

WHEN BLIND GUIDES LEAD

SPRINGTIME, with its throbbing bird-notes and shining showers, seemed destined to bring mental turmoil and distress to Martha Croyer—Old Martha, as the villagers of Nea called her. Last year this turmoil had amounted almost to anarchy; at any rate she had awakened one fine morning vibrantly alive to the dullness of her lot, resentful and rebellious against every heretofore defended habit of a lifetime.

As banked fires burst into flame at the wind's fanning, so had the long hidden fires of ambition, hope and little tender dreams, leaped into riotous blaze before the storm of her mysteriously awakened discontent. She had looked back along the dull years and in the light of this inner blaze had found them meaningless and futile. In that terrifying moment she had realized the pathos of bartering the soul's birthright for daily bread.

Firm in her newborn independence she had decided then and there to leave her self-satisfied husband to his well-filled barns and sleek cattle, to go her own way at last in search of the more satisfying things of the spirit. But no sooner was her mind adjusted to the intoxicating thought of freedom than a new and sombre development presented itself.

Her nearest neighbor and friend sickened and died, and in dying had enjoined upon Martha to take charge of her little daughter Carrie. So, in one flash of springtime glory, Martha caught the long-lost gleam of youthful ardor and poignant desire, only to lose it again in the shadow of this overwhelming responsibility—yet in this very responsibility she was indeed to find a renewal of happiness.

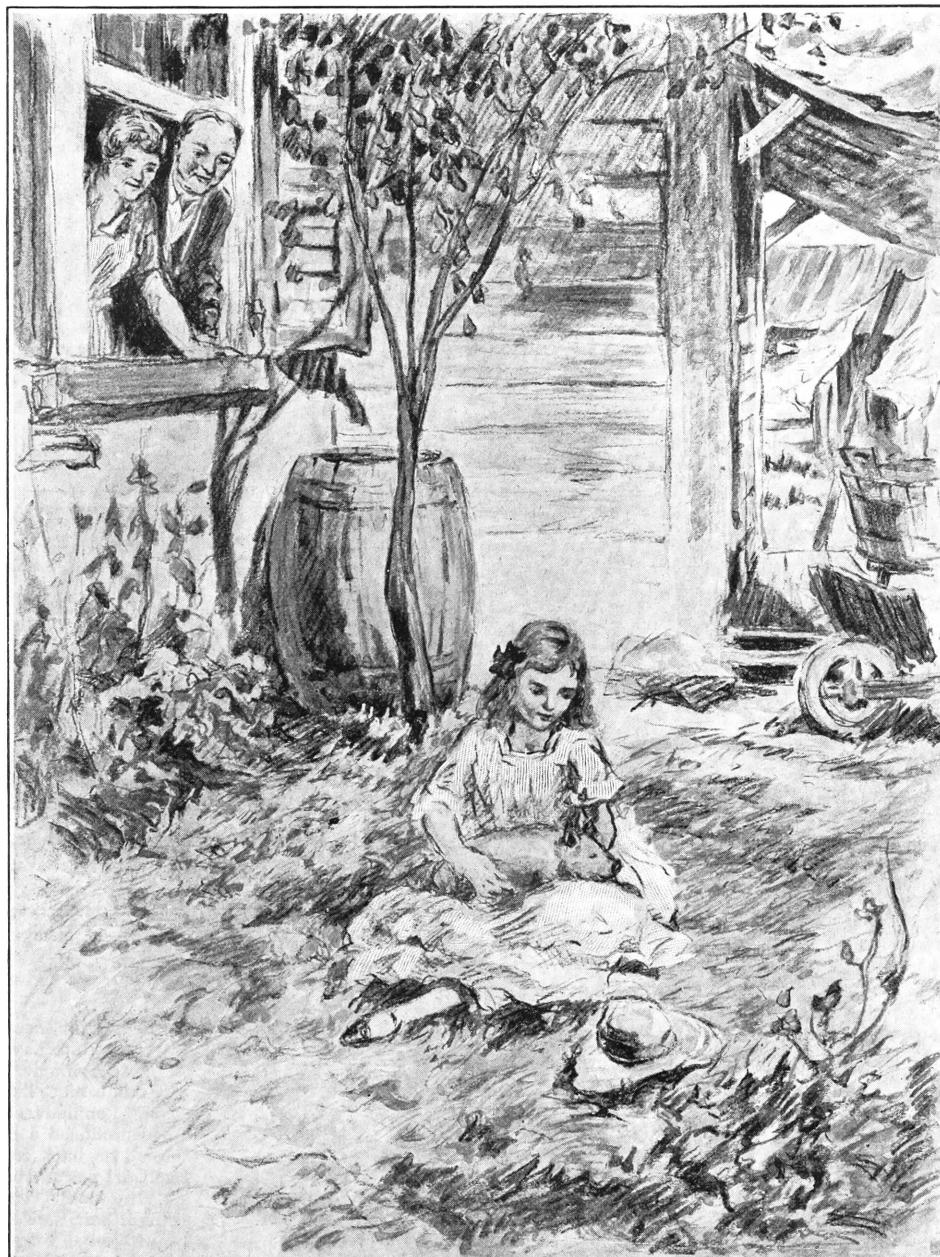
Now another Spring was pouring out its wine upon the dried old world and once again Martha had awakened disturbed and critical, doubtful this time of her right to the past year's happiness.

Throughout the morning this distressing doubt pursued her; agitated and cross, she at last resorted to her knitting—a soothing occupation generally.

OLD MARTHA knitted furiously, frowning above the half-turned sock; and the faster the needles flew the deeper grew her frowning. When the bright blue ball of yarn slipped from the safety of her lap and rolled into the dusty stove corner, she did not trouble to reclaim it—other and more weighty matters preyed upon her mind.

"I declare, Carrie's thinner if anything; seems to me her dresses hang more loosely round her little waist each mortal day. Land sakes, 'taint natural! Here it's another spring since the poor mite's mother up and died, and she still moping. 'Pears to me, Martha Croyer, you're just about a complete failure at this adoption business."

In the midst of this unpleasant soliloquy, Martha discovered she had dropped a stitch, which added to her disapproval of things in general and herself in particular. "A complete failure, that's what . . . There was that poor dying woman with just one awful worry on her mind. 'Martha,' says she, 'take my Carrie, you've no little ones and are well fixed. Take my little Carrie and let her play—until life gets her like the rest of us. Make her happy, Martha, let her be young.' Sakes alive!" groaned the good woman, "if these spirit worshippers are right, what's poor Tillie thinking of me now."



Then John heard a piping little voice singing, as they glanced out of the window, and his banter died.

By LAURA GOODMAN SALVERSON
ILLUSTRATED BY ROY FISHER

Another human story of the prairies, by the noted author of "The Viking Heart."

These reflections proved too much for her; angrily she flung aside her knitting, glanced at the clock and seeing how close upon noon it was, began to hurry up her dinner. Never had she banged the stove-lids more wrathfully nor stirred a boiled dinner with greater fury. Martha was not one to brook defeat easily and she derived, therefore, a sort of pleasure from this abusive method; it was her way of proclaiming that strength still was hers and that she intended to make good use of it.

The old seven-day clock upon the wall chimed the half-hour and Martha, calmer now, stepped to the door-way facing out upon the lane. Yes, there she came, a small, desolate figure, treading carefully, avoiding the jolly brown pools that dotted the path. Somehow this extreme care irritated Martha. "Poor mite, she's afraid

to dirty her boots," she thought. Disquieting visions came to her of wind-blown, marshy places where the dog-eared violets and the great golden cowslips beckoned to erring little feet—came also the companion memory of muddy boots before a glowing hearth and an exasperated mother. Still, somehow, the perfume of violet and wind-blown earth lingered uppermost. "Poor little mite," she whispered, and her eyes grew very soft. What was there for little Carrie to remember? Greasy dishes, wailing babies, and Tillie's plaintively fretful voice—ah yes, and the endless ache of her tiny young arms.

THE little girl looked up; saw her benefactress and waved a thin white hand.

"It's kind o' wet yet, Mis' Croyer," she announced gravely in her soft treble voice, as she wiped her feet carefully on the rag mat outside the door.

Knowledge of her own helplessness made Martha's voice somewhat sharp.

"Sakes alive, child, ain't I told you to stop 'mississing' me. 'Aunt Martha,' that's what I ought to be if anything. There, there, that'll do, you're clean as a cat now; run in and sit by the fire. You'll find a picture paper on the kitchen shelf; your Uncle John's been to the postoffice this morning."

Quietly, obediently, the little girl did as she was bidden; but her fingers were listless as they moved from page to page of the rustling paper; and old Martha, who was watching her from the corner of her eyes, though she seemed intent upon other things, saw how her gaze idled away, straying to the sunny window. "If I could only see the insides of her head," thought old Martha, and with a sigh she asked:

"See any one on the way from school?"

"No'm, least-wise no one particular."

"Your Uncle John met your pa to town this morning. 'Pears like his new wife has persuaded him to move down river."

Carrie heard this in meek silence, but her eyes were more eloquent than words.

"The boys are going along," Martha resumed, "but Mrs. Parks at the feed store is going to keep the baby."

Then a smile, poignant and sweet, illuminated the listless pallor of Carrie's delicate face. "Oh, Mis' Croyer, mayn't I go for the mail Saturday?"

MARTHA was dishing up suet pudding and fussily making room for it in the warming closet, thinking crossly that man's affection and memory were even less reliable than harvest weather, and hoping unsympathetically that this new wife of Mat's would make him toe the mark; so the beautiful eagerness in Carrie's face escaped her.

"I don't calculate your Uncle John will be going to town Saturday, leastwise not if it's good weather for seeding."

"Oh, Mis' Croyer, I meant could I walk? Really, truly, I used to when I was . . . I mean truly I can walk easy."

"Land sakes! You don't expect me to let a little mite like you trapes three miles to the postoffice? Why, what would people say?"

The little girl accepted this with her customary resignation, but the light went out of her little face

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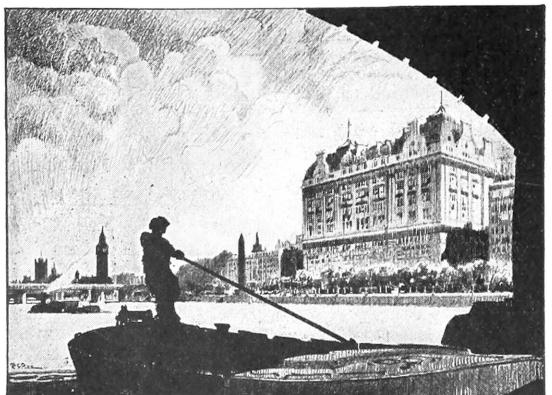
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"Ronald," said my husband's voice, "Peter Ronald."

"Then—" began the sergeant.

"S'n't use," I said, "it's me, Peter."

"Holy Hannibal," yelled Peter, "I resign."

"Your s-s-sister," stuttered Elverson.

"His wife," beamed the sergeant.

"The jig's up," I announced, "but I'm innocent on all charges."

"I don't understand," began Peter, weakly.

"It's simple," I said brightly, "they tried to pick me up—and I had to call a cop. They said I asked for dope and so the officer brought us here and the sergeant made them tell their stories separately and they each told a different fairy tale. That's all."

"I don't believe it," said Mr. Elverson flatly, "they're sweet, pure boys and—"

"If you want the charge pressed I'll add assault to the others," I announced. "They both laid hands on me and kept me from taking my car. Peter, could we collect damages out of this?"

Peter merely put his hands to his head and tried to focus on me, while the sergeant nodded vigorously.

"Are you his wife or his sister?" asked Elverson.

"His wife, sir," I said, "I'll explain that little affair later."

"H'm," he said. "and what have you two fellers to say for yourselves? Is this lady right?"

They nodded miserably.

"All right," he said, with menace in his voice, "I'll see you later and I wish it might be in a woodshed. Sergeant, can you dismiss them?"

The sergeant did so, and they started out. Peter turned to me.

"I've got to square Elverson—at least I've got to keep his friendship if possible," he hissed. "You take a taxi home and don't so much as stick your head out until I come home. I'd like to take you to the woodshed too."

"But Peter dear," I began.

"Save it," he said tersely, "and think fast—you'll need all the excuses you can find."

AFTER I got home I put my new hat sadly away, fed the twins, put them to bed, and gave Pansy the night off. I thought she was too young to hear what she might if she stayed. Then I powdered my face to make it look sort of pale, rouged circles under both eyes, and waited for Peter. It got dark but I was too miserable, and mad too, to light the lights. I sat planning what I was going to tell him about trusting his mate.

"You'd think I had picked them up instead of resisting them," I thought hotly, but I decided that it might be better to be tender with Peter—sad and tender. I had just planned my line when I heard his step on the verandah and I ran to the hall. Before I had time to put the light on he stepped in, and I threw myself into his arms, wound mine tightly about his neck and kissed him hard.

"Sweetheart," I murmured, "I'm so sorry for what happened. I was merely protecting the sanctity of our . . ." Just at this point I noted that he was gurgling and struggling, and at the same moment my hand which had been raised to stroke his hair stroked a marble smooth dome instead.

"Peter," I hollered, "Peter—help."

"Lemme out," murmured a strange voice, "leme out, I say—"

The light flashed on, and there we stood, Peter with his mouth hanging open and his eyes like poached eggs, Mr. Elverson with his face and shoulder smeared with powder and a smudge of

my rouge on his nose and his eyes doing seven come-eleven without respect to the speed limit.

I recovered first.

"I'm afraid I made a slight mistake," I said brightly.

"I'm afraid it is merely one of a succession," stated Peter grimly.

"Lemme out," quavered Mr. Elverson.

"I never . . ."

"Neither did I," I said. "Let's have a drink."

"Ruth," said Peter, "you go to bed."

"I won't," I said. "I'm going to see this through. Besides, there's something I want to tell Mr. Elverson."

Peter shrugged, glared and led the way into the living room. Mr. Elverson brushing all contamination from him, followed. I brought up the rear.

"I don't know what Peter's told you, and I don't care," I said. "He doesn't know why I had my hair cut off, and he didn't know I was having it done until I walked in on you yesterday. He knew you didn't approve and so he made the fatal mistake of lying out of an awkward position and telling you—as you didn't like bobbed hair, that I was a sister and had to have it done. I did have to have it done. I had to for the protection of my weaker sisters. Even Peter didn't know. I am president of an association for the apprehension of mashes, and in order to help round them up and so protect the thoughtless girls who might be victimized I sacrificed my hair—my beautiful hair"—I sobbed here—"that I might look flapperish and so attract the species of human insect known as the flapper-masher. I deeply regret not having known of your association—and more deeply still do I regret that my first success caught your nephews. I feel that they have learned their lesson. Your organization and mine, which is secret—should do much toward making the world safe for our young."

Mr. Elverson's face was beaming when I had finished. Peter looked sheepish and uncomfortable.

"A noble woman," breathed Mr. Elverson, his nose paint gleaming, "a noble, noble woman."

"I also regret," I stated, "that my husband did not see fit to acknowledge his wife—or to trust her. Mr. Elverson, good-night."

Peter sneaked into the bedroom about half an hour later.

"I'm sorry, pet," he said.

"You should be," I answered. "Just let bygones be memories and say no more about it."

"That's generous dear," he said, "and I'll be generous too, I admit that I like your hair bobbed."

"Speaking of generosity," I said, "you owe me twenty dollars."

"Wuffor?" asked Peter.

"My permanent wave," I said, "guaranteed for four months. Really, Peter, it was very cheap," and I told him about the marcelling and the washing and carfare.

"Well," he said, "since you had it done for the association I think they should pay for it."

"Oh, that," I said. "We've decided to disband."

"Since when?" he asked.

"To-night," I said airily.

"And may I ask," said Peter, "when you formed?"

"This afternoon," I grinned.

"You're a little schemer and a —— he began hotly.

"Hold on," I said. "Did Elverson come across with your appointment?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"Then where's your kick?" I said.

"Hand over the twenty."

And Peter meekly obeyed.

When Blind Guides Lead

Continued from page 13

leaving it drooping and pale. Later, when Martha stepped out from her immaculate pantry with dishes and cups in hand, Carrie offered timidly to help set the table.

"Now, child, sit where you are and enjoy yourself, time enough to help when you're older, or when I'm taken with a spell of something."

"But I'd like to do it," insisted the child desperately. "I'd like to do something, Mis' Croyer."

"Well, you can ring the bell for your Uncle John. Dinner's about done to a turn."

John was not the taciturn man he had been before what he termed his "awakening"—the death of Carrie's mother had

brought about this awakening. Yes, Tillie, that pathetic household drudge who welcomed death rather than life if only little Carrie might be spared a fate such as her's, had, with her dying, shaken all John's self-complacency and uprooted his life-long habits. Why, Tillie's husband was an upright man, an honest hard-working man, careful of his animals and foreswore against intemperance and borrowing; yet such things were evidently of little worth to women.

To be sure Tillie had been going downhill considerably the last few years, but wasn't that natural? Those had been her bad years with babies coming fast, each one adding to the already heavy burden. But thus it had ever been with women and doubtless ever would be. When he came to think of it, his own mother had shown similar signs of decay before the youngest children found their "weather-legs," so to speak. Yet she had lived to wave him and Martha a gay farewell when they set off to that first far cabin in the hills.

That memory had made him smile then, and more often of late—powerful glib with her jokes she had been, that bent old mother of his. What was it she had hurled after the newly wedded pair, that long-gone day? "Mind you keep a loose hand on the lines, Johnny. Horses love a bit of fling to their heads and so do women." Martha had laughed and cuddled close . . . strange how he had forgotten what a girl she was for laughter in those days. "A loose hand on the lines!" Would he ever be done marvelling that this jocund command should have come echoing down the years on that grief-stricken day of Tillie's death.

TILLIE dying . . . the laughter gone from those twinkling eyes of Martha's . . . himself a dour old man. What a morning of revelation that had been! Had anything more been needed to open his stubborn old eyes—that is, anything more after Martha, the obedient wife of years, had openly rebelled and threatened to leave him—that more was added by Tillie's distraught husband.

With all a reticent man's horror of emotional display, he had been forced to look upon Mat's helpless sorrow. Tillie, the buoyant, the beautiful—Tillie the utterly beloved—so had he been forced to see the bedraggled woman whom he had known as only a dull and commonplace neighbor.

That day John made up his mind to loosen the reins and give Martha her head. The thought that she had to all intents and purposes already taken the bit in her teeth never occurred to him nor dulled the ardor of his good intent.

Yet, undoubtedly, this high resolve might have come to nothing had it not been for little Carrie. Planting their old feet, once again, upon the high road of happiness might have been work to despair of, an effort doomed to perish of its own ludicrousness; but to nurse this wee sprig of femininity into happy adolescence appeared good and hopeful. In their desperate resolve to make the orphaned child happy, they themselves grew happy; so happy, in fact, that the incredulous truth of Carrie's own depression was only now becoming apparent to them.

JOHN, man-like, left the interpretation of childish vagaries to his wife. Such mysteries belong to a woman's sphere. How should he reflect that an old childless woman had forfeited the key to ready understanding? He was pleased with himself, pleased with Martha, pleased with the child; this pleasure consumed his every thought.

Had he not learned the ways of appreciation? Was he not become expert at ordering bonnets and gowns for his Martha and that even from catalogues? Yes, and did he not see to it that each feast-day found her freshly arrayed though she chided him for extravagance; and were there not shining new pots and pans in her pantry and a bright checkered linoleum on all the floors? Yes, and was he not all but decided upon buying an organ for his little adopted daughter—such a carved and shining organ as the minister had in his parlor?

Upon some such reverie as this fell the sound of the dinner bell. Mellow and at peace with the world, John beamed at little Carrie when he drew near the house.

"Well, well, little mouse, getting so you order my comings and goings, eh?"

She smiled a little flickering smile at his joke.

"Dinner's about done, Mis' Croyer says."

Despite his satisfaction, the child's listlessness disturbed him. She looked a bit peaked, did Carrie . . . well, young ones often contracted something or other . . . he remembered having the measles himself.

Over the meal both anxious guardians watched the child closely.

"Pears to me she's not so pert as she might be," remarked John.

"I've been thinking to make a mess of sulphur and molasses," responded his wife. "I recollect how my own mother always had it on hand each spring . . . You ain't feeling weakish, nor hot, Carrie?"

"No'm, Mis' Croyer, I'm right smart."

None the less, she scarcely touched the pudding, at which Martha cast a significant glance toward her husband, who shook a sympathetic but mystified head.

When the decorous little girl had set off again to school, and John was seated comfortably upon the door-step to smoke a leisurely pipe before returning to the fields, they fell to talking.

"You don't calculate she's coming down sick, do you?"

"Well, no, but she's uncommon quiet. It's not natural for a child just turned nine to grieve this way."

"You think she's still taking on about her ma?"

"John Croyer! What else? The little mite just mopes and mopes. Does she ever play with them dolls we bought her? No. Does she ever skip and jump like a child at all, I ask?"

"She was always an uncommon quiet little thing, Mattie, shy as a whiffet."

"Shucks! Shy do you call it? Was she ever anything but a little old woman, trailing round them babies of Tillie's, and herself but a little one at best?"

THIS was unanswerable; yet something—a vague enough notion—stirred the depths of John's slow mind . . . Carrie never had known real childhood . . . why, that was it! She didn't know how to play!

"Mattie," he announced, triumphantly, "I have it! She's got to be taught to play."

"Humph! You're right smart this day, John Croyer. Taught how, may I ask? Isn't the whole live-long day hers to play in? Aren't there books a-plenty with colored pictures and such cluttering up her room, and dolls and dishes a-setting by like in a store window? What does she do with them? Dust them, John Croyer, and set them back in a neat row again the wall."

John scratched his unruly thatch—a sign of uncommon mental activity in him.

"I've noticed she sort of hankers after helping round—perhaps she'd enjoy doing a little something."

"John Croyer! Are you insinuating for me to put that poor wee thing to work—me, who promised a dying woman to save her from just that! 'Already my Carrie's a slave,' said she to me. John Croyer, 'already a slave and has had nothing . . .'"

"Now, now, woman, don't rile yourself. I reckon it was happiness Tillie wanted for her little girl, no matter how it's come by. And if sitting round idle don't make her happy, 'pears to me it's as plain as the nose on your face that you've taken the wrong way with her."

"Shucks!" said Martha . . . "I've a good mind to get right to town and buy that organ we talked of. But if you think any woman-child just naturally hankers to be messing round the house, you've got a lot to learn."

BUT John clung to his own ideas, vague though they were; this much at least was clear—Carrie, possessed of her new freedom seemed more miserable than formerly. Out of this astounding fact must come his enlightenment and solution. Throughout the day he sifted and weighed with diplomatic care each and every thought, with the result that he became even further estranged from Martha's point of view.

That night his confirmations were strengthened through a simple enough incident. Dusk had fallen; he was settled down for a comfortable doze by the fire with Carrie, quiet as a mouse, sitting nearby reading her Cinderella—one of her few new favorites—when Martha, very much wrought up, dashed in from the chicken yard carrying something in her apron.

"Sakes, alive, that crazy hen has up and



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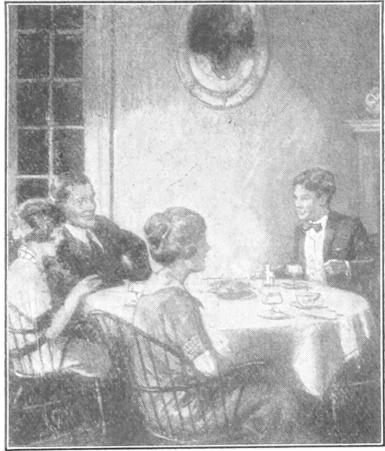
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stepped on this poor chick—after me paying two dollars a setting at that!"

"Oh, Mis' Croyer, let me have him, let me mind him! Please, please, Mis' Croyer! I can wrap him in wool, I'll make him a bed in my shoe-box."

Martha was fussily intent upon the chicken, feeling of its wings, its tiny chest, holding it over the warm stove; absently, somewhat shortly, as was her way, she answered—

"You don't want to be messing with the thing. Like as not it'll die anyhow."

But John had caught the quick gleam which for the moment lighted up the child's eyes; had noted, too, the swift and painful disappointment that followed.

"Let her have it, Martha."

Something in his tone brought Martha out of her absorption, and glancing around in surprise she, too, caught the quiver of those childish lips; consternation overwhelmed her. Why, Carrie was fighting tears, and it was her doing! Her's, who desired laughter above all else from little Carrie.

"Mercy me! Here, child, take it. After all, I've no time to putter around with it."

The little girl bounded to her feet, caught the tiny chicken to her lonely little heart and flew up the stairs.

"Oh, I've such a nice piece of cotton wool that came with my bracelet, and I've got my shoe-box all empty . . . I'll be down in a minute!"

"Well, don't that beat all!" exclaimed Martha helplessly.

"M-m-m. I'm thinking," said John, "thinking."

NEXT morning Carrie actually skipped down the stairs. Martha had never seen her so pretty; the stiff blue frills of her frock cascaded about her; she lent them grace despite their heavy starch. A little airy thing she seemed, a little happy elfin, dancing down the old stairway in a burst of morning gladness.

"Oh, how is he, how is he this morning?" she shrilled before her eager feet had reached the bottom step.

"He who? Oh, the chicken—he's dead, as I expected," said Martha, and hurried to fix Carrie's porridge just right.

All that airy grace oozed away from little Carrie, leaving her an ordinary pale little girl in a much too frilly frock. According to habit she made no outcry, one thin little hand fluttering up to her lips, her one betraying sign of pained emotion.

To John, who, from his seat at the breakfast table, had observed this little scene, that action was somehow more pitiful than tears. His old heart ached for her—so pathetic she was—so resignedly brave—so small; his eyes were not quite clear as he followed her saddened progress to the table. Why, by all the shining stars, he had it at last! Carrie was pining away for want of something to love—to fuss over, bless her dear little heart. What blind idiots they had been!

So much a bolt from the blue was this happy thought that he could scarcely restrain himself from shouting, but guile, which is surely an inheritance from Eden came to his rescue.

"Carrie, my little mouse," he cried, "I'm real ashamed to ask it, but you see I'm in a heap of trouble, and I can't imagine who's to help me if not you."

THOSE patient brown eyes of hers opened wide and into their dulness leapt that ready gleam of hope: her small spiritual face turned toward him in its expectancy, like a thirsty flower.

"Yes, miss," he ran on with unaccustomed glibness, "a heap of trouble, that's what. Why, that old sow, Maggie, has up and deserted one of the finest little pigs I ever saw."

"Why John . . ." Martha began, but something fierce in his encountering glance silenced her.

"That little pig is about as lonesome and bad off as can be—shouldn't wonder but what he'd up and die on my hands unless you can tend him."

Carrie shot from her chair like a bolt.

"Uncle John!" she cried, flying to his side, "where is he? Just you give him to me. I can feed him with a string and a bottle . . . I know how to do . . . Oh, be quick . . . and Uncle John, couldn't you get a nipple next time you're in town."

He did some rapid planning on the way to the barn, with Carrie hard at his heels. Once there he whispered cautiously:

"You just wait outside a bit, Carrie. Maggie's in a bad mood. She's liable to desert the whole family if she gets excited."

Carrie found it easy to obey and with a sigh of relief John skipped into the barn, robbed a contented and conscientious mother of her very contented offspring, and returned with it to Carrie.

The pig was a lusty little pig and voiced its displeasure at this indignity vociferously.

"Oh, oh! the poor little dear. Listen how he cries, uncle! He must be about starved. Oh, hurry, hurry! Get a bottle. I'll just ask Mis'—Aunt Martha for some warm milk."

John watched the flying little figure ahead of him through a mist of tears. Wee tender one—wee tender little womaning! Here he brushed the veil of an aged old mystery, not yet discerning even so much as poor mortal may. But that bottle—he must be on hand with that bottle!

Fussing with her fractious charge made Carrie late for school; but Martha, having drawn closer to realities, decided that this day, being Friday, might with little loss be crossed from the calendar of school-days.

"I'm so glad," sighed Carrie, with shining eyes. "He'll get used to me by Monday, and he's so restless now. Oh, Aunt Martha, I think he's just the sweetest pig!"

A little later John made some excuse to go to the house; there was an air of victory about him as he entered, and his eyes twinkled as he looked at Martha.

"Well, old lady," said he.

THEN he heard a piping little voice singing and his banter faded into tenderness. Together they stole to the window at the sunny side of the house.

Just without sat little Carrie, the sunlight making ripples of gold in her auburn hair and sheer beauty of her radiant little face; her arms cradled the now resigned little pig and she was singing in that sweet treble voice from a full heart—singing as she had so often sung to her little brothers.

Down Martha's kind old face the tears slid unheeded. John cleared his throat huskily; and both of them learned in this pregnant moment a great and eternal truth: Love, once having found its usefulness, may not live idle.

For a moment Martha's hand found her husband's and their fingers interlocked. Then she chuckled softly—

"Well, Johnny, I'll have to admit that it's your score this time."



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faces in the Springhill mine. The seam in this mine is of peculiar formation and accidents called "bumps" continually are taking place, often with fatal results. The seam is said to bump when the working face topples forward upon the miners without any discernible warning, and buries them under tons of coal and rock. This situation is the subject of constant study by mining engineers, but, so far, no effective means of improving it have been found. It is in this mine, too, that a fire has been raging for many years. It has been blocked off by concrete from the active parts of the workings, so continues in other directions, eating its way into the bowels of the earth.

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