

Five Little Peppers and their Friends

Margaret Sidney

Project Gutenberg's Five Little Peppers and their Friends, by Margaret Sidney
#3 in our series by Margaret Sidney

Copyright laws are changing all over the world. Be sure to check the copyright laws for your country before downloading or redistributing this or any other Project Gutenberg eBook.

This header should be the first thing seen when viewing this Project Gutenberg file. Please do not remove it. Do not change or edit the header without written permission.

Please read the "legal small print," and other information about the eBook and Project Gutenberg at the bottom of this file. Included is important information about your specific rights and restrictions in how the file may be used. You can also find out about how to make a donation to Project Gutenberg, and how to get involved.

****Welcome To The World of Free Plain Vanilla Electronic Texts****

****eBooks Readable By Both Humans and By Computers, Since 1971****

*******These eBooks Were Prepared By Thousands of Volunteers!*******

Title: Five Little Peppers and their Friends

Author: Margaret Sidney

Release Date: September, 2004 [EBook #6418]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on December 8, 2002]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS *****

Produced by Tom Allen, Charles Franks
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

Livros Grátis

<http://www.livrosgratis.com.br>

Milhares de livros grátis para download.

FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS AND THEIR FRIENDS

By MARGARET SIDNEY

AUTHOR OF "FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS ABROAD," "A LITTLE MAID OF CONCORD TOWN,"
"SALLY, MRS. TUBBS," ETC.

Illustrated by Eugenie M. Wireman

[Illustration: "What are you doing, Phronsie, sitting down in the middle
of the stairs?"--(See page 46.)]

To my daughter Margaret,
who to her friends embodies
"Polly Pepper" in her
girlhood, I dedicate most
lovingly this book.

PREFACE.

There were so many interesting friends of the Five Little Peppers,
whose lives were only the faintest of outlines in the series ending
when Phronsie was grown up, that a volume devoted to this outer
circle has been written to meet the persistent demand.

Herein the author records many happenings that long ago Ben and Polly,
Joel and David told her. And even Phronsie whispered some of it
confidentially into the listening ear. "Tell about Rachel, please,"
she begged; and Margaret Sidney promised to write it all down some
day.

And that day seems to have arrived in which it all should be recorded
and the promise fulfilled. For the Five Little Peppers loved their
friends very dearly, and were loyal and true to them. And hand in
hand, the circle widening ever, they lived and loved as this history
records.

MARGARET SIDNEY.

CONTENTS

I. A FIVE-O'CLOCK TEA

II. PHRONSIE

- III. CLEM FORSYTHE
- IV. MISS TAYLOR'S WORKING BEE
- V. "SHE'S MY LITTLE GIRL"
- VI. GRANDMA BASCOM
- VII. THE DISAPPOINTMENT
- VIII. THE GARDEN PARTY
- IX. THE TEN-DOLLAR BILL
- X. TROUBLE FOR JOEL
- XI. RACHEL
- XII. DOINGS AT THE PARSONAGE
- XIII. "SHE'S GOING TO STAY HERE FOREVER"
- XIV. "CAN'T GO," SAID JOEL
- XV. UP IN ALEXIA'S PRETTY ROOM
- XVI. THE ACCIDENT
- XVII. JOEL'S ADVENTURE
- XVIII. THE COMFORT COMMITTEE
- XIX. JOEL'S NEW FRIEND
- XX. THE COOKING CLUB
- XXI. OF MANY THINGS IN GENERAL
- XXII. RACHEL'S VISIT TO MISS PARROTT
- XXIII. THE OLD PARROTT HOMESTEAD
- XXIV. RACHEL'S FUTURE
- XXV. JACK PARISH
- XXVI. MR. HAMILTON DYCE A TRUE FRIEND
- XXVII. A PIECE OF GOOD NEWS
- XXVIII. THE LITTLE STONE CUPBOARD

ILLUSTRATIONS

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING, PHRONSIE, SITTING DOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STAIRS?"

FIVE-O'CLOCK TEA

"BUT THIS IS TEN DOLLARS," SAID JOEL
"ON, LARRY," SAID MISS TAYLOR GENTLY, BENDING OVER HIM
"YES, SIR," CALLED JOEL BACK, FROM THE ALCOVE
THE UNLUCKY OAR WAS SEIZED BY THE TRIUMPHANT CREW
"I USED TO PLAY WITH IT," SHE SAID SOFTLY
HE STOOD IN THE MIDDLE OF THE LITTLE SHOP

I

A FIVE-O'CLOCK TEA

"I wish," said Phronsie slowly, "that you'd come in, little girl."

"Can't." The girl at the gate peered through the iron railings, pressing her nose quite flat, to give the sharp, restless, black eyes the best chance.

"Please do," begged Phronsie, coming up quite close; "I very much wish you would."

"Can't," repeated the girl on the outside. "Cop won't let me."

"Who?" asked Phronsie, much puzzled and beginning to look frightened.

"Perlice." The girl nodded briefly, taking her face away from the iron railings enough to accomplish that ceremony. Then she plastered her nose up against its support again, and stared at Phronsie with all her might.

"Oh," said Phronsie, with a little laugh that chased away her fright, "there isn't any big policeman here. This is Grandpapa's garden."

"'Tain't, it's the perliceman's; everything's the perliceman's," contradicted the girl, snapping one set of grimy fingers defiantly.

"Oh, no," said Phronsie, softly but very decidedly, "this is my dear Grandpapa's home, and the big policeman can't get in here, ever."

"Oh, you ninny!" The girl staring at her through the railings stopped a minute to laugh, covering both hands over her mouth to smother the sound. "The perlice can go everywheres they want to. I guess some of 'em's in heaven now, spyin' round."

Phronsie dropped the doll she was carrying close to her bosom, to concentrate all her gaze up toward the sky, in wide-eyed amazement that allowed her no opportunity to carry on the conversation.

"An' I couldn't no more get into this 'ere garden than I could into heaven," the girl on the outside said at last, to bring back the blue eyes to earth, "so don't you think it, you. But, oh, my, don't I wish I could, though!"

There was so much longing in the voice that Phronsie brought her gaze down from the policemen in their heavenly work to the eyes staring at her. And she clasped her hands together tightly, and hurried up to lay her face against the big iron gate and close to that of the girl.

"He won't hurt you, the big policeman won't," she whispered softly. "I'll take hold of your hand, and tell him how it is, if he gets in. Come."

"Can't," the girl was going to say, but her gaze rested upon the doll lying on the grass where it fell from Phronsie's hand. "Lawks! may I just have one good squint at that?" she burst out.

"You may hold it," said Phronsie, bobbing her head till her yellow hair fell over her flushed cheeks.

The gate flew open suddenly, nearly overthrowing her; and the girl, mostly all legs and arms, dashed through, picking up the doll to squeeze it to her neck so tightly that Phronsie rushed up, quite alarmed.

"Oh, don't," she cried, "you'll frighten her. I'll tell her how it is, and then she'll like you."

"I'll make her like me," said the girl, with savage thrusts at the doll, and kissing it all over.

"Oh, my, ain't you sweet!" and she cuddled it fiercely in her scrawny neck, her tangled black hair falling around its face.

"Oh, dear!" wailed Phronsie, standing quite still, "she's my child, and she's dreadfully frightened. Oh, please, little girl, don't do so."

"She's been your child forever, and I've never had a child." The girl raised her black head to look sternly at Phronsie. "I'll give her back; but she's mine now."

"Haven't you ever had a child?" asked Phronsie, suddenly, two or three tears trailing off her round cheeks to drop in the grass, and she drew a long breath and winked very fast to keep the others back.

"Not a smitch of one," declared the other girl decidedly, "an' I'm a-goin' to hold this one, and pretend I'm its mother."

Phronsie drew a long breath, and drew slowly near.

"You may," she said at last.

The new mother didn't hear, being hungrily engaged in smoothing her child's cheeks against her own dirty ones, first one side of the face and then the other, and twitching down the dainty pink gown, gone awry during the hugging process, and alternately scolding and patting the little figure. This done, she administered a smart slap, plunged over to the nearest tree, and set the doll with a thud on the grass to rest against its trunk.

"Sit up like a lady," she commanded.

"Oh, don't!" cried Phronsie, quite horror-stricken, and running over on distressed feet. "She's my child," she gasped.

"No, she's mine, an' I'm teachin' her manners. I ain't through pretendin' yet," said the girl. She put out a long arm and held Phronsie back.

"But you struck her." Phronsie lifted a pale face, and her blue eyes flashed very much as Polly's brown ones did on occasion.

The new mother whirled around and stared at her.

"Why, I had to, just the same as you're licked when you're bad," she said, in astonishment.

"What's 'licked'?" asked Phronsie, overcome with curiosity, yet keeping her eyes on her child, bolt upright against the tree.

"Why, whipped," said the girl, "just the same as you are when you're bad."

Phronsie drew a long breath.

"I've never been whipped," she said slowly.

"Oh, my Lord!" The girl tumbled down to the grass and rolled over and over, coming up suddenly to sit straight, wipe her tangled black hair out of her eyes, and stare at Phronsie. "Well, you are a reg'lar freak, you are," was all she could say.

"What's a 'freak'?" asked Phronsie, actually turning her back on her child to give all her attention to this absorbing conversation, with its most attractive vocabulary.

"It's--oh, Jumbo!" and over she flopped again, to roll and laugh. "Well, there!" and she jumped to her feet so quickly she nearly overthrew Phronsie, who had drawn closer, unable to miss a bit of this very strange proceeding. "Now I'm through pretending an' I haven't got any child, an' you may have her back." She wrung her grimy hands together, and turned her back on the object of so much attention. "Take her, quick; she's yours."

Phronsie hurried over to the doll, sitting up in pink loveliness against the tree, knelt down on the grass, and patted her with gentle hand, and smoothed down her curls. A curious sound broke in upon her work, and she looked up and listened. "I must go back," she whispered to her child, and in a minute she was running around the figure of the girl, to stare into her face.

"Ow--get out!" cried the girl crossly, and she whirled off, pulling up her ragged dress to her face.

"I thought I heard you cry," said Phronsie in a troubled voice, and following her in distress.

"Phoo!" cried the girl, snapping her fingers in derision, and spinning around on the tips of her toes, "'twas the cat."

"No," said Phronsie decidedly, and shaking her head, "it couldn't be the cat, because she doesn't hardly ever cry, and besides she isn't here"--and she looked all around--"don't you see she isn't?"

"Well, then, 'twas that bird," said the girl, pointing up to a high branch. "Ain't you green, not to think of him!"

"I don't think it was the bird," said Phronsie slowly, and peering up anxiously, "and he doesn't cry again, so I 'most know he couldn't have cried then."

"Well, he will, if you wait long enough," said the girl defiantly.

"Chee, chee, chee," sang the bird, with delicious little trills, and shaking them out so fast his small throat seemed about to burst with its efforts.

"There, you see he couldn't cry," began Phronsie, in a burst of delight; "you see, little girl," and she hopped up and down in glee.

"He's got the 'sterics, an' he'll cry next, like enough," said the girl.

"What's 'the 'sterics'?" asked Phronsie, coming out of her glee, and drawing nearer. "Oh, I see some tears," and she looked soberly up into the thin, dirty face, and forgot all about her question.

"No, you don't, either." The girl twitched away angrily. "There ain't never no tears you could see on me; 'twas the cat or the bird. Ain't you green, though! You're green as that grass there," and she spun round and round, snapping her fingers all the while.

Phronsie stood quite still and regarded her sorrowfully.

"Don't you believe I cried!" screamed the girl, dashing up to her, to snap her fingers in Phronsie's face; "say you don't this minute."

"But I think you did," said Phronsie. "Oh. I'm very sure you did, and you may hold my child again, if you only won't cry any more," and she clasped her hands tightly together. The other girl started and ran toward the big iron gate.

"Oh, don't!" Phronsie called after her, and ran to overtake the flying feet. "Please stay with me. I like you; don't go."

The girl threw her head back as if something hurt her throat, then leaned her face against the iron railings and stuck her fingers in her ears.

"Don't! lemme alone! go 'way, can't you!" She wriggled off from Phronsie's fingers. "I'll lick you if you don't lemme be!"

"I wish you'd play with me," said Phronsie, having hard work to keep out of the way of the flapping shoes all down at the heel, "and you may have Clorinda for your very own child as long as you stay--you may really."

"Ow! see here!" Up came the girl's face, and with a defiant sweep of her grimy hands she brushed both cheeks. "Do you mean that, honest true, black and blue?"

"Yes," said Phronsie, very much relieved to see the effect of her invitation, "I do mean it, little girl. Come, and I'll tell Clorinda all how it is."

"I'm goin' outside to walk up and down a bit. Bring on your doll."

"But you must come here," said Phronsie, moving off slowly backward over the grass. "Come, little girl"--holding out her hand.

"Now I know you didn't mean it," said the girl scornfully. "You wouldn't let me touch that nasty old doll of yours again for nothin' you wouldn't," she shrilled at her.

"Oh, yes, I would," declared Phronsie, in great distress; "see, I'm going to get her now," and she turned around and hurried over the grass to pick Clorinda off from her resting-place and run back. "There, see, little girl," she cried breathlessly, thrusting the doll into the dirty hands; "take her now and we'll go and play."

For answer, the girl clutched the doll and sped wildly off through the gateway.

"Oh!" cried Phronsie, running after with pink cheeks and outstretched arms, "give me back my child; stop, little girl."

But there was no stop to the long, thin figure flying down the path on the other side of the tall hedge. It was a back passage, and few pedestrians used the path; in fact, there were none on it this afternoon, so the children had it all to themselves. And on they went, Phronsie, with but one thought--to rescue her child from the depths of woe such as being carried off by a strange mother would produce--blindly plunging after.

At last the girl with the doll stopped suddenly, flung herself up against a stone fence, and drew a long breath.

"Well, what you goin' to do about it?" she cried defiantly, clutching the doll with a savage grip.

Phronsie, too far gone for words, sank panting down to the curbstone, to watch her with wild eyes.

"You said I might take her," the girl blurted out. "I hain't took nothin' but what you give me. I want to play with her to my home. You come with me, and then you can take her back with you."

"I can't," said Phronsie, in a faint little voice. Her cheeks were very red, and she wiped her hot face on her white apron. "You must give me Clorinda, and I must go home," and she held out a shaking hand.

But the girl danced off, and Phronsie, without a thought beyond the rescue of her child, stumbled on after her, scarcely seeing one step before her for the tears that, despite all her efforts, now began to stream down her round cheeks.

At last, in trying to turn out for a baker's boy with a big basket, she caught her foot and fell, a tired little heap, flat in a mud puddle in the middle of the brick pavement.

"My eye!" cried the baker's boy, lifting her up. "Here, you girl, your sister's fell, ker-squash!"

At this, the flying girl in front whirled suddenly and came running back, and took in the situation at once.

"Come on, you lazy thing, you!" she exclaimed; then she burst into a laugh. "Oh, how you look!"

"Give me back--" panted Phronsie, rubbing away the tears with her muddy hands, regardless of her splashed clothes and dirty shoes.

"Keep still, can't you?" cried the girl, gripping her arm, as two or three pedestrians paused to stare at the two. "Come on, sister," and she seized Phronsie's hand, and bore her off. But on turning the corner, she stopped abruptly, and, still holding the doll closely, she dropped to one knee and wiped off the tears from the muddy little cheeks with a not ungentle hand. "You've got to be my sister," she said, in a gush, "else the hoodlums will tear you from neck to heels." And seizing Phronsie's hand again, she bore her off, dodging between rows of dwellings, that, if her companion could have seen, would have certainly proved to be quite novel. But Phronsie was by this time quite beyond noticing any of the details of her journey, and after turning a corner or two, she was hauled up several flights of rickety steps, strange to say without the usual accompaniment of staring eyes and comments of the various neighbors in the locality.

"There!" The girl, still clutching the doll, flung wide the rickety door. "My, ain't I glad to get here, though!" and she drew a long breath, releasing Phronsie's hand, who immediately slid to the floor in a collapsed little heap. "Well, this is my home--ain't it pretty, though!"

Phronsie, thus called on for a reply, tried very hard to answer, but the words wouldn't come.

"You needn't try," said the girl, slamming the door, "'tain't likely you can praise it enough," and she broke out into a hard, sarcastic laugh, which shrilled its way out of the one window, whose broken glass was adorned with nondescript fillings.

"See here now, you're all beat out," she exclaimed suddenly; then rushing across the room, she dragged up a broken chair, and jammed it against the door. "There now, we're by ourselves, an' you can rest."

"I must go home," said Phronsie faintly, and holding up her tired arms. "Give me my child; I must go home."

"Did you think I didn't know what was proper?" cried the girl scornfully, and tossing her head. "I'm going to have five-o'clock tea 'fore you go. There, I'm a lady, an' a swell one too, I'd have you know."

She ran over to the corner of the slatternly room, and set the doll on a bed, over which were tossed the clothes in a dirty heap, Phronsie following every movement with anxious eyes.

"Now she's my child, remember," she said, turning her sharp, black eyes on the small figure huddled up on the floor, "as long as she stays here."

Then she hurried about, twitching a box out here and there from a cupboard, whose broken door hung by one hinge.

"Here's my silver spoons--ain't they beautiful!" she cried, running up with a few two-tined forks and a bent and battered knife. These she placed, also the cracked cups, with great gusto, on the rickety table, propped for support against the wall, as one of its legs was gone entirely and another on the fair road to departure.

"'Tain't stylish to have yer table agin the wall," she broke out, "at a five-o'clock tea; I know, 'cause I've peeked in the windows up on the

avenoo, an' I've seen your folks, too." She nodded over at Phronsie. "I know what I'll do." She tossed her head with its black, elfish locks, and darted off in triumph, dragging up from another corner a big box, first unceremoniously dumping out the various articles, such as dirty clothes, a tin pan or two, a skillet, an empty bottle--last of all, a nightcap, which she held aloft. "Gran's," she shouted; "it's been lost a mighty long time. Now I'm goin' to wear it to my five-o'clock tea. It's a picter hat, same's that lady had on to your house once--I seen her." She threw the old nightcap over her hair, tied the ragged strings with an air, and soon, by dint of pulling and hauling, had the table in the very center of the apartment, the box securely under its most delicate and unreliable portion.

"There--my! ain't we fine, though!" She surveyed her work with great delight, her hands on her hips. "Now, says I, for our ice cream an' cake, with white on top, an' choc'late."

She gave a flirt of her ragged gown and darted here and there with her elfish movements; and presently a cold potato, shivering in its skin, a slice or two of hard, moldy bread, and some turnips and carrots, uncooked, were set about the dirty table, with empty spoons in between. "Them's the flowers," she explained, as she put the last-mentioned articles in their places. "Now it's all ready, except the choc'late." And waving an old tin coffeepot, whose nose was a thing of the past, she filled it at the faucet over the wooden sink, and put it down with a flourish at one end of the table. "Now we're ready, an' I'm the beautiful lady up to your house--I seen her, once when I was peekin' through the fence"--she nodded shrewdly, her little eyes snapping--"her an' your sister."

[Illustration: Five O'Clock Tea]

"Oh, I want Polly," broke out Phronsie, with such a wail, as she sat, a frozen little heap, not daring to stir, that the girl screamed out:

"Well, I'm goin' to take you to her, when I've given you my five-o'clock tea; that is, if you don't cry. An' I ain't goin' to be the beautiful lady up at your house; I'll be Mrs. somebody else. No, I'll be a Dukess--the Dukess of Marlbrer--I've seen her in the paper. Oh, you've got to have the best chair," and she dragged up the sole article of furniture of that name, minus its back, away from the door; then helping Phronsie up from the floor, she wiped off the tears on her pinafore, no longer white, and soon had her installed on it. "Now you're comp'ny." Thereupon she ran and fetched the doll from the bed, and put her on a small, old barrel, from which the articles were dumped out, and, with a box for her back, Clorinda was soon in great state on one side of the feast. The Dukess then slipped into her own seat, an inverted tub, somewhat low, to be sure, but still allowing the view of the festive cup to be seen. "She's my child, now. Will you have some choc'late?"--with a winning smile that ran all over her dirty face and wrinkled it up alarmingly.

"Oh, no, she's my child," protested Phronsie, the tears beginning again.

"I mean till I get through my five-o'clock tea," cried the girl; "can't you understand? Then she'll be yours, an' I'll take you home. Will you have choc'late?--you must, Lady--what's your name, anyway?" she demanded abruptly, bringing her black eyes to bear on Phronsie.

Phronsie could hardly stammer it out for the tears she was choking back.

"Oh, my eye, what a name!" laughed the Dukess, in derision. "Well, you can

be Lady Funsie--Fornsie--whatever you call it. Now, will you have some choc'late? 'Taint perlite not to answer."

"I'd rather have some milk," said Phronsie faintly, "if you please."

"Oh, 'tain't no trouble," said the Dukess airily, quirking out her little finger with grace; and poising the tin coffeepot with an elegant air, she inverted it over a cracked cup, which, when generously full of water, she passed to her guest. "Help yourself to th' cakes. Lady Fonsie," she said graciously, "an' what beyewtiful weather we are havin'!"

Phronsie put forth a trembling hand, as it seemed to be expected of her, and took the cup of water, spilling about half of it, which ran off the table-edge and down her little brown gown, the Dukess greeting this mishap with a shout of laughter, checking it suddenly with a start and a dismayed glance in the direction of the broken window.

"It's time fer you to talk some," she said. "You should say, 'Yes, I think so, too.'"

"I think so, too," murmured Phronsie, viewing her cup of milk gravely.

"An' you must say, 'I think, Dukess, you have the most splendid milk.'"

"It isn't milk," said Phronsie gravely, and she turned serious eyes on the lady of quality opposite.

"Oh, yes, it is," said the Dukess, "an' you orter go on an' say, 'An' all them perfectly beyewtiful flowers, I never see any so fine!'"--pointing to the empty spoons in between the eatables.

"But they aren't flowers," said Phronsie.

This occasioned so much discussion that there was no lack of conversation, and was the reason that steps over the stairway were not heard. The door was thrown open, and an old, stout, sodden woman, in a dirty, green shawl and battered bonnet stood transfixed with amazement in the entrance. She hadn't a pleasant eye beneath her stragglng, white hair, and her first words were not altogether agreeable nor appropriate at five-o'clock tea.

"So this is the way," she said gruffly, "when I sends you out, Rag, to pick up somethin' you eat me out o' house an' home with brats you bring in"; for she hadn't seen through the dirt on Phronsie's face and clothes what manner of child was present.

The Dukess twitched off the nightcap, and sprang up, upsetting the tin coffeepot, which rolled away by itself, and put herself over by Phronsie, covering her from view. In passing, she had grasped the doll off from the barrel and hidden her in the folds of her tattered gown with a quick, sharp thrust.

"'Tain't nothin' 'f I do have some fun once in a while, Gran," she grumbled. She pinched Phronsie's arm. "Keep still." And while the old woman swayed across the room, for she wasn't quite free from the effects of a taste from a bottle under her arm, which she couldn't resist trying before she reached home, Phronsie and Rag were working their way over toward the door.

"Stop!" roared the old woman at them, in a fury, and she held up the

nightcap. Involuntarily Rag paused, through sheer force of habit, and stood paralyzed, till her grandmother had come quite close.

"Hey, what have we got here?" She eyed Phronsie sharply. "Oh, well, you ain't acted so badly after all; maybe the pretty little lady has come to see me, hey?" and she seized Phronsie's small arm.

"Gran," cried Rag hoarsely, waking up from her unlucky paralysis, "let her go; only let her go, an' I'll--I'll do anythin' you want me to. I'll steal, an' pick an' fetch, and do anything Gran."

The old woman leered at her, and passed her hand to the beads on Phronsie's neck; and in doing so she let the little arm slip, that she might use both hands to undo the clasp the better. One second of time--but Rag, knowing quite well what could be done in it, seized Phronsie, rushed outside, slammed the door, and was down over the rickety stairs in a twinkling, through the dirty courtyard and alley--which luckily had few spectators, and those thought she was carrying a neighbor's child--around a corner, darting here and there, till presently she set Phronsie down, and drew a long breath,

"Oh, my eye!" she panted, "but wasn't that a close shave, though!"

II

PHRONSIE

"There now, here you are!" There was a little click in the girl's throat. Phronsie looked up.

"Yes, and your child, too." Clorinda and all her pink loveliness was thrust into her own little mother's arms, and the sharp, black eyes peered down upon the two. "I've brung you home, and you're on your own grassplot, same's you were." Still she stood in her tracks.

"I'm sorry I brung you to my house; but you've had a five-o'clock tea, and now you're home, an' got your child." Still she did not stir.

"Well, I've got to go. Say, don't you call no one, nor tell no one, till I've had time to shake my feet down street." She thrust out one flapping shoe, then the other, gave a scornful laugh, and brushed her hand across the sharp eyes. "Promise now, black and blue, 'I promise true, hope to die if I do'. Hurry up! Do you promise?" she cried sharply.

"Yes," said Phronsie, hugging Clorinda tightly.

"All right. Now for Gran!" She shut her teeth tightly and was off and through the big gateway.

"I've got my child," said Phronsie, putting up a sleepy hand to pat Clorinda's head, but it fell to her side, while her yellow hair slipped closer over her flushed cheek. She tried to say, "Clorinda, we've got home, and my foots are tired," swayed, held her child tighter to her bosom, and over she went in a heap, fast asleep before her head touched the soft grass.

Polly Pepper, hurrying home from Alexia's, ran in by the gateway, and down by a short cut over the grass, her feet keeping time to a merry air that had possessed her all the afternoon. "How fine," she cried to herself, "our garden party will be!--and we've gotten on splendidly with our fancy things this afternoon. It will be too perfectly elegant for--" the flying feet came to a standstill that nearly threw her over the sleeping figure, the doll tightly pressed to the dirty little pinafore and the flushed cheeks.

"Oh, my goodness me!" cried Polly, down on her knees. "Why, Phronsie, just look at your pinafore!" But Phronsie had no idea of looking at anything, and still slept on.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Polly, in consternation, "whatever in the world has she been doing! Well, I must get her up to the house."

"Hullo!" It was Jasper's voice. Polly flew up to her feet and hulloed back. He took a short cut, with a good many flying leaps, across the grass. "Oh, Polly, I've been looking for you!"

"Just see there." cried Polly, pointing tragically to the little heap.

"Well, dear me!" said Jasper. "Why, Polly"--as his eyes fell on the soiled pinafore and the little face where the tears had made muddy streaks.

"I know it," said Polly. "Did you ever in all this world, Jasper! What do you suppose she has been doing?"

"Oh, making mud pies, perhaps," said Jasper, unwilling to worry Polly; "don't look so, Polly. Here, we'll carry her to the house."

"Lady-chair," said Polly, the worry dropping out of her eyes at the fun of carrying Phronsie in. But Phronsie was beyond the charms of "lady-chair" or "pick-a-back," her yellow head bobbing so dismally when they lifted her up, that Jasper at last picked her up in his arms, and marched off with her.

"You bring the doll, Polly."

So Polly ran along by his side with Clorinda dangling by one arm.

Mother Fisher said never a word when she received her baby, but wisely soothed and washed and tucked her away in bed; and little Doctor Fisher, as soon as he got home, viewed her critically through his big spectacles, and said, "The child is all right. Let her sleep." Which she did, until every one of the household, creeping in and out, declared she could not possibly sleep any longer, and that they must wake her up. This last was from Polly.

"What do you suppose it is, Mamsie?" she asked, for about the fiftieth time, hanging over Phronsie's little bed.

"Nothing," said Mrs. Fisher, with firm lips. Polly must not be worried by unnecessary alarm, and really there seemed to be nothing amiss with Phronsie, who was sleeping peacefully, with calm little face and even breath. "It's the best thing for her to sleep till she's rested."

"But what could have tired her so?" said Polly, with a puzzled face.

"That's just what we can't find out now," said her mother, diving into her basket for another of Van's stockings. "Oh, here is the mate. When she

wakes up, she'll tell us."

"Well, Joanna is going, isn't she, Mamsie?" asked Polly, deserting the little bed to fling herself down on the floor at Mrs. Fisher's feet, to watch the busy fingers.

"Yes, she is," said Mother Fisher decidedly.

"I'm so very glad of that," said Polly, with a sigh of relief, "because you know, Mamsie, she might go off again and leave Phronsie when she ought to be watching her."

"Say no more about it, Polly," said her mother, setting even, firm stitches, "for Mr. King is very angry with Joanna; and you needn't be afraid that Phronsie will ever be left again, until we do get just the right person to be with her. Now you better go out and forget it all, and busy yourself about something."

"I've got to practice," said Polly with a yawn, and stretching her arms. "I haven't done a bit this whole afternoon, and Monsieur comes tomorrow."

"Best fly at it, then," said Mrs. Fisher, smiling at her. So Polly, with a parting glance at the figure on the little bed, went downstairs and into the big drawing-room, wishing that Phronsie was there, as usual, where she dearly loved to stay, tucked up in a big damask-covered chair, one of her dolls in her arms, waiting patiently till the practice hour should be over.

But when Phronsie at last turned over, and said without a bit of warning, "I want something to eat, I do." with an extremely injured expression, Mother Fisher was so thankful that she had no time to question her, if, indeed, she had considered it wise to do so. And Sarah was called, and laughed with delight at the summons, and ran off to get the tray ready, Phronsie watching her with hungry eyes in which the dew of sleep still lingered. But old Mr. King was not so patient.

When he saw, as he soon did, his visits to the side of the little bed being as frequent as Polly's own, that Phronsie was really awake and sitting up, he could keep still no longer, but putting his arms around her, fumed out:

"Oh, that careless Joanna! Poor lamb! There, there! Grandpapa will take care of his little girl himself, after this."

"I'm hungry," announced Phronsie, looking up into his face. "Indeed I am, Grandpapa dear, very hungry."

"Oh, to think of it! Yes, Pet"--soothing her. "Where is that Sarah? Can't some one get this poor child a bit to eat?" he cried irascibly.

"Sarah will hurry just as fast as she can," said Mrs. Fisher, coming up with a dainty white gown over her arm. "Phronsie must be a good girl and wait patiently."

Phronsie wriggled her toes under the bedclothes.

"I wish you'd take me, Grandpapa dear," she said, holding up her arms.

"So I will--so I will, Pet!" cried old Mr. King, very much delighted; and lifting her up to rest her head on his shoulder, he walked up and down the room. "There, there, dear! Oh, why doesn't that Sarah hurry!"--when in

walked that individual with a big tray, and on it everything that a hungry child could be supposed to desire. But Phronsie had no eyes for anything but the glass of milk.

"Oh, Grandpapa," she piped out at sight of it, "Sarah's got me some milk," and she gave a happy little crow.

"So she has," he laughed as gayly, "Well, now, we'll sit right down here and have some of these good things," and, Mrs. Fisher drawing up a big easy chair in front of the table where Sarah deposited the tray, he sat down, with Phronsie on his knee. "Now, child----"

"Oh, Grandpapa, may I have the milk?" she begged, holding out a trembling hand.

"Bless you, yes, child." He put the glass into her hand. "Take care, Phronsie, don't drink so fast."

"Honey will choke herself," cried Sarah, in alarm, holding up warning black fingers. "Oh, my! she's done drunk it mos' all up a'ready."

"There, there, Phronsie!" Grandpapa took hold of the glass.

"Phronsie," said Mother Fisher, and it was her hand that took the glass away from the eager lips. "You must eat a roll now, or a little bit of toast."

"But I want some more milk," said Phronsie, and her lips quivered.

"Not yet, Phronsie." Mother Fisher was cutting up the toast, and now held up a morsel on the spoon. "See how very nice it is."

"We'll play it is five-o'clock tea," said old Mr. King, at his wit's end to bring the smiles into her face. Phronsie turned and gave him one look, then buried her face in his waistcoat and cried as hard as she could.

"There, there!" The old gentleman got up to his feet and began to pace the floor again, his white hair bent over her face, his hand patting her back gently. "Don't cry, poor little lamb." And as a sudden thought struck him, "Just look at your mother, Phronsie; you are making her sick."

Up popped Phronsie's yellow head, the tears trailing off from the round cheeks till they fell on the floor. There stood Mother Fisher, quite still.

"I'm sorry, Mamsie," said Phronsie, and she put out a little hand, "I'll eat the toast." So down old Mr. King sat again, with her on his lap, and Mother Fisher cut up more toast, and Phronsie opened her mouth obediently, and after the first mouthful she smiled: "I like it, I do." And Mother Fisher smiled too, and said, "I knew you would, Phronsie." And Grandpapa laughed, he was so happy, and Sarah kept crying, "Bress de Lawd! yer maw knew best." And pretty soon Mrs. Fisher nodded to old Mr. King, and he said, "Now for the rest of the milk, Phronsie," and the glass was put into her happy hand.

And then more toast, and more laughing, for Grandpapa by that time told a funny story, and everything got so very merry that the gayety brought all the rest of the houseful of children up to see if Phronsie were really awake.

"Why didn't you tell us before?" cried Joel, in a dudgeon, revolving around the table. "She's been eating ever so long, and we thought she was asleep."

"That's the reason she's had a little peace," retorted the old gentleman.

"Catch them telling you, Joe!" said Percy Whitney, glad to pitch in with a word.

"Well, you didn't know it, either," said Joel, in great satisfaction. "Say, Phronsie, where were you all this morning?"

"Ugh!" cried Van, with a warning dig in his ribs.

"Let me alone," cried Joel, squaring around on him savagely.

"Look at Phronsie's face," said Percy, with a superior manner, as if no one needed to tell him when to speak.

Polly was on her knees cuddling up Phronsie's toes, and begging to feed her, when she felt her give a shiver, and try to hide her face on her neck.

"Don't, Joey," begged Polly. But Joel, not hearing her, and hating to be dictated to by Percy, cried out persistently:

"Say, Phron, what were you doing all the morning?"

Phronsie at this gave a loud sob. "Take me, Polly," was all she said. So Polly sat down on the floor, and Phronsie snuggled up closer into her neck, and was rocked back and forth to her heart's content, while Joel, perfectly aghast at the mischief he had done, was taken in tow by Mother Fisher, to sob out, his head in her lap, that he "didn't mean to, he didn't mean to."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed old Mr. King, in dismay, "this is a pretty state of things! Polly, my child"--he leaned over her--"can't you think up something to get us out of it?"

"I'm going to talk about the garden party," cried Polly, an inspiration seizing her. "Oh, Phronsie, now you must sit up; you can't think what plans we have for it." But Phronsie burrowed deeper in her nest.

"If you don't sit up, Phronsie," said Polly quite decidedly, "I shall have to put you off from my lap, and go out of the room."

"Oh, no, no, Polly!" cried Phronsie, clutching her around the neck.

"Yes, I shall, Phronsie," declared Polly, in her most decided fashion, "so you must sit right up, and hear all about it. Now, Jasper, you begin."

So Phronsie sat up and let Polly wipe her face; and then she folded her hands in her lap, while Jasper began:

"You see that we thought that we'd take the Wistaria arbor, Father, if you'd let us, for our post office. May we?"

"Yes, yes, certainly," said the old gentleman, who would have been quite willing to promise anything just then.

"Oh, that's no end jolly!" cried Jasper, throwing back his dark hair from his forehead with a quick thrust. "Now we can do splendidly. Polly, only

think!" His eyes shone, and Polly screamed out, "Oh, Grandpapa, how lovely!" and the others joined in, not quite knowing what they were so happy about, until Joel popped up his head from his mother's lap to hear what all the noise was about over there.

"I'm going to be postmaster," he announced, wiping the tears off with the back of his hand, and plunging across the room.

"No, sir-ee!" declared Ben, seizing his jacket-end, "don't think it, Joe. Jasper is going to fill that important office."

"Yes, Jasper is," shouted Percy and Van together, delighted at anything that could keep Joel out. Davie stood perfectly still in the midst of the uproar.

"Why couldn't Joey be a letter carrier, to help give out the letters?" he said at last, in the midst of the noise. "Couldn't he, Ben?" and he ran to twitch that individual's sleeve.

"Hey--what?"

"Couldn't he be the one to give out some of the letters, and help Jasper?" asked David anxiously.

"I don't know--yes, maybe"--as he saw David's face fall. "You best ask Jasper, he's to be the postmaster."

So David ran over and precipitated himself into the middle of the group, with his question; when immediately the rest began to clamor to help Jasper give out the letters, so the babel was worse than at first.

Phronsie by this time was begging with the others, while she sat straight in Polly's lap, with very red cheeks and wide eyes. Now she slipped out, and rushed up to Jasper.

"And I, too, Japser; I want to give out letters, too," she cried, dreadfully excited.

"So you shall, Pet," he cried, seizing her to toss her up in the air, the others all circling around them, Phronsie's happy little crows going up high above the general din.

"Well, I think if we are going to have such a fine post office, we'll have to work pretty hard to write the letters," said Polly, after they had sobered down a bit.

"Ugh!" cried Joel with a grimace, "I'm not going to write a single scrap of one."

"Indeed you are," retorted Polly; "everybody has absolutely got to write some letters. Why, we must have a bushel of them."

"Oh, Polly Pepper!" cried the others, "a bushel of letters!"

"And no one can have a letter who doesn't write some," announced Polly firmly--"the very idea! So we must all work like everything to get ready for the post office."

CLEM FORSYTHE

Phronsie sat on the stairs, halfway down the long flight. It was the same staircase on which Jasper had found her, with Polly waiting patiently on the lower step, when she first came to Grandpapa King's. Now she held Clorinda in her arms, tightly pressed to her bosom.

"I do wish," she said softly, "that I could see my poor little girl, I do."

Clorinda not replying, Phronsie smoothed down the pink gown.

"It wasn't very nice at that little girl's house"--and a troubled expression swept over her face--"but the little girl was nice, and she hadn't any child."

Clorinda's countenance expressed no sorrow, but stared up at her mother unblinkingly. Phronsie bent over and dropped a kiss on the red lips.

"Maybe she'll come again some day, if I watch by the big gate."

"My goodness me!" Polly, running along the upper hall, peered over the railing. "What are you doing, Phronsie, sitting down in the middle of the stairs?"

"I'm thinking," said Phronsie, looking up.

"Well, I should say!" cried Polly, running down to sit beside her. "Oh, Pet, I've an invite for you." She seized Phronsie's hand and cuddled it in both of her own. "It's perfectly splendid."

"What's an 'invite'?" asked Phronsie, coming slowly out of her thoughts, to peer into Polly's face.

"Oh, I forgot, Mamsie didn't want me to say that," said Polly, with a little blush. "Well, it's an invitation, Pet, and to Miss Mary Taylor's, to go with us girls this afternoon to work on our fancy things for the fair. Only think of that, Phronsie Pepper!" And Polly threw her arms around the small figure, and hugged her, to the imminent danger of both falling down the rest of the flight.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Polly, "we almost went over."

"Can I really go, Polly?" cried Phronsie, as soon as she could get her breath, "when you all take your bags and work on things?" She set Clorinda carefully down on the stair above, and stood up to look into Polly's face.

"Yes, child. Take care, you'll tumble over backward," warned Polly, with a restraining hand. "And oh, Phronsie! I'm going to make you a little silk bag, and you can take your pin-cushion to work on."

This was such a height of bliss that it quite overcame Phronsie, and she sat down on her stair again to think it over. To have a little silk bag to hang on her arm to carry her work in, just as Polly and the other girls did when they went to each other's houses with their fancy work, was more than

she ever imagined was coming to her till she got as big as they were. And to put her "cushion-pin" in it, and go to Miss Mary Taylor's with them all, sent her into such a dream of delight that she sat quite still, her hands in her lap.

"Don't you like it, Pet?" cried Polly, disappointed at her silence.

Phronsie drew a long breath, then stood up and began to hop up and down on her stair.

"Oh, Polly," she cried, clapping her hands, "I'm going to have a little silk bag, I truly am, Polly, all my own--oh!"

"My goodness me, Phronsie!" cried Polly, seizing her arms, "you'll roll down and break your neck, most likely."

"And I'll take my cushion-pin"--Phronsie leaned over and put her face close to Polly's cheek--"and I'll sew on it for the poor children, I will," and she began to hop up and down again.

"Take care, and stop dancing," laughed Polly.

"And it shall be a pink bag," said Phronsie, dreadfully excited; "make it a pink bag, do, Polly."

"Oh, I don't know that I can do that," said Polly slowly, "because you know I took my piece of pink ribbon Auntie gave me, for that sachet case I'm making for the fair. But never mind, child"--as she saw a sorry little droop to Phronsie's mouth--"I'll find another somewhere, and it will be nice, even if it isn't pink."

"It will be nice," echoed Phronsie confidently, as long as Polly said so, and she clasped her hands.

"And come on, Pet, we'll go and find the ribbon and make the bag now, so as to be all ready." Polly flew up from her stair. "Pick up your doll, and give me your hand. Here we are!"--as they ran up to the top.

"I very much wish you wouldn't call her my doll," panted Phronsie, as they reached the last step; "she's my child, Polly."

"I know; I won't forget," laughed Polly. "Now, says I, Phronsie, for my piece-box!"

The invitation of Miss Mary Taylor to all the girls who were getting up the fair for the poor children's week, plunged them into such a state of excitement that those who had been lagging over their fancy work now spirited up on it, or ran down-street to get more materials and begin anew. One of these was Clem Forsythe.

"Oh, dear me!" cried Polly, looking up from the floor of her room, where Phronsie and she had thrown themselves, the piece-box of ribbons between them, "here comes Clem up the drive; now I 'most know she wants me to help her on that sofa-pillow," and she twitched a square of yellow silk into a tighter tangle. "How in the world did that spool get in here?" she exclaimed, in vexation.

"I'll get it out, let me," begged Phronsie, dropping a fascinating bunch of gay ribbons she was sorting in the hope of finding a pink one.

"Oh, you can't, child," cried Polly, her impatient fingers making sad work of the snarl. "There, I'll break the old thing, there's no other way"--as Clem ran over the stairs and into the room.

"Oh, I'm so glad to find you!" panted Clem. "Dear me! what _are_ you doing?" And not waiting for an answer, she plunged on: "I stopped at Alexia's--thought you might be there. And she's just as mad as can be because I was coming over here for you. You see, her aunt has something for her to do this morning. I'm tickled to death that for once I got ahead of her. Whew! I'm so hot! I ran every step of the way." She threw herself down on the floor beside the two. "My, what a sight of ribbons, Polly Pepper!"

"I'm going to have a silk bag, Clem," confided Phronsie, dropping the little bunch of ribbons in her lap, to lean over to look into the tall girl's face, "and I'm going to take my cushion-pin in it."

"Are you, really?" said Clem. "Oh, Polly, you see, I want you to----"

"Yes, I am." Phronsie nodded her yellow head. "Polly is going to make it right now, she is."

"Is she? Oh, dear!" Clem gave a groan. "Oh, Polly, I did want you to----"

"You see, I promised her this," Polly was guilty of interrupting. "She's been invited to Miss Mary's this afternoon with us girls, and she wants a silk bag to carry her work in, too, the same as we big girls have, don't you, Pet?" Polly stopped long enough in the final tussle with the snarl to set a kiss on Phronsie's round cheek.

"Yes, I do, Polly," laughed Phronsie, with a wriggle of delight, "and I'm going to carry my cushion-pin in it, I am."

"So you see I can't help you on your sofa-pillow, Clem," said Polly hurriedly, feeling dreadfully ashamed to have to say no.

"Oh, I don't want any help on it," said Clem; "I finished that old thing, Polly."

"Finished your sofa-pillow, Clem!" Polly dropped her snarl in her lap. "Why, how could you?--and you hadn't the dog worked, except one leg, and none of the filling in."

"Oh, I don't mean I finished it in that way," said Clem carelessly. "I mean I'm done with it forever. I just hate that old dog, Polly, and so I gave the whole thing to our second girl, and she's going to work it for Christmas and send it to her mother."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Polly, "and now you won't give anything to the fair," and her mouth drooped sorrowfully.

"Oh, yes, I will, too," declared Clem cheerfully; "I'll give something ten times better than that old dog sitting up on a cushion. And nobody would have bought it when it was done, except my mother--I'd made her--so what's the use of finishing it? Anyway, I've given it to Bridget; and now I'm going to make the most elegant thing--you can't guess, Polly Pepper."

"What is it?" cried Polly, with sparkling eyes.

"Oh, that's telling," said Clem, in a tantalizing way. "You must guess."

"Polly," said Phronsie, with a gentle little twitch on her arm, "can you find any pink ribbon?"

"Yes, yes; I mean no, not yet," said Polly, in a preoccupied way, her eyes on Clem's face. "Oh, I can't guess; it might be anything, you know, Clem."

"But it isn't; I mean it's something," declared Clem, in great triumph. "Oh, do hurry, you're so slow, Polly; it's too elegant for anything!"

Polly leaned her face in her hands, and her elbows on her knees. "Mm, mm--oh, I know!" She brought up suddenly, nearly overthrowing Phronsie, who had bent anxiously over her. "Take care, Pet, I came near bumping your nose. It's a workbag."

"A workbag!" exclaimed Clem, in great scorn. "Well, I guess not, Polly Pepper. What I'm going to make is ever so much better than an old workbag. Guess again."

At the mention of the workbag, Phronsie had gently pulled Polly's arm. But Polly was too deep in thought to notice, and she wrinkled her brows, and bent her head again in her hands. What could it possibly be that Clem was to make?

"Well, I think it is a sachet bag, then," she said at last.

"An old sachet bag, when all the girls are making oceans of 'em! I should think you'd be perfectly ashamed, Polly Pepper, to sit there and guess such things. I'm going to make a most beautiful, embroidered handkerchief case, with little violets all----"

"Why, you can't, Clem Forsythe!" Polly flew to her feet, sending the ribbon box flying, and nearly oversetting Phronsie. "You ought not to do any such thing," she ran on passionately, a little red spot coming on either cheek, "when you know it'll be just like mine. It would be too mean for anything."

"It won't be just like it," said Clem, twisting uncomfortably, and not looking up into Polly's face, "for mine is to be a wreath, and yours is a bunch."

"But it'll be the same thing," cried Polly, too angry to think what she was saying, "and you're perfectly mean and hateful to copy mine."

"Polly," cried Phronsie, in a distressed little voice. She had gotten up to her feet, and now hurried over to hold Polly's gown. "Oh, don't, Polly, don't!"

"Go away," commanded Polly, angrily twitching her gown free; "you don't know what you are doing, Phronsie, to stop me. She's gone and chosen the very thing I thought of all by myself."

"I guess there are other violet handkerchief cases in the shops," said Clem coldly. She was getting over her uncomfortable fit, and now she sprang to her feet. "And I think you are mean and stingy, too, Polly Pepper"--she tossed her head high in the air--"to expect to keep all the best things to yourself, and we're all working ourselves most to death over this old fair. And I did come to ask you to go down-town with me to buy my materials. Mother's given me five dollars to spend just as I like--but I shan't ask

you now, so there!" She gave her head another toss, and walked off toward the door.

Phronsie deserted Polly and ran on unsteady little feet after her.

"Polly isn't mean and stingy," she quavered; "she couldn't be."

Clem looked down at her, and little uncomfortable thrills ran all over her.

"Well, anyway, she's mad at me," she said, with great decision.

"Oh, no, Polly isn't mad," declared Phronsie. She clasped her hands, and swallowed very hard to keep the tears back, but two big drops escaped and rolled down her cheeks. When Clem saw those, she turned away.

"Well, anyway, I'm going down-street by myself," she said, without a backward glance at Polly, and off she went.

"And if she thinks I'm going with her, or care what she does, after this," cried Polly, magnificently, with her head in the air, "she'll make a mistake."

"Polly, Polly!" The tears were rolling fast now, and Phronsie could scarcely see to stumble back across the room to her side.

"And you don't know anything about it, child. To think of making a violet handkerchief case, and mine is almost done, and none of the girls would copy mine! And Jasper drew the flowers on purpose." She was going on so fast now that she couldn't stop herself.

"Mamsie wouldn't like it," wailed Phronsie, clear gone in distress now, and hiding her face in Polly's gown.

"Mamsie would say--" began Polly decidedly. Then she stopped suddenly. "Oh, what have I said!" she cried. "Oh, what can I do!" She clasped her hands tightly together. She was now in as much distress as Phronsie, and, seeing this, Phronsie came out of her tears at once.

"You might run after her," she said. "Oh, Polly, do."

"She won't speak to me," said Polly, with a little shiver, and covering her eyes. "Oh, dear, dear, how could I!"

"Yes, she will, I do believe," said Phronsie, putting down a terrible feeling at her throat. Not speak to Polly?--such a thing could never be! "Do run after her, Polly," she begged.

Polly took down her hands and went off with wavering steps to the door.

"I'll get your hat," cried Phronsie, running to the closet.

But Polly, once having decided to make the attempt at a reconciliation, was off, her brown braids flying back of her in the wind.

MISS TAYLOR'S WORKING BEE

Looking both sides of the road, not daring to think what she would say if she really did see Clem, Polly sped on. But not a glimpse of the tall girl's figure met her eyes, and at last she turned in at a gateway and ran up the little path to the door. Mrs. Forsythe saw her through the window that opened on the piazza.

"Why, Polly Pepper," she cried, "what a pity that Clem didn't find you! She went over to your house."

"Oh, I know, I know," panted Polly, with scarlet cheeks.

"Don't try to talk," said Mrs. Forsythe, "you are all out of breath. Come in, Polly."

"Oh, I can't. I mean I would like to see Clem," mumbled Polly, with an awful dread, now that she was on the point of finding her, of what she should say. It was all she could do to keep from running down the piazza steps and fleeing home as fast as she had come.

"Why, Clem isn't at home," said Mrs. Forsythe, in a puzzled way; "you know I told you she had gone over to your house. She wanted you to go down-town with her, to buy some materials to take over to Miss Mary's this afternoon and begin something new for the fair."

"Oh!" said Polly, in a faint voice, and hanging to the piazza railing.

"You see, she was all tired out over that sofa-pillow. I told her it was quite too ambitious a piece to do, and she was so discouraged I gave her some more money, and advised her to get something fresh. She had almost made up her mind to give up working for the fair altogether."

"Oh, dear me!" gasped Polly, quite overcome.

"Yes." Mrs. Forsythe leaned comfortably against the door-casing. It was such a comfort to tell her worries to Polly Pepper. "Clem said all the other girls were making such pretty things, and it was no use for her to try. She can't get up new ideas quickly, you know, and she was ashamed not to take in something nice, and so she said she didn't mean to do anything. I couldn't bear to have her give it up, for she ought to keep with you girls." Mrs. Forsythe's face fell into anxious lines. "She gets unhappy by herself, with no young people in the house and only my mother and me to brighten her up. So I talked with her a long while this morning, and at last got her to be willing to try again. Well, it's all right now, for she's started to find you, and go down-town to buy the things," and Mrs. Forsythe smiled happily.

Polly sank to the piazza steps and buried her face in her hands.

"Why, my dear, are you ill?" Clem's mother deserted the door-casing and came quickly out. "Let me get you something."

"Oh, no, no!" Polly sprang to her feet and hurried down the steps. "I must go home," she said hoarsely; and not pausing to think, only to get to Mamsie, she sped away on the wings of the wind, not stopping until she had turned in at the little green wicket-gate where she wouldn't be likely to meet any one.

"Oh, dear, dear!"--and she hurried across the grass--"supposing Mamsie isn't at home! She was going out for Auntie. What _shall_ I do?"

In her despair she raced over the greensward and plunged into the Wistaria arbor--to stand face to face with Clem!

Polly was too far gone in distress to say anything. Clem jerked up her head from the table, and raised a defiant pair of cheeks, wet and miserable. "Oh, dear, dear!" was all Polly could get out. But she stumbled in and put her arms around her neck, and down went the two heads together.

"I'm awfully sorry," blubbered Clem. "Oh, dear! I forgot my handkerchief."

"Take mine." Polly put a wet little wad into her hand. "Oh, Clem, if you don't let me go down-town with you and buy that handkerchief case!"

"Let you!" cried Clem. "You won't want to go with me, Polly. But I'm not going to work a handkerchief case."

"Oh, yes, you are," declared Polly positively. "If you don't, Clem Forsythe!"

"It was mean in me to choose it," said Clem, beginning to sniffle again, now that she had a handkerchief.

"Oh, no, no!" said Polly in alarm. "Now I know you won't forgive me when you say such things. For it was all my fault; I was stingy mean to want to keep it to myself."

"You aren't ever mean, Polly Pepper!" Clem hugged her so tightly by the neck that the neat little ruffle Mamsie sewed in that very morning was quite crushed. When she saw that, Clem was in worse distress than ever.

"See here! Why, Clem Forsythe!" Polly Pepper flew up to her feet so suddenly, that Clem started in amazement, and stared at her as well as she could with her eyes full of tears.

"Why, can't you see? Haven't we been two goosies--geese, I mean--not to think of it before!"

"What?" asked Clem helplessly.

"Why, you might make a violet _glove_ case," said Polly, in a burst. Then she began to dance around the arbor. "Oh, Clem, how perfectly lovely!"

"I don't see," began Clem dismally, "and I don't know how to make a glove case."

"Why, make it just like my handkerchief case, only long," flung Polly over her shoulder, as she danced away.

"But I don't want to copy yours," protested Clem, "for it really would be mean."

"But this would make a set, yours and mine," said Polly breathlessly, and coming up to shake the downcast shoulders, "don't you see? Oh, you goosie! and I've been another, not to think of it before. And oh, such a set! Why, it would sell for a lot of money. And I'll ask Jasper to draw you the same

kind of bunch of violets on your glove case, and we'll go right down-town, now. I can make Phronsie's bag when I get home. Come on!"

When Clem once had the idea in her mind, she got off from the bench, and Phronsie, watching anxiously from Polly's window for her return, saw the two girls hurrying across the lawn, their arms around each other and talking busily. And it wasn't but a moment or two, and she was flying over the grass to meet them. Polly had explained that the little ribbon bag was to be made just as soon as the materials for the new glove case were bought. Polly had run up for her hat, and to get her little purse, for she just remembered that her green silk for the violet stems was nearly out, and Phronsie had said good-bye and gone back to the house on happy feet, to tell Clorinda and watch at the window till Polly should come again.

And just after luncheon, for they must start early in order to have a good long afternoon at Miss Mary's, Polly and Phronsie set forth, the new little bag hanging from Phronsie's arm. Jasper went with them as far as the corner, where he turned off to go to Jack Rutherford's, for the boys were to meet there to write letters for the post office. They had promised to be there bright and early.

"Oh, Jasper, it was so good of you to draw that dear bunch of violets for Clem," said Polly for about the fiftieth time; "it was too sweet for anything."

"Too sweet for anything," hummed Phronsie, all her eyes on her bag, dangling as she walked.

"Take care, you came near falling on your nose, Phronsie." Jasper put out a warning hand.

"I think it's so nice there's a pink stripe in it, Polly," said Phronsie, patting her bag affectionately.

"Yes, isn't it, Pet!" cried Polly, glad she hadn't snipped up that very ribbon for little sachet bags. "And the green stripe, too, is pretty, Phronsie."

"It's pretty," cooed Phronsie, "and my cushion-pin is inside, Jasper," she announced.

"Is it really?" said Jasper.

"Yes, it is really and truly, Jasper, and I'm going to work on it," she added, with a very important air.

"You don't say so, Pet!" he cried. "Why, you are going to a working bee just the same as the big girls, aren't you?"

"I'm very big," said Phronsie, stepping so high she nearly fell into a mud-puddle. Whereat Jasper picked her up, bag and all, and marched off, laughing, not to set her down till they reached the corner.

"Well, good-bye. Take care now, Phronsie," and he gave her a kiss. "Good-bye, Polly, and good luck to your bee."

"And I do hope you'll have splendid success with the letters, Jasper," Polly craned her neck around the corner to say, the last thing. Then she took Phronsie's hand and hurried along to meet a throng of girls, all bound

for Miss Mary's.

There on the big stone steps was Mr. Hamilton Dyce.

"I heard there was to be a bee here this afternoon," he said, looking down at them all with a smile, "so I thought I'd come."

"I'm coming," announced Phronsie, breaking away from Polly and holding up her bag; and she began to mount the steps.

"So I perceive," said Mr. Dyce, running down to meet her. "Well, Phronsie, I must tell you I came partly to see you."

"And I've got a cushion-pin inside," said Phronsie confidently, as she toiled up.

"Have you, though?" cried Mr. Dyce. "Take care, don't go so fast. Let some of these girls race ahead of us; we'll take our time. How d'ye, Polly, and Alexia, and all the rest of you?"

"But I must hurry," said Phronsie, with a very pink face, as the bevy rushed by, "for I'm going to work on my cushion-pin."

"So you must. Well, then, here goes!" Mr. Dyce swung her up to his shoulder and went, two steps at a time, in through the crowd of girls, so that he arrived there first when the door was opened. There in the hall stood Miss Mary Taylor, as pretty as a pink.

"I heard there was to be a bee here this afternoon, and I've brought Phronsie; that's my welcome," he announced.

"See, I've got a bag," announced Phronsie from her perch, and holding it forth.

So the bag was admired, and the girls trooped in, going up into Miss Mary's pretty room to take off their things. And presently the big library, with the music-room adjoining, was filled with the gay young people, and the bustle and chatter began at once.

"I should think you'd be driven wild by them all wanting you at the same minute." Mr. Dyce, having that desire at this identical time, naturally felt a bit impatient, as Miss Mary went about inspecting the work, helping to pick out a stitch here and to set a new one there, admiring everyone's special bit of prettiness, and tossing a smile and a gay word in every chance moment between.

"Oh, no," said Miss Mary, with a little laugh, "they're most of them my Sunday-school scholars, you know."

"That's all the more reason that you ought not to be bothered with them week days," observed Mr. Dyce. "Now why can't you sit down here and amuse me?" He pushed up an easy-chair into a cosy-corner, then drew up an ottoman, on which he sat down.

"Oh, look at that Mr. Dyce," said Clem, quite in a flow of spirits, as she threaded her needle with a strand of violet silk; "he's going to keep Miss Mary off there all to himself. What did make him come this afternoon?"

"Well, he isn't going to have Miss Mary!" cried Alexia Rhys, twitching her

pink worsted with an impatient hand. "Horrors! Now I've gone and gotten that into a precious snarl. The very idea! She's our Sunday-school teacher. Oh, Miss Mary!" she called suddenly.

Miss Taylor, just sitting down in the easy-chair, turned. "What is it, Alexia?"--while Mr. Dyce frowned. At which Alexia laughed over at him.

"Please show me about my work," she begged.

"You little tyrant!" called Mr. Dyce, as Miss Mary went over.

"Do I slip one stitch and then knit two?" asked Alexia innocently. Polly, next to her on a cricket, opened wide eyes.

"Yes," said Miss Mary, "just the same as you have been knitting all along, Alexia."

"Well, I couldn't think of anything else to ask," said Alexia coolly. Then she laid hold of Miss Mary's pretty, gray gown.

"Oh, don't go back to him," she implored. "Do stay with us girls, we're all your Sunday-school class--that is, most of us. Please stay with us, Miss Mary."

Miss Mary cast an imploring glance over at the gentleman, which he seemed to see, although apparently he wasn't looking.

"Phronsie, you and I will have to move over, I think"; for by this time he had her in his lap; and so he bundled her across the room unceremoniously.

"Oh, I've lost my needle!" cried Phronsie, peering out from his arms in great distress.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Dyce; so he set her down and dropped to all-fours to peer about for the shining little implement, Phronsie getting down on her knees to assist the search.

Alexia, seeing the trouble, deserted her knitting, and flew out of her chair to help look for it.

"You little tyrant!" exclaimed Mr. Dyce, as she added herself to the group, "to call Miss Mary over there! I should think it was quite bad enough to have you Sundays, Alexia."

"Miss Mary thinks a great deal of me," said Alexia composedly. "Dear me, what a plaguey little thing that needle is! Never mind, Phronsie, don't feel badly. I guess--oh, here it is, and sticking straight up."

"And all this would never have happened but for your calling Miss Mary away," observed Mr. Dyce, getting up straight again. "What a little nuisance you are, Alexia!" All of which she had heard from him so many times before that it failed to disturb her, so she went back to her seat in high spirits, Phronsie hopping over like a small rabbit to a little cricket at Polly's feet. At this there was a bustle among the girls.

"Sit next to me, Miss Mary," begged Silvia Horne, sweeping a chair clear.

"No, no," cried Amy Garrett, "she's coming here!"

"I call that nice," exclaimed Alexia decidedly, "when I asked her to come across the room! I'm going to sit next to her of course."

"You'd much better have stayed with me," laughed Mr. Hamilton Dyce, "since there'll be one long fight over you. Better come back."

But Miss Mary, protesting that the girls needed her, finally settled it by getting her chair into the middle of the group, which she made into a circle.

"There, now, we're all comfy together," she announced. "Now, Mr. Dyce, you must read us something."

"Oh, tell us a story," put in Alexia, who didn't relish listening to reading.

"Oh, yes, a story, a story," they one and all took it up. Even Phronsie laid down her big needle which she was patiently dragging back and forth, with a very long piece of red worsted following its trail across the face of her "cushion-pin" in a way to suit her own design, to beg for the story.

"Oh, Phronsie!" exclaimed Polly, for the first time catching sight of this, "you can't work with such a long thread. Let me cut off some of it, do."

"Oh, no, no," protested Phronsie, edging off in alarm.

"Why, it'll get all knotted up," said Polly, in concern; "you better let me take off a little--just a little, teenty bit, Phronsie."

"No, no," declared Phronsie decidedly, "I must hurry and get my cushion-pin done."

"She thinks she'll get it done faster with a great, long thread," giggled one of the girls over in the corner. Mr. Dyce turning to fix her with a stare, she subsided, ducking behind her neighbor's back.

"Phronsie, I must buy that cushion-pin at the fair," he announced. "I want such an one very much indeed."

Phronsie got off from the little cricket where he had placed her, and went straight over to him, to lay her hand with the "cushion-pin" in it on his knee. "Then I will sell it to you," she said gravely, "and the poor children can go into the country." Then she went back to her seat and took up her work once more.

Some of the girls laughed, but Alexia frowned furiously at them; and Mr. Dyce and Miss Mary apparently seeing no amusement in it, they all began to beg for the story again, till the clamor bade fair to stop the needles from doing their work.

"I guess you'll have to," Miss Mary smiled over at him from the center of the circle, while the color deepened on her cheek.

"I want a story told to me first," he said coolly, leaning back in his chair. "What is all this bee for, and this fair? I know just a hint about that, but let me have the whole story from beginning to end. Now then, some one tell me. I am very anxious to hear."

"You tell, Polly," cried Alexia, and "Let Polly Pepper tell, can't she,

Miss Mary?" begged all the girls, every one saying the same thing. So Miss Mary said yes, and Polly laid down her violet handkerchief case in her lap, although she hated to stop working, and began:

"You see, Miss Mary said one day in Sunday-school----"

"Oh, Polly, not that!" said Miss Taylor, in dismay.

"Go on, Polly, and tell every word," said Mr. Hamilton Dyce. "I'm to be told the whole story; from the very beginning, now mind. You said, 'One day in Sunday-school.' Now go on."

"Yes," said Polly, her cheeks like a rose for fear her dear Miss Mary might not like it, "Miss Mary said we ought to be doing things, not always talking about them and learning how to be good; and she said there were so many poor children who were waiting for us to help them. And----"

"Polly, you don't need to tell that. He wants to know about the fair," Miss Taylor broke in suddenly.

"Oh, dear!" said poor Polly, blushing rosier than ever and moving her cricket so that she need not see Miss Mary's face, while Mr. Dyce, protesting that he was not to be cheated out of a single word of the narration, made her go back and tell over the last thing she said. This was so much worse that Miss Mary decided she would let the story go on at all hazards, so she leaned back in her chair resignedly, while Polly went on:

"Well, and so we said, 'Yes, Miss Mary, we'd like to' and what could we do, for we didn't know how to help poor children."

"And I said I didn't want to," broke in Alexia suddenly.

"But you did, Alexia!" cried Polly, whirling around on her cricket to regard her affectionately. "Oh, Mr. Dyce, she did help"--looking over at him anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I see," nodded that gentleman, "and she's working on some fandango for the fair just as hard as you other girls."

"Oh, this horrible old shawl!" said Alexia, regarding the worsted folds dangling from her needle with anything but favor. "Well, I didn't want it, and nobody will buy it, I know, but the other girls were all going to do things, so I had to."

"Well, go on, Polly," said Mr. Dyce, with a laugh. So Polly, quite satisfied that he really understood how Alexia was helping along the work for the poor children the same as the others, hurried on with the story.

"Well, so then Miss Mary proposed that we hold a fair, and Grandpapa said we might have it on his grounds; and Auntie Whitney said why not have a garden party, and sell tickets, for perhaps some people wouldn't care to buy things and----"

"And I'm going to put my cushion-pin on the table," piped Phronsie suddenly, her cheeks all aglow with excitement, and dropping her needle again.

"So you shall," cried Mr. Dyce, "only you must have a little card saying 'Sold' on it; for I am surely going to buy that pincushion, Phronsie."

And then Polly flew back to her work again, and Mr. Dyce told such a very funny story about some monkeys who were going to give a party in the woods to all the other animals, that Phronsie forgot all about her needle, and ran over to clamber up into his lap.

And then, oh, the needles flew; and Clem's green stems began to grow, and a tiny bud showed itself, and then a full-blown violet. And Alexia's pink shawl took ever so many rows, and all the work seemed to flourish like magic. And at last, Miss Mary looked up at the clock.

"Time to put up work, girls," she cried gayly. And then wasn't there a great bustle, every one trying to see which would get hers into her bag first! And then, oh, such a stretching of tired arms and feet!

"Oh, dear me! the prickles are all running up and down my legs," exclaimed Alexia.

"Hush, well, so are mine," declared Clem. "Oh, dear me--ow! I haven't sat still for so long--ever, I guess."

"Nor I," laughed another girl.

"Come." Miss Mary was telling Mr. Dyce to lead the way to the dining-room. So they all fell into line, and, when there, they forgot tired legs and arms in the delights of the little feast set out.

Miss Mary sat down by the small table and poured chocolate for them, a white-capped maid at her chair, Mr. Hamilton Dyce on the other side as grand helper. Then the girls settled down in pretty groups on the broad window-seats, and on the high-backed chairs, and gave themselves up to the supreme content of the hour.

And then Miss Mary proposed that they should wind up the afternoon with a dance, which was received with a shout of delight. So she led the way to the drawing-room and sat down before the grand piano.

"Can't one of you girls play?" asked Mr. Dyce, at that.

"Oh, no, no," said Miss Mary, "the girls must dance." So, without waiting for any words, she struck into a two-step.

"Oh, I'll play, I'll play." Polly Pepper ran out from the midst of the group.

"Polly, come back, you are going to dance with me," cried Alexia.

"No, you're always getting her first. She's going to dance with me," announced Clem.

Polly was already over at the piano, trying to be heard, but Miss Mary only laughed and shook her head.

"No use, Polly," said Mr. Dyce, and he put his arm around her, and away they went down the length of the drawing-room.

"Well, at least you haven't got this first dance," said Alexia.

"Nor you, either," retorted Clem. "So come on, let's dance together," and

away they went, too.

And at last, when it was time to go home, Mr. Hamilton Dyce, who had absented himself after that first dance, drove up with a flourish to the door in his runabout.

"I've come for Phronsie Pepper," he said.

So Phronsie, half asleep, had her hat tied on, and kissed Miss Mary, and Polly lifted her up and guided her foot over the step, Mr. Dyce, the reins in one hand, helping her with the other.

"Good-bye," he called, his eyes on no one but Miss Mary.

"Oh, my bag, my bag!" cried Phronsie, in a wail of distress, and leaning forward suddenly.

"Take care, child; where are you going?" Mr. Dyce put forth a restraining hand and held her closely.

"My bag!" Phronsie looked back, the tears racing over her round cheeks.

"I'll bring it home," called Polly from the steps, where she was back among the knot of girls.

"My bag!" Phronsie continued to wail.

"Dear me!" cried Polly, "she must have it now." So she ran into the house to get it, where Phronsie had left it on her little cricket, Mr. Dyce meanwhile saying, "There, there, child, you shall have it," while he turned the little mare sharply about.

"We can't ever find the needle," said Alexia, rushing after Polly into the library, and getting down on her knees to prowl over the floor. "Misery me!"--with a jump--"I've found it already, sticking straight into me!"

So Phronsie's "cushion-pin" was thrust into the gay little pink-and-green-striped workbag, and Polly danced out with it and handed it up to her. Mr. Dyce cracked the whip, and this time they were fairly off.

V

"SHE'S MY LITTLE GIRL"

"Oh, I do wish, Polly," cried Phronsie, as they ran along the hollyhock path, "that my poor little girl could go to the country. Can't she, Polly?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh, yes, of course," assented Polly, her mind on the garden party, now only three days ahead. "Phronsie, how perfectly elegant those roses are going to be!"--pointing off to the old-fashioned varieties blooming riotously.

"Oh, Polly!" Phronsie stood still a moment in silent bliss, then hopped up

and down the narrow path. "I'm so glad she can go! Oh, Polly, I'm so
very glad!"

"Who?" cried Polly, in perplexity.

"My little girl, my poor little girl," said Phronsie, hopping away.

"Oh, of course." Polly gave a little laugh. "Well, there are lots of poor little girls who will go, Phronsie," she said, in great satisfaction, "because, you know, we're going to make a great deal of money, I expect. Why, Grandpapa has told Thomas to buy ever so many flowers. Just think, child, and the oceans we have here!" She waved her hands over to take in not only the old-fashioned garden where they stood, but the smart flower-beds beyond, the pride and joy of the gardeners. "Oh, yes, there will be ever so many children who will be happy in the country in the summer."

"And my poor little girl," persisted Phronsie gleefully, "she will be happy, Polly. Oh, let's go down to the big gate--p'raps she's there now --and tell her. Please, Polly." She seized Polly's hand in great excitement.

Polly sank to her knees in delight over a little bed of daisies.

"I do think these are the very sweetest things, Phronsie Pepper," she said. "See the cunning baby ones coming out."

"Please, Polly," begged Phronsie, clinging to her hand.

"Why, Phronsie!" Polly looked up in amazement. Not to pay attention to the baby daisies was certainly astonishing, when Phronsie was always so rapt over the new flowers. "What is it you want, child?"

"Please come down to the big gate, Polly," pleaded Phronsie, her lip quivering, for Polly was not usually so hard to understand.

"Yes, I will," said Polly, reluctantly tearing herself away from the fascinating daisies. "Now then, we'll go there right away; one, two, three, and away!"

"I guess--she'll--be--there," panted Phronsie, but she was running so fast to keep up with Polly's longer steps that her words died away on the air; and Polly, who dearly loved a race over the grass, was letting her mind travel to the delights of the garden party, and what it was going to accomplish, so she didn't hear.

At last there was the big gate.

"Dear me!" cried Polly, with a gay little laugh, "what a fine race! No wonder you wanted me to try it with you! Why, Pet, have I run too fast?" She looked with remorse at the flushed little face.

"No," gasped Phronsie, "but oh, Polly, will you sit down on the grass?"

"To be sure I will," said Polly very remorsefully, "you're all tired out. There, let's come over here," and she led her over to the very tree under which Phronsie had fallen asleep. "Here's where I found you the other day, Phronsie, when you were so tired. Heigh-ho!" And Polly threw herself down on the grass, and drew Phronsie into her lap.

"P'raps she'll come," said Phronsie, and the sorrowful look began to disappear as she cuddled in Polly's arms. "Don't you believe she will, Polly?" She put her face close to Polly's to peer anxiously into her brown eyes.

"Who, child?" asked Polly.

"The poor little girl--my poor little girl," exclaimed Phronsie.

"Oh, there isn't any little girl, at least any particular one," cried Polly. "We're going to send ever so many little girls into the country, Phronsie, but not any special one."

"Oh, yes, there is," contradicted Phronsie, her lip quivering again, and, despite all her efforts, the big tears began to course down her cheeks. "She's my little girl, and I like her. Please let her go, Polly. And maybe she'll come soon, if we only wait for her." It was a long speech, and by the time it was all out, Phronsie had laid her head in Polly's neck, and was sobbing as if her heart would break.

It was for this reason that Polly did not happen to look up across the grass to the big gate, so of course she couldn't be expected to see what took place there. And it was not until Phronsie had been persuaded to sit straight and have her tears wiped away, because Mamsie wouldn't like to have her cry, that any one guessed it at all. And in one instant Polly's lap was deserted, Phronsie was flying over the greensward, crying out:

"There she is--my poor little girl!"

It took but a moment for Polly's swift feet to follow, but none too soon, for the thin little face with the sharp, black eyes was withdrawn, and the flapping old shoes were beating a hasty retreat. But Polly was after her, and her hand was on her arm, and the first thing the stranger knew she was drawn within the big gateway, Phronsie circling around her with great satisfaction.

"She did come, Polly, she did."

"Lemme be. I warn't doin' nothin' but peekin'," said the girl, trying to wriggle away from Polly's grasp. But Polly held on.

"Don't be frightened; there isn't any one going to hurt you. What's your name, little girl?"

"She's my little girl," insisted Phronsie, trying to get hold of the thin little hand, which was less grimy than usual.

"What's your name?" asked Polly again.

"Rag," said the girl, in a burst.

"Rag? Oh, dear me!" said Polly.

"Lemme go. I hain't done no harm. Gran'll be wantin' me."

"Who?"

"Gran." The girl, at that, tried to fold up her arms in the remains of her sleeves. But Polly saw the long, red welts that were not pleasant to look

at. She gave a little shiver, but held on firmly to the tattered ends.

"Oh, make her stay," cried Phronsie; "I want her to play with me. I'll let you take Clorinda again, and she shall be your child," she stood up on tiptoe to say.

"Can't," said the girl, making a desperate effort to twitch away. "Lemme go."

"No, you cannot go until you have told me who you are, and how you know my little sister."

Rag looked into the brown eyes of the little girl not so much older, drew a long breath, then burst out, "She's visited me to my house," and, putting on the most defiant expression possible, stood quite still.

"_ "Visited you at your house!" _ echoed Polly. She nearly dropped the ragged sleeve.

"Yes, an' I give her a five-o'clock tea," said Rag proudly. "Any harm in that? An' I brung her home again, and she ain't hurt a bit. You lemme go, you girl, you!"

"You must come and see Grandpapa," said Polly firmly, a little white line around her mouth.

"I ain't a-goin'." Rag showed instant fight against any such idea.

"Then, if you don't," said Polly, gripping her arm, "I shall call the gardeners, and they will bring you up to the house."

"Oh, do come," cried Phronsie, who thought everything most delightfully conspiring to make her friend remain. "Dear Grandpapa will love you, little girl; come with Polly and me."

She took hold of her other arm, and Rag, seeing no way out of it and wholly bewildered, suffered herself to be led up to the grand mansion.

"Bless me; what have we here?" Old Mr. King, enjoying a morning constitutional on the big veranda, looked over his spectacles, which he had forgotten to remove as he had just thrown down the morning paper in a chair, and stared in amazement at the three children coming over the lawn.

"My poor little girl, Grandpapa," announced Phronsie, releasing the arm she clung to, and tumbling up over the steps, "and please make her stay, and I'm going to let her take Clorinda," and she plunged breathlessly into the old gentleman's arms.

"Hoity-toity, child!" exclaimed old Mr. King, holding her closely. "Well, what have we here?"--as Polly led Rag up on to the veranda.

"I don't know, Grandpapa," said Polly, still keeping tight hold of the arm in its tattered sleeve.

"It seems to be a little girl," said Grandpapa, peering at the stranger.

"Yes, it's my little girl," said Phronsie happily, "and she's come to play with me, Grandpapa."

"Oh, my goodness me!" exclaimed Mr. King, stepping backward and drawing Phronsie closer.

"I ain't come. _She_ brung me," said the girl, pointing with a thumb over at Polly; "tain't my fault; she made me."

"Polly, what is all this?" asked the old gentleman perplexedly, staring at one and the other.

"I don't know, Grandpapa," said Polly, the little white line still around her mouth; "she says Phronsie has been at her house, and----"

"_Phronsie been at her house!_" thundered the old gentleman.

"Yes, she has. An' I give her a five-o'clock tea," cried Rag, in a burst, who, thinking that she was probably now going to be killed, began to take pleasure in telling all she knew. "Swell folks does; I seen 'em plenty of times on th' avenoo, an' here, too"--she nodded toward the long French windows--"an' I got as good a right, I guess. An' she let me take her doll, an' I like her. An' we had an orful good time till Gran came in, an' then we lit out, an' I brung her home. Now what you goin' to do about it?" She folded her thin arms as well as she could, for Polly was still holding to one, and glared defiantly out of her sharp, black eyes.

"Oh, Grandpapa, her arms!" Polly was pointing to the long, red welts.

Rag turned as if shot, and twitched the ragged sleeves down, tucking the free arm behind her back. "Lemme go, you girl: you hain't no right to see 'em, it's none o' your business," she screamed at Polly. Old Mr. King had sunk into a chair. Phronsie, in his lap, was so busy in putting her face close to his, and telling him that it was really her own poor little girl, that she had failed to see the arms and the disclosures they had made.

"Go and get your mother," he said, after a breathing space. "Oh, stay! I can't hold her"--with a gesture of disgust.

"An' you ain't a-goin' to tetch me," declared Rag proudly; "no, sir-ee!"

"Well, Phronsie, you jump down and go and get your mother," Mr. King whispered, smoothing her yellow hair with a trembling hand.

"I will--I will," she cried gleefully, hopping out of his lap.

"Oh, don't send her away." All the defiance dropped out of Rag's face and manner, and she whimpered miserably. "She's th' only nice one there is here. Don't let her go."

"She's coming right back, little girl," said old Mr. King kindly. He even smiled. But the girl had hung her head, so she didn't see it, and she blubbered on.

"I'll bring Mamsie to see my poor little girl," Phronsie kept saying to herself over and over, as she scuttled off, and in a very few minutes Mother Fisher was out on the veranda in obedience to old Mr. King's summons.

"It's beyond me"--the old gentleman waved his hand at Rag--"you'll have to unravel it, Mrs. Fisher. Here, Phronsie, get up in my lap." He strained her so tightly to him, as Phronsie hopped into her accustomed nest, that she

looked up.

"Oh, Grandpapa!" she exclaimed.

"Did I hurt you, child?" he said, in a broken voice.

"A little, Grandpapa dear," she said.

"Well--oh, Lord bless me! I can't talk, child," he finished brokenly.

"Are you sick, Grandpapa?" she asked, sitting straight to look at him anxiously. "Does your head ache? I'll smooth it for you," and she began to pat his white hair.

"Oh, no, child, my head doesn't ache. There, sit still, dear, that's all I want." So Phronsie cuddled up within his arms, feeling quite sure that now Mamsie had her own poor little girl, everything would be all right.

"She's my nice little girl, and I like her," Phronsie was saying. "Yes, I do, very much indeed, Grandpapa."

"You do?"

"Yes, and I want her to stay here, Grandpapa. Please, may she?"

"Oh, dear!"

"_Please_, Grandpapa dear." Phronsie put up one hand and tucked it softly under his chin. He seized it and covered it with kisses.

"Oh, my lamb--that wicked, careless Joanna!"

"What's the matter, Grandpapa?" Phronsie brought up her head to look at him with troubled eyes.

"Nothing--nothing, child; there, cuddle down again. Your mother is talking to the little girl, and she will fix up things. Oh, bless me!"

"Mamsie will fix up things, won't she, Grandpapa?" cooed Phronsie, wriggling her toes happily.

"Yes, dear."

"Grandpapa," said Phronsie, after a moment's silence only broken by a soft murmur of voices, for Mother Fisher had drawn her group to the further corner, "I don't think my little girl has got a very nice place to live in."

"Oh, Phronsie, child!" He strained her convulsively to his breast. "There, there, lamb, Oh, I didn't mean to! Grandpapa won't hurt his little pet for the world."

"You didn't hurt me this time," said Phronsie, "as much as you did before, Grandpapa dear."

"Oh, my child! Grandpapa wouldn't hurt a hair of your blessed head. Oh, that dreadful Joanna!"

"I like my own little girl very much indeed," said Phronsie, dismissing her

own hurts to go on with her narrative. "Yes, I do, Grandpapa," she added decidedly, "but I don't like the place she lived in. And, Grandpapa"--here she drew a long breath--"there was an old lady came in, and I don't think she was a nice old lady, I don't, Grandpapa." Phronsie crept up a bit closer, if that were possible.

"What did she do, child?" He held his breath for the answer.

"She took hold of my arm," said Phronsie, a shiver seizing her at the remembrance, and she burrowed deeper within the protecting arms, "and she felt of my beads that Auntie gave me."

"What else?" He scarcely seemed to ask the question.

"And my own little girl pulled me away, and she carried me home, most of the way, and I like her." Phronsie brought herself up with an emphatic little nod, and smiled.

"That was good."

Phronsie smiled radiantly. "Wasn't it, Grandpapa!" she cried, in delight. "And I want her to stay. May she? Oh, may she? She's my own little girl."

"We'll see about it," said old Mr. King, with a thought of the long welts on the thin arms, and the furious old woman.

"What's that noise?" asked Phronsie, suddenly lifting her head.

"Oh, a bird, maybe," said the old gentleman, carelessly looking up to the vines swinging around the veranda. "There, lay your head down again, child."

"It didn't sound like a bird, Grandpapa. I thought some one was crying." Yet she put her yellow head obediently down, and didn't lift it again till Mother Fisher stood by the side of old Mr. King's chair.

"Well, is the conference over?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mrs. Pepper. Her lips had a little white line around them, too, like that on Polly's mouth, and the black eyes had a strange expression.

Phronsie popped her head up like a bird out of its nest, and piped out:

"Oh, please, Mamsie, may she stay?"

"Yes," said Mother Fisher, "she is going to stay, Phronsie."

"Oh, my goodness me!" breathed old Mr. King.

Phronsie slipped out of his arms and began to dance, clapping her hands.

"I'm going to play with her now, but I must get Clorinda first," she cried excitedly.

"See here, Phronsie," Mother Fisher called, as she was flying off, "you must not play with the little girl yet."

Phronsie stood quite still.

"Come here to mother." Mrs. Fisher opened her arms and Phronsie scuttled into them like a little rabbit. Mrs. Pepper held her so closely that Phronsie looked up quickly.

"Why, you are hurting me like Grandpapa, Mamsie."

"Oh, my child!" Mother Fisher seemed to forget herself, as she bowed her head over Phronsie's yellow hair.

"What is the matter, Mamsie?" asked Phronsie. "I wish I could see your face," and she wriggled violently.

"Nothing is the matter now," said Mamsie. "There, child, now I'll tell you. If the little girl stays here, she----"

"She's my little girl," interrupted Phronsie.

"Well, if she stays here, she must be washed and have on clean clothes. So Sarah has taken her, and is going to fix her all up nice."

"Oh--oh!" cried Phronsie, in a transport, "and can she have some of Polly's clothes, Mamsie?"

"Yes, I guess so. Anyway, we will fix her up all nicely."

"And may she stay here for ever and ever," cried Phronsie, "and not go back to that un-nice old lady? Please, Mamsie, don't let her go back," she pleaded.

Over the yellow hair the old gentleman had found out and communicated several things back and forth. One was, "I don't think she is the child's own grandmother." "Mr. Cabot can investigate," and so on.

"What are you whispering about?" at last asked Phronsie.

"Nothing that you should know, dear. Now I'm going to put you in Grandpapa's lap, Phronsie. You must be a good girl," and Mother Pepper went off.

"You must take care of me, Phronsie," said the old gentleman, "for I really think I need it now. And I guess my hair does want to be smoothed, after all."

"I'll stay and take care of you, Grandpapa," said Phronsie, delighted that her services were really to be called for, and with her heart at rest about her own poor little girl.

VI

GRANDMA BASCOM

"Deary me!" Grandma Bascom stopped shooing out the hens from her kitchen doorway, and leaned on the broom-handle. "If here don't come Mis' Henderson! Now I shall hear about that blessed little creeter and all the rest of them children."

"Good-afternoon." The parson's wife went swiftly up the flag-bordered path between the lilac bushes. "It's a beautiful day, Mrs. Bascom."

"Hey?" Grandma's shaking hand went up to her cap-border, so Mrs. Henderson had to say it over, that it was a beautiful day, as loud as she could.

"You've come to-day?" said Grandma.

"Yes, I see you have, an' I'm obleeged to you, I'm sure, for it's mighty lonesome since that blessed little creeter, an' all the rest of them childern went away. Come in an' set down," and she led the way into the kitchen.

Meanwhile, the hens, seeing nothing to prevent it, had employed the time in slipping in under Grandma's short gown, and were busily scratching around for any stray bits.

"Thank you." The parson's wife nimbly found a chair, while Grandma bustled into the bedroom.

"Excuse me a minute, Mis' Henderson," she called; "I'm goin' to slip on t'other cap."

"Oh, don't take the trouble," said Mrs. Henderson's pleasant voice. But she might as well have said nothing, for Grandma didn't hear a word.

"'Tain't proper to see your minister's wife in your mornin' cap, nor your petticoat neither for that matter," said Grandma to herself, looking down at her short gown. So she concluded to put on her Sunday-go-to-meeting gown, as she called her best dress. This took her so long, because she hooked it up wrong three times, that Mrs. Henderson appeared in the doorway before the operation of dressing-up could be said to be finished.

"I'm very sorry," she began.

"'Tain't a bit o' trouble," said Grandma cheerfully, pulling at the second hook, which she had been trying for some time to get into the first eye; "you set down, Mis' Henderson, an' I'll be out pretty soon."

"I must go very soon." The parson's wife came quite close to say this, up under the frill of the best cap, which stood out very stiffly, as Grandma always kept it in a covered box on top of her high bureau.

"Hey?"

"I must go home soon. I have so many things to see to this afternoon."

It was a fatally long speech, for Grandma only attended to the last part.

"It's aft-noon? I know it. I'm comin' 's soon 's I can git this hooked up"--with another pull at the mismated hooks and eyes. Seeing this, in despair the parson's wife took the matter of hooking up into her own hands, and before long the Sunday-go-to-meeting gown could be said to be fairly on.

"Now that's something like," observed Grandma, in great satisfaction. "I hain't been hooked up by any one since Mis' Pepper went away. Deary me, how I should set by a sight o' her, an' th' blessed little creeter--there ain't

none other like that child."

Mrs. Henderson nodded, being sparing of words.

"I've some letters from them," she said loudly, "and if you come out to the kitchen, I will stay and read them to you."

"What did you say was the matter in the kitchen?" demanded Grandma, in alarm. "Oh, them dirty hens, I s'pose, has got in again."

"I have letters from the Pepper children, and they ask me to come over here and read them to you," shouted Mrs. Henderson. "Dear me!--to herself--"what shall I do? I'm all tired out already, and three letters to read--she won't hear a word."

But Grandma, having caught the word "letters," knew quite well what was in store, so, picking up her best gown by its side breadths, she waddled out and seated herself with great dignity in a big chair by the kitchen window. It was next to the little stand in whose drawer she used to let Joel Pepper look for peppermints.

When the Pepper children shut up the little brown house to go to Mr. King's, Grandma moved the small mahogany stand from its place next to the head of her bed out into the kitchen. She kept her big Bible on it, and her knitting work, where she could "have 'em handy." And it made her feel less lonesome to look up from her work to see it standing there.

"Seem's though that boy was a-comin' in every minute," she said. "My land o' Goshen, don't I wish he was!" for Grandma always had a soft spot in her heart for Joel.

Now she smoothed down her front breadth, and folded her hands in a company way. The parson's wife drew up a kitchen chair close to her side and unfolded the first letter.

"Who writ that?" asked Grandma eagerly.

"That's from Polly," said Mrs. Henderson.

"Bless her heart!" cried Grandma. "Well, what does she say?"

"Ma"--a light-haired, serious boy appeared in the doorway--"Pa wants you," he announced.

"Oh, Peletiah!" exclaimed the parson's wife, in consternation, at his unlooked-for appearance, and, "Oh, Grandma!" in the same breath, "I'm so sorry I must go."

"So sorry? What's ben a happenin' that Polly's sorry?" said Grandma, supposing that was in the letter. "Now I know that blessed little creeter has got hurt, an' they wouldn't let me know afore the rest."

"It isn't in the letter," declared Mrs. Henderson, in a loud, hasty tone, hurrying out of her chair. "Peletiah, what does your father want, do you know?"

"I don't know exactly," said Peletiah deliberately, "only Aunt Jerusha tumbled down the cellar stairs; maybe that's it."

"Oh, dear me! dear me!" cried the parson's wife, in a great fright. "Peletiah, here are the letters from the Pepper children"--thrusting them into his hand--"do you stay and read them to Grandma. And be sure to tell her why I went home," and she actually ran out of the kitchen, and down the lilac-bordered path.

Peletiah, left alone with the letters, turned them over and over in his hands, as he stood quite still in the middle of the kitchen floor. He never thought of disobeying, and presently he pulled up another chair, just in front of Grandma, and sat slowly down.

"Oh, I know she's got hurted bad," she kept groaning, "an' I shan't never see her again. Oh, the pretty creeter! Hain't she hurted bad?" she asked anxiously, bringing her cap frills to bear on the boy in front.

"Yes, I guess so," said Peletiah cheerfully; "she fell way down all over the cat sitting on the stairs."

"Where'd you say she fell?" screamed Grandma.

"Cellar stairs," Peletiah raised his voice, too, and sprawled out his hands to show how his Aunt Jerusha must have descended.

"Oh, me! oh, my!" exclaimed Grandma, in great sorrow, "that blessed little creeter! to think she's fell and got hurted!"

"She ain't little," said Peletiah, who was extremely literal, "she's awful long and bony!" And he could think of no special reason for calling her blessed, but that might be Grandma's fancy.

"Well, read them letters," said Grandma mournfully, when she could control her speech enough to say anything; "maybe they'll tell more about the accident," and she put her hand again behind her best ear.

"'Tain't in the letters," said Peletiah, "it's only just happened." But Grandma didn't hear, so he picked up Polly's letter, which was open, and began in a singsong tone:

"Dear Mrs. Henderson--"

"Hey?"

"Dear Mrs. Henderson," cried Peletiah, in a shrill, high key.

"Do move up closer; I'm a little hard o' hearin'--jist a mite," said Grandma. So Peletiah shoved his chair nearer, and began again:

"Dear Mrs. Henderson, we are going to have the very loveliest thing happen, and I want to write to you now, because next week there won't be any time at all, we shall be so very busy."

It was impossible to stop Peletiah until he had rounded a sentence, as he considered it his duty to pay strict attention to a period. So, although Grandma screamed, and even twitched his jacket sleeve, she couldn't get him to stop. The consequence was that he had to shout this over till at last she understood it, and then she turned a bewildered face upon him, but as he was deep in his second sentence, he didn't see it, but plodded patiently on.

"Grandpapa is going to let us have a garden party; there are tickets to be sold, for we are going to raise money to send poor children out into the country. And Jasper is getting up the post office, which Grandpapa says we may have in the Wistaria arbor. And we girls are all making fancy work, and oh, Phronsie is making a pin-cushion which Mr. Hamilton Dyce has bought already. Just think, and oh, I do believe we shall make lots and lots of money! Give my love to dear, dear Grandma Bascom, and please read this letter to her. From your loving little friend, Polly."

Peletiah, considering it better to read this all as one sentence, had droned it out without a break, to look up and find Grandma sunken back against her chair, her cap frills trembling with indignation.

"I hain't heard a single word," she said, "an' there's that blessed child got hurt, an' I can't seem to sense it at all."

"She ain't hurt, Polly ain't," said Peletiah, stoutly defending himself. "They're going to have a garden party."

"A what?" screamed Grandma.

"A _garden_ party."

"Oh, then she fell in the garding, an' you said cellar stairs," she cried reproachfully.

Peletiah looked at her long; then he got out of his chair and leaned over her.

"My Aunt Jerusha fell," he screamed, so loud that Grandma started.

"Oh, an' the Pepper children ain't hurt?" she cried, in great relief.

"No, they're going to have a party." He wisely left out the garden this time.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Grandma, greatly pleased at the hint of any festivities, no matter how distant, and the smiles began to run all over her wrinkled face again. "I wonder now," she said, "if they don't want my receet for Cousin Mirandy's weddin' cake; it's in th' Bible there"--nodding over to the little stand.

Peletiah, seeing her so absorbed, waited patiently till the second letter was called for. He never for an instant thought of sliding off; so he pulled it out of its envelope, and got ready.

At last Grandma pulled herself out of the charms of Cousin Mirandy's receet, and set her spectacles straight.

"Who writ that one?" she asked.

"Joel," said Peletiah, finding it quite to his liking to read this one, for Joel never wasted any time in preliminaries, but came to the point at once, in big, sprawly letters.

"Dear Misses Henderson." Somebody must have corrected him then, for he scratched out the "Misses," and wrote on top "Mrs." "You tell Grandma Bascom, please, that it's just prime here, but I like her peppermints, too, and I won't chase her old hens when I come back. Joel."

When Grandma really got this letter by heart, she laughed and said it had done her good, and she wished Joel was there this minute, in which Peletiah hardly concurred, being unable to satisfy Joel's athletic demands. And then she looked over at the little mahogany stand, and the tears rolled down her withered old cheeks.

"I'd give anythin' to see him comin' in at that door, Peletiah," she said, "an' he may chase th' hens all he wants to when he comes back"; for Grandma always cherished the conviction that the "Five Little Peppers" were to make life merry again in their "little brown house," and she went on so long in this way that Peletiah, who had glanced up at the clock many times, said at last, in a stolid way, "There's another letter." And Grandma, looking down, saw a little wad in his hand.

"Now I do believe that's from the blessed little creeter," she exclaimed, very much excited; "that must be Phronsie's."

"Yes, it is," said Peletiah.

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" cried Grandma. "You should 'a' read it first of all." She leaned forward in her chair, unable to lose a word.

"You didn't tell me to," said Peletiah, in a matter-of-fact way.

"Well, read it now," said Grandma, quavering with excitement.

"There ain't nothin' to read," said Peletiah, unfolding the paper, many times creased.

"Hey?"

"There ain't nothin' to read," repeated Peletiah; "you can see for yourself." He held it up before her. There were many pencil marks going this way and that, by which Phronsie felt perfectly sure that her friends would understand what she was telling them. And once in a while came the great achievement of a big capital letter laboriously printed. But for these occasional slips into intelligible language, the letter presented a medium of communication peculiar to itself.

"Ain't it sweet!" said Grandma admiringly, when she had looked it all over. "The little precious creeter, to think of her writin' that, and all by herself too!"

"You can read it as well upside down," observed Peletiah.

"I know it." Grandma beamed at him.

"Just think of that child a-writin' that! Who'd ever b'lieve it?"

"I must go now," announced Peletiah, getting out of his chair and beginning to stretch slowly.

"Well, now tell your ma I thank her for comin', and for them letters from them precious childern. An' see here." Grandma leaned over and pulled out the under drawer of the little stand. It wasn't like giving peppermints to Joel Pepper, and it sent a pang through her at the remembrance, but Peletiah had been good to read those letters.

"I'm a-goin' to give you these," she said, beginning to shake therefrom into her hand three big, white peppermints and two red ones.

"No, I thank you, ma'am," said Peletiah stiffly, and standing quite still.

"Yes, you take 'em," said Grandma decidedly. "You've been real good to read them letters. Here, Peletiah."

"No, I thank you, ma'am," said Peletiah again, not offering to stir. "Well, I must be going," and he went slowly out of the kitchen, leaving Grandma with the big peppermints in her hand.

That evening, after everything was quiet at the parsonage, the minister called his wife into the study.

"We will look that letter over from Mrs. Fisher, now, my dear."

Mrs. Henderson sat down on the end of the well-worn sofa.

"Lie down, dear," he said, "and let me tuck a pillow under your head. You are all tired out."

"Oh, husband, I am sure you are quite as tired as I am," and the color flew into her cheeks like a girl. But he had his way.

"You better leave the door open"--as he went across the room to close it--"Jerusha may call."

"Jerusha won't need us," he said, and shut it.

"You know the doctor said she was not much hurt, only strained and bruised, and she's quite comfortable now. Well, my dear, now about this letter. Do you think we might take this child?"

"We?" repeated his wife, with wide eyes. "Why, husband!"

"I know it seems a somewhat peculiar thing to propose"--and the parson smiled--"with our two boys and Jerusha."

"Yes," said Mrs. Henderson, "it is, and I never thought seriously of it."

"She won't do Peletiah any harm"--and then he laughed--"and she might brighten him up, if she's the girl Mrs. Fisher's letter indicates. And as for Ezekiel, there's no harm to be thought of in that quarter. Our boys aren't the ones, wife, to be influenced out of their orbits."

"Well, there's Jerusha." Mrs. Henderson brought it out fearfully, and then shut her mouth as if she wished she hadn't said anything.

"I know, dear. You needn't be afraid to speak it out. It is always on my mind. Oh, I do wish--" and the parson began to pace the floor with troubled steps.

His wife threw back the old sofa-blanket with which he had tucked her up, and bounded to his side, passing her hand within his arm.

"Don't, dear," she begged. "Oh, why did I speak!" she cried remorsefully.

"You said no more than what is always on my mind," said the minister again,

and he pressed the hand on his arm, looking at it fondly. "Poor Almira!" he said, "I didn't think how hard you would have to work to please her, when I took her here."

"But you couldn't help it, husband," she cried, looking up at him with a world of love. "After your mother died, what place was there for her to go? And she really was good to her."

"Yes," said the minister, and he sighed. "Well, it's done, and she is here; but oh, Almira, I think it's made a great difference with our boys."

Mrs. Henderson's cheek paled, but it wouldn't do to let him see her thoughts further on the subject, he was so worn and tired, so she said:

"Well, about the little girl, husband?"

"Yes, Mrs. Fisher's letter must be answered," said the parson, pulling himself out of his reverie. "She asks if we can find a place in Badgertown for this child, who seems uncommonly clever, and is, so she writes, very truthful. And I'm sure, Almira, if Mrs. Fisher says so, the last word has been spoken."

"Yes, indeed," said his wife heartily.

"And they've found out a great deal about her. She's been half starved and cruelly beaten."

The parson's wife hid her tender eyes on her husband's coat sleeve.

"Oh, dear me!" she exclaimed sympathetically.

"And the old woman who pretended to be her grandmother, and who beat her because she wouldn't steal, became frightened at the investigation, and has cleared out, so there is no one to lay a claim to 'Rag.'"

"To whom?" asked Mrs. Henderson, raising her head suddenly.

"Rag--that's the only name the child says she has. But Mrs. Fisher writes they call her Rachel now. You didn't notice that when you read the letter, did you, Almira?"

"No," said his wife, "I didn't have time to read more than part of it. Don't you remember, I hurried over to Grandma Bascom's with the little Pepper letters, and you said you'd talk it over with me when I got home? And then Peletiah came after me, and I ran back here to poor Jerusha."

"Oh, I remember. I shouldn't have asked you." He nodded remorsefully. "Well, then, I'll tell you the rest. You read the first part--how they ran across the girl, and all that?"

"Yes. Oh, dear me! it gives me a shiver now to think what an awful risk that blessed child, Phronsie, ran," cried Mrs. Henderson.

"I know it; I cannot bear to think of it even in the light of her safety," said Mr. Henderson. "Well, now, Mr. King has taken upon himself to support and to educate Rag--Rachel, I mean--and the best place, at first, at any rate, to put her is Badgertown. Now what do you say, Almira, to her coming here to us?"

The parson's wife hesitated, then said, "Jerusha--" and paused.

"Will she be made unhappy by Jerusha, you mean?" asked the parson.

"Yes."

"No, I don't believe she will," he said decidedly. "You must remember she has had her old 'Gran' as she calls her, and after that I think she can bear Jerusha."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Henderson, "I forgot. Then I say, husband, we will take this child. I should really love to put the brightness into her life. And please let her come soon." A pretty glow rushed up to her cheek, and the parson's wife actually laughed at the prospect.

VII

THE DISAPPOINTMENT

"Will it stop, Grandpapa?" Phronsie, kneeling on a chair, her face pressed close to the window pane, turned to old Mr. King, looking over her shoulder.

"I'm afraid not, dear," he answered.

"Doesn't God know we want to help the poor children?" she asked suddenly, a surprised look coming into her eyes.

"Yes, yes, dear; of course he knows, child."

"Then why does he let it rain?" cried Phronsie, in a hurt voice.

"Oh, because, Pet, we must have rain, else the flowers wouldn't grow, you know."

"They're all grown," said Phronsie, trying to peer out into the thick twilight between the great splashes of rain running down the window over toward the garden, "and now we can't have our party to-morrow, Grandpapa," she added sorrowfully.

"No, it would be quite too wet, after this downpour, even if it cleared to-night," said the old gentleman decidedly. "Well, Phronsie, child, we must just accept the matter philosophically."

"What's philo--that big word, Grandpapa?" she asked, turning away from her effort to catch sight of the flower-beds, off in the distance, gay with the wealth of blooms saved for the hoped-for festivities of the morrow, and she put her arm around his neck.

"Oh, that? It was a pretty large word to use to you, and that's a fact," said the old gentleman, with a little laugh. He was having rather a hard time of it to conceal his dismay at the blow to all the plans and preparations so finely in progress for the garden party. "Well, it means we must make the best of it all, and not fret."

"Oh!" said Phronsie. Then she turned back to her window again, and surveyed the driving storm.

"Perhaps the flowers like it," she said, after a pause, when nothing was heard but the beating of the rain against the glass; "maybe they are thirsty, Grandpapa."

"Yes, maybe," assented Grandpapa absently.

"And if God wants it to rain, why we must be glad, mustn't we, Grandpapa, if he really wants it?"

"Yes, yes, child," said the old gentleman hastily.

"Then I'm glad," said Phronsie, with a long sigh, and she clambered down from her chair, "and let's find Polly and tell her so, Grandpapa."

Over in the library there was a dismal group. Joel was fighting valiantly with a flood of tears, doubling up his little fists and glaring at Percy and Van at the least intimation of a remark to him. Little Davie had succumbed long ago, and now, crammed up in a small heap in the corner back of the sofa, was rivaling the storm outside, in the flood of tears he supplied.

Jasper crowded his hands in his pockets, marching up and down the long room. Polly, who was swallowing hard, as if her throat hurt her, wouldn't look at one of the boys. Little Dick was openly wailing in his mother's arms.

"Oh, shut up that, kid, will you?" cried Percy, crossly, over at him.

"Percy, Percy," said his mother gently.

"Well, he needn't boo-hoo like a baby," said Percy; "we've all got to give up the garden party."

"We can't have any garden party," mumbled little Dick between his sobs, and crying all over his mother's pretty blue silk waist.

"There, there, dear," Mrs. Whitney said soothingly, "we'll have it the next day, perhaps, Dicky boy."

"Next day is just forever," whimpered little Dick. "Oh, dear! boo-hoo-hoo!"

Percy started an impatient exclamation, thought better of it, and turned on his heel abruptly. But Van burst out:

"And the flowers'll all be gone, so what's the use of trying to have it then?"

"They won't," cried Joel, in an angry scream, and squaring round at him. "They shan't, so there, Van Whitney!" When the door opened and in walked Mr. King, and Phronsie clinging to his hand.

"Oh, hush, boys!" cried Polly hoarsely, a wave of shame rising in a rosy flush up to her brow. Oh, why hadn't she tried to keep cheerful instead of giving way to the general gloom? And now here were Phronsie and dear Grandpapa, who had ordered "just oceans of flowers" and everything else. Oh, dear, how naughty she had been! She sprang away from the big, carved

table, over to take Phronsie's hand.

"The flowers are thirsty, Polly, I guess," said Phronsie, looking up at her with a smile; "and when they drink all they want to, why, we'll have the party, won't we, Polly?"

"Yes," said Polly, the flush not dying down.

"Then that'll be nice, I think," said Phronsie, smoothing down her gown in satisfaction, "and I can finish my cushion-pin now"; for there was one little corner still untraveled by the remarkable design observed by the worker. But Mr. Hamilton Dyce had protested he didn't care for any such trifling deficiency, for he could put more pins in that quarter, so he should still be its purchaser.

"So you can," cried Polly, with as much enthusiasm as she could muster, and winking furiously over at the boys.

"And we can write more letters," cried Jasper suddenly, springing over to Phronsie's side.

"Phoo!" exclaimed Joel, "we've got bushels already."

"Well, it's nice to have more yet," retorted Jasper, "so you better keep still, old fellow."

"I shall write some more," announced Van, with great pomposity, strutting up and down the room.

"Hoh-hoh!" laughed Joel, snapping his fingers in derision, "you haven't finished one yet, and beside, who can read your chicken tracks?"

"I have, too," declared Van, very red in the face, ignoring the reflection on his writing and plunging over to Jasper. "Haven't I, Jasper, written a letter for the post office? Say, haven't I?"--gripping him by the jacket-sleeve.

"Yes, you have," said Jasper. "He handed it in this afternoon," he added, nodding to the group.

"There, you see." Van rushed triumphantly up in front of Joel. "You see, Joel Pepper, so you've just got to take that back."

"Well, only one," said Joel, "and there can't any one read it, so that's no good."

"And I wrote some letters," cried Phronsie, running away from the little circle to thrust her face in between the two boys. "I did, all by myself. One, two, ten, I guess."

Little Dick at that stopped sniveling, and slipped off from his mother's lap. "I did, too, write some, ten, three, 'leven, just as many as you did." The tears trailed off from his red cheeks as he bobbed his head emphatically.

So no one heard quick steps along the hall, and the door being thrown wide by the butler, saying, "They're all in the library." In came Miss Mary Taylor and Mr. Hamilton Dyce.

"We thought we'd drop in," said the gentleman, with a quick glance at Miss Mary, as if to say, "You see, they didn't need us after all, to help cheer up."

"Why, how very jolly you all are!" observed Miss Mary. The rain-drops were glistening on her hair and cheeks, where she had scampered away from the protecting umbrella at the foot of the steps. "Oh, I'm not wet, Mrs. Fisher"--Mother Fisher at this moment coming in with her mending basket. "I left my mackintosh in the hall."

"Well, well," exclaimed Mr. Hamilton Dyce. Joel had left sparring with Van and now swarmed around the newcomer, for he was extremely fond of him. "How are the letters coming on, Jasper? By the way, I've a few belated ones, in the pockets in my coat out in the hall. I'll get them."

"Let me--let me," screamed Joel.

"All right, go ahead. In both side pockets, Joe." He didn't consider it necessary to explain that Miss Taylor and he had been busy driving their pens all the afternoon.

"Whickets!" cried Joel, rushing back, both hands overflowing, "what a lot!"

"Joel, what did you say?" Mother Fisher glanced up, the lines of worry that had settled over her face at the terrible disappointment that had befallen the family, disappearing, now that the usual cheeriness was coming back.

"I didn't mean to," said Joel, the color all over his chubby face, "but my, see what a lot! The post office won't hold 'em all!"

"We'll put them with the others," cried Jasper, "and thank you, oh, so much, Mr. Dyce; we can't have too many. Come on, all of you, and see our pile"--running out into the hall, headed for his den.

"You must thank Miss Mary," said Mr. Dyce.

But Miss Mary laughingly protesting the gratitude was not so much due to her, the whole company filed out after Jasper in great good spirits.

Little Davie, back of the sofa, poked up his head.

"Are they all gone, Mamsie?" he asked fearfully.

"Why, Davie, my boy!" exclaimed Mother Fisher, much startled, and laying down her needle, stuck in a stocking-heel, "I thought you were upstairs with Ben."

"I haven't been with Ben." said David, working his way out, to run and lay his swollen little face in his mother's lap. She cleared away her work, and took him up, to gather him close in her arms.

"There, there, Davie, mother's boy, it's all right"--smoothing the hair away from the hot brow--"we can have the garden party another day, and then perhaps there'll be all the more pleasure and good time."

"Tisn't that," said little Davie, wriggling around to look up at her, "but Polly--" and for a moment it seemed as if the floods were to descend again.

"Oh, Polly is all right," said Mrs. Fisher cheerfully.

"Is, she, Mamsie?" asked David doubtfully.

"Yes, indeed, and you must see that you keep yourself right. That's all any of us can do," said Mother Fisher. "Now, Davie, my boy, hop down and run into Jasper's den with the others."

"Oh, I can't, Mamsie," protested Davie, in horror, and burrowing in her arms, "they'll see I've been crying."

"That's the trouble with crying," observed Mother Fisher wisely; "it makes you twice sorry--once when you're doing it, and the next time when it shows. You can't help it now, Davie, so run along. Mother wants you to."

If Mother wanted them to, that was always enough for each of the "Five Little Peppers," so Davie slid slowly down from her lap, and went out and down the hall.

Meantime Miss Mary had taken Polly's arm in the procession to Jasper's den.

"Oh, Polly, how cheery you have made them!" she exclaimed. "We expected to see you all perhaps drowned in tears."

"Oh, I haven't done it--anything to make them happy," cried Polly, the wave of color again flooding her cheeks; "indeed I haven't, Miss Mary. I've been bad and wicked and horrid," she said penitently, her head drooping.

"Oh, no, Polly," protested Miss Mary, her arm around Polly's waist.

"Yes I have, Miss Mary, I----"

"Well, don't let us talk now about it; we will look at the letters." Miss Mary drew her within the den. There stood Jasper behind the table perfectly overflowing with epistles of every sort and size, while little packages, and some not so very little, either, filled up all the receptacles possible for mail matter.

"Oh, my, what a lot!" exclaimed everybody, as Joel with a dash precipitated his handfuls on the already long-suffering pile.

"This is only the beginning," laughed Jasper, waving his arms over, to compass the whole den. "Just look on the top of the bookcase, will you?"

Everybody whirled around.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Grandpapa, at the sight. Letters were scattered here and there in the thickest of piles all along the surface, while the Chinese vase had a whole handful poking up their faces as if to say, "Here we are, all the way from China."

"Dear me," exclaimed old Mr. King again, "when do you ever expect to sell all those, Jasper?"

"Mine is in there," announced Phronsie, hanging to his hand and pointing to the vase. "Grandpapa, it really is; Jasper put it there."

"Did he, Pet?" cried the old gentleman, immensely interested.

"Yes, he did truly," said Phronsie, bobbing her head emphatically. "I saw

him my own self, Grandpapa. _And it's to you_." She stood on her tiptoes and whispered the last bit of information.

"No, is it?" cried Grandpapa, highly gratified; and, lifting her up to a level with his face, he kissed her on both cheeks. "Now, Phronsie, I shall always keep that letter," he said, as he set her down.

"Shall you?" cried Phronsie, smoothing her gown with great satisfaction. "Then I'm so glad I wrote it, Grandpapa."

Over by the table Jasper was saying to Polly:

"Now what shall we do with this dreadfully long evening? Do hurry and think, Polly, before everybody gets dismal again."

"Oh, I don't know," said Polly, at her wit's end.

"But we must think of something," said Jasper desperately, and fumbling the letters.

Polly's eye fell on his restless fingers.

"We might sort them out, the letters, and tie them up in little packages to take out to the post office."

"The very thing!" cried Jasper enthusiastically. "Here, all you good people"--he whirled around--"if you want to help, please sit down, and we'll get this mess of letters sorted and tied up into bundles." He waved his hands over his head, and of course everybody stopped talking at once.

"Oh, whickets!" Joel screamed; then he caught Polly's eye, and his chubby face took on a lively red. "Let me--let me!" He crammed himself in between Jasper and the table.

"Hold on!" commanded Jasper, "not so fast, Joe," and he seized Joel's brown hands just grabbing a big pile.

"Wait till Jasper tells us how to begin," said Polly, her brown eyes dancing at the prospect of something to do.

"Oh, dear!" whimpered Joel, stamping in his impatience. The Whitney boys were crowding up close behind. "Do hurry up, Jasper," they teased.

"Well, how shall we begin, Polly?" Jasper wrinkled up his brows in perplexity.

"Let's ask Miss Mary," said Polly. So Jasper called, "Miss Mary!" but she didn't seem to hear, which perhaps wasn't so very strange, after all, as Mr. Dyce was telling her something which must have been very interesting, over in the corner. When at last the summons reached her, she came hurrying over with very pink cheeks. "Oh, what can I do to help?"

"We've been calling and calling for ever so long," said Joel, in a very injured tone, for he had added his voice when he saw that things were waiting for Miss Taylor.

"Oh, have you, Joel? That's too bad." Miss Mary's cheeks became pinker than ever.

"Well, you are always screaming over something, Joe, you beggar"--Mr. Dyce pulled his ear--"so it's no wonder that your cries are not attended to on the instant."

When Miss Mary saw what was wanted of her, she proposed that Jasper give out twelve letters to each person, who should tie them up neatly, and put in a big basket. Then they would be ready to take out to the post office in the Wistaria arbor, and to be sorted into the little boxes which Grandpapa had commissioned the carpenter to make all up and down the sides, leaving one end free for the delivery window. The door for the postmaster and his assistants was to be at the opposite corner.

"Oh, yes, how nice!" exclaimed Polly, hopping up and down as ecstatically as Phronsie ever did. "Jasper, I'll get a ball of twine," and she was flying off.

"No, you stay here and help me give out the letters," said Jasper.

"Oh, I want to do that," cried Joel, squeezing and crowding.

"No, you must get the big basket," said Jasper. "Go and ask Thomas to give you one."

"I don't want to get an old basket," whined Joel; "let Percy get it."

"Hoh! I'm not going to," declared Percy, drawing himself up in great state.

"Then I will go myself," said Jasper, flinging down a handful of letters, to hurry off.

"Joel," said Polly, in a sorry little voice, and turning away from the table, "now you will spoil everything, and we've just got to feeling good. How can you, Joey!"

"I didn't mean--" began Joel, turning his back on her, while he winked very hard, "I didn't mean to, Polly."

Percy dug the toe of his shoe into the rug, and looked down on the floor.

"Then run after Jasper," cried Polly; "hurry, and tell him so."

"I will," cried Joel, plunging off, and Percy, being left alone, as Van had slid away to another group when he saw how things were going on, concluded to follow. And presently Jasper came back.

"It's all right, Polly," he nodded brightly to her, and they fell to work.

And in a minute or two, Joel came back with Percy, carrying the basket, a big market affair, between them. And when he saw what fun they were having over it, for they were both laughing merrily, Van wished he had gone.

And seeing his dismal face, Jasper sent him after a ball of twine. And then Phronsie wanted to get something, and little Dick teased to go too, so Grandpapa suggested they should go after some extra pairs of scissors.

"And Mamsie will let us take hers out of her workbasket, I guess," cried Phronsie. "Let us ask her, Grandpapa dear."

"Oh, you better stop working, Mrs. Fisher." Old Mr. King popped his white

head in at the library door. There sat Mother Fisher by the table, mending away as usual, for the stockings never seemed to be quite done. "And come into Jasper's den and see how fine we all are!" he added gayly.

"Yes, Mamsie, do come," chirped Phronsie, running her head in between him and the door-casing to plead.

"Yes, Mamsie, do come," echoed little Dick, who would do and say everything that Phronsie did.

"You see, you've simply got to come," laughed Grandpapa.

"And may we have your scissors, Mamsie?" Phronsie now deserted old Mr. King, to run over to the big workbasket.

"My scissors?" repeated Mother Fisher. "Why, Phronsie, child, what are you going to do with them?"

"We're going to cut letters," said Phronsie, with an important air, her fingers already in the basket, which, standing on tiptoe, she had pulled quickly over toward her in her eagerness. "And may we have your scissors, Mamsie?"

"Take care," warned Mother Fisher, but too late. Over went the big basket, and away rattled all the things, having a perfectly beautiful time by themselves over the library floor,

"Bless me!" ejaculated old Mr. King, while little Dick laughed right out.

Phronsie stood quite still, the color all out of her round cheeks. Then her bosom heaved, and she darted over to lay her head in Mother Fisher's lap.

"Oh, I didn't mean to, Mamsie," she wailed.

"Oh, deary me! bless me!" exclaimed Grandpapa, in the greatest consternation, and leaning over the two.

"There, there, don't mind it, deary." Mother Fisher was smoothing the yellow hair.

"Take me, Mamsie," begged Phronsie, holding up both hands, and she burrowed her face deeper yet in Mrs. Fisher's lap.

"Oh, dear me!" old Mr. King kept exclaiming. Then he pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his face violently. This not making him feel any better, he kept exclaiming, "Oh, dear me!" at intervals.

"I'll pick 'em up," said little Dick cheerfully, beginning to race after the spools and things over the floor.

Mother Fisher had drawn Phronsie up to her bosom, where she cuddled her to her heart's content. "Now, child," she said, after a minute, "I think you ought to help to pick up the things and put them in the basket. See how nicely Dicky is doing it."

"I'm getting all the spools," announced Dick, jamming all the chairs aside that he could move, and lifting a very hot face. "Yes, sir-ee! Come, Phronsie."

"I think you ought to help him, Phronsie."

So Phronsie slipped out of her mother's lap obediently, and wiped off her tears.

"Come on," said little Dick, in great glee. "I'm going under the table; there's a lot under there."

And in shorter time than it takes to tell it, the spools, and mending cotton, and tape measure, and, dear me! the ever-so-many things of which Mrs. Fisher's big workbasket was always full, were all collected from the nice time they were having on the floor, and snugly set up in their places again. And Mother Fisher, escorted by the children and old Mr. King, who by this time was laughing quite gayly once more, was going out into the hall, on the way to Jasper's den. And Phronsie had the big cutting-out shears, and little Dick the smaller, little snipping-thread scissors.

"Hullo!" Mr. King called out, as the butler ushered into the hall two gentlemen, in dripping mackintoshes. "Now that's fine, Cabot and Alstyne, to drop in of this dismal evening."

"We've called to condole with you all," said both gentlemen, as they were divested of their wet garments, "but it doesn't seem as if our services were needed"--with a glance at Grandpapa and his group.

"Oh, my family gets over any little disappointment such as bad weather," observed the old gentleman, with pride. "Well, come this way, the principal object of interest is in Jasper's den; no need to announce it"--as the peals of laughter and chatter sounded down the long hall.

VIII

THE GARDEN PARTY

And so, after all, it turned out to be the very best thing that the garden party did not take place until two days after, for all was then as sweet and fresh as a rose--all but one thing. And that was, on the very morning of the eventful day, Mrs. Chatterton drove up.

But then, as Jasper observed to Polly when this dire news was announced, "Cousin Eunice was always turning up when least wanted." And Polly had, as usual, to keep back her own thoughts on the subject, to comfort him. It would never do to add to his dismay.

"Why she can't stay in Europe when she's everlastingly saying that there is no place in America to compare with it, I don't, for my part, see," he cried, in a pet.

"I suppose she wants to be with her relations, Jasper," said Polly, with a sigh.

"Relations?"--Jasper turned suddenly on his heel and thrust his hands deeply in his pockets--"well, she fights with every single one of them," he said savagely.

"Oh, Jasper--fights!" exclaimed Polly, in horror, whose great grief had always been at having no relations, so to speak. "Dear me, how very dreadful!"

"Well, you know she does," said Jasper gloomily, and squaring round--"always picking and carping at something or somebody; and now Father will be all upset by her. If she had only waited till to-morrow!"

Polly felt such a dreadful sinking of her heart just then, that for a minute she didn't speak. There didn't seem to be any comfort for this.

"And just think how good Father has been," went on Jasper, too miserable to keep still, "and all those flowers he had ordered, for of course he couldn't let the florists suffer, and that he sent to the hospitals when it poured so."

"I know it," said Polly, swallowing hard.

"And now he has ordered another lot, and everything else--why, you know, Polly, there isn't anything Father hasn't done to make this fair a success, and now she has come!" Jasper flung himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, Jasper," cried Polly, running over to him in the greatest distress, "don't! Oh, dear me! What can we do?"

"Nothing," said Jasper, in the depths of gloom; "nothing will do any good so long as she has come."

"Oh, there must something be done," declared Polly quite wildly, and feeling equal to anything. If she only knew what would avail! "_Hush, here comes Grandpapa!_"

"Oh, he mustn't see us feeling badly." Jasper sprang from his chair. "Come, Polly," and they flew out into the side hall.

"Now where are those two, Polly and Jasper?" said old Mr. King to himself, coming to the library in a great state of irritation. "I've searched this house for them, and nobody seems to have the least idea where they have gone. Polly! Jasper!" he cried loudly, and it wasn't a very pleasant voice, either.

"Oh, dear!" Jasper seized Polly's hands in a corner of the hall. "He's calling us, and we've got to go, Polly, and how we look, you and I! Whatever shall we do!"

"But we must go," breathed Polly. Then she looked up into Jasper's face. "Let's ask him to go out and help us fix the flowers," she cried suddenly.

Jasper gave her a keen glance. "All right," he said. "Come on," and before their resolution had time to cool itself, they rushed into the library.

"Oh, Grandpapa," they both cried together, "do come out and tell us how to fix the flowers."

"Hey?" The old gentleman whirled around from the table, where he had begun to throw the papers about. "Did you know Mrs. Chatterton had come back?" He glared at them over his spectacles, which he had forgotten to remove when he had been interrupted with the unwelcome news while peacefully reading

the morning paper.

"Yes--oh, yes," said Jasper.

"Oh, yes, we know it," cried Polly cheerfully, "but, Grandpapa, we want you"--tugging at his hand.

"Hey? you knew it?" The old gentleman's tone softened, and he suffered himself to be led toward the door. "And you want me, eh?"--feeling with every step as if life, after all, might be worth living.

"Yes, we do indeed, Father," cried Jasper affectionately, possessing himself of the other hand.

"And oh, the flowers you sent are just too lovely for anything!" cried Polly, dancing away along by his side. "They're gorgeous, Grandpapa dear."

"Are they so?" Grandpapa beamed at her, all his happiness returned. "So you want me to tell you how to arrange them, eh?" And his satisfaction in being appealed to was so intense that he held his head high. "Well, come on," and he laughed gayly.

Mrs. Chatterton, newly arrived in the handsome suite of apartments Cousin Horatio's hospitality always allowed her, looked out of the window, and, having no one else to confide her opinions to, was not averse to chatting with her French maid.

"Isn't it perfectly absurd, Hortense, to see that old man?--and to think how particular and aristocratic he used to be! Why, I can remember when he would hardly let Jasper speak to him in some of his moods, and now just see that beggar girl actually holding his hand, and he laughing with her."

"A beggaire, is it?" cried Hortense, dropping the gown she was brushing, to run to the window. "I see no beggaire, madame"--craning her neck.

"You needn't drop your work," said Mrs. Chatterton, with asperity, "just because I made a simple remark. You know quite well whom I mean, Hortense. It's that Polly Pepper I'm speaking of."

"She is not a beggaire, madame," declared Hortense pertly, opening her black eyes very wide. "Oh!" She extended her hands and burst into a series of shrill cackles. "Why, she's like all de oder children in dis house, and I think truly, madame, de best."

"Go back to your work, I say," commanded Mrs. Chatterton, in a fury, forgetting herself enough to stamp her foot. So Hortense picked up the gown, but she continued to cackle softly to herself, with now and then a furtive glance at her mistress.

Outside, with all the sunny influence of the summer morning upon him, old Mr. King, and Polly, and Jasper went about, superintending the placing of the flowers. For there seemed to be a great many in the pots, with ferns and palms, to distribute where they would best show off and be persuaded to swell the poor children's fund,

"Oh, Grandpapa dear! what richness!" sighed Polly, clasping her hands in ecstasy. "I do think I never saw so many, and such beauties. Only look, Jasper, at that azalea!"

"I know it," said Jasper, his eyes sparkling, "and those orchids, Polly!"

"Oh, I know--I know," said Polly, spinning about to take it all in. Old Mr. King put back his head and laughed to see her.

"I'm so glad you like it, Polly, my girl," he said, heartily pleased.

"Like it, Grandpapa!" repeated Polly, standing quite still. "Oh, it's just too beautiful!" and she clasped her hands tightly together.

"Well, I think we'd best get to work," said Jasper, bursting into a laugh. "Come on, Polly, let's set about it."

"I think so, too," said Polly, coming out of her rapture. Thereupon ensued such a busy time!--especially as old Turner and two of his under-gardeners came up for directions, and Mr. King went off with them. So for the next hour Polly seemed to be on wings, here, there, and everywhere, and breathing only the sweet fragrance of the flowers.

"How Phronsie would enjoy it--the fixing and all!" she mourned, in the midst of it, as the transforming of the flower-tables into veritable bowers of beauty went on.

"But you know she had to take a long nap, else she would be all tired out. And the afternoon is going to be a long one, Polly."

"Oh, I know," said Polly, flying on with her work faster than ever, "and Mamsie was right to make her go to sleep."

"Mrs. Fisher is always right," said Jasper decidedly, "ever and always."

"Isn't she!" cried Polly, in a glow. "Well, Jasper, do you think that smilax ought to be trained up there?" She twisted her head to view the effect, and looked up at him anxiously.

"Yes--no," said Jasper critically; "I don't believe I'd put it there. It looks too much, Polly; there are so many vines about."

"So it does," said Polly, in great relief. "Heigh-ho! when one is working over any thing it looks so different, doesn't it?"

"I should say so," cried Jasper. "Oh, Polly, it can't ever in all this world be twelve o'clock."

"It can't!" exclaimed Polly, in dismay. But there was one of the white-capped maids coming across the lawn, with the summons to go in to luncheon, which was to be served at an earlier hour than usual.

And after that, no one had more than a moment in which to think, for at three o'clock the garden party was to open, and the fair to be in full progress.

Long before that time, the avenues and streets leading out to the Horatio King estate were thronged with children of all ages and sizes; most of them with their nurse-maids, all bound to the scene of the garden party, their small purses dangling by chains from their arms, or carried carefully in their hands. For wasn't this to help poor children who didn't have any pleasant homes, but lived in stuffy tenement houses, to go out into the broad, beautiful country, where they could race in the fields and play with

the chickens, and pick all the flowers they wanted to? And so, ever since the announcement had been made that such a fund was to be raised, there had been much hoarding of pennies, and no slight self-denial on the part of the younger element, who would naturally be drawn into the plan.

All the society people were to drive up later; and until the early evening hours it was to be the function of the town, which every one was anxious to attend. But everybody in Mr. King's household was to be ready to receive, exactly at three o'clock.

Phronsie was in the highest of spirits, having Grandpapa's hand to cling to, trying to welcome all the guests, and keeping one eye out to see that Rachel was enjoying herself, attired in a pretty, pink cambric gown, her black hair--which now seemed, oh, so soft and pretty!--tied back with little pink bows. And Rachel's eyes--well, there! no one would ever have suspected that they had only been accustomed to the squalor of Gran's apartment, and Gran herself, but one short week ago. They now looked on the world in general, and this fair scene in particular, with all the nonchalance of one born and brought up in the midst of such conditions as could bring about a state of affairs like the present that surrounded her. And many asked, "Who is that child?" for it was clearly seen that she wasn't of the set that was thronging the grounds.

Rachel herself was wholly unconscious of the remarks that were being made, so she devoted her heart and soul to the duty assigned to her, that of waiting on Polly and her bevy of school friends in one of the flower-bowers. And she never bothered about any curious glances, or asides, until a chance remark struck her ear as she was hurrying across the lawn, which she thought needed attention; then she raised her head, and her black eyes grew sharp and intent. It was Mrs. Chatterton who was speaking.

"Yes, it's a little beggar girl he took in," and the cackle was unpleasant that accompanied the words. "Dear me! I expect she'll rob us all; such creatures are so sly." She was pointing out Rachel to one of her friends lately arrived from Europe, and who had exerted herself to come early and see the children.

"Do you mean me?" demanded Rachel, her black eyes, like gimlets, on the long, cynical face. "'Cause if you does, I can tell you that what I does, I does right out on top; an' I guess by the looks o' you, that ain't your style."

"You impertinent creature!" exclaimed Mrs. Chatterton, her long face crimson with passion, not allayed by seeing that her friend could with difficulty control her amusement. "She'll tell this everywhere," she fumed within. "I shall go and speak to my cousin, Mr. King, about you, girl." She moved her arm and shapely hand, both very beautiful still, and well exhibited on every occasion, and started off with great dignity.

"I would," said Rachel scornfully. Then she laughed, "Oh, me! oh, my! you're such a favor_ite_, you are!" and she doubled up her thin figure, and went off in a little gust of merriment.

"Come with me." Mrs. Chatterton darted back and seized her friend's arm to drag her away. "That detestable creature makes me feel quite faint."

As soon as they had disappeared down a winding path, Rachel's amusement quite left her. She drew herself up stiffly, and hurried back to Polly, to be the same quiet, attentive, deft little maiden as before.

"You do tie flowers up so beautifully," cried Polly, handing her another big spool of baby ribbon. "Doesn't she, girls?"

"Yes, indeed," cried ever so many.

"I can't tie a bow to save myself," declared Alexia; "it all snarls up, and it looks for all the world, when I get through, as if my dog had chewed it. Oh, dear me! Yes, that basket is two dollars."

"I'll take it," said the little tot who had to stand on tiptoes to peer over the table with its blooming beauty. "I want it for my mamma," and he gave his smart little cane to the nursemaid to hold, while he opened his purse.

"Well, it's a beauty, Rick," said Alexia, picking up the basket; "the violets are so sweet," and she sniffed them two or three times as she passed them over.

"Here's Rick Halliday," called Clem, at the other end of the table. "Now I'm going to make him buy something of me. We must all make him, girls; his father's given him oceans of money to spend, of course."

It was loud enough for Polly to hear, and she dropped the box of ribbon under the table.

"No, no," she said decidedly, hurrying over, "Grandpapa said we were not to ask a single person to buy. That's the rule, you know, Clem."

"We could make ever so much more," grumbled Clem; "it's for the poor children, you know, Polly."

"Grandpapa said not," repeated Polly, her cheeks like a rose, and back she flew again to her post.

"I shan't buy anything of you, Clem Forsythe," loudly declared small Rick over to her, taking his little cane from the nursemaid's hand, "anyway. And beside, my papa said if any one teased me to spend my money, I was to come right away. But he didn't believe they would here." And with his basket of flowers for his mother, he moved off with great dignity across the lawn, swinging his cane as he had noticed the men did.

"Of all kids, I do think that Rick Halliday is the most detestable infant," exclaimed Clem, in great discomfort. "Oh, yes, Mrs. Nunn"--her face brightening--"we have heliotrope, ever so much of it." She thrust her hands into a big vase overflowing with fragrance. "How many? Oh, three dozen sprays. Yes, indeed."

[Illustration: "But this is ten dollars," said Joel]

And the bands--one at the end of the big lawn, and the other on the terrace at the farther side of the house--were playing their sweetest; and now the society folk began to put in an appearance among the throngs of children. Everybody was in gala attire, and the garden party was at its height.

"Joel," cried Mr. Cabot to that individual, rushing in and out among the little knots of gayly dressed visitors, "here, run over to the post office, will you, and see if there are any letters for me?"

"All right," Joel cried, as he flew along. And in an incredibly short space of time, back he rushed with three missives.

"How much?"

"Ten cents apiece," said Joel promptly. "I'll get change in a minute," and he was flying off again with the bill thrust into his hand.

"I don't take any change here. I don't want any; I won't be bothered with it," declared Mr. Cabot, in his most decided fashion.

"But this is ten dollars," said Joel, aghast, and stopping short to flap the bill.

"Never mind, that's my affair; go along, or I'll report you. Aren't you one of the postmen?"--pointing sternly to his badge.

"Yes," said Joel, straightening up, and puffing out his chubby cheeks with pride.

"Well, then, you'll find yourself reported if you don't march," cried Mr. Cabot "So off with yourself to the postmaster."

"Come on, Joel," called another of the postmen, who happened to be Percy, rushing along. "I'm going to get my mail bag now, there's just a crowd of folks waiting over there for letters"--pointing over to the pine grove.

"So will I get mine," shouted Joel, "and see here"--waving his ten-dollar bill--"what Mr. Cabot sent to Jasper. I guess that'll send one poor child off into the country, Percy Whitney! Won't that be prime!"

There was such a crowd around the Wistaria-arbor post office, that Percy and Joel, who much preferred being letter-carriers to helping Jasper within, had to crawl in under the vines, to find the mail bags.

"Here, Jasper," cried Joel, "take it, do"--throwing the ten-dollar bill down in a flurry, to fling the strap of his mail bag over his head before Percy should get his in order.

But Jasper, who was trying to satisfy the demands of a throng of people all clamoring at the small window for letters, didn't see it, or even hear his name called. So the ten-dollar bill lay perfectly still where it fell, until it got all tired out, and a little puff of wind, sweeping through the arbor, blew it first to one side, and then to the other, until at last it fell down among a tangle of evergreen with which the posts of the arbor were wound. And presently, Van, who much preferred being assistant to Jasper to running about as a letter carrier, came along and exclaimed, "Oh, that silly old green stuff! It takes up so much room!" And he twitched off a lot of it, and the ten-dollar bill, well crumpled up inside of the bunch, sighed and said to itself as it was flung under the counter, "Now I guess I'm dead and buried forever."

Meanwhile, Joel, as happy as a lark at the thought of Mr. Cabot's contribution, went off on the wings of the wind, distributing letters, here, there, and everywhere, and receiving lots of orders.

It was, "Oh, Joel, get me a letter,"

And, "Joel, get me one; I can't get near the post office; there's a perfect

mob there,"

And, "Joel Pepper!"--from clear across the lawn--"come over here; Mrs. Singleton wants to see you about some letters," until Joel began to feel that he was about running the whole post-office department, and it seemed as if every drop of blood was in his chubby face, he was so hot. But he never thought of being tired, he was so happy, plunging on.

"Oh, my gracious, honey! you done mos' knocked de bref out o' me!" It was Candace, who had left her little shop on Temple Place to help forward the garden party, against whom he had come up, careless where he was going.

IX

THE TEN-DOLLAR BILL

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Joel brought himself up remorsefully, trying to recover the collection of rag dolls sent spinning from her black arms.

"An' dey were sech perfec' beauties!" mourned Candace, twisting her hands sorrowfully together. "Oh, me! oh, my!"

"They aren't hurt a bit," declared Joel stoutly, precipitating the whole collection unceremoniously at her. "There they are, every single one, as nice as ever!"

"Take care," warned Candace. "Oh, my soul and body!" she mourned, "dey're all mussed up."

"You can comb it out," said Joel, longing to comfort, and forgetting it was wool from Candace's own head.

"And what'll Mis' Cabot and Mis' Alstyne say?" groaned Candace. Then she sat right down on the grass and began to pick at the dolls discontentedly. "W'y couldn't you 'a' looked whar you're goin', Mas'r Joel?"

"Have Mrs. Alstyne and Mrs. Cabot bought those dolls?" cried Joel, pointing a brown finger at them. "Oh, dear me!" He just saved himself from exclaiming, "Those horrors!"

"Yes," said Candace, smoothing a woolly head in great distress, "but I dunno's they'll want 'em now, dey've been shook up so and spilt on de groun'--oh, dear me!"

"Joel, aren't you coming with that letter bag?" and, "Joel Pepper, hurry up!" The cries were now so insistent that Joel dashed away, stopped, and rushed back tumultuously. "Oh, Candace, I'm so sorry!" He flung himself down on the grass by her side. Distress was written so plainly all over his hot face that Candace stopped in her work over the dolls to turn and regard him.

"Bress yer heart, honey," she cried, now as much worried over Joel as she had been about the dolls, "dey ain't hurt a mite--not a single grain," she added emphatically.

"Oh, Candace, are you sure?" he exclaimed delightedly.

"Not a mite," protested Candace, bobbing her own woolly head in a decided fashion. "Dear me! now I'm afraid I discomberated my turban, an' it's my spick an' span comp'ny one Mr. King give me for this yere berry occasion," and she put up both black hands to feel of it anxiously. Joel jumped to his feet and ran all around the big figure to get the most comprehensive view.

"It's all right, Candace," he reported, in great satisfaction.

"Sure, honey?" she asked doubtfully.

"Yes, yes," declared Joel quickly, prancing up in front of her. "I like you, Candace; you're just as nice as can be."

"Den gimme your hands!"--she laid the rag dolls carefully on the grass, and put out both of her black ones--"and hoist me up, honey, dat's a good chile."

So Joel stuck out his brown hands, and Candace laying hold of them, he tugged, very red in the face, till finally she set her ample gaiters on the ground and stood straight.

Up rushed Van.

"They're complaining at the post office," he squealed. "You've got to give me your bag. Folks can't get their letters. Give me the bag." He thrust out both hands.

Joel turned on him in a fury,

"You aren't going to have my bag," he screamed.

"I am, too; you're so slow, and don't give out the letters," said Van, delighted to find some chance to get the best of Joel, and quite important to be sent with a message to such an effect.

"You shan't either; I ain't slow," cried Joel, answering both statements at once, and whirling around in an endeavor to keep the bag at his back. But Van flew for it, disdaining to waste more time over arguments.

Candace stretched out a large, black hand. "See here, now, Mas'r Van, leggo dat bag." She seized him by the jacket collar with such a grip that he dismissed all thoughts of the mail bag, his one concern now being to get free from Candace.

"Ow!" he screamed, wriggling violently. "I don't want the mail bag; let me go, Candace, do!"

"See," cried little Dick, half across the lawn, to a merry party of ladies and gentlemen, who turned to follow the pointing of the small finger toward Candace and her capture.

"Oh, let me go," cried Van, very red in the face at this, and trying to duck behind her big figure, "_please,_" Candace."

"Let him go," begged Joel, just as much distressed; "he won't touch the bag, I don't believe, again, Candace."

"Oh, I won't, I won't," promised Van wildly. "I don't want the bag; do let me go, Candace."

"Yer see, Mas'r Joel was a-helpin' me," said Candace, slowly releasing Van's jacket collar, "an' 'twarn't none 'o his fault dat he stopped kerryin' de letters." But Van was off from under her open fingers and shot across the green in the opposite direction from little Dick and his party.

"Now I'll take my dolls to de ladies," observed Candace, bundling them up in her clean, checked apron. She sent a satisfied glance after Joel, making quick time toward the post office, then waddled off.

"Boy!" called a fine, imperious voice, as Joel dashed by a group of ladies and gentlemen. As there wasn't any other boy in sight, he might be supposed to be the one wanted; but Joel by this time was frantic to get to the post office, and with his mind filled with mortification and distress at his delay from his duty, he paid no heed to the call, now repeated more insistently.

"It's a lady," then said Joel to himself, "so I must go back. Oh, dear me!" He wheeled abruptly, and, hot and red-faced, plunged up to the group.

"What is it, ma'am?" Then he saw to his disgust that it was Mrs. Chatterton. She was surrounded by friends whom she had met abroad.

"Why didn't you come when I bade you?" she exclaimed arrogantly. "Don't you know it's your place to serve me?"

"No, ma'am," said Joel bluntly, his black eyes fixed on her face. One or two of the gentlemen turned aside with a laugh.

"What, you little beggar!" Mrs. Chatterton said it between her teeth, furious at the amusement of her friends, but Joel heard.

"I'm not a beggar," he declared hotly, and squaring his shoulders. By this time he forgot all about the mail bag. "And you haven't any right to say so"--with flashing eyes.

Mrs. Chatterton, now seeing him worked up, recovered herself and smiled sweetly. She leaned back in her garden chair and swung her parasol daintily back and forth.

"Oh, yes, you are," she declared; "we all know it, so there is no use in your denying it. Well, you get us some ices and be quick about it." She dismissed him with a wave of her beautiful arm, in its flowing, lace drapery.

But Joel did not budge.

"You don't know it." He swept the whole group with his black eyes. "It isn't as she says, is it?"

"No," said one of the gentlemen who had laughed, whirling around to bring a very sharp pair of eyes on Joel's face, "it isn't, my boy."

"Well, I must say," protested Mrs. Chatterton, an angry light coming into her cold eyes, and turning around on him sharply, "that this isn't very friendly in you, Mr. Vandeusen, to pit that upstart boy against me. Now there will be no managing him hereafter."

"Well, but, Mrs. Chatterton," broke in one of the other gentlemen, in a propitiatory voice, and leaning over her chair, Mr. Vandeusen turning calmly on his heel to survey the distant lawns through his monocle, "a beggar, don't you know--well, it isn't the pleasantest thing in the world to be called that, don't you know?"

"Particularly when one isn't a beggar," said a young lady hotly. Then she turned to Joel and laid a hand on his arm. "Don't you mind it," she said.

"And as for you, Miss Tresor, I should consider it wiser for you to be silent." Mrs. Chatterton turned on her with venom. "What do you know about these miserable Peppers that infest my cousin's house, pray tell?"

"I like them," declared Miss Tresor decidedly, not turning her head. "Don't mind it, my lad."

"I don't, now," said Joel. Then the gentlemen laughed again.

"Oh, I must go." All his long neglect of his letter-carrier duties, made so much worse by this delay, now surged over him. He raised his chubby face, over which a smile ran, and bounded off.

"Isn't he a dear!" exclaimed Miss Tresor impulsively.

"Come away, Emily," begged another young lady, seizing Miss Tresor's arm, "the old cat is quite furious; just look at her face."

"We'll leave her to mamma's tender mercies," said Emily carelessly, "she knows how to handle her. Do you remember that scene, Elinor, at Geneva?"

"Don't !!" laughed Elinor, as they sauntered off.

Well, by the time that six o'clock came, there wasn't so much as a scrap of a letter left in Jasper's post office, but, instead, a box crammed full of silver pieces and banknotes. And Miss Mary Taylor and Mr. Hamilton Dyce, and some other young ladies and gentlemen whom they drilled into the service, shut themselves up in the library and wrote as fast as ever they could make their pens fly over the paper, till little white piles appeared on the table. And Percy and Joel and Van and the other boys would rush in for these same piles to put them in the post office, to earn more money, to go into the big box. So back and forth ran these letter carriers, until even Miss Mary threw down her pen.

"I can't write another word," she cried. "I've exhausted everything I can think of. I don't want to see another letter!"

And then a card was put up outside the Wistaria arbor, "Post Office Closed." And everybody who still had money, was anxious to spend it before going home; so it was just lavished on the flower-bowers, the fancy-work table, and the candy shop.

And then, when there wasn't anything more to be bought or sold, the bands moved down nearer to the center of the big lawn, making the gay little groups all move back, leaving a broad, smooth surface, for the affair was to end in dancing on the green.

Meanwhile Grandpapa was gallantly offering his arm to Madam Dyce, and leading her up to an esplanade on the upper terrace, and, word being spread

about that all the guests were expected to follow, there they found seats and little tables and a bevy of waiters to serve a delicious supper. And here the dancing on the green below by the young people could be seen in all its gayety, the setting sun casting bright gleams upon the merry scene.

"Dear me! shouldn't you think those young people would be tired enough after all they have worked," observed the old gentleman, leaning back in his comfortable chair, "to sit still and take it easy with us here?"

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Madam Dyce, "my old feet are actually twitching under my gown to dance too."

"In that case," observed old Mr. King most gallantly, "let me lead you down, and will you give me the honor?" He bent his white hair to the level of her hand.

"No, indeed," laughed Madam Dyce; "I will leave the field for the young people. But it carries me back to my youth, when you and I did dance many a time together, Horatio."

"Did we not?" laughed Grandpapa, too. And then up came some merry groups, tired of dancing, after some supper, when down they would go again, fortified and refreshed, to begin it all over once more. At last, even the lingering ones were obliged to say good-bye. The evening had shut in and the brilliant garden party was a thing of the past. The King household was resting and talking it all over on the spacious veranda, luxurious in its cushions and rugs, its easy-chairs and hammocks.

"Oh, it has been so perfectly beatific!" exclaimed Polly, in a rapture. She was curled up on the top step, her head in Grandpapa's lap, who was ensconced in a big chair with Phronsie's tired little face snuggled up on his breast. "Hasn't it, Alexia?" For Alexia was going to stay over night.

"Oh, my!" Alexia gave a sigh and squeezed Polly's hand. "I never had such a good time in all my life, Polly Pepper," she declared. "The poor children won't begin to get the fun out of it that we've had."

"Oh, those dear poor children!" exclaimed Polly, stretching out her toes, which now began to ache dreadfully; "just think how perfectly lovely it's going to be for them all summer, Alexia."

Joel caught the last words. He poked up his head from one of the hammocks.

"Well, I guess Mr. Cabot has helped a poor child to go into the country," he cried, in a pleased tone.

"I guess everybody has helped," observed Ben, "the way your letters went, Jasper! Who would think so many could have been sold!"

Jasper stopped pulling Prince's ears.

"Didn't they go!" he cried, in huge satisfaction.

"I guess you were glad to get that big bill, Jasper," shouted Joel. "My, wasn't he good to send it!"

"Eh?" asked Jasper. Everybody was chatting and laughing, so it wasn't strange that things couldn't be heard the first time. So Joel shouted it again, glad to be allowed to scream such a splendid contribution over and

over. "The big bill, wasn't it prime, Jasper!"

"What are you talking about, Joe?" cried Jasper, stopping his play with Prince, as he saw Joel was terribly in earnest over something.

"Why, the big bill I gave you, that Mr. Cabot sent. Hurrah! Wasn't it fine!" Joel kicked up his heels and emitted a whistle that made Polly clap her hands over her ears.

"What big bill?" exclaimed Jasper. "What on earth are you talking about, Joe?"

Joel tumbled out of the hammock and took long leaps across the piazza floor, which landed him in front of Jasper.

"Why, that ten-dollar bill I gave you that Mr. Cabot sent to the post office," he said, in a breath.

"You didn't give me any ten-dollar bill," said Jasper, all in a puzzle; "you've been dreaming, Joe."

"I--I laid it down right by you." Joe could only gasp the words now.

"I didn't see it," said Jasper.

X

TROUBLE FOR JOEL

There was an awful pause, for everybody caught the last words. Joel slid to the floor in a little heap. Mrs. Chatterton spoke up quickly.

"It's easy enough to see where it went," and she gave a little laugh.

"Come on, Joe." Jasper sprang up and shook Joel's arm. "We'll go and hunt for it."

"I'll go, too." Van and Percy screamed it together. Now that any trouble had come to Joel, each vied with the other to see which could work the faster to help matters.

"I laid it--right down. Oh, dear me!" Joel was pretty far gone in distress by this time, and blubbered miserably, as they all raced across the greensward, Polly and Alexia following swiftly. "Hold on there, James," ordered Jasper, to one of the three men busy dismantling the post office of its improvised trimmings of pine branches.

"Eh--eh, sor? Stop, boys," said James to the workmen within the arbor.

"We have lost something," panted Jasper, as the whole group precipitated themselves up to the spot.

"Is that so, sor?" said James, in great concern. "Well, if I'd 'a' known it, I'd 'a' kept a sharp eye out for it, sor." Polly and Alexia were

already in the arbor in the thickest of the green branches scattered over the floor, and the boys were picking and pulling wildly, everywhere a banknote could be supposed to hide. "What was it, sor?"

"A banknote," said Jasper, down on his knees, prowling over the floor with both hands, while Joel, who could scarcely see for the tears that streamed down his chubby cheeks, searched desperately on all sides.

"Is that so, sor?" said James, in great distress. "Well now, that's too bad. We've taken off two loads already, sor."

"Where have you put them?" demanded Jasper, springing to his feet.

"Down in the dump, sor."

"We must look that over," said Jasper decidedly. "Send your men with lanterns; don't touch a single thing here, James, I'll come back," and he sprang off.

"No, no, sor," said James, touching his cap. "Now, boys," to the workmen, "you can leave this here; get your lanterns and help the master."

"All right," said the men.

"Polly, you and Alexia keep on hunting, won't you?" called Jasper over his shoulder, as the boys flew off.

"Yes, we will," called back Polly, who would very much have preferred the pleasures of "the dump," a big dell in process of filling up with just such debris as had now been added.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Alexia discontentedly, "now we're mewed up here when we might be in that dear old sweet dump, Polly Pepper; and all because we're girls."

"Well, we can't help it," said Polly, with a sigh, who wished very much sometimes that she might be a boy, "so we'd much better keep at work hunting for that ten-dollar bill, Alexia."

"And Joel is so dreadfully careless," said Alexia, determined to grumble at something, and poking aimlessly at the green branches scattered on the floor. "I don't suppose we'll ever find it in all this world, in such a mess."

"We must," said Polly, a little white line coming around her mouth.

"Well, we can't, so what's the use of saying that?" and Alexia gave a restful stretch to her long arms. "Oh, me! oh, my! I'm so tired, Polly Pepper!"

"You know we must find that ten-dollar bill, Alexia," repeated Polly hoarsely, working busily away for dear life.

"Well, we can't; it's perfectly hopeless--so do keep still. Just look at all this." Alexia waved her arms at the green draperies. "I'm going to pull the rest down anyway, though; that'll be fun," and she made a dash at it.

"No, no," said Polly, on her knees on the floor, "we must leave all that till Jasper comes back. Come, Alexia, help me look over these."

"Oh, bother!" cried Alexia, in great disdain, "I don't want to poke over those old things. You know yourself it's no earthly use; we'll never find it in all this world, Polly Pepper."

There was a queer little sound, and Alexia, whirling around, saw Polly Pepper in a little heap down in the middle of the green branches.

"Oh, misery! what have I done?"--rushing over to her and shaking her arms. "Oh, Polly, do get up, we will find it, I'm positively sure; do get up, Polly." But Polly didn't stir.

"Oh, dear me!" wailed Alexia. "Polly, please get up." She ran all around her, wringing her hands. "Oh, what did I say it for! Polly, Polly Pepper, we'll find it, as sure as anything. We can't help but find it. Polly, do get up."

She flung herself down on her knees and began to pat the white face. Polly opened her eyes and looked at her.

"What did you say such dreadful things for, Alexia?" she said reproachfully.

"Oh, I couldn't help it," exclaimed Alexia remorsefully. "There! Oh, dear me! you've scared me 'most to death, Polly Pepper. Do get up." So Polly sat straight, and Alexia fussed over her, all the while repeating, "We will find it, Polly."

"Dear me!" said Polly, "this isn't hunting for that ten-dollar bill."

"Well, what's the use?" began Alexia. "Oh, yes, of course we'll find it," she brought herself up quickly. "Now, Polly, I tell you." She sprang to her feet. "Let's clear a place in this corner"--and she rushed over to it--"and then pick up every branch and shake it, and put it over here. Then we'll know surely whether that horrid thing is on the floor or not."

"So we shall," cried Polly, getting up on her feet; "that's fine, Alexia!" And they set to work so busily they didn't hear when the boys came back from their search. But the first moment she saw Jasper's face, Polly knew that the hunt was unsuccessful, and the next minute Joel threw himself into her arms and hugged her closely.

"Oh, Polly," he sobbed, "it's gone, and it's my fault."

"Cheer up, old fellow," said Jasper, clapping him on the back; "we'll find it yet."

Van and Percy stood dismally by, knocking their heels against the arbor side, and feeling quite sure they should burst out crying in another minute, if Joel didn't stop.

Polly patted his poor head and cuddled it in her neck. "Oh, Joey, we'll find it," she said, swallowing a big lump in her throat; "don't cry, dear," while Alexia sniffed and wrung her hands, fiercely turning her back on them all.

"Now, boys," said Jasper, in his cheeriest fashion, "we'll all set to work on these vines that are left. Come on, now, and let's see who will work the fastest."

"I will," announced Van, rushing over to twitch down the green drapery that had been such a piece of work for the gardeners to put up. Percy said nothing, but set to work quietly, lifting each branch to peer under it.

"Take care," warned Jasper, pausing a minute in his own work to look over at Van's reckless fingers; "you must shake each one as you pull it down, before you throw it out on the grass, else we'll have all our work to do over again. Oh, Alexia, are you coming to help?"

"Of course I am," declared Alexia. "Oh, Van, what a piece of work you are making!"

Polly was whispering to Joel, "We ought to help," when Van gave a shout, "I've found it! I've found it!"

"Hurrah!" Jasper leapt down from the railing and plunged up in great excitement to Polly and Joel. "There, old fellow, what did I tell you?" he cried with glowing face, and clapping Joel on the back again.

"Phoh!" exclaimed Percy, in great contempt, "he hasn't, either; it's only a bit of green paper."

"I thought I had," said Van, quite crestfallen, and flinging down the dingy bit; "it looked just like it."

It was too much; and Joel, who had hopped out of Polly's lap, flung himself on the floor and cried as if his heart would break. They couldn't get him out of it, so Jasper just picked him up and marched off to the house with him to give him to Mother Fisher.

And the next morning, search as hard as they could--and everybody was hunting by that time--not a trace of the ten-dollar bill could be discovered. And Mrs. Chatterton took pains to waylay Joel in the hall or on the stairs at all possible opportunities, and ask him, with a smile at his swollen nose and eyes (for he had cried so he could hardly see), if he had found it yet. But these chances became very few, for it was Jasper's and Polly's very especial business to keep guard over Joel, and try to divert him in every way. Meantime the hunt went on. And the third day, when it became perfectly apparent to the entire household that the banknote was in such a clever hiding-place that no one could find it, Joel, his tears all gone, marched into Mr. King's writing-room and up to his big table, and without a bit of warning burst out:

"I want to sell tin!"

"Eh, what?" exclaimed the old gentleman, looking over his glasses. "What is that you are saying, Joey, my boy?"

"I want to sell tin," said Joel bluntly.

"Want to sell tin!" ejaculated old Mr. King, in amazement.

"Yes, sir, just like Mr. Biggs; he got lots of money. May I, Grandpapa? Please say I may." Joel ran around the writing-table to plant himself by the old gentleman's chair.

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Mr. King

Livros Grátis

(<http://www.livrosgratis.com.br>)

Milhares de Livros para Download:

[Baixar livros de Administração](#)

[Baixar livros de Agronomia](#)

[Baixar livros de Arquitetura](#)

[Baixar livros de Artes](#)

[Baixar livros de Astronomia](#)

[Baixar livros de Biologia Geral](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência da Computação](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência da Informação](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência Política](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciências da Saúde](#)

[Baixar livros de Comunicação](#)

[Baixar livros do Conselho Nacional de Educação - CNE](#)

[Baixar livros de Defesa civil](#)

[Baixar livros de Direito](#)

[Baixar livros de Direitos humanos](#)

[Baixar livros de Economia](#)

[Baixar livros de Economia Doméstica](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação - Trânsito](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação Física](#)

[Baixar livros de Engenharia Aeroespacial](#)

[Baixar livros de Farmácia](#)

[Baixar livros de Filosofia](#)

[Baixar livros de Física](#)

[Baixar livros de Geociências](#)

[Baixar livros de Geografia](#)

[Baixar livros de História](#)

[Baixar livros de Línguas](#)

[Baixar livros de Literatura](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura de Cordel](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura Infantil](#)
[Baixar livros de Matemática](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina Veterinária](#)
[Baixar livros de Meio Ambiente](#)
[Baixar livros de Meteorologia](#)
[Baixar Monografias e TCC](#)
[Baixar livros Multidisciplinar](#)
[Baixar livros de Música](#)
[Baixar livros de Psicologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Química](#)
[Baixar livros de Saúde Coletiva](#)
[Baixar livros de Serviço Social](#)
[Baixar livros de Sociologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Teologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Trabalho](#)
[Baixar livros de Turismo](#)