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WAS · NEW



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THE STORY TELLING.

“I like, best of all, to hear about what happened when Grand-mamma was new, ’ said Fritz.” — See page 7.

When Grandmamma
Was New

THE STORY OF A VIRGINIA
CHILDHOOD

By
Marion Harland

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THIRD THOUSAND
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Norwood Mass. U. S. A.

TO
HORACE AND ERIC
FRITZ, TERHUNE, AND STERLING

This Story

FIRST TOLD TO THEM OVER THE LIBRARY FIRE
IN AUTUMN AND WINTER EVENINGS

IS MOST LOVINGLY DEDICATED

SUNNYBANK,
POMPTON, N.J.

Explanatory

IT was Fritz who said it first, and when he was three years younger than he is now.

Somebody asked him what sort of stories he liked best. No doubt he ought to have said "Bible Stories," such as his mother tells on Sunday afternoons, and which he does love dearly. But he spoke out what he really thought and felt at the time of asking, and said, "I like, best of all, to hear about what happened when Grandmamma was New."

The phrase tickled my fancy, and, thenceforward, I would have no other title for the sight-draughts made by the boys upon my bank of memory. When these "vouchers" grew into a volume, no name would serve my turn except the *mot de famille* set in circulation by the quaint five-year-old.

My laddies are well trained. (Good children run in the family.) I record, pridefully, that the sunny head of the least of the band has never drooped drowsily while the tale went

on, and that his chirp was distinct in the general plea for, "More — to-morrow night?" with which the conclave brought up at the call to prayers and to pillows. This has not so far flattered me out of my sober senses as to beget a hope that my reminiscences will find such loving interest and attention so rapt in the larger audience outlying our doors. Yet I dare believe that other grandparents will read and other children will listen to the real happenings of the Long Time Ago WHEN THIS GRANDMAMMA WAS NEW.

MARION HARLAND.

SUNNYBANK,
May, 1899.

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WHEN GRANDMAMMA WAS NEW

When Grandmamma Was New



Chapter I

The Tragedy of Rozillah

66 **J**UST look at her now, Molly! Isn't she the sweetest thing you ever saw?"



Molly, that is, Myself, sitting on the door-step, elbows on knees and shoulders hunched sullenly up to my ears, did not budge or speak.

Before my gloomy eyes was the kitchen yard, a gray and gritty expanse, with never a tree or bush to shade it except the lilac hedge bounding it on the garden side, and one sickly peach tree growing at the corner of "the house." Three hens and one rooster were scratching about the flat stone at the kitchen door.

On the other three sides of the house were rustling boughs and cool grass and flower-beds. It suited my humor to sit in the scanty strip of shadow cast by the eaves, my feet upon the step that had soaked in the noon-day heat, and to be as wretched as a five-year-old could make herself, with a sharp sense of injury boring like a bit of steel into her small soul. The room behind me was my mother's—the "chamber" of the Southern home. A big four-poster, hung with dimity curtains, stood in the farther corner. The dimity valance, trimmed, like the curtains, with ball fringe, hid the trundle-bed that was pulled out at night for Mary 'Liza and me to sleep in. At the foot of the bed was my baby brother's cradle. As Mam' Chloe was walking with him in the garden, it should have been empty. Whereas, Mary 'Liza was putting her doll-baby to sleep in it. We said "doll-baby" in those days. There was Musidora, my rag-baby, who was a beauty when she was new.

She was not old now, but Fate had been unkind to her. Twice I had left her out-of-doors all night. The first time was when I laid her at the foot of a particularly tall corn-stalk, telling her that I would return presently, but could not find her at all when I went back. I was up and out early next morning and “found her indeed, but it made my heart bleed,” for a field mouse — with six acres of roasting-ears to choose from — had made his supper on the bran that served my poor Musidora for brains, nibbling a hole in the exact region of the *medulla oblongata*. My mother plugged the cranium with raw cotton and stitched up the wound, and the dear patient was doing better than could be expected, when there was a thunder-storm and Musidora was on a bench in the summer-house. The rain lasted all night, and I could not go out again.

One immediate and obvious consequence of this adventure was that there was nothing left of Musidora’s features except her eye-

brows, which were laid on with indelible ink instead of water-colors. She hung, head downward, in front of the kitchen fire for twelve hours before she was thoroughly dry. My mother "indicated" eyes, nose, and mouth with pen-and-ink, but the effect was flat and mournful.

While I sat in the door that evening, putting on Musidora's night-gown, I overheard Mam' Chloe say to my mother:—

"I declar' to gracious, Miss Ma'y Anna, you ought to buy that chile a sure-'nough doll-baby while you are in town. It f'yar breaks my heart to see how much store she sets by that po' wrack of a rag thing she's got thar."

My mother's reply was so low that I did not catch it, but her tone was not unpromising. I said nothing to her, or to anybody of what I had heard. Only, of course, Musidora and I talked it all over. I assured her that she was going to have a beautiful sister who would love her and play with her and tell her stories

of the wonderful city, and of how happy we three should be together.

My father and mother went away to Richmond. They took the baby with them, and Mary 'Liza and I were sent to my Aunt Eliza Carter's to stay until they returned, when Cousin Molly Belle took us back home and told my mother before my face that I had been as "good as gold."

"I am very glad to hear it," said my mother, giving me a squeeze and kiss. "I was afraid she might be troublesome. She is not as steady as Mary 'Liza, you know. I have something nice in my trunk for each of my daughters."

She always spoke of us in that way, although Mary 'Liza was her niece, and an orphan. She was seven now, and the pattern child of the county. Pretty, too, with a fair skin and shiny braids of golden hair, and innocent blue eyes, and dimpled arms, and fluffy, kittenish ways, while I was as lean as a snake, as brown as a chinquapin, and as wild as a hawk. I was

used to hearing myself compared to all three. Mary 'Liza could read in the New Testament without stopping to spell a word, at three, and write in a copy-book at five, and do sums on the slate at six, and at seven was as much company to my mother as if she had been seventeen. In a word, my cousin was "a comfort." I was often called "a plague."

Yet, as I can honestly affirm, I had never known, until this black day when Cousin Molly Belle took me home, what it was to be envious. I was not exactly fond of my cousin, yet we seldom disagreed openly. She wore clean frocks and liked to stay indoors and piece bedquilts and knit stockings and read aloud to my mother. I never willingly spent an hour in the house when I could get out, and had odd plays of my own which I kept secret from Mary 'Liza because I was sure she would be shocked, or laugh at them. I fully recognized the claims of orphanhood to the buttered side of life, and that a girl

who had no father or mother deserved to be cared for by everybody else.

My parents had arrived late at night, and the trunk was unpacked with much ceremony the next morning. Under my mother's best new dresses was a long pasteboard box which she opened, smiling at our expectant faces. From it she drew the biggest, prettiest doll-baby we had ever seen, in a blue silk frock with a sash to match. She had real hair, curly and black as a coal, and round black eyes and a cherry-ripe mouth. I reached out both hands, and a cry of rapture rushed from my heart to my lips—an inarticulate gurgle of ineffable happiness.

My mother did not see my gesture. I hope she did not hear the cry. She laid the doll-baby in Mary 'Liza's arms.

“Mrs. Hutcheson, who was your mother's dearest friend, sent that to you with her love.”

For me there was a trumpery book, with very few pictures, and a good deal of reading in it—also from Mrs. Hutcheson.

“She thought it might coax you to learn how to read. I was ashamed to have to say that my little girl does not know her letters yet,” said my much-tried parent. “And your father brought you a Noah’s Ark.”

I received book and Ark without a word, and marched toward the door, my heart ready to break.

“What do you say for your presents, Molly?”

I stood stock-still, my eyes on the floor.

My mother quietly and sorrowfully took the painted Ark from my hand.

“When you can say ‘thank you,’ and stop pouting, you can have it back,” she said, in gentle severity.

I dashed from the room around the house to the end porch. It was high enough for me to stand upright under it and the sides were screened by a climbing sweetbrier. I had often played Daniel in the lion’s den there, assisted by a caste of small colored children. They were the lions, I, with the choice of parts, electing invariably to play the persecuted and

finally triumphant biped. The fury of forty wild beasts was in my heart, as I pushed aside the prickly branches and crept into my lair. The den was paved with bricks, loosely laid. With a pointed stick I pried one up, and scooped out with my hands a grave deep enough to hold the hateful book with the few pictures and the much reading. I thrust it in without benefit of clergy, hustled the earth back upon it, pounded the brick into place, and lay flat down upon the dishonored tomb.

Mam' Chloe found me there at dinner-time, fast asleep. She dragged me back to consciousness and the open air by the heels. Not in wanton cruelty, but she was a large woman, and could get at me in no other way. While she washed and made me decent in clean frock, apron, and pantalettes, she scolded me for my "low-lived, onladylike ways," and warned me of her solemn intention to "tell my mother on me," the next time such a disgraceful thing happened. I did not mind the lecture. I knew Mam' Chloe, and she (Heaven rest her

white, faithful soul in the Kingdom where the bond are free!) knew me, I verily believe, better than the mother that bore me.

Toilet and tirade ended, she slid me, as she might a proscribed book, through a crack in the side-door into the dining room, where Uncle Ike, her husband, was in waiting. He, in turn, smuggled me behind my mother's back to the side-table, there being no room for us children at the main board that day.

None of the dozen grown-up diners noticed me, or that Mary 'Liza, sitting prim and dainty on her side of our table, had her doll by her in another chair, and interrupted her meal, once in a while, to caress her or to rearrange her curls and skirts. I affected not to see the pantomime, which I chose to assume was enacted for my further exasperation. I was apparently as indifferent to Uncle Ike's shameless partiality in loading my plate with choice tidbits, such as a gizzard, a merry-thought, or a cheese-cake, while Mary 'Liza had to ask twice for what she wanted. What

was not tasteless was bitter to my palate. I wondered, dully, why the sight of the doll-baby and the fuss her owner made over her, turned me sick. As soon as I could get away, I slipped down, and out at the friendly side-door, and went to find Musidora. There was a new bond of union between us. She had no beautiful sister, I no beautiful daughter. Sitting down upon the hot step, before the kitchen yard, I hugged her hard and cried a little over her, in a brief, stormy way. The tears hurt me, as they came, and did not ease the hot ache in my chest or the lump in my throat.

At this juncture, when my misery was at its height, I heard Mary 'Liza in the chamber behind me, cooing to, and hushing her doll-baby, with tones and words copied faithfully from my mother's talk over my brother's cradle.

"Wouldn't you like to rock her a little while?" she called presently. "I wouldn't mind if you'd promise not to touch her. Sometimes your hands are not clean, you know."

I set my jaws savagely outside of my leaping tongue, not moving or looking up when I felt her standing close by me. Musidora had dropped from my lap, and lay, face downward, on the step. Mary 'Liza picked her up, and brushed the dust from her inexpressive visage.

“Poor thing!” purred she. “I hope nothing will ever happen to Rozillah. Isn't that a *love-el-ly* name? I made it out of my own head from Rosa and Zillah, two *love-el-ly* girls I read of in a book.”

“I think it is a nasty name,” was my deliberate reply.

She recoiled with a fine horror which stung me like a nettle.

“Oh, Molly! what a word for a little lady to use!”

I looked up at her for the first time, my eyes burning in dry sockets.

“I think your doll-baby is nasty, and Rozillah is a *nigger* name! So there!”

I could command no worse language, for I knew none.

Mary 'Liza looked shocked and terrified. She glanced right and left and upward nervously, as fearing the punishment of heaven upon me.

“I am afraid that you are in a very bad humor,” she faltered, her self-possession forsaking her for a moment. “I’d better leave you.”

She had gone a dozen paces when she glanced over her shoulder to say, in her most grown-up and judicial manner:—

“I hope you will not make any noise and wake Rozillah up.”

I rose and went straight to the cradle as soon as my cousin was out of sight. Cold, deadly fury possessed and filled me, casting out fear of consequences and routing the weakling conscience engendered and nourished by parental counsel. I plucked Rozillah from her downy bed and bore her into the air, cuffing her polished red cheeks soundly on the way. Then I stripped off her gay raiment and knotted the ribbon

sash about her smooth neck. I had never tied a knot before, but this held, as did the loop I cast over a projecting branch of the sickly peach-sapling. Naked and forlorn, Rozillah dangled a foot and more from the ground. I fetched my father's riding-whip from the hall table, and the last feeble check upon my fury was released.

The next I knew a pair of cool, white arms closed about me and the whip together, and Cousin Molly Belle's voice, half-laughing, half-horrified, cried through the roaring in my ears:—

“Dear little Namesake! what has got into you?”

All at once, red mists parted and rolled away from my eyes, and I became conscious that Mary 'Liza was jumping up and down and screaming piteously, that everybody was on the spot.—my father and mother and all the dinner company, and Mam' Chloe with the baby in her arms, and a ring of my small black servitors on the outside of the group;

also that all eyes were focussed on me and what was left of Rozillah.

The lash had drawn sawdust at every blow. One arm and both legs were torn off and weltered in the scattered stuffing beneath; the crop of black curls was tangled in the topmost limb of the sapling. The blue silk gown would never fit the pliant waist again. Rozillah was beyond the possibility of reconstruction.

I threw my arms around Cousin Molly Belle's neck, and burst into a torrent of childish tears.

I think I must have been whipped for that afternoon's work. I ought to have been, and Solomon, as a disciplinarian, was in high repute in the family connection. I am sure that I was put forthwith to bed and left alone for an eternity without even Musidora to bear me company. I had an indefinite impression that they feared the effect of association with such a wicked child upon her morals and manners.

I recollect that my mother brought me the bread and milk which was all the supper I was to have, and talked me tenderly into tears.

But most vividly do I recall the apparition which stole into my solitude after supper—which I had scented longingly from afar. A wraith all in white—gown and neck and arms and face, the masses of fluffy hair making this last more wraith-like. It sank to the floor beside my low bed, and gathered me, miserable culprit, in a cuddling embrace, and bade me “tell Cousin all about it—the whole *truly truth*.”

I could always talk to her, and I began at the beginning and went straight and steadfastly through to the nauseous end.

I did not cry while I talked, and when struck by her silence I raised a timid hand to her dear cheek and found it wet, I was surprised.

“Why, Cousin Molly Belle!” I stammered. “Are you so angry with me as *that*?”

“Angry? yes, Namesake, but not with you, poor little sinner! You and I are always getting into scrapes — aren’t we? Maybe that is why I am going to ask your mother to let you sleep with me to-night.”

Which delicious cup of happiness consoled the outgoing of the first tragical day of my life.



Chapter II

A Prize Fight and a Race

COUSIN MOLLY and I were spending an afternoon in the Old Orchard. My mother had a houseful of company, a common circumstance in itself. This particular houseful was so little to Cousin Molly Belle's liking that she got away as soon as dinner was over, drawing me, a willing captive, in her train. Furthermore, she had stolen Bud, my baby brother, from the chamber floor where Mam' Chloe had deposited him and a string of spools, while she lent a hand with the dinner dishes to her butler husband.

Bud chuckled and crowed and squealed, as if he were the heart, head, and front of the joke, while we scampered down the middle

garden walk, hidden by tall althea hedges, and gained the rail fence at the lower end without being challenged. My accomplice made me climb over first, and lowered her burden carefully into my arms, before she leaned her weight upon the two hands laid on the top rail, and whirled over like an acrobat—or a bird. She could outrun half the boys who had been her slaves and playfellows in childhood, and outjump three-fourths of them.

We were comparatively safe now, the ground dipping abruptly below the garden into a level stretch of “old field” where the broom straw came up to my armpits, the yellowing waves parting before, and closing behind, with the surge and “swish” of a gentle surf. They smelled sweet and they felt soft, and Cousin Molly Belle let Bud down from her shoulder, and making a hammock of her arms, swung him back and forth through the pliant stems until he choked with ecstasy.

Beyond the old field was the Old Orchard. The new orchard, planted nearer the house,

was in full bearing, and my father made little account of such fruit — mostly choke-pears and apples from ungrafted limbs — as was enterprising enough to grow and ripen without tending or harvesting. The trunks of the neglected trees were studded with knobs like enormous wens, and the branches had a jaunty earthward cant that made climbing the easiest sort of work, and swinging an irresistible temptation. In the higher boughs were cosey crotches where one could sit, and read, and even sleep, without danger of falling. I and my court of small darkies had spent one whole July Saturday in and under the “big sweeting,” when the apples were nominally ripe. I was Elijah, and my attendants were the ravens who plied me with sweetings in all stages of development until I could not have swallowed another to save the combined kingdoms of Judah and Israel. I was ill all night after the surfeit, but I bore the sweetings no grudge for my misplaced confidence in the human stomach.

We three runaways camped down under the

brooding branches. The unshorn and un-cropped turf was thick and dry as a parlor carpet. Bud crept lawlessly about, picking up twigs and pebbles, and trying his first four teeth upon them. He was a discreet baby, never swallowing what he could not bite into. His real names were William Skipwith Burwell. Somebody had dubbed him "Rosebud," in the first moon of his sublunary existence, and the abbreviation was inevitable. He would probably remain "Bud" until he entered Hampton Sidney. The chances were even that the alliterative temptation of "Bud Burwell" would tack the label upon him for life. Changes were troublesome, and Powhatan County people were opposed to taking trouble. The name of their own county usually lost the second syllable in sliding between their lips.

Cousin Molly Belle threw herself down at full-length on the grass, pillowed her bright head upon her arms, and stared contentedly into the apple boughs.

“This is what I call taking one’s comfort!” she breathed.

I sat down by her, my short legs tucked under me, Bedouin-wise. That was one good thing—among many—about being out-of-doors with nobody by but her or the colored children. I could sit cross-legged. If I forgot my manners and did it in the house, my mother, or Mam’ Chloe, pulled my legs out straight in front of me, or shook them down, and reminded me that I was going to be a young lady before long. As if that were my fault, or as if it could be helped! My heart glowed with gratification in observing that Cousin Molly Belle had laid one slim ankle over the other. I hitched myself a little nearer to her and lapsed into the confidential tone she encouraged in our *tête-à-têtes*.

“Don’t you just love to cross your—
feet?”

My modest hesitation was not lost upon her. She laughed.

“I like to cross my *legs* — and I do it!”

“Mam’ Chloe says people ought to think little ladies haven’t any legs, — that their feet are just pinned to the bottom of their pantalettes.”

“Mam’ Chloe is an — echo!”

“That wasn’t what you began to say, — was it?” asked I, diffidently.

She laughed again, tweaking my ear, affectionately, and telling me that I was a “monkey, and too sharp to be safe.”

Her eyes were full of laughter and laziness; the color in her cheeks was that of a velvet perpetual rose, shading into peach-blow, then into pure white that never took freckle or tan from the hottest sun.

Have I said that her hair was auburn, and curled like grape tendrils, from the nape of the neck to the forehead? The color was singular. In the shade it was that of a perfectly groomed bay horse. When the sun struck it, it got all alive, as if there were light under it, as well as over it, and was,

unmistakably, red. She made more fun of it than anybody else, but at heart she loved her hair, and would not have exchanged it for paley-gold or ebony tresses. Bud had fastened his chubby hands in it to steady himself on his perch, as she ran, and pulled some of it loose from her comb. A thick curl strayed over her arm, bare almost to the shoulder, as was the warm-weather custom of young ladies of that time. She drew it around before her eyes, thinning it into a silky veil, holding it high up and letting it slip, strand by strand, between her and the light.

A notion — indefinable in words — that a wealth of charms was wasted upon one observant little girl and a non-observant baby, led me to inquire:—

“Would you, sure enough, rather be out here than in the house, talking to them all?”

“I am tired of ‘them all,’ Molly. They tire me to death.”

“Some grown people are not tiresome,” I

essayed. "There's Mr. Frank Morton, now. I *like* him!"

"Oh, you do—do you? Why?" still shredding the veil of curls between her and the sun.

"Well, one thing is, he talks *straight*. He doesn't talk 'round about, and sideways, and crossways, to children. Nor make fun of my questions. He just answers right along and plain."

"I don't think I quite know what you mean, Namesake."

"Why, you see it's this way,—the other day I asked him if he didn't think you were a heap prettier than any other lady he ever saw, and he never so much as cracked a smile. He just put his arm 'round me—he never did that but twice before—and he said up-and-down, as serious as anything—'Yes, I do, Molly!' And he does make the beautifulest chinquapin whistles! They go on whistling after they are dry. You see, the trouble with the whistles other people

make for me, is that they shrivel all up by next day, and there isn't a bit of whistle left in them."

"That's the way with most of my whistles, too, Namesake. And then I throw them away and want new ones. Heigh-ho! What's the use of a whistle when all the whistle has gone out of it? I must ask Mr. Frank Morton how he makes his."

I gave a jump and a little squeak.

"Oh, Cousin Molly Belle! there's a great, *big* race-horse on you!"

He had tumbled out of the apple boughs upon the folds of her skirt and before I could capture him, a second fell after him. I was upon my feet in a twinkling, seized first one, then the other, by their attenuated middles, and held them up, all kicking and sprawling, between a thumb and finger of each hand. I knew the tricks and the manners of what I learned, many years later, that naturalists describe as the *mantis religiosa*, or praying-mantis, because in off-hours,—*i.e.*

when they are not foraging or fighting—they will sit upon their hind quarters and “fold the stout anterior legs in a manner suggesting hands folded in prayer.”

I had caught dozens of them and fed them for days in a box with coarse lace tied over the top to prevent escape, and studied their habits, and humored their propensities by putting several together in the prison that forthwith became an arena, in which *duello* and general scrimmage relieved one another in enchanting succession.

I explained now, to my diverted companion, that I held them by their backs so that they could not bite me, and pointed out the wicked heads turning almost quite around in their savage efforts to avenge their capture. I was sure, I said excitedly, that these two were fighting up in the tree, and that was the way they happened to drop so close together. Had she never seen devil's race-horses fight? Mother didn't like that name for them, so I 'most always said just “race-horses” plain,

so. Only, when they were very cross, the other word would slip out.

“If I were to let them go this minute, they’d begin to fight, ’stead of running away,” I concluded. “S’pose we try them.”

Entering into my humor, she improvised a cockpit by spreading her pocket-handkerchief upon the ground, and I liberated the gladiators.

They more than justified my account of their ferocity by grappling on the instant, each rising to his full height and hurling himself at his opponent’s throat.

“You see they are acquainted with one another,” I commented, as umpire and manager. “They just begin where they left off up in the tree.”

It was an exciting display. Cousin Molly Belle raised herself upon her elbow; I doubled tightly under me what I now let myself think of as my legs, and spread both hands flat on the grass, to lean over the arena. In the hush that followed the onslaught the babbling

song Bud crooned to himself as he crawled over the sun-and-shade dappled turf harmonized with the sleepy shaking of the leaves about us. Such another happy-hearted baby was never seen. And so wise, as I have said, for a yearling! never getting into mischief, and afraid of nothing.

I peeped through a kinoscope last winter at a prize fight. I have never beheld anything that so closely and humiliatingly resembled the battle on the cambric square under the big sweeting. The wary advance after the recoil from the first encounter; the circling about at close quarters, each watching for his antagonist's weak point, the sudden clutch, embrace, and wrestle, which I, with umpiric instinct, interrupted, once and again, to prolong the combat, — none of these were wanting from either exhibition.

At length, I left the combatants to follow the bent of native savagery, and then came such warm and inartistic work as patrons of the human ring would decry as barbarous

and out-of-date. They bit venomously, below the belt, they grabbed at and hung on to any part of the body that came handy; they rolled over and over, intertwined so closely as to appear like one convulsed, centipedal monster. Finally, one half of the creature gave a violent kick and was still. As the victor shook himself free of the carcass we saw the head he had bitten from the other's neck roll from under the survivor. Withdrawing an inch or two from the remains, he sat up on his hind quarters, and "folded his stout anterior legs" sanctimoniously in a battle-prayer. His devotions ended, he proceeded to lick his wound and readjust himself generally.

"I'm sorry I didn't separate them," said Cousin Molly Belle, shaking her handkerchief with coy finger-tips. "I don't think I care to see such another fight. It gives me the creeps."

"I think it is very interesting," replied I. "'Tisn't as if they had souls, you see. They just die and don't go anywhere."

A disagreeable noise joined Bud's cooing and babbling, and made us turn quickly. Right before us, and within six feet of the helpless baby, who had sat up to regard the phenomenon with innocent wonder, was an enormous sow with a brood of hungry young ones at her heels. Her vicious grunt, her gloating eyes, her dripping jaws, and projecting tusks, bespoke her dangerous. Only yesterday I had seen her, prowling in the barn-yard, seize and devour, one after another, three downy ducklings before the stable-boys could beat her off. In the terror of this moment, the scene flashed back to me, and I seemed to hear again the crunching of those slavering jaws.

Cousin Molly Belle swooped down upon Bud, and had him upon her shoulder before I could join my piping cry to her shout that rang out like a silver trumpet. The huge beast halted, made as though she would turn, then gave an angry, squealing grunt, and lunged toward us. Not a loose stick or stone

was within reach. If there had been, there was not time to pick it up.

“Run for the fence! Run!” called the brave girl to me, and met the voracious brute with a kick, so well aimed that the high heel of her shoe struck full upon the eye next to her. In the respite gained by the sow’s stagger and recoil, our defender overtook me, caught my hand, and fled along the path traced in the trampled broom-straw, through which we had waded merrily awhile ago. We had not taken a dozen steps when we heard the enemy roaring behind us.

“Oh!” gasped I, running with all my might meanwhile. “She will eat up Bud! Like she — ate — up — the — little — ducks!”

“She shall eat me first!”

I knew she meant it, and that it was true. The fence was not more than fifty yards away. It looked a mile off, and the wild grass was as tough and treacherous as it had been pliant and sweet when we had danced through it. I was a swift runner and my limbs obeyed

me well. I was conscious, moreover, of the strong upbearing of my companion's hand that lent wings to my feet. If I were to stumble, she would not let me fall. This persuasion kept mind and heart in me.

Yet the sow would have caught up with us had not a pig set up a piteous squeal, as it lost its way or was entangled by the grass. The mother went back to reassure it with a series of staccato gruntings, very unlike those with which she renewed the chase.

We were at the fence. I scrambled over, spent and shaking, hardly able to receive the precious load that was lowered to me. As Cousin Molly Belle dropped after us, our pursuer's snout was poked between the lower rails in a last and futile attempt to get at the baby's fat legs.

"*Then* I got mad all through!" Cousin Molly Belle told my mother, in recounting the adventure.

Her white face flamed scarlet in a second. A pile of disused pea sticks lay in the fence

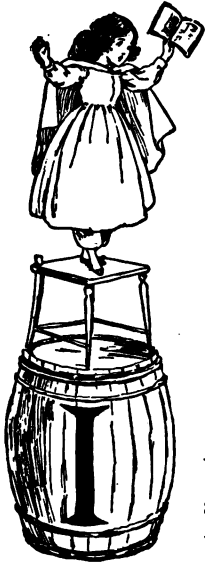
corner. She seized one, and jumped over the fence again. Wielding her weapon as if it were a flail, she brought it down upon the ugly head and raw-boned body; and as the sow turned tail to run, belabored her through the orchard to the gap by which she had entered.

The conqueror returned to me, flushed, but unsmiling. I had Bud tight in my arms, and was laughing and crying together.

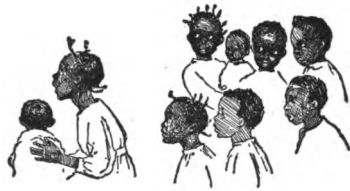
“It was funny to see you lam her and to see her run,” I sobbed between giggles that hurt me more than the sobs.

She sat down on the grass, and clasped the baby to her heart. He cooed joyously, and held up a sweet open mouth for a kiss. He got, not one, but twenty kisses upon his wet lips, his pink face, his curly head, and the bonny eyes that were bluer than the sky. Then she bent to give me one — so long and tender that it checked sob and giggle.

“We will never make devil’s race-horses fight again, Namesake. They have a right to their lives. And a life is a very precious thing!”



Chapter III Van Diemen's Land



LEARNED to read that winter. How nobody knew, and I least of all. Looking backward, I seem to have gone to sleep one night, an ignoramus, and awakened next morning knowing letters, yet never having learned.

Cousin Molly Belle's solution of the puzzle submitted to her by my mystified mother was characteristic:—

“It is the fable of Munchausen's frozen horn over again. All the learning you have been pumping into the poor child for two years has thawed out. I always told you that she had brains if you would wait until they woke up.”

I might speak of that enchanted season as my birth-winter. My mental awakening was into another world, so much wider and fuller than that with which I had been well content up to this time, that life was a continual ecstasy. I discovered, early in December, that, as Mr. Wegg was to immortalize himself by saying a quarter-century later — “all print was open” to me. By the middle of February I had gone three times through the inimitable classic, *Cobwebs-to-catch-Flies*, and read at least six other books through twice, besides being up to my eyes and over the head of my understanding in *Sandford and Merton*, that most fascinating of prosy impossibilities. Beside the classic I have named, and *Rosamond, Harry and Lucy*, Berquin’s *Children’s Friend*, Mrs. Sherwood’s *Little Henry and His Bearer* and *Fairchild Family*, *Anna Ross* and *Helen Maurice*, we had no books that were written expressly for children. No prepared paper being at hand, we expressed real nourishment for the mind — relishful juices that made in-

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tellectual bone and muscle — from the strong meat upon which our elders fed.

Did we comprehend all, or one-third of what we read, or heard read?

Less, probably, than one-sixth, but we got far more than would seem credible to one who has been led up a graciously inclined plane of learning. Our manner of receiving and digesting mind-food was very much like Bud's way of testing unknown substances that might be edible. We rejected what hurt our teeth. What we got we kept.

The current of my outer life was quiet to apparent dulness. After breakfast Mary 'Liza and I had our lessons with my mother in "the chamber." In another year we would have a governess, but the mothers of that time always taught their children to read and write, to spell and cipher through Emerson's *First Arithmetic*. I have known several who never sent their boys and girls to school, even preparing the lads for college. We had our reading, beginning with a chapter in the Bible,

then, our spelling and writing, and sums. After these, my mother read aloud from Grimshaw's *History of England*, simplifying the language when she considered it necessary, which was not often, while Mary 'Liza made up the first set of chemises (in the vernacular, "shimmys,") she had undertaken for herself, and I knit twenty rounds on a stocking. My mother put in a "mark" of black silk every morning from which I could count the rounds upward. Mary 'Liza had knit a dozen pairs in all. In the tops of six, she had knit in openwork her initials "M. E. B." I had no ambitions in that direction. My views on the subject of ornamental initials and sampler autographs were put into pregnant English at a subsequent date by the elder Weller. He professed to have received at second-hand from the charity-boy, set to con the alphabet, what the retired stage-driver applied to matrimony — to wit, that it was not worth while to go through so much to get so little. Knitting delighted not me, nor stitching either.

Lessons and work over, the day began for me in joyful earnest. The rest of the morning and all the evening were mine to use, or abuse, as I liked. We applied "evening" to the hours between the three o'clock dinner and bedtime. We may have caught the phrase from our Bible readings. The morning and the evening were the day.

Early in the fall I had begged permission from my mother to utilize a deserted chicken-house as a play-room. It was long and narrow; one side was barred with upright slats that admitted light and air to the former inmates; one end was taken up by the door; the other and the back were solid boards, the house having been built in the angle of a fence. My mother had the interior cleaned and whitewashed. I think she was glad to provide a decent "den" for me nearer home than the Old Orchard and the more distant woods, and she was losing hold of her hope of making me into a pattern daughter. It gives me a twinge to recollect how thanklessly I accepted what

must have been an act of self-denial on her part, perhaps even a compromise with conscience. Mam' Chloe — by my mother's orders, as I know now — hunted up some breadths of faded carpet in the garret, Uncle Ike beat the dust out of them, then nailed them up along the slatted side to keep the wind away. . These I called my "arras," having picked up the word from hearing my father read Shakespeare aloud at night after we were in the trundle-bed. Other breadths covered the rough flooring, and I had a castle of which I was the undisputed mistress — a court where I reigned, a queen.

Enthroned in a backless chair, I was, by turns, Mrs. Burwell (my own mother), Helen Maurice's Aunt Felix, Rosamond's mother, Rebecca, the Lady Rowena (my father began *Ivanhoe* in January), Mrs. Fairchild, Deborah, Mrs. Murray of *Anna Ross*, Naomi, and Ophelia. Once, I "did" Job by wrapping a meal-sack — for sackcloth — about me, and, sitting upon the ground, throwing ashes over

my head and into the air, the while four colored boys, previously instructed, burst in one by one, with news of the mischief wrought by Sabeian, lightning, Chaldean, and cyclone. A dramatization of Queen Esther, upon which I had set my heart, was, at last, given up because I could not be King Ahasuerus and Queen Esther at one and the same time.

When the castle was too bleak for even child-comfort, Aunt 'Ritta, the cook, let us heat bricks in the kitchen fire, and showed us how to wrap them in rags to keep in the warmth. Clad in my red cloak, a wadded hood of the same color tied over my ears, and my feet upon a swathed brick, I was in no danger of taking cold.

Mary 'Liza put her neat little nose in at the door one raw day when she was walking for exercise, and wondered, gently, "how I could stand it."

"I am afraid the smell would give me a headache, and the cold would give me a sore throat," she said still gently.

I never had either from the time the leaves fell until they came again. Except when, about once a month, some matron from a near or distant plantation brought one or more of her children with her when she drove over to "spend the day" with my mother, I had no white playfellow near my own age. Mary 'Liza "was not fond of playing," although she would do it when we had company who could be entertained in no other way. As a rule, when not engaged with lessons and chemises, she took care in a matronly way of Dorinda, Rozillah's successor, and "behaved."

On the Sundays when we did not go to church because the weather was bad, or there was no preaching within twenty miles of us, or my mother was not well, or the roads were impassable with mire or frost, Mary 'Liza and I learned two questions in the Shorter Catechism, and she learned the references as well. We also committed a hymn to memory, and five verses of a psalm. Beyond this, no religious exercise was binding upon us, and there was a

great deal of the day to be got rid of. Mary 'Liza read the memoirs of *Mary Lotbrop* and *Natban W. Dickerman*, seated upright on her cricket at one corner of the chamber fireplace, and in the evening, if the day were pleasant, took her Bible to Mam' Chloe's room or even as far as "the quarters," and read aloud to the servants whole chapters out of Jeremiah and Paul's Epistles. They used to predict that she would marry a preacher (which, by the way, she did in the fulness of time, a red-headed widower preacher, with five boys).

I liked to go to church, because I saw there people dressed in their prettiest clothes, and they sang hymns. Prayers and sermon were attendant and unavoidable evils. My legs went to sleep, and a big girl "going on six" was too old to follow suit. We read none but good books on Sunday. *Little Henry and His Bearer*, *Anna Ross*, and *Helen Maurice* were allowed; the memoirs I have named were advised. The *Fairchild Family* "partook too much of the nature of fiction to be quite suit-

able for Sabbath reading." So Rev. Cornelius Lee, our pastor, had decided when the doubtful volume was submitted to him. After that, it was locked up Saturday night, along with *Sandford and Merton* and Miss Edgeworth's *Moral Tales*.

I minded the deprivation less after I converted the playhouse into a family chapel, and held services there on stay-at-home Sundays. My audience comprised all the small negroes on the place, — about twenty in number, — and they were willing attendants. A barrel was set, the whole head up, at the upper end of the room; upon this was my chair. I sat in it during the singing, and mounted upon it while reading and exhorting. Subtle reverence, which I could not analyze, held me back from "offering prayer." What we were doing was only "making believe" after all, and belief in the All-seeing Eye, the All-hearing Ear, the Judge of idle words and blasphemous thoughts, was as old as my knowledge of my own being. But sing we could and did, and I read from the

Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments, usually from the narrative portions, with a psalm or two to "beat the upward flame" in our hearts.

And then I would preach a sermon.

Our chapel had been in good running order for over two months, when on a certain drizzly Sunday early in March, I arose discreetly upon my ticklish pulpit to announce through my nose, "We will commence our services by singing the three-hundredth-and-thirty-third hymn—'Come thou Fount of every blessing.'"

As mine was the only hymn-book in the assembly, the mention of the number was a bit of supererogatory business. The omission of the formula would have been a breach of chapel etiquette. I raised the tune, and every other pair of lungs there joined in without fear of criticism or favor of his neighbors' ears. Some of the duller and lesser children smothered or decapitated a word here and there in the main body of the hymn. All

knew the chorus, and it shook the unceiled roof:—

“ Away, away, away to glory !
My name’s written on the throne.
My home’s in yonder worl’ o’ glory,
Where my Redeemer reigns alone.”

Warmed by the vigorous preliminary, I read the sixth chapter of Revelation, still through my nose, catching my breath audibly at the end of each clause. This oratorical touch was copied with ludicrous accuracy from Rev. Wesley Greene, a circuit-rider who had conducted an “ arbor-meeting ” at Fine Creek meeting-house last summer. Our negroes were all Baptists, and considered themselves remiss, as devout hearers of aught that partook of the nature of a religious service, if they did not respond at intervals with groans and pious ejaculations. Their children, as gravely imitative as juvenile Simiæ, came up nobly to their parts in our exercises.

The acknowledged leader in the responses, and my Grand Vizier in the ordering of

my small kingdom, my stage-manager and lieutenant-general, was a girl of twelve, Mariposa by name. She received the fanciful title from a young visitor to the plantation who had studied Spanish. "Mariposa" meant butterfly, she told the baby's mother, who gratefully accepted the compliment to her newly born daughter. The mother and her mates called her "Mary Posy." The mistress, who was fond of the madcap sponsor, retained the original pronunciation.

Mariposa was as black as tar, and to-day was clothed in a yellow homespun frock. Her hair was twisted and bound into two upright tags that projected above her temples. Altogether, she was not unlike a gigantic black-and-tan moth, a resemblance heightened by the afore-mentioned *antennæ*, albeit lessened by the baby she always carried on some portion of her wiry frame. She was the toughest, most supple, and most versatile creature I ever saw, of any color or clime. The baby was disposed decorously across her knees on this

occasion, and she was one of the five auditors who had brought along their own crickets or chairs. She had confiscated some older woman's splint-bottomed rocking-chair and lugged it to the very front, as she had a right to do.

I had heard Mam' Chloe say of one of Rev. Wesley Greene's sermons, "I tell you, Miss Ma'y, the Sperrit struck him that day, an' he jes' *r'arred!*"

Something struck my worthy lieutenant during my reading of the white, red, black, and pale horses of the Apocalypse and their awesome riders, and the others following her lead, my voice was drowned by the "*Humbums!*" and "*Glorys!*" and "*Hallelujahs!*" and "*Bless de Lords!*" arising from all sides.

"It isn't polite for folks in the seats to talk louder than the preacher," I had to admonish them in my natural voice and manner. "I hope you won't be so noisy while I'm preaching."

Nevertheless, when I gave out my text, the

struck Mariposa, rolling from side to side with the motion of a "weaving" horse on her rocking-chair — that squeaked dismally — was so wrought upon by the ring of unknown and high-sounding syllables as to set up a dreary drone like the hum of an exaggerated bumblebee, and to keep it up. This did not disconcert me. I had expected to stir the imagination of my hearers, for my own was aglow.

Mary 'Liza, in reciting her geography lesson on Friday, had several times spoken of "Van Diemen's Land." Without the remotest conception of where or what it was — whether continent, or island, or town — I fastened, in fancy, upon her words, and constructed a hypothesis relative to the mysterious locality. Why I should have strung it upon the same strand of condemnation and doom with Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, Capernaum and Chorazin, I may have known then. I have no idea now why this was done, or the derivation of the inclusive curse.

Van Diemen's Land, thus damned, fell naturally into line with the "Come and see!" of the "living creatures," and the "Death and Hell," and the prophecy of killing with sword and with famine and the wild beasts of the field. I was in a quiver of excitement that made my head and heart hot, and my feet and hands cold, as I fairly shouted my text:—

"For oh! Van Diemen's Land shall be no more!"

Mariposa's rhythmic hum was broken into irregular bars by groans and gruntings and sighings— all, I was gratified to note, modulated to the standard of civility I had indicated. I had made a hortatory hit, and it was encored. I spread wide my hands, in one of which was the New Testament, and reiterated the text with greater unction and volume:—

"For, oh, my brethren! Van Diemen's Land shall be no more!"

The chair careened under my ill-advised

energy; the barrel toppled forward, and I shot, like a rocket, clear over Mariposa's head, breaking my fall somewhat upon another girl and baby, and landing in the middle of the congregation, with my nose against one of the swathed bricks.

I seldom cried when hurt, Cousin Molly Belle having told me long ago that a brave soldier made no noise when his head was shot off. But I screamed lustily now in the belief that my nose was broken and I bleeding to death. The deluge of gore was frightful to inexperienced eyes.

My father's voice, kindly authoritative, bidding me "be still!" hushed my roaring. As tears and blood were stanch'd, I saw his face bending over me, full of concern that yet fought with amusement I did not comprehend. I could not doubt that he pitied me, when he carried me, bloody and dirty as I was, into the chamber, and stood by while my mother and Mam' Chloe set me to rights. The shock of the fall and

the fright left me sick and trembling. The trundle-bed was drawn out to half its width and I was laid upon it, wrapped in my little dressing-gown, a bottle of camphor in my nerveless hand.

“I am afraid you were playing on Sunday,” said my mother, more in sorrow than in anger.

“Indeed, and indeed, mother, I was not playing!” I broke forth, earnestly, my swollen nose making the pious twang involuntary and full of unction. “I was *preaching!*”

My father walked to the fireplace to hide the laugh he could no longer suppress.


“It is true, my dear!” my over-quick ears caught his remark as she followed him. “I heard the singing, and went to see what was going on.”

His voice sank into a low, rapid recitation, and I lost the rest until it rose upon another laugh.

“She and Van Diemen’s Land went down together!”



Chapter IV
Oiled Calico

 FEW days after the disaster in the family chapel, my mother's cousin, Mrs. Bray, came to see us, bringing her daughter Lucy. Their home had been in Henrico County, but Mr. Bray had "the western fever." My mother and Aunt Eliza Carter said so in my hearing before the Brays' visit, and when they arrived I was surprised to see him looking so well and strong and that he had a hearty appetite. They were on their way to Ohio, travelling in their own carriage, and having also along with them a huge covered wagon, drawn by four fine horses, and packed full of furniture. This wagon was rolled into an empty carriage-house and kept there, locked up, while they stayed.

They had planned to spend Sunday with us, just to say "Good-by," and to move on, on Monday. On Saturday night, Cousin Mary Bray was taken ill, and before morning the tiniest baby I ever saw was born. It was very weak, too, and cried like a kitten all the time it was awake. The mother had to be kept perfectly quiet. The dogs were sent to "the quarters," and everybody went about on tiptoe and talked in whispers. It was very dreadful until Monday morning, when an enchanting change was made in domestic arrangements.

The house was a rambling building, with three separate staircases—none of them back stairs—and two wings, besides what I made my father laugh by calling "the tail," in which was "the chamber." Cousin Mary Bray's room was in the second story of the south wing, which was connected by a corridor with the main house. In the north wing was a lumber room that had once been used as a bedroom, and had a good fireplace. Mam'

Chloe set a couple of men to pile trunks, old chairs, bedsteads, and the like, in one corner, and two maids to sweeping and cleaning up the dust; and when half of the room was empty and "broom-clean," had a fire kindled, and our playthings and ourselves taken over to that end of the house. In the corner farthest from the fire were heaped a mattress, a feather-bed, some old blankets and comfortables, and this became, forthwith, our favorite resort. Even Mary 'Liza entered into the fun of climbing upon the pile that let us sink down, *down*, ever so far, and, pulling the blankets over us, making believe that we were in a big covered wagon, and going to Ohio. Our dolls, and a few other toys, went with us, and we munched ginger cakes and apples, and played that it was night and we were to sleep in the wagon, and that the wind howling under the eaves was wolves, roaring 'round and 'round the camp-fire, looking for little girls to eat. Mary 'Liza was Mr. Bray, I was Cousin

Mary, Lucy was just herself, and she did her part well.

On Tuesday, which I heard Mam' Chloe say to my mother in a solemn sort of way was "the third day," our dinner was brought upstairs. We set the table for ourselves by covering a packing-box with an old sheet, and putting our plates and mugs and the dishes holding our food upon it. Mary 'Liza was at the foot of the table, I at the head, and Lucy sat up, prim and well-behaved, at the side, saying, "Yes, ma'am," to me and, "No, thank you, sir," to Mary 'Liza. We were making merry over the feast when the door opened and my mother came in with her maid Marthy, who had a plate in her hand with three round cakes on it. Pound-cake, baked in little pans, and warm from the oven! I danced and screamed for joy. Mary 'Liza sat still, her hands in her lap, and said, "Thank you," when her cake was put on her plate. Lucy laughed all over her face without saying any-

thing, but when my mother sat down on a chair to rest after climbing the stairs, the child ran to her and put both arms around her neck and laid her cheek on her shoulder.

I can see her now — the picture was so pretty! Her hair was dark brown and waved naturally away from her forehead, making her face rather oval than round; her gray eyes were clear and large, and, when she was not smiling or talking, there was a serious shadow far down in them. She had a dear little mouth, and I liked to make her laugh that I might see the dimples come and go in her cheeks.

Her frock was a new material to Mary 'Liza and me, — bright red, with a tiny black clover leaf dotting it. They called the stuff "oiled calico," and, by putting my nose close to it, I could distinguish an odor that was something like oil. What we knew as "Turkey red," many years later, resembled it somewhat, but the oiled calico was much finer and softer.

My mother lifted the slight figure to her lap, and I pressed close to her other side, nibbling my cake, crumb by crumb, to make it last longer. I had a habit of swallowing my goodies as soon as I got them. Mary 'Liza always put aside part of hers "until next time."

At Christmas I had made a valiant effort to be economical and forehanded, and got the plantation carpenter to knock together a savings-bank for me, with a hole in the top. Into this I put half of the candy, raisins, and almonds given to me in the holidays and for a fortnight afterward. The self-denial went hard with me, but I consoled myself each night with the anticipation of opening day. The end of the fortnight arrived at last. I promised my sable cohort such a spread in the playhouse as it and they had never beheld. Barratier, Mariposa's brother, borrowed a hammer and chisel from "the shop," and pried off the lid. All crowded close to peep in. The box was almost full. Sticks

of peppermint candy, with ribbons of red and white winding about them (a barber's pole reminds me of them to this hour); lollipops, also of peppermint, that would just go into my mouth and let the roof down and the teeth meet; cubes of amber lemon candy; and, most delicately delicious of all, squares of pink rose-candy that dissolved upon the tongue and smelt like the Vale of Cashmere to the very last grain; bunches of raisins, which we — and Jacky Horner — called "plums"; almonds, palm-nuts, filberts; small ginger cakes of a cut and size that Aunt 'Ritta would not make for us unless she were in a particularly good humor; — the sight called forth a round-eyed and round-mouthed "*Aw-w-w!*" from the heads packed in a solid circle, as necks craned eagerly forward.

For five heavenly minutes I was a fairy-godmother, a Lady Bountiful, with whom the ability to give was coequal with the desire. I made them sit down in rows on the carpeted boards. I hope there was not sacri-

lege in thinking, as I gave the order, how and where a similar command had been spoken. Beginning with the babies, I put a bit of candy upon each greedy palm, bidding my pensioners wait until I gave the signal to eat it. Then I took a pink cube between my thumb and finger, waved it theatrically above my head, and popped it into my mouth. Every other mouth opened simultaneously.

Even now I hurry over the telling. The treasure-chest was of green pine boards. The contents were so strongly impregnated with turpentine that not a morsel was eatable. The weest pickaninny spat it out and squalled because the turpentine burned his tongue.

I could dwell tearfully — possibly profitably — upon the moral of the adventure, had I not left Lucy Bray all this time on my mother's lap, and myself fingering the oiled calico in covetous admiration.

“Mother,” I said, “I wish, next time you go to Richmond, you would buy me a frock like this. Don't you think it is pretty?”

“Very pretty, Molly. But I do not like to have you wear cotton in the winter. I am afraid you might catch fire. Haven’t you a worsted frock that you can put on to-morrow, Lucy? It would be safer while you children are up here so much alone.”

Lucy was an old-fashioned little body from being the only child for so long and being so much with her mother. Instead of answering directly, she stopped to think, a pucker drawn between her brows with the effort.

“I don’t believe I have, Cousin Mary,” she said slowly. “’Most all my best clothes are packed up, and the trunks are in the wagon. We didn’t mean to stay here more than two days, you know. It wouldn’t be worth while to unpack the trunks, I s’pose? Mamma will be well enough to go on to Ohio pretty soon, won’t she?”

“I hope so, dear.”

My mother drew her up to her and kissed the brown head. She, too, was thoughtful.

I supposed that she was wondering if she would better unpack those trunks. I was not glad that Cousin Mary Bray was sick, but I was in no hurry for her to get well enough to travel. I had never had another visitor whose ways of playing suited me as well as Lucy's. She was a year older than I, and a year younger than Mary 'Liza, and she got along beautifully with both of us. Then there was her cat, Alexander the Great, that she was taking to Ohio with her. He was the biggest cat any of us had ever known, with a coat of the longest, softest fur you can imagine, all pure gray, without a white or black hair on him, and he had lots of fun and sense. Mary 'Liza wanted, at first, to make believe that he was a hungry wolf, but Lucy would not hear of it until I proposed he should be a tame wolf we had taken when he was a baby and trained to defend us. He really seemed to understand what was expected of him, and when we lay down in the feather-bed and

huddled close together under the covers, and whispered, as the wind screamed around the corners of the house:—

“There they are again! Don’t you s’pose they’ll be afraid of the fire? Wolves always are, you know,”—and Lucy would answer:—

“Faithful Alexander will take care of us.”

Alexander would prowl up and down the room and stalk around the bed, never offering to get upon it, until we called out to one another:—

“Another morning, and we are still safe!”

Then, he would leap into Lucy’s arms, and purr, and tickle her nose with his whiskers, until she couldn’t speak for laughing. She had had him ever since he was born, and he slept on the foot of her bed at night. While she sat in my mother’s lap, he was winding himself in and out between her feet, his tail carried aloft like a soldier’s plume, and purring almost as loudly as a watchman’s rattle. My mother looked down, presently, at him, and checked

the absent-minded passes of her hand over Lucy's hair.

“Give him some milk, Marthy,” she said, smiling. “I wish you had a coat like his, Lucy. I shouldn't be afraid then of your taking cold, or of your going too near the fire. Marthy! to-morrow you must hunt up a fender to put here, and see if one of your Miss Mary 'Liza's last winter's frocks won't fit Miss Lucy. It would do very well for her to play in. We must take good care of her while — this bad weather lasts.”

I fancy she would have finished the sentence differently but for fear of saddening the child by intimating that her mother might be ill for a long time. She kissed Lucy in putting her down, and patted my shoulder, telling me to “be a good girl and very kind to my cousin.”

“I am glad you all are so comfortable and happy here,” she added. “I could not have you downstairs just now. Carry these things down, Marthy, and run up every little while

to see how the young ladies are getting on. Be sure and keep up a good fire, Mary 'Liza, my dear. I trust you to look after the other children."

When she had gone I went to the window and flattened my nose against the glass to peer into the storm. It was a dormer-window, and the March snow was drifted high upon the roof on both sides of it, and upon the jutting eaves above it, until I looked out, as through a tunnel, into the jutting tree-tops. Beyond was a mad whirl of snowflakes that hid the nearest hills. The wind whined and scolded, and now and then arose into a hoarse bellow. I shivered, and slipped my cold hands up the sleeves of my stuff frock. We had circassian frocks for every day, and merino for Sundays. Our under petticoats were of flannel, and we wore, outside of these, quilted skirts interlined with wool. My mother had a nervous dread of fire.

A shriek of laughter turned me to the more cheerful scene behind me. Alexander the

Great was chasing his own tail as violently as if he had just discovered it and considered it as an offence to his dignity. Lucy was clapping her hands to egg him on, and Mary 'Liza had sat down upon the pile of bedding to laugh at her ease. Before leaving the room Marthy had piled wood upon the andirons as high as she could reach up the chimney-throat without grazing her hands in withdrawing them, as was the rule in fire-architecture on Virginia plantations. The March wind, finding its way through many a crack and cranny, beat at the flames until they flared this way and that. The cat dashed dizzily across the hearth, and Lucy, with a cry of alarm, darted forward to snatch him from the dangerous neighborhood. She caught hold of him, and pulled him away, and the draught whipped her skirts into the hottest heart of the fire.


It was the work of an instant. The oily dressing of the cotton fabric may have made it the more inflammable. Rooted to the floor by horror, I saw a column of flame flash past

me to the door, and heard the piercing wail grow fainter down the stairs.

My mother heard it in the distant room where the sick woman was sleeping quietly, the tiny baby on her arm. Shutting the door as she came out, the hostess flew across the house to the north wing, and met the burning child on the stairs. Eluding her by keeping close to the wall, she gained the upper room, saw, at one wild glance that her own little ones were safe, tore a blanket from the bed, overtook Lucy at the stair-foot, and smothered the flames with it.



Chapter V What Was Done With Musidora

 THE details of Lucy Bray's death were told to me by others. My childish recollection held every feature of that first awful scene as tenaciously as if the flames had kindled upon me, and not upon my hapless play-fellow. What followed is a hazy kaleidoscope, lurid and vague, until my scattered thoughts settled to the perception that I was making a long visit at Uncle Carter's and sharing Cousin Molly Belle's room and bed.

She made me a new rag-doll-baby while I was there. That was the first thing that

“brought me round,” as Aunt Eliza phrased it. For one whole day when it was raining and blowing out of doors, I had eyes and thoughts for nothing except the evolution of that miraculous doll-baby, as she grew and glowed into an entity under the fingers of my best-beloved crony. She was a blonde after she ceased to be a blank. Her eyes were blue, her cheeks were shaded carmine; she had a real nose raised above the dead level of her countenance, stuffed artistically, and kept in shape by well-applied stitches. Finally,—and half a century thereafter I thrill in thinking of it,—an intellectual cranium was covered with a cunningly fashioned wig of Cousin Molly Belle’s own silky auburn hair.

This last and transcendent touch was added after I went to bed one night. The superb creation, arrayed in a lovely light purple French calico frock that could be taken off at night and put on in the morning, and sure enough underclothes, all tucked and trimmed, smiled from my pillow into my eyes when I

unclosed them at the touch of the morning light.

I christened my beauty "Mollabella," and would not change the name for her maker's gentle remonstrances and all my college cousin Burwell's teasing.

Musidora had lapsed, little by little, into chronic invalidism, spending much of her time in bed. She was uncomely to any eyes but mine, and I would not subject her to unkind criticism. Her case was made hopeless by the officious kindness of Argus, a Newfoundland puppy, in bringing her to the playhouse one day after I had purposely left her tucked up snugly under three blankets inside of my reversed cricket by the dining-room fire. The attention was well meant, and he could not be expected to know that to drag sickly Musidora by the left leg through the mud until the infirm member parted company with the body, and to finish the journey with the head between his teeth, was not a happy device by which to win her owner's

regard. I forgave him, in time, but Musidora was, after this last misadventure, a problem. I wondered much, sadly and silently, what other little girls did with doll-babies who died natural deaths. Not like Rozillah, who was never mentioned in my hearing, unless I were very naughty indeed, and heroic treatment was indicated.

The day after my return home, the question was solved.

In the fortnight of my absence great changes had befallen our household. Lucy and her mother and the tiny scrap of a baby had died, and been laid under the snow in the Burwell burying-ground on the hillside beyond the Old Orchard. Mr. Bray had gone to Ohio along with the big covered wagon. Alexander the Great went with him in the carriage. With tears in her sweet eyes, my mother told me how fond the father was of Lucy's pet, and how strangely the cat had acted in staying on Lucy's grave all the time until Mr. Bray took him away by force and carried him off in the carriage with him.

From my retinue of vassals I had, in the chicken playhouse, a fuller and more circumstantial account of all that had passed during those gloomy days. The pleasant weather that succeeded the March snowstorm had given place to a cold, sweeping rain. I scampered as fast as I could across the yard to my castle, my red cloak over my head, and we had to shut the door to exclude the slant sheets of rain. All gathered in the upper end of the room where my chair stood, the only seat there except the floor. To the accompaniment of hissing rain and angry winds, the gruesome particulars of the triple funeral were narrated. Mariposa — with the baby on her lap — was chief spokeswoman, but nearly every one present had some item of his own, authentic or imaginary, to add. All were sure that the three whose fate had aroused the whole county to a passion of pity and regret were angels in heaven.

“Mammy, *sbe* say, s’long as po’ Miss Lucy was bu’n’ so bad, ’twas mussiful fur to let her go,” said Mariposa, rolling the baby



THE BIRTH OF MOLLABELLA.

“I had eyes and thoughts for nothing except the evolution of that miraculous doll-baby.”

over on his pudgy stomach, and patting his back to "bring up the wind." "*Sbe* say, *ef* one o' we-alls was to get bu'nt or cripple', or pufformed, or ennything like that, she's jes' pray all night an' all day — 'Good Lord, *take* 'em! Heavenly Marster! put 'em out o' they mizzry!' An' Ung' Jack, *be* say, seems ef everything that's put in the groun' comes up beautifuller 'n 'twas when it went in. He tell how the seeds, *they* tu'n into flowers, an' apples an' watermillions, an' all that, an' how folks tu'n inter angills."

I cried myself to sleep that night. My mother, kept wakeful, doubtless, by her own sad thoughts, heard the sobs I tried to stifle with the bedclothes, and came to me with talk of the dear Saviour who had taken little Lucy to his arms, and of her happiness in being forever with the Lord.

I did not tell her — what child would? — that, while I missed and grieved for the companion of those three happy days, a deeper heartache forced up the tears.

For I knew now what must be done with Musidora.

I had taken her to bed with me that night for the first time in many weeks. Mary 'Liza was amused, in an amiable way, when she saw the bundle done up in red flannel — Musidora's rheumatism was *awful!* — that I hugged up to me.

"I never let Dorinda sleep with me," she observed. "I am afraid of hurting her. But I suppose you can't hurt Musidora. Why don't you give her to one of the colored children? She is really a sight."

"Nobody asked you to look at her!" retorted I, crossly, putting my hand over the unfeatured face. "Mam' Chloe says, 'Handsome is as handsome does.' Anyhow, my doll-baby doesn't say mean things to folks."

The little bout raised the tear-level nearer to the escape-pipe. It was easy to cry when Mary 'Liza's breathing assured me that she was asleep. It also confirmed my resolu-

tion to have the poor, deformed dear dead and buried without useless delay.

I cannot decide what moved me to bear her off secretly to the seldom-used staircase in the north wing to prepare her for her last long sleep. I escaped thither the next morning, as soon as lessons were over, and seated myself half-way up the steep staircase. It was scarred in many places by fire and smoke. No amount of scrubbing could quite efface the traces of the catastrophe. I looked at them for a long time before beginning my sad task, and did not shrink from the sight. My state of mind was distinctly morbid. Children were not reckoned to have nerves at that date, and little notice was taken of their silent moods. That I should voluntarily seek a solitary quarter of the house, which was shunned by others, never entered my mother's or my nurse's mind.

I had abundance of time in which to be as miserable as I thought I ought to be, and diligently nursed such sickly, sentimental

fancies as ought to be foreign to a healthy young mind, while I divested maimed and sightless Musidora of her flannel muffings and dressed her in a clean nightgown: Without saying what I meant to do with it I had begged a square of white cambric from Mam' Chloe, and set about notching it with a pair of blunt scissors. Mariposa had described a winding-sheet minutely to me, and I meant that my dead doll-baby should be decently laid out. The notching took a tedious time, and the bows of the blunt scissors left purple furrows upon thumb and fingers. Uncle Ike had given me an empty raisin box. I lined it with Musidora's own mattress and quilt, spread the "pinked" cambric on them, laid the remains (no figurative phrase in this connection) upon this bed, folding the one arm left to the unfortunate across her breast, and wrapped the edges of the winding-sheet over her face. With difficulty I coaxed the points of four projecting nails left in the lid into corresponding holes in the box, and having

no hammer, sat down upon the top to make them fast, bouncing up and down a few times to make a good job of it.

I sat still awhile after closing the casket, and rehearsed mentally the order of the obsequies. I had, thus far, made no arrangements for them beyond instructing the colored children to meet me in the Old Orchard under the big sweeting when the sun reached the "noonmark" my father had, to please me, cut in the fence by the playhouse door. They would be there in force and on time. I would get myself and burden out of the end door of the north wing and steal around the yard fence to the back of the garden without being seen. I knew how Mary 'Liza would smile and hitch up her straight, clean nose at the box and its contents, and I had a boding fear lest grown people might disapprove of and forbid the funeral.

Upon that my heart was fully set. The grief of losing the ceremony would be harder to endure than the delicious mournfulness

with which I had systematically imbued my soul. I chose four boys of uniform size for pall-bearers; Barratier was to have a spade ready and to dig the grave, and when it was filled in we would sing a hymn. Mourning garments were the knotty point. I, as Musidora's mother, could not appear at her funeral in the crimson circassian frock I wore at present. That would upset everything.

A happy thought struck me. I recollected to have seen in the lumber-room, hanging upon some pegs high upon the wall, a row of old bonnets, and a black one among them. Other black things could be had for the hunting. I was a fanciful child, too used to conjuring up weird situations and make-believe happenings to be easily scared by what other children might dread. Nor was I then, or ever, a physical coward. As soon as the idea of visiting that upper room came to me I acted upon it. Tripping up the narrow stairs, I pushed hard against the

door. It stuck in the frame, and I was fearing it might be locked when it gave way suddenly and I almost fell into the chamber. It was a dreary place, although the spring sunshine poured broadly from wall to wall. The charred brands of the fire that had wrought such woe were cold in the corners of the hearth, having toppled, head-foremost and backward, over the andirons after burning through in the middle. The old blankets and comfortables were huddled upon the mattress and trailed upon the floor, as my mother had left them in snatching one to throw about Lucy. A ball with which Alexander the Great had played was in a corner. But for the dead fire and the living sunshine and the stillness that met me on the threshold like a draught of icy air, we might have left the place not three minutes ago.

I learned, subsequently, that my mother had been sadly prostrated by the terrible threefold disaster, and had never had the nerve to revisit the place where it began. None of the

servants would have gone near it of their own free will. A queer, unfamiliar tremor I did not recognize as superstitious dread contracted my heart, and arrested me just within the doorway. The box, from which we had eaten our dinner, was in the middle of the floor, the three crickets pushed a little way back from it, and half-way between the fireplace and a window in the gable was the rocking-chair my mother had occupied while she held Lucy on her lap. Faded calico covered the seat, a valance of the same hung about the legs; two of the upright spindles were missing from the back. I took in every feature of the haunted room before I rushed over to the wall where the bonnets hung, climbed upon a chair, grabbed the black bonnet, and espying a black silk apron dependent from another peg, jerked it down, and ran off shakily, with my booty. The queer trembling had got into my legs, and as I went downstairs I steadied myself against the wall, avoiding, as I had not thought of doing as I went up, the scorched streaks on the

walls and the stains on the steps. Even after I stood in the safe shelter of the garden fence, my heart beat so loudly that I put the raisin box down upon the grass, and pulled myself together.

The sunshine was genial to my chilled frame; through the palings I could see double rows of hyacinths, tulips, and butter-and-eggs, edging the walks, and bushes of lilacs and snowballs almost in bloom, just as they had looked before I went up to the lumber-room. The serene naturalness of it all restored my wits to me; I unrolled the apron which I had wrapped about the bonnet, and reawakened, as from a nightmare, to the business of the hour.

When I presented myself to the group awaiting me under the big sweeting, a low, but fervent, groan of admiration broke forth as from one breast. The bonnet covered my head generously, jutting six inches beyond my nose. The crêpe curtain at the back descended to my shoulder-blades and flapped at the sides like the wings of a dejected crow. I had made

a mourning-cloak of the apron by tying it, hind part before, about my neck, whence it drooped to my heels. Mariposa said — respectful of the genius manifest in my caparison — that I looked “mos’ ezzac’ly like a real, sure-nough widder.” The boys were impressed into gravity becoming the occasion, and obeyed, with never a snicker or a grimace, my instructions as to the conduct of the ceremony.

I walked directly behind the coffin; Mariposa, with the baby on her left hip, marched next, arm-in-arm with another girl, who carried her baby — a very young one — over her shoulder, its head wobbling helplessly as she walked. The rest came after us, two-and-two, through the Old Orchard, out through the draw-bars at the lower end, and into the graveyard beyond.

It was a retired, and not an unlovely spot. A brick wall, splashed with ochre and gray lichens, enclosed six generations of dead Burwells and their next of kin. A locked gate kept out trespassers. Long streamers of brier and wild berry bushes, purple and ashy

with the mantling sap drawn upward by the March sunshine, were matted over the older graves ; a spreading "honey-shuck" tree arose near the middle of the badly kept square, and smaller trees flourished here and there. An apple tree, flushed with blossoms, leaned over the wall above the place selected for Musidora's grave.

Barratier struck his perpendicular spade into the black soil in a truly workmanlike manner, utilizing the foundation of the wall as one side of the oblong pit. The coffin was lowered into place by means of tow-strings, provided by thoughtful Mariposa. There was no reason, save her punctilio of "doin' things jes' like folks," why Barratier, or I, for that matter, should not have stooped and laid the casket in the eighteen-inch-deep hole with our bare hands. But lowered it was in funeral style, and covered with apple blossoms, before the bearers returned the black earth to the excavation and mounded it into proper shape. I stood at the head of the grave, my handkerchief at my eyes,

trying with all my might to feel sorry enough to cry. The excitement of the conventional ceremonies, and the complacent consciousness of being the principal actor in it, and doing the thing creditably, drew the sting out of what would have been real grief had the flutter of my spirits allowed me to think. I believe that, if maturer mourners would be as frank as I, we should find that my experience was not singular, nor my reluctant composure unnatural.

Mariposa had her emotions better in hand. She sobbed volubly, wiping away real tears with the baby's calico slip, and three other girls accomplished commendable snivels. An embarrassing halt brought down my handkerchief and hushed audible mourning. The affair was not over. Every eye was riveted expectantly upon me, and I had forgotten what came next. Mariposa plucked my cloak and whispered in my ear:—

“Thar oughter be a pra'ar now!”

The propriety of the suggestion was obvious. I had seen pictures of funerals and knew

how the officiating clergyman appeared in committing "dust to dust, ashes to ashes." But there was the fear aforementioned of breaking a Commandment by addressing the Almighty in a make-believe service.

"'Tain't a fun'ral 'thout thars a pra'ar!" Mariposa muttered insistently.

Nerved by the exigency, I lifted both hands and eyes toward the sky:—

"World without end, Amen and Amen!"

"A-a-men!" groaned my faithful lieutenant. Her emphasis assured me that the inspiration I had obeyed was a felicitous touch. She pressed still closer to me, mindful of my dignity, and prompted me further, in an artistic mutter, without using her lips.

"The services o' this solemn 'casion will be close' by er hymn."

I uttered it as if she had not given the cue, and "lined out" the hymn I had pitched upon as eminently appropriate for the "solemn 'casion."

"When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies."

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"When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies."

Mariposa raised the tune and carried it, the rest of the band screaming in her wake.

“I’ll bid farewell to every fear
And wipe my weeping eyes,”

I continued in a nasal sing-song.

The chorus was plain sailing before a spanking breeze ;

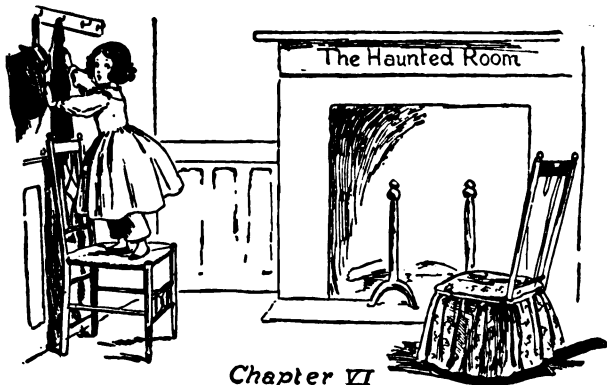
“And wipe my weeping eye-eye-eyes!
And wipe my weeping eye-cr-ese!
I’ll bid farewell to every fear
And wipe my weeping eyes.”

Like the echo of the final screech a fear-some wail arose from within the enclosure,— a long-drawn cry, repeated while we stared into one another’s blanched faces, too affrighted for words.


Mariposa was the first to recover the use of her tongue and limbs.

“*Tb’ gbos’ o’ the little baby!*” she yelled, and took to her nimble heels at a rate that made it impossible for the fleetest of her fellow fugitives to overtake her.

I was left all alone.



Chapter VI

 **L**EANING against the outside of the brick wall, too stunned to join in my companions' stampede, I yet did not lose my senses. Neither did I cry out or whimper. Children have gone into convulsions and become idiotic for less cause. I was phenomenally healthy, and, as I have said, no coward. Before the hindmost deserter gained the draw-bars my reason was on the return path. I had the signal advantage above my comrades of not believing in ghosts. My father had asserted to me positively, once and again, that no such things existed, and put himself to much trouble to explain natural phenomena that

are often misinterpreted by the ignorant and superstitious into supernatural manifestations. His orders were strict that the servants should never retail ghost stories in our hearing; and he was obeyed by the elder negroes. Mam' Chloe, whatever may have been her reserved rights of private judgment, backed him up dutifully with the epigram:—

“Folks that's gone to the bad place *can't* get out to come back, an' them that's in heaven don't *want* to.”

The cry I had heard certainly sounded like the weak wail of Cousin Mary Bray's skinny little baby, but God and the dear angels would never let the helpless, tiny mite wander back to earth alone. My mother had said to me, last night, that it would never cry any more.

“It was in pain all the while it was here,” she reminded me. “It never awoke that it did not begin to cry. Think how sweet it must be for it not to suffer now. I think that God sent for it to come to heaven because He was so sorry for it.”

Strength flowed into my soul with the recollection. My mother never said what was not exactly true. Happy, safe, and saving faith of childhood in a parent's wisdom, a parent's word, a parent's power!

Curious, rather than frightened, I stepped over Musidora's grave, and hurried around to the locked gate. Two unsodded mounds were near the entrance. One was long, and one short. Stretched upon this last was something that moved slightly and cried again, yet more piteously, when I called to it. The sight sent me flying like a flushed partridge through the Old Orchard to the garden fence, over it and up the middle walk of the garden. While yet afar off, I saw my father standing there talking with the gardener. Evidently the scattered horde had not spread an alarm. My father turned at my loud panting, and eyed me with astonishment. Without pausing to consider why he should be amazed, I caught hold of him and shrieked my news:—

“Father! father! it is Alexander the Great come back to look for Lucy!”

My father seldom scolded. He more rarely punished without inquiry. He was stern now and spoke sharply.

“What is the meaning of this nonsense, Molly? You are forever getting up some new sensation. There is such a thing as having too much ‘make-believe.’ I would rather have a little sensible truth now and then.”

“But, father, really and truly—” chokingly, for his words were as drawn swords to my loving heart.

He pushed my hand away from his arm.

“When you look and behave less like a crazy child, I will hear what you have to say. Where did you get those things?”

I wished that the ground would open and swallow me away from his cold, contemptuous eye. I had forgotten my ridiculous costume entirely. The shame and humiliation of having exposed myself to his just criticism, the

added disgrace of the grinning gardener's enjoyment of the figure I had cut — the absurd coal-scuttle of a bonnet hanging down my back, the black silk apron streaming behind me like a half-inflated balloon — overwhelmed me with speechless confusion. I hung my head in an agony.

“Where did you get them, I say?” repeated my father.

“Up in the lumber-room,” I stammered, faintly and sheepishly.

“Go, put them back where you found them! Then, come to me. As I was saying, James —”

He went on with his directions to the gardener.

I slunk away, forgetful of everything except my personal discomfiture, dodging from one clump of shrubbery to another, lest I should be seen from the windows of the house, going almost on all-fours in exposed stretches of walk or garden-beds, and so making my retreat to the side door of the north wing.

I had stripped off the hateful masquerade habiliments and rolled them into a compact bundle, but anybody who met me would ask what I was carrying under my arm, and I could bear no more that day. Unable to contain myself a minute longer, I sank down in the solitude of the steep staircase leading to the lumber-room, and had my cry—if not out—so nearly to the end that I felt adequate to making my judge see reason,—if only he would not look at me as if he were ashamed of his daughter! Was it very wrong to take those things on the sly? Would I be punished for it? Had he told my mother yet? And did Mary 'Liza know about it? I could never, never tell her that I had worn the *nasty* bonnet and cloak as mourning to Musidora's funeral. I would be whipped first.

Crying again in anticipation of the dilemma, I trudged slowly up the steps, and pushed back the door, which stuck fast again although I did not recollect shutting it.

“Just's if somebody was leaning against

it!" said I, pettishly, and flung my whole weight against the lower panel.

The door flew back and I fell headlong, face downward, on the floor, the bundle flying ahead of me clear to the hearth. I picked myself up, rubbed my smarting palms and, in a vile humor, recovered the detestable cause of all the trouble. I boxed the lop-ears of the bonnet, and gave the apron a vicious shake, in restoring them to their respective pegs. Then, I backed down from the chair on which I had been standing, and started for the door. A feeble cry stopped me as if a shot had passed through me.

The room was in afternoon shadow, and the blinds of the larger of the two windows had blown shut. The cry quavered out again, and at the same instant I saw — or verily believed that I saw with my natural eyes — Cousin Mary Bray seated in the rocking-chair between the hearth and the window, holding a baby in her arms. She was rocking gently back and forth, her face was pale and peaceful, and she

wore a sort of dim gray dress. Thus much I had seen when my father called loudly to me from the bottom of the steps:—

“Molly! what are you doing up there? Come down directly! do you hear?”

The apparition disappeared on the instant, and as I moved toward the door, I stumbled over something soft that mewed miserably. In a second I had it in my arms,—a rack of bones covered with muddy, tangled gray fur,—and rushed down the stairs.

“I told you so, father! don’t you see? It is Alexander the Great. Now, isn’t it?”

Will it be believed that the commotion attendant upon the recognition of the wanderer, the talk, conjectures and questions, the nursing and feeding, and cosseting the creature who was at the point of death from starvation and fatigue—put all thought of revealing what I had beheld in the haunted chamber out of my head, until, when I recalled it in all its vividness, I simply could not speak of it? It was all like a swift, bad dream, the telling of

which might revive the unpleasant sensation it created in passing. I do not pretend to explain a child's reserve on subjects which have gone very far into the deeps of a consciousness that never lets them go. Perhaps the solution is partly in the poverty of a vocabulary which lags painfully behind the development of thought and emotion. Certain it is that I was a woman grown before I ever confided to a living soul what I thought sat in the rocking-chair in the haunted room, brooding peacefully above a quieted baby.

Lucy's cat — guided by what instinct only his Creator and ours knows — had found his way to her grave over two hundred miles of fen, field, and forest. Not finding her there, he had tracked me to the room where she had last played with him. When carried to other parts of the house, he cried piteously all day and all night. When the north wing was locked against him, he went back to the grave and could not be coaxed away. Finally, my mother proposed that he be allowed to stay there, until cold

weather. He was the plantation-pet all summer, growing plump, but never playful, with nourishing food and rest. His meals were sent to him twice a day, but he partially supported himself by catching birds and field-mice in the burying-ground, which he never left. We got used to his presence there after a while, and his habit of patrolling the top of the wall, several times a day, for exercise, or under the impression that he was guarding the short green mound where he slept every night.

As the winter approached repeated efforts were made to tempt him to the house, and when they were ineffectual my father took him there in his own arms. The cat refused food and sleep, keeping the household awake with his cries, and in the morning flew so savagely at his jailers that we were obliged to let him go.

The fiercest tempest known in mid-Virginia for forty years beset us on the anniversary of Lucy's death, and raged for three days. When the drifts in the graveyard melted, we found Alexander the Great dead at his post.



Chapter VII Just For Fun



THE floor of the summer-house at Uncle Carter's was of lovely white sand, and did not soil my clean pink gingham frock, although I sat down flat upon it. Under one of the three benches that furnished it, I had dug a vault yesterday. It was modelled upon the description given in *The Fairchild Family* of one belonging to a nobleman's estate. My self-education was essentially Squeersian. When I read a thing, I forthwith went and did it. The gardener had lent me a trowel, and I had found a thin, flat stone that served as a cover. Digging was easy work in the top-dressing of sand and the substratum of loose, dry soil.

There were eight niches in the vault—two on a side. When all was finished, I sallied forth in quest of occupants. My vault was stocked by nightfall. In one niche was a dead sparrow my cousin Burwell had shot by mistake and thrown away. In a second was a frog on which a horse or cow had trod, crippling it so badly that Uncle Carter mercifully killed it with a blow of his stick. The poultry-yard and an epidemic of pip supplied me with two more silent tenants. A mouse-trap strangled a fifth, the gardener's mole-trap yielded up a sixth. Nos. 7 and 8 were land-terrapins ("tar'pens," in negro dialect), which I knew must be dead when I found them, although I could discern no sign of violence. Their shells were shut so tightly that I could not force a straw between the upper and lower, and no amount of kicking and thumping elicited any sign of life.

An innovation upon the Fairchild pattern was the deposit in the bottom of the vault of a tumbler full of flies which Aunt Eliza

told the dining room servant to throw into the kitchen fire. A primitive snare for these destroyers of the housewife's peace was made by filling a tumbler within an inch of the brim with strong soap-suds, and fitting upon the top a round cover of thick "sugar-loaf paper," with a hole in the middle. Molasses was smeared all around this hole upon the under side of the paper, and an alluring drop or two on the top attracted attention to the larger supply of sweets. At least a quart of flies, per day, were caught in this way in the height of the season before window and door screens were invented.

I waylaid the man and tumbler in the back porch.

"Are they dead, sure enough?" I whispered.

"Dead as a door-nail, little mistis."

"Give 'em to me, please! I'll bury them."

He complied, good-naturedly. I poured the contents of the glass into the vault, and strewed fine dry sand over them an inch deep. Then I fitted on the flat stone, and

said nothing to anybody of my new branch of industry.

I was tired of being called "an old-fashioned child!" My mother's oft and resigned ejaculation—"What *next*, I wonder!" was to my ears a covert reproach for not being "steady" and "a comfort," like Mary 'Liza. Even my less critical father's shout of laughter at any unusual freak or experiment abraded my moral cuticle sometimes. At home the colored children would have entered heartily into my mortuary enterprise,—yes! and kept my counsel. The reticence of the serf exceeds in dumb doggedness that of a misunderstood child. But I did not play with Uncle Carter's little negroes. Every Southern child comprehended the distinction between "home-folks" and other people's servants.

Not that I was ever lonely. What I called "things" were an unfailling resource to me. An ant-hill was entertainment for a whole forenoon; I watched bees and their hives.

by the hour; my vault kept me busy and happy all day. If Cousin Molly Belle suspected what I was about, she asked no questions, and refrained from spying upon me. When dressed clean in the afternoon, for the second time since breakfast,—the manufacture of mud-pies, puddings, and cakes, and the baking of several batches in the sun, having engrossed the morning,—I took *The Fairchild Family* out into the summer-house and reread, for the tenth time, the account of the opening of the family vault.

Why, I reasoned within myself, should innocent dumb creatures be thrown away like dead leaves, when they have stopped living? It would be kind in me, or in anybody, to bury them in vaults, and to write Bible verses and all that on their tombstones. I would dig another vault to-morrow and look around for things to put into it,—and still another the next day. I had, in imagination, honeycombed the space under the benches with catacombs, and my book was clean for-

gotten, before I saw a movement in the sandy flooring, close to the edge of the flat stone sealing the mouth of the vault. I leaned forward to inspect it more nearly. The stone had been undermined at one side, and a hole left there, through which a line of flies, gray with dust, was feebly crawling into the sunshine. There seemed to be a thousand of them, all dusty, but some more active than others. As soon as they were quite clear of the hole, they dispersed in various directions, some alighting upon twigs and blades of grass, some flying up to the benches, where they sat cleaning their bodies and wings with their feet and mouths.

I worked my hands into the hole and raised the stone. A cloud of resurrected flies arose in my astonished face. The vault was quick with them. The dry sand, warmed by the sun, that I had sifted over them, had acted as a hot blanket upon the chilled body of a dying man. When I got rid of the swarm I examined the vault. Both of

the terrapins were missing. The sapping and mining was their work. Through the tunnel thus excavated they had regained their liberty, and released a mighty host of fellow-captives.

“The rest of you are *dead*, anyhow!” said I, aloud, intensely chagrined at the cheat practised upon my benevolent nature, and I shoved the stone back over the violated vault.

A shadow fell upon the white sand. Looking up, I saw a young gentleman in the door of the summer-house, smiling down at me. At the first glance I took him for my cousin Burwell, who was at home on his vacation. A second undeceived me. I scrambled to my feet and stared hard at the stranger who stood with his hands behind him, still smiling, but not saying a word. He was nattily dressed in a blue cloth coat and trousers, and a white waistcoat. A white satin stock of the latest style encircled a slender neck; he wore shiny boots, a leg-

horn hat was set jauntily above a crop of black curls. I was never shy, having been accustomed from my birth to meeting strangers and to "entertaining company" when called upon to do so. Yet I was strangely embarrassed by the merry eyes fixed silently upon me.

"How do you do, sir!" I said, dropping a little courtesy, as well-bred children still did in that part of the civilized world.

Still without speaking, the stranger drew nearer and stooped to kiss me. This was going several steps too far. I clapped one hand over my mouth and pushed him away with the other.

"Cousin Molly Belle! *ob*, Cousin Molly Belle!" I screamed between my fingers.

She was the only member of the family at home, my uncle, aunt, and their two sons having gone on an all-day visit to a plantation some miles away.

"Why, Namesake! don't you know me?"

Her voice answered in my very ear, her arm held me as I ceased struggling.

I laughed like a mad thing in the excess of my relief and surprise, and when she sat down, I climbed to her knee for a good look at her disguise.

“Cousin Burwell’s clothes!” I said analytically. “And his hat. But your hair is black.”

She lifted the hat to show that she had on a black wig.

“It belonged to poor Grandpapa when he was young. He had a fever and his head was shaved. I found it in a box on the top shelf of mother’s closet, and tried it on just for fun. I liked myself so well in the glass that I thought I’d see how I would have looked if Burwell had been the girl, and I the boy. I know now that I ought to have been. I mean to be—just for fun—until they all come home. I’m in exactly the humor to do something outrageous. I’m tired to death of everyday doings and everyday people, and my everyday self. You and I are going to have a real spree,

a glorious frolic, and nobody else is to know a single thing about it. Flora" (her maid) "helped me on with this rig. She is as close as wax, and you never tell tales,— Oh, yes! I know—" as I opened my mouth eagerly—" you would have your tongue pulled out by the roots before you would get me into trouble. And there would be all sorts of trouble if I were found out."

She tied my sunbonnet, made of the same pink gingham as my frock, under my chin, and we set forward gleefully upon our spree. To begin with, we jumped over the yard palings, so that we should not have to pass in sight of the house and kitchen, in order to get into the lane leading to the public road. We called it "a lane." Now it would be an avenue, or drive. The finest Lombardy poplars in Powhatan County bordered it; sheep mint, pennyroyal, sweetbrier, and wild thyme grew up close to the wheel-track and gave out a goodly smell as we brushed by and trod upon them. I was in a high gale.

of spirits, and prattled as fast as my tongue could run, flattered beyond expression by the choice of myself as an accomplice in the frolic.

“It’s a pity you *can’t* change places with Cousin Burwell!” I regretted. “You’d be a heap handsomer gentleman than he is. And it must be just fine not to have to hold up your frocks when you want to run fast, and to climb trees and jump fences. Would it be sure-enough wrong—I don’t mean not lady-like—but would it be *sinful* for you to dress that way all the time?”

“People seem to think so, Namesake. They think so so much that it is against the law for a woman to wear a man’s clothes, or for a man to wear a woman’s. Though why any man with a grain of sense in his head should ever want to put on *skirts*, I can’t see. If I were to meet a magistrate while I have on these—*things*,”—flicking her trousers with a switch she had cut from a hickory sapling,—“he would have a right to put me in jail.”

“Oh, Cousin Molly Belle!” squeezing her hand hard. “S’pose we should!”

“I’m Cousin Burwell until we get home. No ‘s’pose,’ you little goosie! If we did, we’d take to the woods, and outrun him. Or, we’d climb a tree.”

We were in the highroad, striding the ruts and skipping over stones like two boys on the way home from school. There was pleasanter walking in bridle-paths and wood-roads branching off from the thoroughfare every few rods. I think the madcap chose the ruddy and mud-holey route because there was, at least, a chance that we might have to plunge into the bushes to hide, or to brave the scrutiny of strangers and acquaintances. The sauce of danger made the escapade the more attractive.

Half a mile from home a creek, shallow, but broad, crossed the road. We could not pass over dry-shod and had to go up the bank into the low grounds to find a long log laid from side to side of a narrower part

of the stream. My companion hoisted me upon her back and ran along the uncertain bridge as fleetly as a squirrel.

“How far are we going?” I asked, as she set me down.

“Around by Tom’s Hill, and then cut across the field home. It’s more than a mile. Can you walk so far?”

“I walked two miles at a time, once!” I boasted.

“You are a brave little lightwood knot!”

She was “fey” — *exaltée* — in the state of lighthearted- and lightheadedness for which sober, literal, decorous English has no synonym. As we went, she danced and sang, and laughed out joyously at everything and at nothing, and talked the most fascinating nonsense — all in the rôle of “Cousin Burwell.” She could imitate him to perfection; her strut and swagger and slang threw me into paroxysms of delight. We picked huckleberries, and dived into the woods to feast upon wild plums that had ten drops of

syrupy juice between tough skins and flinty stones encased in the pulp of bitterness, and gathered handfuls of wild flowers because their beauty tempted sight and touch, and with no intention of taking them home with us. Two of Pan's dryads turned loose for a holiday could not have sported more irrationally.

We met neither man nor beast until we had climbed Tom's Hill, a stony eminence from the top of which, as the neighbors were proud of saying, one could see six dwelling-houses, each with its group of outbuildings, representing six fine plantations. A saddle-horse was tied to a persimmon tree a hundred yards or so down the other side. He whinnied at sight of us, and Cousin Molly Belle ran up to him.

"Well done, Snap! old fellow! clothes don't make any difference to you — do they?"

It was Mr. Frank Morton's riding horse, and the fence by which he stood bounded an

extensive tobacco field belonging to Mr. Frank Morton's brother. About the middle of the field was a tobacco barn, and by climbing upon the top rail of the fence so as to overlook a row of sassafras saplings, I could see a group of men about the door. Their backs were toward us, and if they had looked our way they could not have seen us, when I got down.

Cousin Molly Belle's eyes were two dancing stars. She clapped her hands in riotous glee. Without a word she untied the bridle from the tree, vaulted into the saddle, drew me up in front of her, and before I could put a question we were pacing briskly down the hill. At the bottom we struck into a cross-road leading to Uncle Carter's plantation. Cousin Molly Belle was laughing too heartily to speak distinctly, and I joined in with all my heart, with a very imperfect appreciation of the extent of the practical joke. Mr. Frank Morton would not have to walk home. He had only to go to his brother's

house when he missed Snap and borrow a horse, and Snap would be sent back safely to him in good time.

“What d’you s’pose he’ll say when he comes to the fence and Snap isn’t there?” queried I, at length.

“Oh, *don’t* I wish I were hiding somewhere near enough to hear and see him!” another and yet more infectious outburst. “That would be the best part of the joke. I’m going to turn Snap loose when we get to our outer gate, and hit him a crack with my switch and start him toward home. He’ll not tell tales out of school—will you, old boy?” slapping his neck affectionately. “Mr. Frank Morton will never guess why the horse thief let such a fine animal get away from him, when once he had got him. I can hear him now, telling me the story, and I’ll look as grave as a dozen judges, and wonder as hard as he does—and—*Hark!*”


We were, perhaps, half a mile from the place where we had found Snap, but, as I

have said, Tom's Hill was a stony ledge, running like a sharp backbone between fertile fields, and we heard from afar off the clattering hoofs of a horse pressed to his utmost speed.



Chapter VIII

My First Lie, and What Came of It.

 **H**E is after us!" exclaimed Cousin Molly Belle, and brought down her switch stingingly upon Snap's flanks.

Tightening her arm about me, she urged him from canter to gallop, from a gallop to a run. The trees swept by us like lightning; the wind tore the breath from our lungs, but I had no thought of fear. My cousin was a fearless rider, and the perfectly broken hunter under us flew as steadily and as straight as a blue martin. Against the back of my head Cousin Molly Belle's heart was pounding like an unbal-

anced trip-hammer. I wondered if it were possible that she was frightened, and twisted my face around to get a glimpse of hers. It was as white as a sheet, and her teeth were set hard upon her lower lip. Within a stone's throw of Uncle Carter's outer gate she brought the horse down to a walk, then to a full stop, and slipped to the ground. Her face was so pale and rigid as she set me upon my feet that I began to tremble.

"Are you scared?" I faltered.

"Scared to death, child! Hush!"

She turned Snap's head in the direction from which we had come, and struck him smartly with her switch, in letting go of the bridle.

"Go home, sir! Go!"

He galloped off, stirrups and mane flying, and she drew a deep, agitated breath.

"If ever I get into such a scrape again!"

She bent low and listened; the scared look settled again upon her face. Through the stillness of the summer afternoon, we heard

a sharp "Whoa!" faint but clear, when, as we judged, Snap neared our pursuer. The pause of a second ensued, and the hoofs, doubled in number and resonance, sounded nearer and nearer, thundering over the soft ground, clicking against the stones, like a charge of cavalry. Cousin Molly Belle was so white that a few freckles, never seen through her usually brilliant complexion, made a line of sallow dots across her cheek bones and the bridge of her nose. Clutching me more roughly than she had ever touched me before, she thrust me well into the heart of a tall cedar whose lowest boughs grew out horizontally and swept the earth.

"Don't move or speak!" she whispered fiercely and forced her way to the bole of the tree.

I heard the grating of the bark under her feet, and felt the branches shake, then grow quiet. She was well up the tree, and hidden by the bushy foliage. The tumultuous beat of the charging hoofs echoed more and more

loudly. The rider would be upon us in another minute. Escape through the gate and down the avenue to the house was out of the question. We would have been in sight from the road for several hundred yards, and a few seconds would be lost in opening the gate.

On my part, the adventure was, thus far, pure fun, and the excitement delicious. I giggled in my sleeve in the anticipation of hearing the furious hoofs sweep past and lose themselves in the distance on the false scent. I had not had time to speculate as to why my companion was "scared to death."

The clatter was abreast of, and behind me in the road when the imperative "Whoa!" again arrested it. I knew the voice now. A man leaped to the ground; hasty footsteps struck across the turf edging the highway; dry sticks cracked, my bushy covert was jarred, and Mr. Frank Morton stood before me, parting the branches to get a good look at me. My pink gingham had betrayed me.

"Molly Burwell! what are you doing here?"

As if prompted by a telepathic despatch from the fugitive overhead, I began to pick the bluish white berries studding the twigs and to cram them into my mouth.

“Picking cedar-berries!” I retorted coolly, cocking a saucy eye at him.

“Who came with you?”

I stood on tiptoe to tug at a fat cedar-ball, glossy, brown, and deeply pitted.

“Oh, Mr. Frank! won’t you please cut it off for me?”

He whipped out his knife and severed the twig.

“Did you come all the way from the house alone?”

I had never, within my memory, told a deliberate lie. My cheeks burned like fire; my eyes dropped guiltily. My tongue did not trip or tangle.

“Yes, sir.”

There was a dread silence. My ears rang, my heart was sinking slowly and sickeningly into my heels. I had bethought myself just

as he put the question, that Cousin Molly Belle might be put in jail if he found out that she had been with me, and had on her brother's clothes. As a well-tutored child in a Presbyterian family, I knew what becomes of liars when they leave off living and lying together. My teeth ceased to chatter and met with a snap. The loyal heart rallied to the help of the guilty tongue. I raised my eyes in sullen defiance.

"It isn't so *dreadful* far! I came all by my loney-toney self!"

My friend laughed.

"My dear little girl, there is no great harm in that. Only, I wouldn't run away again if I were you. Your aunt might be uneasy if she missed you."

"She isn't at home," I answered incautiously. "She 'n' Uncle Carter 'n' Cousin Burwell 'n' Cousin Dick have gone to Mr. Cunningham's."

"Ah!" The ejaculation was not regretful. "Isn't Miss Molly Belle at home?"

You would be sorry to make *her* anxious, I know."

The cedar-branches thrilled slightly, as at the flight of a startled bird. Mr. Frank did not notice it, but the movement nerved me. I spoke hastily, walking away from the tree toward the gate.

"Oh, yes, *she's* at home! I reckon she must have been taking a nap when I came away. I'm going right back now."

I had never dreamed that lying was such an easy performance.

"I'll take you home. Wait a minute!"

Snap was grazing on the roadside. Another saddle-horse stood by with drooping head, his bridle hanging loosely in the bend of Mr. Frank's arm. I was lifted to Snap's back; my escort walked beside me through the gate, and along the lane, one hand on me, and leading the second horse.

"I suppose you are wondering what I am doing with two horses," he said lightly. "It is a very funny story. I'll tell you and

Miss Molly Belle when we get to the house. It will make you both laugh."

He had given me Snap's bridle to hold, as if I were riding all by myself. He thought it would please me. In other circumstances I should have been glad and proud to be so mounted, and by him. But from my lofty seat I could see over his head across the field of corn which lay to the left of the road. Something or somebody was running between the close rows in a straight line from the plantation gate to the house. Running like a deer, or a greyhound—or Cousin Molly Belle. She must get home and up to her room before we got there.

"Oh, Mr. Frank!" I cried. "I have dropped my cedar-ball!" And when he had picked it up, "Won't you please make Snap walk very slow? I am afraid I might fall off."

"What has got into you to-day, little Duchess?" He had a dozen pet names for me, and my heart smote me sore at sight of

his kind, honest face. "It isn't like you to be afraid of horses,—and you and Snap are old friends. You will never be such a rider as Miss Molly Belle if you learn to be nervous."

Not another sound fell from my lips until I was put down gently at the front gate of my uncle's house, and Flora bustled out, cross lines in her forehead and cross tones in her voice.

"I do declar', Miss Molly — (How-you-do, Mars' Frank?) I do declar', Miss Molly, you're enough to drive anybody crazy with you' wild tomboy ways. Me 'n' Miss Molly Belle, we've been jes' raisin' the plantation fo' you, and hyar you come home a-riding Mars' Frank Mo'ton's horse, gran' as you please, and nobody knowin' whar you been ever sence dinner-time. Miss Molly Belle 'll be mighty obleeged to you for fotchin' of her home, Mars' Frank. She'll be down pretty soon for to tell you so herself. Walk into the parlor, please, sir. Jim, you take



THE END OF THE PRANK.

“I was put down at my uncle’s house, and Flora bustled out.”

Mr. Mo'ton's horses to the stable. And Miss Molly, you jes' stay thar 'n' ent'tain Mr. Mo'ton like a little lady tell you' cousin comes down sta'rs."

I obeyed with docility that must have surprised the autocrat. Meek and miserable, I preceded the guest to the parlor, although every minute spent under his unsuspecting eyes was a danger and a pain. I made no attempt to "entertain him." Seated upon a high chair, my feet swinging dolefully six inches above the floor, I fingered the wretched cedar-ball, redolent of rosin through much bruising, my pink sunbonnet hanging from the knotted strings to the small of my back, and with difficulty refrained from crying. I had never been wretched just in that way before. Two imperative duties had met plump and face to face, with a shock that jarred all preconceived principles of belief and action out of plumb. Cousin Molly Belle had trusted me to keep her secret, and I saw no way of doing it except to lie outright and repeatedly.

The sin lashed my conscience until I could have located in my corporeal frame the exact whereabouts of the uncomfortable possession. So absorbed was I by individual upbraidings that Flora's barefaced fabrication of the search her young mistress and she had had for the runaway passed unrebuked by so much as a look. It was no comfort to me to hear another person lie even more glibly than myself. Flora was an ignorant colored person, I, a baptized white child of the covenant who could read the Bible for herself.

Mr. Morton tried to make me talk by well-concerted questions. Children are best approached through the interrogative mood. It offers just so many nails set in a sure place upon which to hang conversation. He was a handsome, well-set-up young fellow, and, if somewhat graver by nature and habit than most of Cousin Molly Belle's beaux, suited my taste best of them all. Yesterday I should have been tickled clean out of the proprieties by the chance of talking to him all by myself

for twenty minutes, sitting up in Aunt Eliza's parlor, just like grown folks.

The twenty minutes were like one hundred in sloth and weight before the tap of high heels on the oaken stairs and the swish of skirts against the banisters advised us who was coming.

She walked into the room with her head high and chin level; her eyes shone and her coloring was superb. She had never been more beautiful, and never so dignified. Her admirer felt both of these facts, and was moved to mute inquiry into the cause of the singular mood. His glowing eyes questioned hers while she shook hands with him and then sat down, and held out her hand silently to me, without a smile. I went as straight to her as a wounded bird to shelter, dropped upon a stool beside her and rested my cheek against her knee, my hand in a grasp that was close and loving, and — or so I fancied — monitory. My heart retorted upon writhing conscience that she was worth sinning for. I added,

dogged and desperate, that I would do it again, if she needed to have it done.

“Flora says that you have been very uneasy about this little lady,” said Mr. Frank, the dumb questioning still in his eyes, while he led the talk into safer paths. “And that you have been hunting for her all over the plantation.”

“Flora said what was not true. I knew where she was, and did not look for her at all or anywhere.”

The metallic quality in her voice did not belong to it, and her articulation was carefully clear, not at all like the gliding vowels and consonantal elisions that help make musical the speech of the Southern girl.

Mr. Frank looked puzzled. Had I not been present, he would have got at the answer to the enigma. I felt this, but my hand was still in Cousin Molly's, and I comprehended that she willed me to stay where I was.

“I have had an adventure, if she has not,” resumed Mr. Frank, merrily. “You may

have seen me arrive with two saddle-horses? I was on my way here, riding Snap. As I passed John's upper tobacco-field, I saw him at the barn. So I tied Snap to a tree and went to speak to John. While we were talking a negro ran up, all out of breath, to say that a man and a woman had stolen my horse. The negro was too far off to recognize the fellow, but he saw him untie Snap, mount him, help a little woman in a red dress to get up behind him, and then ride away at a rattling pace. Fortunately, John's riding-horse was standing at the barn door. I was in the saddle before the story was done, put him at the nearest fence, and was after the thieves. I must have gained upon them — Wildfire can outrun any other horse in the county, and I did not spare him — for the rascals left their booty and got away with whole skins. I met Snap just this side of Willis's Creek, going home like the sensible creature he is. He had been ridden hard, and there were welts on his sides where he had been whipped, but I

got him back safe. It was a risky thing — their stealing him. Everybody about here knows the star in his forehead and his white hind foot. The first white man that met the thieves would have taken them up. I have no doubt that they belonged to a gang of gypsies that are roaming through this neighborhood. A wagon-load of them passed our house yesterday and camped last night at the Crossroads. I saw them there last night as I went home from Court. On my way back this evening I'll give them a call and let them understand that this is an unhealthy country for that sort of gentry. Horse-thieves and grapevines are found conveniently near to one another, sometimes."

In the horror of the hearing, I must have cried out but for the warning squeeze that made my finger-joints slip upon each other and the bones ache. The muscles of my face stiffened until I felt it losing all resemblance to Molly Burwell. I was sure that it looked like a gray old woman's, and instinctively

turned it into the folds of my cousin's skirt. Suppose Mr. Frank had called upon the gypsies before coming here! If he had not come to us at all to-day — what would have happened? Would he have had the innocent strangers hanged upon the convenient grape-vine? Could he be prevented from doing this now unless the truth were told him? *That*, of course, was not to be thought of. Better have the gypsy gang driven out of the county and a man and a woman strung up, than let Cousin Molly Belle go to jail for wearing men's clothes. She would die sooner than confess to any man, least of all to this one, that she had worn — *pantaloons!* — and ridden Snap as people who wear the things always ride.

How little I knew her was to be proved.

She let go my fingers all at once, pressed her palms together hard, and sat up very straight, settling her eyes upon Mr. Frank's. When she spoke, the metallic ring was that of a taut piano-string.

“You will please not go near the gypsies. I stole your horse. Just for fun, you know. And wretched fun it was. I saw him standing there, and the temptation to play a trick upon you was too much for me. I meant to let him go and send him back when I got to our gate. I did it sooner than I expected, because I heard you coming and knew in a minute that you must be on Wildfire, and that Snap stood no chance of keeping ahead of him.”

The listener's face was a study. He stood up and stared down at her, at first in incredulous stupefaction, then, frowningly.

“*You — took — my — horse!* You were that ‘little woman,’ then? Who was the man?”

“There was no man. The negro did not see straight, or he told you a lie. Molly was with me, and, as you see, her frock is pink. We were out walking. We both got on the horse. It was a silly, silly prank, and all my fault.”

The frown disappeared; the perplexity

remained. He glanced at me, and my eyes fell. I so wanted Mr. Frank Morton to think well of me!

“But Molly said —” he began.

She took him up quickly.

“I know what Molly said. I was close by and heard every word. She was trying to shield me. I told her that I could be put in jail if anybody knew what I had done. I tempted the poor, loyal, loving little soul to tell the first falsehood that ever soiled her tongue. It was a wicked — a vile — a *mean* thing in me! I loathe myself when I think of it. Oh, Namesake!” — encircling me suddenly with her arm — “we will ask God together to forgive us. I am the sinner — not you!”

I was wetting her sleeve with tears, shed more for her distress than for my sin.

Mr. Frank Morton made a step toward her.

“I don’t comprehend you yet — quite. You could not have imagined that you could ever go to jail if you had stolen every horse

in my stable—and everything else I have? Don't give another thought to the matter. It was a harmless bit of fun that hurt nobody. As to Molly's fibbing—I was the tempter. . What was the child to do? I think all the more of her for standing between you and possible trouble."

"I tempted Molly to tell her first lie!" She waived aside the hand he would have laid upon my head. "I shall recollect that as long as I live. I deserve to suffer for it. And I mean to punish myself by telling you the whole truth."

In the energy of her resolve, she, too, arose to her feet. A sort of ague went from her head to her feet. For an instant there was not a sign of color in her cheeks, then, a great billow of blushes beat her face down upon her hands. If I had not been clinging to her skirt I could hardly have got the meaning of the muffled words. Her lover had to bend his head to catch them.

“*I had on a suit of Burwell’s clothes!*”

She threw up her head so abruptly that her face almost touched his before he could start back.

“*Now*”—she flung out passionately—
“you will despise me! And you ought to!”

Her rush toward the door was intercepted by his quicker action. He seized both of her hands and would not let her pass.

“On the contrary, I never respected you before as I do this moment. You shall believe this, Molly Belle!”

Not a symptom of a “Miss”! And he the most punctilious of men in everything pertaining to polite address and chivalric reverence for women! His eyes had strange flashes in them when he turned to me. He was grave, but with a gravity that overlaid smiles. His voice was very gentle:—

“Molly, run away to play—there’s a dear child!”

As I obeyed, I saw that he had not let go of Cousin Molly Belle’s hands.



Chapter IX My Pets

LIKE my games, my stockings, and my frocks, they were home-made. We had no caged birds. Our yards and woods thrilled with bird-song all day long for eight months of the year, and mocking-birds filled June and July nights with music sweeter and more varied than the storied strain of the nightingale. I had never seen a canary, and knew nothing of him except as I had read of one in what I called a "pair of verses" to which I took a fancy. I used to sing them to a tune of my own making when grown-uppers were not listening:—

“Mary had a little bird,
Feathers bright and yellow,
Slender legs — upon my word
He was a pretty fellow.

“Sweetest songs he often sung
Which much delighted Mary,
And often where his cage was hung
She stood to hear Canary.”

I classed Mary 'Liza with the grown-uppers. She loved cats, adopting two when they were blind kittens, and bringing them up in just such staid habits as made her incomparable among children. At six months of age they would doze at her feet on the rug while she studied, or ciphered, or read aloud, or stitched upon those everlasting chemises. When she took a walk for exercise (she never ran, or hopped, or skipped) they trotted demurely in the path, beside or behind her, indifferent to butterflies and grasshoppers, and as intent upon Behavior as their mistress. They were always fat and sleek, and ate civilized victuals, — bread, milk, and cooked meats cut into de-

cent, miminy-piminy mouthfuls. Not one of them was ever known to commit the vulgarity of catching a mouse. Mary 'Liza considered it cruel, and eating raw flesh "a dirty habit." She, the cats, and Dorinda composed a Happy Family in which — barring the Rozillah episode — no accidents ever happened.

From earliest childhood my love for living creatures as companions and pets was a passion that wrought much anguish to me, and more casualties in the dumb animal kingdom than would be credited, were I to set down the full tale of my bantlings, and the fate of each. At a tender age, I sturdily refused to "call mine" the downiest darlings of the poultry-yard. There would be a few weeks of having, and loving, and fattening, and then the axe and the bloody log at the woodpile, and the stormy tears of bereavement. It mattered not to Aunt 'Ritta that my foster-children had names to which they answered, that they would feed from my hand, and hop on my shoulder, and run quacking, or squawking, or

piping, or chirping, at my heels across the yard, and follow me to the field like dogs. When the day and the hour — always unexpected to me — came, I “called and they answered not again,” until, taught by bitter experience, I “struck” petting tame and edible living things, once and finally.

The miniature menagerie I then set up on my own account, and, as I shall show, to the detriment of everything entered upon the rolls, was stocked principally by the services of my colored contingent.

Among the first inmates — they all became patients in the long, or short run — were two striped ground squirrels (chipmunks) who were caught in a box with a falling door, and presented to me by Barratier. He lent me the box to keep them in. I fed and watered them warily and successfully for a couple of days by lifting the door an inch, having previously rapped upon it to scare the prisoners to the other end, then slipping in the dish of water and the nuts, sugar, or fruit that were

the day's rations. Supposing that kindness and comfortable quarters had tamed them into appreciation of my services and intentions, I raised the door two inches higher on the third day, and took a good look at the beauties huddled trembling in their safe corner. Their bright eyes were alluring, their quiescence was encouraging. I spoke to them in dulcet accents, and advanced a friendly hand. They met it more than half-way, one leaping upon my bare arm, running up to my shoulder, and, with one bound over my head, regaining his lost freedom. I caught his less active brother by the tail as he was sneaking under the door, and held him tight. In a quarter-jiffy he whisked his little body around and dug his teeth into my finger, and, as I still held on to his tail, incontinently shed the skin of the same, leaving it in my grasp. The last I ever saw of him was the flaunt of a gory, ghastly pennant, as the bearer vanished under a heap of stones. I flung the bloody casing from me with abhorrence. Now I can hope that

another grew upon the denuded bones. Then I hoped it would not. The insult was gross.

The immediate successor of the ingrates was a mouse bestowed upon me by one of the stable hands. I named the waif "Caspar Hauser" forthwith, being fresh from the perusal of the history of that engaging fraud, and inducted him into a spare rat-trap set about closely with wires. A horsehair sparrow's nest was lined with raw cotton and put in one corner, a toy saucer of water in the other, and in the third a toy plate filled with cracked hickory nuts, interspersed with bits of sugar. Then I sat down upon the floor beside him, and began the business of taming him by getting him used to seeing me, cultivating his acquaintance by poking my finger between the bars, talking and singing to him, and endeavoring, by other ingenious devices, to make him feel at home. He scampered around the confines of his domicile, as in a treadmill, all the time I was thus employed, and could not be induced to touch his food.

Mary 'Liza and I had outgrown the trundle-bed, and had a room to ourselves upstairs. Into this I surreptitiously conveyed the improvised cage that night and hid it under the bed. When my bedfellow had fallen asleep, I got up softly, lighted a candle, and took a peep at my pet. He had gone regularly to bed after disposing of some of the nuts and scattering the remnants in every direction, and now lay curled up in the cotton-wool in the prettiest, most homelike way imaginable, fast asleep.

I hung over him, entranced. He was tamed! Before long he would be following me all over the house, playing hide-and-seek in corners, sitting upon his hind legs beside my plate at table, and nibbling such tidbits as I might give him. One particularly bright picture of our common future was of taking him to church, smuggling him into the pocket of my Sunday frock, and after settling myself comfortably upon my knees before a corner seat during the "long prayer," taking Caspar

Hauser out and letting him play on the bench. What a boon his society would be — what a relief his antics while Mr. Lee droned through innumerable “We pray Thees!”

After I went back to bed I pursued these and other enchanting visions into dreamland. The next day I took Caspar Hauser into the garden for air and sunshine. His liveliness was something inconceivable by the human imagination. He chased himself frantically around the cage, regardless of my tender exhortations, until I began to fear that taming was a more tedious process than I had supposed. I set the cage upon the grass where the sun was hottest, withdrawing myself into the shade as less in need of light and warmth, and read a volume of Berquin’s *Children’s Friend* in full sight of Caspar Hauser. Whenever I turned a page I would stick my finger between the wires and chirrup encouragingly to the captive, all with a single eye to getting him used to me. His speed and staying powers were equally extraordinary, but I was

cheered, when the forenoon was spent and I picked up the cage to take him in, by observing that he ran more deliberately and with occasional pauses. By the time I got him upstairs he lay down for a nap. He was still slumbering at my supper-time, and had not got his nap out when I went to bed, nor yet when breakfast was eaten and lessons said, next morning.

I had made up my mind by now that he was sick, and carried him into the garden once more. I had read that wild creatures physic themselves if allowed to seek such plants as instinct tells them are specifics for their ailments. Lifting Caspar Hauser from his woolly bed, I stroked him and called him by name. He was so tame by now that he did not struggle upon my palm. Only the rise and fall of his furry sides showed that he was alive. He was limp and helpless, and to me very lovable. I laid him upon a strip of turf hot with the sunshine that had steeped it for five hours. He had a liberal choice of

healing herbs. Parsley, sage, mint, tansy, peppergrass, catnip, and sweet marjoram, rue and bergamot and balsam, flourished within a hundred lengths of his small body. While I watched him he stretched himself as a baby at awakening, and began to crawl weakly toward the tansy bed. To save him needless exertion I pulled a handful of the yellow heads and offered them to his inquisitive nose. Mam' Chloe had given me tansy tea for a bad cold last winter. It tasted nasty, but I got well. Instinct had "indicated" tansy to Caspar Hauser. He refused the panacea dumbly; and made, still feebly, for the parsley patch. I let him go a yard or more, when, fearing lest he might lose himself in the maze of luxuriant herbage, I dragged him tenderly back by the tail to the hot turf.

He had grown so tame that he never moved again.

The funeral took place that afternoon. We buried him next to Musidora. I had had enough of vaults, regarding them, with reason,

as uncertain places of sepulture for the presumably defunct. I had never heard, or read, of cremation. I had had the misfortune to break my slate a few days before, and the biggest fragment made a nice tombstone for Caspar Hauser. With a nail and with infinite toil I produced a suitable epitaph.

HERE LIES
HIS AFLICTED
MISS M. BURWELL'S
FATHEFULL LIT
TLE FREND AN
D TAME PLA
YFELOW AND
SUFFERER
C. H.

There was not room for the whole name, but, as I told my fellow-mourners when I read the inscription to them, since we all knew it, the omission was of no consequence. I could have wished that the slate had broken straight, so that the inscription would have gone in better. However, one cannot control circumstance when it takes the shape of a fracture.

Within twenty-four hours after Caspar Hauser's decease he was succeeded by Bay. His name in its entirety, was Baffin's Bay. The alliterative unctuousness of the title pleased me, as Mary 'Liza pronounced it smoothly in her geography lesson, the day on which Ham-ilar, the carriage driver, drove over a young "old hare" in the road, and knocked one of the poor thing's eyes out. It was taken up for dead, but presently began to kick, and the ownership reverted to me. It lived a week, and for hours at a time was so nearly comfortable as to eat sparingly of milk, lettuce, cabbage, and clover, with which I supplied it lavishly twice a day. I likewise treated the wounded eye with balsam-capeiva and balm of Gilead ointment, sovereign appliances for the bruises and cut fingers of that generation. A lemon box, with slats nailed across the front by faithful Barratier, was the hospital in which I laid Bay up for repairs. Him, too, I carried daily into the garden, for change of air. He condescended to approve of the parsley patch,

limping through it as gracefully as the long tape tied to his right hind leg would allow.

When, upon the third day of his residence in civilized quarters, he had a convulsion in the very middle of the parsley patch, I thought it a playful antic, and was amused and gratified thereat. The second time this happened, James, the gardener, chanced to witness the performance and informed me, brutally, that "that old hyar had throwed a fit, and was boun' to die 'fore long.

"That 'ar lick on de side o' de hade done de bizness fur him, sure. De brain am injerred. Mighty easy thing fur to injer a Molly Cottontail's brain. He ain't got much, an' hit lies close to de top o' de hade."

For forty-eight hours before Bay died, the spasms were distressingly frequent, but I would not have him killed. James might be wrong. Good nursing and plenty of fresh air might bring my patient around. For fear my parents might insist that he should be put out of his misery, I removed the hospital to the

playhouse, and gave him the range of the place, forbidding the colored children to tell what was going on. His agonies were nearly over when, in the distraction of anxiety, I took Cousin Frank Morton into confidence. He had ridden over with a message from Cousin Molly Belle.

(Have I mentioned that they had been married for six months?)

The message was to the effect that I must spend the day and night with her. My mother gave ready consent.

“Molly has been too pale for several days, and has little or no appetite,” she said, looking affectionately at me. “The change will do her good, and there is no other place where she enjoys a visit more than at your house. Molly! can’t you thank Cousin Frank for taking the trouble to come for you?”

Strained by conflicting emotions, I fidgeted awkwardly about Cousin Frank’s chair, pinching the hem of my apron into folds, and shifting from one foot to the other.

“I want to go *dreadfully!*” I got out at length, almost ready to cry. “*But* — Cousin Frank — wouldn’t you like to look at Bay? He’s an old hare that I am taming.”

While speaking, I started for the door, and he came after me. My mother exclaimed, provoked, yet laughing, that I was “getting more ridiculous every day,” but I knew my man, and did not stop.

Bay was throwing a particularly hard fit when we got to him. His cries had something humanlike in them that pierced ears and heart.

“My dear child!” uttered the shocked visitor. “How long has this been going on?”

Upon hearing that the poor thing had never seemed really well from the day he was hurt, and had been “going on like this for four days, hand-running,” he was quite angry — for him.

“I wonder that your mother let you keep him when he was in this state,” he said seriously; and, seeing the tears I could not drive

back, he sat down on my chair and drew me up to him. "It would be better to kill the poor creature, at once, dear. He can never be better."

I begged him not to tell my mother about Bay's sickness. I had become very fond of him, and he was so sweet and patient—and tame,—and I just couldn't bear to have him killed. Whether he would have granted my petition or not was not to be tested. While I was speaking, Bay uttered a shrill scream, leaped up high in the air, and fell over on his back, dead.

We hurried on the funeral that I might go home with Cousin Frank that evening. I pulled up the tombstone from the head of Caspar Hauser's grave and made an epitaph on the other side for Bay. There might not be another slate broken in the family for months. At the present rate of mortality among my pensioners, it behooved me to be economical. I had not time to indite such an elaborate testimonial to the worth of the de-

ceased as graced Caspar Hauser's last resting-place. Yet I thought the tribute not amiss, and the drop into poetry elated me and electrified my audience. The lines were engraved perpendicularly upon the slate to give the rhyme effective room :—

“ Alas ! and Alack A DAY !
Poor Little BAFFINS BAY ! ”

My visit lasted three days instead of one and a half. I brought back with me something worthy of the pride that swelled my happy heart to aching. One of Cousin Frank's men had taken two young hares alive, and given them to his mistress a week ago, and she and Cousin Frank had arranged a pleasant surprise for me. Before I had been in the house an hour I was taken to the dining room to see the dear little things already housed in a cage, made by the plantation carpenter. None of your lemon-box makeshifts, but a strong case in the shape of a cottage, of planed wood, painted white on the outside.

There were two rooms in it with a round door in the dividing wall. One was half full of soft, sweet-smelling hay for Darby and Joan to sleep upon. Their names were ready-made, too. The other room was a parlor where they were to eat and to live in the daytime. Broad leather straps by which the box could be carried were made to look like chimneys.

The whole family collected to admire my treasures when I got home, and Mary 'Liza was so much interested in Darby and Joan that she brought up her cats, Cinderella and Preciosa, to be introduced and make friends with "their new cousins" — so she said. Cinderella was black-and-white, Preciosa yellow-and-white, very large, and with long fur as soft and fine as raw silk. Mary 'Liza put them down close to the cottage.

"You must be very good and never hurt either of the beautiful hares — you hear?" she said, and we all looked on to see what they would do.

Bless your soul! they walked once around

M

the cottage in a lazy, indifferent, supercilious way, hardly glancing at their "new cousins," then Preciosa yawned, tiptoed back to her place on the rug, doubled her toes in under her, and half closed her "greenery-yallery" eyes in real, or simulated slumber. Cinderella purred about her mistress until she seated herself again to work upon her seventh chemise, then jumped up into her lap and composed herself to slumber.

After that, I had no fear that the well-fed, pampered creatures would molest my pets. Everybody sympathized in my good fortune. The weather was intensely warm, and Uncle Ike's own august hands rigged up a shelf against the garden fence, making what I called a "situation" for my cottage. Not even Argus could get at them there, had he been evilly disposed, and he had excellent principles for a puppy. Darby and Joan nibbled lettuce and cabbage from my fingers inside of three days, and if they were in the bedroom when I approached their dwelling, would bus-

tle out to see if it were milk, or greens, or, maybe, clover blossoms that I had for them.

The happy, happy days went by, and I announced to my father one evening as we sat at supper that I really “began to believe the curse was lifted from my pets.”

“The curse! Mary Hobson Burwell! what a word!” cried my mother.

My father held up his hand.

“One moment, if you please, mother! Explain yourself, Molly!”

“I mean,” answered I, bravely, “that it used to seem as if a wicked fairy had cursed a curse upon anything I took a fancy to. Like the girl in the song, and her tree and flower, and dear gazelle, you know. But Darby and Joan make me hope —”

The words were blasted upon my tongue by a terrible scream.



Chapter X Circumstantial Evidence

THE garden gate was close to the dining-room windows, and the windows were not high above the ground. I rushed for the nearest. The moon was bright, and I was in time to see three cats jump down from the shelf on which the cottage was "situated," and dart away in as many different directions. One ran close along the wall of the house, and I recognized Preciosa. Hurling myself over the window-sill, I was the first of our startled party to reach the scene of the tragedy.

The attack had been made from the three exposed sides of the cottage, the cats thrust-

ing their claws between the bars and dragging my darlings up against these.

My father opened the cottage door and took out the mangled, palpitating bodies.

“Oh, father!” I shrieked. “Are they killed?”

“Yes, my daughter.”

Then I went crazy. So raging and raving crazy that when I came partially to my senses, I did not recollect what I had been saying or doing since I heard the awful truth. I had been removed from the dark and bloody ground in some way and by somebody, for I was lying on my mother’s bed. The consciousness of where I was had in it some drops of the oil of consolation. Next to the close embrace of the mother’s arms there is no other resting-place on earth that so aptly typifies the safety and healing grace of Heaven to the child of whatever age, as Mother’s Bed.

In our house, to be laid upon that miracle of elastic fluffiness was to become, in fancy,

a blessed ghost, cradled upon a cloud. The sick child, the hurt child, the repentant child — were received into that holy asylum without other certificate than his or her need.

Finding myself there made me feel that there might still be something worth living for, and to care for. My mother was by me and her arm was under my head; my father stood at the foot of the bed, kind and compassionate; Mam' Chloe was putting a bottle of hot water to my feet, and there was a strong smell of cologne in the air. I was very weak; my head felt queer and light, and although I was not crying, something seemed to grab me inside and shake me every little while — a short, sharp shake that made me gasp. Before I could open my eyes I heard my mother's voice say: —

“I wish the dear child did not take things so much to heart. It will bring her a great deal of sorrow in her future life.”

Ah, blessed mother of mine! for so many years beyond the sight and hearing of the

vicissitudes of that life, then new and all untried — yours was but a partial prophecy. Against the sorrows born of “taking things so much to heart,” I set a wealth of joy and beauty and love that have been made mine own by the same nature and habit.

What she said or meant was little to me at that moment, for as I blinked confusedly about me, I saw Mary 'Liza, neat and upright, in her own especial chair by the window, and Preciosa was on her lap.

An electric bolt quivered through me. I started up and pointed at the placid pair, my hand shaking like a leaf, my voice thick with spluttering wrath:—

“*She* did it! I want her killed.”

“Dear child, lie down, don't talk, you are dreaming,” cooed my mother, trying to force me gently down to the pillow.

I put her aside, and tried to form articulate words.

“*That, cat, did, it!* I saw her. I'll kill her! Let me get up.”

My father came to my mother's help.

"Take the cat out of the room, Mary Eliza," he ordered calmly. And to me — "Now, Molly, we will hear what you have to say."

He heard and weighed the evidence before I was put to bed in my own room. My head still went around queerly when I raised it, but my mind was clear. He sat by me and stroked my hand gently while he got my testimony. His kindness to his orphaned niece was unfailing, but he seldom caressed her, and nobody ever romped with her. He listened to my story first, and as patiently as if he were not to hear any other.

I was hotly positive that the big cat I had seen jump from the shelf and dash by the window so close to me that I could have touched her by leaning over the sill, was Preciosa. There was no other cat of her size and color on the plantation. Beyond this conviction the prosecution had not a scrap of testimony to offer. On the side of the accused were

the record of a blameless life; the lack of motive, inasmuch as the accused was fed abundantly with daily bread far more convenient for her than the raw flesh she had never desired before,—and, as a “clincher,” an alibi was set up by Preciosa’s mistress, who, coming into the chamber a few minutes after the disaster, had found the cat sleeping upon the rug just as she had left her when the supper bell rang,—and with never a speck of blood on her paws and fur.

“She had licked it off, then!” I stormed. “I tell you I did see her! I did! I *did!* I DID! Father! you know I wouldn’t tell a story about it—don’t you?”

“I believe that you think you saw her, my daughter. We all believe that. But you may have been mistaken. You were very much excited, and the cat ran fast, and it was in the night, recollect, and the moon is not as bright as the day. Altogether, we must take it for granted that Preciosa is not guilty,

and keep a sharp lookout for the strange cat that did the mischief.”

“It was Preciosa — hateful old thing!” I insisted, angry and sullen. “She ought to be killed!”

My father arose with decision that showed the case was concluded.

“Mother! you will see that our little daughter does not talk any more about this to-night? She will, I hope, feel differently in the morning.”

I did not. In saying my prayers at bedtime I pointedly omitted — “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” I did not mean to forgive Preciosa. Furthermore, I was not at peace with her mistress and advocate. The more I mused, the hotter the fire burned, until I was ready to convict my father of injustice, and my mother of rank favoritism for the alien. I sulked violently at breakfast, and as I was not reprov'd, grew so stubborn and disrespectful over my lessons that I was sent to

my room to stay there until dinner was ready. The term of banishment had still an hour to run, and I was leaning, listless and wretched, out of the window when Mam' Chloe and Uncle Ike met in the yard directly beneath, and part of the low dialogue reached me.

"Ef I could onct ketch that Precious-O-sir in some o' her tricks, you'd see the fur fly, — mind!" said the butler.

"I suttinly is mighty sorry for po' Miss Molly," answered his wife. "Looks-if hur heart is pretty nigh broke. It's right down pitiful to see how much sto' she sot by them young old hyars. You mus' see ef you can't get her some mo'."

I dropped my head on the window-sill and cried out the tears that scalded my lids at the unexpected touch of sympathy. Then I fell to thinking and with a purpose.

I went down to dinner with a tolerably composed countenance, a good appetite, and a well-digested scheme of vengeance in my mind. Uncle Ike was my only co-conspira-

tor. I think I can see him now as he rolled back against the garden fence to laugh as I unfolded my design.

“Ef you ain’t the *beater!*” he chuckled, his pepper-and-salt poll tilted to one shoulder, and eyeing me with undisguised admiration. “An’ you say nobody ain’ put it into your hade?”

“I haven’t said a word about it to anybody else, Uncle Ike. You’ll help me, — won’t you?”

He doubled himself up like a dyspeptic jack-knife, the ingenuity of the plot gaining upon his imagination.

I pressed my advantage:—

“And don’t tell Mam’ Chloe — please! She’ll think it is cruel. But it isn’t. It’s just only justice. And it can’t bring *them* back.”

I clenched my fists, and my eyes filled.

“That’s so, Miss Molly, that’s so,” sobering instantly. “It is mighty hard on you — powerful hard.”

“And, Uncle Ike,” — hurrying to get it

out lest my voice should fail,—“please don’t let anybody give me any more old hares, or any ’live things to keep. They’ll just die, or be murdered by other folks’ cats— or something. It’s no use making myself happy for a little while just to be sorry for ever and ever so long afterward.”

With which epigram I ran away, afraid to try to utter another word.

That evening we were all on the front porch. The air was breezeless, the moon as yellow as brass through sultry fogs. My mother, in a white dress, lay back in her rocking-chair and fanned herself languidly. My father smoked his Powhatan pipe upon the steps, leaning against one pillar of the roof. Mary ’Liza in pale-blue lawn, occupied the other end of the step. Her hands were in her lap. Cinderella dozed upon a fold of her skirt. Dorinda had been undressed and rocked to sleep at sunset. Preciosa had gone upstairs at the same time. I saw her lying upon the foot of our bed after supper,

her eyes narrowed to slender slits with sleep or slyness. I had a shrewd impression that if I were to go upstairs now I should not find her in the same place. Instead of verifying the surmise in this way I stole noiselessly out of the family group, sauntering along carelessly until I turned the corner of the house, after which I ran like a lapwing to the garden gate, the rendezvous agreed upon between Uncle Ike and myself.

He was there with the various "properties" I had ordered.

Imprimis, a big dish-pan; *second*, a monstrous black pot from which steam arose into the hot night; *third*, a stout twine, to one end of which was attached a brick; a lump of raw liver dangled at the other. By my directions the pan was balanced upon the shelf where the cottage had stood, so that a slight pull would overset it, the brick was laid in the bottom, the string with the liver attachment hanging over the side. Lastly, Uncle Ike mounted upon the stool I

was wont to use when I visited my murdered dears, and filled the pan from the pot. All being ready, we conspirators withdrew to the unlighted dining room, and stationed ourselves at a window.

Our watch was not tedious. I was the first to discern a moving speck in the dim vista of the walk leading from the gate far down the garden. It enlarged and assumed a definite form, slowly. Evidently it was a scout, and the advance a reconnoissance. Feline artifice was in every line and motion. A ray of misty moonlight lay athwart the entrance to the garden. The gate was propped open. As the cat crossed it, we recognized a wily and wicked old Tom from the stable, a disreputable plebeian prowler, never tolerated in the house grounds. I hardly smothered an ejaculation as dainty Preciosa glided into the illuminated area and took part in the furtive inspection of the preparations made for the reception of last night's marauders. A third, and yet a fourth, mis-

creant joined the first two, and heads were laid together in a council of war.

The liver hung high. Tom rose upon his hind feet, clawed the air futilely and came down sheepishly upon all fours. Next, a small, nimble black cat jumped and fell short of the bait. Uncle Ike snickered, and I drew in my breath excitedly, as the pampered exquisite, My Lady Preciosa, tripped mincingly into the open. The moon shone out obligingly to let us see her fall into position, her head upraised toward the tempting morsel — (pig's liver, and none too fresh at that) — her crouching body thrown well back upon the haunches, her tail, enlarged to double the usual size, waving sinuously from side to side in leisurely calculation of distance and chances. Suddenly she launched her supple body into space like a catapult, caught the meat between her claws, swung in the air for a victorious half-second — and then, the deluge!

A chorus of screeches, a frantic stampede in

all directions, and the arena was clear of all except the home-made infernal machine, — the empty dish-pan upside down on the ground, the brick, the string, and the raw meat lying under it.

The caterwauling, Uncle Ike's "ky-yi!" and my scream of laughter, brought the porch-party to the spot. By previous agreement neither of us mentioned Preciosa's name. I had to pinch myself violently to contain the unseemly mirth bottled up in my wicked soul when Mary 'Liza was "so glad the horrible creatures were punished," and "hoped" gently "that Molly was convinced, now, that poor, dear Preciosa was innocent."

"By the way, where *is* Preciosa?" asked my father.

"She seemed so sleepy that I gave her her supper, and put her to bed, when I took Dorinda upstairs," said her surety.

Perhaps my father partly interpreted the gleam in my eyes and the quivering muscles about my uncontrollable mouth, for he glanced

keenly at me and made as if he would let the inquiry drop. Not so my mother. She bade Mary 'Liza run upstairs and make sure that Preciosa was there.

“I want my dear little girl to be entirely satisfied that her cousin was right, and that she did the cat an injustice,” she said with judicial mildness.

Preciosa was not in our room, and she stayed out all night, greatly to her owner's alarm and distress. Her habits were so regular, her deportment was always so impeccable that the circumstance assumed the proportions of an Event by breakfast time. My mother was anxious, Mary 'Liza sorrowful, and my father shook his head more gravely than the occasion seemed to warrant.

“Molly may not have been so far wrong after all,” he observed to my mother, “in spite of the array of circumstantial evidence against her.”

My mother was unconvinced.

“Previous good behavior should count for

much in such a case," she urged. "And our little Molly is too apt to jump at conclusions. We cannot be too careful how we accuse others of sins which they may never have committed."

I understood what they said perfectly. They never talked down to us. That was one reason we were called "old-fashioned" and "precocious" by people who had one set of words for their own use, and another for children. My parents considered, and I think rightly, that the best and most correct forms of speech should be taught to mere infants, that it is as easy to train a child to be grammatical as to let it lapse into all sorts of slovenly inaccuracies that must be unlearned at school, and in society. So, when they talked of "circumstantial evidence" I had a fair inkling of what the phrase conveyed. Preciosa was upon trial for misdemeanor, and I for backbiting.

I ate away industriously to keep from "answering back," — a cardinal offence in nursery government. Mary 'Liza had no appetite, but

she, also, remained silent, and there was moisture under her eyelids.

“We will suspend judgment —” began my father, and interrupted himself to ask — “What *have* you got there, Ike?”

The butler grinned from ear to ear, and broke into uncontrollable cachinnations in depositing his burden upon the floor.

“One of the stable-boys foun’ it in the lof’, suh.”

He could say no more, and would not have been heard had he gone on, for my father roared, my mother fairly shrieked with laughter, and I went into hysterics, while Mam’ Chloe and Gilbert joined in the general racket from the doorway.

An abject nondescript cringed at Mary ’Liza’s feet, whimpering piteously. The devil’s broth concocted by Uncle Ike, according to my receipt, was warm starch, made blue with indigo. A few red peppers were boiled in it to dissuade the cats from licking it off before it could dry. It adhered to every

individual hair of Preciosa's body. She looked like an azure porcupine. I had thought, at first, of using soot as coloring matter, but the thought of the blue appealed to my sense of the congruous ridiculous. I was more than content with the result. Why a blue cat should be more mirth-provoking than a yellow may not be explicable, but the fact remains. Even Mary 'Liza shrank from contact with the absurd object, and the moisture condensed into falling drops.

“Oh, Aunt Mary! do you think it *can* be Preciosa? It looks like a — *monster!*”

With tears running down his cheeks, and his sides shaking with gusts of merriment, my father took me upon his knee, and gave me the funniest kiss I ever had — a jerky kiss, as if a bee had bobbed against my mouth.

“You'll be the death of me yet, child!”
And after another series of side-shakings —
“So much for circumstantial evidence!”



Frankenstein

THE morning was biting cold. A north-west wind had been busy for hours sweeping and dusting the sky until, now that it was resting from its labors, the blue vault was as clean and bright as our mahogany dining-table after Uncle Ike had polished it with beeswax and rosin.

At the breakfast-table the butter splintered off under the knife, and the milk was frozen so hard that Mary 'Liza and I sugared it and made believe it was ice-cream. When Gilbert, the under dining-room servant, brought in the buckwheat cakes and waffles from the kitchen, he had to cover them with a hot plate, and then run as hard as he could go across the

yard to the house, to keep them from chilling on the way.

There are no buckwheat cakes nowadays, like those that Aunt 'Ritta made — glossy brown, all of a size, and porous as a sponge. It was great fun to butter them, and then press them with the flat of a knife-blade, to see spurts and spouts rise from the surface like so many hot oil geysers.

That was the morning when I made the eight-cakes-and-one-sausage speech that passed into a family proverb. The night before I had thrown a candle-end, four inches long, into the fire, and my mother had told me it was a Christian duty to be economical, defining the word for me. Bent, as usual, upon practising what I learned, I divided my sausage into eight bits, and ate one with each cake.

Cousin Molly Belle and Cousin Frank Morton had stayed all night with us, and the talk at table was so lively that nobody noticed what I was about. We were not allowed to chatter during meals when others than the family were

present, or, indeed, at any other time if grown people were talking, until invited by them to take part in the conversation. So I waited for a lull in the chat to say aside to my mother at whose left hand I sat :—

“Mother! I have made one sausage do for eight buckwheat cakes. Wasn't that economical?”

Even Cousin Molly Belle laughed, the “aside” being more audible than I meant to have it. True, she hugged me the next minute, her chair being next to mine on the other side, but her eyes were lively with amusement, and I saw that she was ready to break out again.

My poor dainty mother actually blushed. It was not fashionable then for ladies, and little girls who were going to be ladies, to have hearty appetites. School-girls were instructed that no well-bred young lady ever ate more than two biscuits at breakfast or supper, and one was more refined than two. The pinion of a partridge sufficed the Lydia Languish of

that day for the meat course of a dinner, and to be hungry was to be coarse. My mother was a sensible matron who did not lean to extreme views on any subject, but she did not rise superior to a mortification such as this. When she said distressfully : —

“ Molly! Eight cakes! I am ashamed that you should be so greedy!” I comprehended that my offence was rank, and that not her taste alone, but her sensibilities, suffered.

I got hot all over, as was my custom when self-convicted of sin, and sat abashed, appetite and spirits put to flight together.

My father pulled his face straight.

“ Never mind this time, mother! Better pay meat bills than doctor’s bills. And, on a cold day, a restless little body like hers needs a great deal of carbon to keep the fires going. Eight buckwheat cakes and a thumping big sausage represent just so much animal heat.”

By and by, when I got a chance to speak to him alone, I asked him what carbon was, and what he meant by the fires and animal

heat. He was at work at his table in "the office" in the yard, the Mortons having gone home, but he put down his pen and talked to me for quite a while upon nutrition and food values. He did not use those terms. They had not come into vogue even with medical men and writers upon anatomy. Still, his simple lecture made me comprehend that what I ate kept me alive and warm and active, and how certain kinds of food made blood, and others, muscle, and others were of little or no use in keeping up animal heat, without which there could be no life.

I asked him if we could keep a dead thing warm if it would come to life again. I was thinking of all my dead pets. It was pathetic, — the familiarity of a seven-year-old with death and dissolution, — but of this I was not aware.

He answered very gravely : —

"We cannot keep dead things warm, daughter. When animal heat goes, life goes."

"And when animal heat comes, does life

come?" I queried. "Is that what makes things alive?"

"Yes, dear. I have not time to explain it to you now. I am very busy. Some other time we will talk more about it."

I carried a spandy new idea, and a stirring, into the garden with me at noon, as a chicken runs away to a corner with a crumb. The sun shone brightly, and I easily kept comfortable by skipping up and down a long walk, bordered on the northern side by an arbor-vitæ hedge. I did not know that resinous evergreens really give out warmth, but I had found out, for myself, that this was the warmest nook of the grounds in winter, and haunted it exceedingly.

"When animal heat comes, life comes," I repeated aloud, in dancing along.

The sentence sounded important, and pleased my ears. Presently, I would set about getting all the meaning I could extract from it, and experiment upon my acquisition. All my mental currency went into active circulation.

An odd-looking thing lay in the middle of the path, that was not there when I came down awhile ago. I thought, at the first glance, that it was a hedgehog. I had seen pictures of the animal, and knew that when hunted so closely that it cannot escape it rolls itself into a prickly ball. This queer object was an oblong roll, about six inches in length and two inches thick, and covered with very coarse brown fur or wool. I picked it up. It was very cold. Then it could not be alive. It was light as a puffball. Then it was empty. For the rest it was a puzzle. I ran with it to Mam' Chloe, who was getting Bud to sleep in my mother's chamber.

She cast a look at my "find," and sniffed impatiently.

"Always huntin' and foolin' long some trash or nuther! Fetchin' er ole dade sun-flower in ter show me when I'm doin' my bes' ter git this blessed sugar-plum pie to sleep so's I ken git to my mendin'. Go 'long, Miss Molly!"

I was used to her moods, clement and adverse, and I stood my ground.

“Are you *sure* it’s a sunflower, mammy?”

“What you take me fur, chile? Don’ I know a sunflower that’s run ter seed las’ summer, an’ is empty an’ dade as Furious [Pharaoh] now? I got no time to stiddy ’bout sech foolishness.”

I walked off,—not crestfallen, but blithe. One word had shunted my ideas upon a new track. She called this nondescript—which might, or might not, be the dried and warped disk of a sunflower that had cast its seeds—“dead.” What should hinder me from making it alive? It looked like a hedgehog, or some other animal. It *should* be an animal! Food of the right kind, and plenty of heat, were all it needed.

“Carbon and animal heat!” uttered I, consequentially, swelling with the prospective joy of creation.

Already I foresaw, in imagination, the tremor of the coming breath running through

the uncouth body that would then put out, from mysterious hiding-places, head and limbs and tail, as buds unfold into flowers. I would confide to nobody what I was going to undertake. But I would do it! I would keep up animal heat, hour after hour, day after day, until my — Creature — breathed and moved and grew!

Without delay I hied me to the kitchen, and begged a cold sausage and a pone of corn-bread from Aunt 'Ritta. She made no objection beyond asking why I "wanted sassage 'n' corn-bread in de middle o' de mawnin', 'stead o' piece o' cake, or somethin' sweet."

"Because the weather is so cold," I replied briefly, and got what I wished with a grunt of "Dat's so, honey!" Negroes are constitutionally averse to winter and cold, and recognize, without knowing why, the carboniferous properties of pork and pone. I bore my treasures off to the dining room, shut the door, and began my experiment in the hottest flare of the fireshine.



MOLLY'S EXPERIMENT.

"I hied me to the kitchen and begged a cold sausage and a pone of corn-bread from Aunt 'Ritta."

The sunflower disk was a curiosity to me. It had curled inward upon itself, leaving a considerable cavity within. I stuffed this with the bread and sausage, crumbled fine, ruminating, the while, upon the probability that the sausage and cakes I had devoured presented the like appearance by the time they reached my stomach. When the variegated and viscid compound was tucked away, I wound a soft string about the disk to keep it in shape, and enveloped it, first in raw cotton, then in a bit of red flannel. In my uncertainty as to which end would bourgeon into a head, and from which would be evolved the tail, I left both ends open that it might be able to breathe when breath came. Lastly, I secreted it under my cricket. It was what was known as "a box cricket," and the enclosing sides came to within three inches of the floor. It stood at the warmest corner of the hearth, and I was well-nigh roasted by the time I had sat upon it long enough to read the chapter in *Sandford and Merton* that tells of poor soft Tommy's

choice of the shorter end of the pole on which the load was hung, as likely to be the lighter. I guessed that it was now time for me to expect to hear the birth-cry of my Creature, or at least to detect some thrill of life. Lifting a corner of the muffings, I insinuated a tentative finger.

It was warm! And before I withdrew my finger from the rough brown coat I was confident that I felt a throb like a pulse heave its sides. It is not an exaggeration to say that I was faint with excitement as I replaced the wrappings. I had never heard of Pygmalion and his statue. It was thirty years thereafter before I read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. When I did read it I could not fail to recall the picture of the country-bred child, palpitating with awed delight in the belief that she had wrested Something from Nothing. Youth alone is absolutely fearless. The presumption of ignorance is akin to sublimity.

I sat down again to ecstatic dreamings. It would be all my own when it was made — a

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pet so much better worth the having and holding than any that had preceded it in my affections, that I thought of them — even of the ever-lamented Darby and Joan — with compassionate contempt. I pictured to myself the astonishment of the household, white and colored, in beholding the miracle; the sensation in the neighborhood and county when the news of what had come to pass was bruited abroad. From the outermost border of Powhatan, from Chesterfield, and mayhap from over the river separating Powhatan from Goochland, people would flock to see me and wonder. Grown-uppers, who had never heard my name until now, would tell other strangers what Mary Hobson Burwell, aged seven, had done. I should be CELEBRATED!

I sat and roasted, shifting my position occasionally that another side might get “done,” and seemed to pore over my book until dinner was ready.

“You are eating next to nothing, Molly,” remarked my mother, casually, during the

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meal. "Have you been to see 'Ritta since breakfast?"

"Yes, ma'am," I answered meekly; and she did not observe that I colored uneasily.

Back to my watch I went when the table was cleared, and the others had quitted the room. Uncle Ike replenished the fire, and commended my good sense in "huggin' the chimbley-corner in sech cole weather," before he left me to solitude, to *Sandford and Merton*, and to "Frank." I had resolved to name him for my dear cousin-in-law. When I came to read *Frankenstein* I marvelled at the coincidence. Frank continued warm, as I ascertained by quarter-hourly pokes, but he did not stir. I must be patient. Precious things were slow of growth.

Full as my mind and heart were of thoughts and hopes too big for expression, my behavior was so nearly normal that no troublesome questions were propounded. I had no difficulty in keeping my secret. Imaginative chil-

dren have more secrets to guard than adults ever think of harboring.

I took Frank to bed with me, smuggling him under my pillow, and going to sleep with my hand on him. He was getting warmer every hour.

At midnight a cry—a series of cries—aroused the slumbering household, and drew my father and mother to my room. I had been awakened from sleep too sound for dreams by the bite of sharp teeth upon the thick of my thumb. Even the certainty that Frank had evolved a mouth, and that it was in good working order, could not cheat me into forgetfulness of the terror and pain of that awakening. I jerked my hand from under the pillow and shook something off upon the floor. I heard it fall, and I heard it run. Frankenstein could not have conceived more intense horror and loathing for his foul, misshapen offspring than overpowered me at that terrible instant. The light in my father's hand showed blood streaming

from my thumb and dripping upon the coverlet.

“A mouse, or maybe a young rat, has bitten her,” my mother pronounced without hesitation. “And no wonder! See how greasy her hand is! Faugh! How very careless in Chloe to put the child to bed in such a state! Be quiet, Molly! This should be a lesson to you not to go to bed again without washing your hands. You are old enough to think of such things for yourself. My dear child, can’t you stop crying? It is not like you to make so much noise over a little hurt.”

“She is frightened out of her senses,” said my father. “And you must admit that it was rather startling to be aroused by feeling a mouse’s teeth nibbling at her hand.”

I clung to his neck, shivering with fright and cold. My sobs were uncontrollable.

“It wasn’t a mo-use!” I got out, presently. “Nor a ra-at, either!”

“Not a mouse or a rat! How do you know? Did you see it?”

“It was *Fra-a-nk!*” I gulped. “Oh! I’m afraid to stay here! He is in the room somewhere! He will come after me again!”

The scene was ended by my going in my father’s arms to my mother’s bed for the rest of the night. My mother stayed upstairs with Mary ’Liza.

“But I did not sleep well,” was her grieved report at breakfast. “The pillows smelled horribly of sausage, I suppose because Molly’s hands were so greasy. Marthy! see that the pillow-cases are changed this morning.”

Before Marthy got upstairs, I mustered and dragooned sufficient courage to enable me to visit the room. Still trembling and full of loathing at what I must see, I turned over the pillow. The red flannel was there — and the raw cotton — and inside of all, IT — Frank no longer — as cold as a stone!

I took it up with the tongs and threw it out of the window — and said never a word about it to anybody.



Chapter XII My Prize Beet



I HAD been seven years old for so long that I alluded to myself habitually as "almost eight." We had our governess now, Miss Davidson, a handsome, amiable, and somewhat sentimental Bostonian recommended by a Richmond friend of my father. Four other girls studied with us. Two of them, Paulina and Sarah Hobson, were our second cousins. They stayed at our house from Monday morning until Friday evening, going home for Sunday, unless the weather were bad. Madeline and Rosa Pemberton were day scholars, the Pemberton plantation adjoining ours.

I was the youngest of the six, and while I

fancy that I was rather a favorite with Miss Davidson, I endured much from the girls on account of my inferiority in age, as well as because of my "old-fashioned, conceited ways." That was one reason I spoke of being almost eight. I was trying to grow up to what they complained of as "getting above" myself.

The frank brutality of school children of both sexes, as contrasted with the unselfish forbearance (or the show of it) and the suave courtesy of well-bred men and women, is an instructive study in the evolution of ethics. The youngest boy or girl in class or college is the weakest wolf in the pack, the under dog in the fight. I had all of a little girl's natural desire for new playfellows and the dreamer's passion for more material for castle-building. The prospect of "the school" was ravishing. I constructed scenes and rehearsed conversations, with the cast of coming actors, until the quartette must have been super- or sub-human, had they come up to one tithe of my requirements.

In plain and very homely fact, they were four commonplace, provincial girls of average natural intelligence, in age varying from twelve to fourteen. They studied because they would be called upon to recite, and recited fairly well for fear of reproof and bad marks should they be derelict. Out of school, books and bookish thoughts were cast to the four winds of heaven. Their talk was cheery chatter, as brainless as the rattle of grasshoppers in the summer grass.

Mary 'Liza towered above them in scholastic attainments, although the junior of the youngest of them, keeping at the head of every class with unostentatious ease. I am afraid that I may have done my orphaned cousin seeming injustice in former chapters of this autobiography. Her temper was even, and her nature was finer than her prim, priggish ways would have led the casual acquaintance to suppose. She was ultra-conscientious, and naturally so exemplary that her good behavior was a snare. She could not sympathize with my temptations to naughtiness and many falls

from good-girlhood. I mention this to introduce what was a surprise to me at the time. She never joined in the persecutions of me that were the labor and the pastime of the other girls. It would have been asking too much to expect her to champion me openly. I was affectionately grateful to her for holding herself aloof when baiting me was the amusement of the hour.

My mother had lamented that I took life so much to heart. It took itself to my heart now, uninvited. I was headstrong and headlong, hot in love, and honest in hatred; with a brain full of absurd fancies, all of which were beloved by their author. I had browsed at will in my father's library, poring by the hour over books twenty years too old for me, yet, by mental cuticular absorption, taking in and assimilating much that contributed to the formation of taste and character. My familiar use of language that sounded pedantic because I got it from books, my frequent references to characters I had known in print, were gibberish

and vanity of vanities to my new associates. My very plays were unintelligible to girls who had never heard of William Wallace, and Robert Bruce, and Thaddeus of Warsaw, or read, on Sunday afternoons, of Tobias and the Angel, Judith and Holofernes, and Christiana and her children.

Not one of the four had an intellectual ambition. Mary 'Liza's scholarship did not excite their envy because she was quiet and inoffensive. Proficiency in her studies was "one of her ways." I was talkative and aggressive, and needed taking down. They set themselves systematically about the performance of the duty. The work was done deftly and discreetly, out of the sight and hearing of our elders. Young and raw as I was, I was too wise to tell tales on them. By the time I was four years old that lesson was rubbed into my consciousness by the gruesome rhyme:—

"Tell-tale tit!
Your tongue shall be slit,

And every dog in our town
Shall have a little bit !”

This apparently tedious preamble yet leads by an air-line to the first Agricultural Fair ever held at Powhatan Court House. The date was October fifteenth, and all the gentlemen and ladies in the county were entreated to send exhibits of plantation products and feminine handiwork. Enthusiasm ran from homestead to homestead with the speed and heat of a March fire in pine woods. Cattle, tobacco, grain, vegetables, fruit, flowers, bed-quilts, poultry, bees, knitting, embroideries, — nothing was talked of but the finest specimens of these that would be “in strong and beauteous order ranged,” upon the important day.

Madeline Pemberton had “done” a chair-cover in cross-stitch that her mother said ought to get the first prize, and was dead sure to take the third; Mary 'Liza was knitting a pair of shell-pattern, openwork stockings as fine as a cobweb, in which there would

not be a knot or a dropped stitch, and Paulina Hobson was putting ner eyes out over a linen-cambric handkerchief under Miss Davidson's direction. Fine sewing and embroidery were taught by governesses then. Sarah Hobson had pieced a crib quilt containing one thousand and twelve tiny squares. I was supposed to be left out in the cold. I would not knit, and to sew I was ashamed because I did it so badly. Nobody paid any attention to me when comparing notes and queries touching the great show.

Yet I nursed an ambition of my own to which no one was privy except Spotswoode, a gray-headed, and proverbially taciturn field-hand, without whose knowledge and coöperation the purpose could not have been carried out.

Wandering, one July afternoon, on the outskirts of a corn-field—the same in which I once lost Musidora—I happened upon a “volunteer” mangel-wurzel beet that had sprung up in a fence corner, a quarter of a

mile away from any of its kindred. Attracted by the beauty of the translucent, red-veined leaves, I called to Spotswoode who was ploughing between the corn rows, and asked him what it was. Adopting the waif, then and there, I dug what I called "my little garden" about it, Spotswoode tugging up the stoutest roots and clearing out the wire-grass. With an occasional hand's turn and toss from him I cultivated the vagrant into extraordinary size and vigor. Not a day passed in which I did not visit it. Not a blade of grass or a weed was allowed to invade the charmed circle, and many a spadeful of fresh mould, black with fatness, was worked about the swelling tuber by my kind field-hand. He knew that it was to be sent to the Fair in the fulness of time, and believed with me that "not another beet there could hold a candle to it."

As the air thickened and heated with rumors of the prodigies to be revealed on the fifteenth to the lasting honor of Old Powhatan, it was harder and harder to keep what

I knew to myself. I had purposed not to reveal the secret until my father's wagons were in loading with other mammoth esculents and his finest corn and tobacco. Then —so ran the programme— I would march up, bearing my beet with me. It was to be dug up and cleaned by Spotswoode on the evening of the fourteenth, and kept safely in hiding for me. I could depend upon his literal obedience, albeit he never had an original idea.

Temptation befell, and overcame me, on the afternoon of October thirteenth, a date I was not likely, thenceforward, to forget. All six of us girls were gathered in the porch, listening to, and relating, stories of what this one had raised, and that one had made. Mr. Pemberton had a seven-hundred-pound pig, and Mr. Hobson a rooster more beautiful than a bird of Paradise. The syrup of Mrs. Hobson's preserves was as clear as spring water, and Mrs. Pemberton's water-melon-rind sweetmeats had as good as taken the prize.

Paulina Hobson sat on the top step of the porch. She was very fair, and her hair was nearly as white as her skin. She was fourteen years old, and wore a grass-green lawn frock. Her eyes were of a paler green, she had a nasty laugh, and her teeth were not good.

“Isn’t it nice that all five of us are going to send something?” she said complacently. “You know that nobody but exhibitors can go into the tent for the first hour—from eleven to twelve—so’s they can see everything before the crowd gets in. Who’ll you stay with, Miss Molly Mumchance, when we all leave you?”

I had not spoken while the talk went on, for fear something might slip out and betray me, prematurely, but I took fire at this.

“I’m going in, myself!” I snapped out.

“Oh, you are? What are you going to exhibit, may we ask?” with her nasty laugh.

“The biggest beet in the world! It measures a yard around.”

“Hoo! hoo! hoo!” squealed Paulina so

loudly that my father, who was coming in the gate with my mother, Miss Davidson, Uncle Carter, and Aunt Eliza, said pleasantly:—

“What is the joke, young ladies? Mayn’t we laugh, too?”

Madeline Pemberton answered. Miss Davidson had to reprove her every day for forwardness.

“Why, Mr. Burwell,”—laughing with affected violence,—“Molly says she is going to send some beets to the Fair that measure ever so many yards around.”

“I didn’t!” cried I, in a passion. “You know that isn’t true!”

My father moved toward me.

“What *did* you say, daughter?”

I hung my head. If I told, where would be the surprise and the visioned triumph?

“What did you say, Molly?” repeated my father, in quiet gravity.

“I said *one* beet, and that it measured one yard,” stammered I, reluctantly.

“That was bad enough. When so many

older people are trying to see who can tell the biggest story, little girls ought to be especially careful."

His eyes did not go to Madeline, but his emphasis did. The thought of being classed with her lent me coherence and courage. I looked up.

"I have one beet, father, that is a yard 'round. I raised it myself. If you don't believe me, you can ask Spotswoode."

"I don't ask my servants if my daughter is telling the truth. Where is your beet?"

I pointed.

"Away over yonder—the other side of the corn-field."

Paulina and Rosa tittered, Madeline giggled,—then all three pretended to smother the demonstration with their handkerchiefs and behind their hands. Mary 'Liza looked scared and sorry. My father took hold of my hand.

"Take me to see it!"

The others fell into Indian file behind us,

as we marched outside of the garden fence and past the Old Orchard where the rays of the sinking sun shot horizontal shafts under the trees to our very feet; and so to the corn-field. I did not glance behind to see who entered it after us, but pushed right ahead between the stalks, the stiff blades switching my cheeks. When we neared the "garden," I ran forward, flushed and impatient, not to display my prize, but to clear myself by proving my words. An envious, jagged blade slashed my forehead as I tore by. I did not feel it at the moment, or for half an hour after it began to bleed.

For — *the beet was gone!*

The cleared space was there to show where something had been cultivated; the bare earth was raked level. Not so much as the hole from which my beet had been ravished remained in circumstantial evidence. The rest of the party arrived while I stood transfixed, the picture of detected guilt. To the rustle of the corn, and the shuffle of feet over the

furrows succeeded a horrible hush. Then, a chorus of mocking girlish cackles, led by Paulina Hobson's discordant screech, smote the sunset air and covered me with a pall of infamy. Paulina caught at the fence for support as she laughed; Madeline bent double and reeled sideways.

I clutched my father's hand, drowning and suffocating in the waves of despairing agony; I shook my tight fist at the insulting quartette.

"They — *they* — took it! It was here this morning. It was here just after dinner to-day!"

"Be quiet, girls!" ordered my judge-advocate. "Molly! I want the exact truth. If you accuse them, you must prove what you say. Things have gone too far to stop here. Didn't you say that Spotswoode knew something about the affair?"

"He knows all about it. He helped me, ever so many times, and he saw how big it was," I ejaculated vehemently.

"We shall probably find him at the stables, feeding the horses."

Back we trudged by my air-line, well-worn but narrow. I fancy that my father took note of my familiarity with the path, but he did not speak of it. I marched in front of him, gloomy and desperate. Some of the others talked low as they straggled along. The girls kept up a hissing whispering, for which I hated them with my whole soul. I think that my mother and Miss Davidson shed some furtive tears, for my case was black, and they were tender-hearted.

Spotswoode was looking after his plough-horses, as my father had conjectured. At his master's shout, he emerged from the stalls and presented himself in the stable door. Ungainly, dirty, bare-footed, his ragged wool hat on the back of his unkempt woolly poll, his jaw dropping in idiotic amazement at sight of the party — he was a ludicrous figure in the bath of late sunshine that brought out every uncomely item of the picture. Preoccupied and distraught as I was, I saw how the dust from the stable floor floated in golden

clouds to the cobwebbed rafters, as the sun struck past the man in the doorway and glorified the murky interior.

I rushed through the yard, heedless of manure heaps, and young pigs and calves scattered by my impetuous approach.

“Oh, Spotswoode!” in a voice that cracked and went to pieces as I ran, “somebody has stolen my beet! You can tell father —”

A hot valve closed in my windpipe and shut out the rest.

Spotswoode’s jaw hung more loosely; his eyes were utterly vacant.

“Ya-as, little Mistis!” he drawled, and slunk back into the stable.

“What do you mean, sir? Come back here, this minute!” called his master.

When he reappeared, he carried in both hands, extended, after the similitude of a prehistoric monkey making a votive offering — something dark-red and pot-bellied, and more immense than I had dreamed it could look.

A cluster of cropped leaves crowned it, a taper root, a foot long, depended from the bottom.

“I done been dig it up fo’ you an’ wash it, dis ebenin’, ’stid o’ termorrer,” drawled my vindicator. “So’s ter hab it all ready fur the Fyar.”

Mute and triumphant, I received it in a rapturous embrace, set it on a bench by the stable door, and passed the hem of my muslin apron about it. The ends just met.

“That’s how I knew how big it was,” I said simply. “Mother told me that my apron was a yard wide. I measured it while it was in the ground.”

The beet — and its history — went to the Fair, and a prize was awarded to “*Miss Mary Hobson Burwell, For best specimen of Mangel Wurzel, raised by Herself.*”



Chapter XIII

Two Adventures

IN a country neighborhood where half the people were cousins to the other half, gossip could not but spring up and flourish as lushly as pursley, — named by the Indians, “the white man’s foot.”

The gossip was usually kindly ; sometimes it was captious, now and then it was almost malicious. Everything depends upon the medium through which the floating matter in the air is strained.

Cousin Molly Belle’s best friends thought and said that she chose judiciously in marrying

the clean-lived, high-minded gentleman who had loved her before she was grown and whom she loved dearly in return. Her next best friends intimated that the most popular girl in the county might have done better for herself than to take Frank Morton, as fine a fellow as ever lived, but whose share of his father's estate was a small plantation with a tolerable house upon it, a dozen "hands" and, maybe, a thousand dollars or so in bonds and stocks. The girls she had out-belled, the girls' mothers, and sundry youths to whom Mrs. Frank Morton had given the mitten in her singlehood, said openly that she had quite thrown herself away in settling down to house-keeping, poultry-raising, and home-making in an out-of-the-way farmstead, with little society except that of a man ten years older, and thirty years soberer, than herself.

What a different story I could have told to those who doubted, and those who pitied! Nowhere in all our broad and bonny State did human lives flow on more smoothly and

radiantly than in the white house nestled under the great oak that was a landmark for miles around. It had but five rooms, kitchen, store-room, smoke-house, and other domestic offices being in detached buildings, as was the custom of the region and times. If there had been fifty they could not have held the happiness that streamed through the five as lavishly as the sunshine, and, like the sunshine, was newly made every day.

I was going on ten years old when my sweet mother gave a little sister to Bud and me. She had been with us but three days when Cousin Molly Belle drove over for me and the small hair trunk that meant a visit of several days when it went along. This time it signified four of the very *loveliest* weeks of my life, and two Adventures.

The blessed grandchildren, at whose instance these tales of that all-so-long-ago are written with flying pen and brimming heart, and sometimes eyes so moist that the lines waver and swim upon the page, will have it

—as their parents insisted before them— that “we never, never can have such good times and so many happenings as you had when you were new.”

If I smile quietly in telling over to myself the simple elements and few, out of which the good times were made, and how tame the happenings would be to modern young folk, I cannot gainsay the truth that my daily life was full and rich, and that every hour had a peculiar interest.

For one thing, there was a baby at Oakholme, a bouncing boy, sturdy of limb and of lung, and so like both his parents in all the good qualities possible to a baby, as to leave nothing to be desired by the best friends aforesaid, and no room for criticism on the part of the malcontents. Out-of-doors were chickens, ducks, turkeys, guinea-fowls, pigs, calves, pigeons, and a couple of colts,—all, like the baby boy, the best of their kind. What time was left on our hands after each had had its meed of attention, was more than consumed

by a library such as few young planters had collected in a county where choice literature was as much household plenishing as beds, tables, and candlesticks.

It was July, and the days were at their longest according to the Warrock's Almanac that hung over Cousin Frank's desk in a corner of the dining room. They were never so short to me before.

Adventure No. 1 befell us one forenoon, as Cousin Molly Belle and I were topping and tailing gooseberries for tarts, on the side porch. Baby Carter was on the mat at our feet, bulging his eyes and swelling his cheeks in futile efforts to extort a squeak from a chinquapin whistle his father had made for him. The kind that, as you may recollect, kept the whistle in them over night, and did not shrivel up.

"It's there, old fellow, if you really know how to get it out," Cousin Frank told his son and heir. "Everything depends upon yourself."

“Like other things that people fret for,” moralized the mother.

Nevertheless, she reached down for the whistle, wiped the mouthpiece dry, and sent the baby into ecstasies by executing “Yankee Doodle” flourishingly upon it. A chinquapin fife lends itself more readily to the patriotic, step-and-go-fetch-it melody than to any other in the national *répertoire*. Carter crowed, opened his mouth wide, and beat his fat pink palms together.

“Just as they applaud the clown at the circus!” said the performer. “He already recognizes his mother’s talents.”

“If he ever fails to do that, I’ll flog him out of his boots!” retorted the father.

A wild commotion at “the quarters” cut his speech short. Women shrieked, children bellowed, men roared, and two words disentangled themselves from the turmoil.

“*Mad dog! mad dog!*” pronounced, as the warning cry is spoken everywhere at the South, with a heavy accent on the first word.

Cousin Frank whipped up the baby; Cousin Molly thrust her hand under the collar of Hector, a fine pointer who lay on the floor, and, urging me before them, they hustled us all into the house in the half twinkle of an eye. In another, Cousin Frank was driving a load of buckshot into his gun faster than it was ever loaded before, even by him, and he was a hunting expert.

“Dear!” his wife caught the hand laid on the door-knob; her eyes were wild and imploring.

“Yes, my darling!”

He was out and the door was shut.

We flew to the window. Right up the path leading by the quarters from the spring at the foot of the hill, trotted an enormous bull dog. Half a dozen men were pelting him with stones from a respectful distance. He paid no attention to stones or shouts. Keeping the straight path, his brute head wagging drunkenly, he was making directly for the open yard-gate, from which a gravel walk led to the

porch where we had been sitting. Snap, his master's favorite hunter, and the petted darling of his mistress, was hitched to the rack by the gate, ready-saddled for Cousin Frank's morning round of the plantation. At the noise behind him, the intelligent creature threw up his handsome head, glanced over his shoulder, and began to plunge and snort, as if aware of the danger. His master spoke soothingly as he planted his own body between him and the ugly beast.

“Steady, old boy! steady!”

In saying it he raised the gun to his shoulder. It was all done so quickly that I had hardly seen the livid horror in Cousin Molly Belle's face when the good gun spoke, the muzzle within ten yards of the dog's head, and he rolled over in the path.

“What if you had missed him! He would have been upon you before you could reload!” shuddered the wife, as we ran out to meet Cousin Frank.

“I did not mean to miss him. If I had,

I should have clubbed my gun and brained him. No, dear love! it would not 'have done as well had I fired at him over the palings.' Snap was on the other side of the gate. And"—with an arch flash he might have learned from her—"you and Name-sake and I think the world and all of Snap, you know."

It was the only allusion he ever made in my hearing to the escapade that won him his wife.

We learned, within a few hours, that the dog had bitten several cows, five other dogs, and a valuable colt, before he reached Oakholme.

I was always very fond of Cousin Frank. Henceforward, he stepped into the vanguard of my heroes. I did not believe that Israel Putnam could have done anything more daring than what I had witnessed in the safe place in which he put us "before he sallied forth into the very jaws of death." That was the way I described it to myself.

Tramping through the lower pasture at his side that afternoon I tried to voice my admiration to him, but used less inflated language. I dearly enjoyed these long walks over the plantation in his company. He was an excellent farmer, and kept no overseer. I learned a great deal of forestry and botany from his talk. If he adapted himself, consciously, to my understanding, he did not let me perceive it. The recollection of his unfailing patience and his apparent satisfaction in the society of the child who worshipped him and his wife, has been a useful lesson to me in my intercourse with the young. I had told Cousin Molly Belle, a long time ago, that he "talked straight to children," with none of the involved meanings and would-be humorous turns of speech with which some grown-uppers diverted themselves and mystified us.

When he smiled at my well-mouthed, "Do you know, Cousin Frank, that your bravery may have saved at least four lives

— Cousin Molly Belle's, and baby's, and Snap's, and mine?" — I felt that he was not laughing at me inside, as the manner of some is.

"I don't know about that, Namesake." Nobody but himself and his wife was allowed to call me that. They were one, you know. "All of you would probably have got out of the way, except Snap. It *would* have been a great pity to have him bitten. But here is a wee bit of a thing that could, and would, save a good many lives if people were as well acquainted with it as they ought to be. I am surprised that it is so little known in a part of the country where snakes abound as they do about here."

He stooped to gather, and gave to me, some succulent sprigs from a plant that grew in profusion along the branch running through the meadow.

"It is a cure for a snake-bite if bruised into a poultice and bound upon the place

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soon after one is bitten. My father showed it to me a great many years ago, when I was a little shaver, and told me how he had learned about it from an old Indian herb-doctor. He tried it several times for moccasin- and adder- and copperhead-bites among his servants, and it was a cure in every instance. It grows on both sides of this branch, and nowhere else that I know of on the plantation. My father was an admirable botanist."

"So are you," said I, stoutly.

"Oh, no. As the saying is, his chips were worth more than my logs."

No law of nature is more nearly invariable than that Events are twins, and often triplets. That very evening, after supper, Cousin Frank was on his way from the stables to the house, and saw what he mistook for a carriage whip lying in the walk. The moon was shining and he had no doubt as to what the thing was when he stooped to pick it up. Before he touched

it, it made one swift writhe and dart and struck him on the wrist.

Cousin Molly Belle was laying Carter in the cradle, the last note of her lullaby upon her lips when her husband entered. He clutched his right wrist tightly with the left hand and was pale, but his voice was steady and gentle.

“Dear,” he said, “don’t be frightened, but I have been bitten by a snake. A copperhead, I think. Get me some whiskey, please.”

“The whiskey, Flora! Quick!” called the wife to her maid who stood by. “Pour out a tumblerful and give it to him.”

For herself, she fell upon her knees, seized her husband’s wrist and carried it to her mouth. This I saw, and heard the first words of his startled protest as the dear lips closed upon the wound. I was out of the room and clear of the house the next minute and speeding down the path and hill to the lower pasture.

The snake was at large, and might waylay me from any bush or tuft of grass. The moonbeams were ghostly and the stillness of the wide solitude was eerie. Being but a child,—and a girl-child,—I thought of these things, and of the likelihood of meeting runaway negroes, and mad dogs, and stray sane curs whose duty it was to attack nocturnal trespassers, and of a vicious bull never let out to roam the pasture except at night. I was afraid of them all, intellectually. My heart was too full of a mightier dread to let bugbears turn me back. I ran right on until the branch, a silver ribbon on the dark bosom of the meadow, was before me. Grasses and weeds were laden with dew, and the water whirled and whispered about the roots. I could have believed that the purling formed itself into words when I knelt down to fumble for the snake-bite cure. I would not let myself be scared. I kept saying over and over — “To save his life! to save his life!”

In the intensity of my excitement, language

that I was afraid was blasphemous, yet could not exclude from my mind, pressed upon me:—

“He saved others. Himself he cannot save!”

He might be dying now. He had said that the poultice ought to be applied at once. Horrid stories of what had happened to people who were bitten by rattlesnakes and cobras tormented me, and would not be beaten off.

“A copperhead, I think he said. How could he know that it was not a cobra? Would he swell up, turn black, and expire in convulsions before I could reach him?” I said “expire in convulsions,” out of a book. Everyday Virginia vernacular fell short of the exigency.

My feet were drenched, my pantalettes and skirts were bedraggled up to the knees, my eyes were large and black in my colorless face, when I burst into the chamber, and threw the bunch of priceless herbs into Cousin Molly Belle’s lap. I was too spent for speech.

Cousin Frank’s coat and vest were off; his right shirt-sleeve was rolled up to the shoulder,

and he was holding his hand and wrist in a deep bowl of warm water. The air reeked with the fumes of whiskey and hartshorn.

I concluded, when I came to think of it the next day, that the whiskey must have been doing antidotal work by getting into his head, for he laughed outright at sight of the specific I had brought. Then, tears — real tears and plenty of them — suffused his eyes and made his voice weak and husky. Or — was it the whiskey?

“You are a dear, brave, thoughtful Namesake!” he said, clearing his throat. “Darling!” to his wife who was eyeing the herbs wonderingly, — “She has been all the way to the lower meadow for those. I showed her the snake-bite cure to-day. Bruise them and put them on my wrist. Then Namesake must get off her wet clothes and go to bed. The danger is over.”

I was thirty years old before I found out that what I had risked so much to procure was not the panacea he had showed me, but com-

mon jewel-weed, or wild touch-me-not, a species of the *Impatiens* of botanists, harmless, but not curative.

And they had never let me guess what a blunder I had made!



Chapter XIV
Miss Nancy's Nerves

THE Gateses were our distant relatives. Not nearer than fourth cousins-in-law, I fancy, but we counted them among our "kinfolks" in Virginia, calling Mrs. Gates "Cousin Nancy," and Captain Gates, "Cousin 'Ratio." His proper name was Horatio, of course, and he belonged to the family that gave the Revolutionary hero, Horatio Gates, to his country.

I was slowly getting over the whooping-cough, having taken it, as I took most "catching" things that fell in my way, — with all my might. I began to whoop the last of April, and kept it up all summer, when every other child on the plantation was entirely well.

Captain Gates drove over to our house by

the time the breakfast-table was cleared one sultry August day, bringing in his roomy double buggy a basket of Georgia peaches — brunettes with crimson cheeks — and the biggest watermelon I had ever seen, as a neighborly gift to my mother.

“Miss Nancy gave me no peace of my life till I got off with them,” he said in his loud, breezy tones. “There’s none of her kin she sets more store by than by Cousin Ma’y Anna Burwell. And she’s as proud as a peacock of our fruit. I tell her a judgment will come upon her for it. As I take it, Old Marster sends the rain upon the unjust as well as upon the just, and if it’s our turn this year, somebody else’s turn will come next year, and yet we’ll be as good Christians then as we are now. It’s one of His ways that’s past finding out. Howdy’e, little lady!” putting out a brawny hand to pull me between his knees.

I was standing a yard or so away, but right in front of him, my hands behind me, my eyes and ears, and, I’m afraid, my mouth, open to

his hearty talk. I had never heard God called "Old Marster" before, and if I had not been taught that children ought not to criticise what grown people say and do, I should have been quite sure that it was wrong. I did not want to think any harm of Cousin 'Ratio, and determined that I would not, when he drew a great finger gently over my thin cheek, and looked down at me with kindly, pitying eyes.

"Tut! tut! tut! this is too bad! too bad! We must fill up this gulley somehow, Cousin Ma'y Anna. Other folks' victuals are the best physic I know for that sort of work. Miss Nancy would cry her eyes out if I was to go home with the story that little Molly Burwell had coughed her bones pretty near as bare as barrel-staves, and I didn't try to cover them up again. A week in my peach-orchard and water-melon-patch, with quarts of cream and Miss Nancy's breakfasts, dinners, and suppers — is what she wants. Get her bonnet, and stick a tooth-brush and a pocket-handkerchief into a

bandbox, Chloe, for I'm going to take her home with me, right straight off."

My mother shook her head smilingly at the thought of the week's visit.

"The child coughs so badly at night that I don't like to have her away from me, Cousin 'Ratio. But change of air, even for a day, would do her good. Her father and I will come for her about sundown."

Thus it happened, that, decked in a clean pink calico frock and white muslin apron, I was hoisted to my perch in the high gig beside Cousin 'Ratio, and set off to spend a whole day at Cold Comfort.

The name was so out of keeping with Cousin 'Ratio's kind, red face and funny ways, and the warm, sweet-smelling day, that I couldn't help asking him on the way "why he called his house such a *sbivery* name?"

The gig swayed and creaked under his laugh.

"That was just the reason my grandmother gave for naming it. You see, the house stands on the top of a hill, and all the winds from

three counties get at it in winter. The house my grandfather put up was of wood, and none too tight in the joints, and the poor old lady, his wife.— my step-grandmother she was — had rheumatism, and suffered a heap all the year 'round. So, nothing would do but it must be 'Cold Comfort,' and Cold Comfort it has been ever since. We Gateses have a way of giving in to our wives in 'most everything. Everything that's reasonable, I mean. And we don't pick out unreasonable girls for wives."

The fat, sleek horse was taking his own lazy pace in a mile of shady road, cut through the heart of a pine forest. The ground was brown and soft with pine needles, and the high gig swung and creaked a sort of drowsy tune. Cousin 'Ratio tapped the wheel nearest him with his whip, and fell into talk with himself, rather than with the child under his elbow.

"Now, there's Miss Nancy! There's been a heap of fun poked at me, first and last, for building my house in the shape I did.

'Though, for the life of me, I can't see why I should be obleeged to live in a four-square box because every other man-Jack in Pow'tan County builds his in that way. Miss Nancy was always mighty nervous from the time she was a child; I knew it when I married her. Fact is, she says to me: 'Cap'n Gates, I'm as nervous as a witch, and I'm afraid you'll get out of patience with me sometimes, and I wouldn't blame you if you did.' And, says I, — my hand right on my heart, — 'Miss Nancy Miller! if you'll take *me* as I am, I'll be proud and happy to take *you* as you are, nerves and all!' says I. 'The proudest man in the State of Virginia,' says I. 'Call it a bargain.'

"And she did — bless her soul! It was the best bargain that ever I made, or ever expect to make, too. Some men marry Temper, and some Extravagant Notions, and some Vanity, and some Jealous, Suspicious Dispositions, and some, again, Stinginess — Good gracious! there's no end to the dis-

agreeable things men *do* marry! I married *Nerves!* and with them, the best and sweetest and, to my way of thinking, the prettiest woman in the County and State, and the Universe, and I've been thankful for it every day and every hour since — God bless her!”

I waited for him to say something more until I began to wonder, then to get impatient, that he let the horse jog along, the soft creak of the gig keeping time with the leisurely motions of the pampered beast, the master's eyes fixed upon the wheel he was tapping with his whip, as if he had forgotten me entirely.

I made a bold effort to reopen the conversation.

“I suppose Cousin Nancy asked you to build your house round, instead of square?”

I had heard so many different stories about the odd structure which was one of the county curiosities that I was anxious to get at the truth.

He laughed low and pleasantly: —

“Ask me! Not she, bless your soul! She would never have thought of such a thing. ’Twas me that studied it out, lying awake on windy nights because I knew she couldn’t sleep for the roaring and whistling around the corners of the old house, and the wind humming in the chimneys and between the window-sashes like a bumblebee as big as a whale. It made her feel so lonesome and blue that many’s the time I’ve heard her crying to herself when she thought I was sound asleep. We were going to pull down the old house, anyhow. It was a rickety concern, and inconvenient as could be. So I got Miss Nancy to tell me how many rooms and closets and all that she’d like to have in a house that was to be built on purpose for her, and for nobody else, and I made a plan of it all on paper, and then I sent her up to stay with her mother in Buckingham County for six months, going up to see her myself every Saturday to spend Sunday—like a nigger going to his ‘wife-house,’” — here he stopped to laugh again —

“until the last window-shutter was hung, and all the furniture put back and in order—Jerusalem! how I *did* work! Then I brought her home. I wish you could have seen her face when we came in sight of the solid brick house—round as a cheese box—and I told her I had it built in that shape, so’s she should never be made sorrowful, nor kept awake again by the wind a-cutting up shines around sharp corners, so long as we both should live—Amen!”

He jerked a blazing red bandanna handkerchief out of his pocket, turning his face clear away from me to do it, and blew his nose until the woods rang as with the echoes of a fox-hunter’s horn, then rolled the handkerchief into a ball and polished his face with it in the oddest possible fashion.

Most of the tales current about the round brick house had something to do with Cousin Nancy’s whims, especially with her dislike to hearing the wind blow around the corners. Young as I was, I felt, after hearing Cousin

'Ratio's story, that he had done a beautiful thing in planning the ingenious surprise for his delicate wife. It crossed my mind, too, that she might have thought the house as ridiculous as other people did, yet pretended to like it sooner than hurt his feelings. She must be a good and devoted wife. Furthermore, I got into my foolish head the notion that it was nice and interesting to have Nerves. I resolved to get a set of my own at an early opportunity and to work them well. To this end, I would watch Cousin Nancy's ways and copy them as closely as a little girl could copy the behavior of a grown-up heroine.

She met us in the porch of the house, crying out with pleasure at sight of me.

"That's a little lady, not to be afraid to come all by herself to see two quiet old folks!" she said as she kissed me. "I ought to have had a dozen girls and boys for you to play with by this time — but I haven't a single one."

She laughed in saying it, yet with such

sincere regret of face and accent that I answered, without taking time to think:—

“I’m mighty sorry you haven’t!” Catching myself up, I blundered on: “Not that you and Cousin ’Ratio are not company enough for me. But it seems a pity that, in this pretty place, with so many peaches and watermelons and flowers—and pigeons—and chickens—and all that—there are not any children to eat, and to play with them—and keep you company. I’ve heard mother say, ‘Home wouldn’t be Home without the babies.’”

“Your mother is right, child! Your mother is right!”

The words seemed to stick in her throat, and to scrape it as she got them out. Then, to my horror, she sank into a rocking-chair, and, throwing her hands over her face, began to cry, with queer little squeals between the sobs that shook her all over.

Malviny, her mulatto maid, ran to her with a bottle of hartshorn, and Cousin ’Ratio knelt



A TEA-PARTY IN THE SUMMER-HOUSE.

“Dovey appeared with a large saucer of peaches and cream.”

upon the floor by her and put his arm about her, and fanned her with a turkey-tail fan, and another colored woman rushed off to the kitchen, and was back in a jiffy with a bunch of feathers all on fire, and making a dreadful smell, and stuck them under her mistress's nose. I backed to the door with a wild notion of getting out of the way, and running back home, yet could not tear myself away from the unusual scene.

As soon as Cousin Nancy could speak, she laughed at sight of my face, — the tears still dripping all the way to her chin, — and held out her arms: —

“Poor little lammie! did I frighten the life out of her? You mustn't mind my nervous turns; dear. They don't mean anything.”

“I was afraid I had said something I oughtn't to,” I faltered, on the verge of tears. “I'm sorry if I did!”

Whereupon I was drawn close to her, and kissed three times to assure me that I was

the "best little girl in the world, and that she wouldn't give way again."

"But, you see, I had got so nervous because you were gone so long, and you drove that skittish colt, and I was sure something had happened," she explained to her husband, who still stood by her, stroking the back of her hand, in awkward fondness. He stooped to lay his bearded face against hers.

"That's like you! Always thinking of other people, and never of yourself!" he said admiringly.

She thought a great deal of me for the rest of my visit, ordering Malviny to cut out and make a doll's pelisse for me of a lovely piece of red silk, saying that she would have done it herself if sewing did not make her so nervous.

"I haven't darned a sock or hemmed a pocket-handkerchief for Cap'n Gates in ten years. If he were not the best man on earth, he would have sent me packing long ago."

She despatched another servant to the

garret for some toys her sister's children had left with her last year, and gave me permission to pull all the flowers I wanted in the garden. I carried three maimed dolls, a headless horse, a three-legged cat, and a Britannia tea-set to a summer-house at the end of a long walk, and made believe that I was Titania, the Queen of the Fairies, of whom I had read in a tattered copy of Shakespeare I found in a lumber closet. By and by, Malviny brought out to me a pretty china plate with four sugar cakes, shaped like ivy leaves, and a glass of very sweet lemonade. Awhile later, Dovey, a half-grown girl, appeared with a large saucer of peaches and cream, plentifully sugared.

“Mistis says you must eat 'em all, for she knows you mus' be mighty thirsty, and peaches is coolin' for little ladies whar's been sick.”

There were still some cake crumbs and a spoonful of peaches left when I saw Cousin Nancy herself come sailing down the walk.



Chapter *XV*
Side-Blades & Water-Melons

MY far-away cousin could never have been pretty except to a fond husband's eyes. I should have liked to think her tolerably good-looking now, since he loved her so dearly and praised her so enthusiastically, and she was so much more than good to me. I could not help using and believing the eyes that showed me a tall, lean woman whose skin, once fair, was now nearly as yellow as the freckles spattered all over her forehead, nose, cheeks, and chin. Nose and chin were long, her cheekbones were high, her eyes were pale, the lashes so light and thin as to be scarcely visible at all,

and her scanty flaxen hair was dragged tightly away from a high bony forehead. Her gown to-day was white cambric, as clean, as glossy, and as opaque as cream-laid letter-paper. Her head was bare, and she carried over it a green parasol which made her complexion livid. Her voice was soft and sweet, and her manners were liked by everybody. I was glad to think of these things, and to feel the charm of tone and manner, as she asked if I "would not like to pay a visit to the peaches and watermelons."

I should have preferred to stay where I was, having got very well acquainted with my attendant fairies, and eaten enough sweets to take the edge from my appetite, even for ripe, fresh fruit. Still, I got up with a tolerable show of cordiality, comprehending that she meant to please me, took the hand she offered, and was soon out of the cool shade in the open field separating garden from orchard. Captain Gates was really as proud of his reputation as the most successful fruit-grower in

the county as his wife was, although he affected to ridicule her weakness in the same direction. There were two acres of peach trees, most of them laden with fruit. When pressed to "eat all I could swallow," I managed to do away with three immense globes of crimson-and-gold, and then gave out, shamefacedly:—

"You see I am so little, and the peaches are so big!" I urged. "I hold just so many and no more."

"Of course, you comical little thing!" interrupted Cousin Nancy, highly amused. "By and by, on our way back from the watermelon patch, maybe there will be more room. I shan't ask you to pick the melons from the vines and eat *them* by the dozen. Come along!"

She did not seem to mind the heat that struck upon my face and head like the breath of an oven, as we crossed another open field, to that in which Captain Gates's famous melons lay by the hundred, growing larger and more luscious in the August sunlight that warmed them through and through. Some were dark

green, some light green, some were streaked and mottled with white-and-green.

"Oh, Cousin Nancy!" I cried, "I did not know there were so many in the world! What *will* you do with them all?"

She led the way farther into the network of vines, the rank leaves and starry blossoms bobbing about her feet. The fruit and flowers of Cold Comfort did something toward filling the place left void in her heart by the lack of the children that had never come. She stood still and looked over the wide patch as if she had made every melon there, and meant to have the full credit for her work.

"Do with them, monkey! Why they are as good as a silver mine—the beauties! Every full-grown one stands for a quarter of a dollar. We send six wagon-loads to Richmond every week, and people come for them from every direction—as far as across the river in Goochland; and we give dozens away to our neighbors, and the negroes come at night to steal them — Oh! *ob*!! OH!!!"

She gathered her skirts tightly and high above her ankles with both hands, letting the green parasol tumble, head foremost, to the ground, and screeched as if she had trod upon a yellow-jacket's nest. She was going to have Nerves again, with no hartshorn, or burnt feathers, or turkey-tail fan, or Cousin 'Ratio near. I started to run to the house for help, but she grabbed my frock frantically.

"If you budge one inch you are a dead child!" she wheezed, her pale eyes bulging from the sockets. "Cap'n Gates and the overseer came out here last night and just sowed all this patch with side-blades!" (Scythe-blades.) "Edges up! Sharp as razors and thick as thieves! Hundreds of them! To keep the negroes from stealing any more of them! I heard Cap'n Gates tell them he was going to do it, and the overseer told them this morning that they *had* done it. And I haven't an atom of an idea where a solitary one of the murderous things is! We are as good as dead if we try to get out. We

might tread upon one, at the first step! How could I forget it? Oh, how could I?”

I felt the blood drain away from my face, and I trembled as violently as she. Then a thought came to me, and I got it out between chattering teeth.

“We didn’t tread on any of them coming into the patch.”

“That was sheer providence, honey. We *might* have been cut in two before we had gone ten yards.”

“But, Cousin Nancy!” catching at her hands as she began to wring them again, and to sob and squeal as she had done in the morning. “Listen! I am sure I could go out by the very same path! Let’s try! We can’t stay here always.”

“*Path!* There isn’t a sign of a path! Look!”

She pointed a bony finger in the direction we had come. The leaves and blossoms disturbed by our feet and skirts were as still as the hundreds and thousands of other leaves

on all sides of us. We had not bruised a vine, or left a footprint, that we could see. The sun poured down upon us like fire from heaven; we were in the middle of the patch that seemed, to my horrified eyes, miles and miles in extent, and not another creature was in sight.

“Our only hope is to scream as loud as ever we can,” said Cousin Nancy. “Nobody knows where we are; the hands are all in the tobacco, a mile on the other side of the house, and Cap’n Gates and Mr. Owen may be even farther off, for all I know. If we can’t make anybody hear us, the Lord have mercy upon our souls! We shall have sunstroke inside of an hour.”

I picked up the green parasol, and with clumsy, shaking fingers opened it, and stood on tiptoe to hold it over her head, crying, meantime, as piteously as she, such was the contagion of hysterical terror. Then, with one accord, we lifted up our voices, weak with weeping, in a thin screech. I said “Help!

help! help!" she cried, "Murder! murder!" and "Cap'n *Ga-a-tes!*" We made enough noise to startle the dogs in the house-yard and at the stables, and brought from the nearer "quarters" and corn-field a gang of negroes, of all sizes and ages, all running at the top of their speed, and the faster as they descried us. It would have been excruciatingly funny at any other time, and to one that was not an actor in the drama, to observe that not one man, woman, or pickaninny of the excited crowd offered to pass the confines of the melon patch. Each one was mindful of the hundreds of buried side-blades with their edges uppermost, and almost all were barefooted.

"Run! some of you-all, for Marster an' Mr. Owen!" shrieked Malviny, getting her wits together before the others could rally theirs. The shrill order arose above the chorus of groans and cries and pitying exclamations, and Cousin Nancy, on hearing it, gave one wild cry, and dropped where she stood, a heap of white cambric, head, arms,

and green parasol, crushing the vines, and her head just grazing a mammoth melon.

I had never been so frightened in all my life as when I got hold of her head, and tried to lift it. It was as heavy as lead. Too much terrified and too foolish to bethink myself that a cut would bleed, I concluded that she had struck one of the murderous blades, and it had killed her. Her eyes were closed; her jaw had fallen; her cheek lay close against that of the big melon, and the vines met over her nose. It was a ghastly and a grotesque spectacle, and I behaved as any other nine-year-old would — jumped up and down and screamed, beating my palms together, and calling alternately for “Father!” and “Cousin ‘Ratio!”

Since that horrible moment I have believed stories read and heard of people being scared to death, or into insanity. In the great, round world, there was nothing present to me but a cruel expanse of green below, a white-hot sky above, and at my feet a dead woman, killed

by the razor-like blades thick-set under every leaf, and guarding every melon. Then all this was swept out of sight by a black wave that took me off my feet.

I awoke in the shade of the peach orchard. Mr. Owen, the overseer, had laid me down on the grass, and I heard him say, “She’s all right now.” I sat up and stared around me. Cousin Nancy, still in a dead faint, was stretched upon the ground a little way off, a fluttering swarm of women about her, with water, brandy, hartshorn, cologne, fans, and burning feathers, and Cousin ’Ratio, kneeling over her, was calling in her ear, the tears running down his bristly cheeks.

“Miss Nancy! honey! sugar-lump! wake up! it’s me, dearie! The danger is all over. What a *doggoned* fool I was to put the side-blades there!”

When she at last revived, she was taken to the house and put to bed. She was not yet able to sit up when my father and mother drove over for me in the cool of the afternoon.

“My tomfoolery came near to being the end of the poor dear,” said Cousin 'Ratio, walking with us to the carriage, when we had taken leave of his wife. “I feel mighty bad about it, too, as you may suppose, for it was my fault in not reminding her of those cussed side-blades. Between ourselves, Burwell,” — coming nearer to my father and glancing over his shoulder to be sure none of the servants were within hearing, — “Owen and I put just exactly *two* in the whole patch, and they were near the fence. Miss Nancy never went within a Sabbath day's journey of them. We made a mighty parade of toting twenty of them past the quarters, taking two of the hands along to help. They laid them down by the fence, and we came down after dark and carried all but two off to the old tobacco barn, and hid them there. I wasn't likely to rust my best side-blades by burying them in the dirt. But I'd rather have ruined them all and lost every blessed melon on the place, than have given Miss Nancy's Nerves such a shock.”



Chapter XVI

Old Madam Leigh

NOBODY seemed to know how everybody got into the way of calling her "Old Madam Leigh."

It was not a Virginia custom, and there was not another old lady in the neighborhood to whom the title of "Madam" was ever given. After she had lived to be the oldest woman in the county, the "Old" was prefixed, naturally enough.

I got to know her through Cousin Molly Belle.

"I declare, Frank, Molly has never seen Queen Mab and her hummers!" she said at dinner one day. "I'm ashamed of myself for



not having taken her there. It's just the sort of thing she would enjoy."

When Mrs. Frank Morton was ashamed of having done anything, or having left anything undone, the next, and a quick step with her, was to mend the fault without further waste of words. We went over to Old Madam Leigh's that same afternoon, — she, Cousin Frank, and I, — on horseback, "the road to Queen Mab's palace being the vilest in the State," as my hostess averred.

I thought it a delightful road. It left the main highway a mile beyond Cousin Frank's plantation gate, and lost its way in oak and hickory woods, where the trees touched over our heads. I said they were "trying to shake hands with one another."

"They will be hugging one another before we go much farther," said Cousin Frank.

As they did when we began to climb a long hill, washed into crooked gullies by the water that tore down to the creek at the bottom whenever it rained hard. After this was a short

and steeper hill, and then another long one, and we were on the edge of a clearing, very bright and sunny after the green glooms of the forest.

“Does Queen Mab drive this way, often, in her chariot-and-four?” I inquired, as we struck into a gentle gallop along a grassy lane.

“Queen Mab’s chariot has not been out of the carriage-house in twenty-five years,” answered Cousin Molly Belle. “There is another road from her house to where every-day people live, but it would take us a long way around. Mother can recollect when this was a good road, and much travelled.”

“Doesn’t she make any visits?”

“Never to human beings.”

“Doesn’t she go to church?”

“Not that I have ever heard of.”

“Cousin Molly Belle!” in an awed tone.

“Is she a *beatben*?”

“She is very old, Namesake. Nearly ninety.”

She said it gravely and gently, and Cousin

Frank repeated a verse of poetry I did not know then : —

“ He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small ;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.”

It was so nice that I turned it over in my mind several times before I asked another question. My mother sometimes called me “an animated interrogation-point.”

“ Is Old Madam Leigh married ? ”

“ She has been married. She would not be ‘ Madam ’ if she had not been. She has been a widow for a long, long time. She had two children — twins — a boy and a girl. They lived to be twenty years old, and then died.”

“ Not both at the same time, Cousin Molly Belle ? ” for her tone suggested something very sorrowful.

“ Yes, Molly dear. The sister fell into the river and the brother, in swimming out to save her, was seized with the cramp and sank before

he could reach her. The mother has lived alone ever since, except for her servants. They are very good and faithful. Then, she has her hummers and her pygmies, who are a great deal of company to her."

"*Pigs!*" in intense disgust. "She can't be a very neat person."

A peal of laughter from my companions broke off the speech.

"You'll change your mind shortly," said Cousin Frank, cantering ahead to open a gate in the rail fence.

We saw the house from the gate, — a wee bit of a gray cottage, one story high, literally covered with honeysuckles of every kind I had ever heard of, and now in fullest bloom. An enormous catalpa tree, also in flower, stood in front of the cottage, shading all but one gable, and that looked as if it were made of glass. Between this gable and the garden were two spreading acacia trees, tufted with the tassel-like blossoms. The deep front porch was curtained with white jessamine, and as we walked up the

gravelled path leading to it, Madam Leigh stood in the doorway.

She was a tiny old lady, no taller than I was, and wore a white dress, fine and sheer. Cousin Molly Belle told me afterward that it was India muslin, and that she wore white, winter and summer. The waist of the gown was very short, the skirt was straight, and fell to the instep of a foot no bigger than a baby's. Her cap was also old-fashioned, made of lace, with a full crimped border under which her hair, silvery-white, was dressed in short, round curls on each side of her forehead. Her skin reminded me of a bit of rice-paper I had picked up from the floor one day. It had dropped out of the back of my father's watch, and Bud had found it and played with it until it was creased and cracked all over like "crazed" china, yet not torn. Old Madam Leigh's face could not be said to be wrinkled, for the lines were shallow. They were as fine as if made with an inkless crow quill, and so close together you would have thought there was not room

for another. Her eyes were dark and bright. She had French blood in her veins, and showed it in her quick glance and lively motions.

She took us directly into "the chamber" on the left side of the hall that cut the house in two. Everything there was white, too,—bed and curtains and chair-covers being of white dimité, trimmed with lace. The walls were almost covered with portraits. Some were very old. Two of the brightest hung opposite the bed where Madam Leigh must see them as soon as she opened her eyes in the morning. One was of a pretty girl in a white frock, low-necked and short-sleeved, with a red rose in the bodice, making the fair skin it rested against all the fairer. Her eyes were dark and sweet; short brown curls, like Madam Leigh's white ones, clustered about her temples. The other picture was that of a handsome boy of twenty, or thereabouts, and strikingly like his sister. A dog, with silky ears, leaned his head against his young master's arm.

I tried hard not to stare at these portraits, — to me the most interesting things in the room, — for I knew they must be the twin-children who had died together, ever and ever so many years ago. The instinct of kindly breeding told me that it would not be polite to remind the mother of her loss by looking inquisitively at them. But I could not help stealing a glance at one and the other when the grown people were intent in talk. Looking led to dreaming, as I was left to myself and the thoughts suggested by the portraits. I arranged it in my mind that brother and sister were very fond of each other; that the sister had fallen into the river where the current was strong, from some such place as Maiden's Adventure, on Mr. Pemberton's plantation, where the water was deep above a roaring fall. I thought how she called to her brother, and how he answered, and I wondered — a chill running down my spine and catching at my heart — who carried the awful news to the mother. How could she bear it? how live in

this lonely place with nobody to keep her from thinking of, and missing, her husband and her children, nobody to care whether she were glad or sorry, sick or well, alive or dead?

I did not know that my mouth was drawn down at the corners, that my eyes were mournful, and my whole aspect that of a sadly bored little girl, who felt herself to be left entirely out of the thoughts of her friends and the hostess—until Madam Leigh's voice made me start, as if I had been asleep.

“I am afraid this little lady finds all this mighty stupid.”

I think the old-time practice of calling girl-children “little ladies,” kept them in wholesome remembrance of the necessity of behaving as such. At any rate, I was instantly aware that I ought to be sitting up straight upon my cricket, and seeming to be interested in what was going on. Had not my mother reproved, me times without number, for dreaming in company and for absent-minded ways

that made me heedless of others' comfort? "It is selfish and rude not to pay attention to what people are saying when you are with them" — was a nursery rule I ought to have had well by heart.

It was natural, then, that I should turn as red as a cardinal flower, and fidget uneasily, and stutter when I tried to set myself right with my venerable hostess:—

"Oh, no, ma'am. I'm not a bit tired. I'm sorry — if —"

"There's nothing to be sorry for, my dear. If anybody has been rude it is I who ought to have provided some other entertainment for you than sitting still, and trying with all your might to understand big folks' talk."

Her voice was clearer than one would have expected in such an old lady, and she did not mumble as if she were chewing her words, as a great many old people do. She spoke very distinctly, pronouncing every syllable in each word. She told me, when we were better acquainted, that she read aloud for an hour

every day, for fear she might fall into careless ways of speaking, seeing, as she did, so few educated white people, and, sometimes, talking with nobody but her colored servants for a week at a time. She held herself very straight when seated, and in walking, and stepped as lightly as a young person, as she got up and took me by the hand, smiling at me in the friendliest way imaginable, and, saying "I must introduce you to my family," led me across the hall, and opened a door on the other side.

As soon as we were inside of the door, she shut it quickly behind us, and I stood stock-still with amazement at what I saw and heard.

It was a large room, with two windows at the front and two at the back, while the gable we had seen from the lane was almost filled with sashes, as in a greenhouse. Close against these sashes, now so bright with the Southern sun that I was half-blinded for an instant, were rows of shelves, crowded with cut flowers in vases, and growing flowers in pots. Most

of the sashes were open, and the space thus left was screened by twine netting, something like fine fish seines. Old Madam Leigh had netted each of these squares herself, as I learned afterward. The same protected back and front windows. About the open windows, and around the flowers, flew and floated what I thought, at first, were at least one hundred humming-birds. Madam Leigh said there were but twenty-five, all told. The whirl of their rapid wings filled the air, the gleam of their brilliant breasts and backs was like living jewels.

“*Oh-b-b-b!!*” was all I could utter, as I clasped my hands in admiring wonder at the beauty and the strangeness of it all, and a queer lump came into my throat, as if I were frightened or sorry, and I knew I was only delighted past speaking. Madam let me alone for a minute, before she laid her small, wrinkled hands upon my shoulders and turned me about to see something I had not observed in my raptures over the marvellous birds.

Against the wall beyond the door was a long, broad table, or rather counter, and upon it was a village of small houses, rows upon rows of them. Outside of the village and the streets were other and larger houses, in groups of two and three, with dooryards and gardens, and then came half a dozen farm-houses surrounded by fields and gardens. In the village there were stores and a Court House, and a Clerk's Office and a Jail, surrounded by a Public Square, exactly like that at Powhatan Court House, and two taverns with signs hanging outside of them. Trees lined the streets, and vines were running over the houses. Then, there were wells, and wood-piles with men chopping wood at them, and cow-pens with cows and calves, and pig-pens filled with pigs. Men were driving wagons along the roads, and a fine carriage with four horses harnessed to it and a coachman on the box stood before the larger of the two taverns. The footman, hat in hand, was helping two elegantly dressed ladies out of the carriage,

and the landlady, with two colored maids behind her, was upon the portico waiting to receive them. Men were digging in the corn and tobacco fields; there were turkeys, chickens, ducks, and geese, and boys riding horses to water and driving the cows home to be milked.

Was ever such another Wonderland revealed to a child who had never been in a toy-shop and never owned a doll that was not home-made?

I screamed and capered with joy, like the crazy thing I was, for a whole minute after my eyes fell upon the mimic settlement. Then I fell to examining the "entertainment" more closely, and discovered that everything, except the mosses that imitated the trees, vines, and other growing things, was made of corn-stalks and corn-husks — "shucks" as Virginians call them. The human creatures and the dumb animals were carved out of the firm, dried pith of the stalks, and afterward painted with water colors. The clothes of men and

women were made of the soft inner shucks, dried carefully to the pliability of silk. Log and frame houses were built of the canes themselves; the smallest were used whole, the larger were split. Peeping into the open doors and windows I saw that each house was furnished with beds, tables, and chairs, also made of corn-stalks, pith, and shucks.

At the far end of the counter were six bird-cages, constructed of thin strips of corn-canes, each supplied with perches and water vessels.

“Those are my reform prisons,” Madam Leigh said to my cousins, who had followed and begged to be let in. “You see,” — to me, — “when one of my hummers becomes cross or quarrelsome, I separate him from the rest and shut him up in one of these cages until he is in a better humor. I am sorry to say that they have pretty peppery tempers, and hardly a day passes in which I do not have to interfere to stop their fighting.”

I had no reason to feel myself slighted now. She went all round the room with me, showing

her pets and telling me interesting stories of their habits and dispositions. Each had a name, and some answered to their names when she called them. At least, she thought that they did, and I did not doubt it when I saw them swoop down to dip their bills in the flowers she held up, as she called "Sprite" and "Bright," and "Sweet" and "Swift," and the like crisp, short names in a voice that was like the tinkle of a little bell. It was a pretty sight, — the tiny woman, all white from cap to toe, standing in the full tide of sunbeams, bunches of honeysuckle and catalpa flowers, half as big as herself, in her arms, the elf-like face smiling out of them at the eagerness of her feathered darlings, darting and glancing and gleaming and humming about her, as if she had been a larger edition of themselves, and not of a different genus. She made me stand by her while this was going on, saying that the hummers were "too well-bred to be afraid of her friends, and were especially fond of little people."

“The honeysuckles first made me think of collecting them,” went on the pleasant tinkle. “When they are in full bloom the frisky little creatures swarm in them all day long. They like white and yellow jessamine, too, and catalpa flowers and lilies and acacia blossoms. Ten years ago I found one of their nests upon a low limb of a tulip-poplar tree. Here it is! It looks like a knob of mossy bark, you see. There were two eggs in it. I cut off the limb carefully, and set it in a pot of water in this room. It was full of blossoms, and the water kept these alive. The window was left open and nobody—not even myself—came in here for a week. As I had hoped, the mother and father bird found the nest, and went on sitting on the eggs as if it had not been moved. One night, after the baby birds were hatched, I went softly to the outside of the window and let down the sash. That was the beginning of my aviary. That’s a hard word for you— isn’t it, Molly? It means a family of birds, such as I have here.”

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“I don’t believe there is another like it in the world,” said Cousin Molly Belle. “I’ve always declared that you are a fairy, and charm your hummers. I described it and them once to a famous ornithologist. That’s a real jaw-breaker, Namesake, and means one who knows everything about all sorts of birds — or thinks he does. I met this or-nith-ol-o-gist in New York last May. He said it was impossible to tame and raise families of wild birds, especially humming-birds. And when I said I had seen it with my own eyes, times without number, he looked polite — and unbelieving.”

Madam Leigh was so much amused that the flowers shook in her shrivelled mites of hands.

“Many learnèd strangers have been to see the ‘impossibility,’” she said, her voice shaken by laughter.

(Cousin Molly Belle had the knack of saying just the thing that would please everybody, and saying it in the right way and at the right time.)

“Of course I have not raised them all from the eggs,” continued Madam. “We catch new birds every year, and some are never quite tame. So your or-nith-ol-o-gist” — pronouncing it in the same comical way that Cousin Molly Belle had done — “was not altogether in the wrong. But they get used to their new life much sooner because there are so many of their own kind about them. When I find that a couple are thinking of going to house-keeping, I root a branch of poplar, or hickory, or maple, in a tub of moist earth, and curtain off a corner where they will not be disturbed in the nesting-time.”

“That was the very thing the celebrated or-nith-ol-o-gist said was absolutely impossible,” cried Cousin Molly Belle. “Even though I told him that, if he would pay us a visit, I would show him the cosey corner, and the pretty bride and gallant bridegroom building their nest.”

“A great many things happen to each of us that others would not believe, no matter

how solemnly we might declare them to be true," said Madam Leigh, very seriously.

I had a notion that she was thinking of other things in her strangely desolated life besides the aviary and the learned man who knew all about birds.

"To me, the most singular part of my management of my hummers is that I succeed in making them comfortable and contented in the winter," she said. "For their forefathers and foremothers have been going South at the first sign of frost for six thousand years or so. I have a stove put up in here, covered with wire netting to hinder the little dears from flying against it; then I keep an even temperature and fill the room with flowers. It has, as you see, a southern exposure. I live here with them all day long. When it begins to grow dark, I say, 'Good night' and go across to my chamber. At bedtime I look in to make sure the fire will keep in until morning, and that my darlings are all right. While daylight lasts we are very happy to-

gether. I am busy with my pygmies and my flowers. I feed the hummers with sugar-and-water in winter, with a taste of honey on Sundays" — laughing cheerily. "To make them glad that Sunday has come, you know. I've an idea that they need stronger food in cold weather than in summer. It helps tame them to make them eat from the tip of my finger. I take a great deal of pains to keep a succession of plants in flower, for, after all, hive-honey isn't quite as pure and delicate after it has gone through the bee's body as when the hummer sips it fresh from the flower-cup. You must come over next winter, Molly Belle, and bring the little lady to see my nasturtiums, and hyacinths, and morning-glories. Roses and cape-jessamines, and the like are of no use to us. Our flowers must be shaped like wine-glasses, with a drop of honey-dew in the bottom, to please us perfectly. The hummers and I understand that. You wouldn't believe how much company we are for one another, or how much I learn from

them. Even my silly mannikins give work to my fingers and keep my thoughts steady."

Cousin Molly Belle put her arms around the wee old lady and hugged her hard—the honeysuckles and catalpas falling to the floor.

"All this is the loveliest thing I ever heard!" laughing to keep from crying. "I hope you will live to be a hundred years old, and give the lie to or-nith-ol-o-gists every day you live. And Molly and I will come to see you, often and often, whenever she is at our house. You dear, brave, sensible, lion-hearted, *royal* Queen Mab!"

She kept her word. It was one of her many ways to do more than she had promised. I never paid a visit to my dearest cousins, the Frank Mortons, without riding, or driving, up through the woods, and across the creek, and up the two long, and the one short, hill, and along the grass-grown lane to the gray cottage that always reminded me of a "hummer's" nest masked with moss. I spent a good deal of that summer with Cousin

Molly Belle, and one week in the very middle of December.

The weather was very mild for midwinter, and the great south room felt too warm to me. So warm that I began to feel sleepy and a little dizzy, and Madam Leigh noticed the yawn I could not quite swallow.

“Put on your hood and cloak, little lady,” she said, “and run into the garden to see if you cannot find some roses for your cousin. Betty tells me there has been so little frost this season that the rose-bushes are still all in leaf.”

I scampered off willingly, and did not show myself in the house again until the sun almost touched the tree-tops. I gathered chrysanthemums and nasturtiums and late heartsease, and at least a dozen roses and buds, and, wandering farther and farther down the quiet paths, I saw what I had never noticed before—that there was a small graveyard at the back of the garden, of which it formed a part. An arbor, thickly curtained with a Florida

honeysuckle that kept its leaves all winter, was at one side of the burial-place; a walk, edged with box, stretched from it straight up to the house-yard. Now that the trees were bare, I saw that old Madam Leigh could have a full view, through the windows in the south gable, of the arbor, and the two white headstones before it:—

JOHN AND RUTH LEIGH.

TWIN-CHILDREN OF EDWARD AND JUDITH LEIGH.

BORN SEPTEMBER 3, 1790.

DIED AUGUST 1, 1810.

*“I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because THOU
didst it.”*

I sat down in the summer-house and had a long thinking spell, all by myself. Too young to word the emotions that swelled my heart, the thoughts that oppressed my brain, there was, all the while, in heart and head, the recollection of the story she had told of her manner of getting the first pair of humming-birds—and how she had stolen softly around

to the window after dark, and shut the parents in with their nestlings.

I never saw her again. On Christmas morning the maid, who came as usual to awake and dress her mistress, found that she had died in her sleep.



Chapter XVII
Out into the World



C OUSIN BURWELL CARTER fell in love with our handsome, amiable Boston governess, Miss Davidson, and married her when I was ten years of age. She comforted my mother for her loss by sending for her younger sister, who was even prettier than herself, and had such winsome ways that Mr. John Morton, Cousin Frank's bachelor brother, married her at the end of her first session in our school-room.

My father looked quizzically grave when the two sisters recommended a Miss Bradnor of Springfield, Massachusetts, as a person who

was sure to please our parents and to bring us on finely in our studies.

“Is she pretty and marriageable?” he asked. “My business, nowadays, seems to be providing the eligible bachelors of Powhatan with wives. It is pleasant enough from one standpoint, and that is the young men’s. But my children must be educated.”

Both young matrons assured him, earnestly, that Miss Bradnor was “a predestined old maid — a man-hater, in fact — and was likely to remain a fixture in our school-room as long as we needed her.” When she arrived I was surprised to see a prim, quiet little personage who looked too gentle to hate any one. She fitted easily into her place in our family and soon proved herself the prize we had been promised, being a born instructor, and loving her profession. She awoke my mind as nobody else had done. I fancied that I could feel it stretch, and grow, and get hungry while she taught me. The more it was fed, the hungrier it grew, and the more eagerly it stretched

itself. I studied Comstock's *Natural Philosophy* with Miss Bradnor, and Vose's *Astronomy*, and Lyell's *Elements of Geology*, Bancroft's *History of the United States*, and *Watts on the Mind*, and began French and Latin. It was such a busy, happy year that I was actually sorry when vacation began.

I was sorrier yet when a letter was received from Miss Bradnor, saying that she "had been betrothed for ten years to an exemplary gentleman who now claimed the fulfilment of her pledge. Before the letter could reach us she would (D. V.) have become Mrs. Calvin Chapin. She hoped the unforeseen reversal of her plans for the ensuing year would not occasion serious inconvenience to her dear and respected friends, Mr. and Mrs. Burwell."

"It takes the prim sort to give us such surprises!" exclaimed my mother.

"It takes all sorts and conditions of women, I think!" rejoined my father, dryly. "I foresee that the Richmond plan will have to be carried out, after all. Governesses are kittle

cattle, at the best. And we have had three of the very best.”

As may be supposed, I was consumed by curiosity to know what “the Richmond plan” could be. The city I had never yet seen had been made tenfold more interesting to me within a year by the removal of the Frank Mortons to that place. Cousin Frank had gone into the Commission business there with an uncle who had no son to succeed him in the firm. But, although I pricked up my ears smartly at my father’s unguarded remark, I had to smother my excitement as best I could, and study patience—surely the hardest lesson ever set for the young. When older people were talking with one another, it was esteemed an impertinence in children to interrupt them by questions.

“If it were best for you to understand what we were saying, we would take pains to explain it to you,” my mother would say when we broke this one of her rules. And, still oftener, “Little girls should trust their fathers

and mothers to tell them at the right time all that they ought to know."

The right time in this instance was one moonlight September night, soon after Mary 'Liza and I had gone to bed. My mother had a habit of coming up to our room, and sitting down by the bed in the dark, or without other light than the moon, to have a little talk with us. "To give us a good appetite for our dreams," she would say in her merry way. We dearly enjoyed these visits, especially on Sunday nights, when we told her what we had been reading and thinking that day, and repeated the hymns we loved best.

This was on Monday night, and she began by telling us that Miss Judy Curran was coming the next day, to make our fall and winter frocks, and that there would be a pretty busy time with us all for the rest of the month, as we were going to school in Richmond, the fifth day of October.

"Your father and I do not believe in boarding-schools," she continued. "We think that

God gives our children to us to be brought up and educated, as far as possible, by us, their parents, and not to be made over to hirelings at the very time when they are most easily led right or wrong. There are, however, excellent reasons why you should begin now to know more of the world than you can learn in a quiet country neighborhood such as this. We are thankful to be able to give you the advantages of a city school, without depriving you of good home-training. You are to live with your Cousin Molly Belle, and be day-scholars in Mrs. Nunham's seminary."

Even Mary 'Liza gave a little jump under the sheet at the astounding news, while I leaped clean out of bed, and danced around the room in my night-gown, clapping my hands and uttering small shrieks of ecstasy.

"Hurrah! hurrah! goody! goody! mother! it is like a fairy tale!"

I was somewhat abashed, and decidedly ashamed of my transport when the blessed mother said gently, after a little sigh:—

“Of course I shall miss my daughters sadly, but I hope what we are doing is for their good. If I were less sure of this, I could not part with them.”

From the hour in which her first-born baby was laid in her arms, until she closed her eyes in the sleep from which our wild weeping could not awaken her, her ever-present thought was the children's best good. Nothing that could secure that was self-denial on her part.

I have come to Richmond to write this chapter. From my window I look down upon the pavement trodden by my feet twice a day for ten months out of twelve, during four school years. The house in which I sojourn belongs to a younger brother of him who figures in my story as “Bud.” It occupies the site of the large, yellow frame building in which Mrs. Nunham taught her “young ladies,” more than forty years ago.

I smile, as fancy reconstructs the group that turned the corner into this street, a block



HOW I CAME TO TOWN.

“My father walked between Mary 'Liza and myself, each of us holding to one of his arms, as gentlemen and ladies walked.”

away, on the fifth of October of that memorable year in the forties. My father walked between Mary 'Liza and myself, each of us holding to one of his arms, as gentlemen and ladies in the country walked together then. He was a well-built, clear-eyed, clean-lived, upright gentleman, whom God had made and whom the world had not spoiled. My cousin and I were dressed exactly alike. Into every detail of daily life my mother carried her principle of treating the orphan as her own child. Our country-made frocks were of dark-green merino, becoming to my blond companion, and anything but becoming to my sun-browned skin. Over the frocks were neat black silk aprons with pockets. White linen-cambric frills, hemstitched by hand, and carefully crimped, were at our throats and wrists, and sunbonnets upon our heads, or rather, "slatted" hoods that could be folded at pleasure. These were of dark-green silk, to match the merinos, and ribbon of the same color was quilled around the capes, crowns, and brims.

Our silk gloves were also dark green, and my mother had knit them herself.

Every item of our school costume was prescribed by her before we left home. I comprehend now, why the water stood in Cousin Molly Belle's eyes, while dancing lights played under the water, when we presented ourselves at breakfast-time, dressed for the important first day in the Seminary. I appreciate, furthermore, as it was not possible I should then, the tact and delicacy with which she gradually modified our everyday and Sunday attire into something more in accordance with that of our school-fellows.

As we found out for ourselves, before the day was over, we were little girls in the midst of young ladies, so far as dress and carriage went. We were imbued with the idea — gathered from the talk of friends and acquaintances, and our much reading of English story-books — that we were to be “polished” by our city associations. It was a shock and a down-trople of our expectations to be thrown, with-

out preparation, into the society of girls whose manners were very little, if at all, more refined than those of the quartette who with us constituted Miss Davidson's home school. We were even more confounded at the discovery that our home-education had so rooted and grounded us in the rudiments of learning that we were classed, after the preliminary examination, with girls older than we by four and five years. The circumstance did not make us popular with our comrades.

As if my cheeks had tingled under the assault but to-day, I recall the exclamation of a girl of fifteen who sat next to me while the examination in history was held. Her father was a distinguished citizen of Richmond, and her mother a leader in fashionable society.

"Lord, child! how smart you think yourself, to be sure!" she said aloud, turning squarely about to look into my face.

I had answered as quietly and briefly as I could, the questions put to me, and tried politely not to look scandalized at her flippant failures.

“I’m sure I don’t know!” “Never heard of him!” “If I ever knew, I’ve forgotten all about it!” — were, to my notion, a disgrace, and her cool effrontery would have been severely rebuked by our governess, and have met with still sterner judgment from my mother.

At recess this offensive young person headed a coterie that surrounded us, criticised our clothes, and catechised us as to our home, our family, and our mode of home living. Among other choice *bon mots* from the Honorable Member’s daughter was the inquiry — “if we got the pattern of our wagon-cover hoods from Mrs. Noah?”

I told Cousin Molly Belle that night, that “the whole pack were ill-bred, rude, and unbearable.”

She agreed heartily with two of my epithets, and took me up on the third: —

“Nothing is ‘unbearable,’ Namesake, except the thought of our own folly or sin. Still, this is a part of the discipline of life I

would spare you, if I could. Endure hardness as a good soldier, and shame their want of breeding by the perfection of yours. An unmannerly schoolgirl is the cruellest of tormentors, and ” — with a ring of her voice and a snap of her eyes that were refreshing and characteristic — “ I should like to have the handling of that crew for an hour or two ! ”

I snuggled up close to her, already measurably consoled, and ready as usual, with one of the speeches that stamped me as “ old-fashioned.”

“ We are like two wild pigeons, tied by the foot, in a yard full of peacocks. I would rather be a pigeon than a peacock. But pecks and struts and screamings are not agreeable, for all that.”

Nor was it agreeable to be the only girls in our class-room who were not invited to a party given the middle of November, by one of the nicest of our new acquaintances. She had been quite friendly with us, and the very day the invitations were sent out, laid a sprig of

citronaloes silently on my lap, during a French lesson. The smile that went with the scented leaves was sweeter still, and made my heart and face glow. When we were getting our wraps and bonnets in the cloak-room, at the close of the afternoon session, I edged nearer and nearer to her, pretending to hunt for my overshoes, meaning to say a word of thanks as soon as the group about her thinned. I got so near to her that I caught what she was saying in a low voice to her intimates : —

“ I just *bated* not to invite the Burwells, but they do look so countryfied ! like little old women cut short after they were made. And I don't believe either of them has a party dress to her name. They would be a pair of sights in a roomful of well-dressed people.”

I slipped away with a barbed arrow in my self-love, and a hard, resentful pain at my heart, on my mother's account. Fierce tears scalded the inside of my eyelids as I recalled her weeks of loving preparation for our school life, the thousand of stitches set by her dear hands, the

gentle smile of satisfaction with which she had surveyed our finished wardrobe. When I was in my own room at Cousin Molly's, I hugged and kissed and cried over the slatted hood, vowing vengefully to study so hard, and to rise so fast in my classes, and to acquit myself so nobly in the sight of my teachers, as to compel the admiration of the proud who rose up against me, and who compassed me about like bees. David's "cussing psalms" came readily and forcibly to my help in the hour of bitter humiliation.

If my wrath was unhallowed, it wrought the peaceable fruits of righteousness. The barb had gone too deep to be uncovered even to Cousin Molly Belle, but the hurt made a student of me. Giving up all thought of popularity and polish, I devoted myself to my school work with assiduity that threatened injury to my health before the half-term was over. But for my best and most clear-sighted of cousins I might have become a misanthropic invalid.

On the very day of the now hateful party, she took us for a long drive, — the whole length of Main Street, the sidewalks of which were thronged with promenaders and shoppers. She stopped the carriage—a handsome equipage, with a smart coachman and two spanking grays—at Samanni's and bought us a whole pound, apiece, of delicious candy, and treated us to Albemarle pippins to take home with us, and ice-cream eaten on the spot. Next, we went to Drinker and Morris's, the fashionable bookstore, and she told us to pick out, each for herself, the books we would like best to have. Mary 'Liza chose *The School-girl in France*, and I, *The Scottish Chiefs*. (I have it to this day.) We finished our excursion by a visit to St. John's Church and burying-ground. Cousin Molly Belle's grandfather had heard Patrick Henry's "Liberty or Death" speech, and she made the scene very plain to us as we strolled along the dim aisles, streaked with flaming bars of sunset, striking through the western window upon the very spot where the great orator had stood.

By the time I had finished my supper, and was settled before the fire with my book, the memories of my jaunt making glad my whole being, I had clean forgotten party and slight, and did not care a fig — for that one night — if I *was* countryfied and had not a party dress to my name. The real things were mine, — home-loves and the world of books and imagination, — possessions which the scorning of those who were at ease, and the contempt of the proud could not molest or take away.

I was reading *The Scottish Chiefs* for the second time; — out of school, of course, — and studying with might and main, when something came to pass that altered the tone of my mates, converted oppressors into champions, and made a moderate heroine of me.

There were sixteen of us in the senior Geography Class, I being the youngest. The practice of “turning down” for incorrect answers to questions was common at that date, even in Young Ladies’ Seminaries. When the class was formed, we were seated according to age, but

thanks to my governesses' drill, I had mounted steadily until I was now but one from the top—or, as we put it, was "next to head." The topmost place had been held for over a month by Mary Morgan, a slovenly and indolent girl of sixteen, who wrote poetry and had a great deal of old blue blood in her veins, as she was fond of informing all who had the patience to listen to her. Her recitations in most of her classes were so imperfect that everybody was surprised at her keeping an honorable place in any until the whisper went around that she smuggled "help-papers" into the class with her.

I am told that the use of "ponies," and much less reputable aids to perfect recitation in school and in college, is not considered dishonorable among the youth of the present age. Unmannerly and cruel as the girls in our seminary appeared to me, they had a certain sense of honor, a respect for truth and fair-dealing that bespoke better things than their surface-conduct indicated. When it was certainly known that Mary Morgan carried into the

recitation-room notes of the lesson, written upon bits of paper, and tucked up her sleeve, or hidden in the folds of her dress, popular indignation arose to a bubbling boil. A tale-bearer would have been drummed out of school, and not a lisp of the shameful truth was carried to the teacher, the second Miss Nunham, who was near-sighted and unsuspecting. The geography lesson was the most exciting event of the day, — a prize-ring, in which the two at the head of the class were chief actors. When a question reached Mary Morgan, the class held its breath for a time. When she answered with glib accuracy, the breath exhaled in chagrin audible to all but the teacher. Out of class I was noticed, cheered, and commended, and exhorted to hold on in the course of truth and uprightness — encouragement corresponding to the rubbing down and bracing bestowed by his guardians upon the pugilist. And still the geography questions went around, and Mary Morgan was head and I next to head.

At last, on the fifteenth of December, came the tug of war in the shape of a review of the exercises of the last month, and Mary Morgan was armed for the fray by half a dozen long slips of paper covered with characters in very black ink. Presuming upon the teacher's short-sighted eyes, and nerved by a sense of the gravity of the situation, she boldly laid the papers upon the bench between her and myself, and consulted them from time to time, with coolness that would have been heroic had it not been impudent. The recitation was half over, when the girl who sat next below me "made a long arm" behind my back, and abstracted one of the abhorrent slips without the knowledge of the owner. She perceived the loss as the questions were again nearing her, gave one frightened glance at the floor on all sides of her, colored violently; made a desperate rally of memory and courage when the question reached her, answered so wildly that the teacher gave her a second trial, and, in pity for her distress, still a third.

Such a simple question as it was! I can never forget it. "What large island lies south of Hindostan?"

Nor can I forget the pale dismay of the face turned to me as the teacher said, reluctantly, — "Next."

I had never liked the girl; latterly, I had despised her and regarded her as my enemy. I did not analyze the revulsion of feeling that made me hesitate while one could have counted ten, before saying in a low, constrained voice, — "Ceylon!"

The deposed pupil sank to the middle of the class before the recitation was over, much to the bewilderment of the single-minded teacher. By the morrow she was at the bottom of the line and so far across the outer confines of Coventry that she never got back. That was our way of looking at "cribs" half a century ago.

It is not ten years since I met the banished scholar in a metropolitan reception-room, and a few minutes afterward, another

old schoolfellow, who said in one and the same breath, "Do you know that Mary Morgan is here?" and, "I suppose it is uncharitable, but I can never forget that she used to cheat in her recitations at Mrs. Nunham's."

We went home "for Christmas." My father sent the carriage for us. The roomy family coach he never allowed to get shabby. The "squabs," *i.e.* padded inner curtains to exclude the cold in winter, were in, and there were thick shawls and a pillow apiece and two footstoves for our comfort in the thirty-mile drive, and upon the front seat, gorgeous in a new shawl of many and daring colors, her snowy turban wound about head and ears, was Mam' Chloe, the comfortablest thing there. Hamilcar, the carriage-driver, (we did not say "coachman") had on his Christmas suit, including a shaggy overcoat for which his master had given him an order upon a Richmond tailor, and was spruce exceedingly. To ensure our perfect

safety and respectability we had an outrider in the shape of Mr. James Ireton, a young fellow-countryman, who was returning from a business trip to town.

The boxes under the seats — an old-fashioned convenience, capable of containing a gentleman's entire wardrobe and half of a lady's — were brimful of Christmas gifts and "goodies," and parcels stuffed with the same wedged Mam' Chloe in the exact middle of the front seat. A big hair-trunk was strapped upon the rack behind, and a box packed by Cousin Molly Belle was between Hamilcar's feet.

It began to snow before we had left the city a mile behind us, but that made things all the merrier. How we chuckled with laughter as the fast flakes stuck upon Mr. Ireton's hat and overcoat and leggings, until he looked like a polar bear but for his face that got redder as the rest of his body whitened, until, with his shining teeth and powdered hair, he made us think of Santa

Claus. When we let down the carriage-window to tell him so, he drew a pipe from his pocket, got behind the carriage to screen it from the wind while he was lighting it, and rode up again alongside of us, puffing away at it to carry out the likeness.

We set out at nine o'clock, and at one o'clock stopped at Flat Rock, a well-known house of entertainment, for an early dinner and a generous feed for the horses. The roads were heavy with winter mud, red and sticky. It looked like strawberry ice-cream as the wheels and hoofs churned it up with the snow. Mam' Chloe laughed until her fat sides quaked when I said that. How good she was to us that day! how good everybody was! and how good it was to be just what I was, and where I was—off on a royal spree in the splendidest snowstorm I had ever seen, and Home and Christmas at the end of the journey.

Darkness fell by four o'clock, and, but for the whiteness of the earth, we would

not have been able to see the trees on the side of the road when we came in sight of the house. Not a shutter had been closed, and every window was aglow with fire and lamplight, golden and pink through the snowy veil shifting and swaying between them and our happy eyes.

When, for me, Life's little day — full, rich, and blessed, for all that storm and wreck and blight have, once and again, befallen me, as was God's will, and therefore, for my eternal good — when, for me, Life's little day darkens to its outgoing, may the lights of the Home that changes not, save from glory to glory, shine out for me through night and chill with such loving welcome as gleamed in those ruddy windows!

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