

Phebe, Her Profession - A Sequel to Teddy: Her Book

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Phebe, Her Profession

A Sequel to Teddy: Her Book

BY ANNA CHAPIN RAY

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CHAPTER ONE

"How do you do?"

The remark was addressed to a young man who roused himself from a brown study and looked up. Then he looked down to see whence the voice proceeded. Directly in his pathway stood a wee boy, a veritable cherub in modern raiment, whose rosy lips smiled up at him blandly, quite

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regardless of the sugary smears that surrounded them. One hand clasped a crumpled paper bag; the other held a rusty iron hoop and a cudgel entirely out of proportion to the size of the hoop.

"And how is everybody at your house?" the babe demanded. "Are vey pretty well?"

"Very well, thank you." The young man was endeavoring to remember where, during the two weeks he had spent in Helena, he had seen this child.

"So is my people," the boy explained politely. "It is a great while since I have seen you."

Amicably enough, the stranger accepted his suggestion of a past acquaintance.

"It is a good while. Where have you been keeping yourself?"

The atom tried to drop into step at his side, tangled himself in the long tails of his little coat, gave up the attempt and broke into a jog trot.

"My mamma wouldn't let me go to walk alone for 'most a monf."

"Why?"

"'Cause I used to stay a good while, and spend all my pennies at Jake's shop."

"Where is that?"

"Vat's where vey sells candy. I've got some now. Want some?" He rested the hoop against a convenient lamp-post and opened the bag invitingly.

"Thanks, no. You don't appear to have much to spare."

With a sigh of manifest relief, the child gathered up the crumpled top of the bag once more.

"I did have some," he explained; "but I gave half of it to a boy. Vat's what my Sunday-school teacher said I must do. And ven, by and by, I took his hoop," he added, as he resumed his march.

"Did your Sunday-school teacher tell you to do that?"

"No; but I just fought I would. He couldn't give me half of it, you see, for it wouldn't be good for anything if it was busted."

"No?" The stranger felt that the child's logic was better than his moral tone.

"I'm going to be good now, all ve time," the boy went on, looking up with an angelic smile. "When my mamma says 'No, Mac,' I shall say 'All right,' and when my papa smites me, I shall turn ve uvver also. Vat's ve way."

"Does he smite you?"

The smile vanished, as the child slowly nodded three times.

"Yes, awful."

"What did you do to make him smite you?"

Silence.

"What was it?"

The stranger's voice was not so stern as it might have been, and the smile came back and dimpled the child's cheeks, as he answered,--"Pepper in ve dining-room fireplace."

"What made you do that, you sinner?"

"A boy told me. You ought to have heard vem sneeze, and ven papa fumped me."

"Much?"

The child eyed him distrustfully,

"What for do you want to know?"

"Oh, because--you see, I used to get thumped, myself, sometimes."

"Yes, he fumped awful, and ven he stopped and sneezed, and I sneezed, too, and we all sneezed and had to stop."

"And then did you turn the other also?"

"No; I hadn't begun yet. I only sneezed a great deal, and papa said somefing about rooty ceilings."

In vain the stranger pondered over the last remark. He was unable to discover its application, and accordingly he passed to a more obvious question.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"What's yours?"

"Gifford Barrett."

"Mine is McAlister Holden."

"Um-m. I think I haven't met you before."

"You could if you'd wanted to, I live in ve brown house, and I've seen you lots of times. Once you 'most stepped on me."

"Did I? How did that happen?"

"You were finking of fings and got in my way."

"Was that it?"

"Vat's what my papa says, when I do it. He says I ought to look where I am going." The boy's tone was severe.

There was a pause, while Mac swung his hoop against a post. On the

rebound, it struck the stranger a sharp blow just under and back of the knees. He turned and glared at the child.

"I feel just as if I should like to say confound it," Mac drawled, twisting his pink lips with relish of the forbidden word.

"So should I. Suppose we do. But how old are you?"

"Most four."

"But little boys like you shouldn't say such words."

"My papa does; I heard him. My mamma puts soap in my mouf, when I do it," he added, with an artless frankness which appeared to be characteristic of him. Then abruptly he changed the subject. "Ve cook has gone, and mamma made such a funny pudding, last night," he announced. "It stuck and broke ve dish to get it out. Good-bye. Vis is where I live." And he clattered up the steps and vanished, hoop and all, through the front doorway, leaving the stranger to marvel at the precocity of western children and at the complexity of their vocabularies.

A week later, they met again, this time however not by accident. The young man had tried meanwhile to find out something about the child; but his sister whose guest he was, had moved to Helena only a month before, and she could furnish no clue to the mystery. His visit was proving a dull one; Mac had been vastly entertaining, so, for some days, the stranger had been watching in vain for another glimpse of the boy. At length, his efforts were rewarded. Strolling past the brown house, one morning, he became aware of a tiny figure sitting on the steps in the bright sunshine and wrapped from head to foot in a plaid horse-blanket.

"Good-morning, Mac!" he called blithely.

"How do you do?" The voice was a shade more subdued, to-day.

"Well. What are you doing?"

"Nofing much." The minor key was still evident.

"Are you sick?"

"No; 'course not."

"Playing Indian?"

Mac shook his head.

"What is the blanket for, then? It isn't cold, to-day."

The lips drooped, and the blue eyes peered out suspiciously from under their long lashes.

"I wants to wear it," he said, with crushing dignity.

"All right. Come and walk to the corner fruit stand with me."

The invitation was too tempting to be refused, and Mac scrambled to his feet. As he did so, the blanket slipped to one side. Swiftly Mac huddled it around him again; but the momentary glimpse had sufficed to show the

stranger a dark blue gown and a white apron above it.

"Why, I thought you were a boy!" he gasped, too astonished at this sudden transformation to pay any heed to Mac's probable feelings in the matter.

"So I are a boy."

"But you are wearing a dress."

Mac hung his head.

"I ran away," he faltered. "Vat's why."

The stranger tried to look grave. Instead, he burst into a shout of laughter.

"I think I understand," he said, as soon as he could speak. "You have to wear these clothes, because you ran away, and the blanket is to cover them up. What made you run away?"

"Aunt Teddy."

"Who?"

"My Aunt Teddy."

"Is it--a woman?" The stranger began to wonder if it were hereditary in Mac's family to confound the genders in such ways as this.

"Yes, she is my aunt; she's a woman, not an uncle."

"Oh. It's a curious name."

"Ve rest of her name is Farrington," Mac explained, pulling the blanket closer about his chubby legs, as he saw some people coming up the street toward him.

"And she made you run away?"

Mac nodded till his cheeks shook like a mould of currant jelly.

"What did she do?"

"Talk, and talk some more, all ve time. I want to talk some, and I can't. She eats her eggs oh natural."

"What? What does that mean?"

"Vout any salt. Vat's what she calls it, oh natural. I like salt."

"Don't you like grapes?"

"Yes."

"Let's get some."

Wrapped like an Indian brave, Mac started off down the street, his yellow and blue toga trailing behind him and getting under his feet at every step. His dignity, nevertheless, was perfect and able to triumph over

even such untoward circumstances as these, and he accepted the stranger's conversational attempts with a lofty courtesy which suggested a reversal of their relative ages. Just as the corner was reached, however, and the fruit stand was but a biscuit-toss away, he suddenly collapsed.

"Vere vey are!" he exclaimed.

"Who?"

"My mamma, and Aunt Teddy." And, turning, he scurried away as fast as his blanket would let him.

As he passed them, the young man gave a glance at the two women, swift, yet long enough to take in every detail of their appearance and stamp it upon his memory. The shorter one with the golden hair was evidently Mac's mother, not only because she was the older, but because the child's mischievous face was like a comic mask made in the semblance of her own gentle features. Her companion was more striking. Taller and more richly dressed, she carried the impression of distinctiveness, of achievement, as if she were a person who had proved her right to exist. Gifford Barrett's eyes lingered on her longer, at a loss to account for a certain familiarity in her appearance. Where had he seen her before? Both face and figure seemed known to him, other than in the relation of Mac's Aunt Teddy.

"I saw the small boy again, to-day," he told his sister, that night.

"Who? Your little Mac?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I decline to assume any responsibility for him, Kate. He passes my comprehension entirely. He looks like a cherub on a Della Robbia frieze and converses like the king of the brownies. I expect to hear him quote Arnold at any instant."

His sister laughed.

"I can't imagine who he can be," she said. "I wish you weren't going East so soon, Giff, and we would go on a tour of investigation. Such a child isn't likely to remain hid under a bushel; and, if I find him, I will let you know all about him. What is it, Jack?" she added, as her husband looked up from his paper with an exclamation of surprise.

"I've have been entertaining angels unawares,--in the next block, that is," he answered. "Listen to this: 'Mrs. Theodora McAlister Farrington, the novelist, who has been spending the winter with her sister, Mrs. Holden of Murray Street, left for her home in New England, to-night.'"

"Ah--h!" There was a sigh of content from across the table. "Now I have my bearings. My imp is Mac Holden and Mrs. Farrington is Aunt Teddy, of course. I met her in New York, last winter, at a dinner or two; but she evidently had forgotten me. Such is fame!"

"Which?" his sister inquired, as she rose to leave the table.

CHAPTER TWO

The Savins, glistening in its snowy blanket, wore an air of expectancy, the house on the corner below was being swept and garnished, while the cold twilight air was burdened with savory odors suggestive of feastings to come. Mrs. McAlister came back from a final survey of the corner house, made her eleventh tour of the parlor, dining-room and kitchen at The Savins, and then took her stand at the front window where she tapped restlessly on the glass and swayed the curtain to and fro impatiently. She was not a nervous woman; but to-night her mood demanded constant action. Moreover, it was only an hour and a quarter before the train was due. If she were not watchful, the carriage might come without her knowing it, and the occupants miss half their welcome home.

Framed in the soft, white draperies, her face made an attractive picture for the passer-by. Mrs. McAlister's girlhood had passed; a certain girlishness, however, would never pass, and her clear blue eyes had all the life and fire they had shown when, as Bess Holden she had been the leader in most of the pranks of her class at Vassar. The brown hair was still unmarked by grey threads and the complexion was still fresh and rosy, while in expression the face in the window below was far younger than the one peering out from the upper room, just above it.

Allyn McAlister was a graft on the family stock, in temperament, at least. Born into a genial, jovial, healthy family, his was the only moody nature there. His brother and sisters might be mischievous or even fractious; but they were never prone to have black half-hours. It was reserved for the youngest one of them all, Allyn McAlister, aged fifteen, to spell his moods with a capital M. His father was wont to say that Allyn was a mixture of two people, of two nameless, far-off ancestors. For days at a time, he was a merry, happy-go-lucky boy. Then, for some slight cause or for no cause at all, he retired within himself for a space when he remained dumb and glowered at the rest of the world morosely. Then he roused himself and emerged from his self-absorption into a frank crossness which wore away but slowly. A motherless childhood when he was alternately teased and spoiled by his older sisters and brother had helped on the trouble, and not even the wisdom of his father and the devotion of his stepmother could cure the complaint. At his best, Allyn was the brightest and most winning of his family; at his worst, it was advisable to let him severely alone. In the whole wide world, only two persons could manage him in his refractory moods. One was his father; the other was his sister Theodora, and Theodora had been in Helena, all winter long. However, she was coming home that night, and Allyn's nose grew quite white at the tip, as he pressed it against the windowpane, in a futile effort to see still farther up the street.

Theodora, meanwhile, sat watching the familiar landscape sweeping backward past the windows of the express train. She knew it all by heart, the low hillocks crowned with clusters of shaggy oaks still thick with unshed leaves, the strips of salt marsh with the haycocks like gigantic beehives, the peeps of blue sea, sail-dotted or crossed by a thin line of smoke, and the neat little towns so characteristic of southern New England. Impulsively she turned to her husband.

"Oh, don't you pity Hope, Billy?"

"What for?"

"To live out there. I suppose Archie's business makes it a necessity; but I do wish he would come back and settle down near us."

"He would be like a bull in a china shop, Teddy. Fancy Archie Holden, after having all the Rocky Mountains for his workshop, coming back and settling down into one of these bandboxy little towns! He is better off, out there."

"Perhaps. But isn't it good to get back again?"

He looked at her in some perplexity.

"I thought you were having such a good time, Ted."

"I was, a beautiful one; but I am so glad to see blue, deep water again. I was perfectly happy, while I was there; but now I feel as if I couldn't wait to be in our own home again, Billy, and gossip with you after dinner in the library. People are so in the way. It will be like a second honeymoon, with nobody to interrupt us."

He laughed at her enthusiasm.

"Old married people like us! But you will mourn for Mac, Ted; you know you will."

Forgetting the familiar landscape, she turned to face him with a laugh which chased all the dreaminess from her eyes.

"Billy Farrington! But did you ever know such a mockery of fate?"

"As Mac?"

"Yes, as Hope's having such a child?"

"It is a little incongruous."

"It is preposterous. Hope was always the meek angel of the household, and Archie is not especially obstreperous. But Mac--" Theodora's pause was expressive.

Billy laughed.

"He combines the face of an angel and the wisdom of a serpent," he remarked. "I don't know whether his morals or his vocabulary are more startling. Hope has her hands full; but she will find a way to manage him, even if she can't learn from her own childhood, as you could."

"Thank you, dear. Your compliments are always charming. Perhaps I wasn't an angel-child; but you generally aided and abetted me in my misdeeds. I do hope, though, that Mac will grow in grace before they come East, next summer."

Her husband glanced up, started slightly, then leaned back in his chair while a sudden look of amusement came into his blue eyes. The next moment, Theodora sprang up with a glad exclamation.

"Hu!"

The train had stopped, and a young man had come into the car, given a

quick look at the passengers and then marched straight to Mrs. Farrington's chair. Resting his hands on her shoulders, he bent down and laid his cheek against hers, and Theodora, regardless of the people about her, turned and cast herself into his arms. Tall and lithe and singularly alike in face, it scarcely needed a second glance to show that they were not only brother and sister, but twins as well. Moreover, in spite of Hubert's successful business life and Theodora's devotion to her husband, the twins were as necessary to each other as the blades of a pair of scissors.

"How well you are looking! Have you missed me? Aren't you glad to see us back? How are they all at home?" she demanded breathlessly.

Her brother laughed, as he shook hands with Billy.

"Steady, Ted! One at a time. You haven't lost your old trick of asking questions. We are all well, and I left the mother alternately peering out of the front window of our house and punching up the pillows on the couch in your library."

"And papa?"

"Splendid, and covered with glory for his last operation on the Gaylord child. It is the talk of the town."

Theodora's eyes flashed proudly.

"Isn't he wonderful? If he had never had a patient but Billy, he might have been content. I wish you could be half the man he is, Hu."

"I do my endeavors, Ted."

"Yes, and you are a boy to be proud of, even if you aren't a doctor," she answered. "You look as if the last five months had agreed with you."

"They have, for I didn't have anybody around to torment me, and I grew fat and sleek from day to day. How is Hope?"

"As well as is compatible with being Mac's mother."

"What is the matter with him? You didn't write much."

"No; for I knew you wouldn't believe the half of my tales. Hu, the boy is an imp."

"He combines the least lovely traits of Teddy and Babe," Mr. Farrington remarked gravely.

"I was never half so original and daring as he is," Theodora said regretfully. "My iniquities were trite; his are fresh from the recesses of his own brain. He is a cunning child, Hu, and a pretty one; but his ways are past finding out, and--"

"And, as I said, he favors his Aunt Teddy," her husband interposed.

Theodora decided to change the subject.

"How is Allyn?" she asked.

Hubert's face sobered.

"He is well."

"Is anything the matter with the boy?" Theodora demanded, for Allyn had always been her own especial charge, and her marriage had made no break in their relations. Allyn's home was as much at the corner house as at The Savins.

"No; only the world goes hard with him. He has needed you, Teddy. The rest of us rub him the wrong way. He has a queer streak in him. I wish I could get hold of him; but I can't."

"It is the cross-grained age," Theodora said thoughtfully. "He will come out all right."

"Perhaps; but meanwhile he is having a bad time of it, for he can't get on with any of the boys. He lords it over them, and then resents it and sulks, if they rebel. Where does he get it, Ted? We weren't like that."

"It is too bad," she said slowly; "but I'll see what I can do with him."

"He has needed you, Teddy; that is a fact. Even the mother can't get on with him as you do. You're going to stay at home now for a while; aren't you?"

"Yes; we are going to have a perfect honeymoon of quiet. We have wandered enough, and we don't mean to budge again for the next ten years. I am going to write, all day long; and, when twilight falls, Billy and I will draw our elbow chairs to the fire, and sit and gossip and nod over the andirons till bedtime. We haven't had an hour to ourselves for five months, and now we must make up for lost time."

Hubert laughed.

"You are as bad as ever. When do I come in?"

"On Sundays. I expect a McAlister dinner party, every Sunday night. Otherwise, four times a day. We have three elbow chairs, you know, and the hearth is a broad one."

"You haven't asked after Phebe," Hubert said, after a pause.

"What was the use? Billy had a letter from his mother, the day we left Helena, and I knew you would have had nothing later."

"But we have."

"What?"

"She sailed for home, to-day, on the Kaiserina."

"Hubert!"

"Theodora?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just that and no more."

"How did you hear?"

"A cable, to-day."

"But Mrs. Farrington said she was going to Italy."

"Perhaps she is."

"Not if she is coming home."

"She isn't."

Theodora looked mystified, as much at the ambiguity of the pronouns as at the fact itself.

"Babe is coming home alone," Hubert added.

"Is she ill?"

"Quite well, she says."

"Then what in the world is she coming for?" Theodora's tone expressed both indignation and incredulity.

"It passes my comprehension. What do you think, Billy?"

Mr. Farrington took off his hat and pushed back his red-gold hair. It was a trick he had, when he was worried or annoyed.

"I can't imagine," he said anxiously. "Mother has enjoyed Babe and she has written often of Babe's being happy over there. It seemed a pleasant thing for them both; and I am sorry to have the arrangement broken up. What has Babe written to you?"

"Constant ecstasies. She has been perfectly happy, and has chanted the praise of your mother for paragraphs at a time. I think there can't have been any trouble, or Babe would have told us. She isn't the one to disguise her feelings and spoil a story for relationship's sake."

Theodora sighed. Then she laughed.

"It is only another one of Babe's freaks," she said, with a blitheness which was meant for her husband's ear. "We must bide our time till she comes to explain herself. Did you ever know her to do what you expected of her?"

It was nearly dark when the train rolled in at the familiar station. The Farrington carriage was waiting, and beside it waited a grey-haired man in plain green livery. The travelers hailed him as Patrick, and he greeted them with a delight that was out of all keeping with the severe decorum of his manner of a moment before. Then, merry as a trio of children, they drove up the snowy streets, Theodora and Billy in wild rapture at the thought of being at home once more, Hubert more quiet, but none the less happy in the prospect of having his sister within reach again.

They were to dine at The Savins, that night, and they drove directly there. The low red house rested unchanged on its hilltop where the

twilight was casting greyish shadows across the snow. Lights gleamed in all the windows; but no welcoming face was silhouetted against them. Upstairs, Allyn was restlessly pacing his room at the back of the house; below, a sudden fragrance of burning meats had sent Mrs. McAlister flying to the kitchen, and for an instant the travelers stood alone in the broad front hall, with no one to welcome them.

It was only for an instant, however. Dr. McAlister rushed out from his office, and Mrs. McAlister came running to meet them, to exclaim over them and lead them forward to the blazing fire. Then there was a thud and a bump, and Theodora was gripped tight in two strong boyish arms and felt a clumsy boyish kiss on her cheek, while she heard, not noisily, but quite low,--

"Oh, Teddy, you've come at last!"

CHAPTER THREE

Phebe McAlister sat on the floor beside an open trunk. Around her was scattered a pile of feminine mysteries, twice as bulky as the trunk from which they had come, and the bed was littered with gowns as varied in hue as in material. Pink chiffon met green broadcloth, and white silk and blue gingham nestled side by side with a friendly disregard of the fact that their paths in life would not often bring them together. The whole room was in a wild state of disarray. The only orderly object in it was Phebe herself.

A girl of the early twenties, perfect in health and in trim neatness, never lacks a certain attractiveness; but Phebe went beyond that. At a first glance, her features might be condemned as irregular, her eyes as too piercing, her lips and chin as too firm. The next moment, all that was forgotten. Phebe was rarely silent for more than one moment at a time. As soon as she spoke, her face lighted and became whimsical, piquant, merry, or fiery as suited her mood; and Phebe's friends were never agreed as to which of her moods was most becoming. Pretty she was not, beautiful she was not; but she was undeniably interesting, and at times brilliantly handsome.

She looked up, as Theodora came into the room.

"How do? Sit down," she said briefly.

"I came over to see if I couldn't help you with your unpacking," Theodora said, as she paused beside the trunk.

"Thank you, no. I can do it."

"But it is such a trial. I love to pack; but unpacking is always rather an anti-climax."

"I don't mind it," Phebe said calmly, while she sorted stockings industriously.

"Let me do that," Theodora urged.

"No; it might be a trial to you, and I really don't mind. Sit down and look at my photographs. They are in the third box from the top of the pile in the corner."

"Methodical as ever, Phebe?"

"I have to be. It takes too much time to sort out things. Your bureau drawers would give me a fit." Phebe rolled up her stockings with an emphatic jerk.

"It is no credit to you to be orderly, Babe; you were born so. I wasn't," Theodora said tranquilly, as she took up the photographs. "Billy's bump of order is large enough for both of us, though."

"I should think you would be terribly trying to him," Phebe remarked frankly.

"Poor old William! Perhaps I am; but he is considerate enough not to mention it."

Phebe rose to bestow an armful of clothing in a bureau drawer.

"He looks so well." she said. "I do wish his mother could see him. She worries about him even now, and gets anxious if the letters are delayed. If she could see him, she would leave that off. He is ever so much stronger than when we went away."

"Married life agrees with him. What is this, Babe? It isn't marked."

"It's the hotel at the foot of the Rigi, not a good picture, but I hadn't time to get any other."

"Was that where you left Mrs. Farrington?"

"Yes."

"What made you do it, Babe?"

"The Ellertons were there on their way home, and I could travel with them. I didn't care to cross half the continent alone, even if I am an American girl."

"No; I don't mean that. What made you come home now?"

"A declaration of independence," Phebe responded enigmatically.

Theodora looked anxious.

"But I hope you didn't hurt Mrs. Farrington's feelings, leaving her so suddenly after all she had done for you."

"I am not a child, Teddy, and I think you might trust me," Phebe answered, with an access of dignity.

"I do, dear; only I couldn't understand your coming home so abruptly, and I was afraid there might have been some trouble between you and Mrs. Farrington."

Phebe shook her head.

"No; Mrs. Farrington is an angel. You can't imagine how good to me she has been. She has always managed to make me feel that it was only for her own pleasure that she asked me to go with her. If I had been her own daughter, she couldn't have been more kind to me, and I know she was sorry to have me come away."

"Then why didn't you stay? Were you homesick, Babe?"

"Not for an hour; I'm not that kind. I missed you all; but I was very happy, and I knew you didn't need me here."

"What made you come home, then?"

Phebe pushed the gowns aside and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Teddy," she asked slowly; "that two years is a great while?"

"Yes; but what then? You were happy."

"I know; but it was a child's happiness, and I am a woman, twenty-two years old. It was lovely to wander over Europe, to wear pretty gowns and to meet charming people, and let Mrs. Farrington pay all the bills."

"But if she loved to do it, Babe? She did."

"Yes, she was fond of me," Phebe admitted; "and she wanted me to stay for one more year."

"I wish you had."

Phebe shook her head.

"I couldn't. At first, I thought it would be delightful, and all our plans were made. Then, one night, I couldn't sleep at all, for thinking about it. By morning, my mind was made up; and then,--"

"And then?" Theodora asked.

Phebe rose and bent over the trunk once more.

"And then I came home," she said quietly.

There was a long pause. Theodora was aimlessly turning over the photographs in her lap, while Phebe methodically packed away the contents of her trunk. The room was quite orderly again before either of the sisters spoke. Then Theodora asked,--

"What are you going to do now, Babe?"

"Study."

"Study what?"

"Medicine."

"Phebe McAlister!"

A sudden flash of merriment came into the shrewd eyes.

"That is my name," she observed. "Do you remember how you worked at Huntington's to get money for college? It is my turn now."

"I remember how you scolded me for it," Theodora responded tartly. "What has turned you to this whim, Babe?"

"It is no whim. It is a good profession, and other women no smarter than I, have succeeded in it."

"You are smart enough, Babe; it's not that. But why do you want to do anything of the kind?"

"What should I do? I sha'n't marry. Billy is the only man I ever liked. You took him, and you appear to be in rude health, so there is no chance for me. I must do something, Teddy, something definite. I can't potter round the house, all my days. The mother is housekeeper; I must have something more absorbing than dusting and salads and amateur photography to fill up my time."

Theodora laughed at the outburst. Then, as she sat looking up at her tall young sister, a sudden gentleness crossed her face. In their childhood, she and Phebe had always clashed. To-day, for the first time, she felt a full comprehension of the girl's point of view.

"Things are out of joint, Teddy," Phebe was saying. "It is all right for a boy to be restless and eager to find his place; but we girls must trot up and down one narrow path, all our days. Sometimes I don't mind it; but there come times when I want to knock down the fences and break away into a new track of my own, a track that goes somewhere, not a promenade. I want to have a goal and keep moving toward it, not swing this way and that like a pendulum. Europe was lovely, and Mrs. Farrington; but--I'm queer, Ted. There is no getting around the fact." Phebe brushed away a tear that hung heavy on her brown lashes.

Theodora held out her hand to her invitingly; but Phebe shook her head.

"No; I don't want to be cuddled, Ted; I'm not a baby. I want to be understood; that is all. You never can understand, though. You have Billy and your writing, more than your fair share, and you grew up into them both. You were foreordained. Other people are. I wish I were; but I'm not, and yet I want to work, to do something definite." She paused with a little laugh. "I said something about it once to some nice English girls I met at Lucerne. They seemed very all-round and energetic, and I thought they would understand. They just put their dear, rosy heads on one side and said, 'Oh, dear me, how very unusual!' Then I gave it up and kept still till I told Mrs. Farrington. She understood."

"Did she?"

"She always understands things. We talked it all over, and she agreed that it was best for me to come home."

"But how did you happen to choose medicine?"

"What else was there? Besides, I ought to inherit it, and papa ought to have some child follow him. Hubert didn't, and I must."

"What about Allyn?"

"He is too young yet to tell whether he will amount to anything or not. I don't believe he is the right kind, either. I am."

"How do you mean?" In spite of herself, Theodora laughed at the assurance in Phebe's tone.

"Oh, I have studied myself a good deal," she said with calm complacency. "I am not nervous, nor very sympathetic, and I think I could operate on people very nicely."

"Phebe!" This time, there was no concealment in Theodora's laugh.

"You needn't make fun of me," she said indignantly. "That helps along; papa says it does. I had a long talk with him, last night, after you and Billy went home."

"What did he say?"

"A good many things that there is no use in repeating," Phebe responded loftily.

"Wasn't he surprised?"

"Yes, as much as he ever is, at anything I do." For the moment, Phebe's sense of humor asserted itself. Then she grew grave again. "It is settled that I am to work with him till summer. Then, next fall, if I really want to go on with it, I am to go to Philadelphia to study there. Hope will be shocked, and Hu will make all manner of fun of me, I know. I do hope you and Billy will stand by me, Ted, and believe it is not a schoolgirl whim, but a real wish to find some work and do it."

Theodora rose and stood beside her sister.

"I do believe it, dear," she said. "I know how I feel about my own work and how I want to succeed in it, for all your sakes. Only, Phebe, the time may come when you will be ready to put your profession, not in the first place, but in the second."

But Phebe shook her head.

"No; I am not that kind, Ted. I'm queer, they all say, and I think my work will always come first. Mrs. Farrington tried to make a society woman of me; but it was no use."

"William Farrington!" Theodora said, that night.

"Yes, madame."

"Once upon a time, there was a girl who came down out of a tree, and took a boy to bring up. That's us, Billy, and I always have supposed that my hands were full with training you. Now I have discovered that they are not."

"Is it a new story?" her husband asked, dropping his book and looking at her expectantly.

"Alas, no! No such luck. I came home with a dozen plans for work

simmering in my brain; but I must put them back and let them parboil themselves for a while longer. My family are demanding my whole attention."

"What now?"

"Sisterly confidences. It is funny, Billy; but it is rather distracting to my work. Allyn took me to walk, this morning, and told me the tragic tale of his first love affair. It was Lois Hawes, and it ended most unromantically. He helped her to get ready for the prize speaking, last month, and then she took the prize away from him and neglected to mention that he had coached her. Now he rages at the whole race of girls and says he won't finish his term of dancing school."

"That is unwise of him," Mr. Farrington commented, "Did you bring him to a better way of thinking?"

"I wrestled with him; but he was still proclaiming that 'girls aren't any good,' so I beat a retreat."

"He needs a girl to bring him up, as you brought me," Billy remarked.

"There aren't many who would dare attack Allyn," Theodora said, laughing. "I had you at my mercy; you couldn't escape. Allyn can fight and run away; that makes him doubly dangerous. He does fight, too. He is a dear boy, Billy; but I honestly think that, if he goes on, he won't have a friend left in town. He is a veritable porcupine, and his quills are always rising."

"He has the worst of it. But I do wish you needn't worry about him, Ted"

"I don't really worry; only I wish more people knew the other side of the boy. But now prepare yourself for a shock. It is Babe, this time. She is going to study medicine."

"What!"

"Yes. She came home for that."

"Phebe a doctor! She is about as well fitted for it as for a--plumber."

"So I think; but to hear her talk about it, one would think her whole aim in life was wholesale surgery. She appears to revel in grim details of arteries and ligaments. The fact is, she is restless and wants some occupation, and this seems to appeal to her."

"I believe I know how she feels. I went through something the same experience, my last year in college," Billy said thoughtfully. "It is a species of mental growing pains; one wants to do something, without knowing just what. I don't believe Babe will ever write M.D. after her name, and I devoutly hope she won't kill too many people in trying for it; but the study will be good for her. She has played long enough, and a little steady grind will help her to work off some of her extra energy. Let her go on."

Theodora rose and stood leaning on the back of his chair.

"You are such a comfort, Billy," she said gratefully. "I was afraid you would be horrified at the idea, and feel that Phebe didn't appreciate all

your mother has done for her. It was a great deal for her to take a young girl like Babe for two years, and give her the best of Europe. Babe knows it, and she almost reveres your mother." She was silent for a moment. Then she said impetuously, "Billy, are my family too near?"

"Of course not. Why?"

"Are they too much in evidence? We belong to each other, you and I; I want you all to myself, and it seems as if my people were always coming in to interrupt us,—not they themselves, but worries about them. I love them dearly, and I want them; but I could be content on a desert island alone with you. I never have half enough of you, and sha'n't, as long as I have to bring up Allyn and Phebe and Hubert. Your family are well-behaved; they stay in the background."

"They may crop up unexpectedly," Mr. Farrington answered, in a burst of prophecy of whose truth he was unconscious. "But what about the book, Teddy? It is time you were at work."

Theodora clasped her hands at the back of her head and began to pace the floor. Her step was as free and lithe as that of an active boy; and her pale gown brightened the color in her cheeks and in the glossy coils of her hair. Her husband looked up at her proudly. They had been comrades before they had been lovers; and, from the day of their first meeting to the present hour, his admiration and his loyalty had been boundless and unswerving. Suddenly she paused before him.

"William," she said; "I am lazy, utterly lazy. It is so good to be at home again and keeping house all by our two selves that I want to enjoy myself for a space. For a month, a whole month longer, I am going to play and have the good of life. Then I shall shut myself up and say farewell to the world while I create a masterpiece that will rend your heart and your tear glands. Only," she dropped down on a footstool beside him; "only I do hope that Allyn and Babe will return to their wonted habits, and that this new cook will learn that one doesn't usually mash macaroni before bringing it to the table. If it were not for the souls and the digestions of our families, Billy, we could all produce great works."

CHAPTER FOUR

Theodora Farrington's saving grace lay in her sense of humor. It had saved her from many dangers, from none more insidious than that lurking in five years' experience as a successful author. It had rescued her from the slough of despond when unappreciative publishers rejected her most ambitious attempts; it had come to her aid also when a southern admirer whose intentions were better than his rhetoric, sent her a manuscript ode constructed in her honor. She had won success in her profession; but she had won it at the expense of some hard knocks. But, however much the world might be awry, two people had never lost faith in her talent. To her father and her husband, to their encouragement and their belief in her future, Theodora owed her best inspiration.

For the past year, she had forsaken her inky way and given herself up to a well-earned rest, wandering from Mexico to Alaska and back again to Helena. Now that she was settled in her home once more, the spirit of

work was lacking. Theodora was domestic, and she found it good to take up her household cares again, so for a month after her return she turned a deaf ear to her publisher while she and her husband revelled in their coming back to humdrum ways much as a pair of children play at housekeeping. Then Theodora's conscience asserted itself, with the discouraging result that she became undeniably cross and, over his paper of an evening, Billy watched her in respectful silence. Past experience had taught him what this portended.

Two days later, Theodora came to luncheon with unruffled brow. Across the table, her husband looked at her inquiringly.

"Under way, Teddy?"

"Yes, at last."

"I'm glad. I do hope nothing will interrupt you."

"Something will; it always does. Fortunately it is Lent and not much is stirring. Anyway, I mean to have my mornings free, whatever comes."

"I'll mount guard on the threshold, if you want," he responded.

Only a week afterward, Theodora was in her writing-room, hard at work. Her desk, surmounted by a shabby photograph of her husband in his boyhood, was orderly and deserted; but the broad couch across the western window was strewn with sheets of manuscript which overflowed to the floor, while in the midst of them Theodora sat enthroned, a book on her knee and her ink insecurely poised on one of the cushions beside her. Across the lawn she could see The Savins among the tall, bare trees, and she paused now and then to watch the yellow sunshine as it sifted down through the branches. All at once she stopped, with a frown.

"But I must see her," Allyn was saying sharply.

"She is busy."

"Never mind; she will see me."

There was a word or two more; then a silence, and Theodora returned to her interrupted sentence. The next minute, she started abruptly, as she heard a boyish fist descend on the panels of her door.

"Go away! Oh, my ink!" she exclaimed. "Please let me alone. It's all tipped over."

"I'm sorry, Ted; but I must come." And Allyn stalked into the room.

"Oh, what do you want?" she asked despairingly, as she took up the dripping pillow by the corners and looked about for a suitable place to deposit it.

"Throw it out of the window," he suggested briefly. "I didn't mean to, Teddy; but there's a row, and I must tell you."

She shut down the window sharply. Then she turned to look at him, and of a sudden the annoyance vanished from her face and in its place there came a new expression gentler and of a great protecting love. Years before, in his invalid boyhood, her husband had known that look. Of late, no one but

Allyn had called it forth. To-day there was need for it, for Allyn was in evident want of sympathy. His cheeks were flushed; but there was a white line around his lips, and his hands, like his voice, were unsteady. He was short and slight, with a mass of smooth brown hair and brown eyes that for the moment had lost all their merriment and were sternly sombre under their straight brows. His chin was firm; but his lips were not so full of decision.

Swiftly Mrs. Farrington gathered up her papers and shut them into her Desk. Then she turned abruptly, laid her hands on the boy's shoulders and looked straight down into his eyes.

"What is it, Allyn?" she asked gravely.

For an instant his lips quivered. Then he said briefly,--

"I'm expelled, Teddy."

"Allyn!"

"Yes, I know."

"Not really?"

She read confirmation in his eyes.

"What for?" she demanded.

"For insulting Mr. Mitchell."

"What did you say?"

"I told him what I thought of him, and he didn't like it."

Theodora frowned at the tone of boyish bravado.

"Allyn," she said steadily; "tell me, what you have done."

"I told him he was a great deacon," the boy said hotly; "and I'm glad I did it, too. He ought to know what we think of him. He goes to church every Sunday, with a long face on him; and, all the rest of the week, he bullies the fellows."

"At least, you think he does," Theodora amended.

"He does," Allyn returned fiercely. "He is a coward, too, and never goes for our crowd; but takes boys like Jamie Lyman, stupid, shabby little milksops that don't dare stand up to him. It isn't their fault that they are dunces, and he ought to know it. I told him so."

Theodora looked perplexed.

"Sit down, Allyn," she said. "I want to talk this over quietly. Does papa know?"

"No; it's only just now, and I came straight to you. I thought perhaps you would help me tell him. I'm sorry, Ted, honestly sorry; but there wasn't anything else to do."

Up to this moment, Theodora had been trying to hold on to the threads of her interrupted chapter. Now she dropped them entirely, as she rested her arm on Allyn's shoulder.

"I am glad to have you tell me things," she said. "Now make a clean breast of it, Allyn."

And Allyn did make a clean breast of it, sparing nothing of the detail of weeks of petty tyranny. It was a story which fortunately is rare in these latter days, a story of a nervous, toadying teacher who vented his bad temper in those directions where there was least chance of its rousing a just resentment.

"I couldn't help it, Ted," he said at length. "I've no sort of use for Jamie Lyman; he lisps and he has warts, and he hasn't the pluck of a white rat. He looks like one, anyhow, with his tow head and his little pinky eyes. I told Mr. Mitchell it was a shame. He talked a good deal, and I suppose I did. We both were pretty mad, and then he told me I must take it back, or else get out. I couldn't take it back, so I walked off."

In the boy's excitement, the words came tumbling over each other and his brown eyes lighted. Then they grew dull again, as his sister spoke.

"I am sorry about it, Allyn," she said slowly; "sorry for you, because you must go back and apologize."

"I won't."

"I think you'll have to. There isn't any other way."

"But it was all true."

"Perhaps so. I am not sure. I know you meant to stand up for the right side; still, you must apologize to Mr. Mitchell, all the same."

The boy stared at her reproachfully.

"But I thought you would understand, Ted."

"I do, dear. If I didn't understand quite so well, I shouldn't be so sure what you ought to do. When I was your age, I was always getting into just such scrapes as this, simply because I used to burn up all my powder without taking aim. All the good it did, was to show up the weak spots of my position. Go slow, Allyn, and don't be so ready to fight. It never does any good."

"But I wasn't going to sit still and let him bully that little baby," Allyn argued.

"No; but you needn't have tried to bully him in your turn," his sister answered promptly, though in her heart of hearts she was in perfect sympathy with her young brother. She gloried in his fearlessness, even while she told herself that he must submit to discipline. "It wasn't your place to tell Mr. Mitchell what he ought to do. He is an older man, and he may have reasons that you don't know. He is not accountable to you, Allyn, and his judgment may be better than yours. Moreover, you owe him obedience, and the McAlisters always pay their debts."

"Have I got to eat humble pie and go back, Teddy?"

"You've got to eat humble pie," she said, as a laughing note crept into her voice when she thought of Jamie Lyman, insignificant and warty cause of such a storm. "About your going back, that is for papa to say, dear. I think you ought to do it."

"I hate that school!" he muttered restively.

"Why?"

"Don't like the fellows."

"What is the matter with them?"

"Foolish."

"Try the girls, then."

"They're worse."

"Hm." Theodora mused aloud. "Given ten boys: if nine of them all like each other, and the tenth doesn't like any of them, where does the trouble lie? Allyn you are getting cranky."

"Maybe so; but I can't help it."

"Yes, you can, too. Do you know, you need a chum."

A sudden flash of fun came into Allyn's eyes.

"What's the matter with you, Ted?"

"Me? I'm too old. Besides, I am producing literature."

"And I interrupted," he said penitently, for he took much satisfaction in his sister's work.

"No; at least, not much. I want you to tell me things, Allyn. We have always been chums, and I should be a good deal jealous of any one else."

"But I don't want any one else. What's the use?"

"Yes, you want somebody to antic with, while I am busy, just as I have Billy, somebody of your own age, only you must always like me best. Now come over to see if papa is in his office and talk things over with him. He can advise you a good deal better than I can, Allyn; but, this time, I think I know about what he will say." And she did.

It took more than an hour for Dr. McAlister to explain to his young son the difference between independence and anarchy. There was a fearlessness in the boy's point of view that roused his father's admiration, and more than once he was forced to turn away to hide his amusement at Allyn's disclaimers of anything like personal affection for Jamie.

"Jamie!" he said, in one final outburst. "Jamie! Fifteen years old, and calls himself Jamie! If he'd only brace up and be Jim, there'd be some sort of hope for him."

The result of the discussion was the doctor's sending Allyn back to

apologize and take his old place in the school once more, while he sat himself down to write a plain note to the master. Theodora, meanwhile, went in search of Mrs. McAlister. She found her in her own room, humming contentedly to herself over the family mending. Forgetful of her years and her inches, Theodora cast herself down on the floor at her stepmother's feet.

"Whatever made you do it?" she asked without preface.

"Do what?"

"Marry papa."

"Because--well, because he asked me."

"You never would have done it, if you had seen us first," Theodora responded half whimsically, half discontentedly. "Hope and Hubert are all right; but the rest of us are enough to turn your hair white. I was bad enough; and now Phebe is forsaking the world and taking to skeletons, and Allyn is at war with the whole human race, including Mr. Mitchell. Well, Phebe, what now?"

"I heard my name and thought I'd come and take a hand in the discussion," Phebe announced, as she strolled into the room. "Have I done anything you don't like? If I have, just mention it."

"Nothing more than usual," Theodora said, laughing. "Goodness me, Babe! What's that?"

"What's what?" Phebe cast an apprehensive glance behind her.

"In your hand?"

"That? Oh, that's my tibia. I was studying where it articulates into the fibula. It's ever so nice. Just see the cunning little grooves."

"Booh!" Theodora laughed, even in her disgust. "I am not weak-minded, Babe, but those things do not appeal to me."

"Every one to his taste," Phebe said loftily. "I like bones better than Browning, myself. Isabel St. John thinks she will be a nurse."

"Then you can hunt in pairs," Theodora commented irreverently. "I pity the patient. Do you really like this sort of thing, Babe?"

Phebe rested her cheek meditatively against the upper end of her tibia.

"Yes, of course; or else I shouldn't be doing it. Bones, that is, dead ones, are nice and neat; and I don't think I should mind setting live ones. Of course it isn't going to be all bones; but I suppose even literature has its disagreeable sides."

"Yes," Theodora assented, with a passing memory of the pillow reposing on the lawn outside her window. "After all, Babe, I think you lack the real artist's devotion to your work. Even mumps ought to be beautiful in your eyes and meningitis a delight to your soul. The day will come that you will give up medicine and take a course in plain cooking, now mark my words."

"Thanks; but I prefer tibias to tomatoes," Phebe responded. "When I am the great Dr. McAlister, you will change your tune."

"There will never be but one great Dr. McAlister," Theodora answered loyally. "No, mother, I must not stay to lunch, not even if Babe would grill her tibia for me. Billy gets very grumpy, if I leave him alone at his meals. Good-bye, Babe. Don't let anything happen to your grooves."

She went away with a laugh on her lips; but the laugh vanished, as she went up to her writing-room once more and paused for a moment before her closed desk. Then her face cleared, as she hurriedly put herself into Billy's favorite gown and ran down the stairs to meet him in the hall. The woes of book-making and the worries of her family never clouded Theodora's welcome to her husband.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Teddy, did you ever hear me say anything about Gertrude Keith?"

"Why--yes. Wasn't she the cousin who married Harry Everard?"

"Your memory does you credit." Mr. Farrington's eyes belied his bantering tone.

"What about her?"

"Nothing about her. She died, the year before we were married, and left Harry with this one daughter. He has had a housekeeper since then; but the housekeeper took unto herself a husband, a third one, a month ago. Now Harry has been having pneumonia and is ordered to southern France for a while, and he wants to know if the child can come to us."

"What?" Theodora's tone was charged with consternation.

"Isn't it awful? And yet I am sorry for him. We're the nearest relatives the child has except Joe Everard, and naturally she can't be left to the mercies of a bachelor uncle. What shall we do, Ted?"

For one short instant, Theodora stared into the fire. Then she looked up into her husband's blue eyes.

"Take her, of course," she said briskly.

Mr. Farrington had never outgrown certain of his lover-like habits. Now he stretched his hand out to hers for a minute.

"You're a comfort, Ted," he said. "I hated to refuse Harry, for his letter was a blue one. Will she be horribly in the way?"

"No; I sha'n't let her," Theodora answered bluntly. "Don't worry, Billy; we shall get on, I know. Have you ever seen her?"

"Once, when she was in the knitted-sock stage of development. She wasn't at all pretty then."

"How old is she now?"

"Hear what her father saith." And Mr. Farrington took a letter from his breast pocket. Its creases showed signs of the frequent readings it had received that day. As he said, he had disliked to refuse the request of his old friend; but he disliked still more to burden his wife with this new care which would be such an interruption to her work. Moreover, the girl would be in his own way.

"Cicely is just sixteen now," he read, "a bright, sunny-tempered child, and, I hope, not too badly spoiled. You will find her perfectly independent and able to shift for herself; all I want is to have her under proper chaperonage. I should take her with me; but the doctor has forbidden my having the care, and I hate to put the child into a boarding-school."

Theodora laughed, as her husband paused for breath.

"The paternal view of the case, Billy. Cicely is a nice, demure little name; but I suspect that the young woman doesn't quite live up to it. Still, I believe I would rather have an independent damsel than a shrinking one. She will be more in my line."

"But do you think you ought to try it, Teddy?" her husband remonstrated. "Won't it be too hard for you? I can just as well tell Harry to put her into a school."

For one more instant, Mrs. Farrington wavered. Then she saw the frown between her husband's brows, a frown of anxiety, not of discontent.

"No; it will be good for us, Billy. We are getting too staid, and we need some child-life in the house. We can try the experiment, anyway; and it will be easy enough to pack her off to school, after we have grown tired of her. Will you write, to-night?"

"If you are sure you think best."

"I do; and perhaps I'd better put a note into your letter. It may make Harry feel easier about leaving the child with strangers. He will find it hard enough, anyway."

She crossed the room to her desk, to write the letter which was to bring new courage to the anxious, exiled invalid. Suddenly she turned around, with her pen in mid air.

"Billy, the hand of fate is in this. The girl may be just what Allyn needs."

"Ye--es; only it is within the limits of possibility that they may fight."

"Then they will have to make up again, living in such close quarters as this. Besides, that kind of fighting isn't altogether unhealthful. I believe the whole matter is foreordained for Allyn's good."

"It is an optimistic view of the case that wouldn't have occurred to me, Ted. Still, we'll hope for the best."

Valiantly she took his advice and hoped for the best, while she busied

herself about the details of receiving her new charge. March was already some days old, and it had been decided that Cicely should arrive on the twentieth, so the time was short. In the midst of her domestic duties, Theodora found time for some hours of writing, each day, for she had a well-founded fear lest the new arrival might be of little help to the cause of light literature. In the intervals, she and Billy discussed the invasion of their hearthstone from every possible point of view; but as a rule the ridiculous side of the situation prevailed and they had moments of wild hilarity over the coming demands on their dignity.

"Uncle William!" Theodora observed, one day. "It suggests a scarlet bandanna and an ivory-headed cane. She will probably embroider you some purple slippers next Christmas too."

"No matter, so long as she doesn't undertake to choose my neckties. Never mind, Ted; the uncertainty will soon be over. She comes, to-morrow."

"I wonder what she really is like," Theodora said slowly. "Paternal testimony doesn't count for much, and I am beginning to be a little alarmed at what I may have undertaken. Independent and not too badly spoiled are not reassuring phrases, Billy."

"Her mother was as staid as a church, and Harry is sobriety itself, so the girl can't have inherited much original sin from either of them. Independent from Harry's point of view doesn't mean the same thing that it would from yours. She probably is a mild-mannered little product of the times."

"I don't know just what I do want," Theodora sighed. "One minute, I hope she will be a modest violet; the next, I am in terror lest she be too insipid. What are girls of that age like, Billy? It is years since I have known any of them. Just now, I am in doubt whether I may not shock her even more than she will shock me. The modern girl is a staid and decorous creature, I suspect; not such a tomboy as I was."

Late the next afternoon they both drove to the station to meet their new relative. In spite of herself, as the time came nearer, Theodora was inclined to treat the whole affair as an immense joke; but her husband had misgivings. Theodora was fitted to cope with any girl he had ever known; but he feared she might find the process more wearing than she anticipated.

"I beg your pardon, but is this Mr. Farrington?"

Both Theodora and Billy started and whirled around. In the rush of incoming passengers, they had been looking for some one smaller, more childish than this tall girl who stood before them. She was not at all pretty. Her brown hair was too straight and lank and light, and her grey eyes had a trick of narrowing themselves to a line; but her expression was frank and open, and she wore her simple grey suit with an air which spoke volumes for her past training. Across her arm hung a bright golf cape with a tag end of grey fur sticking out from the topmost folds.

"Are you Cicely?" Mr. Farrington inquired.

"Yes, and I suppose you are Cousin William. Papa said I'd know you by your hair." She caught herself, with a sudden blush. "Oh, I don't mean that," she added hastily; "I think red hair is just lovely, only it is rather uncommon you know."

Mr. Farrington laughed.

"Yes, fortunately," he remarked.

Cicely eyed him askance for a moment; then she too burst out laughing, while two deep dimples appeared in her cheeks and a queer little pucker came at the outer corners of her eyes. There was something so fresh, so heartily frank about her that Theodora felt a sudden liking for the girl, a sudden homesick twinge for her own healthy girlhood.

"There, I have made another of my speeches!" Cicely was saying, with a contrition that was only half mockery. "I'm always doing it, and you will have to put up with it. But truly I don't mind red hair, as long as it doesn't curl; and I hadn't any idea of being rude."

"Mine is tolerably straight, and I'm not very sensitive about it now for I have had it for some time," Billy observed gravely. "Cicely, this is your Cousin Theodora."

The girl turned around and stretched out her hand eagerly.

"Oh, I am so glad to be with you!" she said. "It seems to me I've loved you always, just from your books. You are so good to let me come to you. Am I going to be very much in the way? I'll try to be very good, just as good as I know how."

"And not be homesick?" Theodora asked laughingly, as she took Cicely's hand in both of hers.

Instantly the grey eyes clouded.

"I'll try not," Cicely answered. "I know I shall be happy, only--I wish papa needn't go so far away. We are all there are, you know, only Uncle Joe." Her lips quivered a little, as Theodora bent down to kiss them.

"Never mind, dear," she said. "It won't be for so very long, and I hope you can be happy with us, even if we are strangers to you. Can't Cousin Will take some of your things?"

"Oh, no; I've only this cape, and there's no need of disturbing Billy," Cicely replied, too absorbed in rubbing away a stray tear or two to heed the glance of astonishment exchanged between her new relatives at the unexpected freedom of her use of Mr. Farrington's name.

Seated in the carriage, all three were conscious of an awkward pause. Cicely broke it.

"Cousin Will, don't you feel as if you had a white elephant on your hands?" she asked so unexpectedly that Theodora blushed and wondered if the girl had been reading her thoughts.

"No; only a grey one. I confess you are larger than I expected to see you. When I met you before, you could have been packed into a peck basket."

"They say I was a good baby," Cicely said reflectively; "they always emphasize the word _baby_, though, and that hurts my feelings."

"You cried a great deal, and you spent half your energy in trying to eat your own toes. You wore worsted slippers then," Billy answered, amused at a certain off-hand ease that marked her manner. "Perhaps you have improved since then."

"I hope so; but there may be room for it, even now," she returned, laughing.

"Are you going to miss your old friends too much, Cicely?" Theodora asked. "I have a young brother about your age."

"Really? I didn't know that. Is he near you?"

"Next door."

"I'm so glad, for I like boys. I have always been used to them, not flirty; papa wouldn't allow that, but just good friends." Cicely's manner showed her constant association with older people. She and her father had been always together, and their companionship had left its mark upon her. There was no trace of shyness in her manner, no hesitation in taking her share in the conversation. She was perfectly frank, perfectly at ease, yet perfectly remote from any suggestion of pertness. She only assumed it quite as a matter of course that it was worth while to listen to her. "Is your brother like you?"

"No; not really. But you can see for yourself, for he promised to call on you, this evening." Theodora prudently forbore to mention that she had obtained Allyn's promise only at the expense of much coaxing and some bribery.

"That will be good," Cicely remarked with satisfaction. "Papa always says that boys are good for girls; they keep you from getting priggish and conceited. They take all that out of you. What is your brother's name?"

"Allyn."

"I'm glad it is something out of the usual run. Have you some sisters?"

"One, at home."

Cicely clasped her hands contentedly.

"I didn't know I was coming into a whole family. I supposed I should just have to get along with you and Billy--not but what you'd have been enough," she added hastily, as this time she caught the glance exchanged between Theodora and her husband; "only it is rather good to have some young people within reach. Still, it isn't going to be all play for me. Papa wants me to keep up my practice, and that takes five hours a day."

"What kind of practice?" Theodora asked, as the carriage stopped at the steps.

"Piano. I play a good deal. Oh, what a dear place this is! Am I going to live here?" And she ran lightly up the steps, too eager to hear Billy's despairing,--

"Ted! Five hours of strumming, every day! What will you do?"

Or Theodora's laughing reply,--

"I can forgive that, Billy; but it is still rankling within me that we are no longer young. Alas for our vanished youth!"

"Alas for the frankness of childhood, you'd better say," Billy responded.

Inside the broad hall, Cicely walked up to the blazing fire and rested one slim foot on the fender for a moment. Then she bent down and carefully unrolled the cape. The tag end of grey fur stirred itself; there was a little growl, a little bark, and a little grey dog squirmed out of his nest and went waddling away across the rug.

"Mercy on us! What's that?" Theodora gasped, as the little creature shook himself with a vehemence which fairly hoisted him off his hind legs, then flew at the nearest claw of the tiger skin and fell to worrying it.

"That?" Cicely's tone was tinged with a pride almost maternal. "That's Billy. He is a thoroughbred Yorkshire. Isn't he a dear?"

CHAPTER SIX

"Do you know where Billy is?" Theodora asked, coming into the library, one evening.

Cicely glanced up from her book.

"He was here, just a few minutes ago."

"Patrick wants him."

"Who?"

"Patrick."

Cicely looked surprised and closed her book.

"What does Patrick want of him, Cousin Theodora?"

"Why, really, Cicely, he didn't tell me. Did you say he was here just now?"

"Yes, the last I saw of him, he was asleep under the piano."

"Cicely! Oh, you mean the dog."

"Yes. Don't you?"

"No; I meant my husband."

"Oh, I haven't seen him since dinner." And Cicely tranquilly returned to her book, while Theodora departed in search of Mr. Farrington.

"Cicely," she said, when she came back again; "I am sorry; but I am afraid Billy's name will have to be changed."

"Which?" Cicely inquired, as her dimples showed themselves.

"Yours. Mine is the older and has first right to the name. Do you mind, dear? It is horribly confusing and it startles me a little to hear that my husband is asleep under the piano."

The girl laughed, while she tossed her book on the table.

"As startling as it was to me, this noon, when you said my dog was putting on his overcoat in the front hall. It doesn't seem to work well, this duplicating names. What shall we call him,--the puppy, I mean?"

"Melchisedek, without beginning and without end, because his tail and ears are docked," came from the corner.

"Oh, are you there, Babe?"

"Yes, I had some studying to do, and they were too noisy at home, so I came over here. I'm through now, so I am going home. Cicely, I wish you would let me see how many vertebra there are left in Billy's tail. I think he hasn't but one. That is butchery, not surgery, for it doesn't leave him enough to waggle." And Phebe gathered up an armful of books and took her departure.

Silence followed her going. Theodora had dropped down on the couch before the fire and lay staring at the coals. For the moment, she was forgetful of the girl sitting near her, forgetful even of her story which was pressing upon her insistently, yet eluding her just as insistently. In certain moods, she loved the old willow couch. It had played a large part in her girlhood; and now at times it was good to turn her back upon the present and think of the days when, after the memorable Massawan Bridge disaster, Billy Farrington's boyhood had been largely spent upon that lounge and in that library, while she had brought the fresh zest of her work and her play and all her gay girlish interests into his narrow life. Her father's skilful treatment had laid the foundations for the cure which the years had completed, until to-day her husband was as strong a man as she could hope to see. Year after year, her life had grown better and brighter; yet she loved to linger now and then over the good old days. She pressed her cheek into the cushion, and her lids drooped to keep the modern actual scene from destroying the old-time imaginary one.

"Tired, Cousin Ted?" Cicely had dropped down on the couch beside her.

"Not a bit."

"Worried?"

"No, indeed."

"I was afraid something was wrong, you were so quiet." The girl bent over and fell to touching Theodora's hair with light fingers. Suddenly she stooped and snuggled her face against Theodora's cheek. "Oh, I do love to cuddle you," she said impulsively. "I hope you don't mind. Papa used to let me; I wonder if he doesn't miss it sometimes."

Putting out her arm, Theodora drew the girl down at her side.

"Are you homesick, Cicely?"

"For papa, not for anything else. If he were here, or even well, I should be perfectly happy here. Only, Cousin Theodora--"

"Well?"

"Are we very much in the way, Billy and I? We don't belong here, I know; and it isn't our doing that we came. Are you sorry that we are here?"

"No. I am glad to have you with us, Cicely."

Theodora spoke the truth. In some strange fashion she had grown unaccountably fond of Cicely during the past four weeks. The girl was no saint; she was only a clean-minded, healthy young thing, born of good stock, trained by a wise father who believed that, even at sixteen, his tall daughter was still a child, not a premature society girl. He insisted upon plain gowns and a pigtail, upon hearty exercise and wholesome friendships with boys as well as with girls. So far as lay in his power, he had taught Cicely "to ride, to row, to swim, to tell the truth and to fight the devil," and the result was quite to the liking of Billy and Theodora. They enjoyed Cicely's irresponsible fun and her frank expressions of opinion; they enjoyed the atmosphere of ozone that never failed to surround her; they even confessed, when they were quite by themselves, to a sneaking sense of enjoyment in her rare flashes of temper. True, it was not always helpful to Theodora to be roused from her work by the monotonous _er-er, er-er_ of scales and five finger exercises, and there were moments when she wondered if pianos were never built with only a soft pedal and that lashed into a position which would entail chronic operation. There were moments when the house jarred with the slamming of doors and echoed to the shouts of a high, clear young voice; and there were hours and hours when Melchisedek, as he was now to be called, whimpered without ceasing outside her door, with an exasperating determination to come in and sit supreme in the midst of her manuscript.

And then there was Allyn to be considered.

In her most optimistic moments, Theodora had pictured Cicely as a dainty, clinging little maiden who would cajole and coddle Allyn out of his unfriendly moods. Cicely certainly did rouse Allyn from those moods; but it was by no process of feminine cajolery. She went at him, as the phrase is, hammer and tongs. Good-tempered herself, she demanded good temper from him. Failing that, she lectured him roundly. Failing again, she turned her back upon him and left him severely alone, with the result that, in an inconceivably short time, Allyn generally came to terms and exerted himself to be agreeable once more. Allyn still kept up the pretence of indifference to her, of superiority over her; Cicely had no pretences. She showed her liking for him frankly; just as frankly she showed her disgust at his hours of gloom.

Upon one point, however, Allyn maintained a firm stand. He would put up with no endearments. Theodora was the only person who dared lay affectionate hands upon him, who dared address him in affectionate terms. Just once, in the early days of her being in the Farringtons' household, Cicely, moved with pity at the sight of a bruised forefinger, had ventured upon a caressing pat on Allyn's cheek. It was much the caress she would have bestowed upon Melchisedek, if she had chanced to step on his paw; but she never forgot the look of disgusted scorn with which Allyn had marched out of the room. Accustomed from her babyhood to

petting her father and being petted by him, the girl was at first at a loss to interpret the situation. When the truth dawned upon her that Allyn was really in earnest, she refused to be suppressed, and persecuted the boy with every species of endearment which her naughty brain could invent.

"Oh, but you are the dearest boy in the world!" she announced, one day, walking into the library at The Savins where Allyn sat reading.

"What do you want now?" he asked gruffly.

"You, of course. I'm lonesome, and I want your society."

"Let my hair alone," he commanded, ducking his head, as she approached his chair.

"I'm not touching it."

"No; but you do sometimes, and I won't have it."

"Yes, it seems so like Melchisedek's that I love to straighten the parting," she said demurely, as she came around to the fire. "Where is Phebe?"

"Playing with her everlasting old skeleton."

"What are you doing?"

"Trying to read, if you'd let me be," growled Allyn, with a despairing look at the book in his hand. "What do you want?"

"You."

"What do you want of me?"

"I'm so fond of you. Besides, I am tired of being alone. Don't you want me to play for you?" Cicely's eyes shone mischievously, as she made the offer.

"Not for a farm. I don't like your diddle-diddles; they haven't a particle of tune to them."

"Come and take me to ride, then."

"Why don't you go alone? I'm busy."

Cicely took forcible possession of his book.

"Allyn, you must come. I've a bad attack of the blues."

"Get rid of them, then."

"That comes well from you."

"What's the matter, Cis?"

"Papa isn't coming home till fall, and I've got to stay here."

Allyn looked up sharply. Then he whistled.

"You don't mean it!"

She nodded, without raising her eyes, and Allyn suddenly discovered that her lids were unusually pink.

"Do you mind it so much?" he added. "Or is he worse?"

"No; only the doctor wants him to stay over there till the lung is all in order again."

"And you are homesick?"

"No,--yes,--a little," she said despondently. "But it's not all that."

"What is it, then?"

"It's the being left here till called for, like a sack of potatoes. Cousin Theodora is too polite to say so; but I know she must wish I were in--Dawson City. It's dreadful, Allyn, not having any real home."

"If that's the way you feel over there, you'd better come here to The Savins and stay," he suggested.

The dimples came back into Cicely's cheeks.

"We should fight, Allyn."

"Who cares? It's only skin deep," he returned, with a sudden gravity which surprised her.

She looked at him steadily for a moment. Then she held out her hand to him.

"Let's not any more, then."

He touched her fingers gingerly, gave them a sudden squeeze and then plunged his fists into his pockets.

"Come on and ride, if you must," he said ungraciously.

She had never seen him in a brighter mood. He chattered ceaselessly, quaint stories of his schoolboy friends, quainter jokes and whimsies and bits of advice for her edification. In such moods, Allyn was well-nigh irresistible, and it was with genuine regret that Cicely turned her face towards home. Her regret, however, was as nothing in comparison with the consternation that seized her, as she entered the house. Before the fireplace in the hall, there always lay the skin of a superb tiger. To-night, before the tiger lay Melchisedek, and before Melchisedek lay a triangular scrap of brownish fur. As Cicely entered, the dog looked up with a bland smile; but the smile changed to a snarl, as she came near and stooped to view the ruin he had wrought. Then he rose, gripped his booty in his sinful little teeth, and trotted before her to the library door. On the threshold, he appeared to come to a sudden realization that justice was in store for him. His mien changed. The pointed, silky little ears drooped, and walking on three legs, stiffly and as if with infinite difficulty, he preceded his mistress to the fireside and laid the severed ear of the tiger on the floor at Theodora's feet, while Cicely exclaimed penitently,--

"Cousin Theodora, what will you do with us? It's bad enough to have me stranded on your threshold, without having Melchisedek hunting big game in your front hall."

The words were flippant; but the tears were near the surface. Billy interposed, for he saw Theodora's color come, and he knew that the rug, his own contribution to her college room, was one of her dearest possessions. He shook his head at the six-pound culprit who stood before him, wagging his stumpy tail in smug satisfaction over the success of his undertaking.

"Change his name to Nimrod, Cis," he said gravely; "and send for Babe to mend her first emergency case."

CHAPTER SEVEN

"Where is Babe?" Dr. McAlister asked, one noon in late May.

"Here." Phebe's voice came from the piazza outside.

"Can you ride over to Bannock Bars, this afternoon?"

"Yes, I suppose so. What for?"

"As substitute for me. Mrs. Richardson has consumed all her pills, and she wants some more."

"Why doesn't she get them, then? You're not an apothecary."

"She refuses to take them, unless I inspect them personally. These are the patients who try one's soul, Babe. I would rather deal with Asiatic cholera than with one fussy old woman with a digestion. They eat hot bread and fried steak, and then they eat pepsin."

"Start a cooking crusade," Phebe suggested lazily. "Well, I'll go."

"Thank you. You need the ride anyway; it will do you good, for you have been working too hard lately. I don't want my apprentice to wear herself out." The doctor patted her shoulder with a fatherly caress; then he turned to go into the house.

"Give me leave to prescribe for Mrs. Richardson?" she called after him.

"Yes, I make her over to you, and you can date your first case from this afternoon," he answered.

"No; I'd rather have something a little younger and more interesting. I will be ready to start, right after lunch."

The office door closed behind her father, and Phebe let her book slide from her knee, as she rested her tired eyes on the fresh green lawn before her. For the past three months, she had worked hard, eager to prove that her home-coming had been inspired by no sudden whim, still more eager to win her father's professional approval. Her

work was interesting; and yet at times bones and arteries and nerves had a tendency to pall upon her. She had never dreamed that so much drudgery would attend the early stages of her professional studies. She was heartily sick of the theoretical, and she longed for the practical. She had even teased her father to let her go with him on his rounds. Instead, he had laughed at her and prescribed a further course of drudgery.

"Never mind." she said to herself sturdily. "I'll get there, some day. I won't always carry pills to old women; and when I do get a real case of my own won't I astonish them all!" And events justified her assertion.

She was still sitting there, dreaming of future deeds, when Allyn came out to the veranda.

"Oh, Allyn?"

"Hullo, sawbones!"

"What are you going to do this afternoon?"

"Nothing."

"Don't you want to ride with me?"

"Maybe. Where?"

"To Bannock Bars."

"What for?"

"To take some pills to Mrs. Richardson."

"Not much. Mrs. Richardson is frabjous and a gossip."

"What if she is? You needn't talk to her."

But Allyn shook his head.

"Not if I know myself. I'll oil your wheel for you, Babe, and pack your pills; but I won't go within range of Mrs. Richardson, for she gives me the creeps."

"She won't hurt you."

"No; but she makes me feel clammy in the spine of my back, and then she gives me good advice. I'll tell you, Babe, I'll go and get Cis, and we will ride part way with you. If two people escort you half way, that is as good as having one of them go all the way. Besides, I never feel quite easy when I am all alone with you. If anything happened, you might be moved to experiment on me, and that would be fatal."

On the veranda, after luncheon Allyn and Phebe stood waiting for Cicely. She came running across the lawn at last, trim and dainty in her short grey suit.

"I am sorry to be late," she panted; "but I had to stop to chastise Melchisedek. I found him asleep in Cousin Theodora's fernery. It was so soft and cool that I suppose it tempted him, this hot day, poor little

man! But aren't you forcing the season, Babe?"

Phebe looked down at her immaculate duck suit.

"No; it is almost the first of June, and so warm. Besides, I am only going out to the wilderness. I am clean and comfortable, and that is the main thing."

"Unless we get a shower," Allyn suggested.

Phebe looked up at the sky.

"There isn't a cloud in sight, Allyn. It's not going to rain, I know."

"It's sultry. You can't ever tell about a day like this. Still, if you want to risk it,--"

"I do." And Phebe mounted her bicycle.

The Savins lay at the western edge of the town. Beyond it, the road to Bannock Bars led away straight toward the sunset, over hill and hollow, through stretches of sand and along narrow footpaths. It was a road to terrify an amateur; but Phebe's riding was strong and steady, and she was glad to be in the saddle once more, forgetful of her work and only conscious of the sweet spring life about her. It was only an hour later that The Savins was ten miles behind her, and she was setting up her wheel against Mrs. Richardson's stone horse-block.

Mrs. Richardson met her accusingly.

"I hope you've got them pills," she demanded, without any formal preliminaries.

"Yes, my father has sent them."

"I wrote for them, day before yesterday. I thought sure they'd come yesterday."

"He was busy," Phebe said curtly, as she took off her sailor hat and fanned herself.

"Jim Sykes said he see him drivin' off over Wisdom way."

"Yes, he had a case there, an important case." Phebe's head was tilted at an aggressive angle.

"I guess I was some important, or he'd have said so, if he'd see me, last night. I had a bad spell, and like to fainted."

"What had you been eating?" Phebe inquired, with a sudden access of professional severity.

"Be you his youngest girl?" Mrs. Richardson asked rather irrelevantly.

"Yes."

"The one that was in Paris?"

"Yes."

"I wonder at your father's lettin' you go. They say it's an awful wicked city, and I hear it's nip and tuck whether a person comes home as good as she went."

"I didn't find it so."

"Maybe not. Still, it's risky and I don't think much of folks that don't find America good enough for 'em. You look hot. Come in and get a drink of water."

Inside the house and with a glass of water in her hand, Phebe felt that it devolved upon her to make some efforts at conversation.

"You said you were worse, last night; didn't you? What were the symptoms?" she asked, between her sips.

"What's generally the symptoms? I felt sick and wanted to keel over."

"Had you been--?"

"No; I hadn't. You tell your father that I'll tell him about it, when he comes. I ain't goin' to be doctored by hearsay. Did you see Sol Bassitt's barn, as you come over the hill?"

"I came by the lower road."

"What did you do that for? It's a good mile further."

"Yes; but it's better riding, that way."

"You'd better go back over the hill. The barn's worth seein', the best one this side of town." Mrs. Richardson rocked to and fro in exultation at having some one to listen to her month's accumulation of gossip. Bannock Bars was an isolated hamlet, and visitors were few. "Sol's girl, Fannie, has gone to Oswego for a week. She's had scarlet fever, and it left her ailin'. It's too bad, for she is a likely girl."

"Very likely," Phebe assented, half under her breath.

"What?"

"I said it was extremely probable."

"What was?" Mrs. Richardson glared at her guest who was tranquilly waving a palm-leaf fan.

"That Fannie is a good girl."

"Well, she is," Mrs. Richardson returned shortly.

There was a silence, while Phebe inspected the black cambric binding of her fan, and tried to gather energy to go out into the hot sun once more. Mrs. Richardson had rocked herself into more placid humor.

"They've got a boarder over to Sykes's," she resumed.

"Have they?" Phebe spoke indifferently. Bannock Bars was too near town for her to realize how countrified it was, how the coming of a single

stranger could stir the placid current of its existence.

"He's from New York, Bartlett is his name, or some such thing. They say he's a music feller."

"A what?" Phebe wondered whether Mrs. Richardson had reference to a member of a German band. The words suggested something of the kind.

"A feller that writes music. I don't know anything about it only what they say. Anyhow, he's brought a pianner with him, and they say he bangs away on it like all possessed, and then stops short and scolds. I went past there, one day, when the windows was open, and I heard him thumpin' and tiddlin' away for dear life. It didn't seem to me there was much tune to it, nor time neither; you couldn't so much as tell where one line left off and the next begun."

Phebe's fan slid out of her lap, and, as she stooped to pick it up, she dropped her handkerchief.

"Have you seen him?" she asked, when she was upright once more.

"How?"

"Have you ever seen this Mr. Bartlett?"

"Yes. He goes round in one of these short-pant suits and great coarse stockin's and shoes, and he never acts as if he knew what he was about. Half-baked, I call him. He holds his head like this, and he struts along as if Bannock Bars wa'n't half good enough for him. Mis' Sykes says he ain't a mite fussy, though, takes what she gives him and don't complain. Land! If he can stand Eulaly Sykes's cookin', he must be tough."

"Perhaps he will keel over, some day," Phebe suggested.

"I should think he would. But then, they say folks like him eat all sorts of things at night suppers, so I suppose he is used to it." She rocked in silence, for a moment; then she went on, "What do you find to do with yourself, now you're home again? You was with Mis' Farrington's folks; wasn't you, she that was Theodora McAlister?"

"Yes."

"She does a good deal of writin', I hear. Does she get much out of it?"

Phebe hesitated, assailed by doubts as to how large a story Mrs. Richardson would swallow, and her hostess swept on,--

"She's spreadin' herself a good deal, and it can't all be her earnin's. Do you take after her?"

"No; I am studying medicine."

"I want to know! What for?"

"To be a doctor, I suppose." Phebe rose and put on her hat.

Mrs. Richardson took a step towards her.

"You don't want a skeleton; do you?" she asked. "I've got one I'd

sell cheap."

For one instant, Phebe hesitated. Unexpected as was the offer, it appealed to her. There was a certain dignity in having one's own skeleton; it was the first step toward professional life. That one instant's hesitation settled the matter, for Mrs. Richardson saw it and was swift to take advantage of it.

"It belonged to His sister's husband," she said, with a jerk of her head toward the portrait of her late husband. "He was a doctor and, when he died, all his trumpery was brought here and stowed away in our garret. It's as good as new, and you can have it for five dollars."

"I--don't--know," Phebe said slowly.

Mrs. Richardson interposed.

"I don't want to be hard on you. 'Tain't a very big one, and it ain't strung up," she said persuasively. "You can have it for three. It's a splendid chance for you."

Phebe yielded.

"Well, I'll take it, if it is all there."

"I'll get it, and you can let your father count it up. I'm willing to leave it to him." And Mrs. Richardson went hurrying out of the room.

She was gone for some time. When she came back again she bore in her arms a bundle, large, knobby and misshapen. It was wrapped in newspapers which had cracked away here and there over the end of a rib; but it was enclosed in a network of strings that crossed and crisscrossed like a hammock.

"I thought you might just as well take it right along with you," she said. "You can send me the money in a letter, if it's all right, but land knows when you will be here again, and I hain't got anybody to send it by."

Phebe looked appalled. In a long experience of bicycling, she had scorned a carrier, and she stood firmly opposed to the idea of converting her wheel into a luggage van.

"I can't carry that," she said.

"Yes, you can. Just string it over your forepiece and it will go all right. It ain't heavy for anything so bulky. I'll help you tie it on." And she prepared to execute her offer.

"Oh, don't! At least, I'm much obliged; but--Oh, dear, if I must take it, I suppose I must; but I think I'd better tie it on, myself."

"Just as you like. You'd better hurry up a little, though, for I shouldn't wonder if it rained before sundown."

"Rain? Then I can't take this thing." Phebe paused, with the string half tied.

"Oh, I'll risk it. Besides if you don't take it, there's a man in

Greenway that will."

Phebe looked at her hostess, shut her teeth, jerked the knot tight, and was silent; but there was a dangerous gleam in her eyes, as she mounted and rode away, with her three-dollar skeleton clattering on the handle-bars before her.

CHAPTER EIGHT

There is a certain inconvenience coupled with being called upon to pose as a genius at the comparatively early age of twenty-six. Popular theory to the contrary, notwithstanding, it is easier to plod slowly along on the path to fame. Greatness does not repeat itself, every day in the week. But fate had overtaken Gifford Barrett, and had hung a wreath of tender young laurels about his boyish brow. He deserved the wreath, if ever a boy did. Two years before, fresh from the inspiration of his years in Germany and of his German master, he had composed his *Alan Breck Overture*. It would have been well done, even for a man many years his senior, and it quickly won a place on the programmes of the leading orchestra's of the country. He had known what it was to be called out from his box at the Auditorium or Carnegie Hall to bow to the audience, while the orchestra thumped their approval on their music racks. He had been hailed even as the American Saint Saens, and it was small wonder that he began to feel the wreath too tight a fit for his brows.

His family was well known and, from the first, society had claimed him for her own. He had the gift of talking well, of dancing better; and he had found it easy to drift along from day to day, neglecting his music for the sake of the invitations that poured in upon him. In his more conscientious moments, he told himself that he would do all the better work as the result of seeing the life of his native city; but so far its influence had been only potent to move him to write a triplet of light songs and to dedicate them to three of the prettiest girls in his set, no one of whom was able to sing a note in tune.

At the end of the second season, a reaction set in. The public was clamorous for a new work from him; he was tired of being lionized by people who called his beloved overture pretty. The madness of the spring was upon him, the spirit of work had seized him, and the middle of May found him and his long-suffering piano installed in the "north chamber" of the Sykes homestead at Bannock Bars.

He had chosen the place with some degree of care, in order to be sufficiently remote from society to work undisturbed, sufficiently near civilization to be able to buy more music paper in case of need. Ten miles of even a bad road is not an impassible barrier to an enthusiastic bicyclist; yet the place was as rustic and countrified as if it had been, not ten, but ten hundred miles from an electric light. His digestion was good enough to cope even with Eulaly Sykes's perennial doughnuts, and it was in a mood of supreme content that he settled into his quarters in the wilderness. It was years since he had watched the on-coming of the New England summer; he watched it now with the trained sense, the inherent quickness of perception of the true artist who realizes that the simplest facts of the day's routine by his touch can be transmuted into glowing, vivid material for his work.

It must be confessed that Eulaly Sykes occasionally mourned to her friends over the irregularities of her boarder. His hours of work passed her comprehension, his work itself filled her soul with wonder and disgust. In his moments of inspiration when he was evoking the stormy chords of the introduction to his symphonic poem, _Bisesa_ he never dreamed that his landlady was craning her head up from her pillows in a vain effort to discover the tune, or to reduce it to the known terms of short metre rhythm. His broken, irregular measures troubled her, as did also his broken, irregular hours of work. There were days when he rode far afield, or was seen lying on his back under the pines by the brookside, listening to the splash of the water, the hissing of the air through the boughs above him. After such days, his piano was wont to sound far into the night, and Eulaly, as she slept and waked and still heard her boarder's fingers crashing over the keys, reproached herself bitterly.

"Them last doughnuts was too rich," she used to say to her old-fashioned bolster, set up like a grim idol by the bedside; "and the poor feller can't sleep. I mustn't put so much shortenin' in the next ones. My, but that was an awful scrooch! I wish he'd shut his windows a little mite tighter, and not pester the whole neighborhood."

This state of things had endured for two weeks, and the symphonic poem was progressing as well as its composer had any reason to expect. Already it was bidding fair to rival the _Alan Overture_ and Mr. Barrett began to carry his nose tilted at an angle higher than ever, as if in imagination he already scented the fresh laurels in store for him. Pride goeth before destruction. A long day under the pines resulted not in inspiration, but in an uninspiring cold in his head; his temper suffered together with his nose, and Eulaly Sykes, below stairs, chafed her hands together at the sounds of musical and moral discord which floated down upon her ears. All the morning long, he smote his brows and his piano by turns. The new _motif_ he was seeking, refused to be found.

Later, fortified by Eulaly's fried chicken and rhubarb pie, he tried it again, invitingly playing over the preceding _motif_ in every possible key and tempo. It was of no use. He slammed down the top of his piano, tore across a half-finished page, caught up his cap, mounted his bicycle and rushed away up the road, quite regardless of the clouds lying low in the western sky.

Fifteen miles of scorching over country roads sufficed to bring him to a calmer mood, and he turned his wheel towards the Sykes homestead once more. The _motif_ was still as far beyond his grasp as ever; but there were other things in life besides elusive _motifs_. The increasing blackness above his head was one of them; his hunger was another, and he quickened his pace. His piano might be awaiting him in mute reproach; but then, so did Eulaly's doughnuts await him, and there was no reproach in those, at least, not until some time later. He fell to whistling a strain of his overture, as he rode swiftly along, quite unconscious of the fact that disaster, in the person of Miss Phebe McAlister, was riding quite as swiftly to meet him.

Three miles from his boarding-place, the storm overtook him with a rush which straight-way reduced the roads to the consistency of cream. He looked about for shelter; but no shelter was at hand, and the road meandered along before him uphill and down again with an easy nonchalance which appeared to take no account of the pelting rain. It was hard riding

and dangerous, but he pushed on manfully, while the streams of water trickled down his neck and along the bridge of his nose. As he reached the crest of the hill, he saw before him, just crawling over the crest of the opposite hill, a figure on a bicycle coming swiftly towards him. Even at that distance, he could make out a bedraggled white suit, a limp sailor hat and a vast pulpy bundle lashed to the handle-bars.

"Some country maiden, coming home from market," he said to himself. "I Hope she is enjoying the shower."

Then of a sudden, he braced himself for a shock, for a bell was clanging wildly, and a cry rang out upon his ears,--

"Oh, go away! Be careful! Get out of the way! Quick!"

He turned aside, out of the path of the flying wheel. It sounds a cowardly thing to have done, and doubtless the knights of old would have contrived a way of rescue. To the latter-day knight, however, there was something inevitable in the on-coming of the wheel, with its rider's feet kicking in a futile search for the pedals. It reminded him of his own futile search for his motif. Both searchers seemed equally helpless to attain their objects. Moreover, when a tall and muscular maiden sweeps down upon one, leaving behind her a train of shrieks and scattered phalanges, there is absolutely nothing for one to do but to get out of her way as expeditiously as possible. No use in breaking two necks, and--the critics were waiting for the symphonic poem.

He turned, then, to the right-hand edge of the road. Phebe was bouncing along over the stones dangerously near the other gutter, and he already was congratulating himself upon his escape. Then in a moment the situation was changed. The runaway wheel flashed into a mud puddle, veered and before his astonished eyes shed a rib or two and a clavicle from the swaying bundle, veered again and collided with his own wheel. In another instant, the right-hand gutter held two muddy bicycles, the greater portion of a human skeleton, Phebe McAlister and the composer of the Alan Breck Overture.

An experienced bicycle teacher once said that no woman ever picked herself up from a fall, without saying that she was not at all hurt. True to tradition, Phebe staggered to her feet, exclaiming,--

"Thank you; but I'm not hurt in the least. I'm so sorry--"

Then she paused abruptly and stared at the stranger in the gutter. He lay as he had fallen, his face half buried in the mud and his right arm twisted under him. More frightened than she had been in all her headlong descent of the hill, she bent over him and tried to turn him as he lay. Gifford Barrett was an athlete as well as a musician, however, and it took all of Phebe's strength to stir him ever so slightly. As she did so, she disclosed a gash where his temple had struck upon a stone, and his right arm swung loosely out from his side. Phebe McAlister had suddenly found herself in the presence of her first case, and the presence was rather an appalling one.

In any crisis, the mind attacks a side issue. Phebe rose from her knees, took off the sodden thing which had been her hat, and carefully covered it over her saddle. Her face, underneath the streaks of mud, was very white, and her lips were unsteady. Then she pressed her hands over her eyes, bit her lips and gave her shoulders a little shake. That done, she

knelt down in the mud once more and set herself to the task in hand, wondering meanwhile who and what her victim might be.

Obviously he was a gentleman. His firm, clean-cut lips alone would have settled that point to her satisfaction. Beyond that, she had no possible clue to his identity. The situation was a trying one. The nearest house was a mile away; the rain was still pelting heavily down upon them, and she, Phebe McAlister, was alone in the storm with a perfect stranger whom she had knocked from his bicycle, stunned and perhaps injured for life. To whom did he belong? What should she do with him? If he died, who would be responsible, not for the injury, but for making the funeral arrangements? For a moment, the unaccustomed tears rushed to her eyes, and, seen through their mist, her victim seemed to be expanding until he filled the whole landscape and surrounded her by dozens, all plastered with mud and begirt with whitened bones. Then she pulled herself together again. The stranger's arm was broken, his forehead bloody. She must see what she could do for him, then go for help.

There was a long interval when the noise of the rain was interrupted by little groans and exclamations from Phebe, while she tugged and shoved and pried at the man in the road. He was so very big, so very unconscious, so very determined to lie with his face buried in the mud and meet his end by suffocation. At last, she drew a long breath, mustered all her strength and gave him one pull which turned him completely over on his back. As she did so, his eyes opened dully and by degrees gathered expression. He looked up into her mud-stained face, down at his mud-stained clothes, around at the mud-stained skull which lay close to his side and grinned back at him encouragingly.

"What the deuce--" he faltered. Then once more he fainted away.

Twenty minutes later, Phebe was rushing away to the nearest house in search of help. There was but one house within reach, however, and fate willed that she should find that deserted. She hesitated whether she should ride on for two miles farther, or go back to her victim, and she decided upon the latter course. It seemed hours to her before she reached the top of the hill again. Then she stopped short, dismounted and stared down the slope in astonishment. Her victim had vanished from the scene. Only the skull remained to mark the spot where he had lain, two deep tracks in the soft mud to show the way by which he had gone.

"Well, Babe?" Allyn's voice hailed her, as she rode wearily up the drive, the water squelching in her shoes and her soaked skirt flapping dismally about her pedals. "Were you out in all that shower?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you go under cover?"

"There wasn't any cover to go under." Phebe's tone was not altogether amicable.

"But the mud? It's all over your face, and your wheel, and your hair."

"I fell off."

"Where?"

"Coming down Bannock Hill. I lost my pedals, and my wheel slipped

in the mud."

"Bannock Hill? That's a bad place to fall. Break anything?"

"You can look and see."

But Allyn was not to be suppressed.

"Where's your hat?"

She started slightly and raised her hand to her head. It was bare.

"Oh, yes," she said unguardedly. "I remember now. I must have left it where I sat."

"Sat!" Allyn stared at his sister in amazement. "What did you do? Sit down to study the landscape?"

But Phebe stalked up the steps and into the house, and Allyn saw her no more until dinner-time.

Two days later, Allyn burst into the office where Phebe was bending over a book. In his hand was an unfolded newspaper which he flapped excitedly, as she looked up.

"There are others, Babe."

"What do you mean?"

"This. Listen! Oh, where is the thing? Here it is, in the Bannock correspondence of the Times. Listen! 'Mr. G. Bartlett, the musician who is sojourning at Mr. Jas. Sykes's farm, sustained a bad fall from his bicycle on Bannock Hill, last Tuesday. His injuries are serious, including a cut on his temple and a compound fracture of the right arm. Dr. Starr reduced the fracture and reports the patient as doing as well as--' you see somebody else slipped up on that hill, Babe. You ought to feel you came out of it pretty well."

Phebe looked up with a frown.

"Go away, Allyn; I'm busy," she said sharply.

Three weeks later, Phebe had occasion to make another trip to see Mrs. Richardson. This time, she chose the hill road, the one which led past the Sykes farm. Gifford Barrett was sauntering along by the roadside, smoking. His arm was in a sling, his hat drawn forward, half concealing the patch of plaster on his temple. As she passed, Phebe looked him full in the face, and instinctively his hand went to his cap, though without any sign of recognition.

"Some girl that's heard the overture," he said to himself. "I don't seem to remember her, though. She has a good figure and she rides well; but what a color! She will have apoplexy, some day, if she's not careful."

The next day, Eulaly Sykes's boarder had started for the Maine coast where three unmusical, but sympathetic maidens were waiting to help him pass the dreary days of his convalescence.

CHAPTER NINE

Two willow chairs were swaying to and fro in the gathering dusk, and two voices were blended in a low murmur. Theodora and Billy were exchanging the confidences born of a long week of separation while business had called Mr. Farrington to New York.

"How comes on the book, Ted?"

She shook her head.

"It doesn't come."

"Does Cicely's being here disturb you?"

"No, not really; not nearly so much as Melchisedek. In an unguarded moment, I asked him, one day, to come and help auntie write books. Since then he rushes from his breakfast straight to my room and capers madly on the threshold till I appear."

"And then?"

"Then he insists on lying in my lap and resting his head on my arm, and he snarls, every time I joggle him. It isn't helpful or inspiring, Billy."

"No; I should say not. What is the story, Ted?"

"I'm not going to tell even you, Billy," she returned quickly. "It always demoralizes me to talk over my stories while they are evolving. I must work them out alone. It seems conceited and selfish; but there's no help for it. You believe it; don't you?"

"I'll trust you, Ted. But is this hero very hectic?"

It was an old joke, but they were still laughing over it when Cicely appeared in the doorway, with Melchisedek under her arm.

"Cousin Theodora?" she said interrogatively, for the piazza was dark.

"Yes."

"I want to talk."

"You generally do, Cis," Billy observed unkindly.

"Yes; but I mean I have something to talk about. I don't always."

"Shall I go away?" he asked politely.

"No; I want a man's view of it, too. But perhaps you were busy and I'll be in the way."

For her reply, Theodora drew another chair into the group. Cicely sat down, balanced Melchisedek on her knee and fell to poking his grey hair this way and that, as if at a loss how to begin the conversation.

"How far is it safe for a girl to follow up a boy?" she asked abruptly, yet with a little catch in her breath.

"Meaning yourself?" Billy queried.

"Yes, of course."

"I should say it depended a good deal on the boy."

"I mean Allyn."

"What's the matter? Have you had a falling out?"

"Yes, we are always doing it. I can't seem to help it, either. It's horrid. He is outspoken and tells me what he thinks of me; I'm peppery, and I don't like it."

"I know, dear," Theodora said gently, for she read the girl's irritation in her voice. "Allyn isn't always as polite as he might be; but we must try not to be too sensitive."

"I'm not sensitive," Cicely said forlornly. "I like him, though, and I want him to like me, and it hurts my feelings when he doesn't."

"How long has the present feud lasted?" Billy inquired.

"Almost ten days. It's the worst one yet, and it started from nothing. I know he is your brother, Cousin Theodora; but--I really don't think it's all my fault."

"No." Theodora's voice suggested no mental reservation. "I know how it is, Cicely. Allyn has been my baby and my boy; but, much as I love him, I can't help seeing that he is cantankerous and cross-grained at times. But it is only at times, Cis; it isn't chronic."

"I wish it were. Then I shouldn't mind it so much. But when he isn't cross, he is one of the jolliest boys I have ever known. That's the worst of it, for I miss him so, when we squabble. When we are on terms, I don't care about anybody else; and so, when we are off, it leaves me all alone."

"When I squabbled with your Cousin Theodora," Billy said oracularly; "I generally felt I had done my share, and I left her to do the making up."

"So I observed," his wife answered; but Cicely was too much absorbed in her subject to heed the parenthesis.

"I'm willing to make up," she said, as she twisted Melchisedek's ears with an absent-minded fervor which caused the sufferer to whimper; "but how can I? He just goes off his way, and leaves me to go mine. I hate to tag him; besides, I don't know but he really wants to get rid of me. Hush, Melchisedek! Don't whine. I didn't intend to hurt you. That's what I meant, Cousin Ted, when I asked you about following him up. How far is it safe to go?"

"Till you get there," Mr. Farrington replied.

"Billy!" his wife remonstrated.

"All right, Ted; but I'm not altogether joking. I know boys better than you do. It's not easy for them to come down off their dignity; and, nine times out of ten, when they scowl the most darkly, they are really wishing that they knew how to come to terms. I must go down town now, Cis; but my parting advice to you is to corner Allyn and bully him into shaking hands. The boy is an ungracious cub; but he is sound at the core, and I honestly think he is fond of you in his dumb way."

After he had left them alone, Cicely dropped down on the floor at Theodora's feet.

"Life isn't a straight line; it's horribly squirmy," she said, and her voice was unusually grave.

Theodora drew the brown head against her knee.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

"It's only Allyn. I don't know what the reason is that we can't get on. I've known lots of boys, and I never squabbled with any of them before. And I don't know why I care so much. Sometimes I really think I am good for Allyn and can help him out, and I am disappointed because he won't let me; but I more than half think it is only my vanity, after all."

"Was it a bad fight?"

"Awful." In spite of herself, Cicely laughed at the recollection. "He wound up by telling me that I was no lady, and he didn't care to have anything more to do with me. Since then I have hardly had a glimpse of him."

"I hadn't noticed that anything was wrong between you," Theodora said thoughtfully.

"No; we both of us are old enough not to quarrel in public. But I can't see any end to this. I care for Allyn a great deal, and I miss him; but if he does not want me for a friend, I can't force him to take me. I'm not a pill, to be swallowed whether or no."

"Perhaps I could help a little."

Cicely shook her head.

"No; we were the ones to fight, and now we must be the ones to make up, without any go-betweens. Papa has always told me that dignity doesn't count in a case like this; and I'm willing to do anything reasonable. The only trouble is that I don't know what Allyn really wants. If he truly does wish I would let him alone, I don't see any use in my hanging on to him. Just once, more than a month ago, he said something that made me think he cared, and was glad to have me here; but it was only once, and maybe I was mistaken. It isn't forever since you were a girl, Cousin Theodora. What did you do in such cases?"

Theodora rapidly reviewed her past.

"I think I never had just such a case, Cicely," she said honestly. "Hu and Billy were my two best friends; and I don't think either one of them ever had a cross-grained day in his life. I was generally the

aggressor, myself."

Cicely rubbed her head against Theodora's knee in mute contradiction.

"But what should you do in my case?" she persisted.

"I don't know. Sometimes I can't tell what to do in my own. Allyn is rather a puzzle."

"He's worse than an original proposition in geometry. I want to solve him and I can't. Papa has always taught me that we girls have a good deal of responsibility, and that we can help our boy friends a good deal, or else hinder them. Perhaps I am conceited; but it seems to me as if I could help Allyn, if I could get at him. Besides--" she hesitated.

"Well?" Theodora said encouragingly.

"Oh, it's silly to tell; but sometimes I wonder whether it wouldn't help you a little, at the same time. I'd love to feel it did; you have been so good to me. I know you worry about Allyn. You watch him as a cat watches a mouse, and you always seem to understand his queer ways and know just how to manage him. I wish I could do it as you do."

Theodora was silent for a moment. Then she bent down and laid her cheek against the brown chair.

"Cicely," she said; "those eyes of yours have a trick of seeing deeper into things than you suspect. We have gone so far that we may as well go a little farther. Allyn is very dear to me; but I do worry about him more than I like to tell. He is headstrong and obstinate; worse than that; he is moody, and there is his great danger. Under it all, he is a splendid fellow; but I am afraid he will turn sour and hard. It grew on him fast, last year, while I was away, and the next two or three years will settle the matter, one way or the other. Ever so much is going to depend on keeping him happy and jolly. He hasn't many friends left, and he needs all those he has, needs to trust them and feel they trust him and care a great deal for him, whatever he says or does. If you want to, you can help me in this."

There was a short silence. Then Theodora went on,--

"Every girl has the making of at least one boy, if she manages him in the right way. I agree with your father in that, Cis, agree with him with all my heart. She must forget, though, that they are boy and girl, and only remember that they are comrades. Flirting never helps things. But a girl has more patience than a boy, as a rule, and more tact. Where a boy fights, she waits till the time comes for her to put in a word that tells. Moreover, she is willing to stand by her friends through thick and thin, if she has any conscience at all, and most boys go through an age when every such loyal friend counts in holding them steady. A girl that neither preaches nor flirts, can sometimes carry a boy through hours when his own mother would be helpless to manage him. It's a great gift in the hands of you girls, Cis; and it shouldn't make you careless or conceited, but very conscientious in the way you use it."

"I think I understand why Cousin Will looks at you just as he does sometimes," the girl said slowly. "But about Allyn?"

"You can do whatever you choose with him," Theodora answered quickly.

"Allyn is very fond of you, Cis. I know him better than you do, and I know that he cares a good deal more for you than you suspect, even if he does take queer ways of showing it. You have it in your hands to help him over one of the worst spots in his life."

"How?"

"By making up with him and, if he fights again, making up again. Keep friends with him, keep him bright and interested and healthy. I don't mind his being cross half so much as I do his going off by himself and looking glum. If you are willing, Cicely, you can do more to break that up than I can."

The girl shook her head.

"I can help; but you stand first, Cousin Ted."

"Not in this. I'm related to him, and I am a great deal older than he is. Those are two serious handicaps, sometimes. He will come to me always probably in emergencies; at least, I hope he will, but it is the steady companionship that counts for more than this, the chance to lessen the friction in all manner of little things. There I am helpless. Allyn knows that I have my house and my writing and my husband to look out for, and he would be on his guard directly, if he saw me turn my back on them and give my time to him. But, Cicely, this is asking a great deal of you."

"Not so much as it sounds," the girl said earnestly. "I'm not all a child, Cousin Ted; and I have watched Allyn a good deal. It hasn't seemed to me that things went right with him; but there was nothing I could put my finger on, nothing at all. I like him, and I like to do things with him, even if he is younger; but I don't want you to think I am horrid and forward with him, when he doesn't want me."

She was silent for a moment, while Melchisedek licked her face, unrebuked. Then she rose, pushing the dog gently away.

"Is this what you mean, Cousin Theodora: that it will be a good idea, for me to do things with Allyn, to care for the things he likes, and, if he gets cross and goes off not to care, but just go after him and bring him back again?"

"If you feel as if you could, Cicely."

"I do; I'd be glad to. Sometimes I wonder if any one else were ever half so good fun; sometimes I wonder how such a grumpy thing can be a McAlister," she said, with thoughtful frankness. "It's the grumpy side that must be kept under, I suppose; but he isn't real sweet to handle under such circumstances."

"I know that," Theodora answered, as she rose and stooped to pick up Melchisedek who was pulling at her skirts appealingly. "But it's only the chance of helping him forget to be grumpy, till he outgrows the habit. It isn't that I want to spoil him, Cicely. It wouldn't do any good to coddle him or give in to him. Just keep out of all the skirmishes you can; and when he forces you into one, do what you can to establish a truce. Most boys go through this thorny age; it's as inevitable as mumps, but Allyn is taking it very hard, and we want to break it up before it becomes chronic. Do you see what I am driving at, dear?"

"Enough so that I am going to wave the olive branch, to-morrow," she answered, laughing. "If he ignores it, I'll try it again in some other form. I only wanted to make sure that you approved of my meddling." She put her hand through Theodora's arm and together they paced up and down the broad piazza. Above them, the stars were dotting the still, dark air, and the ragged outline of The Savins showed itself faintly through the great trees. "His eyes have looked so heavy, the last day or two," she added, as she looked across to the light shining out from Allyn's window. And again, after a long interval, "It's not so easy, after all, Cousin Ted, this being a girl."

CHAPTER TEN

"Teddy, I am worried about Allyn."

"What is the matter? Isn't he well?"

"Yes, only rather listless. It isn't his health I am worrying about; it is his character."

"He will come out all right," Theodora said cheerily, for it was rare to see her father in a despondent mood, and the sight distressed her.

"Perhaps; but it seems to me that something is wrong with the boy. He isn't like the rest of you."

"Mercifully not; and yet we were all queer sticks," Theodora observed tranquilly. "We appear to be working out our own salvation, though, whether it's writing or bones, and Allyn will probably follow our example when he is old enough."

"I wish he might. He is giving me more trouble than all the rest of you put together, and the worst of it is that I don't know whether he needs a tonic or a thrashing." The good doctor knitted his brows and endeavored to look stern. "I suspect it is the latter," he added.

Theodora shook her head gayly.

"It wouldn't be of any use, papa. We must bide our time. Allyn is queer, most mortal queer; but these may be the mutterings of genius, a volcanic genius that is getting ready to erupt."

"I never regarded bad temper as a sign of genius."

"Perhaps not. But, even if it isn't, thrashings only leave callous spots. You'd better try the tonic."

They had been walking up and down the front lawn. Now they turned, as by common consent, and strolled away towards a more distant part of the grounds.

"Is anything new the trouble?" Theodora asked, after an interval.

"No; only that his school reports get worse and worse, and that he appears to have a perfect genius for losing friends."

"Even the warty James?"

The doctor laughed.

"I can't blame him for half his antipathies," he said; "and that makes it hard for me to corner him in an argument. The boy was born with a hatred of dirt and of lying and of toadying, and he is utterly intolerant of anybody who shows anything of the three. His theories are all right, only his way of carrying them out makes him rather unpopular. But what is worrying me now is his school work. He isn't stupid; but his marks are away below par."

"You might try the tonic," Theodora said. "But what about Babe?"

"Don't ask me, Ted. That girl defies prediction. She always did. One day, I think she will bring glory to us all; the next, I want to turn her out of my office. She is as smart as a steel trap; but she is as lawless as Allyn. It's in a different way. I blame them both; but I am sorry for him, while I want to shake Phebe. She could do anything she chose, but she never really chooses. Sometimes I think she is only playing with her study. The next day, she astonishes me by some brilliant stroke that makes me forgive all her past laziness. She's splendid stuff, Ted, only she needs a balance-wheel. The fact is, the girl is selfish. She isn't working for love of her profession and the good it can do to others; all she cares for is the pleasure she takes in it, the pride that it brings her. That may do in some lines; but a doctor must think beyond that and outside of himself and his own interests."

"That's true of most of us," Theodora said; "at least, that is what we are aiming at."

"Some of us; not all. Teddy, you are a comfort to your old father."

"Even if I did help to turn his hair grey?"

He shook his head.

"You used to rush headlong into things, Ted; but you never went very far astray, and now--"

Theodora seized his arm.

"Hush!" she said, pointing to the shady spot under the trees where Allyn lay on the grass with Cicely by his side. The girl was bareheaded, and one shaft of sunlight, slanting down between the oak leaves above her, struck across her brown hair and across her hand as it lay on Allyn's outstretched palm.

"Come, papa, let's leave them there," she added. "Cicely is a better doctor for Allyn than either you or I."

It was the third day after her talk with Theodora, and Cicely had not so much as caught a glimpse of Allyn, though she had dropped in at The Savins repeatedly, on the chance of finding him at home. Whether the boy had turned his back upon the world, or was merely trying to keep out of her way, she was at a loss to determine. However, she saw no use in taking the whole family into her confidence, and she apparently gave her entire attention to Mrs. McAlister and Phebe, while in reality her grey

eyes were keeping a sharp lookout for the missing boy.

At last she made up her mind that indirect methods were useless. Siege failing, she determined to carry the place by assault.

"Where is Allyn?" she demanded, as she came up the steps of The Savins with Melchisedek at her heels.

"I don't know. Get away! Shoo! Cicely, do call your horrid dog away." And Phebe brandished a scalpel threateningly.

"Here, Melchisedek, come here!"

But Melchisedek, his paws planted on the hem of Phebe's skirt, was barking madly and making little lunges at something in her lap.

"Get out! Ugh! Do go away! Cicely, call him!"

Cicely stooped and caught up the wriggling little creature who protested loudly, as she tucked him under her arm.

"Might I inquire what that choice morsel is, Phebe?" she asked disdainfully.

"It's a chicken's gizzard," Phebe answered shortly.

"Oh, and you were having a private lunch out here. Beg pardon for disturbing you." Cicely's eyes were dancing, and the dimples in her cheeks were at their deepest; but Phebe never looked up. "Poor little Melchisedek!" the girl went on. "Wouldn't his old Aunt Babe give him one little bittie piece? Well, it was too bad. Do you lunch out here from choice, Babe; or were you sent away from the table?"

"Don't be silly, Cicely. Can't you see I am studying it?"

"What for?"

"To see how it's made."

"Oh, then it's science, not hunger. It's all right, Melchisedek; she is learning things, not eating them. But what was it you said about Allyn?"

"Nothing."

"Please do say something, then. I want him."

"Ask mother," Phebe said absently. "Oh-h, there now!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing, only it's tough. Do go on."

"Gizzards generally are. If I can do you any little good turn in the way of table scraps, Babe, don't hesitate to mention it." And Cicely departed in search of Mrs. McAlister.

"No," she said; "I mustn't stay. I only want Allyn."

"I saw him go across the hill, just after lunch. He had a book with him,

and you may find him reading, somewhere over there. Don't hurry."

"Thank you; I must go." And she went away across the lawn.

She found Allyn quite at the farther side of the grounds, lying in the tall June grass with his arms folded under his head. Face down beside him was a book; but his thoughts were elsewhere and quite apart from the great tree above him into which he was staring so fixedly. Instinctively he had chosen the most beautiful spot in the grounds where the land sloped away to the west, across a salt marsh all bright with greeny brown grasses, and onward into the open country beyond. At the north, a faint line of white smoke marked the path of a passing train; at the south could be seen a small blue patch of ocean.

In the thick grass, Cicely's steps were noiseless, and Melchisedek considerably neglected to bark, so Allyn was unconscious of her approach. He started suddenly, as she dropped down at his side.

"What do you want?" he asked gruffly.

"You."

"I'm busy."

"You look it," she said merrily, as she pointed to the book against which Melchisedek had promptly braced his back while he searched for a missing burr that he had accumulated in the course of his rambles.

"I wish you'd go away," he grumbled.

"I'm not doing any harm," she said composedly. "You don't own this place, anyway."

"My father does, then."

"He won't turn me out."

"Wish he would and done with it." Allyn rolled over on his side with his back inhospitably turned to his caller.

Her dimples came ever so little. Then she said quietly,

"What a dear, courteous soul you are, Allyn! Please do listen to me, for I've come to tell you something."

"Tell away, if you want to." He pushed aside Melchisedek who had stolen up behind him and pounced down upon his ear.

"I want to make peace."

"Make it."

"But if it takes two to make a quarrel, it probably takes two to make a peace. Allyn, I am tired of fighting. Let's make up."

"What's the use? We should only fight again."

"Perhaps; but sufficient unto the day--We might try it and see."

He made no answer. Instead, he dislodged Melchisedek from a seat on his neck, and reached out for the neglected book. Cicely anticipated him and grasped it first. Quickly she dropped her coaxing tone and became curt and matter-of-fact.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Dutch."

"Not reading it for fun?"

"Not if I know myself. It's grammar."

"Isn't it hard, though?"

"Beastly. I can't get it into my head. Don't believe anybody can." And Allyn sat up and vented his spite against the language by hurling a stone against a distant birch tree.

"What are you studying it for now?" Cicely demanded, as Melchisedek scurried, yelping rapturously, in search of the flying stone.

"Got to, or else be conditioned."

"I don't believe it is as bad as that."

"Yes, 'tis. I barely scraped through, last Christmas, and papa told me then that, if I failed now, I couldn't go to Quantuck, but must stay here alone with him and work all summer."

"And so you are trying to be on the safe side?"

"Not any safe side about it. I was warned, a week ago."

"How horrid!" Cicely said sympathetically. "It won't be any fun at Quantuck without you. I was counting on having you to explore things with, you know. I've never been there."

"You'll have to take it out in counting, then."

"I don't see why. You're only warned, and it's two weeks before examination."

"Yes; but I can't get the blamed stuff into me."

"Perhaps I could help you," she suggested.

"You!" Allyn's tone was not altogether complimentary, and Cicely was uncertain whether she wanted to laugh or to box his ears. "Do you know any German?"

"Papa and I used to talk it a good deal," she said demurely; "and I know something about the grammar."

"Why, I didn't know it. I didn't suppose you knew anything but music." In his honest boyish wonder, Allyn's voice regained something of its old friendliness.

"Yes, I was almost ready for college; but, when I came up here, papa said

I'd better take a vacation and only keep up my music," she answered, in an off-hand way which gave Allyn no hint that he was talking to the show pupil of Professor Almeron's school. "It was great fun at first; but now I am honestly sick of having so much vacation and I'd love to take up my German again if I only had somebody to do it with."

"Do you like to study?"

"N--no; but I don't mind it. I like to practise better."

"I hate it all. I wish I weren't going to college."

"What do you for, then?"

"Oh, I'm expected to. They all take it for granted. Ted did, and Hubert and Billy. I hate languages, though. I'd like to cut the whole thing."

"What do you like?"

"Drawing."

Cicely clasped her hands in sudden envy.

"Oh, I do love pictures! Can you draw? I never saw any."

"I never drew a picture in my life." Allyn's tone was disdainful.

"What do you draw then?"

"Machinery, of course. Wheels and pulleys and things. It's such fun to fit them together, Cis, and see how you can get the power across from one to the other."

Her eyes flashed at the use of her nickname once more. She felt that the feud was forgotten, as she asked, with an interest which was not all feigned,--

"Have you any of them?"

"Not here; but lots of them in my room. I do them, evenings and all sorts of off times, and some of them aren't so simple as they look, either."

"Has anybody seen them?"

He shook his head.

"What's the use? Phebe's bones are bad enough. The house wouldn't hold two cranks. Nobody else knows."

"I want to see them," she asserted.

"They aren't anything to see. Besides, you couldn't understand them."

"I'm not so sure of that. At least, you might try me."

"Anyhow, I like them lots better than I do this stuff." He thumped the German grammar viciously.

"Why don't you do them then?"

"No good."

"I mean instead of college."

"Papa wouldn't let me."

"Have you ever asked him?"

"What's the use? He wants me to be a doctor."

"Do you want to?"

"No. Babe is enough to make me sick of doctors," he answered with brotherly frankness.

"I like doctors, myself; but I'd rather be a good machinist than a bad doctor."

"So would I, a plaguy sight," he muttered; "but the others wouldn't stand it."

"I can't see why," Cicely said thoughtfully. "It is smutty work, and it doesn't sound exactly aristocratic; but soap is cheap, and you aren't obliged to eat out of a tin pail. Allyn, I'd do it if I were in your place."

He turned to face her, and his brown eyes were lighted with his enthusiasm.

"I wish I could," he said excitedly, his words tumbling over and over each other. "Ever since I was a little bit of a fellow, I've liked such things, machinery and all that. I've felt at home with it and wanted to handle it. I hate school and the things the fellows care for, girls and dancing school and that stuff--I don't mean you, Cis; you're more like a boy,--and I hate worst of all the everlasting Greek and Latin. It is out of my line; I can't see anything in it. There's some sense in machinery. You can handle it, and mend it, and make it go, and maybe improve it. That's enough better than things you get out of books. Do you suppose there would be any chance of their letting me cut school and go into a shop?"

With a boy's eager haste, now that his secret was out, he was for dropping everything else and rushing headlong into his hobby. Cicely counselled patience.

"Wait," she said, as she rested her hand on his for an instant. "You're only fifteen, and there is plenty of time to decide. It is worth trying for, and I think perhaps you may get your way; but, first of all, you'll have to prove that it isn't just because you are too lazy to study Greek and German that you want to give it up. If you pass good examinations, this June, your chance will be all the better. Then you can go off, this summer, and take time to think it over. By fall, you can tell what you really do want; and, if your father is the man I think he is, and if you behave yourself in the meantime, I believe you will get it." She paused and, for the second time in her acquaintance with him, she felt Allyn's fingers close warmly on her own; but he only said,--

"You're not half bad for a girl, Cis."

"And when shall we begin our Dutch?" she asked, determined to clinch the fact of their treaty of peace.

"When can you?"

"To-night. Come over at eight, and I'll be ready. We'll take an hour, every evening and I'll do fudge afterward."

The dinner bell was sounding at The Savins, as Cicely and Allyn came strolling homeward. It was evident that they had been for a long walk. Melchisedek's tail drooped dejectedly, and Allyn carried a sheaf of nodding yellow lilies, while Cicely had the despised grammar tucked under one arm and a bunch of greenish white clovers in the other hand. They came on, shoulder to shoulder, talking busily, and Theodora as she watched them, was well content.

At the table, Cicely ignored the events of the afternoon

"Allyn is having a bad time with his German and I am going to see if I can help him," was all she said. "Are you going to use the library, this evening?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"'Lit-tle ones to him be-long,
Vey are weak, but he is strong.'

"Mam-ma-a-a!" Mac's burst of psalmody ended in a roar.

"Yes, Mac. Here I am."

"Where?"

"Upstairs, packing."

Mac toiled up the stairs and into his mother's room.

"I fought maybe you wanted to see me," he observed. "What for you putting all vose fings into ve box?"

"Because we are going to see grandpapa and Aunt Teddy, and then we are all going to the seashore."

"What is ve seashore?"

"The ocean, the great, broad blue water without any edge to it, where the waves keep tumbling over and over on the beach."

"What's beach?" he demanded. Always used to the mountains, the phraseology of the sea was a new tongue to him.

"It's the edge of the water," his mother said absently, while she tried to fold an organdie gown to the best advantage.

"But you said vere wouldn't be any edge," he protested, for he was nothing if not logical, and he insisted upon logic from others.

"Well, never mind now. Run away, dear, and I'll tell you about it, some other time."

But Mac festooned himself across the open box couch.

"No; sometime isn't ever, and I wants to hear it now. I do 'clare, mamma, you've put in my best coat." And before she could stop him, he had pounced upon it and pulled it out, upsetting a superstratum of gowns in the process.

"Mac, let that be."

"But I want it, mamma. I want to wear it. I look just too sweet in it."

"Mac!"

"Well, vat's what Lizabuf said. Will Lizabuf go too?"

"No."

"Who will take care of me, and put me into my coatsleeves ven?"

"I shall."

"I'd ravver have Lizabuf. Oh, mamma, is vat your swishy dress? It's so beautiful!" This time, Mac lost his balance and plunged headlong into the trunk. For one moment, his chubby legs waved in the air; then his mother seized him and set him down in a chair at the farther side of the room.

"Now, Mac, I want you to stay there," she said with decision.

There was a brief silence. Then Mac remarked,--

"You act and look awful bangy, to-day, mamma, just as if you were going to sweep rooms right away."

Five days later, Mrs. Holden acknowledged to herself that she felt "bangy." It was her first long journey without her husband and, less independent than her sisters, she would have dreaded it in any case. Without Mr. Holden, the trip was an undertaking; with Mac, it was almost insupportable. She embarked with a lunch basket, with picture books and with theories. She landed, a chastened woman. Within twelve hours, the basket was empty, the picture books were in shreds, and Mac, bareheaded, coated with cinders and wreathed in smiles, was prancing up and down the car, heedless of her admonitions. By day, the other passengers petted him and encouraged him to all manner of pertnesses. At night, they murmured, not always among themselves, when he waked up and in stentorian tones demanded a drink. No child of three is altogether a desirable companion on a long journey, least of all McAlister Holden. Small wonder that it was a pale and haggard Hope who drove up to The Savins, one night in late June, while Mac was as vivacious as at the start!

He went through the introductions with the nonchalance of his years, though he resisted Theodora's efforts to kiss him, and sniffed disdainfully at Phebe who was trying for her sister's sake to conceal her dislike of children. By Mrs. McAlister's side, he paused and looked

straight up into her face. Then he tucked his hand into hers confidently.

"Are you my grandma?"

"Yes, dear."

"Why, you look too new," he said frankly, and then put up his rosy lips for a kiss. For the moment, the cherub side was uppermost, and his mother, as she reflected upon the permanence of first impressions, rejoiced that it was so, and she hurried the child off to bed, for fear he might do something to destroy the illusion.

"Mamma," he said sleepily, as she left him, to go down for her own dinner; "will you please tell me just vis much?"

"Well?"

"Were you a mamma when you lived here before?"

"No, Mac."

"And now you've grown out into a beautifully mamma. Good-night!" And he went to sleep with the saintly side of his character still uppermost.

The Farringtons and Cicely dined at The Savins; but, directly after dinner, Cicely excused herself and went home to do some practising.

"No; I suppose it could wait," she said to Allyn who followed her to the door; "but it must be done some time. It is ages since you were all here together, and you ought to be just by yourselves to-night."

"But you are one of the family," Allyn protested.

"That's nice of you, Allyn; but it isn't quite the same thing. Besides, if I practise now, I shall have more time for fun, to-morrow. Go back to your sister. Isn't she a dear?"

"Yes, Hope is a good one," Allyn said, though without much enthusiasm; "but Ted is worth ten of her, according to my notions." And Cicely nodded up at him in token of agreement.

By the time dinner was over, the evening had grown chilly, and the McAlisters drew up their chairs around the open fire.

"All here once more, thank God!" the doctor said contentedly, as he settled himself between Theodora and Mrs. Holden.

"This seems just like the good old times," Theodora added. "It's five years since we were all here together, like this. Doesn't it make you feel as if you had never been away, Hope?"

"Yes, almost. If Allyn weren't quite so grown up and Billy so lively, I should believe we were children again. Ted, do you remember the first night that Archie came here?"

"The night I went slumming and stole the child? I should say I did. Archie didn't take it kindly at all, when he found the infant in his bed."

"That reminds me, papa," Phebe said abruptly; "Isabel and I want to take some fresh-air children, next week."

"Why, Babe, I don't see how you can," Theodora remonstrated.

"I didn't ask you, Teddy. I have thought it all over, and I can't see any objections. I should take all the care of it, and I want to do it."

"But the house is so full, Babe," Mrs. McAlister said. "There isn't any room for one."

"It could sleep on the lounge in my room. I wouldn't let it trouble you any. It is a fine charity, and this is such a good place for a child to play. Isabel will take one for a week, if I will, and I said I would. There is just time, before I go away," Phebe said with an air of finality which would have ended the subject, had it not been for Allyn's last shot,--

"They'd better get its life insured, then, for there's no telling how long it will be before Babe takes it as a subject for her scalpel."

"Don't be foolish, Allyn," Phebe returned; but Hubert interposed,--

"Isn't Archie going to come on at all, this summer, Hope?"

"I'm afraid not. Summer is his busy time, and he will be out in camp till snow flies."

"I don't see the use of having that kind of a husband," Phebe observed severely.

"You like the kind like me better; don't you, Babe?"

"No; I should get sick of having you everlastingly around the house, Billy. I want a man to have hours and stick to them, not keep running in and out. I sha'n't marry. If I did, I would insist on a ten-hour law; then I could be sure of getting some time to myself."

"Archie lives on a ten-month law," his wife said regretfully. "Of course, I can go out to camp to be with him; but it's not good for Mac. He picks up all the talk of the miners and retails it at inopportune times, and runs wild generally. Archie usually comes home for a day, every two or three weeks; but, this year, he is too far out for that, so I thought it was best for me to come East now."

"You had an easy journey; didn't you?" Hubert asked.

"Yes; at least, as easy as it could be with Mac."

"I think you have slandered Mac," Mrs. McAlister observed. "He seems as gentle as a cooing dove."

Hope and Theodora exchanged glances, as Hubert said laughingly,--

"That's because he paid you a compliment. Your judgment isn't a fair one."

But Hope only added,--

"Wait and see what the morrow may bring forth."

The morrow brought forth Mac, rested, refreshed, ready for mischief. Before breakfast was on the table, he had had an unfriendly interview with Patrick, had come into collision with Melchisedek, and Mrs.

McAlister met him hurriedly retiring from the kitchen with both hands full of fried potatoes. The next that was seen of him, he was playing horse on the front lawn, and Allyn was the horse. Even in his brief survey of the family, the night before, Mac had come to a decision upon two points. He did not like his Aunt Phebe; he did like his Uncle Allyn. And Allyn, unaccustomed to children though he was, promptly became the slave of his imperious young nephew.

"Oh, Hope, it is good to have you here," Theodora said, with a tempestuous embrace, when Mrs. Holden appeared at the door of the writing-room, that morning.

"Then I am not in the way?"

"Not a bit. I'm not writing, to-day; I can't settle myself, when I know you are within reach."

"Perhaps I'd better go back to Helena," Hope suggested.

"No; I shall calm down in time; but I never get used to having you so far away. It never seems quite right, when the rest of us are all here together."

"I am a little terrified at the prospect of the coming week," Hope said, as she sat down on the couch and looked across the lawn to where Mac was playing.

"What now?"

"Babe is to have her fresh-air child."

"Hope! You don't mean it?"

"Yes, she has coaxed papa into giving his consent. Is it a new idea to you?"

Theodora dropped her duster, and sat down beside her sister.

"It's new to us all," she said despairingly. "We never heard of it till last night. What will that girl do next? She detests children, and she has about as much idea of discipline as she has about--raising poultry. It is Isabel St. John's doing, I know. She is Babe's best-beloved friend; and where one leads, the other will follow."

"Babe seems to be in earnest about it," Hope said charitably.

"She's in earnest about everything--by fits and starts. It only doesn't last. She seems to be losing something of her medical fervor, and probably this is taking its place. I suppose she has met somebody who slums for a living, and the idea enchants her. I used to have aspirations that way, myself; but I am coming to the conclusion that for me charity begins at home, and that it counts for more to make Billy comfortable than to make his life a burden with my hobbies."

"Blunt as ever, Teddy?" Hope's laugh had no sting.

"Yes. I haven't reformed yet. Things 'rile' me, just as they used to, things and people. I'm a good hater, Hope." There was a suspicious glitter in her eyes; but it vanished, as Hope's hand touched her own.

"And a good lover, too, dear. I wasn't criticising, for I think you are in the right of it. But Babe really seems rather practical. She only wants the child for a week, and she agrees to take all the care of it and give it its meals away from the table."

"Yes; but what will she do with it?" Theodora's tone showed her perplexity. "There's no telling what may happen in the course of a week. She will test all the theories of all the cranks on the one poor baby, one theory a day, and by the end of the week, there won't be any baby left to send home again."

"My chief worry is for Mac," Hope said resignedly.

"Oh, I don't think the child will hurt him," Theodora reassured her. "They won't dare send a very bad one."

"No; but it may work the other way about. I am a good deal more worried in regard to Mac's effect on the child, and--"

"Mam-ma!"

"No, Mac. I told you that you mustn't come here. This is Aunt Teddy's house, and people don't come here, unless she invites them."

The door swung open a little way, and a chubby face appeared in the crack.

"Ven please 'vite me now, Aunt Teddy."

"You may come in, Mac."

Mac came in, wriggled his fat little body into the narrow space between his mother and his aunt, and gave a sigh of relief.

"Vere," he said gravely; "we're all fixed nice, Aunt Teddy, just ve way my mamma does when she's going to give me somefing good to eat."

CHAPTER TWELVE

"I really can't see why they should call this cottage Valhalla," Dr. McAlister said thoughtfully.

"Probably because there isn't any hall, and the dining-room is a tight fit for five of us," Phebe answered, as she took a cup from the china closet without troubling herself to leave her seat at the table.

"Teddy's establishment boasts the poetic name of Dandelion Lodge," Mrs. McAlister added. "There isn't a dandelion in sight, and, architecturally

speaking, it is more like a hen-house than a lodge. Still, I suppose it is well to have a name, even if there isn't anything in it."

"No matter," Hope said contentedly; "it's good to be free from the everlasting Belviews and Wavecrests. Valhalla isn't trite; Babe and I will be the Valkyries, and we have caught one hero already." She smiled at her father, as she spoke.

"I intend to have another before I leave here," Phebe proclaimed, as she passed her plate for more fish. "One hero isn't enough for us; we need one apiece."

"Where will you get him, sister Valkyrie?"

"I don't know; out of the briny deep perhaps, but time will show."

"Or old Valhalla's roaring hail,
Her ever-circling mead and ale,"

the doctor sang, and Phebe joined his song,--

"Where for eternity unite
The joys of wassail and the fight,"

for the stirring ballad was a favorite with them both.

Mac levelled his fork at them accusingly.

"You mustn't sing at ve table. It's horrid to sing at ve table."

"I beg your pardon, Mac," said his grandfather meekly.

Outside their windows, the sun was glowing over the steel blue sea. Not a sail broke the distance; only the ceaseless tossing of white foam above the rips, and close at hand a dory or two, rocking and rolling just outside the line of surf. In the foreground was a broad strip of sand and silvery beach grass then a narrower strip of sand without any grass at all, and then the huge breakers which came crashing in, wave on wave, mounting up, curling over, falling, breaking and racing up the sharp slope of sand, with never a halt for rest. Beyond that, the sea; beyond that again, three thousand miles beyond, Spain.

Quantuck lies crescent-wise along its low sandy cliff. The arms of the crescent are made up of new houses of more normal shape and size; but between them, the primeval village huddles itself together around the old town pump. No seaside villas are there, but the tiny low cottages of the old fishing hamlet, which seem to have grown like an amoeba, by the simple process of putting out arms in any direction that chance may dictate. Between them, the rutted, grass-grown roads are so narrow that traffic is seriously congested by the meeting of a box cart and a certain stout old dachshund that frequents the streets, and the cottages present their fronts or sides or rears to the roads, according to the whim of the owner. Crowded under the cliff are the bits of fishhouses, built, like the cottages above, all of shingles all gray with the passing years, for Quantuck history stretches back far into the long-ago, when, Town seven miles away, was a prosperous whaling port. But though the summer visitors come in schools like the bluefish, the little gray village on the cliff is unchanging and unchanged.

In the very heart of the old settlement, poised on the verge of the cliff, Valhalla and Dandelion Lodge were side by side, and the middle of July found Dr. McAlister in one, in the other the Farringtons with Hubert and Allyn as their guests.

"Valhalla can't hold you all," Billy had said, when they were making their plans for the summer. "If we take the Lodge, there will be an extra room, and Allyn and Hubert may as well use it. It really won't make any difference how we divide up. At Quantuck the houses only count on foggy days."

In fact, it had been Billy's idea, their choosing Quantuck, that summer. Years before, in his young boyhood, the Farringtons had been there, season after season, and he had always wanted to get back to the old place. Again and again he had been prevented, and it was not until this summer that he had succeeded in carrying out his plans. Now, for the first time in years, Dr. McAlister had consented to take a long vacation; Theodora's novel was locked up in the safe at home, waiting for revision; Hubert was to be with them for three weeks of the time, and Hope had come on from Helena to make the family circle complete.

To no one of the family had the week before the flitting been absolutely enjoyable. On one scorching July morning, Phebe and Phebe's own familiar friend, Isabel St. John, had roused their respective households at four o'clock in order that they might catch the six-thirty train for New York. Once there, they betook themselves to Hester Street in order to study the conditions of life in the East Side. It chanced, however, to be Friday, market day, and the place was a veritable Babel with the cries of the hucksters and the shrill clamor of the women elbowing each other about the push-carts. No one paid any heed to the girls; and on their side, after a brief inspection they paid heed to but one question, how to get out of the region as speedily as possible. Accordingly, they went up town to lunch, strolled about Twenty-third Street for an hour or two before going to the office of the fresh-air charity, and, late that evening, reappeared at their own front doors, each with a wan and weary child at her heels. Isabel's was a boy; Phebe, in deference to the conditions of a family treaty, had a girl.

For about three weeks, Phebe's table had been heaped with books on child-study, on pedagogy, on domestic hygiene; her room had been littered with syllabi on child impressions in every conceivable relation. Phebe was resolved to be scientific, or die in the attempt. She came nearer achieving the latter alternative. The struggle began on the first morning of her new charge. She was up early and ran down to the kitchen to put the oatmeal over the fire. Then full of courage and sociological zeal, she approached the tub, a thermometer in one hand, the child in the other. The fray which followed, was a short one. It began with Phebe's dropping the thermometer on the floor and plumping the child bodily into the bath. It ended with the child's breaking away and diving into bed again, dripping with bath-water and tears, while Phebe picked up the scattered fragments of the thermometer and fished the towels from the tub where they floated limply.

During the next half hour, Phebe parted with most of her theories and all of her temper. In the first place, she had never before tried to dress a child, and this first experience was not a pleasing one. The child's toes persisted in catching in the tops of the stockings, the little waist seemed to her unaccustomed eyes to be constructed upside down, and the scant little skirt went on hind side before. In spite of shrill

protestations, she braided up the lanky hair and scoured a patch of skin in the very middle of the child's face, and at last the toilet was complete. Breakfast brought with it a new chapter in her experiences. No arguments could induce the child to touch the oatmeal, unless it were combined with equal parts of sugar, and Phebe meekly yielded to the inevitable, while she hung up the dripping sheets to dry. Then she locked the child into her room, and went wearily down to join the others at the breakfast-table.

Later, when she appeared on the lawn, leading her charge by the hand, Mac came forward to meet them. With his pudgy hands clasped behind him and his small legs wide apart, he halted in front of the girl and, bending forward, peered up under her sunbonnet.

"Shake hands, baby," he said encouragingly.

The child obediently put out one small fist; but unluckily Phebe had spent all her energies on the face and neglected the hands entirely. Mac looked at the grimy fingers, recalled the talk at the breakfast-table and put his own hands behind him once more.

"Nahsty little girl!" he said severely, and, turning on his heel, departed in search of Allyn.

For the next seven days, Phebe passed through every variety of toil and woe and anxiety, also, it must be confessed, of teasing from her family. According to its lights, the child was good. It was not bright enough to be mischievous; it was pitifully apathetic on most points. In four directions, however, it held pronounced opinions, and, moreover, it had the courage of its convictions. It refused to be left alone for more than five minutes at a time; it refused to be washed; it refused to eat plain food, and it persisted, in spite of all opposition, in calling Phebe grandma. The title suggested affectionate devotion; but Phebe would have given up the devotion with perfect readiness.

It had been decreed that, if Phebe took the child, she should assume the whole responsibility in the matter, and she was resolute in carrying out her share of the compact. Theodora washed her hands of the affair entirely and only viewed it as an immense joke; but Hope, motherly and tender-hearted woman that she was, tried her best to come to the aid of her young sister. It was in vain. The little girl, homesick and forlorn for her wonted ways and plays, appeared to regard Phebe as the sole connecting link between the present gilded captivity and her old-time freedom. She wailed loudly at the approach of any one else, and was only content when her temporary guardian was within sight and touch. For seven weary days, the child was Phebe's inseparable companion and adjunct. On the evening of the eighth day, Phebe came home from New York, burned her syllabi and carried seven bulky tomes back to the public library.

"Retail reform isn't of the least use," she said vehemently to Isabel, that night. "Next time, I'll either import a colony, or let the whole thing alone. Either I will go and live with them, or nothing. It doesn't do any good to drag them here to pine for their ashbins. Just wait till next year, Isabel, and we'll try one of the settlements. This year, I've got to go to Quantuck and enjoy myself."

With whatever misgivings she started for Quantuck, she certainly achieved her end of enjoying herself. The summer colony, that year, was a large and lively one, and Phebe threw herself into it with the same fervor

which had marked her entrance into slumming, and, before that, into medicine. Skeletons and syllabi appeared to be alike forgotten; golf and swimming lessons took their place, and Phebe revelled in her out-of-door life as simply and as sincerely as Mac himself. Out on the cliff at dawn, down on the beach for the bathing hour, out to the links for the afternoon, back on the beach to watch the moon rise, she was perpetually active, perpetually in earnest, perpetually in a hurry. To the others, her energy was amusing and, at times, a little wearing. They liked better to spend long hours on the beach, where their awning soon became a focal point for the fun of the bathing hour; they loved to roam over the moors, to sit down now and then on their own broad piazzas and glance from book to sea and from sea to book again with the curious indifference to time and literature which is characteristic of the place.

"Do stay down here, this afternoon," Theodora urged her, one day. "The Bensons are coming over here soon, and it is much more fun to be here, a day like this, than to be prancing around those links."

But Phebe shook her head.

"I didn't come down here to frivol, Ted; I leave that to you. Nobody knows when I may have another chance to get myself in good form at golf, and I must make the most of this."

"But there are more days coming, and the Bensons are such pleasant people to know."

"I know more people now than I can get any good of," Phebe said, as she balanced her driver, and then swept it around in a circle with a force which nearly overturned her. "What's the use of any more? There comes Harold; he's going to caddy for me, to-day. I must go."

"What do you suppose can be the attraction out at the links?" Theodora said, after she had gone.

"Sheer delight in the sport," Hubert answered lazily, for he was sprawling on the sand by his sister's side, and it seemed almost too great an effort to speak.

"Isn't there any attendant knight?" Hope asked. "Phebe is impenetrable; but I have sometimes wondered whether there might not be a social side to it, rather than athletic."

"Don't waste any romance on Babe, Hope," Hubert advised her. "I wondered about it, myself, for there is rather a gay crowd out there, and I didn't know what might be going on. I went out, one day. I found the others all in a bunch, and Babe tearing around the links all by herself, with her poor caddie trotting hard to keep up with her."

"Who's that? Babe?" Allyn had suddenly plunged into the midst of the group. "I hear that the caddies are talking of a boycott, charging her double fees unless she goes slow. She plays a smashing game; but there's no sort of sense in the way she goes about it."

Theodora yawned.

"Babe is upsetting all my ideas," she said languidly. "I had always regarded golf as a suitable amusement for stout elderly persons who waddled, a good deal like the caucus race in Alice. Babe's vigor fairly

takes my breath away."

"Same with her swimming," Allyn remarked, with a certain pride. "She's gone into it all over."

"Into the surf?" Cicely inquired, as she scooped little mounds of sand over his feet.

"Yes, just that. She swims under water like a fish. There isn't another girl here to beat her. You are nothing but a porpoise beside her, Cis, and you swim fairly well. Hope, I do wish you'd take lessons. I'm tired of seeing you chug up and down beside that lifeline."

"Do you know," Theodora said meditatively; "I'd rather face the footlights at the Metropolitan than come down this beach at the bathing hour. It makes me feel pigeon-toed in the extreme."

Cicely eyed her with a calm lack of comprehension born of healthy girlhood.

"I don't see why," she said.

"Because you stay in the water, and can't hear the gossip along shore," Theodora answered. "Just you stay out here, some morning, and sit in the Dragons' Row, as Billy calls it, and you will find out what I mean. Charity covers a multitude of sins; but it never drapes an awkward woman in an unbecoming bathing suit."

"That is where Babe has the advantage," Hubert remarked. "She isn't exactly graceful; but she is no more awkward than an unbroken colt."

"And she acts a good deal like one," Hope added, laughing. "Still, she may get broken soon, so let's let her go her ways in peace. She has worked hard, the past six months, and she deserves to be allowed to take her vacation in any form she chooses."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Down on the shore, Dragons' Row was holding high carnival. It was the bathing hour, when those who had much energy plunged through and through the breakers, those who had little floundered in the edge of the foam, and those who had none sat upright under the awnings, lorgnette in hand, and passed judgment upon their fellows. The tall, sinewy bathing master sat on the shore, his yellow collie beside him, enjoying an interval of well-earned leisure, for at this season he was the most conspicuous and the most popular figure on Quantuck beach. Just now, he was looking on in manifest pride at the skill of his latest pupil, Phebe McAlister. Even Dragons' Row fell silent, when Phebe took to the water for her noon bath. It was good to see her free, firm step as she came down the board walk, dressed in the plain black suit which set off her fresh, clear skin and her bright hair. Phebe scorned caps entirely, and no sunburn could roughen her cheeks. Her suit fitted her, and she was as trim and comely in it as in her more conventional raiment. Once on the beach, she had a trick of standing for a moment, looking out at the distant water with an unconsciousness which was not feigned, then rapidly measuring the

incoming wave, she chose the exact moment of its rising to curl over and break, plunged through it and, after an interval when the onlookers waited breathlessly, she reappeared on the farther side and swam tranquilly away up the shore. Hope might cling to the lifeline and be boiled to her heart's content, and Theodora was welcome to paddle about in the thick of the crowd, with Hubert and Billy beside her. To Phebe, there was something fairly intoxicating in the knowledge of her strength, in feeling the free, firm play of her muscles and in conquering the power of the sea.

The wind had been blowing strongly, all the morning, and the waves were rolling in heavily. Their green tops were crested with white foam which rose high and higher, curved over as softly as a rose petal, balanced for a brief second, then fell with a crash and went flowing up the bank of the beach, circling and twisting in countless eddies that now and then crept to the very awnings and caused a stampede among their inhabitants. A dozen portly matrons sat in the sand, rocking to and fro as the wave came up about them and receded; and children innumerable pranced around them, playing tag with the tricky surf that often caught them unawares.

"Grandma," Mac said, trudging up to the McAlister awning with a pail of sand under his arm; "isn't vat sky just lovely? I'd like to fly up vere, and maybe God would let me work ve sun."

"Do you think you could work it, Mac?"

"Yes, it goes just like ve clock. He winds it up wiv a key, and ven it goes all right. Grandma!"

"Well?"

Mac dropped his sand into her lap, and then plumped himself down by her side.

"Did you see vat funny man in ve pinky suit? Well, he's Mrs. Benson's boy."

"Hush, dear!" Mrs. McAlister said hastily, for Mrs. Benson's awning was next her own.

"What for should I hush? He is funny; just you look at him and see."

"Mac is earning his right to a place in Dragons' Row," Hubert observed from the spot, ten feet away, where he was taking a sunbath between plunges. "Why don't you come in, mother?"

"I dare not face the critics," she answered laughingly, while she emptied Mac's sand from her lap. "I shouldn't come out of it as well as Babe does."

Hubert raised himself on his elbow and looked after his sister with evident satisfaction.

"She's the best swimmer on the beach, except Mr. Drayton," he said, as he dropped back again and burrowed his brown arms into the sand. "If he gives her many more lessons, she'll beat him at his own trade, and that's saying a good deal."

Phebe, meanwhile, had been swimming with the tide and was now far up the

shore. There she landed herself through the breakers as craftily as a fisherman lands his dory, and came tramping back toward the awning onto more. Not even the deep sand could hamper her light step, as she came striding along with a perfect disregard of the buzz which passed along the line of awnings parallel with her coming.

"Miss Phebe McAlister, Dr. McAlister's daughter, splendid looking girl, but rather eccentric, they say." "A perfect snob; but I don't know as I blame her. Sister to Mrs. Farrington, that tall woman with the handsome husband." "Sister to Mrs. Theodora McAlister Farrington, the novelist. Isn't she superb? But I hear she doesn't care a fig for society."

So the buzz ran on, and Phebe passed by, heedless of it, heedless, too, of the gaze of a young man who stood alone, a little back of the line of awnings. It was evident that he was a stranger, for he spoke to no one, although it is not easy to be unsocial at Quantuck. For the rest, he was tall, strongly built, with a fresh, boyish face; he wore a little pointed beard, and he carried himself with an indescribable air of being somebody at whom it was worth while to look twice.

"Did you see the new man on the beach, this morning?" Allyn asked, at dinner, that noon.

"The new man, when there are new men here, every day in the week!" Theodora's tone was one of amusement.

"Evidently you didn't see him, or you'd speak with more respect. He was a duke in disguise, at the very least."

"Do you mean the man with the Frenchy beard, and his nose in the air?" Cicely asked, with scant respect for the stranger's ducal appearance.

"Yes. Who was he?"

"I don't know. He acted as if he did the beach a favor in even looking at it."

"He didn't look that way at Babe," Allyn remarked, with a chuckle. "I thought sure he was going to applaud her, when she came stalking down the beach."

"Babe does take the beach a good deal after the manner of Lady Macbeth," Lilly observed. "Where was your man, Allyn? I didn't see any titled strangers of my acquaintance."

"He was just back of the Whitmans' awning for a long time. After that, he came down to Mr. Drayton and talked to him. I didn't see him speak to anybody else, though."

"Oh," Hubert said suddenly; "I know the man you mean, Allyn. There is a good deal of him, too. Sam Asquith told me he had just come to the hotel. He is a composer and hails from New York."

"What is his name?" Theodora asked rather indifferently.

"Gifford Barrett."

"Oh!" There was a clatter, as Cicely dropped her knife and fork and clasped her hands in ecstasy. "Really?"

"Is it so painful as all that, Cis?" Allyn inquired.

"Pain! It's utter rapture. I've always felt that, if I could just once look at Gifford Barrett, I could die happy. Do you know who he is, you ignorant ones?"

The others owned up to their mental darkness; but Theodora said vaguely,--

"Seems to me I met him once. The name is half-way familiar."

Cicely groaned.

"Half-way familiar! I should rather say it was."

"Who is he, anyway?" Allyn demanded.

"Who? Why, he wrote the _Alan Breck Overture_."

"What's that?"

"Allyn! When I have played it on an average of twice a day, ever since I came here! Haven't you any ears?"

"Not for your kind of music," Allyn returned bluntly. "I want a little tune in mine."

"Who is the man?" Billy asked. "Is he really of any account, Cis?"

"I should think he was. Mr. Paulson, my teacher in New York, said he is the greatest American composer," she returned triumphantly.

"A genuine lion, not a duke," Hubert observed. "But I thought composers always wore their hair in flowing ringlets, Cicely. This man is too well groomed to be really inspired."

Theodora laughed suddenly.

"Hu, you remind me of Mrs. Benson. The day after I came, she asked me whether Miss Greenway didn't write books; she thought all people who wrote books were generally a little untidy."

"Did you enlighten her?"

"I couldn't, for I had just ripped my jacket sleeve open for more than two inches. 'Twas made with one of those insidious one-thread machines, and I tried to pull out a loose stitch. Since then, she has avoided the subject of Miss Greenway, and I have spent a good share of my energy in mending the more visible portions of my attire. I didn't know before that the eyes of the world were upon us, as upon a peculiar people."

But Cicely had returned to the charge.

"Cousin Hubert, how long is he going to be here?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Who is he here to see?"

"Nobody, apparently, unless his own fair face," Billy answered irreverently.

"Cousin Ted, did you say you knew him?"

"I'm not sure; but it seems to me I met him once."

"Oh, I do hope so. I want just once to meet him and hear him talk."

"Even if his voice has a falsetto crack in it?" Billy inquired.

"Even if he's--dumb!" Cicely's climax was lost in a burst of laughter, in the midst of which she fled from the table.

"Never you mind!" she proclaimed from the doorway. "I'll find a way to meet him yet. You needn't laugh at me, either, for you're every one of you hero-worshippers, if you'd only own it." Then she crossed over to the piazza of Valhalla, where Phebe was drying her hair in the sunshine. Phebe received the great news disdainfully.

"Oh, that man!" she said, with something that came dangerously near to being a sniff. "I saw him. After most of the people were gone, he came down and went into the water."

"Really?" Cicely's tone was rapt. "I wish I'd seen him. How did he look?"

"Atrocious. He is bow-legged, and he wore a rose-colored suit. Against the green of the waves, he looked like a huge pink wishbone."

"Did he swim beautifully?"

Phebe shook her hair back from her shoulders.

"Like a merman," she said; "a forsaken merman with the gout."

"Babe!"

"Well, if you must know the truth, the abject, literal truth, he hung his clothes on a hickory limb, as far as going near the water was concerned. He waded in up to his ankles and stood there, shivering, shivering a day like this! Then he trotted back and forth a few times and went back to the bathhouse again without letting a wave touch him. Booby! If he played golf, he would probably get his caddie to take him around the links in a wheelbarrow. I do hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing the creature get boiled." And, with a final flirt of her hair, she marched away into the house.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

For the next week, Cicely stalked her lion patiently, warily and in vain. Gifford Barrett had come down to Quantuck, firmly resolved that on no conditions would he consent to be lionized. His six weeks in Maine had been all that he could endure. He had at last come to the wise conclusion that his talent, if he had any, belonged to himself and his work, and was

not to be spread out thin on biscuits and served up at afternoon teas. He had fled from Maine and from his admiring friends in a mood dangerously near to disgust. His nostrils were tired of incense. He wished ozone, unflavored with anything whatsoever. The symptom was a healthy one and portended good things for the future. Meanwhile, it led him to choose a resort where he knew no one, where he himself was unknown, and where he could be as independent as he liked.

During the first week of his stay, he accomplished his ends. He went his own way at his own times; he ignored the many inviting glances cast in his direction; he talked only to the bathing master, the native fishermen and the waiter at his table. With observant eyes, he took in the least details of his surroundings; but he did it in an unseeing fashion that completely misled the members of the summer colony who discussed him largely under their awnings and wrangled solemnly over the important question as to whether he was surly, or only shy.

On his side, Gifford Barrett was gaining considerable amusement from the morning conventions on the beach. As a general thing, he only watched the people in groups, and entertained himself with making shrewd guesses as to the probable relationships existing in those groups. Only two individuals made distinct impressions upon him. One of these was the tall, lithe girl in the black suit, who walked as well as she swam; the other was also a girl, but younger and less good-looking, and Gifford Barrett found himself wondering how she could possibly be in so many places at once. He appeared to be always falling over her, always coming upon her path, on the cliff, on the moors, at the tiny post office where it seemed to him that he spent half of his time waiting for the leisurely distribution of the mails to be completed. She usually wore a grey bicycle suit, and she was invariably attended by a small grey dog who took unwarrantable liberties, in the post office, with people's trouser legs and even had been known to whet his teeth on the softer portions of umbrellas. To tell the truth, he paid more attention to the dog than he did to the girl; and he was utterly unconscious of the expression of glee that crossed Cicely's face, one day, when he exclaimed,--

"Get out, you small brute!" and accompanied the words with a pettish little kick which reduced the dog to a yelping frenzy.

On one other occasion Cicely had been conscious of penetrating to the nerve centres of her hero; although, fortunately for her peace of mind, she did not know the exact way in which she had accomplished the feat. Early one morning, Mr. Barrett had been strolling along the road nearest the edge of the cliff when as if by chance, there had floated down upon his astonished ears, a high girlish voice singing the second theme of his Alan Breck Overture. For a moment, his lips had curled into a complacent little smile; the next minute, he had sucked in his breath sharply between his clenched teeth. In her excitement, Cicely had mistaken her distance; she had flatted by a full half-tone the final upper note, reducing the tonal climax of the overture to the level of a comic song.

A few days later, however, Cicely was destined to make an impression upon something besides the nerve centres of her hero. As a rule, Mr. Barrett took his baths at odd hours, either going to the beach in the early morning, or else delaying until the rest of the world was at the noon dinner which it sought ravenously, the moment it left the beach. On this particular day, however, his watch apparently had played him false, and he came down upon the sand just as the throng of bathers was

at its height. In the eyes of Dragons' Row, he immediately became an object of derision, for it was as Phebe had said, there was certainly no doubt whatever of his being extremely bow-legged, and, strong and powerful as he looked, he kept himself well away from the shock of the breaking waves.

After his wonted fashion, he paddled about in the edge of the water for a few moments, then turned to walk back to the shore. The next moment proved to be his undoing. Unconscious for the once of his appearing, Cicely had been swimming back and forth just outside the line of surf; then borne on the crest of a wave higher by far than any of its fellows had been, she came floating towards the beach. She landed on her feet as usual; but the wave, heavier than she expected, swept her off her balance and sent her sliding up the sand, straight against the retreating heels of her hero. There were two hurried exclamations, there was a splash; then the backward flow caught them, pulled them down and they reached the line of breakers again just in time to be boiled sociably together in the next in coming wave.

Gifford Barrett shook the water from his eyes and rubbed his right arm a little anxiously, as he staggered to his feet again. Cicely had fled to Allyn's side, and the young man nodded curtly to her as he stalked back to the shore. At the water's edge, he was greeted with a voice which sounded strangely familiar to his ears.

"How do you do? Vat was ve time you got boiled; wasn't it?"

No childish voice ever fell unheeded on Gifford Barrett's ears. The stoutest spot in his mental armor yielded to the touch of small fingers, and some of his best comradeships had been with tiny boys and girls. Now, in an instant, all his sense of injured dignity fell away from him, and the watchers under the awnings wondered at the sudden kindness in his face, as he grasped Mac's pudgy fist.

"Why, Mac, who ever dreamed of seeing you here, old man!"

"I live here now," Mac said gravely; "me and my mamma and everybody, only papa."

"I thought you lived in Helena."

"Not now. We like it better here; it's so funny to sit in ve sand and build pies. Can you build pies?"

"Yes, and forts."

Mac fell to prancing delightedly, quite regardless of the havoc his small shoes were creating among the bare toes of his companion.

"Oh, can you? Truly, no joking? Make me one now."

"Mac!" The call came from the nearest awning.

"Vat's mamma," Mac said. "She wants us. Come." And he tugged at Gifford Barrett's hand.

"Not just now, old man."

"Come. Aunt Teddy's vere, and all ve rest. Come."

"Mac!" This time, the voice was more decided.

"Yes, mamma; but he won't come."

"Mac, come here at once."

There was a brief skirmish; then as usual, Mac conquered, and Gifford Barrett was led, an unwilling victim, to the awning where sat Mac's mother, beyond her a serried rank of Mac's relatives and, beyond them all, a tall girl in a black suit who watched him with dancing eyes.

The situation was not an easy one. It was Theodora who relieved it.

"Isn't this Mr. Gifford Barrett?" she asked, rising to meet him with the easy dignity which she assumed at times and which made her husband feel so proud of her. "You may not remember me, Mrs. Farrington; but I think I met you in New York, two years ago, at a dinner that Mrs. Goodyear gave." And, as she spoke, Theodora was distinctly grateful for the accident which had left a dozen old letters in the tray of her trunk.

With a grave courtesy all his own, Gifford Barrett went through the trying ordeal of an introduction in his bathing suit. Even Phebe was forced to admit that he was well-bred, while, in the distance, Cicely capered about madly, half in rapture that the desired meeting had taken place, half in rage that she could not with dignity annex herself to the group. For one short, ecstatic moment, she held her breath; then she vented her feelings by plunging headlong into the next wave and swimming off as fast as she could. Instead of making his bow and then beating the decorous retreat of an eccentric recluse, Mr. Gifford Barrett, the composer of the Alan Breck Overture, had deposited his tall form in his rose-colored bathing suit on the sand at Theodora's feet.

"No; I thought I wouldn't go in to-day," she said. "I don't care very much about it, when the surf is running so high."

"Your sister doesn't seem to mind any amount of surf," Mr. Barrett said, glancing at Phebe.

Coming nearer him, one saw that his brown eyes were frank and kindly, that his face was attractive when he smiled. Theodora liked him unreservedly; she even began to remember him a little, in a vague sort of way, and she hoped that Phebe would be in one of her more lenient moods. In vain.

"Yes, I like to swim," Phebe said briefly.

"Evidently, for no one could swim as you do, without enjoying it," Mr. Barrett observed, with an enthusiasm which was almost boyish.

"Mr. Drayton swims magnificently, and he hates it."

"Is this your first season here at Quantuck?"

"Yes."

Under cover of her gown Theodora gave Phebe a furtive poke. Phebe turned abruptly and stared at her.

"Well?" she asked.

"Well what?" Theodora said, with a smile.

"What did you want? You poked me; didn't you?"

"I beg your pardon. Did I hit you? I get stiff with so long sitting still. Is Quantuck an old ground of yours, Mr. Barrett?"

"No; I am a stranger here. Your little nephew is the first friendly face I have seen."

"I hope you will be neighborly at the Lodge, then. It is just on the edge of the bluff, and the latch-string is always out. So are we, for that matter. We spend most of our time down here, all of us but Phebe. She infests the golf links."

"You are a golf enthusiast, then Miss McAlister?"

"Yes. Aren't you?"

"No; not just now, at least. Have they good links here?"

"Very." Phebe rose as she spoke.

"Where are you going, Babe?" Hope asked.

"Down to take one more plunge, then back to the house. I'm going out early this afternoon, and I must be ready."

Theodora's next remark fell upon empty ears. Gifford Barrett was watching Phebe as she went away, admiring her tall, lithe figure, her well-set head, and wondering why in the name of all that was musical this girl should snub him so roundly. He searched his mind in vain for some just cause of personal offence; he could not realize that, in Phebe's present state of mind, there was no interest at all for her in a man who could neither swim nor play golf, and that it was characteristic of Phebe McAlister never to hide her feelings. Meanwhile, it was the first time in his life that he had been snubbed by any girl, and he found the experience novel, interesting and by no means satisfactory. As he left the awning and strolled away up the beach, he was resolving that incense and solitude should give way to snubbing. He would see more, much more of this taciturn young woman, force her to talk and, if possible, undermine her antipathy to himself.

Unhappily for Gifford Barrett, however, his conceit was playing him false. Phebe felt no antipathy to him, none whatever; she was only completely indifferent to the very fact of his existence, and she went round the links, that afternoon with a healthy forgetfulness of the fact that she had ever set eyes upon the tall person of the greatest American composer.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"Papa," Allyn said bravely; "I'd like to have a talk with you, before the

day is over."

Dr. McAlister looked up in surprise, for the boy's tone was weighted with meaning. During the two or three weeks that they had spent at the shore, Dr. McAlister had been congratulating himself upon the change in his young son. Allyn had seemed brighter, happier, more like the normal boy of his age, and his father had been hoping that some mental crisis was past, that the old moodiness had vanished. For the last day or two, however, Allyn's face had been overcast, and the doctor's anxiety had returned to him once more. Nevertheless, there was no trace of this in his voice, as he answered,--

"I wanted to go for a drive on the moors, this afternoon, and I had wondered whether I could get somebody to go with me. Will you be ready, right after dinner?"

Down on the beach, that morning, there was a general question about Allyn and Cicely; but neither of them put in an appearance. Cicely, indeed, had been ready to start for the awning; but she saw Allyn going towards the road, and she ran after him to ask whither he was bound.

"Just for a walk, out to Kidd's Treasure or somewhere."

"Who with?" she demanded, regardless of grammar.

"Alone."

She looked into his face inquiringly.

"Anything wrong, Allyn?"

He shook his head.

"Why don't you come down to the beach?"

"Don't want to. Cis, I'm going to have it out with my father, this afternoon."

She nodded slowly.

"Yes, you may as well. It's about time."

He turned away and started down the narrow road through the town. She stood looking after him for a moment; then she called,--

"Mayn't I go, too, Allyn?"

"If you want to. I sha'n't be back in time for the bathing hour, though," he answered; but his eyes belied the scant cordiality of his words.

For more than an hour, they sat on the high bluff that juts seaward at the south of the town. On the one hand, the sea stretched away, its deep sapphire blue only broken by the diagonal white line that marked the rips; on the other were the treeless moors looking in the changing lights like a vast expanse of pinkish brown plush. Directly at their feet, the little bowl of Kidd's Pond lay among its rushes like a turquoise ringed about with malachite; beyond it was the grey village, and beyond again, the lighthouse whose tall white tower by day and whose flashing light at night are the beacons which seem to welcome the wanderers of the summer

colony, whenever their steps are turned back to Quantuck.

At length, Cicely rose to her feet.

"We must go, Allyn. Here is the noon train now, and we shall be late to dinner."

But the boy did not stir. He sat with his elbows on his knees, his chin resting on the back of his clasped fingers, while his eyes followed the slow approach of the primitive little Quantuck train. Cicely waited for a moment. Then she came back to his side once more and dropped down on the coarse moorland grass.

"Allyn," she said gravely; "it isn't always easy to know what to do; at least, I don't think it is. The future seems so far off, when we try to plan about it. But papa used to tell me that, as long as I did the next thing in order and did it hard and carefully, without trying to save myself any work or to sneak, the rest of things would take care of themselves. It sounds pretty prosy; but I rather think after all it may be true. It is a good deal more romantic to plan what great things we'll do when we are grown up; but I never noticed that planning helped on much. When I began on my music, I used to dream lots of dreams about the concerts I'd give; but all the good it did was to make me lose count in my exercises, so I gave up dreaming and took to scales instead, and then I began to get on a little better." She paused for a minute; then she went on gayly, "And the moral of that is, stop worrying and come home to dinner, for I am as hungry as a bluefish."

"Mr. Barrett spent half the morning with us, Cicely," Hubert said, as she came to the table. "Where were you, to miss your chances?"

"Gallivanting with another young man," she said. "But was he really and truly there? What did he talk about?"

"Soft-shell crabs."

"How unromantic! What else?"

"Welsh rarebit, if you must know."

"Was that all? Didn't he talk any music?"

"No; only the music of his own speech. It's not manners to talk shop, Cis."

"Oh, but I do wish I could meet him!" she sighed. "Is he ever coming here to the Lodge?"

"Perhaps, if we hang Babe out for bait. He appears to have her on the brain. He asked, to-day, apropos of nothing in particular, whether Miss McAlister were not very intellectual."

"I hope you assured him that she was," Billy remarked.

"I did. Trust me for upholding the family reputation. I told him that she had a receptive mind and would be an ornament to any profession."

"Hubert!" his sister remonstrated.

"Well, why not? Babe is able to hold her own, whether she turns her attention to the ministry or to coaching athletic teams, and it is only fair to give her the honest meed of praise."

"Cousin Ted," Cicely said earnestly, after a pause; "I wish you would ask Mr. Barrett here to supper, some night. I want so much to meet him."

"Why, Cicely, I never supposed you were such a lion-hunter." Theodora's tone, though gentle, conveyed a distinct rebuke.

"It isn't just silly wanting to meet him," she said, as her color came. "I do want to know him, to hear him play and talk, because there isn't anybody else whose work I love as I do his. I used to feel that way about yours, Cousin Ted, and want to know you on account of your books; but now I forget all about them. It's different with Mr. Barrett. He doesn't seem especially interesting. He looks conceited and he toes in; but his work is wonderful. Besides, I want to have him hear me play. He looks as if he wouldn't mind telling disagreeable truths, and I want somebody to tell me whether I am wasting all my time, trying to do something that is impossible. I don't care whether he eats crabs or clams; he may eat with his knife, if he wants to. All I'm after is his music."

Theodora laughed at her outburst.

"I will do what I can for you, Cis; but I am afraid it is a forlorn hope. I don't believe he is a man who can be coaxed into talking shop, and I fear he hasn't the least idea of accepting any invitations, while he is down here. I will try to get him; but you may be driven into taking a piano down on the beach and discoursing sweet music to him, while he bathes."

"Bathes!" Cicely's tone was a faint echo of Phebe's. "He doesn't bathe; he paddles. No matter! Some day, I'll get what I want." But happily she had no foreknowledge of the circumstances under which she would talk of music with Gifford Barrett.

An hour later, Allyn and his father were driving away across the moors. It takes good seamanship to bear the motion of a Quantuck box cart; it requires still better seamanship to navigate one of them along the rutted roads. For some time, it took all of Dr. McAlister's energy to keep from landing himself and Allyn head foremost in the thickets of sweet fern and beach plum. By degrees, however, he became more expert in avoiding pitfalls and in keeping both wheels in the ruts, and he turned to Allyn expectantly.

"Well, Allyn, what was it?"

For two days, Allyn had been preparing himself on various circuitous routes by which he might approach his subject and slowly prepare his father's mind for the plea he wished to make. Now, however, his father had taken him by surprise, and accordingly he blurted out the whole plain truth.

"Papa, I don't want to go to college. I want to be an engineer."

Back in the depths of Dr. McAlister's eyes, there came an expression which, under other conditions, might have developed into a smile. The boy's tone was anxious and pleading, out of all proportion to the gravity of his subject; but Dr. McAlister wisely forbore to smile. All his life,

he had made it his rule never to laugh at the earnestness of his children, but to treat it with the fullest respect.

"A civil engineer?" he asked, thinking that Allyn was attracted by the profession of his brother-in-law.

"No; just a plain, everyday engineer that runs machinery. I wish you'd let me. There's no use in my going through college; I'm too stupid about lots of things, and I never could make a decent doctor."

"What makes you think you could make a decent engineer?" the doctor questioned keenly.

"Because I love it. I like wheels and beams and valves so much better than I like syntax and subjunctives," he urged. "I'd be willing to work for it, papa; it's interesting and it really counts for something, when you get it done."

"Perhaps. Is it a new idea, Allyn?"

The boy shook his head.

"It's nearly as old as I am, I believe. Ever since I remember, I have liked such things. I've watched them, whenever I had a chance, and when I couldn't do that, I've looked at pictures of them. I don't suppose I ought to have said anything about it, for I know you want to have me go through college; but I hate my school, and I don't seem to get on any."

"But your marks were higher, last month, than they had been for a year."

"That was Cicely."

"Cicely?"

"Yes, she helped me. I was warned, and would have been conditioned; but she found it out and went at me till she pulled me through. That was how she found out about it."

"About what?"

"This."

"Then Cicely knows?"

"Yes; but nobody else. I let it out to her, one day, and she made me show her my drawings. Then she told me that, if I wanted you to listen to me, I'd have to do a good deal better work in school than I had been doing."

The doctor nodded approvingly.

"Cicely has a level head of her own," he said; "but how do I know you aren't trying to shirk school, Allyn?"

Allyn faced him proudly.

"I never lie, and I promise you I'll do my best."

"Well, that's all right." The doctor was coming down to the practical side of the question, and all of a sudden he found that it was not going

to be an easy thing for him to relinquish the hope of having one of his sons follow him in his profession. "Do you know what it means, though, Allyn, to be an engineer?"

"I think so." The boy spoke with a quiet dignity which was new to him.

"What?"

"To work eight or ten hours a day in a factory; to begin at the bottom and work up; maybe, at last, to invent a machine of my own."

"Yes." In spite of himself, the doctor's voice was encouraging, for he could not help realizing that the boy had weighed the situation carefully. "But do you know that your work would be in heat and dirt and noise, among men who are not your equals in family and training?"

"Is Jamie Lyman my equal in family?" Allyn demanded. "Or Frank Gavigan, or Peter Hubbard? You don't seem to mind putting me into school with them."

"That is only for a short time. The other would be for life."

"Not if I work up."

"Perhaps not; but there is no upper class in a shop. But you said something about some drawings. Have you made some?"

"Yes."

"What are they?"

"These." And Allyn offered a half-dozen sheets of paper to his father. Dr. McAlister glanced at them; then he put the reins into Allyn's hand.

"Here," he said; "you can drive. I want to look at these."

For some moments, there was a silence, while the doctor turned over the papers and Allyn's heart thumped until it seemed to him as if it could be heard distinctly. Then deliberately the doctor took off his glasses, shut them into their case and put the case into his pocket.

"Allyn," he said slowly; "I don't know much about such things; but I rather think that you have found your work. Some of these drawings are well done. Where did you get your machines?"

"I made them up."

"Oh." The doctor's tone was more dry than he realized; but he was unwilling, for the boy's own good, to show the pride he felt in his son. "Suppose we talk this over, then, and see what plans we would better make. I did want you to be a doctor, Allyn; it would have made me very happy, but I think it isn't best for you. It doesn't seem to be just in your line, and I don't believe in forcing you into the wrong profession. Even if an engineer's life meant hard work and disagreeable people and things around you, would you like to try it?"

"Yes."

"You would be happy in it?"

"Yes."

"You think you would stick to it through thick and thin?"

"Yes."

There was no gush, no enthusiasm; yet something in the quiet affirmative carried conviction to the father's mind.

"My boy," he said, as he rested his hand on Allyn's knee for a moment; "you are my youngest child, and very dear to me, dearer because for years your life has had to make up for the one that ended as yours began. It has been my constant hope to make you into a broad and happy man, and a good one. The rest doesn't count for much in the long run. If you really are sure that you care for machines, then let it be machines; only make up your mind to put your very best self into them, whether you oil up old ones or invent new ones. It doesn't make much difference what the work is; it makes a great deal of difference how you do it. Now listen to me, for I am going to make a bargain with you."

He paused and looked down into the brown eyes, and they looked back at him unfalteringly.

"If I give up my pet dream for you--you will never know how often I have dreamed it, Allyn--and let you throw over the idea of being a doctor, I shall expect you to keep on for two more years in your school and to take a good stand there. A mechanic should be as well-balanced mentally as a doctor. I want you to know some classics, some history. Then, after that, if you still feel the same way about this, you may fit for any of the good technological schools you may choose, and I will do all I can to help you carry out your plans for your work. Is it a bargain?"

Allyn's hand met his father's for a moment, and he nodded briefly. That was all; but his father, as he watched him, was content without further demonstration.

"Then we'll call it all settled," he said briskly, as he took the reins once more. "I'll speak to the others about it, if you want. Sometimes discussions of such things are a trial. Next time, though,--Has this been worrying you, Allyn?"

"A little. I was afraid you wouldn't like it."

"I'm sorry. Next time, come to me in the first of it, and we'll talk it over together. That's what we fathers are for; and all we want for our sons is to see them strong and honest and content, determined to get the very best out of life as they go along. The only question is, where the best lies, and that we must each one of us decide for himself. That's enough moral for one afternoon," he added, laughing.

"N--no," Allyn answered meditatively; "I hate morals, as a general thing; but I don't seem to mind this. It's too sensible."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Mac was at his evening devotions.

"And not squeal at Aunt Phebe, A-ah-nen!" he concluded in a gusty sforzando. Then he reached up and took his mother's face between his two pink palms. "I hit Aunt Phebe, to-day, mamma. Vat was very naughty; but I 'scused her, so it don't make any matter."

The fact was that Mac and his Aunt Phebe were not on intimate terms. Never fond of children and none too fond of being disturbed in the pursuit of her varying hobbies, Phebe had scant patience with the vagaries of her small nephew. His ingratiating ways annoyed her; his shrill babble distracted her; her sense of order revolted at the omnipresent piles of sand which marked his pathway. Mac was revelling, that summer, in the possession of unlimited supplies of sand, and, not content with having it on the beach, he surreptitiously lugged it up to Valhalla and constructed little amateur beaches wherever he could escape from Phebe's searching eyes.

Phebe protested loudly over the beaches. They were in the way; they rendered it unsafe to cross the floors, since they had a trick of appearing in new and unsuspected localities. Moreover, they afforded a source of constant interest to Melchisedek, who appeared to be secreting an anatomical collection beneath them, and spent long hours on guard above his latest addition to his hoard. It offended Phebe to be growled at, just at the moment when her foot struck a heap of sand and bones which should have had no place in a well-ordered home; it offended her still more to listen to Mac's shrill unbraidings, when he found her ruthlessly sweeping the whole deposit out of doors. Hence Mac's blow. Hence his forgiveness.

"I wish you were my brother, and I would see if this couldn't be stopped," Phebe had said, in the fulness of her wrath.

Mac surveyed her blandly.

"But I don't want you for a brovver. You're nofing but a girl, and if I had a little brovver, I'd ravver have a he-brovver," he returned dispassionately.

"All the same, I'd make you mind me," she said vengefully, as she gave the broom a final flirt.

"But you doesn't own me, Aunt Babe; every one else doesn't own me, just myse'f."

What remote memory of past Sunday stories had asserted itself, the next day, it would be impossible to tell; but Mac suddenly projected himself into the long-ago, and out from the long-ago he addressed Phebe.

"You are Pharaoh, you know, and you kills babies."

"Don't be silly, Mac." Phebe was writing a letter and was in no mood for historical conversation.

Sitting on the floor at her feet, Mac clasped his shabby brownie to his breast.

"Yes, you are Pharaoh, you know; naughty old Pharaoh! But you wouldn't

kill vis little baby; would you, Pharaoh?"

"I'd like to, if it would clean him up a little," Phebe returned, for she had an antipathy to the brownie which usually took its meals in company with Mac.

"Do peoples be clean, all ve time, in heaven?"

"Of course."

"Ven I don't want to go vere, Pharaoh."

"Mac, you must stop calling me Pharaoh. Aunt Phebe is my name."

The next instant, the baby came flying straight into Pharaoh's face, and Mac fled, weeping, to his mother.

"Mam-ma!"

"Yes, Mac."

"I'd be glad if I was dead."

"Why, dear?" Hope looked startled.

"Cause peoples are happy when vey are up in ve sky."

"But you can be happy here, Mac, if you are good," Hope said gently.

"Yes; but I aren't happy; I are cross."

Hope sighed and laid away the letter she was writing to her husband. There were days when she regretted that she had brought this restless, tempestuous child into so large a family circle, days when Mac's cherubic qualities appeared to be entirely in abeyance. Gentle as she was, her own influence over him was of the strongest; but here she felt that she had less chance to exert this influence. In spite of her efforts, Mac was running wild, this summer. The smallest child on the beach, he was petted and spoiled by every one, and Hope disliked the inevitable pertness which followed so much attention. Most of all, she disliked the constant friction with his Aunt Phebe, and she felt that the blame was by no means entirely upon the one side. Mac was no heavenly child, and it was only by dint of much tact that he could be managed at all; but tact in dealing with children was not Phebe's strong point.

The summer, then, was not proving altogether restful to Hope. To one person, however, she felt an overwhelming gratitude. Of all the people on Quantuck beach, Gifford Barrett had been the only one who appeared to have either conscience or common sense in dealing with Mac's idiosyncrasies. The child never seemed to bore him, or to come into collision with him, yet there was never any question who was the master. Again and again, Hope had wondered at the dexterity with which the young musician had led Mac away from his small iniquities, had coaxed him into giggling forgetfulness of his bad temper. She wondered yet more at the obedience which Mac readily accorded to his new friend, an obedience which she was accustomed to win only after long and persistent siege.

"My papa couldn't come here, vis summer," he had said gravely to Mr. Barrett, one day. "Will you please be my papa while we stay here?"

And Gifford Barrett's smile was not altogether of amusement, as he accepted the adoption. Hope saw it and understood; and hereafter she ranged herself on Cicely's side when Mr. Barrett was being discussed in the family circle.

That same afternoon Gifford Barrett strolled down to the beach. The wind had been on shore for the past two days, and the breakers, too heavy now to allow any bathing, crashed on the sand with a dull booming that sounded far inland, while close at the water-side was heard the crash of the grinding pebbles. Under the McAlister awning, Mrs. McAlister, Hope and the Farringtons sat in a cozy group, and Mac, close by, was devoting his small energies to burying his grandfather. The young man stopped to speak to them for a minute; then he moved away towards the spot where Phebe sat alone under her umbrella.

"Isn't the surf superb, Miss McAlister?"

She looked up from her book rather ungraciously.

"Yes, it's very fine."

"How does it happen you are not at the golf links?"

"There's a tournament, to-day."

"And you didn't enter?"

"No; they didn't play well enough to make it worth my while."

Deliberately he settled himself at her side.

"Am I interrupting?" he asked. "That book looked rather indigestible for an August day."

"I prefer it. I can't spend my time over novels," Phebe said.

The strong wind had ruffled her bright hair and deepened the pink in her cheeks. The young man looked at her admiringly. Up to this time, he had only seen her in her short blue suit, and he told himself that this fluffy pink muslin gown was vastly more becoming to her.

"Don't you ever do frivolous things?" he asked in some amusement.

"No. What's the use?"

"There's going to be a dance, next week."

"Is there?" Phebe's tone betrayed no interest in the tidings.

"Yes. I came down to see if I could induce you to go with me."

"I hate dancing in August," she said flatly.

"I'm sorry. Besides, one must do something down here."

"One can, if one wants to. I don't. There's no sense in coming to this kind of a place, just to put on one's best clothes and dance all night in a stuffy room."

"You might take Lear's method," he suggested;

"And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon."

For one instant, Phebe relaxed her severity.

"Do you like Lear, too?" she asked.

"Of course. What sensible person doesn't?" He stretched himself out at full length, resting his head on his hand, and, for the moment, Phebe, as she looked at him, felt that he was almost handsome enough to atone for his lack of energy. "But you haven't accepted my invitation," he added persuasively.

"I know it."

"Please do."

"What for? I told you I don't like hops in August."

"But I can't hop alone."

"Ask somebody else, then."

"Don't want to. Well, I'll consider it an engagement."

"Why don't you play golf?" Phebe demanded.

"Too energetic for me. I want something more restful."

His languid tone annoyed Phebe, and she dropped her indifferent manner.

"Mr. Barrett, did it ever occur to you that you were lazy?"

He flushed.

"No; it hadn't occurred to me in that light before. Am I?"

"Very."

He sat up.

"I am sorry. Miss McAlister, had it ever occurred to you that you are outspoken?"

"I don't care if I am."

For an instant, he looked at her angrily. It was a new experience to him to have any one take that tone in addressing him. Then he rose to his feet.

"I am afraid I have been intruding upon your time, Miss McAlister," he said stiffly.

"You needn't get mad," Phebe observed. "People don't all think alike, you know; and I only told you my opinion."

He bowed in silence; then he walked away his hands in his pockets and his cap tilted backwards aggressively. Half-way to the row of awnings, he spoke.

"Little vixen!" he said forcibly. Then he dropped down on the sand at Hope's feet, with his back turned flatly towards the figure under the blue umbrella.

"Then you are coming to supper with us, to-morrow night," Theodora said, as at length he rose to his feet. "I suppose music is a forbidden subject, Mr. Barrett; you probably get very tired of the things people say to you. Still, I have a little cousin staying with me, who is anxious to meet you, and--"

Her sentence was never finished, and Cicely's anxiety was left hanging in mid air, for there came a cry from Phebe,--

"Oh, Hope! Mac! Help!"

Mr. Barrett whirled about to face the surf just in time to see Mac swept off his feet by an incoming wave, drawn back under the next one and hidden from sight beneath the awful weight of water. With a quick exclamation, he ran forward into the edge of the water. Then he drew back.

"Save him," Phebe commanded. "Go in! I can't do anything in this horrid gown." As she spoke, she tugged fiercely at her fluffy skirt which, wet to her knees, clung closely about her feet. "Go in and get him!" she commanded again.

Then for the hour, Gifford Barrett wished that the sand would close over him.

"I can't," he said through his shut teeth. "It would be of no use."

"Coward!" she said fiercely. "And you would let the boy drown!"

The words had been low and hurried, and no one was near to hear them, or to check Phebe. For a moment, Mr. Barrett turned white. He started to reply; then he controlled himself and was silent. This was not the time to seek to justify himself. The little scene was ended before Billy Farrington, stripped to his waist, rushed past them and plunged into the pounding surf.

To the watchers on the shore, it seemed hours since he had disappeared, days since chubby little Mac had been swept out of sight. The beach chanced to be deserted, that afternoon; Dr. McAlister could not swim a stroke, Phebe was powerless to do anything in such clothing as she wore, and Billy was not an expert swimmer. Hope's anguish was almost unbearable; yet, for the moment, Theodora's suffering was greater than that of her sister. She spoke no word; she only stood, tall and stately and dry-eyed, staring into the great green, curving waves that had swallowed up her husband and, with him, all the best that had made life for her since her girlhood. There was small chance for an inexperienced swimmer in such a sea as that, least of all for one burdened with the weight of a four-year-old child.

One. Two. Three. Four. Slowly the pitiless waves came crashing down on the sand. They were so mighty, so unrelenting in their grim beauty. If

one must be drowned, it would have been better to die in a sunless sea, not in the gorgeousness of a day like this. Five. Six. Then Theodora sprang forward with a little, low, choking moan. The seventh wave washed up at her very feet the form of her husband, still breathing and with Mac's body dangling from his unconscious grasp.

Under such circumstances, some men would have thanked Providence. Dr. McAlister was of other stuff.

"Phebe, come here!" he commanded. "You know what to do. You go to work on Mac, while I try to see if anything can be done for Billy. Work for your life, for there's a life hanging on yours now."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"Yes dear, Uncle Billy was almost drowned, in trying to get you out of the water."

"Drowned dead, mamma?"

"Yes, Mac."

For a minute, Mac silently contemplated the possibility of his uncle's dying. Then his face dimpled into a smile once more, as he said,--

"If he was dead, mamma, I should get a little warm 'pirit and put in his stomach, and ven he would be all well again."

It seemed strange to Hope to be laughing once more. All the night through, a heavy cloud of anxiety had rested upon Valhalla where one hero at least was lying. It had been no easy feat which Billy Farrington had attempted, and no one was more keenly aware of the fact than he, himself. Well and strong enough for all practical purposes, his physique in reality was no match for men whose boyhood had been sound, and no match at all for the fury of Quantuck surf in a gale. He had realized all that, yet he had not hesitated for an instant as to what was the one thing for him to do. Billy's code of honor was a simple one and a straight-forward. It even included the possibility of laying down one's life for a little child.

All that night, the doctor worked over him. For a long time, it seemed to him a losing fight; but he prolonged it to the end, and in the end he was victorious. Phebe had succeeded in bringing Mac to consciousness, and she was superintending Hope's putting him to bed; the doctor had ordered the others out of the room, and he and Theodora were alone with Billy when at last the blue eyes opened.

"Billy! My dear old William!"

That was all the doctor heard. Then he brushed his hand across his eyes and stole away out of the room. Alone in the kitchen, he wiped his eyes again and blew his nose violently.

"That tells the story," he muttered to himself. "I wish there were more

such marriages. But I thought for one while that there wasn't much chance for him." Then he shrugged his shoulders and put on his most professional manner, as he went back to his patient.

"Stop your loving, Ted, and give him another drink of this. Lie where you are, for half an hour, Billy; then let Teddy tuck you up warm in bed and sleep it off. You did a fine thing, a mighty fine thing, and Hope will have something to say to you in the morning."

"All right, thank you, only rather stiff in the joints, so the doctor advised me to keep still, to-day," Billy said to Gifford Barrett, the next night.

The young man had met Hubert on the beach, that morning; but apparently he could be satisfied by no second-hand report from the Lodge. In the late twilight, he came strolling up to the seaward porch where he found Billy stretched out at his ease on a bamboo couch, and the others grouped around him, in full tide of family gossip.

"Then you are really none the worse for your ducking?" Mr. Barrett asked, as he took the chair that Theodora offered him.

"Rather stiff, and a bruise or two, nothing to count at all."

"And the boy?"

"Lively as a sand flea."

"How did he happen to get into the water, in the first place?" Mr. Barrett inquired.

"Chiefly because his Aunt Phebe advised him to be careful, or he would get his feet wet," Hope answered. "There is no use in my trying to excuse my naughty boy, Mr. Barrett. Mac was so eager to assure my sister that she didn't own him that, in his defiance, he backed straight into the water."

"Oh, Hope, what is the use of telling, now it is all over?" Phebe's remonstrant tones came from inside the house.

Gifford Barrett rose and went towards the door.

"Are you there, Miss McAlister? I hoped I should see you."

"I'll be out in a minute."

The minute was a long one. Then Phebe stepped through the open doorway into the stronger light outside. Her face flushed a little, as she reluctantly touched the young man's outstretched hand; but that was all there was to show that she recalled the last words they had exchanged, the day before.

"I wanted to see you," he went on, as he seated himself once more. "I am going away, to-morrow night, and before I went, I had something I wished to tell--to explain, that is, to you all."

A sudden tension seemed to make itself felt throughout the group. No one of them had the remotest idea of what he was about to say, yet even Dr. McAlister drew his chair a few inches nearer, while Cicely, in her

corner, fairly bounced in her excitement.

"Well, let her go," Billy remarked, after a moment when the guest seemed to find it hard to open the subject.

"Why, you see, I may seem very silly and egotistic to speak of it; but--The fact is, didn't any of you think it was strange that I didn't try to go into the surf for Mac, yesterday?"

Three of the women before him made a polite murmur of dissent. The fourth was silent; but Dr. McAlister said frankly,--

"Yes. It wasn't at all like my idea of you, Mr. Barrett."

The young man looked pleased.

"Thank you, doctor," he said heartily. "I value that sort of compliment. But I didn't want to go away from here and leave you to think me an arrant coward. The truth is, I shouldn't have been of much use to Mac or to myself. I'm not swimming, this summer, for I was unlucky enough to break my arm, last June, and it's not at all strong yet."

Quickly Billy put out his hand.

"I'm glad to know this, Barrett," he said. "I haven't been quite fair to you."

"I wish you had told us before," Theodora added laughingly. "We haven't had time to compare notes yet; but there is no telling what some of us may have thought about it. But isn't it very bad for your music, Mr. Barrett?"

"It came at an inconvenient time," he admitted; "for I was in the middle of some work, and I have had to let it all go."

"How did it happen?" Hope asked sympathetically. "I hope it wasn't a bad break."

"A compound fracture of the right arm," he replied. "It wasn't a pleasing break; but it was a good deal more pleasing than the way it happened."

"How was that?" Billy looked up expectantly, for the young man's tone was suggestive of a story yet untold.

Gifford Barrett laughed.

"It was very absurd, very ignominious; but the fact is, I was run into by a woman, one day in a pelting shower, and knocked heels over head off my bicycle."

Sitting in the doorway, Phebe had been holding a book in her hands. Now it fell to the floor with a crash.

"Drop something, Babe?" Hubert asked amicably.

"Yes, my book," she answered shortly.

"I shall never forget my emotions at the time," Gifford Barrett was saying to Billy. "I had been off for a long ride, one day, and was

caught, on the way home, in this heavy shower. The road was all up and down hill, and just as I came down one hill, the damsel came down the other. She had lost both her pedals, and you've no idea how she looked, bouncing and bumping along, with her soaked skirt flopping in the wind. She hadn't even the grace to be pretty, so there wasn't an atom of romance in the affair from first to last. She was a great, overgrown country girl, and tied on the front of her wheel she had a bundle that I took for some sort of marketing stuff; but, just as she met me, it popped open and out tumbled a whole assortment of bones, human bones, legs and arms and a skull. What do you suppose she could have been doing with them? She was too young and fair to have been an undertaker."

"They might have belonged to her ancestors, and she have been taking them home for burial," Hubert suggested.

Mr. Barrett chuckled in a manner which suggested the composer in him had not entirely ousted the boy.

"Anyway, she is short a skull. I sent out, the next day, and had it brought to me. I have it yet."

"Did she hit you?" Theodora asked.

"Hit me! I should think she did. She was large, and she came at me with a good deal of force. The last I remember, I felt the crash, and I knew I had had the worst of it." He rubbed his arm sympathetically at the recollection.

"What became of you?" Mrs. McAlister inquired. "Did she pick you up and carry you home?"

"Not she. She was an Amazon, not a Valkyrie within hailing distance of Valhalla."

"Who was she?" Theodora asked. "The story ought to have a sequel."

"It hasn't. It ended in mystery. The girl vanished into thin air, and a man, driving by, found me lying in the mud, with a skull on one side of me and a white sailor hat on the other, neither of them my property."

"Just rode away and left you with a compound fracture?" The doctor's tone was incredulous.

"Apparently, for she was never heard of again; at least, I never found out who she was. It was very funny and very unromantic; but it laid me up for a few weeks, and my arm doesn't grow strong as fast as it should, so I have to be careful of it. No swimming or golf for me, this year. Meanwhile, I am waiting to hear of a buxom damsel who lacks one skull and one white straw Knox hat, size six and one-eighth. Then, when I meet her, I shall take my vengeance."

"I hope you will find her," the doctor said vindictively. "If one of my daughters had done such a thing, I would disown her. Babe, it is growing chilly. I wish you'd bring out some rugs."

But Phebe had vanished from her seat in the doorway.

The full moon was laying a silvery path across the restless waves, when Gifford Barrett finally rose to go. There was a cordial exchange of

farewells, of good wishes for the coming winter, of hopes of another meeting, yet Mr. Barrett was not quite content, as he slowly walked away to his hotel Mrs. Farrington's cordiality and Cicely's evident woe at his departure could not quite atone for the lack of a word and a glance of friendly good-bye from Phebe. One's liking is not altogether a matter of free will. In spite of himself, Gifford Barrett liked the blunt, outspoken, pugnacious Phebe far better than the girls whose honeyed words and ways he had found so cloying.

Farewell parties are all the fashion at Qantuck station and few people are allowed to depart, unattended. However, Mr. Barrett's fame, and his manifest wish to hold himself aloof from the people about him had had their effect, and he went trudging down to the station the next afternoon quite by himself. On the platform, to his surprise, he found Mrs. Holden and Mac waiting for him.

"Mac insisted upon saying good-bye," Hope said half apologetically; "and I really hadn't the heart to refuse him. Besides, I wanted to thank you again for your many kindnesses to my small boy. Mothers appreciate such things, I assure you, Mr. Barrett."

The young man's face lighted. He liked Hope, and, from the first, he had dropped his professional manner and met her with the simplicity of an overgrown boy.

"We've had great times together; haven't we, Mac?" he inquired.

"Yes, lots; but now I'm going to see my truly papa," Mac observed.

"Are you going soon?" Mr. Barrett asked Hope.

"Next week, I think. Mr. Holden has written so appealingly that I dare not keep him waiting any longer. The others will stay down for September; but Hubert will go off island with me, next week, and start Mac and me on our way to Helena."

"And may I ask my sister to call on you?"

"Please do. Mac's mother doesn't have time to make many calls; but I should like to know your sister, and then I shall be sure to hear when you are in Helena again."

"Perhaps you'll let me write to you, now and then," he suggested, with a shyness that was new to him. In his past life, he had never met a woman quite like Mrs. Holden and he was anxious to win her liking and to hold it, once won.

"I wish you would," she said cordially. "But your train is waiting. Ought you to get on board?"

He took a hurried leave of her. Then he turned to Mac.

"Good-bye, Mac."

"Good-bye," Mac answered cheerily. "Aren't you glad you ever knew me?"

"Yes, Mac," he replied sincerely, for he felt that his meeting with Mac had been foreordained, that, child as he was, Mac had served his turn in knotting together some of the broken strands of his life.

As the train slowly jogged away across the moorland he felt a sharp regret while he watched the disappearing of the little grey village and the tall white lighthouse beyond. He had enjoyed his solitary month there; he had enjoyed Hope, and the sweet, womanly frankness with which she had taken him quite on his own personal merits. Incense was good; it was far better to be liked as Gifford Barrett than as the composer of the Alan Breck Overture, however, and he had a vague consciousness that he had never been more of a man than when he was walking and talking with quiet Hope Holden.

The train rounded the curve at Kidd's Treasure, and Mr. Barrett looked backward to catch one last glimpse of the sea. As he did so, he forgot Hope, and went back to the memory of his last hour on the beach. Strolling along the sand, that noon, with his eyes fixed on the ground, he had caught sight of an approaching shadow and he looked up to see Phebe standing before him.

"Mr. Barrett," she said abruptly; "I'm sorry I called you a coward."

He rallied from his surprise and raised his cap.

"Oh, that's all right," he said lightly.

"No; it wasn't right. I don't want to abuse people to their faces and behind their backs, when they don't deserve it. That isn't my way."

"But you couldn't be expected to know."

"I ought to have known."

"How?"

Phebe's cheeks grew scarlet. In her contrition, she had walked straight into the trap which she had meant to avoid. She was silent.

"How could you know?" he urged. "I don't think I look in the least like an invalid."

There was another silence, a long one, while he stood looking down at her curiously. Then she raised her eyes with an effort.

"I was the girl that ran into you," she said bluntly.

The young man's face suddenly became somewhat less expressive than the skull which he had kept as a souvenir of the experience they were discussing. That at least expressed a cheery unconcern; his face expressed nothing.

"Oh, I-I-I'm sorry," he remarked blankly.

"So am I. I didn't mean to."

"Have you known it, all the time? Was that what made you so down on me?"

"I wasn't down on you. I didn't think much about you, either way," Phebe said, with unflattering directness.

"But did you know it?"

"Not till last night, when you told the story. Your beard changes you a good deal." She paused. Then she went on, "I didn't mean to let you know it; but I think it is better that I have, for now I can set you right on one point. I didn't go off to leave you. I did what I could, and then went for help. When I came back, you were gone."

"How came you there, anyway?"

"I live there."

"Oh! And the skull?"

"I don't want it."

"No; but where did you get it?"

"I bought it."

"Miss McAlister! Might I ask what for?"

"To study. I'm going to be a doctor."

"Oh, I wouldn't," he urged dispassionately. "You'll find it very messy."

"But I like it. I worked with my father, all the spring, and now I am going to Philadelphia to study there. Didn't you know I set your arm?"

"No." He looked at her, with frank admiration shining in his eyes. "Did you, honestly? Dr. Starr said it was a wonder that it hadn't slipped out of place any more."

"I'm glad if I did any good," she said with sudden humility. "I must go now, for it is past dinner time." She turned to go away. Then she came back again and held out her strong, ringless hand. "I'm so sorry," she said hurriedly; "sorry for all I have made you ache, and sorry for all the hateful things I have said to you."

"Don't think about that any more," he said heartily, as he took her hand. "Have you told your father, Miss McAlister?"

"Not yet."

"Please don't. There's no use in saying anything more about it, And now promise me that you will forget it,--as a favor to me, please." As he spoke, he looked steadily into Phebe's eyes, and her eyes drooped. For the first time in her life, Phebe McAlister had become self-conscious in the presence of a young man. He dropped her hand and raised his cap once more.

"Good-by, doctor," he said; and, turning, he walked away and left her alone.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"Mel-chisedek!"

As who should say "What, ma'am?" Melchisedek lifted his snubby little nose and gazed inquiringly at Theodora. Then he went back to his assaults on the corner of the rug. Melchisedek's mother had been a thrifty soul; in her young son's puppyhood, she had impressed upon him the fact that well-trained dogs should bury superfluous food supplies, to be held in reserve for the hour of need. Cicely had been too lavish, that morning, in her allowance. Melchisedek had eaten until his small legs stuck out stiffly from his distended little body, and now he was endeavoring to bury the remainder of his meal in the folds of the rug. The room was a large one, and it took a perceptible time for Theodora to reach the scene of action. Melchisedek's efforts increased in vigor as she came nearer, and, just as she stooped to catch him, he succeeded in folding the end of her ancient Persian rug above an overturned Chelsea saucer and a widening pool of oatmeal and cream. Then he retired under the table and smiled suavely up at her, while she removed the debris.

It was now two weeks since they had returned from Quantuck, and the year was at the fall of the leaf. The Savins was covered with a thick carpet of golden brown, and the birches and hickories were blazing with gold, while the corner house was set in a nest of crimson and yellow and scarlet maples. For the hour, earth was almost as radiant as the sun; but the quiet drop, drop, drop of the yellow leaves through the golden, hazy air told that the end was not far distant, that too soon the gold would give place to the grey and the brown.

This autumn season had brought a new break into the McAlister family circle. Phebe had gone away to Philadelphia, almost immediately after their return from the seashore. If her interest in medical science were on the wane, at least she was too proud to confess the fact, and the doctor, with some misgivings, had consented to her departure.

"There's no especial reason Babe shouldn't make a good doctor," he said to his wife, the night after the matter was finally decided; "the trouble is, there seems to be no especial reason that she should. I can't discover that she's any more in love with that profession than with a dozen others. She simply took it up because it was the most obvious one, and because she was restless for some sort of an occupation."

"Wait and see," his wife counselled him. "For the present, she is contented with this choice, and she may as well try it for a year. By that time, she will be able to decide whether she wants to go on. One year of it, at her age, can't do any harm, and it may do her some good, if only to steady her down a little."

"Then you don't think she will carry it through?"

"No," she said honestly; "I don't. Babe hasn't the make-up for a professional woman in any line. She is too self-centred, too impetuous. She needs something to humanize her womanhood, not make an abstract thing of her. I'd rather see Babe a gentle, loving woman than the greatest light of her profession."

"What a little bigot it is!" the doctor said teasingly.

"No, not a bigot," she returned quickly. "I believe in a girl's taking a profession, when it is the one absorbing interest of her life. It wouldn't be so with Babe. She would take it from restlessness, not love,

from sheer unused vitality that must have an outlet. It was different with Ted; it will be different with Allyn. They are ready to give up other things for their work. Phebe isn't."

"After all, Babe is developing," the doctor said thoughtfully. "She is steadier than she used to be, and a good deal more true and sincere. If she would only grow a little more affectionate, I should be content."

"Wait," his wife repeated. "She develops slowly, and she hasn't found out yet just which way it is worth her while to grow. When she does, you will find that she grows fast enough. Look at Allyn. He seems like a new creature in this new plan of his."

The doctor smiled a little sadly.

"Perhaps I am impatient, Bess; but I am getting to be an old man, and I want to see all my children on their own straight roads, before I die."

But if Phebe's choice of career filled her family with doubtful questionings, their doubts were at an end in respect to Allyn. The boy had not only come back from the seashore to settle down into the harness of school life again; he was even tugging hard at the traces. Mindful of his bargain with his father, anxious to prove that his wish was both fixed and earnest, he had gone to work with a dogged determination to show his father that, once interested, he was capable of doing honest, solid work. He did work with a will and with a healthy appetite that left him scant time and energy for outside things; and between his books and his drawings he was far too busy to heed the ways and the warts of Jamie Lyman and his kin. Directly after their return to The Savins, the doctor had sent a package of Allyn's drawings to one of his old-time classmates, now the head of a famous school of technology. The answer which came back to him was prompt and full of enthusiasm, and Dr. McAlister, as he read it, felt his last regret leaving him that his son was to abandon his own profession.

Cicely, meanwhile, was mounting guard over Allyn's languages, advising, admonishing and often helping him along the devious paths of syntax and subjunctives. She had a good deal of time at her disposal. She gave it to him freely, and unconsciously she gained as much as she gave, in her work with the boy. Their comradeship was as perfect as was their unlikeness. Each complemented the other, each modified the other, and both were far the better and the happier for the intimacy. To be sure, their paths were not all of pleasantness and peace. Both Cicely and Allyn were outspoken and hot-tempered; but their feuds now were measured by moments, not by days, and the overtures of peace were mutual.

Although Gifford Barrett had never been known to speak more than a dozen words to Cicely, and those were chiefly concerning the weather, the girl appeared to have gained great inspiration from her meeting with the young composer, and she plodded away more diligently than ever at her long hours of practice. Day after day, she ended with her beloved overture, playing it over, not so much to perfect herself in it, as to remind herself that music was a living, vital means of expression quite within the reach of one not so much older than herself. It was not that Cicely ever hoped to compose. That was as far beyond her ambition as it was beyond her powers. She only gained courage from the thought that success in one's chosen line was not always deferred until the end of life. Moreover, she felt a certain human and girlish satisfaction in being able to state that, once at least, she had swept the gifted composer of the

Alan Breck Overture completely off his feet. The fact was enough; no need to enter into details.

Theodora and Billy never stopped to analyze how large a hold upon their hearts this healthy, happy girl had taken. If she dined at The Savins, they devoured their own meal in silence. If she spent an evening away from home Billy read his paper with one eye on the clock, and Theodora reduced Melchisedek to whimpering frenzy by asking once in ten minutes where his missy was. They wanted her chatter, wanted her more gentle moments, wanted above all else her pranks which served as a sort of vicarious outlet for their own animal spirits. For nine days out of ten, Cicely and Melchisedek frisked through life together. On the tenth, Cicely passed into a thoughtful mood; Melchisedek never.

"What's the matter, Cousin Ted?" Cicely asked, one day, as she met Theodora stalking up the stairs after dismissing a caller.

"Another reporter. I wish they would let law-abiding citizens alone, and use up their energy on tramps," Theodora said viciously. "Such a morning as I have had! My marketing took twice as long as usual; my typewriter has broken a spring, and now this man has wasted a good half-hour of my time. Cis, the next man that comes to interview me, I shall hand over to you."

"All right. What shall I tell him?"

"Anything you choose, as long as you keep him away from me. It's no use to refuse to see them. I tried that, and they straight-way went off and published three columns of my utterances on South African politics, when I don't know a Boer from a Pathan. Farewell, I am going to work." And, the next moment, Cicely heard the click of her typewriter.

It was more than three weeks later that Cicely sat alone, one afternoon, reading lazily before the fire, when the maid brought her a card.

"It's for Mrs. Farrington," she said.

"Let me see." Cicely took it and glanced at the name, Mr. William Smith. Down in the corner was the legend "Boston Intermountain." "It is all right, Mary," she added. "I will see the man."

There was a short delay while she sped upstairs, ransacked Theodora's closet for a long skirt, and swiftly coiled her hair on the top of her head. Then demurely enough she presented herself to the waiting guest.

"Mrs. Farrington?" he said interrogatively, as he rose.

"Good-afternoon," she answered, extending her hand graciously. "Won't you be seated?"

He looked surprised. As a rule, the reception accorded to him was not so cordial.

"I came here on behalf of the Boston Intermountain," he said a little uneasily. "They are making up a Thanksgiving number, and are anxious for a special feature or two. Among other things, they want a little sketch of your work and your ways of doing it."

"Certainly." Cicely seated herself on the sofa and smiled encouragement

at the young man, while she vaguely wondered whether he had discovered that her cousin's waist measure was three inches smaller than her own.

"Might I ask," he inquired, as he pulled out a notebook; "whether you are busy just now on a new book?"

"Yes, I am writing four at present," she answered unexpectedly.

"Four, all at once?"

"Yes."

"But--pardon me--but is there not danger of confusing them?"

"Oh, no; I keep them in different pigeon-holes," Cicely replied blandly.

"Ah, yes. Do you? Very good!" He laughed a little vaguely. "Are they to come out soon?"

"This winter, all but one. That will not appear for seven years."

"Indeed. And are you willing, Mrs. Farrington to tell me when you do your writing?"

"Certainly. I do it all at night."

"But isn't that very wearing?"

"Of course. I am often a total wreck for months after finishing a book."

"Where do you do your writing?"

For a moment, Cicely hesitated between the rival charms of the front steps and the attic. Then she replied,--

"In the kitchen."

"The--kitchen!" For an instant, the man was thrown from his professional calm.

"Yes. I put my little kettle of tea to draw on the hob--"

"The--what?"

"The hob," Cicely said severely; "and when I am tired of writing, I refresh myself with a cup of Flowery Pekoe and a biscuit, and then I return to my pen once more."

"How much do you usually accomplish in a night?"

"Four thousand, five hundred words is my usual limit."

"And do you never write during the day?"

"Never. My thoughts only arise by candle-light."

At this poetic outburst, the interviewer glanced up and privately registered the belief that Mrs. Farrington was slightly cracked.

"I always sleep till noon," Cicely reassured him. "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No, thank you. I think not. This will make a very interesting and acceptable article, I am sure. But, before I go, would you mind telling me what you think of Browning?"

"The greatest poet of the century," Cicely replied glibly, mindful of local prejudice.

"And your favorite poem?" he asked insinuatingly.

Then at last Cicely floundered, for she was quite beyond her depth.

"I think the Rubaiyat is by far the best," she said gravely, and her querist received the announcement in perfect good faith.

It was some weeks afterwards that Theodora, turning over her mail, came upon a marked copy of the Intermountain.

"What in the world is this?" she said in astonishment. "I never heard of the paper."

She opened it, and then she gasped. Upon the first page appeared a woodcut, evidently culled from the advertising department, and beneath it these headlines:

"Interview with Mrs. Theodora Farrington.
Alone with Her Tea-Kettle.
The Famous Young Author Works by Night.
The Inspiration of Genius by the Hob."

Theodora read it through, carefully, deliberately, down to the final statements in regard to Browning. She wondered at first. Then the light dawned upon her, as she came upon a carefully-turned phrase descriptive of "the little grey dog, the constant companion of his gifted mistress," and she looked up.

"Cis, you wretch!" she said.

But Cicely had been watching her face and, as she watched, her own dimples had grown deeper.

"Didn't you tell me I might?" she asked meekly.

"Yes," Theodora acknowledged; "yes, I did, and I don't know but it was justifiable. He must have been an innocent youth, Cis; but it's not so much worse than some of the tales told by men who have really seen me; only--don't do it again, dear. It might make me serious trouble."

"But, after all," she said to her husband, that night; "I am not so very sorry. They needn't make public property of us and our work. It is none of their affair, anyway; and Cicely has only done what I have wanted to do, and didn't quite dare. If more people had a deputy to be interviewed for them, it might put a stop to the literary columns in a good many minor papers."

And her husband agreed with her.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Down in Philadelphia, that fall, Phebe was having her first experience of bitter homesickness. She had always supposed herself immune from that dire disease, and, for some time, she had no idea what was the matter with her. In vain she tried to trace the cause of her complaint to malaria and to every known form of indigestion. She studied her symptoms carefully and tried to match them up, one by one, to the symptoms recorded in her text-books. At last, she was forced to the ignoble conclusion that she was suffering from homesickness pure and simple, homesickness in one of its acutest forms. Her appetite for her work declined in proportion to her appetite for her food. She was listless, dull, and, it must be confessed, most deplorably cross. The fact of the matter was that the girl was pining for the broad lawns of The Savins, for the shabby red house, for her father and Hubert, even for Cicely and Cicely's dog Melchisedek.

Her work interested her. To her mind, there was a great charm in seeing the neat economy with which her body was constructed. She enjoyed the lectures keenly; but the clinics had proved to be her undoing. At the first one she had attended, she had ignominiously fainted away. There was a certain satisfaction in feeling that she had drawn upon herself at least one-half as much attention as the more legitimate object of the gathering; however, she was sternly resolved never to repeat the experience, and she accordingly became a walking arsenal of restoratives, whenever a clinic was on hand. In a nutshell, Phebe found theory far more attractive than practice. Surgery was a grand and helpful profession; but, under some circumstances, it was not neat, and Phebe must have neatness at any cost.

With her fellow-students she was quite unable to fraternize. For the most part, they were older than herself, a body of enthusiastic, earnest women who were ready to lay down their lives for their profession. Grave-eyed and intent, they went through the day's routine with a cheery patience under drudgery which showed the noble stuff of which they were made. They looked askance at Phebe's grumblings, her fluctuating enthusiasm, her hours of girlish frivolity and of pettish complaint. Among themselves, they analyzed her; but they were unable to classify her. She was foreign to their ways of life and thought; in a word, they set her down as worldly and lacking in conviction.

On her side, Phebe detested them heartily. Golf was a sealed book to them; their skirts were prone to hang in dejected folds; their talk, even in their hours of relaxation, was of the shop shoppy. Down in her heart of hearts, she respected them; but in her naughty little head, she railed at them, not loudly, but long and unceasingly.

There were days when, utterly discouraged and out of conceit with herself and the world, she meditated writing to her father, telling him the whole truth and then taking the next train for home. Then she shut her teeth and went back to her work in a grim silence that warned her neighbors that she wished to be let alone. So far in her life, she had never given up anything she had undertaken, and she hated the idea of doing it now. She would fight it out a little longer. Perhaps in time it would be a little less intolerable. Perhaps people always found it hard at first to

adapt themselves fully to their professions. It was even within the limits of human possibility that, if she kept on long enough, she might come to the point of delighting in clinics, like Miss Caldwell who was fat and wore spectacles with tin bows and a cameo breastpin. Then she hunted up a dry spot in her pillow, and dreamed of The Savins, and Mac, and Quantuck, and waked up, and went to sleep again, and dreamed of hearing her father saying in the next room,--

"Poor Babe! I don't think she was ever meant to be a good doctor; but I don't see what on earth she really is good for, anyway."

The next afternoon, there were neither lectures nor clinics, and Phebe determined to go for a long walk. It was early November, and the hush and the haze of Indian summer lay over the park, as she halted on the bridge and stood looking down into the river beneath. Not a soul was in sight. The noises of the city were hushed in the distance, and before her the broad reaches of the park stretched out and out under their mighty forest trees. In a way, the rolling slopes, the broad lawns and the trees reminded her of The Savins. She could imagine just how it looked at home, the green lawn heaped here and there with brown oak leaves, the golden glory of the hickories, the masses of late chrysanthemums, red and white and pink and yellow, filling every sheltered nook and corner, above it all, the soft November haze which is neither rosy nor purple nor gold, but blended from them all, yet quieter far than any one of them.

All of a sudden Phebe's head went down upon her arms folded on the rail of the bridge and, secure in her solitude, she gave herself up to her woe.

"Miss McAlister?"

She started and pulled herself together abruptly.

"Are you in trouble?"

The voice was unknown, yet familiar, and she spun around to find herself face to face with Gifford Barrett.

"Where did you come from?" she asked, too much astonished at his appearing, too glad to look into a friendly pair of eyes to resent the sympathy written on his face.

"I came over here, for a few days, and I took the liberty of calling on you. The people at the house told me you had spoken of coming out here, so I came on the chance of finding you. But was something--?" He hesitated.

Phebe rubbed away her tears.

"Yes, something was," she answered, with an attempt at her usual briskness. "You caught me off my guard, Mr. Barrett. The fact is, I am desperately homesick."

"Then why don't you go home?" he asked prosaically, for he had learned, even in his slight experience at Quantuck, that it was not wise to take a sentimental tone in addressing Phebe.

"I can't. I came down here for a year, and I must stick it out."

"What's the use?"

"Because I never do give in. It would be babyish. Besides, I am going to be a doctor."

"I don't see why. It isn't in your line."

"I begin to think nothing is in my line," Phebe said forlornly.

"What else have you tried?"

"Nothing; but--I don't care about many things. I should like this, if it weren't for the clinics and the students and such things, and if I could be a little nearer home."

"When do you go home?"

"Christmas, if I live till then," Phebe laughed; but her mirth sounded rather lugubrious. Then she added half-involuntarily, "I wonder what you must think of me, Mr. Barrett. I'm not generally given to this kind of a scene."

"No matter," he said soothingly, much as he might have spoken to a child; "I am an old acquaintance, you know; and I never tell tales."

Suddenly Phebe laughed out blithely.

"What about the last night you were at Quantuck, Mr. Barrett?"

"Oh--well, that was different. How could I know that my muddy, murderous Amazon was Miss Phebe McAlister in disguise?"

This time, they both laughed, and Phebe felt better.

"Let's walk on," she suggested. "This bridge is getting monotonous. Is your arm quite strong again?"

"Perfectly. I think, if you'll let me, I can match your record in golf, before I go back to New York."

"I didn't even know there were any links here," she said.

"There are, fine ones. One of my errands, to-day, was to make some kind of an engagement with you. I've my reputation for laziness to redeem, you know."

"I wish you wouldn't remind me of all the horrid things I said to you," she said contritely.

He looked at her in surprise. It was not like the Phebe McAlister he had known, to speak like this. At Quantuck she had been cocksure, aggressive; now she was gentler, more womanly. He missed something of the piquancy; yet after all he rather liked the change.

"Really, aren't you enjoying it down here?" he asked.

"No; I am not. I'm all out of my element. I don't mind the work so much as I do the people. They despise me as a worldling, and I don't like being despised." For the moment, it was the old Phebe who was speaking.

"Don't tell," she begged. "I'd rather die than have them know it at home. How long are you going to stay here?"

"About a week, I only came over last night."

"I don't see why I am glad to see you," Phebe said, with characteristic frankness. "I didn't know you much at Quantuck; it probably is because I associate you with the home people. You used to be around with Hope a good deal."

"What's the use of analyzing it?" he answered. "I'm here, and you are homesick and glad to see me. That's enough for any practical purposes. When are you going to play golf with me?"

"Can you really play?"

"I shouldn't dare ask you, if I couldn't. One thing that has brought me over here is a thirsting to beat you."

"I haven't touched a club since I came."

"Did it ever occur to you, Miss McAlister, that you were very lazy?"

"Did it ever occur to you, Mr. Barrett, that you were outspoken?"

Like a pair of children, they laughed together, and Phebe suddenly discovered that his eyes were singularly clear and frank. She also discovered that the day was much finer than she had supposed, the sunlight clearer, the air more bracing.

"We may as well cry quits," she said. "I fought you rather violently; you retaliated by telling my family the one sealed chapter of my life."

"But if they don't know it--"

"They do know it; but not my share in it."

For a little distance they strolled along in silence. Then Phebe asked abruptly,--

"You said, that night at Quantuck, that you were in the middle of some work, when I ran into you. Did I break it up entirely; or have you ever finished it?"

"Then you haven't seen the papers?" he asked, with boyish egotism.

"Yes, I always read them. What then?"

"My symphonic poem is to come out soon."

"Oh, I don't ever read the music notes. I don't know much about music, anyway."

"And care less?" he asked a little shortly.

"Oh, I don't mind it much. I don't often go to concerts; but I like it behind palms at receptions."

For a moment, he looked at her, in doubt whether or not she was jesting.

Then as her face suggested no humorous intent, his color came.

"What about it?" she inquired. "How is it coming out?"

"I didn't know as you would be interested."

"Of course. I am interested in you, even if I don't care a fig for your music," Phebe answered, with a bluntness that should have been death to sentiment.

"It is going to be given in New York, on the twelfth of December," he said, and Phebe wondered at the slight catch in his breath. "I'm to conduct the orchestra, you know. I have sent for Mrs. Farrington to come down and bring Miss Cicely, and--I wondered--do you suppose--at least, could you make time to run over and join them in my box?"

Phebe clasped her hands rapturously.

"Oh, Mr. Barrett! Could I? I should like nothing better. How good you are to ask me! I shall be so glad of the chance to see Teddy again."

When the night of the twelfth came, Theodora and Phebe and Cicely were in the box set apart for Mr. Barrett's use. Eager and happy as a child, dressed in rose-pink and with a great bunch of pink roses in her hand, Phebe was looking her very best. Unconscious of the envious eyes which watched her, she talked to the young composer with the same girlish frankness she had shown, that day in the park. Theodora looked at her in surprise. This was a new Phebe to her, gentler, infinitely more lovable; yet she smiled now and then as she saw the utter unconcern with which her young sister was receiving the attentions of the hero of the evening.

The symphony over and the aria, Gifford Barrett left them and, a moment later, came forward to the conductor's desk. Applause, a hush, then the orchestra gave out the low, ominous chords of the introduction before the violins took up the opening theme which repeated itself, met another theme, paused to play with it for a space, then in slow, majestic growth passed on and up to a climax which left the audience breathless, so much moved that it needed time to rally before bursting into the well-won applause. The Alan Breck Overture was surpassed, and Gifford Barrett's name was in every mouth; but Phebe, while she watched him, tried in vain to realize that the man now bowing before the footlights was the man she had capsized upon Bannock Hill, that the right arm which had swayed the orchestra, now banging their approval on their racks, was the arm she had broken, once upon a time, and then tugged back into place.

Gifford Barrett came back into the box, trailing after him a huge wreath. He laid it down at Phebe's side.

"What in the world is that for?" she demanded. "I didn't write your music for you."

"No" he answered, with a queer little smile; "but perhaps you helped it on."

CHAPTER TWENTY

"Billy, I am low in my mind."

"You look it, Ted; but cheer up. What's the matter?"

"Plus a publisher; minus a maid," she answered enigmatically.

"Explain yourself."

"I shouldn't think I needed to. The bare fact is sufficient."

"Yes; but I am dense."

"Well, you knew Hannah had given warning, and now Delia is going, and I expect to take to the kitchen for a space."

"Where's Patrick?"

"If that isn't man all over! Patrick is a treasure and good for almost everything in the line of work; but I never discovered that he could cook succulently. I should live through that crisis, William; but there is a worse one. Mr. Gilwyn is going to lecture here, next week, and he will expect us to entertain him."

"What of it? We can buy things."

"Yes, William, and we must also cook things. He has never been here, and much depends upon the impression I create on his inner man. My book will be ready to send in before long; and, if I give him dyspepsia in his stomach, it will surely mount to his brain and lead him to reject my magnum opus."

"Your which? Cicely, can you translate her remarks?"

"Ask Melchisedek. He devoured Allyn's Latin grammar, day before yesterday," Cicely responded from the farther side of the room where she was feeding the dog chocolate peppermints, in a futile endeavor to teach him that vertebrae were meant to assist him in sitting up.

"But it is no joke, really," Theodora went on. "I can cook, or I can entertain; but I can't do both."

"Then go out into the highways and hedges and hire somebody," her husband suggested.

"I have. I started with a long list of people who had been recommended to me; but they all are engaged for that day. One would think the town was going into wholesale banquetings. For some people, I wouldn't mind; but Mr. Gilwyn is a pompous, gouty old soul, and moreover, he holds my fortunes in the hollow of his hand."

"How do you know he is coming?"

"A note, this morning. He hopes to see me at his lecture, and so on."

"Let's shut up the house and run down to New York, for a day or two," Billy said hospitably.

"No use. I should feel guilty to the end of my days, and embody my guilt

in my next book. No; I can't afford to have my 'healthy tone' demoralized. I shall face my duty, even if I have to ask him to sit by the kitchen hob, as Cicely calls it, while I prepare his simple meal."

Cicely gave the last of the peppermint to Melchisedek who bolted it with an ill-advised greed that brought the tears to his eyes, for the peppermint was a hot one.

"Cousin Ted," she remarked, as she came forward and perched herself on the arm of Theodora's chair; "I have a bright idea."

"Not really?" This from Billy.

"Yes, really. Patrick is no use, and you can't get anybody. Borrow old Susan from The Savins. She isn't good for much but staple commodities, roast beef and things; but I'll help her out. I know something about cooking, not much, but better than nothing; and then I'll serve it."

"Cis, you sha'n't."

"I'd like no better fun. Your man has never heard of me; you don't know what a stunning maid I'd look in a cap and pinafore. I always did love dressing up, and this will be such fun. May't I, please?"

She took Theodora by the chin and turned her face upward; and Theodora as she looked into the merry eyes above her, weakly gave her consent. It was not easy to face a domestic crisis; it was still less easy to face Cicely when her dimples were coming and going and her eyes as full of fun as they were now.

"Allyn," Cicely said breathlessly, as she dashed into the library at The Savins, half an hour later; "you are invited to a dinner party at our house, this day week."

"Thanks. I'll come, and please have lots of sticky jelly things."

"But you aren't invited to eat. I want you in the kitchen to help me."

"Not much! I'm going somewhere else, that night."

"You can't beg off. I must have you to help me navigate things to the table. I have agreed to act as assistant cook and head waitress, and I want you as second butler." And she unfolded the details of her plan.

Late one afternoon, a week afterwards, a trim maid in cap and apron was peering out from between the curtains of Mrs. Farrington's front window. Allyn was beside her, and both the young faces wore an air of merry mystery, while there was an evident good-fellowship between them that was out of all harmony with their seeming difference in social rank.

"Oh, Allyn, say a prayer for the success of the salad!" the maid said wearily, as she settled her cap and pulled out the great bows of her apron strings.

"'Twill be all right. I sampled the dressing, as I came in. Isn't it time they were here?"

"Unless the train is late. Poor Cousin Ted! She has worked all the morning. I do hope things will be good."

"Cis!"

"Yes, Cousin Will."

"Do you happen to know where Ted keeps her keys? I want to get something out of that box of old trumpery of mine in the attic, and the thing is locked."

"I'll see if I can find them." And Cicely vanished, followed by a cry from Allyn,--

"Here they are, Cis, and here he is! Great Caesar, what a pelican of the wilderness! Poor Ted! She can't live up to such a man."

Seated at the dinner table, the publisher was very large, very ruddy, very imposing. He had a trick of imbibing his food solemnly, with a judicial air which sent apprehensive chills coursing down Cicely's spine, as she watched him pursing up his lips over the salad and nibbling daintily at the macaroni. The dinner was good, as far as it went. Of so much she was certain, for Susan was an expert in plain cookery, and, in her own cooking class, Cicely had shown herself past master in the art of entrees. It only remained to be seen whether or not she could succeed in getting the supplies to and from the table without losing off her cap or dropping too many of the forks. Just outside the door, Allyn was toiling handily in her behalf; and, strange to say, she was free from the obstacle she had most feared, that Melchisedek would get under her feet at some critical moment, and project her headlong, roast and all, upon the smooth bald pate of Mr. Gilwyn. To her relief, the dog had mysteriously vanished. She was too glad to be rid of him to care whence or wherefore he had gone.

Little by little, she entered into the spirit of her part. At first, she had been a little frightened at what she had undertaken. She feared a break, either of ceremony or china. Then, as she had time to watch the guest and accustom herself to his ways and his appetite, she devoted her energy to plying him with goodies, bending beside him with grave and deferential mien, then straightening up again to pass through a dumb show of mirth above his august head. Theodora was talking away valiantly, sternly resolved to do what credit she could to the family; but Billy, at the foot of the table, was sorely taxed to keep up his dignity.

Suddenly Theodora turned to the maid.

"Cicely dear," she said; "I wish you would give me another spoon."

Above Mr. Gilwyn's head, Cicely shook her fist at Theodora.

"Yes, ma'am," she said respectfully.

Mr. Gilwyn looked surprised. He had known eccentric authors in his day; moreover, he was aware that many housekeepers were women of theories in regard to the proper relation between mistress and maid. Still, he had never supposed that the spirit of domestic regeneration included a system of public endearments. He pondered upon the matter while he was eating his pudding, and it rendered him inattentive to Theodora's views on the origin of totem poles. Theodora saw his inattention, and, with the tact of the true hostess, she promptly changed the subject to one which should be less ponderous and more interesting. Leaving the totem poles, she

began to talk of Quantuck and the vagaries of Mac. Quantuck proved to be an old vacation ground for Mr. Gilwyn, and he and Billy vied with each other in stories of the days when golf links were not, and the post office was still of the peripatetic variety, while Cicely kept close guard on her lips, lest she should involuntarily be drawn into adding her share to the conversation. Then all at once, Billy fell from grace, even as Theodora had done.

"Oh, Cis, old girl," he said jovially; "wake up and bring me some more coffee."

This time, Mr. Gilwyn's lower jaw dropped in amazement. There was a sudden awful silence, while, behind the guest's chair, Cicely's shoulders were shaking. In her mind, Theodora rapidly summed up the situation and judged it best to make a clean breast of the whole matter. Mr. Gilwyn looked as if his sense of humor were somewhat deficient; but he was a married man, and it was barely possible that his wife had not always escaped from similar experiences. Accordingly, she put on her most brilliant smile and leaned forward slightly in her chair.

"Mr. Gilwyn,"--she was beginning.

"Grrrrr! Grrrrr! Grrrrr! Woo--woo--woof!"

There was a sudden patter of tiny feet, a scamper, a rush, a succession of ecstatic little growls followed by a still more ecstatic yelp of rapture and glee. Melchisedek had emerged from his temporary retirement and come prancing upon the scene. He bore something in his mouth, something long and flexible and brown; and he danced up and down the room, worrying it and growling, worrying it again and yelping. Unhappily Mr. Gilwyn disliked small dogs, especially small dogs of frisky habits, and he showed his dislike quite frankly.

"Cicely, can you catch him?" Theodora demanded.

Dropping her tray into the nearest chair, Cicely made a snatch at Melchisedek as he shot past her. He eluded her, and, happy that at last he was to have a companion in his sport, he took refuge under Mr. Gilwyn's chair where he mounted guard over his plaything and snarled invitingly whenever Cicely tried to seize him. The situation reacted upon the nerves of the guest and caused him to spill a portion of his coffee. Ever curious, ever greedy, Melchisedek scampered out to sniff at the coffee, and Cicely made a dash at his abandoned booty.

"What is it, Cicely?" Theodora asked.

"Something he oughtn't to have, ma'am," she answered quickly, her finger on her lip.

But Billy missed the signal.

"Let's see it," he demanded.

For an instant, Cicely hesitated. Long before this, Allyn had told her of the girlish fit of temper which had led Theodora to cut off her own hair, and she had a shrewd suspicion of the history of Melchisedek's trophy.

"Let's see it," Billy repeated, while Melchisedek on appealing hindlegs walked around and around her, praying that his own might be restored to

him. Cicely hesitated for a minute longer. Then the spirit of mischief triumphed, and she held out to Billy a long, soft braid of silky brown hair, tied at either end with a bow of scarlet ribbon.

"Here it is, sir," she said demurely.

"Billy!" Theodora's voice was sharp with exclamation points.

"I know it."

"Where did it come from, at this day?"

"My box in the garret. I was up there, this afternoon, and I must have left it open."

"And you've had it all this time?"

"Yes."

"You silly old boy!"

Her face had grown scarlet and her eyes were shining. Then she turned to her mystified guest.

"Excuse this family by-play, Mr. Gilwyn; but that was a lock of hair I cut off, in the early days of our acquaintance, and my husband has kept it ever since. You see a small dog in the family is rather destructive to sentiment."

When the carriage was announced, Theodora was upstairs, putting on her hat. Mr. Gilwyn came down the stairs and marched straight to the dining-room where Cicely, divested of her cap and encased in a gingham apron, was busy clearing the table. In his hand was a book, and his face had suddenly lost all its pomposity and grown genial and merry.

"I found this on the table in my room," he said without preface; "and it isn't a very common name."

As he spoke, he opened to the flyleaf and pointed to the two lines written there.

"Cicely Everard," it said; "with the love of Cousin Theodora."

"I've a daughter of my own," he added; and Theodora, when she came in search of her guest, found the guest and the maid laughing uproariously.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"Oh, Cis!"

"Well?"

"Come down here."

"Can't. I'm busy."

"What are you doing?"

"Washing Melchisedek. He hunted an hypothetical rat all over the coal cellar, and came out looking like a chimney sweep."

"Well, hurry up. I have something to tell you, something exciting."

"I can't. It is a work of time to get him bleached out again. Come up and talk to me while I scrub."

Allyn clattered up the stairs. He found Cicely kneeling before a pail in which Melchisedek stood upright, a picture of sooty dolefulness, with water trickling from every sodden spike of his coat. The corners of his mouth drooped dejectedly, whether from Cicely's chidings or from the taste of the soap it would be hard to say.

"Pretty little dear; isn't he, Allyn?" she asked, while she scoured away at the tiny paws. "Just my ideal of a dainty lap dog. Melchisedek mustn't go into the coal. No, no!"

Melchisedek made a futile attempt to waggle his dripping tail; it only splattered sadly against the top of the pail, and he gave up that effort in favor of one to climb into Cicely's lap.

"No; Melchisedek must stand on own footies. What is your news, Allyn?"

"Mr. Barrett is here. Called, last night."

"On Babe?"

"On the whole family."

"It was meant for Babe, though," Cicely said conclusively. "But it strikes me he doesn't waste much time."

"About what?"

"About putting in an appearance here. Babe has only been at home for two days."

"You think it is Babe, then?"

"Who else? You didn't see them in New York, Allyn. I did." Cicely emphasized her rhetoric by rubbing Melchisedek so violently that he howled. "There! Poor little boy! Stand still!" she added.

"But Babe doesn't care two pins for him."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. Wait and see."

"Of course she doesn't. Fancy Babe in love!" He giggled derisively at the idea.

"Fancy Melchisedek neat and dressed up in a pink bow!" she retorted. "It seems impossible now; but it will occur in time. Allyn, what do you suppose sent Babe into medicine?"

"Sheer Babe-ishness."

"She won't stay there."

"Maybe. But I think Babe really wants to do something," he added, with sudden gravity. "You know papa isn't very rich, to say the least, and Babe is an independent mortal that wouldn't want to be supported all her days."

"I wonder if that did have anything to do with it," Cicely said musingly. "It must be horrid to have to think about money things."

"Don't you ever do it?"

"No. Papa attends to all that, and he has all he wants. Oh, but won't it be good to see him!"

"Are you glad you're going, Cis?" Allyn's tone showed that he was hurt at the thought.

"No," she said flatly. "I have missed papa terribly, more than you can even imagine; but I have had a very happy year here, and I shall be sorry to go away. You've all made it pleasant for me, Allyn; you and Cousin Ted more than any of the rest."

"I--I'm glad if we have. It doesn't seem so. But what am I going to do without you, Cis?"

"Take to Jamie Lyman," she said merrily. "He won't fight with you as I do. Tell me about Mr. Barrett, Allyn. How long is he going to stay?"

"Till the day before Christmas."

"I hope he will call here. I'd like to see him," she said, as she gave Melchisedek a final polish and set him down on the floor. "Oh, Allyn, I am so glad I am to have one jolly Christmas here. Papa and I have been by ourselves lately, and it will be great fun to have a whole large family to play with."

That very day, she had started her Christmas gift on its way to her father and, that same evening, she sat alone over the library fire, so absorbed in planning her gifts for the McAlisters that she paid no heed when Theodora and Billy came into the next room. She felt very comfortable as she sat there, very content with what fate offered her. Early in the new year, her father was to sail for home, and she was to join him in New York again. Meanwhile, she was to spend the holidays here, and, as she glanced about the cozy, luxurious room, lighted only with the flickering fire, she realized how dear to her this adopted home had become. Next to their own beautiful house in New York, this was the dearest spot in the world to her, and there would be some regret mingled with her happiness in her return to the city once more. In the meantime, she did wish she knew what Allyn wanted for Christmas, good old Allyn whose squabbles with her were largely in the past.

Suddenly she roused herself.

"Do you think it is necessary to tell her?" Theodora was asking.

"She will see it," Billy answered.

"No; she never half reads the papers. Burn this one, and she will never miss it."

"But she will have to know."

"Yes; but wait and let her father tell her."

"Poor Harry! It will be a blow to him. I wonder if he knew it was coming."

Cicely stepped out from the dusky library and stood before them. Her eyes, dazzled by the sudden glare of light, had a strained, frightened expression; but there was no suggestion of faltering in her bearing and in the poise of her head.

"What is it, Cousin Theodora?" she asked. "You were talking about papa and me; weren't you?"

Surprised at her sudden appearing, both Billy and Theodora were silent. Then Theodora put her arm around Cicely's waist and drew the girl down on the arm of her chair. The motion was womanly and gentle and protecting; but it was not enough to satisfy Cicely. She must have the truth.

"Please tell me," she said again with a ring of authority in her voice. "I'm not a baby; and, whatever it is, I ought to know it."

"To-night's paper reports the failure of Everard and Clark," Billy said quietly. "It may be an error, Cis, and it may not be a bad failure. I wouldn't worry till I knew the truth of it."

She looked straight into his face, and her own face grew white; but she neither exclaimed nor bewailed. There was a short hush. Then she said steadily,--

"Let me see the paper, please."

Silently Billy handed her the paper. Silently she read to the end the sensational account of the failure of the well-known banking firm.

"Is anybody to blame?" she demanded then.

Billy read her secret fear, and was glad that he could answer it with perfect truth.

"No, Cis. The trouble all came from outside the firm. You needn't worry about that."

"I'm glad," she said slowly, as she rose. "No; don't come, Cousin Ted. I want to think it over."

But Theodora did come. Up in the dark in Cicely's room, they talked it all over, crying a little now and then, then rousing themselves to make brave plans for the future and for the meeting between Cicely and her father. His home-coming now must mean a return to anxiety and business care, and to the sharp mortification of finding the firm whose reputation had been made by his sagacity and skill, fallen into bankruptcy during his one short year of absence.

"Oh, it was cruel for him to be ill," Cicely said forlornly. "They say it

would never have come, if he had only been here to manage things. He couldn't help having pneumonia and going away; but I do wish they had left that out. It's like throwing the blame on him for something he couldn't help. He isn't the man to shirk things, Cousin Theodora."

"They didn't mean that, dear," Theodora said gently. "They were only trying to show how much he had done in past years. You've no reason to be ashamed of your father, Cicely."

"Ashamed of him!" Cicely's tone was hard and resonant, free from all suspicion of tears. "You don't know my father, Cousin Ted. He couldn't do anything, anything in the world, that would make me ashamed of him. He's not that kind of a man."

Two days later, Gifford Barrett came to call. Cicely received him alone. She was pale; but a bright red spot burned in either cheek, as she offered him her hand.

"Cousin Theodora is out, Mr. Barrett. I knew she wouldn't be here, and I asked you to come now on purpose, because I wanted to see you alone." She paused and restlessly pushed back her hair from her forehead. Then she went on rapidly, "Have you heard of papa's failure?"

The young man's face showed his distress.

"Yes, I have." His reply was almost inaudible. "I am very sorry."

"Thank you," she said. "I knew you would be; but please don't say so, for it--I can't stand being pitied. You know what I mean." Brave as was her smile, it was appealing. "Now I want to talk business. Have you time for it?"

"Of course. I wish I could be of some use," he said eagerly. He liked Cicely, and he was surprised at the sudden womanliness that had come into her manner. For the hour, they met, not as man and child, but on precisely equal terms.

"It is going to take everything we have," she said hurriedly. "Papa will want to pay all he can, and it will leave us poor. I don't mean to have him do all the work; I must help what I can, and I've been wondering whether my music would be good for anything. I have taken lessons for years and from good teachers. Are you willing to hear me play, and to tell me honestly whether I could teach beginners?"

He wondered at her steady bravery, at the gallant courage with which she was starting into the battle, her colors flying. A moment later, he wondered again, for Cicely played well. He had braced himself for the girlish, amateurish performance, had braced himself for the inevitable fibs he must tell, the specious promises he must make. Instead of that, as she ended a Dvorak dance, he contented himself with one short exclamation which was more eloquent than many words.

"Good!" he said, and Cicely was satisfied; but she only said,--

"Wait, and let me try once more."

She turned back to the piano and, after a random chord or two, she played the Alan Breck Overture, played it so well that even its creator was pleased, as he listened. Then she rose, shut the piano and crossed the

room to the fireside.

"Mr. Barrett," she said, and her voice never betrayed the fact that this moment was the hardest she had ever known; "when you go back to New York, will you try to find me some little girls to teach? I'll do the best I can for them, and perhaps I can help along a little in making both ends meet."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The snow drifts were piled high about The Savins. The fences were buried, great heaps of snow lay on the broad east terrace and the path to the front door had become a species of tunnel. Christmas was close at hand and the earth, as if to make ready for the sweetest festival of the year, had wrapped itself in a thick, soft blanket, dazzling and pure as the stars shining in the eastern sky above.

Christmas was always a high day at The Savins. Ever since Theodora was a little child, the family tradition had been unbroken, the family rite unchanged. Around the Christmas basket and before the Christmas fire, the young McAlisters had gathered for their childish revels. Now, grown to manhood and womanhood, they still gathered there and, for one night in the year at least, they were children still, and their revel had lost none of its old charm.

"I am embarrassed in my mind," Cicely said, one day just before Christmas. "Half my presents were bought before I was a pauper, half of them not till later. It makes it look as if I were partial; but I'm not. It's poverty not partiality that ails me, and you mustn't any of you care."

"Isn't Cicely wonderful?" Hubert said, when she had gone. "Her pluck is beyond anything I have ever seen. I didn't suppose she had it in her."

"I did," Allyn responded loyally. "There's more stuff to Cis than shows on the surface, and you never catch her crying over spilt milk."

Two hours later, however, he did find her in tears. She was alone in the house, and he discovered her in the library, her face buried in the sofa pillows.

"Oh, please don't tell," she sobbed. "I didn't suppose you would find me. I don't mean to be a baby; but it is going to be so horrid to be poor and not have things, and I did want to give you something lovely for Christmas."

Allyn was a boy, and, boylike he was not prone to sentiment. He only said,--

"Don't worry your head about that, Cis. You've given me a good deal more than you know, this last year."

Surprised, she sat up and stared at him.

"Me? I? I've not given you a thing, Allyn, only those cuff buttons, your

birthday."

He looked at her steadily for a moment, Then he said,--

"Maybe not. I thought you had, though."

Suddenly Cicely understood him.

"There is no sort of sense in your going away, Cis," Billy said to her, as soon as he heard of her talk with Gifford Barrett. "Your Cousin Theodora and I both would be delighted to have you stay here for the present. The fact is, child, we shall miss you awfully, and can't stand it to have you go. You will stay with us; won't you?"

"I wish I could; but it wouldn't be fair. Papa needs me."

"You can't do any good, Cis. You're better off here."

"To live on you, and leave papa alone to stand things, the best way he can? That's not my way, Cousin Will."

"But if you can't help him?"

"I can. If I couldn't do anything else, I could make a little corner of home for him, and he will need it. He needs me. We have been together always, till just this last year when he had to go away, and now I'm not going to leave him to shift for himself."

"Do you know what you are undertaking, Cicely?" he asked her gravely.

"I think I do," she answered quite as gravely. "We shall have to go into a horrid little flat, somewhere in the wrong end of town, and pinch and scrimp to get along. I hate it, hate the very idea of it, and I wish I could stay here; but it is all out of the question. If papa ever needed the good of a daughter, it's now, and I must meet him when he lands. I must go, Cousin Will, so please don't make it any harder for me than it is anyway."

And Billy, as he watched her face and heard her words, forbore to urge, even though he dreaded for Cicely the future of which she spoke so bravely. The crash had been more disastrous and final than he had been led to suppose from the earlier reports. Both he and Theodora would have been only too glad to keep Cicely in their home; but they knew the girl was right, her place was with her father. Accordingly, they ceased to oppose; and only did their best to make the rest of her stay with them as happy as possible and to help her in her plans for her future home. Together with the McAlisters, they chose their Christmas gifts for her carefully, wisely, even merrily, for fun had a large share in Christmas at The Savins; but only Theodora knew that Billy had bought a small annuity for Cicely, and that the papers were to be given to her, not in the basket on Christmas eve, but when she was quite alone, on Christmas morning.

"I've a good deal more than we are likely to use," Billy had said rather apologetically, one night; "and even if it doesn't support her, it may as well help along a little. Cicely is a good girl, and I wish there were more like her."

And Theodora's assent was a hearty one.

"Phebe, how long is Mr. Barrett going to stay up here?" Theodora asked, a day or two before Christmas.

"I don't know."

"I thought he was going, to-morrow morning."

"Well, is he?"

"Probably not, inasmuch as I heard him ask you to go to drive with him, in the afternoon"

"Well, what difference does it make? He's free to stay at the hotel as long as he likes; isn't he?"

"Yes, if he doesn't starve in the meantime. But it seems to me it would be well to ask him here to Christmas dinner, if he is going to be in town."

"I wouldn't."

"Why not?" Theodora asked, in some surprise.

"Christmas is no day to ask strangers here."

"But Mr. Barrett isn't a stranger. Besides, he has been so good to Cicely that I think we owe him a little hospitality."

"You must do as you like, then," Phebe said curtly, and she marched away out of the room, leaving Theodora to knit her brows in anxious perplexity.

However, the next afternoon, the snow was falling heavily, and Phebe's drive was out of the question. At the appointed hour, she glanced out of the window to see Gifford Barrett wading up the path to the front door, and she vanished to her own room.

"Come in," she said, in answer to her mother's knock.

"Mr. Barrett is here, Phebe."

"Is he?"

"Yes, he has asked for you."

"But I'm busy."

"Never mind, Babe. Please hurry down, for I am too busy to stay with him, and I don't like to leave him alone."

"Oh, I really don't think he would steal the spoons," Phebe said languidly, as she rose. "Well, if I must, I suppose I must. I'll be down before long."

She turned to her closet and took down a dark red gown which had just come home from the dressmaker. It was the most becoming gown she had ever owned, and Phebe was quite aware of the fact. She laid it on the bed and stood looking at it for a minute or two. Then she shut her lips resolutely, hung it up again, picked a loose thread or two from the plain

blue gown she wore, and marched down the stairs.

Mr. Barrett rose to greet her, as she came stalking into the room. His manner was boyishly eager, his eyes brimming with mischief, as he took her hand and then offered her a small round package wrapped in dainty blue papers.

"Merry Christmas, Miss McAlister! Wasn't it too bad of the snow to spoil our drive?"

"I like a white Christmas," Phebe said perversely. "What's this?"

"A little offering for the season's greeting," he said, laughing. "It is really only a case of returning your own to you."

She took the package in her hands, and, as her fingers closed over it, she began to laugh in her turn.

"Oh, it's my skull," she said. "I'm so glad to have it again. I shall want it when I go back to Philadelphia."

His face fell.

"I thought you weren't going back."

"Of course I shall go back."

"But if you are homesick?"

"I shall get over it."

"And the clinics?"

"Nobody ever died of a clinic--except the patient," she said grimly.

He stood looking at her steadily, and any one but Phebe would have known the meaning of his expression; but she was examining the skull intently.

"You are sure you don't want it any longer?" she asked.

"No; I think there are some other things I would rather have," he returned.

She shook her head.

"It is a good one, Mr. Barrett, small and quite perfect, and it is yours by right of possession."

"Phebe," he said, as he came a step nearer her; "my ancestors were Yankees and I inherit all their love of a trade. You take the skull and give me--" and he took it as he spoke; "your hand, dear."

She drew her hand away sharply and turned to face him. Then the color fled from her cheeks, only to rush back again and mount to the roots of her hair.

"Oh, Gifford," she said brokenly; "I'd like to ever so much, only--do you really think we'd better?"

An hour later, the two young people sat side by side on the sofa, talking over and over the wonderful thing that had happened to them.

"I must go back to New York, the day after Christmas," Mr. Barrett said; "but you will write to me often; won't you, Phebe?"

"If I have anything to tell," she answered; "but I never could write letters, you know."

"You could once."

"How do you know?"

For his only answer, he opened his cardcase and took out a folded scrap of paper.

"How about this?" he asked, as he handed it to her.

She took it curiously and unfolded it. Then she turned scarlet as she read the four lines written there.

"Dear Sir

"This money is to pay for your wheel and your doctor's bill. We are sorry you fell off and we hope you will be better soon. A SINCERE FRIEND"

"I owe you some money," he added, when she had finished reading it. "But what moved you to send it?"

"My conscience. I supposed you were a poor, struggling musician, and I was really afraid you would starve to death if I didn't help you out, so I borrowed Teddy's typewriter and went to work."

"Give it back to me," he commanded; but she was too quick for him, and a dozen scraps of paper fluttered into the fire.

"It's the end of that old story," she announced briefly.

"And the beginning of our new one," he added, as the door swung open and Dr. McAlister came into the room.

Christmas day dawned, clear and crisp and bracing, and The Savins was gay with Christmas wreaths, with holly and mistletoe boughs. The rooms were in their annual state of disorder, for Christmas gifts and Christmas jokes were piled on all the tables and chairs. Gifford Barrett had been included in the revel of the evening before, and now, at the Christmas dinner, he sat in the place of honor, next Mrs. McAlister. In all its history, The Savins had never held a merrier party, and Dr. McAlister's face was quite content as he glanced down one side of the table where Phebe, radiant but shamefaced, was trying to conceal something of her rapture under a show of severity, then down the other where Allyn's open content with life was matched by Cicely's brave courage in facing whatever the coming year might have in store for her. Then, as he looked past and beyond them all to his wife, he threw back his handsome, iron-grey head proudly.

"It is a good Christmas," he said, in the sudden hush which fell upon the table; "a good Christmas and a merry one. Bess, we'll change the dear old

toast, and say, Here's to our good health, and our family's and may we all live long--and prosper!"

Theodora was in her usual seat beside her father. Now she leaned forward and laid her hand on his.

"Selah!" she said devoutly.

THE END

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