room for consolation. It was nearing Christmas, and “The Maids” were planning a holiday entertainment, which just now was the chief topic of conversation in the school.

“Why, grandma,” said Persis, in answer to Mrs. Estabrook’s question, “it’s about the club tea. You know we are all to dress in old-fashioned costumes. It is going to be lovely. Basil has been making sketches for us, and he is so interested in getting up the decorations and all that. You know we have the dear old gowns and buckles and things that you gave us, so we shall not have any trouble in getting up our dresses. We are to wear ancestral costumes if any of us are lucky enough to have them, and we are lucky. Well, you remember that there are four frocks that belonged to our great-great-grandmother, and I want Annis to wear one. But Lisa says she isn’t going to have it so; that she doesn’t want to have us identified so closely with Annis. It’s a shame for her to talk so; for what if Mrs. Brown does keep boarders, she has as good a right to go in the best society as we have.”

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“Very true, my dear; what else?”

“Lisa pretends that she hasn’t. She says we can follow out our record on both sides of the house, and that Annis doesn’t know anything about her father’s people; and Lisa says because she is the eldest the extra gown belongs properly to her, and she will not consent to Annis’s wearing it.”

Grandma looked thoughtful. Then she asked, “When is the tea to be?”

“During the Christmas holidays.”

“Then we have plenty of time. Leave it to me, dear. I think we can manage a costume for Annis.”

“Oh, grandma, you are always the fairy godmother!” replied Persis, with a happy face. “You see, very few of the girls have old costumes, or heir-looms of any sort. We are extremely lucky to have so much, and so those girls who haven’t will have to get new ones, and that Annis cannot afford to do. The only heir-loom she has is a little miniature of her Grandmother Brown. It is lovely, too. I must ask her to show it to you some day. Oh, she can wear it to the tea-party!”

“I should like very much to see it,” responded Mrs. Estabrook, cordially; “and you may trust me to do all I can to help you both. Now, dear, try to keep peace between yourself and Lisa. I do so regret these squabbles. They keep us all in a state of irritation, and the habit may grow to be one you will find it hard to overcome.” [Pg 80]

Persis looked penitent, for she was quite aware that her own sharp speeches had as much to do with the friction as Lisa’s top-loftiness. So she asked, mutely, “What shall I say to her about Annis, grandma?”

“Simply tell her that Annis will not need to borrow the fourth frock; that a friend will loan her a suitable costume.”

Persis’s eyes danced, and she left her grandmother feeling very much consoled. Her intimacy with Annis had not abated. She had always preferred the quiet, studious little girl to any of her school-mates, although she was fond of Connie. But Annis had the first place, and Persis was always ready to stand up stoutly for her friend.

“It is going to be such a beautiful tea,” the girls told their friends, “and we are going to powder our hair, and will look like old pictures.”

“Do tell us about your gowns,” said Audrey Vane to the Holmes girls.

“Well,” replied Lisa, in her element, “I am to wear the yellow brocade, with the petticoat, and Persis is to wear the white and green, so that leaves Mell that cunning short-waisted blue gown, and she does look so dear in it. We have tried them all on, and have dived into every chest and box for buckles and things. Perse doesn’t care for jewelry, so Mell and I are to have the pick. I shall wear that lovely girdle set with brilliants, and Mell is to have the high comb.” [Pg 81]

Persis looked very demure, but she said nothing except to put the question to Audrey, “What are you going to wear?”

“I think pink, if I can make it fit. It is too large as it is, and I hate to have it cut.”

“Can’t you take up the seams?” asked Mellicent.

“We are going to see if that can be done. The slippers are a perfect fit, and I have a lovely old fan. I wonder what Annis Brown will wear,” continued Audrey, curiously. “Has she told you?”

“Ask Perse. She ought to know,” replied Mellicent.

“I don’t!” returned Persis, bluntly. “I know it will be all right, whatever it is.”

“I seriously hope so,” remarked Lisa; and Persis bit her lip with a look of annoyance. But just then the bell rang for the opening of school, and nothing further was said.

“I’ve asked Annis to come over here and dress,” announced Persis, the day of the tea. “Her room is small, and the house is so crowded. Grandma says we may dress in her

room.”

Lisa elevated her eyebrows, but refrained from comment, and Persis, in great delight, repaired to Mrs. Estabrook’s room when Annis arrived.

“Oh, Annis!” she exclaimed; “it is lovely.” For Annis was displaying upon her little figure a quaint primrose-colored gown. “I am so glad your mother had to make so little alteration,” continued Persis. “You see grandma remembered that her other daughter, my Aunt Esther Wickes, had two or three old gowns with all the fixings. Grandma had divided all that came to her between mamma and Aunt Esther, and she knew Aunt Esther would be glad to loan one; and so she was, and she picked out the prettiest. I knew that primrose color would just suit you.” And, truly, sweet little Annis, with her chestnut locks plentifully powdered and her slim, girlish figure clad in the primrose gown, with a slender chain around her white neck, did indeed look very lovely. [Pg 82]

Lisa and Mellicent had made a raid upon Grandma’s jewel-box and had carried off the most desirable articles; but here again Mrs. Wickes came to the rescue, for she had sent a string of gold beads for Persis and the delicate chain for Annis, with two beautifully carved fans and an assortment of long lace mitts, while yards of old lace, to be tacked in wherever necessary, accompanied the other articles.

“Oh, grandma, doesn’t she look like a real little piece of porcelain?” cried the delighted Persis. “Oh, Annis, I could eat you with a spoon!”

“Now, I know where you got that expression,” laughed Annis. “It sounds like Connie.”

“So it does. How do I look, Annis?”

“Fine,” responded Annis, heartily. “Just a puff more white on top of your head. Your hair is so dark that we have had to use the greatest quantity of powder on it. Shouldn’t you like to know where these gowns were first worn?”

“I can tell you,” said grandma. “The one you have on was worn by my Grandmother Carter at a ball given in honor of Lafayette, and the one Persis wears was my Grandmother Herrick’s, which she wore to some festivity at the time of Washington’s inauguration.” [Pg 83]

“Doesn’t that make them precious?” said Persis, passing her fingers lightly over the rich fabric. “And these gold beads?” she questioned, putting her hand to her throat.

“They were given to me by my only sister, Mary Carter,” replied grandma, with a little sigh; “and as your Aunt Esther always fancied them I finally gave them to her.”

“How good of her to loan them,” said Persis, looking grave. “Come, Annis, we must put on our cloaks.”

But Annis was gazing very thoughtfully at the miniature she held in her hand. “How strange!” she said, lifting her eyes to Grandmother Estabrook. “My grandmother’s name was Mary Carter. See, here she is.”

Mrs. Estabrook’s hand trembled as she eagerly took the little miniature held out to her. Then her lips quivered and the tears came to her eyes. “Mary! Mary!” she said; “it is truly your own dear face.”

Persis was looking at her in bewilderment. “Why, grandma,” she said, “what do you mean? Let me see.”

“Dear child,” said grandma, drawing Annis to her side, “tell me all you know of this grandmother.”

“I do not remember very much,” replied Annis. “I know she was named Mary Carter before she was married, and she lived in Virginia when she was a girl. She married my grandfather, Worthington Brown, and he went into the army when the war broke out. He was killed at the battle of Bull Run, and she died shortly after, leaving my father, her only child. Papa was sent to his father’s people in Maryland, and always lived with them. Mamma says,” continued Annis, slowly, “that papa never knew much of his mother’s [Pg 84]

people, because he was so young when she died, and everything was in such a mixed-up state after the war, and she thinks his father's parents were afraid he would want to leave them, they were so fond of him, and so they never encouraged him to look up his mother's people."

Joy and sorrow were striving for mastery in grandma's face; but she drew Annis to her very gently and said, "Then, my dear, you are wearing your own great-great-grandmother's gown."

"Hurrah!" shouted Persis, gleefully executing a dance around Annis. "Oh, grandma, this is a perfectly wildly thrilling romance. I am crazy to hear about it. You are sure?"



"Then, my dear, you are wearing your own great-great-grandmother's gown."

“Absolutely. My sister Mary married when she was very young, and led rather a wandering life, so that we seldom heard of her. My father had discouraged her marrying while still a school-girl, and there was not that frequent correspondence which otherwise would have existed. There was, too, very strong political feeling at that time, and my father felt bitter upon the subject, so a difference of views between him and Mr. Brown added to the coolness. All Annis’s facts are strictly in accordance with what we already knew, so there is not the slightest doubt in the matter.” [Pg 85]

“Then—why, Annis, you’re my cousin! Hurrah! Oh, what a joke! I must tell Lisa. Oh, no; shall I? No, I’ll have a disclosure at the tea. Oh, Annis, I am perfectly ecstatic. Just think of it. Cousin! *Cousin!* do you hear? Isn’t it the finest thing that ever happened? Come, papa has been calling for ever so long. We’ll have to go, and I’m just on tiptoe to hear more. There, put that dear, sweet—what is she?—great-aunt of mine on your chain. Isn’t that a dear little frame, all set with pearls? There is a three volume novel in all this. I’d like to write it up. Good-bye, grandma; kiss your grand-daughter and your niece, and we’ll leave you to recover.” And the two girls sped down the stairs to where Mr. Holmes was waiting for them.

The big school-room certainly presented a most attractive appearance to Persis and Annis as they entered it. Lisa and Mellicent had already arrived and were among the reception committee, looking conspicuously lovely in their handsome costumes. Looking around, one saw a lavish display of Christmas greens and potted plants. Daintily spread tea-tables stood in one of the class-rooms; old family pieces of silver, china, and glass had been pressed into service, while on the walls of the large room hung old portraits of colonial sires and dames. Behind a bower of palms an orchestra was placed; the national airs, which were considered in order, seemed to stir the souls of the young people to an unusual degree, with such an air of dignity did they step about. [Pg 86]

“Oh, isn’t it lovely?” whispered Annis to Persis. “Oh, Persis, I am so happy. I wish mamma were here.”

“Isn’t she coming?”

A cloud passed over Annis’s face. “No; she couldn’t,” she said, wistfully. “But, oh, Persis, I wish she knew right away. I feel as if I ought to have gone to tell her the first thing.”

“You couldn’t very well,” replied Persis; “and it will be just as nice when she does know.”

“Is your grandmother coming?”

“She said she would try to be here, and mamma is surely coming. I think it was very nice to invite all the families instead of having it confined only to the young people, as Audrey wanted it, for after our mothers had taken so much pains to help us, I think it would have been mean to leave them out. It certainly does us credit, and the floor will be fine for dancing. You know we receive from four till seven and then dance till ten. May I have the pleasure, Miss Brown?”

Annis laughed assent.

“Oh, there is Lisa making signs to me,” said Persis. “I wonder what she wants. I will have to go and see.” And just then Connie Steuart joining them, Persis left Annis and sought her sister.

“Don’t stay with Annis all the time,” said Lisa, shortly. “You are on the music committee, and must tell the musicians not to play the same things over and over; they must mix up the melodies more. If the national airs don’t last, they must string them along.” [Pg 87]

“Wait till they have finished ‘Dixie,’ and I’ll tell them to play a waltz or something.”

“How lovely Annis looks!” remarked Nellie Hall.

“Yes, doesn’t she?” agreed Persis, her eyes sparkling. “She is wearing her great-great-grandmother’s gown.”

“I want mamma to meet her,” continued Nellie. “Here she comes now,” as a sweet-looking woman entered.

“I’ll go and bring Annis,” Persis hastened to say, but Lisa’s hand detained her.

“Where did Annis get that gown?” she asked.

“I said it was her great-great-grandmother’s.”

“It looks exactly like that one of Aunt Esther’s, the one she wore to the ball in New York last year.”

“So it is,” replied Persis. And before Lisa could say a word she darted away, her eyes dancing, while Lisa stood looking after her in astonishment.

“I believe Persis is daft,” she said, turning to Nellie Hall.

Presently Persis returned in company with Annis. She approached the little group where Mrs. Hall was standing. “I am so glad you are here, Mrs. Hall,” she began, in a clear voice. And then, “I want to present my cousin, Annis Brown.”

“Your cousin!” cried a chorus of voices, while Lisa, dumb with amazement, looked at her sister as if she feared for her sanity.

“Yes,” replied Persis. “Her grandmother and mine were sisters. We found it out this afternoon, when Annis showed her grandmother’s miniature to us. Grandma recognized not only the name, but the features of her only sister. We haven’t heard all the details, but we know that much. Isn’t it fine?” And Persis beamed upon the group. [Pg 88]

“Well!” exclaimed one and another.

“I certainly am glad,” declared Nellie Hall, warmly. And then, with gentle thoughtfulness, “I do congratulate Persis upon finding such a dear cousin.” Annis’s sweet blue eyes sought Persis with a happy look as Mrs. Hall also offered her congratulations.

Soon after came a pleasant little surprise to Annis in the arrival of her mother with Mrs. Estabrook.

“Oh, there is mamma!” exclaimed the girl to her friend, who, having done her duty by the musicians, was following her own sweet fancy, and with Annis was wandering from room to room.

“Where?” queried Persis, and over the heads of the guests looked to see the fair, slight woman standing by Mrs. Estabrook’s side. “Oh, I see,” continued she. “Let’s go to them as quickly as we can.”

“Oh, mamma, how did you get off? Has Mrs. Estabrook told you? And isn’t it lovely?” questioned Annis, eagerly.

Mrs. Brown smiled. “Yes, I have been told more than you imagine. It is lovely, dearie, and I should never have been able to come but for Mrs. Estabrook, who appeared like a fairy godmother a couple of hours ago and suddenly set aside all my obstacles.”

“You look so nice,” whispered Annis, in delighted surprise. “Where did you get the lovely bonnet and coat and the new gloves? Oh, mamma!” [Pg 89]

“From the fairy godmother. You shall hear all about it,” she whispered back. “Oh, my darling, you do not know half.”

“You must stay and see the minuet. We are going to have it at seven o’clock; so those who want to see it will not have to wait long,” Persis informed these latest arrived guests.

And very soon the pretty, stately movement was begun. The boys from the university had been in training for weeks, and in their powdered wigs, lace ruffles, and quaint, elegant costumes made fitting partners for the girls in their old-fashioned array.

“Lisa, the queenly,” as the girls called her, with Ned Carew, led the couples, and no one could have been a truer embodiment of grace than herself. It was the greatest joy of her evening, the pleasure of which had become marred by the incident in which Annis had borne so prominent a part, for it was Annis who was sought after as the heroine of a romance, Annis who was admired and congratulated. “We Holmes girls are nowhere,” Lisa remarked, half defiantly, to Mellicent, and the very fact of her chagrin no doubt gave added stateliness to her treading of the minuet’s slow measure.



CHAPTER VIII.

COMPLICATIONS.

But Persis little foresaw what her interest in Annis's ancestry was to develop, nor how it would affect the whole family. The first storm of indignation fell upon her devoted head the next day, when Lisa and Mellicent burst in upon her as she sat absorbed in one of her new Christmas books.

"A nice thing you have done for us all," began Lisa. "I just wish you had let those Browns alone; but, as you are such a stickler for justice, maybe you will enjoy having your chickens come home to roost."

"Why, what have I done?" Persis asked, innocently, looking up from her book.

"You have done everything. Poor, dear grandma, whom you profess to love so much; and now you've deliberately robbed her! Yes, robbed her, when she does so like to be Lady Bountiful; all for the sake of that meechin Mrs. Brown and her meek little milksop of a daughter."

"Milksop, indeed!" retorted Persis, angrily. "She isn't a milksop anything of the kind. She's just as bright as you are, and much more of a lady."

"Thank you! And what do you call yourself, pray? Oh, no doubt you consider any one is better than your own family. You'd better go and live at the Browns. You might help to wait on the boarders." And Lisa's nose took an angle of forty-five degrees in the direction of the ceiling.

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"They won't have to keep boarders now, will they?" inquired Mellicent.

"No, I suppose not," Lisa acknowledged, with something like unwillingness.

"Oh, won't they? Why? Do tell me. I am wild to know," interposed Persis.

"Maybe you'll not be so glad when you hear," returned Lisa; "but I will tell you. Of course you know how grandma's sister ran away from home and married a wild young fellow by the name of Brown, and how she died, and how he was killed during the war, and all that. Well, his people knew that grandma's people objected to the match, which they had a right to do, for this Brown was as wild as could be."

"He perfectly adored his wife, and he reformed when he married her. He was only wild when he was very young," interrupted Persis, in defence.

"Well, that is neither here nor there. Anyhow, his family were furious because the Carters snubbed him, and there is no telling how he might have turned out if he had lived. At all events, his people wrote to Great-grandpa Carter and told him that both Mary Carter and her husband, Worthington Brown, were dead, and they never said a word about their having left a child, for they wanted to spite the Carters."

"It was more that they loved the child so much they were afraid he might choose to spend his time with his mother's people if he knew them," put in Persis, still on the defensive.

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Lisa passed over the interruption. "And so," she went on, "they left him in ignorance. Then Great-grandfather Carter made an entirely new will, leaving all his money to Grandma Estabrook and her brother's family, but he never signed the will; but in his first will he left the money to his three children, and in a codicil he said that if his daughter Mary left no heirs her share was to go to grandma, because he had already given his son as much as it would amount to; so grandma had her sister's money, and now she is going to give it up to these Browns, people she never heard of till lately, for the name of Brown is such a common one that grandma never dreamed they were related to her till you fished them out."

"And you know"—Mellicent continued the grievance—"she will only have half as much as she has had; and then she has been a great help to mamma, for all the luxuries came from her, so we shall not have any."

Persis was conscious that this was an appalling piece of news, but she valiantly held her ground. "Well, it doesn't make us paupers, and we shall not have to keep boarders."

"Except Basil and Porter," put in Mellicent.

"They're not real boarders; they are papa's wards, and we are doing them a great favor," Lisa amended. "We shall have to do without all sorts of things; and when we have had pretty nearly everything we wanted it will be no fun to see Annis Brown perked out in what ought to be ours, and to have to say we can't afford to do thus and so."

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"It is rather a strain," admitted Persis; "but, just the same, it is right, and it will not hurt us. Besides, if you look at it from the Browns' side, we have been defrauding them all these years, and they have had to bear all sorts of things which we will never be called upon to do."

"It is no fault of ours. They wouldn't have been so poorly off if old Mr. Brown had taken better care of his money."

"Oh, Lisa, how could he? It was the war made him lose, and he died before he had time to make good his losses."

"Well, it doesn't alter the fact that it is all very unpleasant, and I don't enjoy having unexpected relations thrust upon me, and I don't believe the rest of the family do either. It would be perfectly unnatural if they did." With which parting thrust Lisa took her departure, Mellicent following.

Persis was left with conflicting emotions; her spirit of justice was here satisfied in a way of which she little dreamed. Her "chickens" had "come home to roost," indeed, and she was conscious of a queer contradictory feeling about the matter. Pretty trinkets, her new bicycle, little treats, summer journeyings, had all been grandma's bounty, and now—well, she would go and see grandma herself, and take her cue from this interested member of the family.

Accordingly she sought Mrs. Estabrook's sunny room. "Oh, grandma," she began, as soon as she entered, "I am so dreadfully upset in my mind; are you?"

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"About what, dear?"

"About your giving up half your income, and all that."

Grandma smiled a little sadly. "Dear child," she said, "we human beings are far from perfect, even though our standards are as high as we can make them; but there is one thing we can do: we can rout unworthy feelings at their first appearance, and we can be sure that what seems to be our loss is oftener our gain through the development which it brings us and the good which it brings to others. I confess to having had a little pang at giving up some of the riches I have held in trust, but then I considered that all I have is only mine to use for the Master, you know." And she paused while Persis buried her head in the comforting lap as she sat on the floor by grandma's chair.

"So," grandma went on, "it resolved itself into this. A purely selfish consideration was what was troubling me, and that was unworthy of an almoner of my Father. I enjoyed

giving because of the recognition to generosity I received, because I was tickled by thanks and pleased by expressions of gratitude; therefore I said to myself, quite likely I am getting to be a self-satisfied old woman, and it is time some one more worthy should have a share in the giving; and then I became quite ashamed of myself, and after I had thought of how my dear sister if she were here would sorrow for the trials and deprivations of her little grand-daughter, I became more ashamed than ever, and now I am very happy to think I can add so much to the comfort of such a worthy descendant of my dear Mary.”

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Persis looked up, and her face reflected the exaltation she saw in the one bent over her.

“You can help me much, dear,” grandma went on. “I know the rest must feel somewhat sore over it, although they admit the justice. And you, my dear generous little girl, will do your best not to grumble if you cannot have all you have been used to.”

“Oh, grandma, I will try,” Persis replied, earnestly. “Tell me,” she continued, “did you—did you use to quarrel and say snappy things to each other, you and your sister Mary?”

Grandma sighed. “I am afraid sometimes we did, dear, and if you knew how much I have grieved, all these weary years, over some of the unkind things I have said, you would set a seal upon your lips very often.”

Persis laid hold of her grandmother’s hand sympathetically, and looked up with a penitent look in her gray eyes. “How can I help it, grandma?” she said. “Lisa queens it so, and is so aggravating. She always makes me feel as if I were such an inferior, as if I were a worm of the dust, a regular earthling, and I soar, indeed I do.”

Grandma laughed as much at the phrasing as at the protesting tone. “I don’t doubt you soar, dearie, and it is quite likely that some day your wings will take you longer flights than Lisa dreams of, but it is better to bide your time and prove your right by your deeds, not by your words.”

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“I am inclined to be wordy, I admit,” acknowledged Persis. “I never know when to stop talking about a thing. I hammer and hammer till I wear every one to a thread and they wish me in Halifax. How shall I help it, grandma?”

“Set a seal upon your lips,” again quoted grandma.

“I will,” declared Persis, jumping up with the zeal of a new decision shining in her eyes. “I will, grandma, sure enough. I’d like to start at once.” And she did so literally, for an hour later Lisa, coming into her room, was amazed to see Persis sitting gravely over her book, an enormous wax plaster fitted over her mouth, which plaster bore an unusually fine impression of the family crest, the motto, “*Toujours fidèle*,” standing forth in distinct prominence.

“For pity’s sake!” exclaimed Lisa. “What is that for?”

Persis gravely produced a bit of paper and a pencil; then she wrote, “I shall be glad to hear anything of importance you may wish to say, but I am bound not to talk for an hour.”

“Are you going to wear that thing for an hour?” asked Lisa.

A nod of the head gave the reply.

“Then you are a goose.”

A very decided shake in the negative, and Persis was aware that but for her seal Lisa’s remark would have brought forth a much more disagreeable protest. She therefore concluded that in the very first hour she had warded off a discussion, although, as she pensively decided, there wouldn’t have been any need of it but for the seal.

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Failing to have her curiosity gratified, Lisa left her sister to her own devices, and when the hour was up Persis carefully peeled off the wax, to be put aside for future use.

“My goodness!” she exclaimed. “I feel like a corked-up bottle of beer,” she continued to herself. “And, my, how sore my lips are! I’ll have to have the glycerin-bottle filled if I am to keep this up. Oh, dear, what a mean creature I am! I have not been near Annis to-

day. It is kind of awkward, too, for they all feel so stirred up about her that they will be horrid if I ask her here. Mamma won't, of course, and grandma will be a love. I'll find out when Lisa is going out, and then I'll go. Oh, maybe she can have a wheel now, and we can go all around together. After all, as grandma says, gain often comes from loss. I don't believe I shall mind the change of affairs so very much. I wonder if the boys know."

The boys did know. They had been told with much emphasis by Mellicent, who dwelt with feeling upon the pitiable condition to which she personally would be reduced, though, to give her credit, she did mean to be cordial to Annis, and was really glad to discover the kinship. The whole affair appealed strongly to her romantic little soul, and gave her an interesting topic to discuss with Audrey.

Persis found her with the boys playing "parcheesi" in the library.

"I say," blurted out Porter, without looking up, "why didn't you let that Brown girl fight her own battles? If you hadn't been so fierce to get her into the club you would never have known anything about her being your cousin." [Pg 98]

"As if I were so mean as to be sorry," said Persis. "She'd as good a right and a better one than any of us to join it; and even if she'd never had a single ancestor, she would always be a dear, lovely girl."

Basil looked up, amused at the fierce little partisan with her remarkable statements and her readiness to take up the cudgels. "Where's your chip, Perse?" asked Porter, mockingly, for "Perse is always going around with a chip on her shoulder," he was wont to say.

"Chip, yourself; at least you're only a blockhead," retorted Persis, the seal being most certainly no longer upon her lips.

"Ah, what's the use of squabbling?" interposed Basil, in his slow way. "You did all right, Persis, and I side with you, whatever the others say. They'll get over it after awhile. Annis is a first-rate sort of a girl, and you were another to take her part."

Persis shot him a grateful look and sat down to watch the game. The little talk with grandma came back to her, but it was too sacred to be repeated there, and she contented herself with remarking, "Well, anyhow, grandma is content, and so I think we have no right to complain."

"Well, but if she had never known she would be just as happy," persisted Porter, "and you'd all be better off." [Pg 99]

"Oh, but then Annis would have been cheated out of her rights."

"What's the odds, so long as no one knew it?" continued Porter.

Basil spoke up. "Look here, young man; that's no way to talk. Wrong is wrong, whether any one knows it or not."

It was Porter's turn to look uneasy, and he glanced quickly at Mellicent, who blushed and seemed to be giving close attention to the game.

"I'm going out on my wheel," Porter announced, as if anxious to change the subject, and, springing up, he left the room, Mellicent following.

Basil began to turn over the leaves of a book absently, while Persis sat watching him. Presently he looked up. "Say, Perse," he said, "does Porter talk to you much about the boys and—and things?"

"No," she replied; "he used to more than he does now, but he told me some tricks the boys played, and I suppose I was too plain-spoken for him, for he said I was 'a chump,' and since then we haven't been quite so confidential."

Basil looked thoughtful. "I wish he were confidential with you. I know you are up and down straightforward enough not to let him impose on you. I wish I didn't have to say it, but Porter is awfully plausible."

“Yes he is,” agreed Persis. “He is very agreeable when he wants to be, and he knows just how to get around one. Is—is anything wrong, Basil?” [Pg 100]

“I hope not, but I thought I’d just ask.” And Basil began to walk around the room, his hands in his pockets and an occupied look upon his face.

“Can I do anything?” hesitatingly asked Persis. “Maybe I shouldn’t ask,” she continued, quickly, “but you know papa and mamma have always said we all ought to be sisters to you, and I would do anything I could.”

“You’re very good,” replied Basil. “Just keep your eyes open, that’s all. If I see any cause for anything further, I’ll tell you. I—I don’t like to have Port discussed too much,” he added, apologetically, and Persis realized that her “wordiness” might be in the way of further confidences.



CHAPTER IX.

TROUBLE FOR TWO.

For several days Basil appeared pre-occupied and went about with an anxious look on his face, while Porter seemed keeping out of the way as much as possible. Persis, with her quick sympathies, saw that something was wrong, and, following Basil's hint, did keep her eyes open. It was only by accident, however, that she made the discovery of what was affecting the two brothers.

One cold day in January she and Mellicent were sitting in the cosey corner Persis called her very own. This was a tiny place hardly larger than a closet. It had been used by Mrs. Estabrook as a store-room for certain of her belongings, but as it had long been evident to her that Persis had no special quarters, Lisa assuming the proprietorship of the room Persis shared with her, and Mellicent's room being too small for two, the good grandmother set herself to work to provide a little retreat for her favorite. She busied herself all one morning stowing away sundry bags and boxes, and by the time the girls came home from school, with the help of the housemaid, the place had been made as clean as a new pin.

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There appeared to be a closer affinity than before between grandma and Persis, these days, and to the former's question, "How would you like to have a little snugger of your very own?" Persis looked up in pleased surprise.

"Why, grandma, what do you mean?" she asked.

"Come here, and I will show you," was the reply, as grandma opened the door leading into the small packing-room. "I cleared this out to-day, for it occurred to me that it was high time you had some sort of a room of your own. You know, dear, I love you all, but I think you and Lisa might be more loving if you were not so constantly together, and this place, tiny as it is, will be a nest to which you can fly when your feathers are ruffled."

"Oh, you dear, dear grandma!" cried Persis, ecstatically. "If you only knew how I have longed for a spot of my very own. Now that the boys are here, we have less space than ever; and oh, how cunning it will be! That little window is so high up that I shall not be tempted to look out, and yet I shall have plenty of light. How would you furnish it, grandma? It will not hold much."

"I thought you could have two big boxes, set side by side, along that wall; they will hold some of your books and papers. Some denims or cretonne will do to cover your boxes, and they will form a sort of divan for you. A few pillows piled up on them will make that end of the room quite a comfortable lounging-place and about fill it up. You will still have space for a small table and a couple of chairs; then some hanging-shelves and a few pictures will look well on your walls, and that will be about all you can crowd in. You know the place can only be entered by going through my room, and you shall have entire right of way. No one else shall be admitted to your sanctum, except by your express invitation."

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Persis looked up gratefully. Perhaps she did not quite appreciate the sacrifice her grandmother was making, for to give up her entire seclusion, not knowing what moment a lively girl might bounce in upon her, meant more than Persis realized. Mrs. Estabrook

had thought it all over, however, and with her usual unselfish spirit had told herself that she was getting too self-indulgent and too dependent upon small things. "That is the way we are too apt to do as we grow older," she thought, "and thereby we encourage old age to take a firm grasp of us. I never used to mind having my room open to the family when my own children were small." So, sweetly setting aside her own comfort, she gave up one of her most valued privileges. Nevertheless she felt that Persis's delight was compensation, and before many days the little corner was as pretty a place as need be. Here Mellicent came to be helped with her lessons; here Annis repaired to talk over all sorts of things with her friend. It must be confessed that Persis triumphed rather too visibly over Lisa, who was quite indignant that the room had not been offered to her. She did not admit this, but she carefully avoided the spot, and professed herself greatly relieved that Persis's possessions no longer crowded *her* room.

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The question of the reduction of Mrs. Estabrook's income, of course, was discussed by the sisters, and they were gradually beginning to adapt themselves to the changed condition of affairs. "It doesn't make so much difference to us," Persis said to Mellicent. "Papa still gives us our allowance just the same, and we really can get used to going without the extras. If we want anything very much we can buy it ourselves. I always have some money ahead after the holidays. I still have the five dollars Aunt Esther gave me and last month's allowance besides. Oh, Mell, I'll tell you what let's do! Let's buy the material for our own bicycle suits. We really need them, and it will save mamma that much. Let's tell her now that we mean to do it. Go get your money and we'll give it to her to-day. Don't you want to?"

Mellicent hung her head. "Yes, I'd like to. I think it is a lovely plan; but—but—I—I haven't—haven't got the money just now."

"Why, Mellicent Holmes! You haven't spent nine dollars since Christmas?"

"No. I—I haven't spent any, hardly. I got some peanut taffy one day and some pencils and things."

"Then where in the world is it?"

"Oh, don't ask me!" And Mellicent looked troubled.

"If you have given it for charity it's all right, and you needn't inform your left hand, if that's what you mean."

Mellicent was silent, but she lifted a pair of appealing eyes to her sister. She opened her lips as if to speak, then evidently concluded to keep silence. Persis was watching her narrowly. "I'd like to tell you, but I have promised not to," said the younger girl, helplessly, shrinking from her sister's penetrating gaze.

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"Does mamma know? Tell me that, Mell, and I'll not say another word," ventured Persis.

Mellicent shook her head.

"Then it isn't all right. You know perfectly well, Melly, that a thing is not right if we cannot tell mamma about it. You know we never, never promise to do anything without saying that mamma must know."

Mellicent was looking very miserable. "Oh, Perse," she said, her eyes filling with tears, "it isn't all gone; it's just loaned. I couldn't help it; indeed I couldn't. He was in such a trouble."

"Who are you talking about, Mell? Tell me," said Persis. "Was it Porter?"

"Oh, dear," began Mellicent, breaking down, "I didn't mean to say that. Oh, what have I done? I'll be despised for not keeping it to myself."

"Goodness, child! You have kept it to yourself. I'm firmly convinced that Porter is at the bottom of it, and that is what has been bothering Basil. Never mind, Mell, he's a mean-spirited little wretch. Don't worry about it. If you've only been loaning money the only harm is in not telling mamma."

“That isn’t all; and if I’m not found out it will be all right,” wailed Mellicent. “I wish I had minded mamma.” [Pg 106]

“Then it isn’t all right,” returned Persis, clearly and decidedly. “It is not the getting found out that makes a thing wrong; it’s the doing something that you’re afraid to tell about.”

Many years before, when these two were scarcely more than babies, a similar experience had taken place, which Mrs. Holmes had recounted to her mother as showing the difference between the characters of Persis and Mellicent. A large and handsome doll had been sent to the little Mellicent, who had viewed it with tenderness and admiration, begging to take the beautiful Geraldine out on the street to walk. But mamma said, “No, you will be very likely to break her, dear.” At last, however, the temptation was too great, and as Persis was waiting at the gate for her little sister, she saw her appear with Geraldine in her arms. In her haste to reach the gate, Mellicent’s uncertain feet tripped and down she went, breaking poor Geraldine’s head beyond repair.

“Oh, dear! oh, dear!” sobbed the child. “I wiss I had minded mamma. I is so sowwy I didn’t mind mamma.”

“No, ’ittle sister,” came in Persis’s earnest voice, listened to by the mother at a window above, “’oo isn’t sowwy ’cause ’oo didn’t mind mamma, ’oo is only sowwy ’cause ’oo bwoke Gewaldine.” And so it was with poor little Mellicent this time: she was grieving because of the prospect of censure.

Persis, after her reproof, felt so sorry for her sister that she began to comfort her by saying it might be made all right if she would tell her mother the whole story; and leaving her in penitent tears she sought Basil, whom she heard softly twanging his guitar. In response to her knock he appeared at the door of his room. [Pg 107]

“Come down in the library, Basil,” said Persis. “I have something to tell you.”

“What’s up?” he asked as he followed her down-stairs.

“Why, I think I can tell you something about Porter. I hate to be a tell-tale, but I am pretty sure he borrowed some money from Mellicent. She had nine or ten dollars after Christmas, and now she only has a few cents. You know they both looked sort of confused, the other day, when you said wrong was wrong whether any one knew it or not.”

“Yes, I noticed that. My goodness, Persis, I hope Porter hasn’t done a mean thing like that. Of all contemptible things, to borrow from a girl! My father used to say that when a man was willing to borrow money from a woman it was pretty good evidence of where he stood with men, and the very fact of his taking advantage of a woman’s soft-heartedness made him the more censurable; that if men couldn’t trust him, women ought not to.” And Basil looked much perturbed.

“Oh, don’t think that way,” returned Persis, comfortingly. “He is only a little boy, and very likely it was only thoughtlessness.”

“I’ve got to find out about it,” responded Basil. “Don’t say anything more about it till you hear further; not that I would have you keep anything from your mother, but don’t tell any one else. It will be best to get at the root of the matter, and then Porter must make a clean breast of it.” [Pg 108]

But the very next day something occurred to throw light on the affair, and to show Mellicent’s part in it as well as Porter’s. An acquaintance calling upon Mrs. Holmes said, sweetly, “I saw your little girl at the theatre not long ago,—the youngest one I think, with the golden hair. What a pretty child she is! And I suppose the nice-looking lad with her was one of the Phillips boys.”

Mrs. Holmes was puzzled, but discreetly managed the subject without showing her ignorance. But when Mellicent was summoned to her mother’s room, a half-hour later, the grave face that met her told that something was wrong.

“Have you nothing to tell me, daughter,” began Mrs. Holmes, “which you should have told me before this?”

Mellicent burst into tears. “Oh, mamma, I have been so miserable. I wanted to tell, but I promised—I promised not to. It was a secret, and you know you have so often told us it was dishonorable to tell a secret.”

Mrs. Holmes drew the weeping child gently to her. “My dearie, are you sure it was a secret you should have kept? I think it would have been better if you had gone to the person who shared the secret with you, saying to him, I must tell my mother. Your conscience, my darling, has been overstrained, and your judgment at fault. I know that you and Porter were at a matinée not long ago. Mrs. Ward saw you there.” [Pg 109]

Mellicent’s tears fell afresh.

“Now, you see, dear,” continued Mrs. Holmes, “I know all about it; tell me how it happened.”

“I wanted to go so much,” sobbed Mellicent, “and Porter said if—if I would loan him some money he would take me. It was a very exciting play, and I was afraid you wouldn’t let me go if I asked.”

“No, I should very likely have refused. How did you find out about the play?”

Poor Mellicent felt herself deeper and deeper in the mire. “I read the book it was taken from,” she confessed. “Oh, mamma, I see now how wrong I was.”

“I thought I could trust my girls,” said Mrs. Holmes, sadly. “You know, my child, you are too young to exercise a right judgment in the matter of selecting books or plays.”

“Audrey read the book.”

“With her mother’s approval?”

“I don’t know. She said it was lovely, and she loaned it to me.”

“You knew you were doing wrong not to show it to me before reading it.”

“Yes,” faintly.

“And you knew that you should not have loaned Porter your money without permission.”

“I didn’t think about that, mamma,—I really didn’t,—and I can’t bear to hurt any one’s feelings by refusing to do a favor.”

“My dear little child,” Mrs. Holmes said, “that is one of your greatest dangers, that wanting to have persons think well of you; and in the fear of being censured very often you consent to do what you know to be wrong. Doesn’t it seem to you a much worse thing to disobey and grieve your mother, and to injure yourself by doing wrong, than to yield to the persuasions of any one who is tempting you to do what is not right?” [Pg 110]

Mellicent nodded assent.

“A very wise old Roman philosopher has said, ‘He who does wrong does wrong against himself. He who acts unjustly acts unjustly against himself, because he makes himself bad.’ And,” continued Mrs. Holmes, “there is another side of it. You are really hurting a person much more by yielding to his bad suggestion than by bravely standing up for the right, for your good example would probably help him, and your consenting to join in misdoing would injure him.”

Mellicent gave a long sigh.

“This is a real lecture, I know,” said Mrs. Holmes, “but I want you to take it to heart. Compliance can get us into all sorts of trouble, and it is my little daughter’s weakest point. Struggle against it, dear. Make up your mind that to say ‘No,’ when it is right to do so, will win you more respect than a consent which is given because you don’t want to hurt another’s feelings. A much deeper hurt sometimes comes from a yes than a no. Now tell me about the play.”

“It was very sentimental and had all sorts of things in it,—villains and murders and, oh, such a lovely heroine!” [Pg 111]

Mrs. Holmes smiled. “You saw the romantic side only, I see; but you know your parents are exceedingly particular about the kind of plays you see. We think you too young to go often to the theatre, and there are very few plays suitable for little girls to witness.”

“I know, mamma. I was uncomfortable all the time. I am so sorry—I really am sorry I didn’t mind you. Please give me some punishment to make me remember. I really am sorry.”

“I think you are, dear. Now leave me, for I am ‘so sorry’ too.” And mamma’s sad eyes were almost more than Mellicent could bear.

Persis waited in vain for her little sister that evening. Porter looked very uncomfortable, and Basil was as grave as a judge.

Pleading lessons as an excuse for a hasty flight, Porter left the dinner-table abruptly, and Basil, finding a chance for a word with Persis, told her all that he had discovered.

Having spent his pocket-money very freely, Porter found himself without the means to contribute toward a grand oyster supper some of his school friends had planned to have during the holidays. It was to be a most elaborate affair, and five dollars from each of those who meant to enjoy it was demanded. “I wasn’t going to have those fellows leave me out,” said Porter, in defence of himself. “You’re always so particular and preach so about going in debt that I knew you wouldn’t help me out.”

“I’d rather have given it to you outright than to have had you borrow from a little, gentle, generous-hearted girl.” [Pg 112]

Porter flushed up. “I took her to the theatre,” he retorted, “and a silly, stupid sort of a play I saw, too. I didn’t enjoy it a bit.”

Basil frowned. “You’re not helping matters much,” he remarked. “Now look here, you’ve got that little girl into a nice peck of trouble, and you’ve got to do one of two things. You’ve either got to go to Mrs. Holmes and tell her the whole truth and return the money to Mellicent or write to mother about it. If you don’t I’ll tell the professor the whole business.”

“I haven’t got the money,” said Porter, sullenly.

“You shall have it to-morrow. I’ll see to that. You’re not such a cad as to stand by and see that little girl punished while you go scot-free. You were seen at the theatre, anyhow, so you’d better accept my terms.”

“I’ll do it,” consented Porter. He had never seen Basil so angry, and was half afraid of him in this mood.

“He is going to tell your mother,” Basil informed Persis. “I wish you’d put in a word for him. I’d hate to have your father know. I haven’t the money for Mellicent now, but she shall have it to-morrow.”

“Oh, never mind! I can loan it to you,” offered Persis.

Basil turned a reproachful glance upon her. “Do you think I’m going to follow Porter’s example and be such a sponge as to take your money?”

“Oh, I didn’t mean that!” Persis hastened to explain.

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“I know you didn’t,” returned Basil, in a different tone. “It was just a generous impulse. Thank you for the offer; but I can manage.” And he did, although the twang of a guitar was not heard in his room for many a day, while one of his class-mates wondered why Basil Phillips was so ready to part with his pet instrument at such a moderate price. “He used to be so fond of it, too,” said Rob Van Dyke.

Mrs. Holmes kept the secret; so did Persis. Even Lisa did not hear of it, although she wondered why Mellicent did not go to Audrey Vane’s for a whole month, a punishment

the little girl felt sorely, but which she accepted meekly. "I suppose they've had some fuss," Lisa concluded.

Persis brooded in a motherly way over Mellicent in her period of penitence, and Basil dealt so unsparingly with his brother that the younger boy felt ashamed of himself, and began to see, even though dimly, a glimmering of higher principle and finer honor than had yet appeared to him.



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CHAPTER X.

MORE ABOUT ANNIS.

All this time Persis had been having sundry confidences with Annis, who in her quiet way was happier than she had ever been in her life, and her devotion to Persis grew as her cause for gratitude became more and more evident to her.

“Mamma and I have such a good time making plans,” she said to Persis. “We are going to have a cunning little house all our own, and, Persis, I hope you will help me to make my room cosey and pretty. We want to have a little garden if we can get a house with ground enough around it.”

“Then you will have to come over in our neighborhood,” returned Persis, well pleased, “for all the houses over our way have little garden plots. Let’s go house-hunting ourselves, this very afternoon. I believe I know just the house for you—it is so ugly.”

Annis looked shocked, and Persis laughed merrily. “That sounded funny, didn’t it? but, of course, you couldn’t see inside my mind,” she explained. “It is just this way: the house is very cosey and convenient inside, but outside it looks blank and uninteresting. Still, I’ve often thought what a pretty place it could be made; at least, Basil called my attention to it once when we were out on our wheels. You know he is going to be an architect, and his eyes are always wandering over buildings. He said that if the house were painted another color, and had a porch around it, with a better-looking approach to the door-way, it would be so much more attractive that it would be snapped up in a minute. There is a lovely place for a garden in front, and quite a piece of ground in the rear, but the house is a hideous color, and has been idle a long time, for no one will take it as it stands, and the owner will do nothing to it. I think it could be bought at a very low price.”

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Annis was listening attentively. “Let us go right away,” she exclaimed, when Persis concluded. And they set off, forthwith, getting the keys of the house and exploring it from garret to cellar with Basil, who joined them at Persis’s suggestion.

“It is just the place,” Annis decided. “I know mamma will think so. There is such a lovely view of the west, and it is so near you all, Persis. Oh, I’d so much rather have a house like this, to contrive and plan for, than a spick and span, nippy little affair, all gingerbread work outside and fussiness inside.”

Basil looked approval. “That’s what I think,” he said. “When I plan houses I don’t intend to build a whole row with Japanese roofs and Moorish windows and colonial porches. That’s the kind of hodge-podge you see nowadays. I wouldn’t live in such a house if I owned a whole block.”

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“This is where Basil waxes eloquent. Start him off on the subject of inartistic modern buildings, and you will hear him at his best,” informed Persis, roguishly.

Nevertheless, the judgment of the prospective architect did prove of such value that when Mrs. Brown had been made to see the possibilities of the little house, she felt that the moderate price at which it was to be obtained secured her a great bargain, since it left her a margin for repairs and alterations, making the entire outlay fall below what she had determined she could afford. In consequence, within a reasonable time the dingy

unattractive dwelling was transformed into a most homelike abode, in which the Holmes family, with Porter and Basil added, took almost as much interest as the Browns themselves.

“Oh, Persis,” said Annis, one Saturday afternoon, when Mrs. Brown’s boarding-house was a thing of the past, “you don’t know what a relief it is to have a home all to ourselves, and how delightful it is to have real, sure enough relations only two blocks away. Isn’t it funny for me to call your grandma Aunt Persis, and your mamma Cousin Mary?”

“They like it,” returned Persis, comfortably settling herself among the cushions on Annis’s window-seat.

“Audrey Vane has been over twice to see me,” informed Annis. “Her brother is quite a chum of Basil Phillips, Audrey told me.”

“Yes, he is,” returned Persis, shortly, looking a trifle vexed.

“Audrey is as sweet as honey to me,” Annis went on, a little gleam of merriment coming into her eyes. “She has invited me to luncheon, and, oh, Persis, it is so absurd to see the reverential tone she uses in speaking of the ancestors. Nice old persons they were, no doubt, but probably they had as many faults as the rest of the world, and I’m sure the knowledge of them hasn’t changed me in the least; yet you would suppose they had in some way invested me with new virtues. I really believe Audrey thinks so, she is so extra attentive.” [Pg 117]

Persis was looking somewhat cross, the truth being that she was a trifle jealous of Annis, and felt that these overtures of Audrey’s rather encroached upon her rights as a friend, and she very soon took her departure with a certain stiffness which Annis could not understand.

“Persis looks like a thunder cloud,” declared Lisa. “What’s wrong, Tommy?”

“Nothing that need concern you,” snapped back Persis.

“Well, you needn’t take my head off on account of my sisterly solicitude,” replied Lisa. “It is something about your precious Annis, I have no doubt.” And she returned to her embroidery.

Lisa had long since condescendingly accepted Annis, but she could not refrain from little flings at Persis’s devotion to her new cousin, knowing it was the surest way to nettle her. Therefore this last remark did not add to Persis’s peace of mind, and she was about to pass through grandma’s room to her “snuggery” with scarcely a word to the dear old lady.

Grandma, however, was used to the uncertain moods of youth, and, seeing the irritated look upon Persis’s face, she called her over to the window to look at a favorite plant just ready to blossom. “See, Persis, four more buds, I didn’t discover them till this morning.” Persis could not refuse the invitation, but it was accepted with rather a dour face. [Pg 118]

“Where is my girl’s sunshine?” asked grandma, pleasantly.

“Oh, I’m disgusted—just disgusted!”

“With what?”

“Oh, I don’t know—people, girls; they are so hateful!”

Grandma laughed. “Is Persis Holmes upon the list?”

Persis had to smile. “No doubt I am hateful sometimes. Grandma, what are you to do with yourself when you feel jealous and all stirred up over a trifle?”

“You are to go to your grandmother and tell her all about it, and then she will dive into her scrap-bag of experience and see if she can find a bit with which to mend your ragged temper.”

“She generally does find a patch,” returned Persis, the frown beginning to smooth out. “Well, I’ll ’fess. It’s just this way. You know I was the first one to take up Annis.”

“Very praiseworthy of you.”

“Now, don’t mock me, grandma, right at the beginning. I hate to have to give in at the very outset.”

“I know you do.”

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“Oh, dear, that is a second hit! Well, I will be humility itself and say: Since I was the first whom Annis favored with her regard. Will that do?”

“No. You can say: Since Annis and I mutually discovered that we were congenial spirits.”

Persis looked a little rueful. “Then that takes the point out of what I was going to say.”

“Perhaps there was no point there.”

Persis looked up. “Grandma, you are a witch. I believe you had a Salem ancestor, didn’t you?”

Grandma laughed. “Who is mocking now? Go on, naughty girl.”

“Then I’ll put it in my own disagreeable way, with all my I’s in very black italics. Well, *I* have always felt that *I* was Annis’s special friend, and here Audrey Vane is getting awfully intimate with her, and *I* don’t like it a bit.”

“Why not?”

“Because.”

“Such a very satisfactory reason.”

“Then it’s because—because Audrey was so hateful at first, and it makes me mad to see her so honeyfied now.”

“Audrey did not show a fine spirit, I admit; but would you have her continue to show ill-feeling to Annis?”

“No-o.”

“Then, when she is doing her best to make up for past slights, isn’t that rather commendable?”

“I suppose so.”

“Would you rather that Audrey should treat Annis badly?”

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“No—at least—oh, grandma, I suppose I have a horrid disposition, but I do believe I would almost rather she would be hateful, so I could have an excuse for keeping Annis all to myself. Just see into what a Valley of Humiliation you are driving me.”

“My darling, I think the fact that you have confessed it will make it much easier for you to run past the lions in your path. Now let us get at the real, honest truth. Annis is a dear, forgiving little girl. She is magnanimous enough to accept the advances the girls are making, so she will win herself hosts of friends of whom you are surely not selfish enough to wish to deprive her. There is not the slightest evidence that she loves you any the less, and she would have very narrow quarters in her heart if there were not room for others besides yourself. You have your two sisters, your mother and father, and your old granny to love you, and yet you do not want Annis to win the affection of any one but her mother and yourself.”

“Oh, grandma, not quite that. I want all my family to love her.”

“Yes; I admit I am describing your rags as being in a shabbier state than they are. It isn’t as bad as that; but you see what I mean.”

“Yes, I do, and I wish I were not so exacting.”

“Girls usually are more so than boys. Let me dive into that mental scrap-bag for an experience to point the moral. Let me see. I was a little older than you when I estranged my best girl friend because I was too exacting. She had gone on a visit to a young

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relative, and I demanded a letter every week from her. So when one, two, three weeks passed and no letter came I felt much aggrieved. I heard indirectly of her good times, and fancied the girl cousin whom she was visiting had taken my place. When my friend returned home I did not go near her, and when after a few days she came to see me I sent word that I wished to be excused to callers. So time went on till the situation became awkward, and I did not know how to meet Alice. Later on I heard that she had written the first week and the letter miscarried; so, receiving no reply, she did not write again at once, and later a sprained wrist prevented. But it was too late to explain my coldness upon the excuse of such a trifle, and she never felt the same. I remember my brother, to whom I took my woes, gave me a piece of advice on the subject. 'Never gauge a friendship by letters, first, because there may be a fault in the mail; secondly, because we are apt to invest written words with meanings not intended.' My brother, I remember, told me, too, that he had a friend to whom he wrote once a year, and probably no friendship was ever closer than his and Henry Vaughan's. Now, is my lecture long enough?"

Persis looked up, smiling. "It is so nice to think that you were once a silly girl," she said. "It encourages me very much."

Grandma laughed. "What are you going to do about Annis?" she asked.

Persis jumped up. "I am going there right away."

"Do," urged Mrs. Estabrook; "and tell her we want her mother and herself to come to tea to-morrow evening." [Pg 122]

"Oh, grandma, that's good of you to give me a message. I left in a huff, and I know Annis is mourning over it. The message makes a nice excuse to go back without hurting my dignity." And Persis was out of the room like a flash, and in half an hour she and Annis were building air-castles with all the fervor imaginable.

"We'll always work together," Annis declared, "for you know, Persis, I don't want to marry and leave mamma, so we can do something fine. We might teach in the same college, or we might edit a paper together."

"I shall not marry, either," responded Persis. "Lisa and Mellicent will be sure to,—they are so pretty,—and I shall want to give the family a change of experience. I think I would like the editing best. You see papa represents the college professor sufficiently, and I'd like to be something quite different. Let us decide to be editors. What kind of a paper shall it be,—purely literary, or just general?"

"We might begin with a juvenile magazine; that would be nice," replied Annis, whose limitations rather daunted her when something "purely literary" was considered.

"Well," returned Persis, "that might do, only I'd like something rather more ambitious."

"But we'll have to know such a lot to edit a grown-up paper."

"Oh, we'd not need to do it till we were prepared. We'll study for a journalistic career. I think it will be fine for you to be literary editor and for me to be managing editor." [Pg 123]

"I can imagine how fierce you'd look when any one came in with a complaint," laughed Annis. "Won't it be funny to know all about printers' devils and forms and proofs and all those things?"

"Where shall we start it?" said Persis, as if it were a matter to be determined at once. "Shall we have our office here?"

"Oh, I'm afraid we shouldn't succeed where there are so many papers. We might go to some new Western town," returned Annis.

"Then we'd have to have those ridiculous items like, 'Mr. Canada Halifax was in town yesterday buying a new plough. Canada has raised a pair of side whiskers, and they are vastly becoming.'"

“Or, ‘Mrs. Alaska Sitka is visiting her friend, Mrs. Siberia Behring,’” added Annis. ““She wears a new gown, which she purchased last year from our honored townsman, Mr. Woolly De Beige.”” The girls both went off into a fit of laughter at their nonsense. “That reminds me,” said Annis, “of a man in a little village where we were once. Mamma was buying stockings, which this shopkeeper never by any accident called anything but ‘hose,’ and once he said, ‘These are not quite so nice as some others I have, madam. Now, this,’ opening another box, ‘is a much better ho.””

Persis laughed merrily. “Of course, ho ought to be the singular of hose,” she said. “Prue is always making funny mistakes. She calls hucksters ‘hucksens,’ and the garbage-box the ‘goblidge-box.’ She told me the other day that all the new houses ought to have ‘fire-skates’ on them, so ‘folks could git out of ’em easy; they build ’em so tall nowadays.’ And she told me her church was so crowded last Sunday that even the ‘islands’ were full. We try to tease her, but she never will admit but that she knows just as much as any one, and she always has an answer ready. Lisa asked her the other day what she thought of a war with England. ‘Humph!’ she said. ‘I reckon we could stand it.’ ‘I’m not so sure,’ said Lisa. ‘We might manage very well on land; but what about our water forces?’ ‘They ain’t no trouble ’bout that,’ said Prue; ‘we got all the water we kin use. You ought just to see the way it flies out o’ the spigot.””

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“What are you two girls so merry over?” asked Mrs. Brown, putting her head in at the door, attracted by the peals of laughter.

“Oh, we’re just telling funny things. Persis was telling about old black Prue.” And Annis repeated the story.

“You are such a comfort to me, Persis,” Mrs. Brown said. “I don’t know what my little girl would do without you. You have waked her up and are making another girl of her. She used to be such a little mouse.” And Persis felt a remorseful twinge as she remembered her late jealous feelings.

“I shall never, never be so exacting again,” she said to herself as she took her way home. But as it takes more than one stroke to fell a well-grown tree, so it takes more than one effort to overthrow a fault.



CHAPTER XI.

SUMMER DAYS.

The year passed away uneventfully. Porter and Basil returned to their home for the holidays, but were back again in the autumn, Mrs. Phillips having concluded that it would again be necessary for her to spend the winter in California, as her sister's health demanded it. There was, therefore, an unbroken circle in the Holmes family. It was Lisa's last year at school, and she was looking forward to being graduated in June. It was a struggle with her to decide whether or not she should enter college another year. She was divided between her love of pleasure and her desire to do her parents honor by winning distinction in a collegiate course. Lisa had rather a good opinion of her ability, and fancied she could do or be almost anything with little effort on her part. There had been a long rivalry between herself and Margaret Green, and there was great conjecture among the school-girls as to which would be graduated with highest honors,—a question which would not be decided until the very last week of school.

"I shall be mortified to death," Persis confessed to Basil, "if Lisa does not come out first. I have made such a talk about it. That's just like me to talk too much, you know. I get excited and carried away, and the first thing I know I'm saying all sorts of things I'd better have left unsaid."

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"Speech is silver, but silence is golden," replied Basil, who was one of the silent kind himself.

"I know that. I wish I could remember it. I hate to be wordy. I see the fault in others fast enough. Connie is a bit that way. There, I needn't have said that!"

"You don't see much of Connie these days."

"No-o," doubtfully; "I like Annis best. Grandma once said that the safest kind of a friend to have was one who helps us to do our best, and the unsafest,—that's not exactly the word, but it will do,—the unsafest the one who doesn't make it easy for you to do right. And yet, Basil, do you think we ought to keep away from those to whom we might do good?"

"That depends upon how strong we are. You know it would be a sort of a silly thing to do if I were to go with a fellow who was always knocking me down unexpectedly if I hadn't muscle enough to give him back as good as he sent."

"That's so. I didn't realize that it meant something like that."

"One doesn't like to be tumbled over in the mud with a broken head for no reason," went on Basil, "and yet if we had to fight for honor's sake it would be right enough to square off."

"I understand. You're a real good brother, Basil. How far off we are from our subject; we began with Lisa. I think I shall simply sink to the earth if Margaret comes out ahead."

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"No you won't," replied Basil; "or if you do, you'll bob up serenely."

Basil was tinkering at Persis's wheel. He was always ready to do some kind little act for Persis, and they discussed moral and psychological subjects with great gravity while

Basil was deftly using his tools and Persis was looking on appreciatively.

A few days after this conversation Persis entered her snuggery and saw hanging over the door the motto, "Silence is golden." It was prettily framed, and the lettering was done in a most artistic manner. "That's Basil's work, I know," thought the girl. "It's just like him to do that. Now, Porter would have given me a copy of 'Chatterbox'—that's just the difference between them. No one but Basil and I will ever know just what it means; the rest will think it is intended as a hint to keep quiet while I am studying my lessons. It was awfully good of him to try to help me in such a nice way," she thought, gratefully.

The fateful day arrived when Lisa would learn how she stood, and to her intense chagrin, as well as that of her sisters, it was announced that Margaret stood first. Miss Adams explained it by saying that Lisa's theme displayed less originality than Margaret's and her examination papers were more superficial.

For once Lisa was humbled. She was so used to receiving praise for her brilliancy, so accustomed to having high marks for her glib recitations, that she could hardly reconcile herself to accepting the verdict, although inwardly she could but acknowledge it to be just. In spite of the disappointment, which gave her a feeling of tightness about the throat, her eyes shone like two stars and there was a red spot on each cheek as with head held high she hastened to be the first to offer Margaret her congratulations. One or two of Margaret's special friends declared that Lisa's graceful acknowledgment was done for effect, but that it was well done. Nevertheless, there was real bravery in Lisa's act, and to herself and Miss Adams it represented a recognition of the justice of the decision. Especially did it seem so to Miss Adams, who saw tears in the dark eyes when she praised Lisa for having done so well as to win second honors. [Pg 128]

Persis had never in her life loved Lisa more dearly than she did that day. She passionately declared that it was injustice, favoritism, or trickery, but Lisa stopped her with a gentle gesture. "It's all right, Persis. Thank you for wanting to battle for me, but I can see where Margaret's theme is far ahead of mine, and no doubt her examination papers are the same." Then she stooped and kissed the disappointed little sister, making the girl feel a new admiration for Lisa in this tender mood.

"Anyhow there will not be one of the graduates—not one—so beautiful as you," declared Persis, emphatically. And Lisa smiled, feeling quite sure that she could wear beauty's palm if the other were denied her.

It was all this which decided the girl not to go to college. "I am too ambitious to go," she declared to her parents. "I would want to be first, and I know I could not be. I have suddenly become aware of my limitations in an intellectual direction, and I know I could be a success in the social world." And she drew herself up, with a glance of assurance toward her mirror. [Pg 129]

"Do you think a purely social life would make you happy?" asked her father, rather disappointedly. He had been very proud of this handsome daughter, and had almost expected great things of her. "Mere excitement is not pleasure, nor does selfish amusement bring happiness. Think it over daughter," he advised; "you need not decide just yet."

"I am sure you have done well," interposed Mrs. Holmes. "Don't let this little disappointment persuade you to give up college. It certainly is no small thing to stand second in a class of ten girls."

But Lisa shook her head. "None of the class have much brains except Margaret. I must be a leader," she declared. "Don't look so, papa. It isn't very dreadful to say that, is it?"

"That depends entirely upon your motive," replied her father, slowly. "If it is love of admiration, I am grieved; if it is because you feel your best powers can be put to their fullest use in a different direction, it is another thing. I do not want to think that one of my daughters would be willing to be a soulless butterfly."

"I don't know what it is," returned Lisa, flushing a little. "I haven't analyzed it, so far. Now, mamma, what are the plans for the summer?" [Pg 130]

"It is a puzzling question, dear, and much depends upon you," replied her mother. "Mrs. Brown knows of a quiet, pleasant place on the bay shore, and your grandmother has quite decided to go there. It has the recommendation of being moderate in price, as well as being delightfully situated. Persis, of course, is only too ready to go. Mrs. Phillips, likewise, thinks she will join the party with the two boys, and, as Basil has determined to do some extra work this summer, that he may catch up with his class and be ready to take his examinations in the fall, your father has suggested that Mr. Danforth, one of the instructors at the college, shall go along to coach him. Mr. Danforth is anxious to make some such arrangement for the summer, and Persis is quite sure she will like to go ahead with her Latin under his tutelage. Your father must go elsewhere on account of his hay-fever, and I, of course, shall go with him. We feel that we can afford to take only one of you with us, so now, which shall it be, you or Mellicent?"

"Oh, mamma, I should be bored to death down there where the Browns want to go. Will there be other boarders?"

"I think our party, including the Browns and the Phillipses, will about fill the house, which suits the others perfectly."

Lisa looked annoyed. "I don't see why there should be any question of who should go with you," she said; "only that the mountains agree with Mellicent much better than the shore, and she is not very well this spring; she gives signs of inheriting that unpleasant hay-fever. Then, of course,—oh, mamma, why can't I go somewhere with some of our friends?"

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"Because it is not every one in whose care I would be willing to have you go, and you could probably not find any of our intimate friends going where there is as moderate board as that at Bellingly; and I should, moreover, have to provide you with a wardrobe more expensive than I can afford. You know this year we must not expect great help from grandma."

Lisa looked very dissatisfied. "Everything comes in a lump," she sighed. "I know I would be perfectly miserable down there."

"The place has many attractions," Mrs. Holmes continued, comfortingly. "There is delightful boating, fishing, and bathing; then the drives around are very pretty, and there will be no disagreeable persons in the house."

"No; only old women and school-girls."

"Pray, how long since you were a school-girl?" laughed Mrs. Holmes.

"I was eighteen last winter."

"And Persis is scarcely two years younger."

"Yes; but we always rub each other the wrong way, although, to do Perse justice, she is less aggressive as she grows older, and for the past week, since school closed, she has never been hateful once. I don't see anything for me, mamma, but to go with grandma. I couldn't be such a beast as to refuse when Melly would suffer by it."

"You relieve my mind very much," returned Mrs. Holmes. "There may be pleasant persons in the neighborhood, and you may have a better time than you expect. One does not always have the happiest time at a fashionable watering-place."

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This somewhat consoled Lisa, although she made her preparations for her summer outing in rather a half-hearted way.

Persis, on the contrary, was in great glee over the prospect. To have grandma and Annis, not to mention her "brother" Basil, was quite enough to insure her a happy time, she reflected.

"We can have no end of fun," she said to Lisa. "I don't see how you can feel so grumpy over it. In the first place, we don't have to fuss over our clothes, and then we can live in the water if we like. I am crazy to learn to swim, and oh, Lisa, you can learn to

ride my wheel; they say those shell roads are delightful. Then we can go cruising all around. Papa says Mr. Danforth is a splendid sailor."

"I wish he, at least, didn't have to go," rejoined Lisa. "Who is he, anyway? Some didactic old Methuselah, I suppose."

For once Persis kept a golden silence, but a smile of amusement passed over her face. "Such a joke!" she thought. "I'll let her be surprised."

And Lisa certainly was surprised a couple of weeks later, when all of the party excepting the tutor were comfortably settled at Bellingly, and the arrival of Mr. Danforth showed her a stalwart young fellow not over twenty-five, who had been a college student himself only a year before.

"Why didn't you tell me, Persis?" demanded Lisa. "You said you had seen him."

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"I thought you'd enjoy the joke," returned Persis, demurely. "He took Professor Hunter's place the last half-year just to fill in while the professor was abroad. Basil says he is one of the best athletes in the college; that what he doesn't know about sailing a boat and all that sort of thing isn't worth knowing. Yet he doesn't let himself get carried away by such matters; he is devoted to study, and is just a regular, nice, manly fellow, not a bit what is called a ladies' man."

"I've no doubt he is a prig," decided Lisa. "I shall not bother myself to entertain him."

"I don't suppose he'll be very miserable if you don't," retorted Persis, with some of her wonted fire.

Nevertheless, when Lisa encountered a pair of keen blue eyes regarding her across the table she was annoyed at finding herself disposed to wish the owner might be looking at her with favor, and in consequence avoided any appearance of giving a friendly notice to the young man. This, however, in no way disconcerted Mr. Danforth. He devoted himself specially to Mrs. Estabrook during his leisure time when he was not boating or riding or fishing with the boys. Two hours each morning were given to Basil and Persis, and the rest of the day a free-and-easy, homelike way of occupying himself seemed to be what he preferred.

"I just love to go out in the water," Persis remarked one day, as with glowing face she dried her wet locks. "I wish you'd come, Lisa. Mr. Danforth is such a fine swimmer; he is just like a big sea-lion in the water; he is teaching Annis and me to swim, and I did ten strokes this morning. Maybe you'd like rowing better. I didn't even catch a crab once yesterday; but, my! I am getting tanned."

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In her secret heart Lisa was sure she would like to know how to use the oars skilfully. She was a fine tennis player, and was equally devoted to golf. Such sports always attracted her, but she had made up her mind that Mr. Danforth ignored her rather too determinedly, and she was not going to make advances, she told herself. "I don't like your Mr. Danforth," she informed Persis.

"Well, you might treat him civilly," returned Persis. "You sweep by him as if he were a small beetle on the floor, and when you say 'good-morning' the words sound as if they were wrapped up in a case of blue ice."

"How absurd!"

"It's so. Even Mrs. Brown noticed it."

"Mrs. Brown!" contemptuously.

"You needn't be so top-lofty. She's as good as you are, and lots more amiable. There, Lisa, I didn't mean to say that. I promised myself that if you came down here this summer I wouldn't say one disagreeable thing. Come, go out in the boat with the rest of us to-morrow. You know the water is not deep enough to be unsafe if we don't go out too far. Mr. Danforth is going to be busy all morning. He said so."

To this Lisa graciously agreed, and the next morning was laughing as merrily as any of them in their boat on the blue waters. But while they were all rocking and singing in great glee, Lisa making the most of Basil's lessons in rowing, they saw another boat coming toward them. [Pg 135]

"Hallo, Mr. Dan!" called Porter, catching sight of the occupant; "I thought you were boxed up till noon."

"So I thought," was the reply as the boat came alongside, "but the mail let me out of my work by bringing me a letter I did not expect, so I have a respite and couldn't resist joining you. Here, Basil, you can take care of Miss Persis and Miss Annis. Porter and I will see that Miss Holmes overcomes her difficulty," for Lisa was trying in vain to keep her oar from flying up in the air, while Basil was laughingly directing her. And before she could utter a word of remonstrance Mr. Danforth stepped aboard, steadying the two boats and handing Persis and Annis into the one he had just left, while Basil exchanged places with him.

"I am fairly caught," thought Lisa. "I can't swim, I can't run away, so I'll have to make the best of it." And she amiably lent herself to her task, although finding a very critical and exacting teacher, who was not disposed to give praise or encouragement simply because she was a pretty girl, and she felt nettled by his lack of recognition. "I'm simply a person," she told herself. "He acts as if I had no individuality. I don't believe he knows whether I am old or young, good-looking or ugly. He is horrid!"

There was, however, nothing rude in Mr. Danforth's manner; he simply avoided the little honeyed speeches and the obsequious attentions which Lisa liked, and she could but admit that he treated her quite as well as she did him. [Pg 136]

"He is much nicer to grandma than he is to me," Lisa told Persis. "He says the nicest little complimentary things to her, and he jumps up and joins her the minute he sees her coming, as if she were the only person in the place of any account."

"He just loves grandma," returned Persis. "He told Basil so."

"Well, I am very glad," Lisa averred. "It doesn't concern me anyway. He never could be a leader of fashion like Ned Carew."

"I wouldn't call him a leader. I would call him just the opposite," remarked Persis, her mouth dimpling.

"What would you call him, pray?"

"The off ass," responded Persis, impudently.

"You are perfectly shocking," pronounced Lisa, sailing out of the room and taking her place on the balcony where she could overlook the water.

"That was rather a shameless speech," Persis admitted to herself. "I don't believe I'll ever learn to be careful of Lisa's beautiful smooth feathers. I forgot that she considers Ned Carew one of her special admirers. How she can like such a flavorless, insipid creature I can't imagine. He always reminds me of sugar and water. But I can't lose that sunset, Lisa mad or Lisa not mad." And Persis walked out on the balcony where her sister sat. "Come, let's go down to the beach," she said, in a conciliatory tone. "Don't be mad, Lisa. I'll borrow Annis's wheel and we'll take a little try at riding." And Persis, bending to look at her sister, was surprised to see tears in her eyes. [Pg 137]

"Why, Lisa, what is the matter?" she inquired, solicitously. "I didn't hurt your feelings, did I? It never occurred to me that you were so very fond of Edwin Carew," she added, in a half-puzzled way.

"Edwin Carew! I hate him!" cried Lisa. "I hate men anyhow, and I despise this place. I wish I could go home and stay by myself."

"Why, you dear, homesick thing," said Persis, caressingly. "Don't feel lonely, sissy. Basil wants some one to ride with him. Take my wheel and go, won't you? I'm sure it will cure your blues."

But Lisa shook her head, and Persis decided to give up the ride to which she had been looking forward, and to devote herself to amusing her sister.



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CHAPTER XII.

LITTLE RUTH.

The fine old country house in which the party were stopping was one of those well-built, substantial affairs seldom found nowadays. One lofty-pillared porch faced the bay, another the avenue of locust-trees which led up from the highway. "It is a real, ancestral hall," Persis had declared, delightedly, upon first acquaintance with it, and Basil found it quite up to his idea of what a house should be. Even the rambling arrangement of rooms seemed quaint and attractive, while the hostess, with her black silk apron, her jingling key basket, her lavendered chests, and her herby-smelling store-room, Annis asserted, was made to match the house.

Mrs. Chamberlaine did, indeed, represent the typical chatelaine of a by-gone period, and made them all so comfortable in the great roomy house that they congratulated themselves upon their selection of a summer stopping-place. Persis, with her housewifely instincts, took great delight in the big, queer closets, the tower-room, and the garret. The tower-room was Persis's discovery, and she was the most enthusiastic over it. From it one could see the country for miles around, and on starlight nights could look out from one of its many windows and see the sparkling heavens as from an observatory. The way to this place was through a sort of garret, in the dim corners of which one might detect an old spinning-wheel, a jumble of antiquated hats and bonnets hanging from the rafters, or perhaps a ponderous cradle in which many a representative of the family had been rocked.

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One corner of the garret, where a semicircular window made it quite light, was the playroom of Mrs. Chamberlaine's little grand-daughter, Ruth Harrison, a grave, old-fashioned child about six years old. Her grandmother had taken her from her dying mother's arms when she was a tiny baby, and she had lived ever since at Bellingly. Left to herself, with no playmates save a sedate yellow cat and a big old-fashioned doll by the name of Patience,—a queer, staring creature with regular black curls,—Ruth had always lived in a world of fancy; her imagination, with such slight material as a few old fairy-tales had offered, built up a realm of her own, peopled by beings half angels, half fairies. Among them was a human companion whom no one ever saw, yet who was an actual identity to the child. Callie, Ruth believed to be a little girl of her own age, and together they played strange games in the attic corner.

Since the arrival of all this houseful of strangers Ruth had felt sorely distressed, for Callie's room, as she called it, had been given up to the guests. The child herself slept with her grandmother, and Callie could not be accommodated there. After long thought Ruth decided that Callie must have the cradle. She would not mind sleeping in the playroom, even if it were lonely there at night. Ruth would give up Patience to Callie. This was a great sacrifice, for ever since she could remember, Ruth had taken Patience to bed with her, and grandmamma had not minded, of course, for Patience had been her doll when she was a little girl. Ruth would say that Patience made her uncomfortable in this warm weather. This was not quite true, Ruth felt, but she must make the excuse to Callie, and for her sake, for somehow grandma was not fond of Callie. So, every night Patience was laid in the big cradle to be company for the invisible Callie.

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Strange to say, all this was confided, not to the gentle little Annis, nor to the rollicking Persis, but to Lisa. From the first Ruth had conceived an adoring admiration for the beautiful young lady, whom she called her fairy princess, and to the eldest Miss Holmes the shy little child made her first advances, which Lisa, who loved little children, met half-way. Therefore, not even Mrs. Estabrook, nor Mrs. Brown, could win from Ruth the secrets which Lisa could, and no matter how the imperious girl conducted herself toward others, when Ruth appeared all the sweetness of her nature arose as to her ready arms Ruth ran, while on Lisa's face appeared a tenderness which not many ever saw there.

As time went on the members of this house party became on better terms, and even Mr. Danforth was not excluded entirely from Lisa's good graces. Persis admired him exceedingly, and chattered away to him in the most unconstrained way, while he, in turn, thoroughly liking his bright little pupil, talked to her of his ambitions, his family relations, and such like matters, just as he did to Mrs. Estabrook. He was not a handsome man, but in his clean-shaved face one could detect strong intelligence, and fearless integrity. There was an unusual sweetness in the expression of his mouth, yet his chin was firm and decided. Persis quoted him on every occasion, till Lisa said, petulantly, "I don't see how you can make such a fuss over so commonplace an individual."

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"Commonplace!" objected Persis; "he is not; you don't know anything about him. He is very unusual. Just think, he has helped to support his mother ever since he was fifteen, and has educated himself besides. That's why he is down here, so he can make something during the summer. I shouldn't wonder if he were a professor like papa, some day. He writes now for some paper, and he is just as smart as he can be."

"I never have been impressed by his ability," remarked Lisa, grandly. But Persis's account did make some difference in her manner toward the young man, and one evening she found herself more than usually entertained in a long conversation with him.

There was a direct simplicity about Maurice Danforth which Grandma Estabrook approved highly, but which Lisa declared indicated a man unaccustomed to conventionalities, a grievous fault in her school-girl eyes. However, she did concede, after a time, that he was a very intelligent man, even if he did forget to use his opportunities for paying compliments, and treated her just as he did every one else; but the concession brought a sort of defiance with it.

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"He's got to treat me more courteously," she said to herself. She caught him looking at her sometimes in what she considered a judicial way, and she determined to change the look to one of admiration, if possible.

But a conversation she heard one evening on the porch turned her impulse in a strangely new direction. Annis, Persis, and the two boys were frolicking in one corner. Mrs. Estabrook, with Mr. Danforth, sat somewhat apart from the other three ladies, who were chatting upon every-day topics. Lisa, with Ruth in her arms, was sitting in a low rocker listening to the child's whispered confidences about Callie and Patience.

"What a sweet, earnest little face Annis Brown has," Mrs. Estabrook said; and the answer came,—

"Yes; there is pure goodness there."

"She is doing Persis a world of good," returned grandma. "Persis is so impetuous, and is so ready with her opinions, that I think Annis is a very helpful influence for her."

"They are very different-looking girls," returned Mr. Danforth; "yet Miss Persis has a fine face. Hers is a strong character."

"She is not so pretty as her sisters," Mrs. Estabrook said, reluctantly; "but," she added, "I am not sure but that she will be more beloved."

"Beauty is not always lovable, nor even admirable," Mr. Danforth observed. "The woman whose face indicates self-esteem and selfishness can never be beautiful."

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"That is a very patriarchal remark for a young man like you to make," returned Mrs. Estabrook, smiling.

"I suppose," the young man replied, "that I am older than men usually are at my age. I have been my mother's man ever since my father died, and perhaps I see the beauty of character earlier than men usually do. Yet I do like to look at pretty girls."

"No doubt; that is quite natural. I do myself."

"But," returned Mr. Danforth, slowly, "I don't believe I would ever fall in love with a beauty, unless the beauty of her spirit were more evident than that of her features."

"Take care," warned his companion. "I am afraid you will never find your ideal, or else, like too many who talk as you do, you will finally be captured by an unscrupulous girl who has hoodwinked you by appearing to have a lofty spirit when she is only catering to your fancy."

The young man shook his head positively. "I don't think that possible; for that very reason I would not flatter a girl. A woman who is to be won by compliments is not yielding to an affection which can uplift her, and the man who is willing to win a woman by such means does not deserve to find in her a noble helpmeet."

"Poor girls," returned Mrs. Estabrook, mockingly, "who love to be flattered and are confronted by a man of theories."

"Now, Mrs. Estabrook, I hope I don't impress you as being a man with a self-righteous soul. You do not know how much I have thought of all this, and how I have kept a watch over myself lest I should be led away by a mere exterior charm. I repeat it, a man ought to help a woman up to the best within her, and how can he do so if he simply adds to her vanity?" Then he added, reverently, "Don't you see, Mrs. Estabrook, that the feeling that a man must be such a help to a woman ought to make him strive to the uttermost to be a good man. Oh, please don't imagine I think we men are saints. That's just it, we need to have more moral strength, and the ones who can best help us are the women, like you and my mother, who do not live for admiration, but for the happiness of others,—women whose unselfishness and unconsciousness of having attractions give them a greater charm than all the little airs and graces in the world. Miss Persis, now, doesn't begin to know how attractive a woman she will be."

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"My dear young Daniel come to judgment," replied Mrs. Estabrook, ignoring the last part of his speech. "Do you know you are flattering an old woman? For shame!"

"No, no; that isn't flattery! You are superior to that sort of thing. It is simply a young man's recognition of a good woman's influence."

"Thank you," replied grandma, the mockery gone at the earnest tone. "Well, my dear boy, I wish you joy in finding the 'one woman.'"

Lisa in the corner heard every word, and was battling against indignation and self-reproach. "He scorns me. I suppose it is I against whom he is casting his arrows of scorn and letting my own grandmother know it. Oh, I can't endure him!" And she put down her little companion so abruptly that the child felt quite aggrieved, for she was in the midst of a story about Callie and Amber, the yellow cat.

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Just at this moment there came a sudden rushing sound up from the water. The sky, which had been overclouded, showed a strange funnel-shaped cloud moving rapidly along. In an incredibly short space of time the gale was upon them. Every one rushed into the house to lower windows and to fasten the blinds, which were flapping in the fierce wind. For a few moments it seemed as if the spirits of chaos were abroad; the mighty roar of the wind surging along, rising to a terrific shriek as it passed over the land; the snapping of trees whose branches were hurled violently against the house; the dash of the salt spray flung with fury upon the windows looking toward the bay front; the threatening flashes of lightning; the sullen roll of thunder which, as the storm came nearer, increased to an incessant crashing, all made a season of terror to every one.

Persis sought her grandmother's side; Annis cowered near her mother; Basil tried to quiet his mother's fears; Porter, boy like, darted from window to window, peering out into the darkness, which seemed filled with the writhing, swaying forms of storm-tossed

trees. Lisa stood with her hands clasped, never saying a word, but gazing into the outer world with an expression of wonder. [Pg 146]

“It is a terrible gale,” said Mr. Danforth at her side.

“It is wonderful, mysterious,” rejoined Lisa. “I feel as if I were seeing ‘Dante’s Inferno.’”

Presently Grandma Estabrook’s voice rose solemnly in the words of Cowper’s old hymn,—

“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.”

She repeated it to the end, while the rest listened silently.

Suddenly Mrs. Chamberlaine appeared from the kitchen, where she had been to quiet the terror of the servants. “Is Ruth with you?” she asked, anxiously.

“She was with me just before we came in-doors,” Lisa informed her, feeling conscience-stricken at not keeping the child with her. “What was it she was saying? Oh ——!”

She was interrupted by a sudden crash, sounding near at hand, and the jar given to the house showed that one of the large locust-trees must have succumbed to the gale and have fallen against the building.

Mr. Danforth ran to the door to see if he could ascertain what had taken place. As he was crossing the hall Lisa’s white figure passed him, and he saw her disappear up the stairway.

“Don’t go up, Miss Holmes,” he cried. “The tree may have broken through the roof, and you do not know what injury you may be courting.” But Lisa, unheeding, fled on, and Mr. Danforth turned to follow. [Pg 147]

Up the first flight, on to the second she went, and then she came to the garret. A confused sound filled her ears as she opened the door. “Ruth! Ruth!” she called. A faint sobbing reached her from the corner where the little girl kept her toys. It was pitch dark, except for the sudden flashes of lightning, and in one of these Lisa, anxiously looking before her, saw, sitting beyond a heap of *débris*, Ruth’s little figure.

“Ruth! Ruth! Are you safe?” she called, eagerly, as she tried to pick her way across the floor.

“Yes, Princess,” Ruth’s plaintive little voice answered, “I’m safe; but Patience is killed and Callie is dreadfully hurt, and I don’t know where Amber is.”

Groping her way along, Lisa at last reached the child. There was a great gap in the roof overhead, and the place was strewn with bits of plaster and brick. The tree had indeed fallen against one of the chimneys, which had toppled in upon the roof.

“Oh, my dear, my little dear!” said Lisa, catching the child in her arms. “You might have been killed. Let me take you and Patience down-stairs.” And Lisa began to make her way in a roundabout fashion back to the stairway.

At the top step she encountered Mr. Danforth with a light. “Miss Holmes,” he exclaimed, “what are you doing up here? I could not find you before, there are so many passages in this rambling old house.”

“I came for Ruth,” replied Lisa. “I thought she might be up here.”

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“You might both have been killed.” And as he gave utterance to the words another crash brought down more bricks and mortar.

"I couldn't leave Patience and Callie," explained Ruth. "And poor Patience is dead. A brick fell right on her head."

"Maybe she can be cured," Lisa tried to comfort her by saying, as she put her cheek against the child's soft hair. "Never mind, dear; you are sure you are not hurt? And Callie, —perhaps Callie had not gone to bed yet," she whispered. "Maybe we shall find her in her own room where Persis and I sleep. Let us go and see.—Please tell Mrs. Chamberlaine that Ruth is safe," was the only remark she vouchsafed Mr. Danforth, as, with Ruth's arms clasping her neck and with the battered doll held closely, she passed into her room, leaving Mr. Danforth looking after her.

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"Please tell Mrs. Chamberlaine that Ruth is safe."



CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER THE GALE.

It was perhaps half an hour after Lisa had carried Ruth to her room and the storm had spent its fury that a new excitement was furnished by the appearance of a flickering light near the bay shore, directly in front of the house. It was Porter who discovered it and announced the fact in tragic tones.

“A ship in distress! Mr. Dan, let’s go to the rescue.”

Mr. Danforth went to the window, and agreed that there did appear to be something wrong with a small craft which they saw dimly outlined before them. “You’re right, boy,” he exclaimed; “we’ll have to see what’s the matter. Come, Basil.” And the three took their way to the shore.

The sky was full of scudding clouds; through the rifts a star peeped once in a while, but it was evident that, although the tempest was over, the occupants of the little yacht before them were unable to land.

A survey of the scene showed that the small rowboats usually lying in the little cove had been broken from their moorings and were tossing about, drifting farther and farther away. [Pg 150]

“I’ll have to swim for it,” declared Mr. Danforth. “Boys, you stay here, and I will swim out and capture one of those boats. Have you the boat-house key, Basil? No? Then, Porter, run to the house and get it and a lantern. Hurry back. And you two get the oars while I go for the boat.”

“Oh, let me go too, Mr. Dan!” besought Porter. But this Mr. Danforth forbade, and he was soon plunging through the surf toward the nearest boat, which he presently reached and pulled ashore, finding there the two boys ready to join him in rowing out to the larger vessel.

“Ship, ahoy!” shouted Porter, delighted to be able to hail the yacht in true sailor fashion.

“Hallo!” came the answer borne toward them.

The trip was longer than at first predicted, but they finally reached the little yacht and were able to lie alongside. “What’s wrong?” inquired Mr. Danforth of the first one who appeared.

“Oh, we’re all broken up by the gale. We started for a place called Bellingly, but we weren’t sure of our bearings, and put for this cove when we saw the storm brewing; but we’re terribly battered to pieces and have lost our mast, so we are, strictly speaking, all at sea. Hallo! I’m blest if it isn’t Baz Phillips, by all that’s lucky!” as a flash of the lantern disclosed the faces of the boys.

“Why, hallo, Walter! It’s my cousin, Walter Dixon, Mr. Dan. Who’s with you, Walt?”

“Ned Carew and our skipper.” [Pg 151]

“Well, I’ll come aboard and see what can be done,” said Mr. Danforth. “Two of you pile in here, and the boys can take you up to the house.” The boys, however, protested at

being left out of such an experience as boarding a possible derelict, and Walter insisted on remaining with the others.

"We're about as wet as we can be," the latter said. "Everything is drenched, and we are hungry as hunters. We counted on getting ashore in time for supper."

"What are you doing down this way, anyhow?" inquired Basil.

"Why, we were coming to see you."

Basil laughed. "Well, that's a joke, my storm-tossed mariner! However, you're all right now." And not long after the visitors were taken in under Mrs. Chamberlaine's hospitable roof, their clothing dried, and a hot supper provided for them.

"I'll tell you it was a shaky business," remarked Ned Carew, "when we were being battered around by the wind, not knowing what minute we might be dashed into another vessel or be sent out into the open bay. The anchor didn't seem of any use at all, although I suppose it was."

"I can imagine you were pretty much used up, Ned," answered Basil. "Not quite so safe as leading a german, was it?"

Edwin flushed up. "I'm not such a molly-coddle as to be scared," he returned.

"I brought Ned down to make love to the mermaids," put in Walter, teasingly. "I knew he wouldn't feel quite comfortable unless there were some siren to listen to his pretty speeches; but I'm blest if he made any. The only thing I heard him say was,—what was it, Ned? Oh, yes,—'I think this is real horrid!'" And Walter spoke mincingly, with a little dab of his hand at Basil. [Pg 152]

"Oh, come off; I didn't," replied Edwin, gruffly, all his effeminacy gone in the face of his late experience.

"Yes, you did, Miss Nancy," teased Walter. "I'll bet a dollar you don't go back with me."

"I don't intend to while there is room for me and better company," retorted Edwin, with spirit.

"You'll have to bunk in with us, then," said Basil. "How are you going to manage to stow us away, Mrs. Chamberlaine?" to that lady, who entered the dining-room with a view to seeing if the appetites of the guests were satisfied.

"I'm afraid I shall have to ask Mr. Danforth to take in one of the gentlemen," said Mrs. Chamberlaine, in reply, "and I can put up a cot, in your room, Mr. Phillips, for the other one. There is quite a comfortable little room over the wash-house for the man, Mr. Dixon."

"That is a perfectly satisfactory arrangement so far as I am concerned," declared Mr. Danforth. "My room is a spacious apartment, Ned, and the bed is as big as an ark. You can take your cousin in with you, Basil, and we shall all be as snug as possible."

All this time Lisa was quite unconscious of what was going on below-stairs. She was comforting Ruth for the loss of Patience, telling her that she was not dead, only very much hurt, and that she thought it would be well to send her to a hospital, and when she returned she would be lovelier than ever, determining that a new head should be procured for Patience if such a thing were possible. [Pg 153]

Persis had come up as soon as Mr. Danforth had related how he had found Lisa and Ruth in the damaged attic, and a consultation with grandma and Mrs. Chamberlaine resulted in the consent of the former to sharing her bed with Persis that night in order that Lisa might keep Ruth with her.

"You see," Lisa whispered to Mrs. Chamberlaine, "Ruth is so distressed about Patience, and thinks that Callie is gone too, so I am going to persuade her that Callie is in my bed."

Mrs. Chamberlaine shook her head. "You should not encourage that fancy, Miss Holmes."

"Oh, I don't think it will do her any harm," Lisa contended. "She will outgrow it when she is older and has school friends. Indeed, Mrs. Chamberlaine, I am sure she will not be the worse for her little imaginary friend."

Therefore the make-believe Callie was supposed to be comfortably settled on one side of the bed, Ruth in the middle, and Patience tenderly established upon two chairs, covered with a fleecy shawl of Lisa's, while Persis hunted up Amber, and he lay purring contentedly at Ruth's feet. The little girl was therefore entirely at her ease concerning her companions, and went to sleep with Lisa's assurance that she would not leave her. [Pg 154]

Persis went down to report upon the proceedings and to say that Lisa would not be down again that evening. "She hasn't the least idea that you all are here," she said, turning to the new arrivals. "Won't she be amazed to see you in the morning?—What will she think," she said to herself, "to see the 'off ass.' I wonder if she really likes him. There were certainly tears in her eyes that time." And Persis determined to keep a watch upon her sister.

"I am glad you are here, grandma," she said, irrelevantly, as she snuggled up to her grandmother that night after they had gone to bed.

"I never supposed for a moment there was a doubt of it," returned Mrs. Estabrook, giving her a hug. "Why do you think it necessary to assure me?"

"Oh, because you are so *perspicuitous*!"

"Is that in the dictionary?"

"I don't know; but it ought to be, anyhow. You know what it means."

"And in what direction do you think my perspicuity is needed?"

"In Lisa's and the off—I mean Ned Carew's. You'll see how he will bob around her. Didn't he look funny in Mr. Danforth's clothes?"

"He did seem lost in them; yet Mr. Danforth is not much taller than he."

"No; but he's bigger every way, physically and intellectually. What is it you say, grandma,—you can't expect any one built upon pint-cup proportions to fill a quart measure? I think Ned measures just about a gill." [Pg 155]

"I'm afraid you don't admire the young man."

"He is such a popinjay," returned Persis. "He is not a bit 'wicious,' but he's—oh, I don't know—just a sort of a tailor's dummy. I believe if an idea should suddenly strike him it would knock him flat."

"We'll try to find that out. Are you going to talk about this young man all night? For if so, I'll ask Mrs. Chamberlaine to let me share her room."

"Oh, no, grandma; that's mean! I am not going to open my mouth again, not even to snore."

When Lisa saw Mr. Danforth the following morning at breakfast there was something very like admiration in the first look he gave her; for when Annis said, "Oh, Lisa, you were so brave! How could you go up there in the dark when you didn't know but what any moment something would come crashing in on you? I couldn't have done it. I should have been scared to death," Lisa only answered, simply, "I didn't think of anything but Ruth." And then she felt her face flushing at the look she saw in Mr. Danforth's eyes.

However, she gave the young man food for further thought that same evening. Naturally the appearance of two more guests at the breakfast-table was a great surprise to Lisa, and she quite exulted at the thought that here was at least one devoted cavalier who would dance attendance upon her and thereby add to her pleasure. But, although Ned Carew was acceptable enough as a companion at a dance or a theatre-party, a whole morning passed in his society in the country proved to be something very different. The [Pg 156]

rest of the masculine element spent the day in getting the little yacht in better condition, and Lisa herself could but feel a small scorn for the only one of the party who declined to help.

She was sitting in a high-backed chair, with Ned in an attitude of devotion at her feet, when the workers returned for their mid-day meal. Lisa fancied there was a look of contempt in Maurice Danforth's eyes as he passed them on the porch, and she flushed angrily. "He shall know what I think of him," she said to herself. "The supercilious, didactic pedagogue! He is not the only one who has an ideal."

"Oh, Lisa, you look like a floating cloud in that pink gown!" exclaimed Persis, in heartfelt admiration, as she noticed that Lisa had dressed with unusual care that evening. "How lovely you look!"

"Don't!" cried out Lisa, sharply.

Persis looked surprised. Why wasn't Lisa pleased? She always liked to be told that she looked lovely. And Persis followed her sister down the stairs with a puzzled look on her face.

It was after an early tea that Lisa found an opportunity to "pay back the pedagogue," as she expressed it to herself. Most of the party had gone to see the damage done by an enormous oak-tree which had fallen some distance away, bringing down in its fall sundry other trees. Mr. Danforth came out from the house and leaned against one of the pillars of the porch, while he looked out upon the water, now blue and serene, showing no sign of yesterday's storm. [Pg 157]

Lisa, with her satellite, Ned Carew, placed herself within hearing distance, and skilfully brought the conversation around to the subject she wished to discuss.

"You want to know what kind of a man I admire?" she said, in her soft, clear tones. "Well, I can tell you the kind of a man I despise, and then you can judge. There is nothing more insufferable to me than a conceited man,—one who pretends to a mock humility, and yet sets himself up as a mentor; who imagines there is nothing good save as he approves of it; whose consummate egotism makes him lose sight of his own faults; who looks upon all women as frivolous butterflies or insipid nonentities."

Poor Ned was looking at her in astonishment at this tirade. What had he done to provoke it? "Now, Miss Lisa," he protested, "you know we're not all that way. Now, I think a girl is a—a—perfect goddess. I just worship—a—the right kind of a girl."

"Oh, you!" And in the scorn of her accent Lisa hoped the subject of her remarks might recognize that Ned was not the target.

"No," she continued, "I wasn't thinking of you just then. I was simply telling you the kind of man I despise, you know. The man who thinks he is walking on a mountain-top when he is really on a very small hummock, and the mountains are hid by the clouds of his self-esteem."

Ned thought Lisa was on a mountain-top herself at that moment, for she was talking over his head and he was looking at her with a dazed expression upon his rather stupid face. The sight of it so roused Lisa's sense of humor that she began to laugh, and Ned smiled fatuously. The figure leaning against the pillar did not move until the reconnoitring party returned, and then, in the midst of the slight confusion their coming caused, he approached Lisa and said, "Will you take a little walk with me?" [Pg 158]

The color rose to the girl's face as, with an assenting motion, she made ready to go with him.

There was scarcely a word said until they reached the fallen tree; then Lisa, taking a seat upon one of the leafy boughs, said, lightly, "As this seems to be a silent session, I shall sit here until the spirit moves me."

Mr. Danforth stood looking down at the graceful figure in the cloudy pink drapery framed by the green of the tree. "Miss Lisa," he said, "somehow I have offended you."

“Oh, no,” she replied, indifferently. “I don’t see why you should say that. We are simply casual acquaintances.”

“Then,” he said, with the shadow of a smile, “we will say that I do not impress you favorably. That is no fault of yours; but I think it would be more pleasant for us all if we could be more harmonious.”

Lisa was silent. She leaned over and pulled a little switch from the tree and began to tap the toe of her slipper with it.

“I have a confession to make to you,” Mr. Danforth went on. “I will tell you that I thought you a vain, frivolous girl, with little love for anything but excitement and admiration, until yesterday.” Lisa raised her eyes for a second, then began to pull the pointed leaves from the switch she held. “And then I saw that in my ignorance, in my warped, one-sided views of womankind, I had misjudged you, for I saw a girl whose tenderness for a little child made manifest her capacity for self-forgetfulness, and so I want to ask your pardon for my first opinion of you.” [Pg 159]

“It was my fault,” responded Lisa, now completely disarmed. “I gave you reason to think as you did. I never knew a man before who—who cared—who didn’t care for pretty girls and preferred ugly ones.”

A glimmer of amusement came into Mr. Danforth’s eyes. “I do admire pretty girls,” he said; “but you know there are different opinions as to that, too. We don’t all admire the same type, and perhaps what Ned Carew considers beautiful I might not.”

Lisa bit her lip. She wasn’t going to forgive him, she told herself. “You are very rude,” she said, petulantly, tearing the leaves to bits.

“And you will not forgive me because I will not say I prefer your looks to your soul.”

“I can’t have you say such things,” cried Lisa, passionately, rising and letting a shower of green fall from her lap. “What right have you to talk so? No one ever did so but my mother.”

A gentle look came into the young man’s eyes. “Perhaps,” he said, “I do it for the same reason: there is no friend like a mother.”

Lisa felt a strange sense of mingled fear and pleasure. Then she turned and held out her hand. “I forgive you,” she acknowledged. “Will you say the same?” [Pg 160]

“There is no need,” replied Mr. Danforth; “you have done me a service, for you have shown me a fault.”

Such magnanimity! Lisa felt ashamed at being outdone by this—this pedagogue.

“Now,” continued Mr. Danforth, “let us talk of something else. I heard you say that little Ruth was mourning the disaster which happened to her doll, and you were wondering where you could find an old-fashioned head to supply the place of the one which was smashed. I think maybe I can help you out.”

“You?” And Lisa looked up. Was this man never to be done with his surprises?

“Yes. My mother, I remember, had just such a doll when she was a little girl, and, if I am not mistaken, she still has it.”

“But I would not rob her of it.”

“She would give it willingly if I were to state the case. You or I would do it.”

Lisa inwardly thanked him for the implied suggestion of her generosity. “And you can be very certain,” Mr. Danforth continued, “that my mother will give me the doll to do with as I wish, since it would afford me a very great pleasure.”

“You are very good,” returned Lisa. “We shall only need the head, you know.”

“Yes; and when I go home next week I will send it to you.”

“Are you going next week?” asked Lisa, suddenly taken off her guard and displaying more interest than she intended. [Pg 161]

“Yes. I must be with my mother a little while. I have promised Walter to go back with him, for Ned declines to return in anything less than a steamboat. Basil will not require further coaching, and he has promised to help Miss Persis with her Latin, so I can easily be spared.”

“Grandma will miss you,” said Lisa. But that night when the house was silent she lay awake a long time. Life looked more serious to her than ever before. Perhaps she would best go to college. No; she would think of something else to do to rouse her best self. What did he—Mr. Danforth—mean by saying that—that strange thing? Perhaps he talked so to her for the same reason her mother did. “A mother is the best friend one can have.” He said that too. Did he mean, then, it was for friendship’s sake, or—or——? And Lisa buried her face in her pillow.



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CHAPTER XIV.

NEW BEGINNINGS.

And so it happened that Patience was supplied with a new head, to the surprise and delight of Ruth.

“It is just like you, princess,” she said. “Fairy princesses always do such things, and oh, dear princess, what lovely clothes you have made Patience. She has been to fairyland I know. Did you make that cunning hat of rose-leaves, and the frock of spun cobwebs?”

Lisa laughed and hugged the imaginative little creature to her. “Do you know, Ruth,” she said, “that you and your grandma are coming to see us in the winter, and when we go away next week you will have that to anticipate?” For Ruth had grieved sorely over the prospect of Lisa’s near departure. Walter’s yacht had set sail a very few days after the storm, leaving Ned Carew behind. Poor Ned kept his place persistently by Lisa’s side, despite that maiden’s very contemptuous treatment.

“You never can tell what a girl means to do,” Ned had confided to Basil. “You know they say a girl often treats you very badly when she really likes you.”

“Can’t you see through a millstone when it has a hole in it?” returned Basil. And Ned pondered as deeply as he was capable upon the remark, finally concluding that Basil meant to suggest in a delicate way that Lisa’s conduct toward him indicated an opposite state of feeling from that which appeared upon the surface.

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Persis had a lofty scorn for the “Popinjay,” as she called him, and any leniency toward him on Lisa’s part was mainly due to a contrary spirit aroused by Persis’s persistent attacks upon the unfortunate Ned.

Every morning found Persis and Basil ensconced in a corner of the porch with their Latin books, while Mrs. Estabrook sat near them in a high-backed chair. Persis had a persistent, dogged way of attacking her difficulties which amused Basil, and which made grandma aware that here was a trait which augured well for Persis’s success in life. No amount of persuasion or temptation would induce the girl to allow one lesson to be slighted, and in consequence, by the time the summer was over she had an assured prospect of finishing her studies at Miss Adams’s school earlier than at first seemed possible, and she was planning for her college life with high hopes.

“I miss Mr. Dan, but Basil is a great help,” she told her sister. “He is like a real brother, isn’t he, Lisa? Of course you are so taken up with the Popinjay you haven’t eyes for any one else. I believe you actually drove Mr. Dan away by your high and mightiness.”

Lisa’s lip curled. “I drive him away, indeed! It was doubtless because he was bored to death down here. I know he was just dying to get off with Walter away from us females. He was like a cat in a strange garret among such a raft of us, and I don’t wonder.”

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But when the summer days were over, and the return home was an actuality, it was Lisa who left regretfully. She had felt for some time that the going back must mean active decision; that womanhood’s call awaited her when she appeared in the world as a school-girl no longer; and, although Persis had always been the one most anxious to see her

mother, on this occasion it was Lisa who first sought her with an eagerness which Mrs. Holmes could but note.

“Oh, mamma,” said Lisa, “I am so glad to have you a little hour to myself. I want your help, mamma. I have been thinking so hard, and I am tired.” And there was a child’s wistfulness in the tone.

This was Lisa in a new mood which her mother scarcely understood. “My darling, I imagined in that quiet, drowsy old place you would have little cause for considering any question of moment,” she made reply.

Lisa shook her head. “I never was so roused, mamma, and all because of a hateful—no—a—man,—Mr. Danforth.” And Lisa’s eyes fell before her mother’s look of inquiry.

“He despised me, and I didn’t like to be despised,” she went on, “and so I cast around to find why he did; and then I despised myself; and so, mamma, I want to study kindergartening, and I mean to teach in the free kindergarten. I have a way with little children, I find, and I should then have some purpose in life; it would have a meaning beyond that of a mere butterfly existence. Wouldn’t it?” [Pg 165]

Mrs. Holmes regarded her daughter with a thoughtful gaze. “And so you have come to a woman’s estate,” she replied. “I did not think it would come to you so soon.” And there was a new tenderness in her voice.

“What come?”

“Your knowledge of your heart,” returned her mother, gently.

“Why? What? Oh, mamma!” And Lisa buried her head in her hands. “I hate him!” she whispered.

“No, dear. I understand. Ah, my darling, I am glad your best self is aroused. He must be a good man who could make you respond to the best within you.”

“He is good,” answered Lisa, in a little breathless way. “He is too good; but, oh, mamma, he doesn’t—oh, I don’t know.” And then from a full heart she told her mother all that had occurred which bore upon her acquaintance with Mr. Danforth.

“Well, my dear one, I am so glad you have come to me with all this. No one is a truer friend than your mother,” Mrs. Holmes assured her.

“That is what he said,” replied Lisa, in a low tone. “But perhaps I shall never see him again.”

“Oh, yes, you will! He has been offered and has accepted a position in the preparatory school, and some day perhaps he may occupy a professor’s chair at the university, unless some other profession attracts him more. Your father esteems him very highly, and I think there is little doubt but that you will see him again.” [Pg 166]

Lisa lifted a flushed face to her mother. “Don’t tell papa,” she entreated.

“No, my dearie; but he will be very glad to know that you mean to be of some use in the world, and I am sure that he will encourage the kindergarten plan.”

And, therefore, to the great surprise of Persis and Mellicent, Lisa announced that her winter’s work was decided upon.

“Well, of all things!” said Persis. “I thought you were going in for society, and would be a tremendous success; and now to think all that grandeur is nipped in the bud.”

“It’s the bud that refuses to be nipped,” laughed Lisa. “The scorching breath of adulation might blight her, and she prefers to retain her pristine fragrance. Now you see how our ambitions change as we grow older. Instead of desiring to be the centre of admiration in the ball-room, I crave the adoration of a set of youngsters in a school-room. There is something unique in the ambition. Don’t you think so?”

“I should say there is,” returned Persis. “But you will be frivolous sometimes, I hope?”

“Of course. I don’t mean to be a nun. You shall have the pleasure of seeing me in gorgeous array quite frequently, no doubt.”

“Well, I’m glad of it. I don’t want you to be a crank,” replied Persis. “What worthy daughters of our father we shall be, to be sure,—you a kindergarten professor, I a B.A. or a M.A. or some sort of an A or a D or something, and Mell—what about you, Pigeon?”

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“I don’t know. I think I shall try genealogy, and hunt up people’s pedigrees. I’d like that.”

Her sisters laughed. “You certainly would,” they declared. “How about Audrey? Has she come to the end of her pedigree yet?”

“I think she must have. She has traced it back to Adam,” replied Mellicent, gravely.

A shout of laughter came from Lisa and Persis. “How did she manage to do it?” they asked.

“Oh, she got hold of some book on Irish pedigrees, and she found out that her mother’s people were descended from one of the old Celtic kings, and he was descended from Ir, the son of King Milesius of Spain, and his lineage was given all the way back to Adam. It’s all down in black and white. I saw it. I can’t remember many of the names, but Noah and Methuselah are among them.”

“That is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard,” Lisa asserted. “I hope Audrey has more sense than to believe it.”

“Of course she believes it,” returned Mellicent, somewhat offended. “You would, too, if you saw the book; it’s as clear as day, and it’s very interesting.”

“There’s no doubt of our all claiming Adam,” remarked Persis, “but William the Conqueror, or, as Porter vulgarly puts it, ‘Billy the Corn-curer,’ is quite as far back as I should dare go. We shall have to call Audrey the Milesian. I am going to tease her by telling her we have a Welsh ancestor somewhere, and that they say Adam only comes half-way down a Welsh pedigree.”

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“What nonsense!” observed Lisa.

“Oh, dear!” exclaimed Persis, suddenly. “I am just beginning to realize that you will not be in school this year, Lisa,—neither will Margaret Greene,—and I shall be one of the seniors, and then next year I shall be at college. Think of it, Lisa!” And she gave her sister a gentle pinch.

“Don’t nip the bud,” expostulated Lisa, “even if you are going to college. I don’t like nips. You are too enthusiastic when you show your emotions, Persis.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean to hurt,” contritely said Persis. “Tell me, my bud, what is the Popinjay going to do if you ignore society?”

“I’m not going to ignore it.” And over Lisa’s face a cloud came. Then she arose from her place and left the room.

“There! I never open my mouth but what I put my foot in it, as the Irishman said,” Persis declared, turning to Mellicent. “I don’t quite understand Lisa these days. She’s ever so much gentler, only she’s more—sort of uneven. One day she is as gay as a lark and the next she’s down in the dumps. She has been that way ever since we came back from Bellingly.”

“I believe you had a better time down there than I had at the mountains,” returned Mellicent. “I got so tired of so many people coming and going all the time. No one seemed to stay long enough for you to become really acquainted, and there were hardly any young people.”

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By the first of October all three girls were busy at work with their various studies, and to Persis, who was now nearing the end of her time as Miss Adams’s pupil, the future held delightful possibilities.

It was therefore a great downfall to her hopes when one day her father told her that she must give up the prospect of going away from home to college the next year. "I am afraid, my dear child, it is going to be a greater expense than we can afford," he told her.

Persis looked at him with surprise and disappointment. "Why, papa! Why, papa!" she stammered; "what is the reason?"

He smiled a little sadly. "My small investments are paying me nothing, and your grandmother, who expected to share the expense of your college course, is suffering from the same condition of affairs. Certain railroad stocks on which we both have heretofore depended are paying no dividends, and then there are other stocks which bring us nothing."

Persis's lips quivered, but she said, bravely, although with swimming eyes, "I'll try to bear it, papa, but I am so disappointed. I worked so hard all summer with my Latin so as to get through a year sooner."

"I know you did, daughter. Don't think it is no disappointment to me too." And he laid his hand gently on the girl's shoulder.

Persis rested her cheek against it, saying, contritely, "I'll not be so selfish, papa; but I feel as if all my ground were slipping from under me. I had planned it all out so many times, and I don't know how to build any new castles." [Pg 170]

"Perhaps time will develop some new interests for you," her father suggested, consolingly. And Persis left him with a very downcast countenance. She could not bear to face her grandmother with the tears rolling down her cheeks, and so a good cry in her snuggery was denied her, for this was a question in which grandma was too closely involved. Persis therefore escaped to the room she still shared with Lisa, and a half-hour later the latter found her there with a very shiny red nose and traces of tears still upon her long black lashes.

"Why, Tommy, what in the world is the matter? You look as if you had lost your last friend."

"I feel as if I had," responded Persis, dejectedly. "Papa says I can't go to college next year." And the tears began to flow afresh.

Lisa put down her books upon the table. "I am awfully sorry," she replied, with real sympathy. "I knew the investments were paying poorly this year, but I didn't know it was so bad as that. Hard times, you know. Never mind, Perse, maybe you can go next year after all. I'll tell you what: I'll try to get a position to teach in a kindergarten and keep up my study at the same time; then I could help out."

"You're awfully good," sobbed Persis, quite overcome by this mark of affection in her sister, "but I couldn't stand having you work for me. I'll try to get something to do myself—I don't care what. I shall be wild if I can't do something."

"You could study a lot at home," suggested Lisa, cheerfully, "and maybe you could gain almost as much that way." [Pg 171]

Persis looked up a little comforted. "It's good of you to suggest it. I know Basil would help me, and so would Mr. Dan."

The color mounted to Lisa's forehead. "No doubt," she said; "although he does not trouble himself to call upon us very often."

"He is so busy, you know," Persis explained. "He does other things besides teaching."

Lisa did not pursue the subject, and Persis, drying her eyes, prepared to study her lessons.

"I shall have to tell Miss Adams, I suppose," she said, taking up her books.

"Yes. I suppose you might as well, although it will not make any difference with your being graduated."

“No; the certificate will take me to college, I know. Oh, dear, Annis will be so disappointed.” And Persis drew a deep sigh as she turned over her pages.

She took an early opportunity of telling Miss Adams of the disappointment, being sure that her teacher, who knew her bright little pupil’s ambition, would give her sympathy. Miss Adams smiled at Persis’s lugubrious tone, although she felt so very sorry for her.

“My dear child,” she said, “you are taking this very much to heart.”

“I know I am,” acknowledged Persis, ruefully. “I had so hoped I could enter the freshman class with Annis, and it spoils all our plans. You know we wanted to edit a magazine when we had finished at college.” [Pg 172]

Miss Adams smiled again. “Well, I don’t see that you will be prevented from following out your ambition if Annis does well. She is sure of going, isn’t she?”

“Yes; but I’m not.” And Persis’s face took on a more doleful expression than before.

“My dear,” said Miss Adams, feeling very sorry for Persis’s disappointment, “I do not want to raise false hopes, but do you know you might try for a scholarship? There are several offered in the college, and one of them might be opened to you if you chose to try for it.”

“Oh, Miss Adams,” cried Persis, starting to her feet, “I never thought of that! Do you really think I could? What would I have to do?”

“You would have to stand an examination instead of trusting to your certificate.”

“Oh, I’ll do that! I’ll do anything. I’ll study harder than ever. Oh, Miss Adams, I am so much obliged to you for even suggesting such a thing.”

“You must not count on it. There may be no vacancies next year, and then you must remember that the expense of your board will be extra,” Miss Adams warned her.

Persis’s face fell again and she sighed.

“I’ll try anyhow,” she made known her determination, after a moment’s reflection. “Maybe some way will be arranged for me.”

“That is the proper spirit,” approved Miss Adams. “I’ll help all I can, Persis, and there is no knowing what good fortune may come to you.” [Pg 173]

“Don’t tell any one,” begged Persis. “I’d like to keep it a secret. I don’t want even mamma and papa to know just yet, for if I should fail I should feel so ashamed.”

“Do you think you can keep it a secret?” Miss Adams asked, meaningly.

Persis’s tone held a little reproach as she answered, “Oh, Miss Adams, I don’t tell everything, as I used to do. I’m getting a little more discretion, don’t you think?”

“I hope so,” returned her teacher. “I think your vineyard contains fewer little foxes to steal the grapes.”

From this time Persis bent herself to her studies with redoubled energy, and her strict application puzzled even Lisa. “I don’t see why you study so unusually hard,” she said.

“I want to be graduated with highest honors,” Persis returned. But a little injured look on her sister’s face told her that she had made a mistake in making this answer.

“Oh, dear, I forgot that Lisa came out second,” she thought to herself. “No,” she corrected, “it isn’t that, Lisa; but I want to study as hard as I can this year, so as to be that much further ahead next.”

“Oh,” responded Lisa, more graciously; “I see! It is a good plan, Perse, for you will need all your wits if you hope to keep up with Annis.” And the subject was dropped for the time being.



CHAPTER XV.

A SPRING MEETING.

The winter passed with busy days crowding each other closely. Lisa fretted more than any one else against enforced economies, but, after all, managed to enjoy herself by taking on new duties and new pleasures. Her kindergarten studies gave her plenty of mental application, and she also became interested in a church guild, talking with a little womanly air about her "girls" and their needs. There was less friction between her and Persis now, for the latter was obliged to concede that Lisa, as a society lady, must have more latitude than a school-girl, and enjoyed nothing more than to see her handsome sister arrayed for a dance or a theatre party. "Lisa, you are a beauty," she said one evening, as she sat rolled up in a warm wrapper upon the bed.

"This is my last german," replied Lisa, "for Lent begins this week, and then I shall devote my leisure hours to my girls."

"Oh, I wish I could peep in on you to-night. I suppose the dear Popinjay escorts you."

"Yes," replied Lisa, indifferently, as she threw her pretty cloak over her shoulders.

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"Aren't you just a little bit tired of him?" Persis asked, mischievously.

Lisa threw her a look which spoke volumes, but the only answer she vouchsafed was, "He dances perfectly."

"What did you do all summer? I sang, said the grasshopper," quoted Persis. "What's he going to do when his summer-time is over?"

"Oh, he will dance while he can totter," replied Lisa, laughing. "He will be a fine old beau. I can see him in my mind's eye. Very shaky, but very spruce, and still devoting himself to pretty girls."

Persis clapped her hands. "Then he is not to marry you!"

"Do you suppose I am going to make an idiot of myself?"

"Then why do you keep him dangling after you?"

"I don't know." And picking up her fan, Lisa went out.

"I'd know," thought Persis, nodding her head with decision. And getting down from the bed, where she had perched herself that Lisa might have full swing, she began to gather up her books and papers. "Now for the midnight oil," she said, and she had but just gone to bed when Lisa returned.

Some weeks later Basil came in with the announcement that the spring meeting of the college athletic association would soon take place.

"I want to have a real jolly party to go from here," he said to Mrs. Holmes. "Won't you let Perse go? I am going to get a three-seated conveyance that will hold nine of us, so we can drive out in fine style, and then we want to go to the Inn for supper."

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"Who else will be in the party?" asked Mrs. Holmes.

"I should like to have Lisa and Persis, and Annis Brown. Walter Dixon is coming on, and I think—at least, I'd like to ask Mr. Dan to go."

Mrs. Holmes continued her sewing, thoughtfully. "Who will chaperon the party?" she asked.

"Why, I don't know. Won't you, Mrs. Holmes?"

"I think a nice plan would be to invite your aunt, Mrs. Dixon, to come on with Walter. We are all so fond of her, and she was so kind to Persis, it would be a great pleasure to us to have her here."

"I'd like that too," returned Basil. "That is a fine plan, Mrs. Holmes; thank you for thinking of it. Will you write to her, or shall I?"

"I will write, and I am sure the girls will be heartily glad to be of your party."

Persis was exuberant over the prospect. "Are you sure Mr. Dan will go, Basil?" she asked. "I should like to have him. I wonder why he hasn't been to see us lately."

"I haven't seen him, myself, lately," Basil told her. "His mother has been very ill, and he has been away for weeks, but he is back again now, and I think he will go."

"Tell me all about it," said Persis. "When, how, and where are we to go?"

"The twenty-fourth of April is the date; we are to go in a big three-seated affair that can be hired from Dunn's stables; and I want you girls to deck yourselves out in the college colors. We'll have streamers on the whip, and 'fustunes,' as Prue calls them, on the wagon. Then we will go to the Inn for supper, and come home by moonlight." [Pg 177]

"Oh, what a lovely arrangement!" cried Persis. "We shall enjoy it so much. I do hope it will be a nice clear day, not too cold."

Mrs. Dixon accepted the invitation, and on the eventful afternoon, which proved to be bright and clear, there was quite an excited little company ready to start for the grounds.

Lisa cast a swift look at the big vehicle as it drove up. There were three young men within,—Walter Dixon, Basil, and—not Mr. Danforth, but Wilson Vane.

"I was afraid Mr. Dan couldn't come," Basil informed them, "so Wilson is going out with us, and we may meet Mr. Dan out there. If he finds he can come, we can easily make room for him." And taking the reins he started up the horses, and they were soon on their way.

"I'd like to sit with the driver," Persis said to Lisa, "but Annis ought to have first choice, and I know she wants the place, so I'll sit back with Mrs. Dixon."

Lisa nodded and moved aside to make room for Wilson Vane. But Persis was very well content, and the flying streamers, flower-decked maidens, and prancing horses attracted all eyes as they drew up to one side of the field. Numbers of other teams had already arrived, and salutations were exchanged while the college lads were preparing for their feats. [Pg 178]

"Oh, there is Mr. Dan!" cried Persis, after a time. "Go bring him here, Basil." And she leaned eagerly forward, while Lisa shrank farther back in her seat, as Basil proceeded to hunt up his friend, after calling on Wilson to look after the horses.

"He has nearly forgotten me by this time," thought Lisa, a sudden wave of humility rushing over her. "How silly to suppose he ever gave me more than a passing thought!"

In another moment Mr. Danforth was answering Persis's welcoming words, and then Annis in her turn received his greeting. Lisa was the last to give recognition. She held out her hand timidly, and since Wilson had clambered down to take the driver's place for a moment the new-comer took the vacant seat by Lisa's side.

"It is quite a gay sight, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes," replied Lisa, laconically.

Persis leaned over. "Basil is going to be in the running-match, and that comes next. Oh, Mr. Dan, don't you hope he will win?"

"I do, indeed," returned he over his shoulder. "Basil is a good runner."

"I know he is. There he comes!" And all eyes were turned toward the race-course. Three slim lads stood abreast, each intent, alert. "Go!" And they dart forward. Basil is ahead. No. Harvey Dana has passed him. Persis, with parted lips, watches breathlessly, unconsciously rising to her feet as the runners appear on the opposite side of the ring. Once around and Harvey Dana is ahead. "Oh!" cried Persis, sinking down in disappointment. [Pg 179]

"It is the best out of three," Mr. Danforth told her, consolingly. "Basil is not the boy to give up yet, and if I'm not mistaken he has a reserve force which will show itself later."

"Oh, look, what jumpers!" cried Persis, all attention. "The Grasshopper should be one of them; shouldn't he, Lisa?"

Lisa laughed. "He is. Didn't you know it?" she replied, with a slight blush.

Persis turned squarely around. "You don't say so! Why didn't you tell me? I think that's a great joke."

"What's the joke?" asked Mr. Danforth, with a smile.

"Oh, some of Persis's nonsense!" Lisa replied; but Persis merrily told him that she had found a new name for Ned Carew. "The Grasshopper is beaten; it is the Toad that has won," she cried.

"And who is the Toad?" asked Mrs. Dixon, quite enjoying the spirit of the thing.

"Why that pop-eyed fellow with the long legs and bumpy face. He always reminds me of a toad. I have often seen him, but I don't know his name."

"I know him," said Mr. Danforth. "And he does look like a toad. He is a very *blasé* sort of chap. I wonder he joins these sports. He is a great friend of Ned Carew's. Yes, that is Steve Boyd. I didn't recognize him at first." [Pg 180]

"There comes Basil," cried Annis. "Now, let us see."

"It lies between Harvey and Basil. See, Jim Harper is 'way behind," exclaimed Walter. "Basil is gaining."

"Yes, he is! he is! There! he has passed Harvey. No! Yes, he has! Oh, Basil, keep ahead! do! do!" And Persis clasped her hands excitedly.

"Phillips! Phillips!" rang out from all sides. "Dana! Dana!" came a second encouraging shout.

Steadily Basil gained, and at last Persis drew a sigh of relief. "Oh, I can't wait for the third heat," she said. "The next thing is that throwing of weights, and I don't care much about it. Isn't it exciting to have Basil and Mr. Dana so close? Oh, dear, I'm afraid I shall be very much disappointed if Basil comes in second. I wish I could take things more calmly."

Mr. Danforth smiled at the girl's excitement. "Don't try to outgrow your enthusiasm," he said. "The more appreciation the more enjoyment."

Persis made no reply, for the final trial of speed for Basil was about to be made. The eyes of the two lads measured each other as they stepped into the ring, and Persis nervously settled herself in the best position to catch sight of every movement of the runners. Off they go, heads up, shoulders back, neck to neck. Harvey is ahead, Basil gaining. One quick glance behind causes Harvey to lose ground, and Basil, seeing his advantage, darts ahead with a sudden spurt. Faster! faster! faster! There is no hope for Harvey; he has used his best strength too soon. On, on goes the winner, until with one last effort he reaches the goal, passes beyond, and drops exhausted. [Pg 181]

Then a mighty cheer goes up, led by the little company of his nearest friends. "Hurrah for Phillips! Baz! Baz! Baz!" Persis, hardly knowing what she is doing, fairly shouts the triumph she feels, standing up, waving hat, handkerchief, even carriage whip. Quiet Annis, too, is borne away by the excitement, and snatching from her belt the roses she wears, tosses them to the victorious lad as he passes the carriage on his way inside. A bright smile answers the girls' enthusiastic cries of congratulation, and Persis sinks down on her seat, with cheeks scarlet from excitement, saying, "Oh, Annis, why didn't I think to throw him my flowers. Never mind, he shall have them when he comes out. Isn't it fine to have such a champion runner for a brother. I love, I just love to see all this, and soon it will be over."

It was a merry crowd which met at the Inn, for the Holmes party was not the only one which went there from the athletic grounds for supper. Audrey Vane, Kitty Carew, Margaret Greene, Harvey Dana, the Toad, and the Grasshopper were all there before them.

"Isn't this jolly?" cried Kitty, as she greeted Basil's company. "Oh, you have that quiet Mr. Danforth with you. Is there any fun in him?" she whispered to Persis.

"Lots," returned Persis; "just get him started, and you'll see."

"Is that true?" returned Kitty, "We girls all thought he was too dignified to recognize a joke when he met one." [Pg 182]

"Dignified! I wish you could have seen him last summer," replied Persis. And then, being called by Mrs. Dixon, she returned to her special party of friends, who were by this time ready to take supper. Great fun they had over it, getting once in a while so uproarious that Mrs. Dixon had to remind them that they were in a public place, and must not make themselves conspicuous by such loud laughter.

"I know you are extremely funny and witty, you children," she said, "but moderate your transports, if you please. It isn't quite like ladies and gentlemen to make yourselves the centre of attraction in a place of this kind."

"We know it, Aunt Agnes," said Basil, "but Walter should have been better trained at home, for he is the ringleader of this nonsense."

"You saucy boy," returned Mrs. Dixon, laughing; "I am perfectly aware that Walter is at the head of it, but I'd like any one to curb his wit when he gets started, and if the rest of you don't stop your hilarity he will disgrace his mother."

"Then we'll be good, for your sake," returned Basil, and the mirth subsided somewhat.

The long porch of the Inn faced a grassy slope, below which ran a winding river. Lisa stood in one corner of the porch, having escaped from the others, who were established at the other end of the building and were continuing their nonsense.

The spring was still too young for the trees to show much leafage, but there was the thrill of expectancy perceptible in the waiting world. One could imagine it already passing through each fibre and rootlet hidden by the brown earth. There was a spring-like odor in the air which hinted of bursting buds and overturned sods. That vague fulness of heart which the season brings to young people and lovers of nature Lisa felt overpower her, and when Mr. Danforth joined her she met his first question with a sweet seriousness. [Pg 183]

"Of what were you thinking, off here by yourself?" he asked.

"I was thinking of many things. One was this waiting world, and another was your mother. I only heard of her illness a day or two ago. I remembered your saying that a mother is the best friend one has, and I was hoping she was out of danger."

"Thank you for the kind thought. It has been an anxious time, but she is out of danger, and I am able to face my duties again. Will you tell me what you have been doing since I saw you?"

Lisa's eyes were downcast. "I have not been so very frivolous," she said, with a little smile. "I have been studying and working." And she told him of her interest in the kindergarten, of her guild, of certain hopes in herself, while he listened gravely.

"I don't know why I am boring you with this exhaustive account of my doings and my wonderings and my wishings," she said, suddenly, with a realizing sense of having unfolded her heart more fully than she had meant to do.

"You are telling me because you know I understand, and because I am interested in hearing about you all. Even if I do not see you all very often, I do not feel myself a stranger in your father's household, and each one of you has a claim upon my friendship." [Pg 184]

Lisa did not reply, but she was vaguely conscious of a dissatisfaction at such generalizing.

They were interrupted by a "Where are you?" from Persis. "We must go, Lisa. Isn't this moonlight lovely? The wagonette is waiting at the door, and Mrs. Dixon says we must be off. Isn't she a nice jolly chaperon, and haven't we had a good time?"

Mr. Danforth looked at Persis as if suddenly realizing a new fact. "You are not a little girl any more, are you, Miss Persis?" he said.

"No," she replied; "not such a very little one, but I am not a full-fledged young lady like Lisa. I am still only a school-girl."

But to Lisa's discomfiture it was this younger sister to whom Mr. Danforth devoted himself on the drive home, which was enlivened by college songs and the gay humor of young people full of life and care-free.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIRST BREAK.

Persis's first poetical effusion was found pinned on Lisa's pin-cushion a few days after their last frolic. It followed a call from Edwin Carew and Stephen Boyd, during which Persis, in her snugery, composed the following:

There was a little, hopping toad
Lived underneath a tree,
Who breakfasted and dined on flies,
Ate little gnats for tea;

Who found his one excitement this,
In hopping 'cross the walk,
To see a grasshopper who lived
Beside a mullein stalk.

This warty, pop-eyed little toad
Concluded one fine day
That life was very flat indeed,
The world far, far from gay.

So, hopping, hopping, off he went
To Grasshopper Slimleg.
Said Grasshopper, "Come, in, my friend.
Good-day! Come in, I beg."

"You seem quite blue,"—he meant quite green,—
"Pray, what distresses you?"
"Oh, I'm so bored," replied the toad,
"I don't know what to do.

"If you could but suggest some plan
To while the time away,
Your goodness I could ne'er forget,
And never could repay."

The grasshopper, with thoughtful leg,
Began to scratch his wing,
Hopped forward once, then back again,
And said, "Suppose we sing!"

"Sing! Oh, good gracious, don't you think
I hear enough of that?
And I'm no vocalist myself,
Fun's what I'm driving at."

Then Slimlegs scratched his other wing,
And let his feelers drop,
Then raised them suddenly again,
And said, "Suppose we hop!

“I’ll bet you even flies that I
Can win in ev’ry heat.”
“Done!” said the toad. “I’m very sure
I’ll be the one to beat.”

So off they went. I saw them go,
With energetic hop;
They cleared the walk, they passed the wall,
But never did they stop.

Indeed, I’d really like to tell
Which of them won the bet;
They hopped so far, for aught I know,
They may be hopping yet.

“What a ridiculous girl you are, Persis,” said Lisa putting down the paper.

“You don’t mean to say the hoppers have gone,” returned Persis. “I thought you would never get a chance to have any dinner. We have all finished long ago. I wonder why some persons will be so stupid as to make calls just at meal-time, and neither go when the meal is ready nor expect to come to the table.” [Pg 187]

“I suppose they don’t know exactly how to get away.”

“I don’t believe it is anything of the kind. It is a pure lack of consideration,—absolute selfishness; but I suppose you couldn’t expect common sense of toads and grasshoppers. I remember now how Ned Carew used to come and call on you in the middle of a hot summer afternoon before we went away last year. Everybody with any sense knows a girl hates to rig herself up in the midst of blazing heat. Why couldn’t he have waited till evening? I used to get so mad.”

“You didn’t have to entertain him.”

“No; but you did, and you used to look so comfortable in your white wrapper lolling in a cool room. I hated to see you obliged to make the exertion to go up-stairs and change your dress. Men haven’t very much sense about some things. I suppose they imagine girls are always sitting up in some fairy-like toilet ready to smile upon any chance admirer.”

“Some girls are.”

“Well, I’m not one of them. Where’s Mell?”

“I suppose she has gone to the Milesian’s.” And the two laughed, knowing Mellicent’s annoyance at having Audrey so termed.

“What grown-up girls we are getting to be,” remarked Persis, after a short silence. “I am in my eighteenth year, and you are nearly out of your teens. Isn’t it appalling?” [Pg 188]

Lisa looked thoughtful. “Yes,” she answered. “And, Persis, I have something to tell you. No one knows yet, except mamma. Captain Wickes is ordered to Japan. Aunt Esther is going to join him there, and she has invited me to go with her.”

Persis’s eyes grew big with surprise. “Oh, Lisa!” was all she could ejaculate.

“Mamma has left me to make up my mind. You know Aunt Esther says I shall not be put to the least expense; that it shall be just as if I were her own daughter.”

“Oh, Lisa!” exclaimed Persis again. “I am so afraid you might marry a missionary, and you’d have to live there always in one of those funny little houses with paper partitions, and it would be so dreadful.”

Lisa laughed. “I can solemnly assure you that I will not marry a missionary. My one winter in society has shown me that missionary work served up without the sauce of other diversions would not be to my liking, so count the missionary out, if you please. I’ve always been wild to go to Japan—and—and—there are other reasons why I should like to go away for a while.”

“Then you have really decided to go? Oh, Lisa, I hate to think of a break in the family.”

“Well,” returned Lisa, “I thought I might be willing to go if Aunt Esther would promise faithfully that I could come back after three months if I wanted to. She wants me to stay a year, but I cannot make up my mind to do that. Just think, Persis, I shall see California, and just imagine what an experience it will all be! They say nothing develops one like travel.”

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Persis was looking very dubious.

“I’ll bring you the loveliest kimono, and oh, Perse, I’ll get you a China crêpe in San Francisco for your graduating dress.”

Persis looked pleased, but her face fell directly, as she said, “Then you won’t be here for class-day.”

“No. We are to go almost immediately,—as soon as we can get ready. Uncle Wickes is already on his way, and Aunt Esther wants to stop a little while in California before we sail. We shall probably be at Yokohama, or some such port, wherever the captain is stationed, and you know what lovely times they have—dances and such things—on board a man-of-war.”

“Well,” replied Persis, “I don’t say but that it is a delightful chance for you, but oh, Lisa, we shall miss you so.”

“Don’t Perse,” Lisa besought her, putting her arms around her; “I shall not be able to stand it. I shall give in at once if you do that; and indeed it is better for me to go. It is, truly. I can’t tell you all the whys and wherefores that decide me; but mamma knows, and she thinks it is best.”

Persis therefore said no more, but lent herself to the task of helping her sister to prepare for her long journey. Soon nothing else was talked of; even Persis’s anticipations of class-day dwindled into insignificance before Lisa’s wonderful trip, and early in May she was on her way.

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A few evenings after her departure, Mr. Danforth called and was told of the breach made in the family circle. Mrs. Holmes watched him narrowly as she gave the information; but, although he was much interested and said he quite envied Lisa her good fortune, there was no shadow of regret in his words. On the contrary, he seemed quite pleased, and was really more concerned in Persis’s preparations for class-day; and Mrs. Holmes, when she wrote to her absent daughter that evening, said, “We miss you sorely, dear child; but I am glad this opportunity has come for you to see the world.” And then she wrote of Mr. Danforth’s call in such a way that Lisa, reading, felt a few hot tears come to her eyes as she crumpled the letter in her hand. But she smoothed it out and kissed it directly after. “Dearest, dearest mother,” she said, “there is no friend like you, for even when you give a bitter pill you smother it in honey.”

“You’ll come to the commencement, won’t you, Mr. Dan?” asked Persis. “We’re going to have something quite different from the conventional plan this year. We are going to have a regular Greek setting, and all the graduates are going to wear Greek costumes. Basil is going to show me about mine. We are going to have our themes written on long scrolls and everything as much in keeping as possible. It will be when roses are in bloom, and we can have such lovely rosy decorations.”

“I shall be delighted to come,” Mr. Danforth assured her, with evident heartiness.

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“We are going to bury our Cæsar under a big rose-bush. You know Miss Adams’s grounds are beautiful, and some of the rose-bushes are perfect trees. We are going to find a tall urn to put on the bier for the ashes, so it will be real Greecey. No,” and the girl rippled out a little laugh, “I don’t mean that. I mean it will be truly Grecian. What a difference one little word makes. I like to study the value of words.”

Mr. Danforth responded appreciatively. “Yes; I heard you were a specially good student in your English.”

"That speech of mine sounded like it. Who told you,—Miss Adams?"

"Herself. She said you had a very nice critical sense, and she thought you would really do well in some direction where your literary analysis would be required."

"It is very nice of you to tell me such complimentary things. You don't usually believe in compliments, do you?"

"That depends. I believe in encouraging those who deserve it. Do you know that I am thinking of turning newspaper man?"

"Really?" And Persis clasped her hands interestedly. "Then you'll be just the one to tell me all about it. What are you going to do?"

"I have been writing for one or two papers lately, and I have been offered a position on the staff of a new weekly."

"Shall you like it better than 'professing,' as Lisa and I call it?"

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"Much better. I never intended to teach except while I should be making the way for something else."

"Oh, I always thought you meant to be a professor." And Persis looked thoughtful.

"I never intended any such thing. I am much fonder of journalism."

Persis's face took on a new expression of interest. "How nice it will be!" she declared. "I always said I meant to be an editor."

Mr. Danforth smiled, and later on this ingenuous avowal came back to him.

It did seem very lonely indeed without Lisa, and when in due time the China crêpe arrived, Persis shed tears over it, even while she was admiring the soft clinging folds of the beautiful stuff.

Basil was charmed with the idea of helping Annis and Persis to design their graceful costumes. Lisa had chosen a pale pink for Persis, and her slender, girlish figure, with her round white arms and delicate throat, her dusky hair bound with a silver fillet, never showed to better advantage than when, clad in the costume, she stood for criticism. Annis, in pale green, was like a dainty bit of decoration for spring.

"I think it is ever so much nicer for some of us to dress in colors," said Persis. "We must thank you for the suggestion, Basil. You always see the artistic side of things. What's the matter?" for Basil was gazing at her intently. "Is there anything wrong?" And Persis looked down uneasily.

"No; on the contrary, you never looked so stunning. You're a perfect picture, Persis."

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"Oh, am I?" said Persis, delightedly. "Thank you, Basil. I am so glad I look nice."

There was such unaffected surprise in her tone that little Annis smiled.

"Persis, you've the dearest way of being unconscious," she said. "I don't believe you ever admire yourself."

Persis looked around at her in wonder. "Of course I don't, when I have Lisa and Mellicent to admire. They are the beauties."

Annis gave a merry look to Basil, who was smiling quietly. He shook his head at her, and Persis, perfectly unaware that none of Miss Adams's graduating class would look more attractive than she, began to admire Annis and to speak of the honors about to be given.

"Annis and I are at swords' points," she told Basil. "This is the time truly 'when Greek meets Greek.'"

"Is that meant for a joke?"

"No, unless you prefer it to poetry. You know we are to hear to-morrow who is to be first-honor girl. I say Annis, and Annis says I will be."

"Perhaps it will be neither."

"Then it will be Nellie Hall." And Persis went up-stairs to lay aside her costume.

The next day the great question was settled, and Persis was quite overpowered when it was announced that first honors were hers, that Nellie Hall stood second, and Annis third. Annis was of course disappointed. She had always been very confident of Persis's place, and declared that it was only the rivalry between herself and Nellie that was the question at issue. And she was in reality very happy over her cousin's success. [Pg 194]

Class-day dawned with fair skies and balmy breezes. "What is so rare as a day in June?" quoted Persis, as she appeared at the breakfast-table. "Did you ever see such a gem of a day? It is just perfection. Oh, I am so happy! Just think of having blue skies and roses, delicious odors, a picturesque costume, and first honors all at once. There is only one flaw in my perfect happiness."

"And that is——?" queried her father.

"Lisa is not here. If I could only see her dear, beautiful face I should be so glad."

"You'd get into a fuss before the day was over," Porter observed, sagely.

"No, we wouldn't. I think Lisa and I are both getting more sense as we grow older. Annis has done me a lot of good," admitted Persis, candidly. "She is so sweet, and has shown me that persons need not be simply good-naturedly meek to keep out of fusses. Annis has lots of firmness of character, and she can show a disapproving silence. And then, Basil—oh, yes, Basil is a fine example of how one can disapprove silently. I'd rather he'd 'sass me back' at any time."

"You still have a great deal to learn not found in school-books," said Mr. Holmes, "although you think you are to be graduated to-day."

"Yes, I know, 'sermons in stones, books in the running brook,' and all that, and I still have an ambition for more book l'arnin', papa." [Pg 195]

"You'd better learn that you will need something to eat before noon," interposed Mrs. Estabrook, looking at the scarce-touched food on the girl's plate.

"Oh, no, grandma, I can't eat anything more. I shall not need much breakfast, for the Juniors are going to give us a luncheon, and I shall want to save up for that. We are going to pass around the staff or wand, or whatever you call it, and each one who receives it is to respond a sort of toast, you know. I've written an effusion, and it's very witty, I assure you."

"In the sense that Prue uses witty?" inquired Mrs. Holmes, slyly.

Persis laughed, and Porter, seeing a possible joke, asked how Prue utilized the word.

"She uses witty for witless," Persis explained. "Come, boys, help me gather the roses; and, Basil, you know you promised to arrange the bier for poor Cæsar. Nellie has written a fine parody on the famous oration, and it is to be delivered at the grave. Come, boys!" And the girl in the exuberance of her youthful spirits danced from the room as if she hardly felt the ground under her feet.

It was truly a beautiful sight to the looker-on, the young graduates, in classic attire, marching slowly down the long school-room and into the open air, the first six carrying, uplifted, the bier, upon which a tall Grecian urn, lightly draped and strewn with white flowers, was held. Into the summer-garden the little procession passed, all eyes following, and as the rose-petals fell softly from the vine above the young heads. Cæsar was buried, Nellie Hall delivering her oration with much effect. [Pg 196]

The luncheon was pronounced a great success, and after the reception, which took place in the evening, Persis felt that this had been the happiest day of her life. All had done her honor; the sunshine of praise had shone upon her; she had been at her best all day; Mr. Danforth, Basil, Wilson Vane, had been sedulously attentive during the evening.

“I know how Lisa used to feel,” thought the girl as she felt herself the centre of an admiring group. “It is nice to have attention.”

But late as it was when she reached home, she stopped at her grandmother’s door, knowing that the dear old lady would lie awake till her return.

“My heart is so full, grandma,” she whispered. “The brook and river meet to-day, and I don’t know what course the river means to take; it looks a very winding way.”

““He leadeth me,”” whispered back grandma. And Persis, for answer, said,—

“Let me sleep with you, grandma, to-night; I don’t want to be all alone.”

And grandma was only too glad to say, “Yes, my darling.”



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CHAPTER XVII.

PASTURES NEW.

The first unexpected turn in Persis's winding river was made very shortly after this, and her first view of it was through Mr. Danforth's agency. To the girl's disappointment she learned from Miss Adams that no scholarships at the college were open for applicants the coming year, and to Persis her college career seemed to drift farther and farther away into the unattainable.

While still chafing under the disappointment, a call from Mr. Danforth drew forth her confidence. "It was quite natural," she told herself, that she should tell her former tutor of this special affair. "I haven't said a word about it, even to Annis or Basil," she informed him, "but I must talk it over with some one, or I shall lose my wits. I feel as if I didn't know what to 'jump into next,' as Prue says."

"It is strange how events shape themselves," replied Mr. Danforth, "for I came here for the express purpose of making a proposition to you—I have not forgotten your ambition to be an editor, and I thought perhaps you would not object to a little journalistic training. In this new paper, which I think promises well, we purpose to have a page devoted to the young folks, and I wondered if you would care to try your hand at managing it in the fall."

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Persis looked up, her face aglow. "I? Why, I haven't had a bit of experience. I don't know a thing about such matters, except," she added, thoughtfully, "that I have always edited our little club paper. It isn't printed, you know, only written out, and copied on the type-writer, and it is a very insignificant affair."

"Nevertheless, I believe you could take hold of our page for us. We want something attractive to children. You have a fund of humor, good taste, good judgment, and a decided faculty for analysis. I can soon initiate you into certain mysteries of a technical sort, and we would rather have some one young enough to understand the likes and dislikes of children. We cannot pay you a large salary;" and he named a figure which seemed quite important to the inexperienced girl.

"That editorial *we* always sounds so very important," laughed Persis. "I should be perfectly enchanted to try the work, but I must consult mamma and papa first, and I will let you know as soon as possible. Oh, Mr. Dan, you don't know what a load it will lift for me. It will put a reason into my days. I had intended joining the Monday Afternoon Club, and I shall still keep up my interest in the Maids, but this seems so much more real than anything else. Thank you so much for offering it to me."

"You can do the greater part of your work at home," Mr. Danforth explained. "A call once a week at the office will be all that will be demanded of you, and even that may not always be necessary."

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In a tremor of excitement Persis unfolded the scheme to her mother, who at first looked doubtful, but as Persis smoothed away all obstacles it was decided that she should be allowed to make the experiment, and she wrote of her new work in exuberant terms to Lisa. Just what that young woman thought of the proceeding was not gathered from the letter she sent in reply; but she congratulated Persis upon her prospects, and stated that

she had concluded to remain through the year; that she had made some very pleasant acquaintances, and there was so much to see. "I shall have a volume to tell you when I do get home," she wrote. "I long to see you all, but Aunt Esther is so good and generous, and is so anxious to keep me, I really think I ought to stay."

The summer was passed quietly at Bellingly, by the same little company with the exception of Mr. Danforth and Lisa, whose absence made itself felt, and Persis concluded that it was a mistake to go a second time to a place where you had once specially enjoyed yourself.

Mr. Danforth began his system of training by sending to Persis a batch of proofs each week. These she was to correct and return; and in this way a pleasant correspondence was kept up. Sometimes a little poem would be slipped in, or accompanying the bundle might be a letter giving comments upon the last corrections; and once Mr. Danforth came down to spend Sunday at the old place.

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"It does seem very natural to see you here," said Persis, viewing him from the hammock. "Grandma, I know, must have missed you. If it were not for Annis—and Basil—and grandma, I should be rather lonely myself."

Mr. Danforth looked amused. "It seems to me you are pretty well secured against loneliness."

Persis laughed. "I'm not likely to lose them all, am I? But I don't know what I shall do next winter when Annis goes to college and the boys go with their mother."

"Are they going to leave you then?"

"Yes. Mrs. Phillips's sister is so much better, and has made so many friends in California, that she is going to live there altogether, and Mrs. Phillips will take a house somewhere in the city. Oh, by the way, I wonder we never thought of it, but perhaps Mrs. Brown would like to rent her house, if she goes with Annis. I must suggest it. Oh, dear, what shall I do without Annis?"

But strange interventions remove our threatened troubles, and, after all, Annis did not go to college that year; for shortly after her return home she was stricken down with typhoid fever, and the snow was on the ground before she so much as dared to venture out of doors.

Her devotion to Persis made itself manifest all through the long illness, and she could scarcely bear to have her friend out of her sight; so Persis would take her work to Annis's room, look over proof or read manuscripts while the patient slept, and be ready to minister to her when she awoke.

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"It is so very quiet at our house nowadays; it doesn't seem like the same place," Persis told her cousin. "With the boys gone, and Lisa away, it is so desolate. Mellicent is at school all the morning, and she is not noisy at the best of times. The boys come in very often; for, although they have a very pleasant boarding-place, they say it is not like home, and they pop in on us at all sorts of odd times. Do you know, Annis, for all that I feel awfully sorry that you have been so ill, I am mean enough to have a little glad feeling 'way down inside of me because you didn't go to college after all. Aren't you ashamed of myself?"

Annis, with her little pale face, big eyes, and closely cropped head, was sitting up in a large chair by the window. "Well, no," she answered, after a pause, "I'm not a bit ashamed of yourself. I should feel the same; and as it is I am rather glad. I did hate to think of going without you, and I quite enjoy the getting well. It is nice to have you here every day where I can see you. You are so nice and healthy-looking, Persis."

"I certainly am not puny, for I am not working myself to death. I think, after all, it has turned out for the best. I think it would have been almost too much for the family if I had gone away too. I hope we shall see Lisa before next fall, and then I can leave without feeling so *compuncted*."

Annis laughed at the word. "Tell me about the paper. I like to hear about it."

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“Oh, it’s great fun! I get such funny manuscripts to look over, and such absurd letters come. You know, of course, I am not a *bonâ fide* editor. I only have a certain part of the work to do. It is very interesting, and I think I shall earn enough to help me through the first year at college. I don’t know where the rest is to come from; but, as Mellicent once wrote in a letter, ‘I keep hopping.’”

“Do you know, Persis,” said Annis, “I have been talking about something to mamma, and I want you to say ‘yes’ before I tell you.”

“What good will yes do?”

“I mean I want you to promise to—to—— Well, I’ll tell you, and you must say ‘yes,’ or I shall go straight to work and have a relapse.”

“You shall not if I can help it.”

“Then I am sure of the yes. It’s just this way. You know you are my very dearest, darlingest girl, and mamma and I should still have been struggling with boarding-house breakfasts but for you; and so mamma is going to rent this house next year.”

“To Mrs. Phillips?”

“Yes. And mamma wants to take a cunning house, or maybe a little apartment, near the college, so we can still have a home to ourselves, and we want, we invite, we insist on your coming and staying with us as our guest while we are at college together—you and I. Oh, Persis, it would make us so happy. Aren’t you my cousin, and haven’t we a right to you?” And Annis leaned over to put her little thin hand on Persis.

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There was no immediate reply from the latter.

“Please,” pleaded Annis. “I feel myself getting paler.”

Persis laughed, but her eyes were downcast to hide their moisture. “I don’t know why I feel like crying,” she said. “You dear, sweet thing! If the family consent I say yes, but I don’t like the idea of sponging.”

“It will not be—no, no!”

Persis shook her head. “You see it would not be if there were no object in my accepting. If I were just going to visit and not go to college. I tell you, Annis, if I may be allowed to just pay for my keep I shall feel much more comfortable.”

“I think you’re very hard-hearted,” returned Annis, the tears coming to her eyes.

“You dear child! There, it’s all right. You mustn’t get worked up over it. You are not strong enough yet to talk of business matters. I’ll come. Yes, I’ll manage by hook or by crook, and we will settle it when the time comes. There, does that satisfy the baby?”

“I know I am silly,” returned Annis; “but I feel like crying if my tea is too sweet or my toast is scorched, so don’t mind me.”

“It’s time for your nap,” announced Persis. “Let me cuddle you down, and then I must leave you. I am due at the office at noon.”

Annis consented, admitting that she was a little tired, and Persis gathered up her papers and took her leave. [Pg 204]

It was a cold day, and as she wended her way through the business portion of the city she hoped she would not be detained long, but could reach home in time for a hot luncheon; yet she rather enjoyed her little trips to the office. They were at first greatly discouraged by her parents, who felt that so young a girl should not go unaccompanied to a newspaper office; but Mr. Danforth was too correct a man to countenance anything not strictly proper, Mr. Holmes reflected; and after seeing the pleasant, matronly looking woman employed as bookkeeper, and finding that his daughter was not exposed to the meeting of casual callers in the outer office, the objection was removed, and Persis was free to enjoy the unconventional proceeding.

Depositing her papers on the desk, where paste-pot and scissors awaited her, Persis went to work at her proofs and began to make up her dummy. This was done by pasting in an old copy of the paper the new proofs just where they were intended to be arranged in the coming issue of the paper, and it was sometimes quite a puzzle to fit the matter within a given space.

“It is always five columns of matter to four of space,” said Persis, addressing the bookkeeper; but upon looking up she saw Mr. Danforth watching her. “What a mean advantage to take,” she said, merrily. “I didn’t see you come in. If I am not allowed more space I shall have to ask Lisa to send me a Chinese puzzle to practise my wits upon, so as to get this solved.” [Pg 205]

“Can’t you cut it?” asked Mr. Danforth, looking over her shoulder.

“I shall have to; but that will necessitate my leaving out my favorite verses and this thrilling anecdote, as well as one bit of pleasantry. There, now. Oh, dear, how late it is! I have been working over this thing for an hour, and I still have some other work to do. I hoped I shouldn’t have to go out again in the cold till I started for home, and I am too hungry to wait.”

“Suppose we have some luncheon here,” suggested Mr. Danforth. “I know a place where they have especially delectable meat-pies, and we can make some coffee or chocolate.”

“How?”

“You don’t suppose that I haven’t resources of which you never dreamed. Mrs. Bailey knows what this office can supply.” And he opened the door of a little cupboard. There were plates, cups and saucers, a can of chocolate, and one of coffee, disclosed.

“Fine!” exclaimed Persis. “But we shall have to have some milk.”

“Which is easily obtainable. Where is our little tin bucket? Off goes the boy, back comes the feast. Come, Mrs. Bailey.” And the bookkeeper came forward with a clean sheet of paper, which she spread upon the desk, setting forth the cups and saucers, a bag of loaf-sugar, a tin of biscuits, a jar of East India preserves, and a glass of club-house cheese.

“Oh,” cried Persis, “what an array of comestibles! That is my favorite word for something to eat, since I have taken up journalism. Here comes Jimmy with the pies. Will they be good cold?” [Pg 206]

“We’ll warm them,” said Mr. Danforth.

“I don’t see how you are going to do it.”

“I’ll show you. We are not at the end of our resources. ‘Necessity is the mother of invention,’ you know.” And going into a back-room he returned with a long splint of wood, upon which the little pies were placed and held inside the big stove.

“What a way!” commented Persis.

“I have not been to a corn-roast for nothing.”

“Suppose the wood catches fire.”

“Suppose we are stupid enough to let it.”

“I give in. Your housewifely arts are too much for me. How is that milk to be boiled?”

“Over the gas. We have a very small, but very convenient, gas-stove. Where is it, Mrs. Bailey?”

“I am dumb with admiration,” declared Persis. “I am so glad I did not finish my work in time to go home for luncheon. This is a most delightful change from the usual routine. There! I smell that wood; the pies must be warm. Please give me one; I am half starved. Oh, how good it is!”

A very merry meal was made. “My first in Bohemia,” Persis certified.

“But not your last, I venture to say. I see many such in the perspective,” Mr. Danforth predicted.

“Not for some time,” rejoined Persis. “I am pretty sure of college, Mr. Dan. Will you keep my place for me till I come back? But, no; that is pressing friendship rather too far. I should not require such a thing of you. Even with all the benefit my vast acquirements might prove to your paper I will not exact it.” [Pg 207]

“I promise, nevertheless, that you shall have the place whenever you want it.”

“Even though some one else should take my place,—some one perfectly satisfactory? That would not be fair.”

“Whoever takes your place will do so with the full knowledge and understanding that he or she is to be ‘bounced’—to use Porter’s pet word—when you return with laurels upon your brow, unless you are so given over to superior wisdom that the children’s page can no longer interest you.”

Persis thoughtfully suspended a cracker midway to her mouth. “You suggest such possibilities that I can scarcely grasp them,” she said, presently. “I was thinking of the ambitious plans Annis and I have made, and wondering if they would ever be worked out. But then I wonder, wonder, wonder all the time. It seems to me every day brings some new mystery. But there, I have talked enough, and eaten enough, too. I must go to work, or there will be wonderings on the part of the family concerning my whereabouts.”



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CHAPTER XVIII.

A PILGRIMAGE.

For a long time Persis had been possessed of a desire to take a certain trip with her grandmother to the “ancestral halls,” as she called them, and, to her great joy, Mrs. Estabrook announced to her one day that she had planned the outing for the Easter holidays.

“I’ll get my work all in order, and make up my page of the paper ahead of my usual number, so it will all be plain sailing when I get back, and I shall have an easy conscience while I am away,” Persis said, delightedly. “Oh, grandma, I have so wanted to take this journey. I’ve not been to the haunts of the ancestors since I was a wee thing. I can remember one or two of the places, an old garden where there were so many little low pear trees,—dwarf pears. I used to imagine they called them so because the trees belonged to a dwarf, and I was afraid to touch them. I can remember, too, how I ran away once and went over to some one’s house, where I was treated royally. Where was it? I can barely remember the place and the nice, kind man who took me in charge. Who was he?”

“Cousin Ambrose Peyton,” returned Mrs. Estabrook.

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“Is he still living, and shall we see him?”

“He is still living in the same place, and you shall go there if you like.” There was a very sober look on Mrs. Estabrook’s face as she made the reply.

“What makes you look so solemn?” inquired Persis. “I don’t believe you want to go. Are you doing it just for my sake? Will it make you unhappy?”

“I want to go very much. I have put it off from time to time, because I have felt that it would bring too many sad memories; but since we have discovered Annis I do not feel so about going, and I am very eager to see the old familiar scenes. I should like to take Annis, too, if I could afford it.”

“Oh, wouldn’t that be fine! I believe Mrs. Brown would pay Annis’s expenses if she knew you wanted her to go. She was saying the other day that Annis ought to have a change after her illness. Will you take her if she can go?”

“Most certainly.”

In consequence, to the delight of the two girls, it was arranged that Annis should go, and the three set off full of expectation.

“I feel exactly as if I were going on a pilgrimage,” declared Persis. “Let me see, we are going to the old Carter place first, Annis, and then to the Herricks’. There are distant cousins scattered all through that part of the country, and we shall be continually coming upon some of them. I can hear the old ladies exclaim over Mary Carter’s grand-daughter, for you know you are a discovery, and your existence has never been known to them. They will put on their spectacles and turn you round to the light, to see if you look like the Carters, or who you are like; won’t they, grandma? Are we going to that queer little town where those three sisters live, the ones who are so old? Annis, they are so funny; the youngest one is nearly seventy, and her two older sisters always treat her as if she were such a young, frivolous thing that they are afraid she might elope with the milkman, or do

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some equally giddy thing, if they didn't keep a strict watch over her. They call her 'Babe' still, and she wears little blue bows in her hair and at her collar because blue was considered her color when she was young. Aunt Esther told me about them. We call them the Grææ."

"We go there first," Mrs. Estabrook informed them. "Cousin Cyrene is always the family news-letter, and we shall be able to make a number of little trips from their village, keeping that place as our headquarters."

And at last when Parkerville was called the girls stepped out on the platform of the station, with curious eyes ready to take in every detail of the little place. In a lumbering old coach they were taken to the small hotel, which rejoiced in the name of the "Mansion House," and presently were conducted to their rooms by a small colored boy. After passing along two long porches they found themselves at one end of the building, where three large comfortable rooms were opened to them.

"Isn't this fine?" cried Persis. "I think it is great to come to such a funny old place. Do you see, Annis? All the rooms open on the porch, and you don't go through any inside hall-way at all. Oh, look at those mountains right in front of us. Aren't they lovely and blue?" [Pg 211]

"Persis is fairly bubbling over," Annis asserted.

"Oh, I am; and I am as hungry as a hunter. Oh! what's that?"

"Only a gong, my child," replied Mrs. Estabrook, looking with amused eyes at the two girls, who had started at the sound of the clamorous summons. "It is the same old gong that has sounded here for dinner these fifty years."

"Oh, is that it? Now that I know it is such a dear old-fashioned thing, I am charmed with it," Persis assured the others. "I am ready to admire everything antique, you know, so long as they draw the line at butter and mutton."

Passing through the long porch, down a flight of steps, through another porch to the other end of the building, they reached the dining-room, where a most excellent and plentiful dinner was served them. "Fried chicken and hot biscuits," said Persis. "Now I know I am in Virginia. I think this place is perfectly fascinating. I am almost sorry we shall never be able to live here. Oh, Annis, maybe we can start our paper here." And they both laughed.

Up the long street, along whose sides were gardens where lilacs were making ready to bloom, they took their way that afternoon, and finally stopped at one of the oldest houses, long, low, and white.

"The Grææ live here," whispered Persis. "I think they still have only one tooth between them." [Pg 212]

Annis nodded appreciatively and looked around with curiosity at the huge brass knocker which Mrs. Estabrook lifted.

With exclamations of pleased astonishment the visitors were greeted by the eldest of the sisters. "Why, Persis Carter, it isn't you!" exclaimed Miss Cyrene. "Columbus," addressing a small colored boy, "go tell Miss Sidney and Miss Babe that our cousins are here. And these are your grandchildren, I suppose, Persis. Come here, my dears; let me look at you. They are quite young ladies."

"Only one is my grand-daughter. I will leave you to guess who the other is," returned Mrs. Estabrook.

"Not Mary's grand-daughter, of whom I heard! Some one wrote me that she had been discovered. Hurry, Columbus! Dear! dear! where are those girls?"

"Those girls" soon appeared, the frivolous Babe all fluttering ends of ribbon and gay apparel, the inevitable blue bow perched upon her hair.

“See, Sidney! see, Babe! this is Mary Carter’s grandchild,—the fair one. Isn’t it wonderful? And we always heard she left no child.”

“Isn’t it wonderful?” repeated the other two sisters in a breath.

“There is a little look of the Carters about her, I think,” continued Miss Cyrene, scrutinizing Annis closely.



“This is Mary Carter’s grandchild.”

“A little look of the Carters,” echoed the two sisters. And Persis gave Annis a glance [Pg 213] which nearly upset the latter’s gravity.

The conversation continued to be carried on in this manner; playful allusions were made to Babe's being so thoughtless, and these were received by the youngest sister with slight bridlings and protestations of, "Now, Cyrene, not always."

All the family news was dispensed, and an urgent invitation was given the visitors to make this house their stopping-place. This, however, was declined, but a compromise was made by giving a promise to spend an afternoon with the old ladies; and the girls, with Mrs. Estabrook, departed.

"Oh, aren't they fun?" cried Persis, when she was out of hearing. "Annis, I wonder if you and I will get that way when we grow old? We have made up our minds not to marry, remember."

Annis laughed. "But I don't believe Miss Babe has made up her mind not to be married," she said.

"Isn't she a dear, coquettish old thing? I wouldn't have her more sensible for the world."

"She is delicious. Perhaps if we should come here to live we would be the same. Oh, Persis, wouldn't Mellicent love to have that family tree they showed us? You are down there on a little, tiny leaf."

"Yes, and I shall remain on the little, tiny leaf all alone. After all, there is something rather pathetic in the thought that I shall go down to posterity only as a collateral, no matter how famous I may be in my age and generation. Oh, Annis, you and your father must go down on that tree!"

"Yes; Miss Sidney said she would finish out Mary Carter's twig; and she seemed so pleased to think the opportunity was afforded her. You know she made all those little twigs and leaves herself, and takes great pride in it."

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The travellers were too tired to do more that evening than take a walk about the village, which was fraught with interest to them, as Mrs. Estabrook pointed out the scenes of various events of family history. There stood the old ivy-clad church where the Carters had worshipped for generations; from the door-way many a bridal procession had gone forth. In yonder brick house, surrounded with trees and walled about by a brick barrier ten feet high, lived the famous Judge Herrick, beneath whose roof many notables had been entertained. In such a spot a duel had been fought. At this corner stood an old pump at which Mrs. Estabrook remembered stopping many a time when a little girl. And so it went till, tired out, they returned to their hotel ready for supper and for an early going to bed.

A drive the next day took them to a true specimen of an old Virginia plantation, where they were all greeted cordially by other cousins of several removes, but who, though distant in relationship, were far from being so in manner, and who would have had them stay indefinitely.

This was the old Carter homestead, and here was the garden of Persis's childish recollection. Every foot of ground was familiar to Mrs. Estabrook, whose father and grandfather were born upon the spot, and tender retrospection almost overcame her as they drove up before the door. From here Mary Carter had gone forth never to return, and in her old room her own grand-daughter slept that night.

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Annis and Persis sat up solemnly in the high four-posted bedstead and looked almost with awe around the room, which contained the old pieces of furniture in use a hundred years ago.

"We are to go to Cousin Ambrose Peyton's to-morrow," said Persis. "Grandma will not go with us. I think she feels a little bit tired from all this junketing, and it wears upon her feelings, too, so Cousin Dolly Peyton is going with us. We must call her cousin, although she is four removes. I can scarcely keep them all straight in my mind; can you, Annis? They all seem, however, to have the various ramifications at their fingers' ends. I am

quite anxious to see Cousin Ambrose. He is an old bachelor, and lives on the adjoining place. You know that is where I went when I was a tot and ran away from my nurse."

The stately old gentleman who received them the next day, although showing a kindly interest in Annis, scanned Persis narrowly as he took her face between his hands and looked at her.

"So you are little Persis," he said; "little Persis. I remember you."

"And I remember you," returned Persis. "I ran away and came to see you once upon a time. You fed me on ripe gooseberries and let me play with that very Venus over there. I remember when they came for me I had dressed up the statue in one of your silk handkerchiefs and was having a fine time. Oh, mayn't I go see the garden where the gooseberry bushes grew? And the old well; is it still there?" [Pg 216]

"Still there. If you will excuse me, Cousin Dolly will go with you and show them to you, while I devote myself to Miss Brown." And the courtly bow accompanying the words showed Persis that there was no lack of gallantry in the suggestion that she should go without him.

"I am going to ask your acceptance of the little statuette," he said before they parted, giving the exquisitely modelled figure into her hands.

"Oh, no," protested Persis. "You have always had it just in that place. It seems too bad to rob you of it."

"The pleasure would be much greater if I knew it was in your possession," returned the old gentleman, with his most dignified bow. "I beg of you to do me the honor of accepting it." And Persis could but consent, feeling that he really wanted her to have it.

He also gave to Annis a delicately carved little ivory box which she admired, and then he led the way into the library, where the family portraits hung.

Here Persis caught sight of an old desk in one corner. "I just love that old desk. How well I remember it!" she exclaimed. "You took me on your lap and let me write supposed letters with real ink,—not only black, but red. I can remember what a joy it was to be allowed to do that. I had always longed to dabble in ink, which was one of the forbidden things. I've no doubt I made a spectacle of myself with it." [Pg 217]

Mr. Peyton smiled at the recollection of the small inky fingers which had been so ready with the pen. "You still love to dabble with ink, I hear," he made answer, adding, "I cannot express the pleasure it has given me to see you again." And when they took their leave shortly after, he held Persis's hand fast, then bent with a grave grace and kissed her cheek. "You should have been my grand-daughter," he said.

Both the girls were rather silent on the return drive, although Cousin Dolly chatted volubly and told them tales of the neighbors whose homes she pointed out. The moment they were in-doors Persis ran to her grandmother. "Oh, grandma," she whispered, "how could you?"

"How could I what, my dear?"

"How could you not marry that dear, nice Cousin Ambrose Peyton?"

Mrs. Estabrook smiled a little sadly. "So you have jumped at that conclusion. Some day I will tell you; but you must not rake over old ashes just now. One of these days you shall hear all about it. How did you find Cousin Ambrose?"

"He is charming; but I don't think he is in very good health. Cousin Dolly says he is not, and it seemed so to me; but oh, grandma, what a delightful old house it is! I did enjoy it so; and see what he gave me." And she displayed the Venus.

"Mr. Peyton asked me such a lot of questions about you," Annis told Persis; "what kind of a girl you were, and all about you." [Pg 218]

"And you told him a lot of stuff, no doubt. You made a perfect dime-novel heroine of me, I'll venture to say."

"I told him the truth," insisted Annis. "I told him you were the dearest, truest, most unselfish girl in the world, and—and—oh, lots of things; and he was very much interested. You know there are some subjects upon which I can talk even if I am not usually a loquacious individual."

"I know you are a dear old flatterer," returned Persis, giving her a hug.

The remainder of the week was spent in further journeying to kinfolk in the neighborhood, and everywhere so warm a welcome met them that Annis was quite overpowered. "The people where I have been," she said, "usually hunt around for excuses not to entertain you, but down this way they do just the opposite. I never knew such hospitality; but then I've never been below Mason and Dixon's line before, although my father was a Marylander. I must say I like these lovely, warm-hearted people."

"I knew you would," returned Persis. "I am so glad we came."

But no visits made such an impression on the girls as those paid to the stately Cousin Ambrose and to the Three Gray Sisters. Tea taken with the latter proved an event of great interest. Such beautiful old china and silver graced the table,—silver that was hidden under a tree in the garden during the war, and china that escaped being demolished by being taken to the cabin of one of the darky adherents of the family. Such a source of reminiscence and family history was Miss Cyrene, and the girls sat spellbound as she told them tale after tale full of thrilling incident.

[Pg 219]

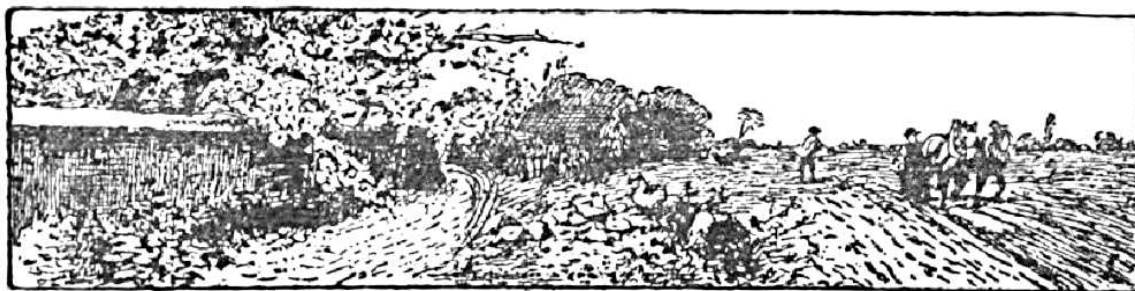
"I'd like to have her give a lecture before our club," said Persis afterward; "she is so interesting. I love to hear those war stories, and all about those duels and law-suits and valorous deeds. They make me tingle to write them down. I think we must utilize them some day."

"In our paper," put in Annis.

Persis nodded and settled her head back against the cushions of the car, for they were then on their way home.

"Such a delightful, interesting time we have had, coming home seems very dull," Persis said, as they turned the corner nearest the house. "I wish we could find something surprising to meet us," she added, as she mounted the steps.

Strange to say, the surprise was there, for when she opened the door of her room there sat Lisa.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE OLD DESK.

Such a cry of delight as went up when Persis discovered her sister. "Why, Lisa! Lisa! Lisa!" she exclaimed, her voice rising with each reiteration. "When did you come? How did you get here? Oh, you dear old thing! Let me see if your eyes have a slant upward, and if you wear bodkins stuck in your hair. No, you look quite, quite natural." And the hugging that followed left scarce breath for utterance to either of them.

"Didn't I surprise you nicely?" said Lisa, at length. "I sent a despatch from 'Frisco, but you were away, and Mell begged mamma not to let you know, and I am glad she didn't. Yes, I am safe and sound. I had a chance to come with some friends as far as New York and the rest of the way was nothing. Let me look at you, Perse. You haven't grown as much as Melly. I believe she is as tall as you."

"Yes, she is, and a wee bit taller," confessed Persis. "Now tell me all about yourself. Oh, my, but we shall have to talk all night for a week, to catch up. Aunt Esther didn't come with you?" [Pg 221]

"No; the captain is there for three years, you know. I just had to come home, although I have had a perfectly lovely time. Oh, Persis, how you would enjoy seeing that interesting Japan! Aunt Esther did everything in the world to make it pleasant for me, and—well, altogether it has been a great experience."

Persis's eyes were roving over her sister, dwelling on her beauty and taking in every detail of her face and figure. Presently she darted forward and caught Lisa's hand. "Lisa," she cried, "where did you get that ring? Did Aunt Esther give it to you?" And Lisa blushed up to her eyes.

"That?" she answered, trying to look unconcerned. "No, Aunt Esther didn't give it to me. Oh, Persis, I shall have to tell you. I am engaged."

Persis dropped the hand on which the diamond shone, and looked as if she were ready either to laugh or cry. "Not to a Japanese!" she said, quizzically.

"You ridiculous girl. No; although one might go farther and fare much worse."

"You couldn't go much farther," answered Persis.

"Well, he isn't a Japanese. He is a *bonâ fide* stars-and-stripes American; so much so that he is in the United States navy,—a lieutenant, Perse, and his name is Richard Griffith."

"Oh, yes; I remember your having written about him to us. Go on; tell me everything."

"Well, he went out on the same steamer that we did to join his ship, and right away I liked him. He has another year's sea duty; then he will have land duty for three years, and—he is a dear, good fellow." [Pg 222]

"Of course. Although I always have heard that these naval officers are great flirts, and are not always as moral as they should be. Who is he the most like,—the Popinjay or Mr. Dan?"

Lisa blushed a little. "He isn't like either of them. He is thoroughly manly and intelligent, and yet he likes society; and as for his morals, he is as good as gold. Even Aunt Esther approves of him."

"And are you dreadfully in love with him?"

"What a probe you are, Perse. Of course I am."

"How could you come away, then?"

"Because I do care so much for him that I wanted to come home to get ready to be married."

"Oh, Lisa, not yet. You are so young."

"That is what mamma says; but I think when Richard is recalled and she sees him, she will consent. Now tell me all about your trip. I have had a chance to hear most of the home news, for I have been home a day and a half."

"I'm so flabbergasted by your news," returned Persis, "that everything else is knocked out of my head. I wish your young man were here for me to see."

"So do I; but I can show you his photograph." And Lisa produced the picture.

"He isn't handsome, but he has a nice face."

"No, he isn't specially good-looking, but he is just my dear Rick, and I would not have him any different." And Lisa put away the photograph a little jealously. "I told you we met on the way out, and I have seen him nearly every day since, so you see we have had a good opportunity of knowing each other well."

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Here came a knock at the door, and a box was handed in by Lyddy. "For you, Miss Persis."

"For me?" And Persis opened the box with some curiosity. "Oh, see, Lisa: flowers from Mr. Dan. I wasn't here at Easter, so he has sent them as a welcome home. Isn't it nice of him?"

"Yes; very. I hear great accounts of you and Mr. Dan. I think he will suit you very well, Perse."

"Suit me? What do you mean? Why, Lisa, I never gave him a sentimental thought. We are just good comrades; that's all. He has been awfully good to me. Do you suppose ——" And Persis stopped. Could there be any other than friendship's message intended to be conveyed by the flowers? "Nonsense!" she said. "We're in business together; that's all. Don't you put notions in my head, Miss Lisa, and go thinking every one is in your fix."

Lisa laughed and then looked rather thoughtful. "I'm going to tell you a secret, Perse. I don't mind your knowing it now, for it's all done with long ago, but do you know, when I went away I was quite interested in Mr. Dan myself."

"You! Why, Lisa, I thought you couldn't bear him. Then that is why you acted so."

Lisa nodded. "Yes, I suppose it was," she said, after a moment's reflection. "I told mamma, and that was why she was willing to have me go with Aunt Esther, for, Persis, he wasn't near so much interested in me as I was in him, and I was getting unhappy over it; so you see I did just the right thing. Of course, girls often do have two or three fancies sometimes before they really find their true love. Mamma was such a help. She saw just how it all was, and she wrote me exactly the best things to make me get over it. Don't think for a moment that I owe Mr. Danforth a grudge; in fact, I feel myself rather under obligations to him, for he opened my eyes to several very wholesome truths, and I am sure I should never have appreciated Richard's goodness quite so much if Mr. Danforth had not shown me what to avoid in men and what qualities to cultivate in myself. Really I feel quite inclined to offer him my thanks."

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Persis was very thoughtful. "I should like to have had Mr. Dan for a brother," she said.

“Really?”

“Yes, really. I wish you hadn’t told me, for I shall always be regretting. I wish now you had not gone away, for it might have been different after a while.”

Lisa shook her head. “That is disloyalty to my Richard, to which I shall not listen. Come, Persis, let’s go down. I haven’t seen grandma, remember. How I do miss the boys!”

Persis sighed. “So do I, although we see them nearly every day; but it isn’t like having them here. I actually hate to go by Basil’s room now.”

“Persis!”

“What?”

“Nothing.” And Lisa refrained from a speech which she intended to make, thinking that perhaps here was a reason for her sister’s finding no message in the roses. [Pg 225]

“The house seems more like itself with my pretty maids all here,” Mrs. Holmes said, fondly, as she looked at the bright faces of her daughters in the library that evening. “It will be many a day before I spare one of them again.”

“Oh, mamma!” expostulated Lisa.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Holmes, decidedly. “You must remember that neither of your parents has as yet seen your sailor lad, and the engagement is only conditional until we do see him, and must not be announced. You are too young to think of nest-making yet, the pair of you.”

“Yes, my Nancy Lee,” interposed Persis; “take the advice of your wise sister and ‘bide a wee.’ You won’t find me so ready to leave you, mammy.” And Persis patted her mother’s face with her pretty soft hand.

“What about college?”

“Oh, college is different; that is just for a time. I’ll go just to make you glad to have me back again, and you’ll be so glad you’ll want to keep me always. It does seem a shame to break up the constellation, as Ned Carew calls us. I asked him which one we represented, and he had some dim idea of meaning the Pleiades, I think, until I reminded him that we are not seven; and then he said, ‘Ah, you’re those bright stars in a row. What d’ye call ’em? Orion’s belt.’ Now you know where we belong, girls.”

“That sounds like Ned. How is my late adorer, by the way?” asked Lisa.

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“He is well. In your absence he has been devoting himself to Audrey, and in consequence the relations are somewhat strained between the Pigeon and the Milesian.”

“‘Wha’ fo’?’ as Prue says,” inquired Lisa.

“Because Pidgy does not admire the Grasshopper, and Audrey is quite grown up nowadays. She is quite a society lady, while Melly is only a school-girl yet; so you see, like the conundrum, Why does a duck go in the water? it’s for divers reasons.”

“What about the other girls? How is Connie?”

“Oh, poor Connie, or, rather, fortunate Connie. Mrs. Steuart died about a year ago, Imogene is married and has gone to another city to live, and Oriana lives with her. And, what do you think? Connie is living at Mrs. Dixon’s. I think it was lovely of Mrs. Dixon to have her, and it will mean everything to Connie. She has refined instincts, but they were in danger of being blunted by her home surroundings. Mr. Steuart is off somewhere all the time. I don’t think much of him anyway. And Bud? oh, Bud is with his brother-in-law in some large mill or factory or something. Imogene really did very well in her marriage. And that is the news in Connie’s direction. Nellie Hall is just the same dear old good thing, and Margaret Greene has joined all the clubs going. Kit Carew is engaged to—guess who?”

“I can’t.”

“The Toad.”

“No!”

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“Yes, truly. I don’t see how she can like him; but he ought to be very good, for he is not beautiful, although I believe he is quite wealthy.”

Mrs. Estabrook’s entrance then caused the conversation to turn upon the incidents of the trip just taken, and Persis produced the little statuette which Mr. Peyton had given her; and that night she told Lisa the story of it and of her impression of Mr. Peyton.

“Isn’t it queer,” she said, “to think of grandma’s being the heroine of a romance? I know there is one about her and Mr. Peyton, and to think that even now he feels so about her. It isn’t usual to find such constancy, is it?”

“No; I think not, nowadays. It’s more often on with the new love before you are off with the old.”

“I don’t like that,” returned Persis. “I think men and women should be as honorable in their love affairs as in their business, and they are not. I do not believe in that saying, ‘All’s fair in love and war.’ All isn’t fair, and persons have no right to deceive each other. They’ll be sure to get found out some day, and then they bring unhappiness to some one, if not to themselves.”

“Yes, my wise mentor. How did you learn so much, Tommy?”

“Watching other people and thinking very hard; but I’d like to know the truth about Mr. Peyton.”

Some time after Persis heard the story. It was when the announcement of Mr. Peyton’s death reached her, conveyed by means of a letter from one of his executors, who stated that the old desk, with its contents, was left as a bequest to “Persis Carter’s granddaughter, Persis Holmes.” A few days later the desk was sent, and since Persis’s snuggerly was too small to accommodate it, after some planning it was decided that the second daughter really needed a room of her own, and so Lisa took her possessions into the larger apartment, formerly occupied by the boys, and Persis set up her desk by the window.

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Annis was on hand when the big piece of furniture arrived, and viewed it with much satisfaction. “Isn’t it a dear old thing?” she said.

“Yes. I feel quite pensively sentimental over it. I think it was so good of Cousin Ambrose to leave it to me.”

“Have you examined the contents?”

“Yes. I found some old books and coins,—nice old books they are, too. On the fly-leaf of one I found, ‘To Ambrose Peyton; from his cousin, Persis Carter.’ Then there are some volumes of history and a very old edition of Shakespeare.”

Annis was opening the various doors and compartments of the old desk. “Oh, here is a tiny little drawer,” she said. “It has a big envelope in it. Have you seen that?”

“No; where did you find it?”

“Here, in this little place that opens like a sliding panel.”

“I never thought of looking there. Let me see. Why, Annis, it is addressed to me.”

“Open it, Persis. Hurry! let us see what is inside.” And Persis broke the heavy seal. “Why, what are these things?” she exclaimed. “And there is a letter and a ring.” Opening the letter she read:

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“TO MISS PERSIS HOLMES:

“MY DEAR CHILD,—The pleasure which I have lately received from your visit has renewed an old desire to emphasize in some substantial way my obligation to and affection for your grandmother. Many years ago I was the suitor for the hand of my cousin, Persis Carter, who always has been and always must be the loveliest woman

in the world to me. But, alas! I was not worthy, and your beloved grandmother, my cousin, Persis Carter, would not consent to link her fate with one who chose to degrade his manhood by the use of the intoxicating glass. She married a good and noble man, and was a happy wife and mother. It was only when I lost her that I realized what a foe to me was the wine-cup. But her dear helping hand was stretched out to save me, for when, in a moment of frenzy, I struck down a neighbor, believing I had killed him—which, thank God! I had not—I fled to her and she saved me, not only from myself, but from the consequence of the act which threatened to brand me as a criminal. I have never seen her since then, but her image has never faded and her nobleness and generosity has been ever a holy memory. I feel that my days are numbered, and for the sake of Persis Carter I wish to bestow upon her namesake this token of my undying gratitude and affection. Your little friend has told me of your hopes and ambitions. May this gift help you to become as wise and good a woman as my beloved cousin, Persis Carter. The little ring was my mother's. I had intended it for the Persis whom I hoped would be my wife."

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"Faithfully yours,"

"AMBROSE PEYTON."

"Oh, Annis!" Persis exclaimed, her eyes full of tears; "isn't it sad, sad? The dear old man! How he has suffered; and what a story lies between the lines! Dear, dear grandma, who could believe to look at her that such a tragedy as that had been so near her!"

While Persis was reading the letter Annis was attentively looking over the other papers which lay in her lap. "Why, Persis," she said, "these are bonds,—government bonds!"

"What?"

"Yes. Why, Persis! why, Persis! there are one, two, ten thousand dollars' worth of government bonds! Oh! oh!"

"No! I don't believe it!"

"Yes, they are, truly. Look!"

Persis dropped down on the floor all in a heap and began to cry.

"Why, Persis Holmes!"

"I can't help it! I can't help it! First Lisa comes home and tells me she is engaged, and then I read that letter, and then this comes. It is too much all at once. I seem to see that poor, young, desperate fellow rushing to his cousin and begging her help. I can see grandma appealing to his better self. I can see him, with the shadow of guilt following him, fighting against temptation."

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"Don't get so wrought up, Persis. You are so excited you are trembling all over."

"Where is that little ring? I want that."

"I believe you would rather have it than the bonds."

"So I would, just at this moment. Let me indulge my sentimentality for a little while."

"Well, then, here is the ring. Isn't it pretty—just those three big milk-white pearls?"

Persis put it on her finger and sat pensively regarding it. "I shall always wear it," she said. "I shall be true to you, Cousin Ambrose."

"What deadly sentimentality!" laughed Annis. "I never would have believed it of you. Come, let us go show these bonds to your father."

Persis jumped up. "Very well, I have finished mourning over the ring. Oh, Annis, if they really are government bonds, college does become a very solid fact. To think of my being a 'bloated bond-holder'! What in the world did you say to Cousin Ambrose about me?"

"I confess I told him that you were longing to take a college course, and I told him, too, of all your grandmother and you have done for us; how you plucked us from the

‘wall of poverty’ and sat us upon the ‘hill of prosperity,’ and—well—all that kind of thing; but I never dreamed it would bring this result, or I should have told still more.”

“I never would have dreamed that you could be so communicative and diplomatic. [Pg 232]
After all, then, it is your doing.”

“No; it is the reward of merit. Just as it comes out in books, virtue is rewarded and the evil-doer is punished.”

“Who is the evil-doer in this case? He hasn’t appeared upon the scene so far. We must tell grandma before we go to any one else. Come; she is in her room.”



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CHAPTER XX.

WINGS TO FLY.

Persis's government bonds were indeed a most unexpected windfall, and the family was given an entire surprise, for Mr. Peyton had a sister and a brother to whom all his property would naturally be supposed to go, and conscientious Persis at first rather demurred about accepting the legacy, but as the executors informed her it was a strictly legal matter, and as Mr. Peyton's sister and brother were not needy, she was glad to set aside her compunctions, and accepted her bonds gratefully.

"You and Annis, grandma, how much you have done for me!" she said. "Isn't it strange that Annis should have discovered the envelope, and that it was she who put it into Mr. Peyton's head to remember me? Doesn't it seem like bread upon the waters?"

"It does, indeed. I have regretted your giving up college more than I can tell you, and now all is made smooth."

"Do you suppose Mr. Peyton really knew that he had such a short time to live?"

"Yes, I think so. I, too, have had a last word." And grandma's face took on a grave look. [Pg 234]

"Oh, grandma, have you?"

"Yes, dear; the letter was written just after your visit. I think it is dated that same day. He said that he knew his time was short, and that he wanted you to have what would have been yours if you had really been his grand-daughter. Life was a battle for him in many ways. With all the comforts which his means provided, he still had a strangely sad life, and I am thankful that he is at rest. The things he most desired in this world were never his; many things which might have added to his happiness seemed to slip away from him. He was a great lover of books, yet for years he was not able to use his eyes except for a few moments at a time, two or three times a day, and there were other trials from which he was never free."

"How little we know," Persis replied, softly. "I thought him such a fortunate man. What a year of changes it has been. In it Lisa has been away, and has come back engaged; the boys have left us; I have started on my journalistic work; and now this comes. Before that everything went along so uneventfully. I believe the changes have dated from our discovery of Annis."

But there were more changes to come, which were to involve the entire family. The question of Persis's college career was first considered, and it was decided that she should make her home with Mrs. Brown and Annis while she was away. Then came a decision to be made regarding Mellicent, who had shot up into a tall girl so suddenly that she had outgrown her strength, and the doctor advised a warmer climate and cessation from study for at least a year. How this question was to be met was determined most delightfully and opportunely for Mellicent by a sudden offer on the part of the college to send Professor Holmes abroad on an archæological expedition which would take him to Greece and Egypt, and there seemed nothing better to be done than for Mrs. Holmes and Mellicent to accompany him. [Pg 235]

“Dear! dear!” Persis exclaimed when this was told her. “Just think how my sisters are outdoing me. Here Lisa has been to Japan, and Mellicent is going to Egypt, while I——”

“You are going to college, which is a place neither of us is likely to go,” put in Mellicent, aptly.

“True, and when I get my degree I’ll go abroad; or maybe, Lisa, you will be living in Japan. You know your Richard is likely to be ordered anywhere, and you’ll tag after him, I suppose, so I’ll perhaps be able to visit you in some of the out-of-the-way corners of the world.”

“Yes, that is something to anticipate, but just at present I am wondering what is to be done with me while you are all planning for next winter. It doesn’t seem to occur to any one that I am left out of all these calculations. I believe, after all, I shall have to be married in order to have a home and a protector.”

“Not a bit of it,” put in Basil, who was present at this family session. “You know mother has leased Mrs. Brown’s house, and you can come to us, you and Mrs. Estabrook. Then you can shut up this house and give it no further thought.” [Pg 236]

“That’s very kind of you,” Lisa replied, “but no doubt grandma and I can manage to live very cosily here together.”

However, the suggestion started a new idea, and it was decided, after much importuning from Persis and Annis, that Mrs. Estabrook should go with Mrs. Brown, “to keep an eye on Persis,” she said, although every one knew that it was really an excuse to be near her favorite, and that Lisa should go with her parents and Mellicent.

“I don’t feel as if I could part from my girl again so soon,” Mrs. Holmes had said. “And we shall be gone but six months from the first of November. Persis can go with the Browns, and grandma can join her when we are ready to shut up the house.”

Mrs. Brown at last consented to accept a small sum for board from Persis, and Mrs. Estabrook made the same arrangement, so that the matter was adjusted comfortably.

During the intervening time there were many plots and plans laid. Persis exacted a promise from Lisa that she would not think of marrying during the college session, but when the marriage did take place it should be in the month of June, when Persis would be free from college exactions.

“Of course I shall be best girl,” declared Persis, “and Mell can be bridesmaid, with—who else, Lisa?”

“Oh, I don’t know; Margaret Greene and Nellie Hall and Annis, I think.”

Persis looked pleased. “That’s nice of you, Lisa; and is there anything gayer than a military or a naval wedding, with all the men in their uniforms and everything so fine! I believe you thought of that when you decided to accept Mr. Griffith.” [Pg 237]

“No, I didn’t,” Lisa protested. She was very lovable these days. Whether it was due to her stay with the gentle, courteous Japanese, or to the happiness she felt in her engagement, Persis could not determine, but she certainly found her sister’s arrogance much softened. “She seems to be on good terms with the whole world,” Persis said to herself.

“No, I didn’t,” repeated Lisa. “I liked him because he was so thoughtful of every one, and so good and frank. He never pretended not to like me from the first. He always looked it; and yet he has seldom said he admired me. I think he brought all the best of me to the surface by his belief in that best. You can’t help liking him, Tommy; he is so genuine.”

Persis laughed. “I never expected to hear you go on in this way. I might look for it in the Pigeon, but in the Princess, never.”

This was a few days after Persis had returned from her trip to Virginia, and the two girls were unpacking one of Lisa’s trunks, which had just come on from San Francisco.

“There,” and Lisa shook out a gay costume, “I bought this specially for you. Put it on, Persis, and I will dress your hair *à la* Japanese, and you can make yourself look exactly like one. Let me see,” as Persis made narrow slits of her eyes and screwed up her mouth after the manner of a figure on a face. “I knew it,” continued Lisa. “Here are two of those queer little silver shields that are worn on the fingers to make them taper. I thought they could be mounted as pins for you and Melly.” [Pg 238]

“How odd and pretty!” returned Persis, duly admiring them. And next Lisa proceeded to arrange her sister’s glossy black hair.

“Now go off and show yourself,” she said, when she had completed the wonderful structure. “Wait till I stick these funny pins in for ornament. Now take that fan.” And she followed the droll figure down-stairs, laughing at the exact reproduction. “I hear Basil in the library,” she said. “Stand there, Persis, by the door of the dining-room by the big screen.” And Persis obeyed.

Before Basil made his appearance, Prue came in with a tray full of dishes. She stared at Persis, who stood immovable. Prue’s curiosity was aroused. She stepped up with her head to one side, and Persis made a sudden movement. “Law, it’s alive!” exclaimed Prue. “I thought it was one o’ them Chinees figgers.”

Lisa and Basil, coming in, joined in the laugh; then Basil turned Persis around and admired her pretty, comfortable dress. “I must make a sketch of you Persis,” he said. “You’re a regular Japanese decoration.”

“I suppose I’ve got to go and take off these things; it’s dinner-time.” Persis spoke regretfully. “Don’t tell me the Japanese are not more civilized than we are. I never wore such a satisfactory costume.”

“Keep it on,” suggested Lisa, “and let the family see it when they come down to dinner.” And Persis was only too glad to retain the convenient attire, and actually sat down to dinner in her odd array, rather to the disapproval of Mrs. Estabrook, who was somewhat particular in such matters. [Pg 239]

Once more the original company gathered together at Bellingly for the summer. Ruth was overjoyed to see Lisa again, but the little girl was outgrowing her belief in fairies, and Callie was fading into a creature of the past. Patience and Amber still held their places in the child’s affection, but such a very sedate cat now objected to being dressed up as a fairy prince, and, moreover, was now seldom called upon to take such a character, while Patience sometimes sat for a whole day staring ahead of her without once changing her point of vision. The reason of this was that Ruth had acquired such a love of reading that she devoured eagerly anything she could lay her hands upon,—from works on theology to the lightest of light magazines.

Mr. Danforth spent his infrequent holidays with these friends, and it amused Lisa to see Persis’s interest in the long galley-proofs he brought her and Mr. Danforth’s interest in the girl herself.

He and Lisa were now on excellent terms. Had she but known it, the pretty girl was much more attractive to the young man in her present happy, gracious humor, when she demanded nothing and was at peace with every one. They had pleasant talks together when Persis was off on what she called her metalsome steed with her “brother Basil.” Quite as often it was Annis who was Basil’s companion, while Persis and “Mr. Dan” were still discussing the work of the paper. Then Lisa, with eyes made wise by her new experiences, saw possibilities which probably none of the others discerned. Lisa liked much to be with her grandmother these days. To the dear old lady she could talk of her sailor-boy and be sure of an interested and sympathetic listener. [Pg 240]

“To think of Persis being so grown up! eighteen! think of it, grandma,” she said one day. “I can hardly realize it; and Annis a young lady, too. Don’t you think Annis likes Basil very much?”

“Does she? I had not observed it.”

Lisa laughed. "Oh, grandma, I suppose I am looking for romances on every side. I see that Mr. Danforth likes Persis more than she suspects, and that Annis always looks very happy when she is with Basil,—shy little Annis; and that Persis, dear old Tommy——"

"What of her?" asked Mrs. Estabrook, a trifle anxiously.

"She is heart free. I don't believe her heart has waked up yet. She finds in Mr. Danforth a good comrade; she is as free from consciousness and is as spontaneous as need be in his company, and the same with Basil, although sometimes I have seen her watch Annis and Basil rather closely. Basil, like Persis, doesn't think about the girls except in the light of comrades."

"Well, my dear, there is plenty of time to settle all those questions. Probably each one will make some very different selection, eventually. I know Persis has no romantic notions, and I think while she is a college student she will not bother her head over any such matters, if she ever does." [Pg 241]

"She is a woman, and therefore to be wooed," quoted Lisa.

"Time enough," returned grandma. "Let her springtime last as long as possible. I should not disturb her serenity by suggesting possibilities, Lisa."

"That's just why I am telling you. I must talk over my little romances to you, grandma. I think I should prefer Basil for a brother. There is something very lovable about Basil; but you should see my Richard."

Grandma smiled indulgently, but she sighed as she watched Persis come up the lane with Basil and Annis. There was, however, no need of anxiety in Persis's direction. Her eager young mind craved knowledge. Of love she felt she had no lack, so content was she in the affection of her friends and her family, affection to which she responded with all the warmth of her ardent nature. Her dreams held visions of college balls; of days spent in digging for the nuggets of learning; of whys answered and wherefores satisfied; and her serious intent was visible in the lack of coquetry with which she received attention, and in the trend of her girlish enthusiasms. She liked companionship which could yield her pleasant mental stimulus, but she had a lofty scorn for triflers, even though she did enjoy nonsense in a most hearty way.

"Persis's intellect far outstrips mine," Lisa acknowledged, reluctantly. "She is so thorough and so original. I was never anything but a copyist." [Pg 242]

And so the golden summer drifted away, bringing them, at its close, all together again under the home roof, only to be separated. When September's last days came they saw Persis ready to take a new flight. It was hard to be the first to say good-bye, and but for the warm welcome which met her in Mrs. Brown's cosy little home, it would have been a very homesick girl who spent her first night within sight of the college walls.

The first of November found the house deserted, shutters barred, and doors bolted. It looked very lonely to Porter and Basil as they passed it each day on their way to college. But they heard after a time of the safe arrival of the voyagers across the ocean, of the eager diligence with which Persis was taking up her new work, nearer home, of Mrs. Estabrook's interest in the doings of the college community, and of Annis's happiness in having her dearest friend with her.

"We'll see them all next summer, Port," said Basil, "but I do miss them every one."

"And I, too," returned Porter. "They've been awfully good to us, Baz, and we mustn't go back on them, even if they're not here to keep us up to time."

Basil looked down with pride at the tall, manly boy striding along at his side. "I believe Port is going to turn out all right," he thought. "He needed Mr. Dan, as well as the others, to take him in tow." But it was not all Mr. Dan, nor even the others, who had been of most use to Porter, for the unswerving example of his elder brother had been his best guide. [Pg 243]

Afar under unchanging blue skies Lisa dreamed of wedding-bells, and Mellicent drew in strength with each breath of balmy air, so different from the biting winds which Persis faced with glowing cheeks as each day she took her wintry way through the streets of the dignified old town where her college stood.

But hope stood by the three sisters and brought them cheer, whispering to Lisa of love, to Mellicent of health, to Persis of success, and to all of them of a coming happy reunion.

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Transcriber's Notes

- pg 28 Changed: I wont, then.
to: I won't, then.
- pg 127 Changed: Margaret comes out ahead
to: Margaret comes out ahead
- pg 167 Changed: King Mileseus of Spain
to: King Milesius of Spain
- pg 167 Changed: but William the Conquerer
to: but William the Conqueror
- pg 179 Changed: runners appear on the opposite site of the ring
to: runners appear on the opposite side of the ring
- pg 181 Changed: waving hat, hankerchief, even carriage whip
to: waving hat, handkerchief, even carriage whip
- pg 222 Changed: "that everthing else is knocked out
to: "that everything else is knocked out

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