Peggy



LAURA E. RICHARDS

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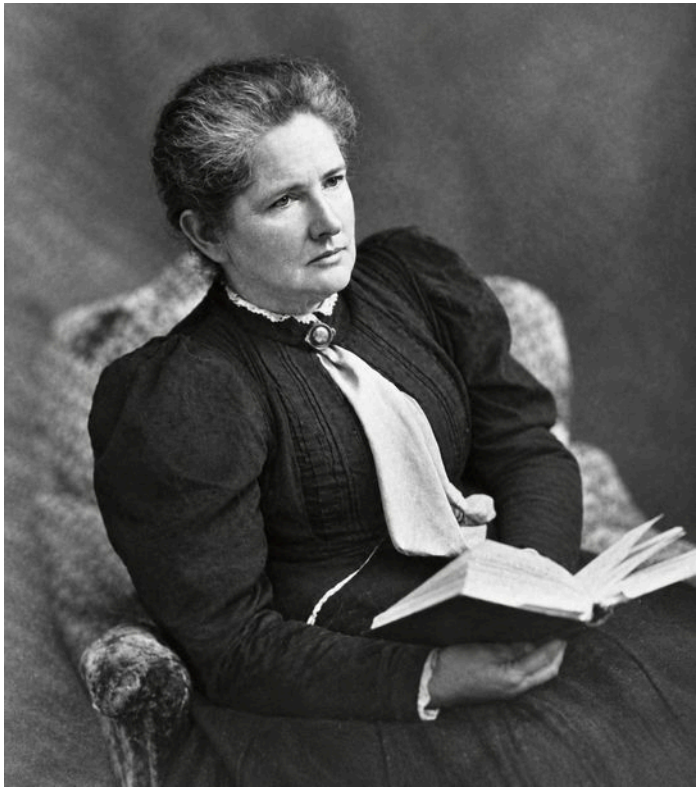
THE AUTHOR



Laura E. Richards

1850 - 1943

AI-created interpretation after Reynolds photograph, published in The Critic by 1902.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura E. Richards

Laura Elizabeth Richards was an American author, born in Boston in 1850. The daughter of Julia Ward Howe and Samuel Gridley Howe, she grew up in a family associated with literature, education and reform. After marrying Henry Richards, she moved to Gardiner, Maine, where much of her long writing career took place.

Her work includes stories, poems and books for children, among them *Captain January*. She also wrote nonsense verse, finding comic possibilities in the sounds and movements of language. Her writing for young readers ranges from playful verbal invention to stories shaped by affection, responsibility and the wish to belong.

Richards was also a biographer. With her sister Maud Howe Elliott, she wrote a life of their mother that received the first Pulitzer Prize for biography in 1917. Alongside her literary work, she participated in educational and community activities in Maine, connecting authorship with practical interests beyond the page.

She died in Gardiner in 1943. Readers can notice how her stories use a small encounter or domestic detail to make a relationship vivid. In the verse, rhythm and verbal surprise invite reading aloud; in the prose, sympathy often develops through attention to another person's needs. These different forms reveal the range of a writer whose career continued across many decades.

Biographical references: Maine State Library; Pulitzer Prizes. Portrait source: Reynolds photograph, published in The Critic by 1902. Full source records retained in the edition archive.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW WORLD.

"Miss Montfort!" said the Principal.

Peggy looked about her.

"I wonder if it's another cousin!" she said to herself. "It can't be, or Margaret would have known. Dear Margaret! now if she were only here, she could answer, and everybody would—"

"Miss Montfort!" said the Principal again, rather sharply.

"Isn't that your name?" whispered the girl who sat beside Peggy. "You'll have to answer, you know!"

Peggy started violently, and, looking up, met the Principal's eyes bent upon her. She struggled to her feet, feeling herself one blush from head to foot.

"I—I beg your pardon!" she faltered. "I didn't suppose—did you mean me?"

"You are Miss Montfort, are you not?"

"Oh, no! my cousins are both—that is,—I am just Peggy!"

There was a general titter, which the Principal checked with her pencil. "Young ladies!" she said in a warning tone. "Miss Montfort, you will have room No. 18, in the second corridor. You will be alone for the present."

"Oh, goody!" cried Peggy. "I mean—I'm ever so much obliged, thank you! Can I go now?"

"You *may* go now!" said the Principal, with a slight emphasis on the auxiliary.

Peggy stumbled over the foot of the girl next her, stepped on her own dress, tripped and came to her knees; picked herself up, with a sound of rending cloth, and finally got out of the room. This time the titter was not so easily checked. Peggy heard it rippling behind her as she fled. Even Miss Russell smiled as she rapped on the desk, and said one word to herself: "Untrained!"

But the girl who had sat beside Peggy rubbed her foot, which hurt a good deal, and said three words: "Poor little thing!"

No. 18 in the second corridor was a good-sized room, with two windows, one of them crossed on the outside by a fire-escape. Its present aspect was bare and unhomelike. The furniture consisted of an iron bedstead, a bureau and wash-stand, two chairs and a small table, all neat, but severely plain. The small square of carpet on the floor was a cold gray mixture with brown flowers on it. As Peggy Montfort looked about her, her heart sank. Was she to live here, to spend her days and nights here, for a whole endless year? She thought of her room at home, the great sunny room that she shared with her sister Jean. That had four windows, which were generally flung wide open; it was bare, because she and Jean liked to have plenty of space for gymnastics and wrestling; but that was a homelike, accustomed bareness, and they loved it. The great old four-post bed, with the round balls on which they loved to stand and perform circus tricks; the hammock slung across one end; the birds' nests and hawks' wings that adorned the walls in lieu of pictures; the antlers on which they hung their hats,—all these, or the thought of them, smote Peggy's stout heart, and sent it lower and lower down.

A maid knocked at the door: here was Miss Montfort's trunk, and would she unpack it, please, as the man would be coming again to take the empty trunks to the attic.

Peggy fell to work with ardour; here, at least, was something to do, in this strange, lonesome place. Arriving in the afternoon, a day or two after the beginning of school, her lessons were not to begin till the next morning.

Every dress, as she lifted it out, seemed a bit of home. Here was the triangular tear in her blue gingham, that Jean mended for her. One could hardly see it now! Dear Jean! she was neat-handed, and she had a little look of Margaret, the same soft hair and clear, quiet eyes. Here was her beloved bicycle skirt! Ah, there was something heavy in the pocket. Peggy explored, and drew forth an apple; that brought the tears, which were not very far off in the first place, and there was a good deal of salt in the apple as she ate it. She was so determined to make the best of everything, however, that she fought back the homesickness that was rising like a flood within her, and even managed to whistle a tune as she hung up her dresses and laid her stockings and handkerchiefs in the drawers. Then the shoe-bag must be hung against the closet door, the bag that Margaret had

made and worked with her initials. Dearest Margaret! and here was the pincushion that Flora gave her, and the writing-case from Brother Hugh— Oh! she would write to him every week of her life, indeed she would! and so on and so on.

When the trunk was empty, the room looked less forlorn, though still pretty bare, for in Peggy's home little thought was given to anything not of practical use. The door was open, and happening to look up she caught a glimpse of the opposite room, on the other side of the narrow corridor. Here, too, the door stood open, and Peggy gazed open-eyed. A greater contrast could hardly be imagined. Here every available inch of wall-space was covered, with photographs, with Japanese fans and umbrellas, with posters and ribbons and flags. The room itself was choked, it seemed to Peggy, with chairs and tables, low tables covered with books, with cups and saucers, with knickknacks of every possible description. The whole effect was bewildering, but so gay and cheerful that Peggy sighed as she glanced back at her own bare white walls, at the bureau with its sober brush and comb, and the polished table where the writing-case lay in solitary state. She could not imagine living in a room like that other: she should stifle, and throw half the things out of the window; but it would be nice to have just a few more things! If she had only thought! Jean would have been glad to share the nests with her, and she could have had the rattlesnake skin, for had she not killed him herself? and then there were the fossils!

As Peggy meditated, steps came along the corridor, and halted at her door. A face peeped in. "May I come in?" asked the girl who had sat beside her in the class-room.

"Oh, do! I wish you would!" cried Peggy, eagerly. "I am so glad to see you! Sit down! I wanted to tell you—you were awfully kind to let me know she meant me. You see, I never was called Miss Montfort in my life before."

The girl sat down, and looked kindly at Peggy. She was a singular-looking girl, short and dark, with a curious effect of squareness in her thickset figure. Her face was plain, but one forgot that when one met the bright, intelligent gaze of her dark eyes.

"I ought to introduce myself!" she said. "My name is Bertha Haughton. I'm a neighbour of yours. No!" she added, laughing, as Peggy glanced involuntarily across the way. "That is Vanity Fair. I

don't live there; I live in the Owls' Nest, some way down the corridor."

"Are all the rooms named?" asked Peggy, wondering.

"Most of them, on this corridor, at least. There's Vanity Fair and Rag Fair and the Smithsonian Institute on the other side—oh! and the China Shop and the Corner Grocery, too. And on this side is ours, the Owls' Nest, and Bedlam, and the Soap Factory, and the Nursery, and this room of yours."

"Oh, how interesting!" cried Peggy. "Do tell me what the names mean! Why Owls' Nest?"

"Oh, well, we got the name of studying hard, that's all. We don't study harder than ever so many others, but in our freshman year we—my chum and I—passed an examination that a good many failed in, and so we got the name of owls. That's really all! And the China Shop—well! Ada Bull had it last year, and she had a mania for china-painting; and that with the name, together, you see! Then there is the Soap Factory,—that is quite a story! you really want to hear it? well!

"You know we are not allowed to buy candy, or to have it sent to us. This girl's mother—I won't tell her name, she's in college now—was a very silly person, and she sent her a great box of chocolate, five or six pounds (though she knew the rules, mind you!), all done up like soap."

"Like soap!" repeated Peggy.

"Yes! the box was marked soap, and the chocolate was in little cakes, just like the little sample cakes of soap they send round, don't you know? and each cake wrapped up in paper, with '*Savon de Chocolat*' stamped on it. It came from Paris, I believe.

"Well, of course the girl ought to have told Miss Russell at once, but she didn't. She kept the box under her bed, and told all the girls she knew; and of course they kept coming into her room all day long, and her pocket was always full, and, however it happened, at last Miss Russell suspected something. One day she came suddenly upon Margie in the hall, and saw that she was eating something, and asked her what it was. We're not allowed to eat going about the house, of course. Margie had just bitten off half a cake, and she had the other

half in her hand, with the printed side up, '*Savon de Chocolat!*' and she said 'Soap!'

"'Soap!' said Miss Russell.

"'Yes!' said Margie. 'Soap, Miss Russell.'

"The Principal looked at her a minute, and then I suppose she smelt the chocolate. She told her to wait, and then she went into her own room and came out with a little cake of tar soap—sample cake—that looked for all the world like chocolate soap.

"'Pray try this!' she said, as grave as a judge. 'I am sure you will find it excellent. I must insist upon your trying it, since you have a taste for soap.'

"Poor Margie! she had a good deal of pluck, and when she saw there was no help for it, she took a bite of the soap. But it was too horrid; she couldn't swallow it. She choked, and ran to her own room; the Principal followed her, and then the whole story came out. Margie never told us just what Miss Russell said. The chocolate was sent to the Orphans' Home next day, and she was a pretty serious girl for some time after. So now you know why that room is called the Soap Factory."

"That's a splendid story!" cried Peggy. "Why, I think this is great. Did this room have a name, too? I'm sure it must have! Do tell me what it is!"

A queer look crossed the dark girl's face.

"It has been called Broadway!" she said. "I hope it may be changed now." She hesitated, and was about to speak again, when two girls came along arm in arm.

"Look!" said Bertha Haughton. "There are your opposite neighbours, Vanity and Vexation of Spirit. I'll call them over and introduce them."

"Oh, please don't!" cried Peggy, under her breath, catching her companion's arm. But it was too late.

"V. V.," called Bertha, in her clear, hearty voice, "come and be introduced to Miss Montfort."

The girls turned and came forward, one eagerly, the other rather unwillingly.

"Miss Viola Vincent, Miss Vivia Varnham," said Bertha Haughton, "this is Miss—Peggy, did you say?—Miss Peggy Montfort."

Miss Varnham simply bowed, but Viola Vincent advanced with outstretched hand.

"How do you *do?*" she cried; and she lifted Peggy's hand to the level of her chin, and shook it gently from side to side. "Awfully glad to see you! It's been too perfectly horrid to have this room empty; hasn't it, V?"

"A great bore!" assented Miss Varnham, who looked thoroughly bored herself.

Both girls had entered the room, and were standing, looking about them. Peggy stood, too, feeling unspeakably shy and awkward, and not knowing what to say. Bertha Haughton gave her a quick, friendly glance, and made a slight motion with her head toward a chair. Peggy started, and coloured violently.

"I beg your pardon!" she stammered. "Won't you sit down? here are two chairs; and you and I can sit on the bed!" she turned to Miss Haughton with an air of relief; she seemed already an old friend.

Peggy's timid glances at the newcomers showed her that they belonged to a species unknown to her. Living on a great prairie farm, she had known no girls save her sisters and the two cousins with whom she had spent a happy summer at Fernley House, the home of her uncle, Mr. John Montfort, a year before.

But neither sisters nor cousins, nor Bertha Haughton herself, bore any resemblance to the two young women who now seated themselves on her two straight-backed chairs. Both were dressed in the extreme of the fashion, which was not a specially graceful one. Both wore their hair elaborately dressed, with a profusion of gold and silver pins, a passing fancy easily carried to extravagance. Both were pretty, and there was even a kind of likeness between them, though it vanished when one looked closely. Viola Vincent had limpid blue eyes, and long lashes which she had a way of dropping, as she had been told that they looked well on her cheek, which was clear and delicately tinted. She smiled a good deal, and in doing so showed a pretty dimple in one cheek. In spite of a certain affectation, Peggy thought her charming.

Vivia Varnham was less attractive, in spite of her bright hazel eyes and pretty fluffy hair; there was a supercilious lift to her eyebrows, an unamiable droop to the corners of her mouth. Peggy did not make this analysis; she only thought, "I shall not like her, I know I sha'n't!"

The girls chattered away without much regard to her, and she only half understood their talk.

"My dear! *Have* you heard?" This was from Viola to Bertha Haughton. She patted herself all over while she talked, now her hair, now her collar, now her blouse, little approving pats.

"You never hear anything, you owls! When *is* the Snowy coming back? She has been away forty years! I simply can't exist without her. Why, my dear, we are to have the straw-ride after all. Miss Russell says we may. Isn't it perf'ly fine?"

"Are you sure?" said Bertha Haughton, doubtfully. "You know last time she said we couldn't go again, because Grace acted so, pulling out the linch-pin and dropping us all into the road."

"My dear, I know! that's just it! The Goat went to her this morning and said she would stay at home and do double lessons if the rest of us could only go. Noble of the Goat, I call it; only it won't be half so much fun without her, and Billy gone, too. Oh, you can't possibly imagine how we miss Billy. How forlorn this room looks without all her pretty things!" She glanced about the room. "Perf'ly awful, isn't it?" she said.

Poor Peggy flushed scarlet. Bertha Haughton flashed her a glance of indignant sympathy.

"Billy had the room simply ridiculous!" she said, hastily. "Almost as bad as your toyshop, Vanity. I can't abide a frippy room!"

Viola Vincent opened her blue eyes wide. "What ruffled you up, Fluffy?" she said. "I didn't say anything about the Nest." Then, happening to glance at Peggy, she realised what she had said, and blushed a little herself.

"I'm sure I didn't mean anything!" she cried, with a little giggle. "Of course when Miss Montfort gets all her things out and arranged, it will be quite charming, I'm sure it will."

"I haven't any more things!" said honest Peggy. She managed to keep her voice steady, but the tears would come into her eyes, and she raged at herself.

"Oh, you'll accumulate them!" said good-natured Viola, who liked to have people comfortable, if it did not take too much trouble. "Won't she, V.? We had hardly anything when we came, had we, V.? Barns, my dear, were nothing to us, were they, V.?"

"Oh, of course not!" assented Miss Varnham; but her smile was so like a sneer, and her glance about the room so cold and contemptuous, that Peggy felt dislike hardening at her heart.

"What is all that noise in the entry?" exclaimed Bertha Haughton, anxious to change the conversation. "It sounds as if an elephant were coming to call."

Viola Vincent fluttered to the door, patting her waist affectionately as she went.

"My *dear!*" she cried, in high-pitched staccato tones. "It's a box, an express box. Oh, it's a perfect monster, a mammoth! Vi, this must be your dresses. Hurrah! we'll have a grand trying on."

Vivia Varnham looked out. A burly expressman was staggering forward with an enormous box, almost as big as a packing-case.

"Take it in there!" she said, imperiously, motioning across the corridor. "Put it down carefully, mind! Miss Varnham, is it?"

"No, miss," said the man, respectfully. "Miss Montfort!"

"Me!" cried Peggy, starting to her feet. "Oh, there must be some mistake. I wasn't—there's nothing coming for me."

"It must be for you!" said Bertha Haughton. "There is no other Miss Montfort in the school. Look at the address, and you may know the handwriting!"

Peggy looked. In a clear, bold hand was written:

Miss Peggy Montfort,
At Miss Russell's School,
Pentland.
Glass, with care. All charges paid.

"Oh!" she cried, clasping her hands. "It *is* for me! It's from Uncle John! Oh, what do you suppose—what can it be?"

"Bring it in here, please," said Bertha Haughton, quietly, to the man, who still stood balancing the box. "There! set it against the wall; thank you! Now," as the man departed, "we need a screw-driver. Have you one, Viola?"

"My *dear!* I had one, but the Goat broke it, using it for a step, you know, to get up to the next story. I use a can-opener now, but that will only do for small boxes. I don't have—well, State Houses, coming every day," she added, with a good-natured laugh, glancing at the great box.

Bertha Haughton ran to fetch a screw-driver from her room, and the other two girls moved toward the door. Vivia Varnham looked black. She had made sure the box was for her, and felt aggrieved at the stupid freshman who appropriated it. Viola Vincent, on the other hand, was delighted. "I'm awfully glad!" she said. "It's simply dandy, having a box come. Ta, ta! I hope it will be something perf'ly splendid, dresses and hats and all kinds of giddiness. I love giddiness! When you want to be giddy, you must come to us; the Owls are too worthy. There's Fluffy back again with the screw-driver. Ta again! Awfully glad!"

Peggy was half inclined to ask Viola to stay, but still it was rather a relief when the opposite door closed. Whatever the box contained, she could not have enjoyed it with those sharp, cold eyes of Viola Varnham looking on.

"Here is the screw-driver!" cried Bertha, out of breath with her flight along the corridor. "It's very strong, you need not be afraid of pressing on it. Can I do anything more to help you? If not, I must go. I hope it is something very nice indeed!"

"Go! you!" cried Peggy. "Oh, must you? Can't you stay and help me see what it is? It isn't any fun opening boxes alone," she added, piteously.

The girl does not live who would not rather unpack a box than eat her dinner. "If you are sure you want me," said Bertha. "I didn't want to be in the way, that was all."

"In the way! Oh, Miss Haughton! Why, you are the only friend I have here in this lonesome place."

"If I am going to be your friend, I am not going to be Miss Haughton another minute. Do you really want me to stay, Peggy?"

"I do, Bertha, indeed I do."

"Honour bright?"

"Honour brightest!"

"Hurrah, then! And now for the box!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BOX FROM FERNLEY.

The box was no ordinary rough affair, knocked together for simple purposes of transportation. It was neatly and carefully made, the edges fitting closely together, the lid furnished with hinges.

"We must take care how we open this!" said Bertha. "It would be a shame to spoil such a fine box."

Peggy was used to tools of every description, and she drew out the screws deftly, then lifted the lid. Both girls bent eagerly forward. Nothing was visible but white paper, neatly fitted to the top of the box. Yes! on the paper lay a card, on which was written, "For Peggy's housekeeping. From Uncle John and Margaret, with best love."

The handwriting was Margaret's, and Peggy seized and kissed it before going further. "It is Margaret!" she said. "Dear, darling Margaret, the best friend I have in the world. Oh, how dear and kind and lovely of them both! What *do* you suppose they have sent me?"

"Suppose we see!" said Bertha Haughton. Yet both girls lingered a moment, tasting the joy of suspense.

It was not a joy to be long indulged, however. Together they lifted the paper, and lo! more paper, but this time enveloping various mysterious packages neatly tied with pink tape.

"Margaret's tape!" cried Peggy. "Uncle John gave her a great big spool of it, because she said she had never seen enough in her life. Oh, what a fat bundle! You shall open it, Bertha, because you have been so good to me."

"Open your bundle!" cried Bertha. "Indeed I will not! I never heard of such a thing. Be quick, though, for I do want to see."

The big square parcel revealed an afghan, knitted in long stripes of red and blue, the colours rich and warm, and harmonising pleasantly.

"Oh, what a beauty!" cried Bertha, while Peggy gazed in silent delight. "My dear, it warms the whole room! and the length of it, and the breadth! why, it will go on double. I never saw such a splendid one."

Indeed, the great afghan had been Margaret's "pick-up work" ever since she first heard that Peggy was going to school, and loving thoughts were knitted into every stripe.

"What next?" said Bertha. "My dear, sofa-pillows!"

So they were, four of them, each prettier than the other.

"But what shall I do with them?" said Peggy, with a comical glance around the room. "There's no sign of a sofa. Never mind! they are perfect beauties. Oh, and what can this be? Oh, Bertha, see, it is a bookcase!"

The six pieces of polished wood were quickly fitted together, and there was indeed a bookcase, not very large, but still ample to contain all the books Peggy would be likely to need.

"Where are your books?" asked Bertha, innocently; and Peggy hung her head.

"My Bible is in my drawer," she said. "I—I didn't bring any other books. I'm a dreadful dunce," she added, timidly. "I might as well tell you now, for you'd find it out anyhow, the very first time you talked about books. I don't—care—about them, much."

"Oh!" and Bertha looked a little blank, being a bookworm herself. "But there must be some books you are fond of, Peggy?"

Peggy shook her head despondently. "I don't believe there are," she said. "Oh, of course I like 'Treasure Island,' and 'Robin Hood,' and that kind of thing. But history, and the Waverley Novels—why, Margaret would like to read the Waverley Novels all day; and they put me to sleep in five minutes."

She looked anxiously at her new friend, to see the effect of this dreadful confession; but Bertha only laughed. "Well, I love the Waverleys very much myself," she said; "but I know everybody doesn't care for them. But when you want to read, Peggy, what do you do?"

"But I don't want to read," said Peggy, humbly. "It—it seems such a waste of time; except Coues, of course, and he wouldn't go in my trunk, and Pa is going to send him by express."

"What do you mean?" asked Bertha, puzzled in her turn. "Cows!"

"Yes, the book, you know! Oh, I couldn't live without that."

"Do you mean a herd-book? Of course, you said you lived on a farm. You mean that you study pedigrees and that kind of thing?"

Now it was Peggy's turn to laugh, as she explained that she meant Prof. J. Elliott Coues's admirable book on birds.

"Pa has Samuels," she added, "but I couldn't bring that, because it is out of print, and too valuable. Besides, he isn't so thorough as Coues, don't you know, especially in anatomy and that part. Is there a good class in anatomy here? Of course I shall want to join that."

"Oh, dear!" cried Bertha, in comical dismay, "I don't know! Peggy Montfort, you are not a dunce at all; you are just shamming. The idea of any one *wanting* to study anatomy!"

"The idea of wanting to study anything else," cried Peggy, "except physics and geometry. It's this horrible literature and stuff that I cannot bear. But we can't stop and talk, with the box only half unpacked. Oh, pictures! Now I do like pictures, when they are the right kind. Bertha, look at this, will you?"

With difficulty she lifted out a large picture which filled the box from end to end. Both girls uttered a cry of delight. It was the "Automedon" of Henri Regnault. The great horses rearing and plunging, the heroic figure of the charioteer, seemed to take Peggy's breath. "It—it's the kind of thing you dream about, isn't it?" she said. "They are alive; I believe they'll break through the glass in another minute. Oh, there can't be anything else as splendid as this!"

But when she drew out next a fine photograph of "The Night Watch," she hardly knew what to say. The gleaming eyes of the lions, prowling among the ruined columns, fascinated her almost as much as the wild horses had done. She had less to say to the beautiful photograph of the Sistine Madonna, which came next; yet she looked at it with eyes of wistful affection. It was Margaret's favourite picture, and she loved it on that account as well as its own. Yet her taste was for "critters," as she freely acknowledged; and she glowed again as Bertha held up an engraving of "Sheridan's Ride," with the great captain riding straight out of the picture at her.

"That's the kind of thing she wants!" Mr. Montfort had said, when he and his niece Margaret were having their delightful "Peggy-lark," as he called it. "The Sistine by all means, Meg; but no more old

masters for our Peggy. She won't understand them, and she won't like them. What was it she said about your pet St. Anthony?"

"She said he looked as if he had gone out for clams and fallen into the mud!" said Margaret, rather ruefully. "I suppose you are right, Uncle John; but, oh, do look at this lovely Murillo angel! How could she help loving this?"

"The anatomy of it would distress her," said Mr. Montfort, dryly. "You know Peggy is strong on anatomy. Better take the 'Automedon.'"

"Which you said was out of drawing!" cried Margaret, with a flash of mischief. "Oh, if you are going to put false ideas into her head, Uncle John—" on which she was very properly told to choose her pictures, and not be saucy.

The last picture in the box had not been chosen in any picture-shop; and at sight of it Peggy sat down on the bed and began to cry.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "What shall I do? Oh, Margaret, Margaret, what shall I do?"

Kind-hearted Bertha was distressed. "Don't cry, dear!" she said. "I know! I know just how it feels. Is it your father and sister?"

"No! oh, no!" said Peggy, wiping her eyes. "Of course it's different with Pa and the girls, because I shall be going home every vacation, you know. But I never was so happy in all my life as I was there; and seeing it—it is Fernley, and Uncle John and Margaret."

The large photograph showed a stately house shadowed by lofty trees. Standing on the stone verandah were two figures, one, that of a tall man in a black velvet coat, with bright dark eyes; the other a slender girl with a sweet, thoughtful face. Both seemed to be looking straight at Peggy, and she felt Uncle John's kind look and Margaret's tender smile like warmth at her heart.

"I—I'm only crying because—I'm—glad!" she said. And Bertha seemed to understand that, too.

But the wonderful box was not yet empty; it really seemed like the famous bag of the Fairy Blackstick. Out came a gay Oriental cloth, which made another thing of the chilly little polished table; item, a bureau-cover embroidered with gold-coloured chrysanthemums; item, a wonderful work-basket, fitted with everything that a

needlewoman's heart could desire; item, a spirit-lamp and a hot-water bottle, and a neat little tool-chest. Peggy sighed over the work-basket, and resolved to do her very best, but at sight of the tool-chest her eyes sparkled, and she seized upon it with delight, and caressed each shining implement as if it were a living and beloved creature.

"Did you ever see such a little duck of a saw?" she cried. "Oh, I must go to work and make something this very day. Only, these two dears have sent me everything that I could ever possibly need. What is that, Bertha? There can't be anything more!"

There could, though, and was. The bottom of the box was fitted with a cushion or mattress of chintz, chrysanthemums again, on a pale green ground; and the last parcel of all contained several yards of the same material.

"What do you suppose— Oh, I see!" cried Peggy. "The box,—we wondered why it was such a good box, don't you know? It is to be a kind of sofa, or window-seat, or something; and this is the cushion, and the rest is for a flounce and curtains. Oh, dear, did you ever hear of anything so perfectly lovely? Dear Uncle John, dear Margaret!" and she wept again, and, in default of Margaret, hugged the biggest sofa-pillow, a wonderful affair of soft yellow silk, with ruffles and puffles.

"Come," said Bertha, "this will never do, Peggy! We must get these all arranged before tea, mustn't we? The gong will sound in a few minutes."

Peggy dried her tears, and the two girls went to work with right good will. In ten minutes the dreary room was as cheerful and homelike a place as heart could desire. The pictures were hung (I forgot to mention that the fairy box contained picture-hooks and wire, hidden away in a corner), the cushions fitted, the chintz tacked in a neat flounce around the box, which straightway became a divan, and looked positively Oriental with the pillows heaped with careful carelessness on it.

Peggy stood and surveyed the whole effect with shining eyes. "When the curtains are up—" she said, and looked inquiringly at Bertha.

"When the curtains are up," said Bertha, "it will be one of the pleasantest rooms in the whole school."

And then the gong sounded, and they went down to tea.

A throng of girls was pouring into the great dining-room. Few of them noticed the newcomer, being taken up with their own concerns, laughing and chatting, hurrying to their places; yet Peggy felt as if all eyes were upon her. She clung close to Bertha Haughton's arm; but now that friendly arm was drawn away.

"I must leave you here, Peggy," said Bertha.

"Oh, don't leave me! Oh, can't I sit by you?" asked poor Peggy, in an agonised whisper.

"No, dear, I have to go over there, quite to the other side of the room. See, Miss Russell is beckoning to you. You are to sit at her table, with the other freshmen. Cheer up, Peggy, it'll be all right after the first minute."

Bertha nodded kindly, and took her way across the hall, while Peggy stumbled along, tripping over several dresses (she always stumbled when she was embarrassed), to the table where the Principal sat. There were six tables, twelve girls to each table, with a teacher at the head. Miss Russell greeted Peggy pleasantly, and it occurred to our friend for the first time that the Principal was not a Gorgon, but a human being, with a grave face, it is true, but with kind and friendly eyes.

"I trust you have been resting after your journey, Miss Montfort! Yes? That is good. Coming so late yesterday you did not meet your classmates, who had already gone to their rooms. Miss Parkins, Miss Barclay, Miss Manton,—this is Miss Peggy Montfort. I hope you will introduce her to the other young ladies after tea."

The three girls nearest Peggy bowed, all more or less shyly; it was comforting to feel that there were others who felt as strange as she did. In fact, Miss Parkins, who sat on her left, was so manifestly and miserably frightened that Peggy felt herself a lion by comparison, and, by way of improving acquaintance, asked her boldly for the salt.

Miss Parkins gasped, shivered, clutched the pepper-pot, and dropped it into her own plate. The other freshmen giggled nervously, but Peggy glowed with compassion and sympathy.

"Never mind!" she whispered. "That's just the kind of thing I am doing all the time. There is the salt; why, I can reach it myself, and nobody ever wants pepper, anyhow. There, that's all right!"

The girl lifted a pair of eyes so red with crying, so humble and grateful and altogether piteous, that Peggy's own eyes almost overflowed. She put her hand under the table, found a little limp, cold paw, and gave it a hearty squeeze. "Cheer up!" she said. "It'll be better pretty soon, I—I guess. I am—homesick—too!"

Then, finding a sob rising in her throat, she hastily filled her mouth with buttered toast, choked, and caught herself with a wild sound, half cough, half snort, that brought the eyes of the whole table upon her. The strange thing was, Peggy did not seem to care this time. They were only freshmen like herself. Any one of them might have choked just as well as she, and she was bigger than any of them. If those other girls had seen, now! not Bertha, but the other two! She glanced over to the opposite table, where the two V's sat facing her; but they were chattering away, with no thought of freshmen or their doings. Viola Vincent looked very pretty in a pale blue blouse and white piqué skirt; she was evidently in high spirits, and was patting her hair and her waist with perfect satisfaction.

"Perf'ly *fine!*" came to Peggy's ears, in her clear piping voice. "My *dear*, it will be simply *dandy!*"

Peggy glanced at the Principal, she hardly knew why, except that Margaret disliked slang; and she saw her brows contract with a momentary look of vexation. "It does sound rather horrid!" she thought. "I wonder if I shall have to give up saying 'awfully!' That would be perfectly awful. Besides, it sounds awfully affected to talk like a book all the time."

Thus meditating, Peggy let her napkin slip down to the floor. Her neighbour saw it, and both stooped at the same time to pick it up. Their heads came together with a violent crack. "Ow!" cried Peggy, and rubbed her flaxen poll vigorously. Miss Parkins was too frightened to know whether she was hurt or not. "Never mind!" said Peggy. "It was my fault just as much as yours. Did you get an awful crack? Oh! I mean, did you hurt yourself?"

The poor girl murmured something, but it was more like a sob than a speech; and Peggy could only press the limp hand again, and

resolve that when she knew the girl a little better she would try to put some spirit into her. Her own spirit was rising. She felt that ten pairs of eyes were watching her furtively; that her companions were taking notes, and that every spoonful she ate was counted and criticised; but still her courage was good, and she was even able to notice that the biscuits were light and the peach preserves delicious.

I said ten pairs of eyes, for the eleventh had never been lifted above the level of the table-cloth, save for that one grateful glance over the spilt pepper. Certainly Miss Parkins was a queer-looking little person. Very small and slight, with a certain wizened look that did not belong to so young a face; a long, thin nose, and two small reddish-brown eyes that looked as if they had always been given to crying. The child—she did not look more than a child—had no beauty of any kind; yet a certain gentleness of look redeemed the poor little face from absolute ugliness. She was queerly dressed, too. Her gown was of good, even rich material, but in questionable taste, and cut in a fashion that might have suited her grandmother. Peggy's own ideas of dress were primitive, and she was not very observant, but she did feel that blue poplin stamped with large red roses was not a suitable dress for a schoolgirl, even if she were not small and plain and wizened, and even if it were not cut in a bygone fashion.

Peggy saw, or fancied she saw, glances of amused contempt thrown at her poor little neighbour.

"All the more reason," she thought, "why I should make friends with her."

"Do you—did you come yesterday, or the day before?" she asked, as cheerfully as she could.

"Oh! yes, I think so!" was the reply, in a gasping whisper. This was not very encouraging, but Peggy proceeded.

"Did you have far to come? I came all the way from Ohio."

"Oh! no, I don't think so!"

"It took me all day to get here. It's horrid travelling alone, don't you think so?"

"Oh! I—don't know! I never travelled."

On the whole, the girl seemed so distressed that Peggy felt it would be a cruel kindness to pursue the conversation. "I needn't talk

to the others," she said to herself. "They came before I did; they can talk to me if they want to."

But now supper was over, and the girls rose with a whirr, like a flock of pigeons, and fluttered out of the dining-room. Peggy looked longingly after Bertha Haughton; indeed, Bertha seemed to be lingering, looking for her; but at that moment two or three girls swooped down upon the junior, and began a hubbub of questions. Peggy felt all her shyness rushing back in a flood. Turning to flee, she almost fell over little Miss Parkins, who was hastening on her way, too. "Come!" said Peggy. "We are both strange cats; suppose we stay together! What happens now, do you know? This is my first evening here. It's awfully queer, isn't it?"

"Oh!" gasped Miss Parkins. "They—she—read something last night. Don't you think I might go to my room? I want to go to my room! Don't you think I might?"

"Of course you may!" said Peggy, on fire with sympathy. "It's a pity if you've got to hear reading when you don't want to. Cut along, young 'un!"

Her brother's familiar phrase rose naturally to her lips; it was unfortunate that at that moment one of the teachers happened to pass by. She was a long, sallow woman, with greenish eyes set too near together, and the gaze she fixed upon Peggy was appalling in its severity.

"Young ladies are required to attend the reading!" she said. "Your expression is an improper one, Miss Montfort!" and pinching her lips together she passed on.

"My goodness gracious me!" whispered Peggy. "Who is that?"

"Oh! hush! oh, don't!" whispered Lobelia Parkins, miserably. "She's going to read to-night, because the Principal has a cold; I heard them saying so. That is Miss Pugsley!"

CHAPTER III.

IN THE "GYM."

Peggy's pillow was quite damp when she went to sleep that night. To be sure she had been cheered by a friendly call from Bertha Haughton, but even that could not keep the homesickness from triumphing, when she was left alone, and the sounds in the corridor died away, and the light was out. Home seemed so far, so endlessly far away; she felt so utterly alone in the world! Education seemed a foolish and meaningless thing beside the love and comfort of home. What would she not give to be able to put out her hand and feel her sister Jean beside her, warm and loving, her own flesh and blood!

So the pillow was damp, as I have said; but Peggy was young and healthy, and she fell asleep after awhile, and when she woke again the sun was up and the pillow was dry. Now she did put out her hand for Jean, forgetting where she was; and finding nothing but a cold wall, lay looking around her, coming back to the present. The room looked very strange at first. "Maybe I'm not awake!" said Peggy, wisely; then she pinched herself, and with the pinch the whole thing came back.

"Why, of course!" she said. "Oh, dear! well, here I am; and I wanted to come, and I've been thinking about it for months, and then it goes and is like this!" She sighed, and wondered what they were doing at home, and at Fernley; then she became interested in her pretty room, and her heart overflowed once more with love to her dear ones at Fernley, who had made it so bright and charming for her. "I know what Margaret would say!" exclaimed Peggy, raising her head from the pillow. "She would say, 'Now you are there, my dear, try to make the best of it;' and so I will! You hear me!" These last words were spoken aloud with some severity, and appeared to be addressed to the brush and comb, which took no notice whatever. And then Peggy made the best of that moment, and got up.

Breakfast was another ordeal, but not so bad as the tea of the night before; after breakfast came prayers, and then the class-room. Peggy found herself seated at a desk, beside one of her classmates, Rose Barclay, a pretty brunette, with rosy cheeks and bright dark

eyes. In the brief pause before study-time, the two girls made acquaintance, and Peggy learned that theirs was the largest freshman class the school had ever had. All the others were in the west wing, where the freshmen belonged.

"You came late," said Rose Barclay, "and that's why you are over among the Jews and Seas. That's what they call the juniors and seniors; I've learned so much already!" she said, laughing. "They seem to have nicknames for everything and everybody in this place."

"Yes!" said Peggy. "Even the rooms are named!" and she told of Vanity Fair and the Owls' Nest.

"Corridor A?" asked Rose Barclay. "Oh, they must be Jews. That is Judea, I am pretty sure; and the Senior Corridor is the Mediterranean. It's awfully silly, isn't it? and yet it's funny, too. I suppose we shall get into the swing of it after awhile. You homesick?"

Peggy nodded.

"So'm I! Cry last night?"

Peggy nodded again.

"So did I! but not so much as the girl next door to me. My! she must have cried about all night, I should think. I woke up two or three times, and she was crying every time, and I heard her sniffing in her bath this morning."

"Why didn't you go in and try to cheer her up?" demanded Peggy, rather fiercely.

Rose Barclay stared. "Oh, I couldn't do that! why, I've never spoken to her; it was that queer little piece that sat next to you. Besides, she looks as if she'd die if any one spoke to her."

The school was called to order, and Peggy soon forgot homesickness and everything else in the keen joy of mathematics.

She had chosen the scientific course—there were three courses in the school—in order to get as much of practical and as little of literary knowledge as might be. Geometry was her delight, and it was geometry over which she was bending now.

Most of the teachers at Pentland School expected little of the new pupil from Ohio. The written examinations that Peggy had passed had caused many a head-shaking. The history teacher sighed; the gentle mistress of English literature groaned, and said, "Why must

this child come here?" Only Miss Boyle, the mistress of mathematics, had nodded her head over the papers. "Here's a girl who knows what she is about!" she said. Accordingly, when Peggy entered class this morning, she was surprised at the cordial greeting she received from the bright-eyed lady at the central desk; and an indefinable sense of being at home and among friends stole gradually over her, as she wrestled with one delightful problem after another.

Rose Barclay, at her side, was biting her pencil and twisting her pretty forehead into hard knots, and making little progress; but Peggy had forgotten her existence. The period passed like a moment, as theorem after theorem was disposed of.

"Let EDF and BAC be two triangles, having the angle E equal to the angle B, the angle F to the angle C, and the included side EF to the included side BC; then will the triangle EDF be equal to the triangle BAC?"

"Of course it will!" Peggy drew triangles in swift and accurate demonstration. "Put the side EF on its equal BC, and let the point E fall on B, and the point F on C. Then, you see, of course—"

"I don't see how any one is ever to do this!" murmured her neighbour, in despair. "Why! why, you've done yours. Oh, just let me see, won't you? I never can work it out in the world, so do let me copy yours!"

Peggy reddened to the tips of her ears. "Do you—can you—are we allowed to do that?" she stammered.

"Oh! Just as you please!" said Rose Barclay, coldly. "I thought you might be willing to oblige me, that's all. It's of no consequence!"

"Oh! But you don't understand!" whispered Peggy, eagerly; but Rose had turned away, and paid no heed to her; and Miss Boyle tapped with her pencil and said, "Young ladies! No whispering in class, if you please!"

In a few minutes a bell rang, and all the girls sprang up in great relief; geometry was not generally popular, and now came the "gym" hour, dear to all. Peggy turned at once to her neighbour, sure that she would be able to explain everything to the satisfaction of both. To her amazement and distress she met a look so cold and hostile that it seemed to freeze the words on her lips.

"Miss Barclay!" she said, imploringly. "You didn't understand me, indeed you didn't. I should be perfectly delighted to help you, of course I should, only I thought it might be against the rules. Of course, I might have known you would know what is allowed. I'm awfully sorry!"

Rose Barclay hesitated; her face seemed to soften for a moment; then it hardened again, and another change came over it which Peggy did not comprehend.

"I don't know what you mean!" she muttered. "Please excuse me, I am in a hurry." She was gone, and Peggy, turning in great distress, found Miss Boyle standing at her elbow. Had she heard? Peggy was sure she could not have heard, for there was no look of surprise or of anything peculiar in her pleasant face.

"You like geometry, Miss Montfort?"

"Oh, yes, I love geometry! Oh, please, are we allowed to help each other, Miss Boyle?"

"Certainly not!" said Miss Boyle, quietly. "Not upon any account. You can see for yourself that there would be no use in a girl's taking geometry if she cannot do the work herself."

"Yes, I see! I thought so, only—thank you very much. Do you—shall I go now?"

She looked around, and was startled to see that all the other girls had disappeared, and she was alone with the teacher.

Miss Boyle smiled, and her smile was so friendly that it warmed poor Peggy's heart.

"Yes, you may go now," she said; "but I shall hope to see something of you, Miss Montfort. If you will come to my room some evening, I will show you some pretty problems that are not in the text-books."

With this, the highest compliment she could pay a pupil, Miss Boyle went on her way; and Peggy, after wandering through two or three deserted class-rooms, and breaking in upon a senior committee-meeting of a highly private nature, and walking into a pantry, found herself at last in the gymnasium.

This was a lofty and spacious room, fitted with every possible appliance for gymnastic exercises. Peggy's eyes brightened as she gazed about her, at the rope-ladders, the parallel bars, the rings and

vaulting-horses and spring-boards. If this were not Paradise, Peggy did not know what was, that was all.

Some of the girls were already arrayed in blouse and full trousers, and were taking their place in ranks, under the eye of an alert, graceful young woman in a pretty dark blue suit. Others were hurrying up from some apartment on a lower floor, and from the stairway came a hum of voices which showed that others were still making ready.

Bertha Haughton, in crimson blouse and black trousers, hurried up to Peggy.

"Here you are!" she cried. "I have been trying to find you. Where are your gym things? Haven't got any? Oh, how too bad!"

"I didn't know!" said poor Peggy. "It didn't say in the programme, did it? Can't I do anything without them? Oh, dear."

Her face, so bright a moment before, clouded so instantly with disappointment and mortification, that the experienced junior could hardly repress a smile.

"My dear! my dear!" she cried. "Do wait till I tell you. You can wear the Snowy's things. She hasn't come back yet, and you can wear them just as well as not till she comes."

"The Snowy?" repeated Peggy. She remembered vaguely that she had heard the name, but it meant nothing to her in her trouble.

"Yes, my chum, the Snowy Owl. I'm the Fluffy one, don't you remember? The Snowy is a bit taller than you, but that is no matter; you can wear them perfectly well, I tell you. Come along, and I'll get you into them."

Peggy hung back, protesting faintly against appropriating the clothes of a person she had never seen; but finally she yielded to Bertha's vigorous pulls, and followed her down a winding stair, into a narrow room filled with a hubbub of girls in every stage of dressing and undressing. Viola Vincent fluttered up to her (it is difficult to flutter in a gymnasium suit, and only Viola's supremely butterfly quality enabled her to do it), a charming vision of pale blue, with a profusion of tiny brass buttons twinkling wherever a button could be put.

"Here you are!" she cried, airily. "I haven't seen you for an age. I've been telling everybody about you, the V. V's vis-à-vis. It sounds

so quaint, doesn't it? I adore quaintness. How do you like my new suit, Fluffy? Isn't it too cute for anything? This is the first time I've worn it; I think it is too perfectly sweet to live in, don't you?"

"I hope not!" said Bertha, laughing. "We should be sorry to have you pass away, Vanity, because your dress is too sweet."

"No, but really!" continued Viola, earnestly. "Do I exaggerate, Fluffy? *Isn't* it the sweetest thing you ever saw? I ask because I want to know, you know!"

Bertha's only reply was to pull her pink ear good-naturedly, and then dive head-foremost into a locker.

"You find the Fluffy quaint?" said Viola to Peggy. "Yes? she is quaint, but delicious! So is the Snowy! I simply could not exist without them; they are the guiding stars of the corridor, don't you know? What are you about, Fluffy? What are you doing with the Snowy's togs? She has not come back, no!" clasping her hands in ecstasy. "*Don't* tell me the Snowy has come back, Fluff!"

"I certainly won't!" said Bertha, coolly. "She isn't coming back till day after to-morrow. Peggy Montfort is going to wear her things till her own are ready, that's all. Don't excite yourself too much, Vanity; it'll take the colour out of your hair."

"No! *Do* you think so?" replied Viola; "really? ah! here's V., ready at last. What I have to endure, V., waiting while you prink, no tongue can tell. Ta, dears, come up soon!" and she fluttered away, arm in arm with her chum.

"Is she always like that?" asked Peggy, bewildered.

"Who? Vanity? Oh, yes! there's no possible harm in Vanity; she is really the best hearted creature in the world. The other, though,—well, you want to be a little on your guard with Vivia. Oh, we are the best friends in the world, of course; only, her temper is a little uncertain at times, and it's just as well to know about it. There! why, the trousers fit you to perfection!" The trousers, as wide as the Flying Dutchman's, certainly fell comfortably enough about Peggy's stout knees.

"Now for the blouse! I'll put it over your head!"

A silent but breathless struggle followed, from which Peggy emerged panting and crimson, but victorious. "Oh, I do hope she—your chum—won't mind!" she cried. "I am so afraid I shall get

them dirty!" for it was a whim of the Snowy Owl's to wear a white gym suit, and it was as fresh as if it were just out of the tub, as indeed it was.

"Oh, that is no matter! She washes them every week; she likes to wash; it's one of her accomplishments. Come along now!"

They ran up-stairs, and found the class just forming in ranks. A gesture bade them fall into line with the rest, and Peggy stood with her toes on a chalk mark, waiting the word of command.

It came. "Left foot forward—fall out!" At the command every girl put out her left foot as far as she could, and flung her whole weight forward on it. Peggy did the same, and fell on her nose with a resounding crash. The class giggled, but were sharply checked by the teacher.

"We will try this once more. Try to balance the body carefully! Take time! Once more! Left foot forward—fall out!"

Again the line dropped forward with one motion; and again our poor Peggy fell on her nose. This time the nose protested in its way, and bled; great crimson drops fell on the white plumage of the Snowy Owl. Almost crying with distress and mortification, Peggy felt for her handkerchief. Alas! she was not used to trousers, and no pocket could she find, though there was one, and her handkerchief was in it. What should she do? She was just about to make a bolt for the stairs, when a handkerchief was thrust into her hand. She clapped it to her suffering nose, and looked gratefully at her left-hand neighbour in the ranks. The girl nodded slightly, and said, "All serene! better ask leave to retire. Hold arms over head, stop it!" She was a slender girl, with a pensive face and melancholy blue eyes. Her hair was plainly parted, Madonna-fashion, and there was something remote and old-world about her whole look and air.

"Oh, thank you!" murmured poor Peggy. "You're awfully kind!" She hoped the tiresome bleeding would stop on the instant, but it did not; she was obliged to ask leave to go down-stairs; and receiving it, dashed down headlong, and cannoned violently against Vivia Varnham, who had gone down for something she had forgotten.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" gasped Peggy. "I'm—awfully clumsy—"

"I think you are!" said the other, with a flash of her hazel eyes. "Perhaps you'll let me pass now, please, before you make another exhibition of yourself." She went on, with a scornful toss of her head.

Poor Peggy! her tears flowed fast over the friendly handkerchief. "I wish I was dead!" she sobbed. "I wish I had never come to this horrid, odious place, where everybody is so hateful. And I can't hold up my arms when I have to hold this to my nose all the time."

"Quite so!" said a quiet voice behind her. The sad-looking girl took her hands and held them straight up in one of her own, the other keeping the handkerchief in position. No word was spoken, but in five minutes the bleeding was stopped.

"Basin—water!" said the stranger. "Don't mention it!" as Peggy tried to falter her thanks. And she was gone.

Peggy waited till she felt sure of herself and her nose. Then she spoke severely to herself, and asked what Uncle John would say to such behaviour. "*Everybody* isn't hateful!" she said. "And anyhow, there are some things there that I can do, if I haven't learned this trick. I won't give up till I've gone up that rope."

Her eye had been caught by a stout rope dangling from the ceiling. This was in her own line, and she felt that if she could redeem herself in her own eyes, she should not care so much about all those other laughing eyes. And yet, perhaps she thought more about those eyes than she was aware of, for our Peggy was very human.

This time fortune favoured her. As she emerged from the lower regions, a girl was just trying to climb the rope; in fact, there were three ropes hanging side by side, and the climbing of them was part of the regular exercise. She sought Bertha, who was most sympathetic, not having been near enough to help Peggy.

"Climb the rope? Oh, you'd better not try that, Peggy! it takes a lot of practice. Why, I've been here two years, and I can't get to the top yet. Really, it's very hard. Let's come and swing on the ring, if you are quite sure about your poor nose."

But Peggy did not want to swing on the rings, nor to do anything else that Bertha proposed; she wanted to climb that rope, and she meant to do it; the prairie blood was roused.

"Well, I'll ask Miss Brent," said good-natured Bertha, finding her determined. "You say you have had some experience in climbing? Perhaps she'll let you go a little way up."

Miss Brent, interrogated, came and looked Peggy over carefully; felt her muscles, asked her a few questions, and then said, "You may have the next turn, Miss Montfort."

The girl on the rope next her was having a sad time of it. She swung this way and that; her legs waved wildly in the air; and at length she came down "all abroad," having only ascended a few feet. At the same moment, the girl on the next rope dropped, so that two were left unoccupied. Peggy advanced and laid her hand upon one rope, just as Vivia Varnham took possession of the other. On the third, the pensive girl with the Madonna braids was swinging easily, half-way up to the ceiling; she twisted her feet around the rope, and, so resting, observed the progress of the other two.

Up they went, hand over hand. Vivia Varnham gave a glance of disdain when she saw who her rival was. She was light and agile, and did not for an instant think that this heavy, clumsy creature could make any headway against her. She went up lightly and easily, but somehow the heavy, clumsy creature managed to keep abreast of her; was even gaining upon her, drawing up, up, above her head. Vivia put on a spurt, and passed Peggy, climbing very swiftly—for a moment; then the ache in her wrists compelled her to slacken her rate of speed, and the thickset figure came up, up, steadily and surely. Truth to tell, though Peggy Montfort was awkward, she was as strong as a steer. Her weight was not fat, but sheer bone and brawn; and her one hundred and forty pounds were easy enough for her to carry, even up a rope thirty feet long. But Vivia Varnham, with all her lightness and quickness, had little strength in her wrists. They ached painfully, but she would not give up. Her face flushed, her breath came in distressful gasps, she struggled on and up. They were more than half-way up; they had passed the quiet observer, swinging comfortably with her feet twisted in her rope. "Better go down, V.!" said the girl with the sad eyes. "She's too many for you!"

Vivia shook her head with an angry gesture. Her eyes swam, the pain in her wrists was unendurable; but she set her teeth, and struggled on, till from below came the voice of Miss Brent, calm and authoritative.

"Come down, Miss Varnham! You have gone far enough."

Most unwillingly, with sullen face and fluttering breath, Vivia slid to the floor. She expected, everybody expected, to hear the order repeated for the benefit of the newcomer, the audacious freshman who had ventured upon junior ground; for the rope-climbing was not generally attempted till the third year. But Miss Brent kept her eyes on Peggy, and smiled, and made no sign.

Peggy was enjoying herself immensely. She was not a swift climber, but there was no tiring her, and this, as she said to herself, was "great!" She wished Margaret could see her! No! It would frighten dear Margaret. Rita, then! Rita loved feats of skill; probably she could climb far better than she, Peggy, could; Rita was so light, so graceful, so fearless.

A shout rang from below. Something passed her on the next rope, light and swift as a bird in flight. She could almost touch the ceiling now; she looked up; there, at the very top of the next rope, was her friend of the dressing-room, gazing at her with melancholy blue eyes, and holding out a slender hand.

"Shake!" said the girl with the Madonna braids.

CHAPTER IV.

ENTER THE SCAPEGOAT.

Peggy was sitting alone in her room that evening, studying, when there rose a hubbub outside her window; wheels, and the trampling of horses, and girls' voices. She ran to the window and looked out; there was a great hay-rigging, drawn by four stout horses, and comfortably lined with straw. Girls were climbing into it on every side, and more and more came pouring out of the house. It was full moon, and their faces shone so clear and merry in the light, that Peggy could not help feeling a pang, not of envy, but of longing. Of course there had been no question of her going; it was a junior affair; but they all looked so happy and jolly, and it was so lonely here! As she stood longing, Viola Vincent popped her pretty head in to say good-bye.

"Thought you might like to see my toque!" she said, fluttering in the doorway. "It's the first time I have had it on. Isn't it dandy? Isn't it perfectly sweet?"

Peggy thought it charming, and said so; she was rapidly losing her heart to her pretty butterfly neighbour.

"I thought you'd like to see it!" said Viola, naïvely. "It makes it easier to study, if you see something pretty. Ta, dear! I wish you were going. We shall have a dandy time, simply dandy!"

She fluttered out, and left the door ajar behind her, so that Peggy could not help hearing the half-whispered colloquy that ensued in the corridor.

"Went to say good-bye to the Veezy Vee. Why shouldn't I?"

"Why should you? You'll have her around your neck if you don't take care, like a lump, as she is."

"Hush, V.! you're quite vinegar, aren't you? Why? She's perfectly harmless, and I find her quaint. You know I adore quaintness!"

"Oh, come along, and don't talk flummery to me; you know I can't stand it."

The two passed on, and Peggy's ears burned uncomfortably. Evidently Vivia Varnham had taken a violent dislike to her; well, she

certainly returned it. And of course that would prevent her from ever seeing much of the other, sweet pretty thing. Well, of course she should have to be alone most of the time. She went to the window again, and saw the two V's climbing in; then there was a great shouting and waving of handkerchiefs, and they drove away. Peggy sighed, and sat down once more to her task. It was rhetoric, and her whole nature cried out against it; but the study was prescribed, and the teacher, Miss Pugsley, was reported to be very strict. Peggy put her elbows on the table, and her head on her hands, and bent in good earnest over the book.

"'Both prepositions and conjunctions are called connectives.'

"Oh, dear! then why can't we *call* them connectives, and have one word to remember, instead of three?

"'When I say the hen barks'—why, that makes nonsense! Oh, I got two lines mixed up. 'When I say the dog barks, I speak of some particular dog.' Well, anybody can see that. Oh, I do wonder if Flora will remember to wash Peter's ear, where he had the canker! It was almost well, but still it will need washing. Dear Peter! dear dogs! they will miss me, I know they will. If one could only have a dog here, it wouldn't be half so bad. I could have a basket for him to sleep in, you know, and then in the morning he would get up on the bed, and we'd have a beautiful time. There's a dog barking now! He wants to be let in, poor dear! How perfectly idiotic some people are, not to know what a dog wants. I remember that stupid man at home beating poor Peter,—beating him with a hoe, when all the time Peter was telling him that a tramp was stealing the melons. Yes; but when Petie saw that the man was an idiot, he went and attended to the tramp himself, and you never saw a tramp so scared in your life. Oh, dear! well!

"'He was in the room, and went out of it.' I wish I could go out of this room; but I don't know where I should go to. Bertha went, of course, with the others. If it wasn't for Bertha, I really don't think I could possibly stay here."

A knock at the door; and Bertha's square, cheerful face looked in. "Any chance to study here? there's something the matter with my lamp, why,—Peggy!"

For Peggy had jumped up and thrown her arms around her friend's neck, and given her a hug which took her breath.

"Oh, you dear!" cried Peggy. "I never was so glad to see anybody in my life. Here, take this chair, Bertha. Oh, it was just lovely of you to come in. You knew I would be forlorn, I know that was why you came. But why didn't you go on the straw-ride? I supposed of course you had gone."

"One question at a time," pleaded Bertha; "and I can't answer any if you destroy my breathing apparatus, Hippolyta."

"Why Hippolyta?"

"Oh; she was Queen of the Amazons, don't you know? Only because you are so strong, my dear."

"No," said Peggy, dolefully. "I never heard of her. Margaret would know, but I am awfully stupid, I told you I was. Do you have rhetoric, Bertha?"

"Not this year. I had it the first two years. It's not so bad; in fact, I was rather fond of it."

Peggy gazed at her in such unfeigned amazement that Bertha could not help laughing; but there was never any sneer in Bertha's laugh. "Come!" she said. "Now we'll sit down and study our prettiest. See! I have a lot of Greek to do. Peggy, don't look like that! What is the matter?"

Peggy had recoiled in horror, her blue eyes opened to their widest extent.

"Greek!" she cried. "You don't—I sha'n't have to take Greek, shall I? because I would rather die, and I should die!"

"Nonsense! no, I don't know that you will have to take it at all. What course have you taken,—scientific? Oh, no, you don't have Greek in that. What have you had to-day?"

"Geometry! Of course that was splendid."

"Oh, indeed! was it?"

"Why, yes; I just love geometry. I could do it all day, but we only have it one hour." And Peggy looked injured.

"Well," said Bertha, "you are a queer girl, Peggy Montfort. But there'll be one happy person in this school, and that is Miss Boyle."

"I don't understand you! Don't most girls,—don't you like geometry, Bertha?"

"My dear, I regard everything in the shape of mathematics with terror and disgust. I don't know any geometry, nor any algebra. I've been through them both, and the more I learned, the more I didn't know. As to arithmetic, I know that four quarts make a gallon, and that really is all my mind is equal to. But if you won't let me study my Greek, Peggy, I shall go home again to the Nest."

"Oh, I do! I will!" cried poor Peggy; and there was silence for a time, both girls studying in earnest, the silence only broken by the turning of a page, or a heartfelt sigh from Peggy as she dealt with parts of speech.

So thoroughly were they absorbed in their task that they did not hear sundry noises outside the window. The window was open, for the night was warm as well as bright; indeed, the upper half of it was pushed entirely down, so that it was like a double half-door of glass. Outside this window was the black skeleton of the fire-escape; and if the two girls had been on the alert, they might have heard various unobtrusive sounds from this direction. As it was, they both started violently when a clear voice addressed them in quiet and thoughtful tones.

"Peace to this dwelling!" said the voice.

Peggy looked up hastily. There, leaning on the window-sash, as calm and composed as she had been at the top of the rope, was the stranger with the melancholy eyes and the Madonna braids.

"Peace!" she repeated. "Piece of pie! have some!" She held out a large segment of pie, and added, "Any admittance for the Goat?"

Peggy was still too startled to find breath to answer, but Bertha sprang up, crying, "Grace! how could you frighten us so?"

"Not Grace!" said the stranger, with an unmoved countenance. "Goat! let us not deceive the Innocent! A scapegrace is one thing, a scapegoat is another, and from some points a preferable one. But the Innocent is abroad, I perceive. Innocent, I am the Scapegoat. Is there admittance?"

"Oh!" gasped Peggy, blushing and faltering. "Oh, please come in! I—I didn't know you were waiting for me to— Sha'n't I open it from the bottom?"

"If you will take the pie," said the stranger, gravely; "thank you; that is your piece, this is mine,—already bitten, or I would offer it to the Fluffy."

Relieved of two large pieces of pie, she laid one hand on the sash, and vaulted lightly over; then she shook hands solemnly with Peggy, took her own piece of pie, and, seating herself on the floor, proceeded to eat it daintily.

"It is a good pie!" she said. "If not afraid of pollution, Fluffy, a bite?"

Bertha was looking half amused, half angry. "Grace, how can you act so?" she said.

"How?" said Grace. "My sweet child, it is as easy as breathing. I will give instruction at any time, without charge."

"I thought you were doing double lessons," Bertha went on, "and being as good as gold. Grace, you can be so good!"

"Can't I!" said Grace; her tone was one of admiring gravity; her blue eyes kept their look of pensive sadness.

"And it's a thing I admire, goodness!" she went on, shaking her head. "That's why I practise it. Double lessons? I'll warrant you! this is the second time I have been down here to-night, for example; other things in proportion." She waved her hand, and fell to again at her pie.

Peggy had been sitting open-eyed, watching this singular person, not knowing what to say. Now, however, meeting the solemn gaze of the large sad eyes, she felt compelled to speech.

"It—it's delicious!" she said, timidly. "Wouldn't you rather sit in a chair, Miss—" she hesitated, not liking to say "Grace."

"Oh, dear!" said Bertha, still put out. "You make me forget my manners and everything, Grace. Peggy, this is Miss Grace Wolfe; Grace, Miss Peggy Montfort."

"Charmed!" said Miss Wolfe. "But we have met before, Fluffy, or I should not have descended."

"We met, 'twas on a rope,
And I thought she had done me;
I felt, I could not feel,
For my fate was upon me.

"If it hadn't been for your possession of peas, you would have beaten me, Miss Montfort. As it was, here's to our next meeting under the ceiling!" She took a large bite of pie, and regarded Peggy benevolently.

"Of peas?" repeated Peggy, vaguely, feeling that this might be English, but was not sense.

"Precisely. *Avoir du pois*, literally, to possess a pea! The French language. But you should have seen Vexation!" this strange person added, turning to Bertha. "Did see her? Well, she was a pleasant sight. Noxious animal, Vexation! It is a joy to see her taken down occasionally."

"I notice you are good friends enough, where any mischief is afoot!" said Bertha, bluntly. She broke a corner off the pie, and added, "Goat, this is mince pie!"

"It is! it is!" said Miss Wolfe. "Ever discriminating, my own! And good? Say it is good, Fluffy!"

"Yes, it is uncommonly good!" said Bertha. "Where did you get it? You've no business to have it, of course!"

"I got it out of a bandbox, sweet one!" replied Grace Wolfe. "It lives—they live, I should say, for there are three of them, thanks be to praise!—in a bandbox. A round one, or, to be more exact, oval in form, covered with wall-paper, whereon purple scrolls dispute the mastery with pink lozenges. It's the sweetest thing in bandboxes that I've seen since time was."

"Yes, but the pies!"

"The pies! as I was saying, three of them; ample, full moons of rapture!

"They came in beauty, side by side,
They filled one home with glee.
Their bones are scattered—"

She paused with an expressive gesture.

"The best of it is,—you will admit that this is neat, Fluffy, even if your slavery to the virtues compels your disapproval,—the best of it is, the bandbox is the property of our Puggy."

"Miss Pugsley's bandbox! Oh, Grace!"

"Precisely! Our Puggy goes heavily without it, I am told. What would you? It was outside her door, while sweeping was going on; one is human, after all. She was out, with the best bonnet on her head. Poor head! Poor bonnet! My hearty commiseration for both! When she returned, no bandbox! At present she harries the domestics; she hasn't thought of me yet, for a wonder. To-morrow, or the day after, I shall finish the pies—alas! Then I return the repository, and her bonnet acquires a fine, full, fruity flavour that annihilation alone can remove.

"You may break, you may shatter
The tile if you will,
But the scent of the brandy
Will cling round it still."

"Grace! What a diabolical plot! and you have been lying awake, I suppose, chuckling over this!"

Miss Wolfe waved her hand in deprecation. "Not lying awake, sweet one! Too slight a thing for that; still, it served to amuse. One must live, even you will admit that. What's this? Greek? Give it me!" She stretched out her hand for the book, but Bertha held it fast.

"No! no, Goat; I want it myself, and besides, you have no business here, you know you haven't."

"No; and you?" replied the other, coolly.

"I have permission; my lamp is out of order, and I asked Miss Russell if I might study in here," said Bertha. "But you will get into trouble if you stay, Grace, you know you will. Be good now, and go home!"

Grace Wolfe gazed pensively at her.

"You would check the interchange of souls?" she said. "I feel drawn to this Innocent, Fluff! I feel that she may have an influence over me for good. You would not part us? Could'st love a Goat, Innocent?" she added, turning to Peggy, and fixing her eyes on her with mournful intensity.

Peggy blushed, but before she could reply Bertha struck in decidedly.

"Grace, just one word! Peggy Montfort is a stranger, and I am not going to let her get into trouble if I can help it. And I don't want you

to get into trouble, either!" she added, more gently. "You know, my dear—"

She stopped suddenly, for Grace Wolfe threw up her hand with a warning gesture; then, with a single swift movement, she rolled under the bed, and was out of sight.

"Study!" said Bertha, in a low whisper. "Study *hard!*"

Wholly bewildered, Peggy fixed her eyes on her book. She had heard no sound before, but now came a footfall in the corridor. A knock at the door, and Miss Russell opened it and looked in.

"Your lamp is in order now, Bertha," she said. "I thought I would tell you, as I was going by; but you can stay a little longer, if you like. How charming you have made your room, Miss Montfort."

"Won't—won't you come in, Miss Russell?" stammered poor Peggy, conscious of Grace Wolfe's eyes under the bed, yet feeling that civility admitted of only one answer.

"Not now, thank you! Some day soon I shall come and make you a little visit, though, with pleasure. Good night, young ladies!"

She nodded kindly, closed the door, and passed on.

The girls drew breath. A moment, and Grace Wolfe rolled out again, rose, and shook her neat dress.

"So much for Buckingham!" she said. "The good point about Principie is, she is respectable. Now, my Puggy would have looked through the keyhole first. But I foresee a visit to my own humble cot, to see whether I have learned my lessons.

"Oh! Farewell, friends!
Here Thisbe ends!"

She waved her hand, vaulted once more over the window, and was gone. An occasional faint, cat-like sound told of her progress up the fire-escape; then a window creaked slightly overhead, and all was silent.

Bertha Haughton ruffled up her curly black locks with a gesture of exasperation.

"And the worst of it is," she said, "that girl will know her Greek better than any one in class. That's half the trouble; she learns so quickly, her lessons don't take half her time, and she puts the rest into mischief."

"She seems awfully clever!" said Peggy, timidly.

Bertha nodded. "She is just that, my dear; awfully clever! I'll tell you more about her to-morrow, but now we must study hard, for we've only twenty minutes left. Only, my dear, when you think of the Goat, remember three things: she is D. D. D.,—dear, delightful,—and dangerous!"

CHAPTER V.

TO THE RESCUE.

The next morning proved a hard one for Peggy; the rhetoric lesson was the first that must be recited. She had studied it hard, but somehow the rules seemed to make little impression. Whenever she tried to fix them in her mind, there came between her and the page two melancholy blue eyes, and she seemed to hear a voice of singular quality, a voice with a thrill in it, saying, "Could'st love a Goat, Innocent?"

So she was not as well prepared as she should have been when she went into the class; and on meeting Miss Pugsley's cold greenish brown eye, what she did know seemed to evaporate from the top of her head, leaving a total blank. She stumbled and floundered; she did not know what an antecedent was, and she could not remember ever to have heard of a reciprocal pronoun.

"Pray, Miss Montfort, were you asleep or awake when you studied this lesson?" inquired Miss Pugsley, with acrid calm.

"I don't know!" replied Peggy, now thoroughly bewildered.

"Well, if you were asleep, let me recommend you to try it again when you wake up; or if you were awake, perhaps you might do it better in your sleep."

Peggy flushed scarlet, and the ready tears sprang into her eyes; but she forced them back, bit her lip, and tried not to feel the eyes of the whole class bent on her in amused astonishment. Miss Pugsley seemed to take positive pleasure in her ignorance and embarrassment. She put one question after another, each more ingeniously contrived than the last—or so it seemed—to show what Peggy did not know. At last, in self-defence, the poor child took refuge in one simple and invariable answer: "I don't know!" So confused was she that these words were the only ones she could utter, even when she knew the correct answer, or would have done so if she could have collected her wits. By the end of the hour, Peggy was entirely convinced that she was the dunce and butt of the school; that she knew nothing, and never would know anything.

It seemed a cruel stroke of fate that this terrible period should be followed by that of general history, for Peggy detested history, as some of my readers already know. She went into the next class-room with an aching head, and a heart throbbing with a sense of utter worthlessness in herself, and of bitter cruelty in others. She did not even look up at the teacher, but kept her eyes fixed on her desk, and answered the few questions that meant anything to her, sullenly and unwillingly. She did try at first to follow the lesson, but her head ached so, the words seemed to sing themselves into mere nonsense, and she soon gave up the attempt; the more so as this teacher, who had been observing her pretty closely, for some reason or other asked her very few questions. At last, however, the blow fell.

"Where did Philip of Macedon come from, Miss Montfort?"

"I don't know," said Peggy.

"Oh, I think you do," said Miss Cortlandt, with a pleasant smile, and checking, with a warning glance, the rising giggle.

"Try again, Miss Montfort. Philip the Great, Philip of Macedon,—where did he come from? Surely you can tell me!"

"I don't know," said Peggy, doggedly; and at the moment she actually did not.

"My dear child," said the teacher, "did you ever hear what was the colour of Washington's gray mare?"

"No, ma'am," said Peggy.

"Well, what was it?"

"I don't know."

Emily Cortlandt had graduated from college the year before. She laid down her pencil, and looked very kindly at the distracted girl.

"I think you are not feeling well, Miss Montfort," she said. "Does your head ache?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Peggy. She could not have said another word; her whole strength was needed to keep back the flood of tears that was rising, rising.

"You need not stay through the lesson," Miss Cortlandt went on, and the sympathy in her voice only brought the flood higher and nearer.

"You can make up the lesson to me some other time. Now, you would better go and lie down for a little, and then take a turn in the fresh air. Miss Bangs, what was the date of Philip's first invasion?"

Peggy never knew how she got out of the class-room. She longed to give at least a grateful look at the kind soul who had saved her, but her eyes were already swimming in tears. She fled along the corridor, sobbing hysterically, blinded with tears, conscious of only one thing, the desperate resolve to get to her room, before she broke down altogether. Flying thus around a corner, she rushed headlong into a group of girls who were gathered around something, she could not tell what. So violent was the shock that Peggy reeled and struck her head sharply against the wall. This brought her to herself. She caught back the sob on her lips, and dashed the tears from her eyes before any one saw them,—or so she hoped; then she looked to see what was going on. Next moment she had forgotten that there were such things as tears in the world.

There were six or eight girls in the group, mostly sophomores, though a few were freshmen. They were looking down at something—somebody—crouching on the floor against the wall, and their laughter, checked for an instant by Peggy's onset, broke out afresh. "Here's Peggy Montfort, just in time to see the fun. Look, Miss Montfort, and see the fashions! Straight from Paris, and the very last thing!"

The speaker was Blanche Haight, a tall sophomore with bleached hair, and eyes set too near together. She was considered a wit, and every time she spoke the other girls giggled and screamed.

The person crouching on the floor was Lobelia Parkins. Her head was pressed against the wall, her face hidden in her hands; misery and terror were in every line of her poor little shrinking figure, but this only gave added delight to her tormentors.

"Look, ladies, at the new sleeve!" cried Miss Haight, lifting the skinny arm, from which the blue poplin sleeve hung in an awkward fashion. "Did you ever see anything so exquisite? Look at the fringe, will you, and the pattern? I'm going to get Miss Russell to put her up on exhibition, so the whole school can have the benefit; it's a shame to keep it to ourselves!"

"He! he! he!" went all the girls. "Blanche, you are too funny for anything!"

"Where did your mother get it?" asked another; and this, as Peggy saw with a shock, was pretty Rose Barclay. "Did the ragman bring it around, or did she pick it up in the gutter? Say, Miss Parkins, I wish you'd tell us, 'cause we all want to know."

"Yes, of course we want to know!" cried Miss Haight. "I'm going to write this very night, to see if Mumma can't get me one like it. I never shall be happy till I—"

That sentence never was finished. The speaker found her own arm seized in a grip of iron, which forced her to drop the poor little arm in the blue sleeve. She was forced back against the wall, and found herself confronted by a pair of blue eyes blazing with righteous wrath.

"How dare you?" cried Peggy Montfort, in a voice that quivered with rage. "You mean, cowardly brute, how dare you? Touch her again, and I'll choke the words down your throat!"

Blanche Haight gasped for a moment; indeed, the whole group was cowed by this sudden vision of strength and fury. But she recovered herself in a moment.

"Well, indeed!" she said. "I should like to know what this means, Miss Montfort? I should like to know who gave you authority to choke people, and abuse them, and call them names?"

"You'll find out what it means!" said Peggy, waiving the second question, and replying to the first. "If you touch that child again, or so much as speak to her, I'll choke you."

"Girls, do you hear this?" cried Blanche Haight. "Are you going to stand by, and let this girl ride over us?"

"Shame!" cried the girls. "Bully!"

"Bully!" cried Peggy, dropping her hold of Miss Haight, and turning to face the others. "You call me a bully, and you yourselves, eight great grown girls, standing around to torment and torture this poor helpless child? Shame on you! Shame on you all, every one! I'm ashamed to be in the same school with you. I—" (Here, I am sorry to say, Peggy forgot that she was a young lady, forgot everything save that she was the daughter of hot-blooded James Montfort.) "I could

whip the whole lot of you, and I'll do it if you dare to say 'Boo!' but you don't!"

It was a fact that no one did say "Boo!" There was a pause, Peggy standing with folded arms before the shrinking child, her whole figure dilated with passion, till she seemed to tower above the rest, who for their part cowered before her.

Rose Barclay was the first to speak.

"We are very fortunate to find a leader for the freshman class," she said, spitefully, "and such a leader! Miss Montfort is too high-toned to help a classmate with her lesson, but not too high-toned to talk like a Bowery rowdy. Come, along, girls! I for one don't care to listen to any more such refined, elegant talk!"

"Yes, you'd better go along!" said Peggy, the Valkyr, briefly.

"Pray, may I ask," said Blanche Haight, with a bitter sneer, "are you monitor of this corridor?"

"No," said a voice behind her; "but I am."

A girl had come quietly up the stairs, and was now standing close beside the excited group, none of whom had seen or heard her,—a tall girl, with red-gold hair, dressed as if she had just come from a journey.

"I am the monitor of this corridor," she repeated. "Please go to your rooms, or I shall be obliged to report you."

The girls shrunk together, whispering, the freshmen questioning the sophomores.

"Who is it? Who is it?"

"Hush! It's the junior president. Come along!"

The group melted away; another moment, and all were gone save Peggy, who was now on the floor, with her arms around the little miserable creature, who still shrank close against the wall, as if her life depended on the contact.

"There, dear!" she cried. "They are gone. Come! Don't huddle up so, you poor little thing. Those brutes are gone, and there's nobody here but me, Peggy, and—" she glanced up at the tall girl. "Oh! won't you help me?" she cried. "I think—she doesn't seem to hear what I am saying. Oh, is she dead?"

"No," said the monitor. "I think she has fainted, though, poor little soul! We must carry her to her room. Do you know where it is? I have only just come back, and don't know where the freshmen are."

"No, I don't know, but I'll take her to my room; I'm in No. 18. Oh, I can carry her alone; she's all skin and bone; she doesn't weigh anything."

The little figure in the staring poplin gown hung quite limp, as Peggy lifted it. "You'd better let me help," said the tall girl, kindly. "We can make her more comfortable; so!"

Together they carried her to Peggy's room, and laid her on the bed. It was really more fright and distress than actual fainting, for she soon opened her eyes, and looked eagerly at Peggy, but closed them again with a faint cry, at sight of the stranger.

"You needn't be afraid of her!" cried Peggy, eagerly. "She isn't one of them; she's none of that horrid crowd. I don't know who you are," she said, "but I'm ever and ever and ever so much obliged to you. I don't know whether you heard what they were saying."

And she poured out an indignant account of the cruelty she had witnessed and put a stop to. The stranger's eyes were stern enough, as she listened. "I heard only the end of it," she said, briefly, "but where I see Blanche Haight, I am never surprised at anything cruel or cowardly. I am very glad to know you; it was a mercy that you happened to come along just then. I hope we shall be friends, Miss—is it Miss Montfort?"

"Oh, that I will!" cried Peggy, responding with all her warm heart to the sweet smile and the lovely look in the clear blue eyes. "Oh, I should like to ever so much; but I don't know your name, do I?"

The stranger smiled again. "They call me the Snowy Owl," she said, "but my name is Gertrude Merryweather."

CHAPTER VI.

THE OWL'S NEST.

When Peggy escorted Lobelia Parkins back to her room, she found that it was the one directly above her own. Point for point, the rooms were alike, fire-escape and all,—so far as the actual outlines were concerned; there, however, the likeness ended. There had been no Uncle John, no Margaret, in this case. The room was furnished, evidently, by the same hand that had dressed the girl, and with equal taste. The carpet on the floor was costly, but hideous as staring colours and execrable design could make it. The furniture was cumbrous, and the fact that the ugly chairs were rosewood, and their cushions brocade, made them neither beautiful nor comfortable. On the bureau were some bottles of red Bohemian glass, such as were thought handsome fifty years ago; an elephant of a writing-desk, staring with plush and gilding, almost covered the table. Altogether, the room was as desolate as its occupant; more could not be said. Lobelia seemed smaller and more shrunken than ever amid all this tasteless display; she seemed conscious of it, too, as she gazed piteously at Peggy. She had been crying, in a furtive, frightened way; and, gazing at her, Peggy felt that it must be years ago that she was crying, too, and hoping for nothing in the world save to get to her room and have a good solid deluge of tears. At present it seemed hardly likely that she should ever weep again; she felt strong and confident, and was still burning with indignation, none the less hotly that the outward flame had gone down. Her kind companion had been obliged to leave them, with the promise of seeing them soon again. Peggy thought she might stay a few minutes, though the gong for gym had already rung.

"Now, Lobelia," she was saying,—"I am going to call you Lobelia, you know, and you are to call me Peggy, and we are going to be friends. Now, Lobelia, mind what I say! if those girls ever give you any more trouble, you are to come straight to me. Do you hear?"

"Yes," said Lobelia, faintly.

"Have they tormented you before? Beasts! Or was this the first time?"

"Oh, not—not so much!" said the girl, deprecatingly. "A little yesterday; but—I don't know whether they meant to be unkind, Peggy. I know that my dress *is* queer!"

"Don't be so meek!" cried Peggy, unable to repress a little stamp of her foot, which made Lobelia start. "Have some spirit of your own, Lobelia. I tell you, these girls are mean, cowardly wretches, not fit for girls like the Owls to speak to. They don't speak to them much, either," she added, "and I'm not going to any more than I can help."

Lobelia looked more miserable than ever. "Don't!" she said. "I can't bear to have any one get into trouble on my account. It—it needn't matter to you, Peggy. Of course you are very, very kind, and I think I should have died if you had not come along just then, for I couldn't seem to bear much more; but I don't want you to get into trouble."

"Who's going to get into trouble?" demanded Peggy. "Guess I can take care of myself against such a set as that."

"I don't want you to get into trouble!" repeated Lobelia; and, as she spoke, she glanced around the room with a peculiar shrinking look, one would say a look of dread, that Peggy did not understand.

"Who's next door to you?" she asked, briefly. "Rose Barclay, for one, I know. Who is on the other side?"

Lobelia thought it was another freshman, but was not sure.

"Have they troubled you?" asked Peggy, suspiciously.

But Lobelia shook her head, and seemed so distressed at the question that Peggy did not know what to think.

"Please, please don't bother about me!" she implored. "I dare say it will be a good deal better now, after you and Miss Merryweather being so brave and so kind. I don't want to say anything against anybody. Please, please forget all about it, Peggy."

"I want you to be brave yourself," cried Peggy; and Lobelia started again, and shrank in her chair. "Don't be so—so—well, I don't know any word but meeching, and Margaret won't let me say that. But have a spirit of your own, and stand up to them, and give 'em as good as they send. I would, I tell you, quick enough, if they tried it on me."

Lobelia looked at her with hopeless eyes. "But I am not you!" she said. "I—Peggy, I know just how I look, and how I seem, and how little and ugly and queer I am. I don't wonder they laugh, I don't,

really. I haven't any spirit, either; I can't have. You can't do anything with me; it isn't any use."

Peggy gazed at her, with eyes almost as hopeless as her own. Yet she must make one more attempt; and with it the honest blood came into her face.

"Look here, Lobelia!" she said, "I am awkward, too, and shy, and—and stupid, awfully stupid. Why, my cousin Rita used to call me—never mind, that was only before she grew so kind! But I know what it is to be laughed at, my dear! Only this morning, in rhetoric, Miss Pugsley was just as hateful as she could be, and all the girls laughed; yes, they did. So you are not so different as you think. Why,—I don't mind telling you,—when I came along just now, I was trying to get to my own room, so that I could have a good cry. There, Lobelia! now how do you feel?" Lobelia raised her eyes with a wondering look; but next moment her eyes fell on the looking-glass and she shook her head.

"No!" she said. "No, Peggy! You are kind, and you want to make me feel comfortable; but look!"

She motioned toward the mirror. Peggy looked, and her kind heart sank. She herself was no beauty; her round, fair face and honest blue eyes were pleasant to look at, and she had beautiful hair, but that was all; yet she could not help seeing that she was a very vision of loveliness beside the sallow, puny, almost deformed aspect of her poor little neighbour. She coloured deep with angry sympathy, but Lobelia only smiled, a wan little smile.

"You see!" she said. "It's no use, Peggy."

For all answer, Peggy threw her arms around the shrinking figure, and pressed it in a warm embrace. "I don't care!" she cried. "I don't say you are pretty, you poor little thing, but just remember that you are my friend, and if anybody dares to meddle with you again, they'll have to reckon with me, that's all. And now I must go, or I shall lose all the drill. Cheer up, Lobelia, and don't sit here and mope, mind! and if you have any more trouble, just knock on the floor, and I'll be up in half a quarter of a jiffy. Good-bye, dear!" and off she ran, feeling that at least she had left some degree of comfort and cheer behind her.

Soon, however, came something that put Lobelia Parkins and her troubles out of Peggy's head for the time. Bertha Haughton was not at the gymnasium, but when Peggy came back to her own room after an hour of rapture, she found a note pinned on her pincushion.

"Dear Peggy:—Study *hard*, please, and get through before this evening. The Snowy Owl is going to give us a Grand Tell about the wedding she has been to, and we both want you to come, too. I'm going to speak to Miss Russell, but you'd better ask her, too; it will be all right, for the Snowy has asked permission, anyhow. Eight o'clock, just after reading; be sure to come on time!

"Affectionately,
"Bertha."

It was hard to study through that lovely afternoon, when the other girls, or most of them, were out-of-doors, playing tennis or basket-ball, and their voices came in at the window in every tone of joyousness and delight. It was very hard to study the detested rhetoric and history, but Peggy was strong in her good resolve, and bent steadily over her books, trying her very best. Once, indeed, came a sore temptation, when a ball struck her window lightly, and, going to look out, she saw Grace Wolfe standing below.

"Come out, Innocent!" said the Scapegoat, in her deep, musical tones. "Come and sport with me!

"The ship is ready and the wind blows fair,
And I am bound for the sea, Mary Anne!"

"Oh! Oh, thank you!" cried Peggy. "I wish I could, but I have to work now, I'm afraid."

"Is this a time to think o' wark,
Wi' Scapegoat at the door?"

inquired Grace, looking up with her head on one side. "Why work at this hour, Innocent? Even the slaves of virtue, even the Owls, are at play now."

Peggy leaned out of the window; it really seemed as if her body would be drawn out after her longing spirit, which had been out and away from the first summons.

"Yes, the Owls!" she said. "That's just it, Miss Wolfe."

"No!" interrupted Grace. "Not Miss Wolfe! Not all Æsop! Impossible to be wolf and goat at the same time, and do justice to either character. Let it be Goat, or Grace, as you like."

"Grace, then, thank you! Well, you see, the Owls,—that is, Bertha asked me to come to their room this evening, and of course I want to dreadfully,—though not more dreadfully than I want to come out now," she added, wistfully. "And if I do, you see, I must get my rhetoric done. It's awfully hard, and I am so stupid about it, it takes me for ever. Oh, will you ask me again some time, please?"

The Scapegoat regarded her for a moment, standing with the ball in her hand, swaying her light, graceful body to and fro.

"Another slave of virtue?" she said. "Can I permit this? Innocent, I have half a mind to cause you to come down. I am to be thrown over for owls, who have, if you will consider the matter, neither horns nor hoofs? I am to let you stay and grind through the afternoon for them and for my Puggy? Well—"

Her whole face seemed to lighten with whimsical determination. She laid her hand on the fire-escape, and seemed on the point of mounting it, when suddenly another change came over her. Her eyes darkened into their usual melancholy look.

"Here's luck!" she said, abruptly. "See you later, Innocent!" She was gone, and Peggy, with a revulsion of feeling, wished she had gone with her. Bertha was a dear, and Miss Merryweather looked lovely, but neither of them had the fascination of this strange girl, so unlike any one she had ever seen in her life.

It was a forlorn afternoon; but Peggy stuck to her work manfully, and had the satisfaction of closing the book at last with the feeling that she was sure of it now, however things might be in the morning under Miss Pugsley's hostile eye.

There was still a little time left before supper. She ran out to the lawn, hoping to find Grace Wolfe still there, but she was disappointed. The only occupants of the lawn were half a dozen sophomores clustered together at one end. Blanche Haight was among them, and at sight of Peggy she turned her back pointedly, and whispered to the others. They turned with one accord and stared at Peggy, with a cool insolence that made her blood boil within her and surge up in angry red to her forehead. She could not do anything

about it; they had a right to stare, if they had no better manners. She returned the look for a moment, then turned away with a sore and angry heart. Fortunately, at this moment came out two classmates of her own whom she knew slightly,—mild, pleasant girls, with no special traits of interest, but still friendly and approachable. They were going to play tennis, and invited Peggy to join them; so she had a good half-hour of exercise and pleasure, and came in with rosy cheeks, and with the cobwebs all blown away for the time.

At eight o'clock Peggy was standing before her glass, putting a last touch to her hair, and surveying her image with some anxiety. Did she "look nice?" Peggy had as little personal vanity as a girl could well have; but she had learned from her cousin Margaret that it was part of her duty to look as well as she could. Her cousin Rita would have had her go further than this.

"Study, my child," Rita would cry, "to be beautiful! Let it be your dream by night, your thought by day!" And, in all kindness, Rita would try to teach her how to cross her feet so that they might look slender, how to extend her little finger when she raised her hand, "not too much, but to an exact point, *chérie!*" how to turn her head so as to show the lines of the neck to advantage. But Peggy's own good sense, aided by Margaret's calm wisdom, had told her the inappropriateness of Rita's graceful airs and poses to her own sturdy personality. She was to look nice; more she could not aspire to. So here she was to-night, in a pretty blue silk waist, with a serge skirt of a darker shade, her hair smoothly braided in one mammoth "pigtail," and tied with blue ribbons, her neat collar fastened with a pretty pearl brooch. Thus attired, our Peggy was truly pleasant to look upon; and her "Is that right, Margaret?" brought a little satisfied nod of reply from the smiling image in the glass.

Drawing near the Owl's Nest, she heard a hum of voices, and straightway her heart sank again, and shyness possessed her. There was a crowd there! They would all be juniors and seniors, and she the only freshman among them. How could she go in? Oh! she almost wished she was up in the other corridor with the younger girls!

But at this moment the door opened, and Bertha's kind face looked out.

"Here you are, Peggy!" she cried, cordially. "Come along; there's plenty of room, for I've saved a place for you. Come!"

For a moment Peggy hung back, and knew how Lobelia Parkins felt; then she made an effort, and followed Bertha into the room.

The Owl's Nest was a corner room, with windows on two sides. It seemed to be furnished chiefly with books. There were the two brass beds, of course, the twin bureaus, the desks, and table. All of these, except the beds, were covered with books; bookshelves took up most of the wall space, though there were two or three good pictures, among them a great photograph of the sea, that almost dashed the spray in one's face, so perfect was it. It was at a later visit that Peggy observed the books; now, she was conscious of nothing save the girls. The room was certainly full of them. There were three on each bed, curled up in every variety of picturesque and comfortable attitude; two sat on one of the bureaus, having pushed books and toilet articles up into a toppling and highly perilous mountain behind them; four more crouched somehow on the rather narrow window-seats. The rest were on the floor, except two early birds, who had come in time to get the two chairs. The floor was made comfortable with sofa-pillows, borrowed from the whole length of the corridor. Altogether, there might have been twenty girls in the room, and every girl was, or seemed to be, talking as fast as her tongue could move.

Peggy was hailed with a bird-like call from one corner.

"My Veezy-vee! come here, Peggy Montfort, and sit by me."

It was Viola Vincent. She was curled up at the head of one of the beds. She wore the prettiest pink tea-gown imaginable, and her hair was a wonder of puffs and curls.

"Come here!" she repeated, patting the pillows. "Lots of room; miles! Let her come here, Fluffy!"

"Yes, she shall, in a minute, V.," replied Bertha. "But first,—Toots, here's Peggy Montfort!"

The Snowy Owl came swiftly out of the closet, where she had been performing some mystic rite; she took Peggy's two hands in hers, and held them in a warm, firm grasp that was the very soul of cordiality.

"I'm so glad!" she said. "How's the poor little thing? Better? I'm sure you did her a great deal of good."

"Oh, no!" stammered Peggy, pleased and confused. "I couldn't really do anything; but she is feeling better."

Gertrude Merryweather nodded wisely. "My dear, you can do a great deal for her!" she said. "We'll have a talk sometime; no chance now. Only, Bertha has been telling me things, and I'm so glad you are in our street! There, now V. shall have you."

Judge of the glow at Peggy's heart, on these words from the Junior President, the best-loved girl—or so it was said—in the whole school. Those foolish tears actually got half-way up to her eyes,—only they were very different from the last tears; but fortunately Viola's high-pitched babble drove them back again.

"My *dear!* How nice you look! perf'ly *fine!* doesn't she, V.? Say, that's a dandy pin you've got on, simply *dandy!* There! isn't this too quaint for anything? You comfy? so'm I! Room, my dear? gallons of room! I haven't seen you for an age; where have you kept yourself? I looked into your room, though, and it's perf'ly *fine!* I told you it would be, when you had things fixed. Your chintz is too perfectly sweet for anything; isn't it, V.? We were simply cold with envy, weren't we, V.?"

"Do cackle for yourself, if you must cackle, V.!" responded Vivia Varnham, who sat on the same bed, a little lower down. "I can't hear myself think, you make such a noise."

"No, really?" cried Viola. "But that must be such an advantage sometimes, V. But, say! we came here to hear the Snowy talk, didn't we? She hasn't had much chance yet, has she? Are you ready to talk, Snowy? Oh, you duck! it is too perfectly enchanting to have you back again. I haven't lived since you went away, have I, V.? I've been simply a vegetable, haven't I, V.? Potatoes, my dear, are lively compared to me. *Are* you ready to talk, Snowy?"

"If you are ready to have me," replied the Snowy Owl, laughing. "First, however—here!"

She produced a mammoth box of "marshmallows," and handed it around. It was received with a shout.

"Toast 'em!" cried one. "Hat-pins!" cried another. There was a movement toward the gas-jet; but Bertha Haughton checked it

decidedly. "You have come here to hear the Snowy tell!" she said. "It's a long tell, and if you begin toasting now, there won't be time. Tell first, toast afterward! that's what I say!"

"Hark to the Fluffy! she speaks well!" cried the girls. There was silence; and Gertrude Merryweather, sitting on the floor, with her hands clasped around her knees, began her "tell."

CHAPTER VII.

WEDDING BELLS.

"To begin with, girls, this is Fluffy's idea, not mine! Of course none of you ever saw our Hildegarde, so I didn't suppose you would care particularly; but when I was telling the Fluffy last night, she said it was selfish and all kinds of things to keep it to ourselves, and that you must all hear about it; so if you don't find it interesting, pull out the Fluffy's feathers, not mine.

"Hildegarde Grahame—she is Hildegarde Merryweather now, but I cannot realise it yet—has been a very dear friend of ours for several years. We think there is no one like her in the world; I'll show you a picture of her by and by. Well, a year ago she became engaged to my uncle."

"Your uncle!" cried the girls. "Why, I thought she was a girl!"

"So she is a girl, but Roger—well, he is my uncle, but he isn't so very much older than I am. That is—he is twenty-five, and Hildegarde is twenty; so you see it is just exactly right. There isn't anybody like him, either. He is as near an angel as a man can come and be alive; and he is tremendously clever, really eminent already in his profession, and we all love him to distraction."

"Is he handsome?" asked Viola Vincent.

"I don't know; yes, I think he is. Not a barber-shop beauty, though. He is tall, and very strong, broad-shouldered, with the kindest eyes in the world, and a smile that makes you crinkle all over with pleasure. Well, and so they were engaged, and now they are married; the wedding was on Wednesday, and this is Friday, and here I am. Now I'll begin at the very beginning of the day. Of course we woke up early, and looked out of the window; and it was all gray and cloudy. I thought it was going to rain, and I was in the depths, but Bell—you know Bell, my sister, at college—was sure it would clear before seven, and so it did. The sun came out bright and clear, and soon we saw that it was going to be the most beautiful day that ever was. We had been out in the fields all day before, getting flowers, and we had them all ready in tubs and bowls and pitchers; so after breakfast we could go right to work on the decorations. We

did the church first. It is a pretty stone church, with a good deep chancel. We filled in the back of the chancel with great ferns—mostly evergreen ferns, so that they would not wilt—and palms and things; and then we made banks and banks of asters and goldenrod,—oh, it was lovely! Most of them came from the camp-pasture, Bertha; you remember how lovely it is in September."

Bertha nodded. "I should think I did!" she said. "Most beautiful place I ever saw, except the rest of it all."

"Well, I never saw it look more beautiful than that day before the wedding, when Bell and the boys and I rode out on our wheels, and came back by moonlight, with great bundles of purple and gold tied on our backs and nodding over our heads. But all the ferns and the asters and chrysanthemums and roses came mostly from Hildegarde's own garden at Braeside, and from Roseholme, Colonel Ferrers's place. We might have carpeted the church entirely with asters, if we had wanted to; as it was, we had great garlands of them twined over the chancel rail and swinging among the ferns and goldenrod; really, I never saw so many flowers at one time in my life. When that was all done we went to the house, Braeside, the Grahames' house, to see if we could help there; but Mrs. Flower, a friend of Hildegarde's, of whom we used to be the least little bit jealous before we knew her, was there, and another friend, Miss Desmond,—she was one of the bridesmaids,—and they had everything so beautifully arranged that there was nothing for us to do but stand and admire it with all our eyes. People in New York had sent down all kinds of splendid flowers, boxes and boxes of them, so that the house was a perfect bower, and smelt like the Vale of Cashmere; but we knew very well that Hilda would like our flowers best. Then—well, a lot more presents had come since the night before, so as there was time enough before dressing, we went in to see them. I don't suppose you care about the presents, girls!"

"Oh! oh! we do!" cried the girls, in chorus. "We want to hear about every single one, Snowy."

"My dears! it would take me all night, and then I couldn't remember them all. But I'll try and tell you some of them. Let me see! Colonel Ferrers gave her a set of sapphires; the most beautiful things you ever saw. Necklace and pendant and pin, most wonderful dark blue stones, set in star-shape. And Jack Ferrers and his father

gave her some wonderful Roman gold-work—I don't know how to describe it, I never saw anything like it—that Jack picked up in Europe. Then there was silver, heaps and heaps of it, from relatives in New York and I don't know where; some of it very handsome indeed, but I don't care so much about silver, do you? I remember there were ten salt-cellars, no two alike. But the things we cared for were the small presents that came from people we knew; people who loved Hildegarde, not just because she was their grandniece or something, but because she was herself. Oh, some of them were funny, girls! There were two dear old people who had come a long way to the wedding, a Mr. and Mrs. Hartley, with whom Hilda spent a summer when she was about fifteen, and whom she has been fond of ever since. I should think she would be; the old lady has a face like Raphael's grandmother—I can't think of any other way of describing it; and Mr. Hartley is simply a duck, the dearest funny old man you ever saw. Well, they brought Hilda the most beautiful toilet-set I ever saw or dreamed of,—something wonderful, all blue dragons and gilding. Papa said it was very rare; and Hilda cried when she saw it, and scolded them dreadfully for bringing it away from its own room; but still she was delighted to have it, and says she will never use any other. Then there was young Doctor Chirk,—funny name, isn't it?—Mrs. Flower's brother. Such a nice, bright, jolly fellow! Well, he was part of that same summer, it seems, and he carved a beautiful frame out of wood that grew in Hartley's Glen; and Mrs. Flower, who paints very well, had made a picture of the glen itself—lovely place!—for the frame, or I suppose the frame was made to fit the picture, no matter which; and *that* filled her with joy.

"Then there were the people from Bywood. My dear, Miss Wealthy Bond is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen, except two. She is just like live Dresden china, smiling and dimpling; and the dear quaint maid who came with her, Martha, had made Hildegarde's whole winter provision of jellies and jams, because 'it wasn't likely Hildegarde would have time herself this first season, and it wasn't a thing you could trust to hired help in general.' Miss Bond herself had brought china—my dear! did you ever see tortoise-shell crockery? Well, it is a most beautiful thing, and the art was lost a hundred years ago, and each piece is worth I don't know how much; but this dear old lady had a dozen plates, all hexagonal, too, and not a single

point broken or chipped, and two pitchers,—well, I haven't the heart even to think of those pitchers, I wanted them so,—and they were all for Hilda, because Hilda had brought the sunshine back into her life, she told me.

"Girls, it was the same story everywhere. Mrs. Grahame being so delicate, and Hilda so busy, Bell and I were there a great deal the few days before the wedding, and we took the guests to walk and drive and so on. Everywhere it was the same story, the joy and brightness and love that this one girl had carried with her wherever she went. I never shall forget it—never.

"Then—let me see—what next? Oh! I had nearly forgotten the dear little boy, Benny, Miss Bond's adopted son. He considers Hilda his own private property, and he was furiously jealous of Roger and everybody else. When he first came it was quite sad, really, the child was so unhappy, and there was no consoling him. He wanted Hilda to sing to him and play with him just as she did when she was staying there at Bywood; and naturally she couldn't, poor dear, though it was wonderful how she managed to be with them all a little every day, and to see to almost everything, so that her mother should have no care or worry. Well, where was I? oh! the little boys. Hugh Allen, our Hugh,—I can't stop to tell you about Hugh now, but he is the dearest, queerest little fellow,—Hugh watched all this for awhile, and then he took Benny away with him, down into the garden, and they were gone a long time. And when they came back Benny marched straight up to Roger, and said, 'You are nice! you can have my girl,' and then marched off again, and went and cried, poor lamb, till Hugh comforted him.

"But I am not getting on with the presents, am I? We all gave her linen, because she had to have that, and we wanted to do something ourselves; so we, my mother and Bell and Kitty and I, hemmed every one of the table-cloths and napkins, and embroidered the marks on all the towels, and had a beautiful time over it. Mammy read to us part of the time while we sewed, all the interesting weddings that she could find in history or fiction, and that was great fun; then she wrote some funny verses to go with them, and they really were lovely patterns, so it was a nice present, though strictly necessary, you see. Oh, I haven't told you about the diamonds! Helena Desmond was so funny about them! 'Hilda,' she said, 'it was clear from the beginning

that I must be offered up on the altar of diamonds. I detest diamonds. They are absolutely uninteresting; they are almost vulgar. Never mind, you have to have some, and nobody else will be stupid and commonplace enough to give them to you. I had hopes of your Aunt Emily, but she has expended herself in lace, and was so happy over it that I hadn't the heart to whisper "diamonds!" in her ear, as I had meant to do. Here they are, my child; the customary horrors!'

"Well, they were very beautiful, though I confess I should have liked pearls better for Hilda. A diamond crescent and star, really splendid. She is very rich, you know."

"Is that the great beauty?" asked a girl.

"Yes, she is superb, certainly. Next to Hilda, perhaps—but I'll come to that presently. Well, now perhaps I have told you half the things, or rather more than half; but they are the things I cared most about, you see. I can't go into a list of forks and spoons. So now I come to the wedding itself."

The girls drew a long breath and leaned forward; presents were very well, but weddings were better.

"It was at noon, of course. There were only two bridesmaids, Helena Desmond and I. Hilda said she wanted only her nearest and dearest, so she would not ask her cousins, though I fancy they had hoped to be asked. She wanted Bell, but Bell said it was positively necessary that she should play the organ, and so it was. We wore perfectly plain white muslin gowns, but, oh, they were so pretty! with soft pale green sashes, and little wreaths of ivy in our hair. Hildegarde wanted everything as simple as possible, so we didn't go into hats, or any of that kind of nonsense. Jerry—my brother Gerald—was best man, and the ushers were Phil and Willy, my other brothers, and Jack Ferrers and Doctor Chirk and Hugh Allen. Well, so the hour came.

"Helena and I were ready and waiting at Braeside when Hilda came down-stairs. Girls, you never saw anything so lovely in your lives as she was. Her dress was very simple, too, white embroidered muslin, exquisitely fine. Colonel Ferrers brought it from India, years and years ago, for a lovely young girl who died while he was on his way home. It had been made in the house, and it looked just like her, as her dresses always do. She wore a little gold pin that Roger made

for her himself,—mined the gold and all,—no other ornament, and a wreath of white roses, roses that the Roseholme gardener had been nursing all summer to make them blossom just at the right time. That was his present; everybody wanted to do something, you see."

"What does she look like?" asked a girl.

"Well, you have to see her to know what she really looks like, for half of it is the expression and the look in her eyes. Gray eyes, so clear and true,—you know she couldn't say or do anything unkind or false to save her life,—and a colour just like a wild rose, and a nose,—well, it's just her own nose, tilted up a little, but perfectly delightful; and when she smiles, you think she has the most beautiful mouth in the world, though I don't suppose she really has. Here, this gives you a little idea of her; just a very little, for it doesn't begin to think of doing her justice."

The girls clustered eagerly to see the photograph, which was passed on from hand to hand. It was a lovely face, indeed, at which they looked; yet, as Gertrude said, the actual beauty was the least part of its charm. Truth and kindness shone from it; not the lightest and most foolish girl there but felt grave for a moment, meeting that steady look of cheer and constancy.

"And yet she looks awfully jolly, too!" said one, breaking the silence, and voicing the thought of all.

"My dear, she is more fun—"

"Than a goat?" asked a new voice; and Grace Wolfe slipped in quietly at the window, and, nodding to the company, took her seat on the floor.

"I have heard all!" she said. "Go on, Snowy! I see now where you got your virtues; this young woman has much to answer for."

Gertrude looked at her kindly, but said nothing; in a moment the story went on.

"We walked over to the church—it is only a few steps—just as we were, without any formal arrangement. Hilda held her mother's hand fast all the time; they were both very quiet. The dear old black cook walked with them, crying all the way. Hugh had Hilda's other hand. I—I can't tell about this part."

Gertrude's voice faltered for a moment; then she went on more steadily.

"Colonel Ferrers was waiting at the church door, with his brother, Mr. Raymond Ferrers. All the ushers were there, too, and we could see that the church was full. And, oh! just a little way from the door was a band of little girls, Hilda's sewing-class, and they all had baskets of flowers, and scattered them in front of her as she walked. I forgot to put that in where it belonged, but it was very pretty, and if you had seen the way they looked at her!

"Well, then it all seemed to happen in a moment. Mr. Raymond Ferrers took Mrs. Grahame up the aisle; and then the organ broke out with the wedding march. I have heard my sister Bell play pretty well, but never as she did then. It seemed to fill the whole world, and yet it was not too loud, either. Then the ushers went up, and then Helena and I, and then came our dear bride on Colonel Ferrers' arm. Roger was waiting at the altar steps with Gerald. He came forward to meet her, and took both her hands,—oh, with such a beautiful look in his face! and then drew her arm through his, so proud and quiet and happy, and then the service went on. They both spoke so clearly, everybody could hear them, and the ring was ready, and there was not a mistake anywhere; only both Jerry and the colonel were on the point of breaking down, both of them, and every time the colonel blew his nose I could see Jerry start and wince. And so they were married, and the music broke out again, and Roger put back the veil and kissed his wife; and—and then they came back down the aisle, and—and—and that is all!"

Gertrude had struggled hard for composure. She had nearly outgrown the childish proneness to tears, which in early days had earned her the home sobriquet of "Chelsea Waterworks;" but this recital touched her too nearly, and she had overcalculated her power of self-restraint. Her voice broke altogether, and she could only nod and smile through her tears on Bertha, who was regarding her remorsefully.

"I ought not to have made you, Toots!" said Bertha. "I did want them to hear it, it has been so beautiful. Don't cry, dear!" But Grace Wolfe came and laid her hand on Gertrude's shoulder, and spoke in a tone one hardly ever heard in that voice.

"Don't stop her!" she said, gravely. "Let her cry! It's good for her—and for all of us! Snowy, your friend is a blessed creature, and you are another."

No one spoke for a few moments. Peggy was crying quietly in her corner, and feeling that she had been at the wedding herself, and wondering what she should possibly do if Margaret should ever get married.

But now the Snowy Owl wiped away her tears in good earnest, and spoke in her own cheerful tones.

"Come, this will never do. Girls, we have extra time to-night, Miss Russell was so kind when I told her what I wanted to do; but even that time will be up if we don't mind. Volunteers to toast marshmallows!"

Instantly there was a rush and a cry. A dozen hands were stretched out. Hat-pins appeared, as if by magic, brandished on every side. In another moment a dozen marshmallows were frizzling over the gas-jets, while the student lamp did duty for several more. As soon as one was done, it was popped, hissing hot, into an open mouth, and the hat-pin, charged with another freight, returned to the charge. Cries of mingled joy and anguish rose on every side.

"Oh, I am burnt entirely! The skin is all off my lips."

"Here, for me one!"

"No, she has had two already! Fluffy, my turn next!"

It was a merry Babel. The fun rose higher and higher. Peggy dried her eyes, and looked on wondering. How could they hear each other? They were all talking at once, each one faster than the other.

"My dear! Perf'ly fine, wasn't it? Oh, I do love to hear a tell—"

"When my cousin was married, she had eight bridesmaids, and they wore just mob caps, not another thing—"

"Orange-blossoms are too sweet for anything, but they make some people—"

"Simply pea-green, my dear, with fright, and she had blue woollen socks on over her white slippers—'something blue,' you know,—and forgot to take them off—"

"Her head, and you never saw anything like it in your life. It measured three yards around, if it did—"

"A sunburst, you know, diamonds and pearls. I adore diamonds, for my part. Why, to be married without diamonds would be—"

"Simply fierce! I should die, I know I should, before I got half-way up the aisle. But to see one, and the music and flowers and all, is—"

"Dandy! perf'ly dandy! I wouldn't miss it for all the—"

"Flounces, my dear, up to the waist, as true as I sit here! and she said 'No!' She said: 'Before I'll be flounced to the waist, I'll—'"

"Marry a tin peddler! said there was nothing in the world she'd like better, because then she could—"

"Sit still the whole morning without moving a muscle, for fear of breaking her—"

"Heart, with forty pearls and sixty diamonds. Fact, I assure you, my dear! I had it from—"

"A perfect brute, not fit for any one to—"

Here, Destiny knocked on the door; the round, rosy face of Miss Carey, the housekeeper, looked in.

"Girls, you really must go to bed. Miss Russell sent me to say so. Do you know what time it is?"

Grace Wolfe slipped like a shadow out of the window and was gone unseen; the assembly broke up with laughter and cheers for the Snowy and the Fluffy, and snatches of talk bubbling all the way along the corridor. When Peggy reached her room, she found the Scapegoat already there, sitting on the floor and chanting solemnly:

"I have nailed my Puggy's slippers
Down upon her closet floor.
She may pray with both her flippers,
But she'll never use them more!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BY MOONLIGHT.

The time went quickly enough at Miss Russell's. Once the routine established, lesson followed lesson and day followed day with amazing rapidity. Before Peggy could realise that she was fairly settled, a month had passed. It was not so bad now; in fact, a good deal of it was very pleasant, she was obliged to admit. Her geometry was a constantly progressing joy; so was her anatomy, and she had the happy consciousness that she was doing well in both studies. This enabled her to bear up against the bitterness of rhetoric and of Miss Pugsley. As for the history, once equally dreaded, its terrors had nearly vanished. Miss Cortlandt had a way of making things so clear that one could not help remembering them once they were explained. Furthermore, she managed to invest the lay-figures of dead and gone kings and conquerors with life and motion. Alexander the Great was no longer a tiresome person in a book, who cried in an absurd way when there was nothing left to conquer. That had always exasperated Peggy, "because if he had had any sense, he would have gone on, and found out for himself what a lot more there was, that his old books and seers and things had never found out." But now, she found Alexander in the first place a boy who knew about horses, which in itself was a great thing, and in the second place a man who knew about a great many other things, and who acted on his knowledge in a variety of swift and surprising ways. As with this hero, so with others, till Peggy came to look forward, actually, to the history hour; which shows what a teacher can do when she understands her girls, and knows enough to call Plutarch and his peers (if any!) to aid her in her task.

But when all was said and done, Peggy was not cut out for a student; and her happiest hours were not those of even the pleasantest class-room. Basket-ball claimed her for its own, and she proved an apt and ready learner in this branch of study. Less swift than Grace Wolfe, who seemed a thing compact of steel and gossamer, she was far stronger to meet an attack, and many a rush

came and passed, and left the stalwart freshman standing steady and undaunted in her place.

The hours of sport brought the two girls nearer and nearer together; and Peggy found herself yielding more and more—often against her own judgment—to the fascination of the lawless girl, who on her part seemed curiously drawn to the simple, downright, law-abiding freshman.

It was about this time that Peggy found out why her room had been called Broadway. The nights were still fine and warm, though it was now October. Apples were ripe in the neighbouring orchards; and though it was perfectly practicable and allowable to buy all the apples one wanted in the daytime, that method did not approve itself to the wilder spirits at Miss Russell's school.

To slide down the fire-escape, slip across the lawn, keeping well under the trees by the edge, and so out into the road and down to the nearest orchard, only a few rods off,—this was the true way to get apples, and a very thrilling way it was. Peggy had been a good deal startled when the first merry party, with noiseless steps and stifled giggles, came stealing into her room, and, nodding to her, made their way out of the window and down the fire-escape. It never occurred to her to make any effort to stop them; they were sophomores, and she only a freshman. She supposed it was against the rules, but of course they would not really do any harm; and oh, what a good time they would have!

She looked after them with a sigh, and wished them luck in her heart, a successful raid, and a safe return. Indeed, it was not long before they were back, rosy and breathless, with baskets and pockets stuffed with apples. The Fresh Freshman, as Peggy was called, did not fail to receive her share; and she ate it with a little thrill of vicarious guilt which was certainly not unpleasant. The two Owls never came with these parties; and somehow Peggy did not mention the matter to them, though she saw them constantly, and loved them always more and more. Sometimes the expeditions were headed by Grace Wolfe, in her wildest mood; sometimes it was Viola Vincent, who came tripping in with a band of her chosen intimates. Viola had several times asked Peggy to be of the party, but Peggy had not gone,—she could hardly have said why. Why was it that Grace had never asked her? If she had, perhaps—

The night came when Grace did ask her.

Peggy had been studying as usual, and the signal for "lights out" came while she was still at her task. Out went the light, for Peggy was, as we have said, a law-abiding citizen. She was groping about, not yet used to the half-light of the growing moon, when the door opened, and Grace glided in with her usual noiseless tread. She laid her hand over Peggy's mouth without a word, and stood motionless, seeming to listen. Then she said aloud and deliberately:

"Yes, I must go this minute. I had no idea it was so late. Suppose Miss Pugsley should catch us! You know she goes around and listens at the doors every now and then, and looks through the keyholes to see what is going on."

"Oh, Grace!" said Peggy.

"Fact, I assure you. I sometimes wonder what Miss Russell would say if she knew it. That isn't her own style, you see. The fun of it is, the other never realises that the wheeze gives her away every time."

Grace Wolfe had the ears of a fox; but, in the pause that followed, even Peggy heard, or fancied she heard, a breathing outside the door. It was only for an instant, if, indeed, it had been at all; yet in another moment a board creaked somewhere along the corridor, and again in a moment came the slight but unmistakable sound of a closing door.

Grace laughed, and pirouetted merrily on one foot, looking in the moonlight like a glimmering sprite.

"Oh, Grace!" repeated Peggy, aghast. "Was she—could she have been there, do you think?"

"She could very easily have been there. Innocent," replied the Scapegoat. "Indeed, she was. I saw the glitter of her eye, and a sweet thing it was."

"Oh, but how could you? how dared you? Surely, you will get into dreadful trouble, Grace."

"Not I!" said Grace. "She can't report me, you observe, without saying that she was listening at the door. And even if she did, Miss Russell would ask her what I said, and she would be sad and sorry to relate that. No! this time I am safe enough, my Prairie Flower. But come, now that I am here, shall we be merry?

"The owl is abroad, the bat, and the toad,
And so is the catamountain.

"Shall the Goat be lacking on such a night as this, or the Wolf either? One has one's responsibilities toward one's names. Come, Innocent, we'll go abroad and celebrate my victory over my Puggy!"

Grace's tone was as quiet as ever, but she was more excited than Peggy had ever seen her. Her eyes shone; her hair, which was very beautiful, was unbraided for some reason—one never knew what whim would seize the whimsical one—and hung like a mantle about her shoulders. Standing thus, with her hand on the window, she looked, as I have said, like a creature from another world.

"Come!" she repeated; and Peggy had never heard sweeter music than her voice.

"Do you—do you think I ought to?" stammered the freshman, moving toward the window.

"One owes it to the catamountain!" cried Grace. "As for the owls,—well, they will be abroad!" she added, with a low laugh. "They would be far enough abroad if they knew. Come, Innocent!"

She glided out of the window, and Peggy followed, her heart beating to suffocation, her cheeks glowing with excitement. To be chosen by the Lone Wolf (for this was another of the wild girl's nicknames, the third being Ishmael) as the companion of one of her solitary rambles was perhaps the most thrilling thing that had ever come into Peggy's simple life. Probably she would have had courage to resist an invitation from any of the frolicsome parties that came and went through her room; she had no power to resist this. Silently she followed the Scapegoat down the iron ladder of the fire-escape, across the lawn, out into the open road.

Grace turned to her with one of her sudden movements, and took both her hands.

"The world's before us, where to choose!" she cried. "What shall it be, Innocent? Shall we climb up into the tower and ring the fire-bell? or go for apples? This is your first expedition, you shall choose."

"Oh, no, Grace; please! I don't know. I cannot. I'll go wherever you go, that's all!"

The Scapegoat meditated. "On the whole," she announced, "soda seems to be the thing. We'll go and have some soda, Innocent."

"Go down-town?" gasped Peggy.

"Yes; why not? Only to Mrs. Button's. You know she is the college grandmother; why shouldn't she be ours? Many's the time Granny Button has sheltered me from the wrath to come. Besides, I have had no marshmallows for a week. A vow, a vow! I have a vow in heaven to have marshmallows once a week, merely for the honour of the school."

Granny Button, as she was called, kept a neat little shop at the corner of the High Street. Here she dispensed soda-water, candy, and cakes to the students of school and college. She was a little old woman, with a face like a dry but still sound winter apple, and she shook her head reprovingly as the two girls entered.

"Now, Miss Wolfe!" she said. "You hadn't ought to come here at this time, now you hadn't, my dear. What do you want? I declare, I've most of a mind not to give it to you, for a wild slip as you are. What would Miss Russell say if she should come in this blessed minute, Miss Grace?"

"Ah, but she won't, granny!" said Grace, coolly. "She's gone to a lecture, you see, so it is all right, truly it is.

"I saw her go; one horse was blind,
The tails of both hung down behind,
Their shoes were on their feet.

"I got so exhausted studying, I feared the vital spark might become extinguished, might pop out, granny, if I didn't have some soda. Two pineapple creams, please, and be quick about it. I'll be getting the marshmallows while you pour it."

The old woman filled the long glasses, shaking her head all the time, and muttering about naughty girls and dark closets.

Peggy drank the soda, but it did not taste very good, and her hand trembled as she held the glass. Her eyes were fixed on the door, and every moment she expected to see it open, and Miss Russell or one of the teachers enter. But no one came. Grace found the marshmallows, and in high spirits brought them to Mrs. Button to count and tie up for her.

"Granny, you look lovely to-night!" she said. "Don't try to look cross, Granny Button, for you don't know how. Smile on me, lovely one, for we must kiss and part."

"Indeed, then, we'd better, Miss Grace," cried the good woman; "and don't let me see you here again this long while, save and except at proper hours. I know well enough I ought to tell that good lady of all the times you've been here out of hours. Yes, dear, I know it well enough, and sometimes it makes me uneasy in my bed. But you have the beguiling of the serpent himself, Grace Wolfe, and you know it, and that's the worst."

"Isn't it?" said Grace, pensively; and her large eyes were full of tender gravity, as she fixed them on the old woman.

"I'll add serpent to my menagerie, and thank you, granny! Nobody ever called you serpent, did they, dear? Wait till you come to my time in life, and you'll know what it is to suffer.

"Well, Innocent, shall we come? After all, it is hard to stay where one isn't wanted, and the only trouble with Granny Button is that she has no heart."

"Yes, go, dear!" said the old woman to Peggy, eagerly. "Go right along home now, and don't let Miss Grace bring ye out again, as she's a naughty girl, and so I always tell her, though I never can say no to her, and that's the truth. But you are different, dear, and a freshman, I'll be bound; and don't let me see ye here again without leave or license, let alone the hour as is getting on for 'lights out.'"

"Fare thee well, my first and fairest!" said Grace, kissing her hand at the door. "Till our next meeting!"

It was only a few steps back from the turn into the High Street. Peggy's pulse began to beat more naturally; in a moment, now, they would be back, safe back, and she would never do it again, no matter what Grace thought of her. Fun was fun, but it was not worth this; and what would Margaret say?

Coming up from the High Street, they skirted a field that lay like waving silver in the moonlight. Nothing would do but that Grace must have a run through this field; she declared that it was her favourite spot in the world.

"After all, soda and marshmallows are carnal!" she insisted. "Our bodies are fed, Innocent, our souls starve for want of poetry. There is

poetry in all that silver waving. I must! I must prance, or I shall not rest in my bed. Come along!"

And she went flitting about through the long grass, hither and thither like a will-o'-the-wisp, her long hair floating around her, her arms waving in gestures sometimes fantastic, but always graceful. Peggy could think of nothing but her cousin Rita, as she used to dance in the old days at Fernley. What a pair she and Grace would make! What a mercy they had never come together. Moreover, her heart, the heart of a farmer's daughter, smote her at the treading down of the grass. She stood at the edge of the field, now and then calling to her companion and urging her to come home, but for the most part simply watching her in mingled terror and admiration.

At length the wild spirit was satisfied, and Grace came flying back, radiant and breathless.

"That was glorious!" she said. "Poor little Innocent, you haven't much soul, have you? Still, I love you. Come, we will go back to the shades."

They neared the gate; as they did so, they heard voices and the sound of approaching footsteps. Grace paused for a moment; then held up her hand with a warning gesture. Peggy felt her heart turn cold; it was coming! one of the voices was that of Miss Russell. It was impossible for them to escape being seen. The broad stretch of the lawn lay between them and safety, and the relentless moonlight lay full upon the hedge which had lain in shadow when they came out. Peggy braced herself to meet the shock; but Grace laid a hand on her arm, and then made a gesture. A great tree stood just by the gate of Pentland School; a chestnut-tree, with low-jutting, wide-spreading branches. With the swift movement of some woodland creature, Grace Wolfe swung herself up to the lowest branch, and motioned Peggy to follow; Peggy was a good climber, too; more slowly, but with equal agility, she gained the branch; then softly, slowly, both girls crept along, inward and upward, till a thick screen of leaves hid them completely from sight.

Two ladies came around the turn, and paused a moment at the gate,—Miss Russell and Miss Cortlandt. They stood directly under the chestnut-tree; Peggy could have dropped a nut down exactly on the crown of Miss Russell's bonnet; she never knew how near Grace

came to doing so, nor how hard it was to refrain for her, Peggy's, sake.

"I hope not!" said Miss Russell. "I do most earnestly hope not."

"I am afraid there is little doubt of it!" replied Miss Cortlandt. "Miss Pugsley seemed quite positive; I know she means to bring it up at Faculty Meeting to-morrow night."

Miss Russell sighed. "Then it will not be done in the wisest manner!" she said. "I can say this to you, Emily, for you understand her as well as I do. I had hoped," she continued, "that the whole business would be over when Wilhelmina Lightwood—well, I suppose she will always be 'Billy,' even to me—when Billy went away. I put Peggy Montfort there, because she seemed such an honest, steady, sensible kind of girl. I thought I could trust Peggy Montfort."

"I think you can!" said Miss Cortlandt. "I don't believe Peggy has had any share in the flittings. But I do think it might perhaps have been better to tell her all about it, and put her on her guard. Being a new girl, she might not feel at liberty to stop the older ones when they came; and she could not tell of it. You see, Miss Russell, it is such a little time since I was a 'girl' myself, that I haven't got away from their point of view yet."

"I hope you never will, my dear!" said Miss Russell, warmly. "It is when I get too far away from that point of view myself that I make mistakes. Yes, I ought to have put the child on her guard; I'll do so to-morrow."

She looked over toward the school, and sighed again.

"Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction!" she said. "It was Grace who gave it the name, of course. Poor Grace!"

"Poor Grace!" echoed Miss Cortlandt; and then the two passed on.

They were two very silent girls who crossed the lawn five minutes later. Grace Wolfe held her head high, and walked with her usual airy grace; her face was grave, but perhaps no graver than usual. Still, she did not speak; as for Peggy, she was too bowed down with shame and wretchedness to think even of her companion. She had been trusted; and she had betrayed the trust. There seemed nothing in the whole world but that.

They parted outside Peggy's window. Grace was going up a story higher on the fire-escape, Peggy did not think nor ask where.

No word was spoken; only, Grace laid her hand on Peggy's shoulder and looked in her face for a moment. Peggy could not speak, could only shake her head. A single sob broke from her lips; then she hurried in, and closed the window behind her.

Then Grace Wolfe did a singular thing. Standing on the iron step, she took from her pocket the packet of marshmallows, and deliberately scattered them over the lawn, throwing each one as far as her arm could reach.

"For the frogs!" she explained, aloud. "With the compliments of the Goat, the Wolf, and the Serpent,—to which is now added the Beast which Perishes!"

CHAPTER IX.

FACULTY MEETING AND BEDLAM.

"Have you proof of this, Miss Pugsley?"

"I am perfectly sure of it, Miss Russell!"

"Yes; I am sure you would be, before you spoke of it; but have you the proof? Of course, before taking any such serious step as you propose, I should, in justice to all, be obliged to ask for positive proof."

"Proof!" cried Miss Pugsley, in some excitement. "Proof enough! Look at my bonnet, Miss Russell. Oblige me by smelling of it. I can never wear it again, never! I tell you, brandy has been poured over it. Here are the slippers!" She produced a pair of slippers which were certainly in a sad condition. "They were nailed—nailed with tenpenny nails, to the floor of my closet; they are totally ruined. Look—I ask you all, ladies, to look at my hand-glass!" She held up the glass; and at the sight Emily Cortlandt had one of those violent fits of coughing that often troubled her; this one was so bad that she was obliged to leave the room for a moment. The worst of it was that one or two of the other teachers seemed to have caught the infection, for there was a regular outbreak of coughing and choking, which only a severe glance from Miss Russell checked.

Somebody had painted a face on the little mirror. It covered the whole surface; the face of a monkey, with grinning mouth, and twinkling, malicious eyes; it had an undoubted resemblance to Miss Pugsley. As she held it up with a tragic gesture, the effect was so absurd that even Miss Russell might have wished that she could—cough!

"It lay on my dressing-table, face downward," Miss Pugsley went on. "I had just done my hair for tea,—I am scrupulous in such matters,—and took up the glass to see that my pug was straight behind. I looked—and saw this. Ladies, I could have fainted on the floor. My nerves being what they are, it is a marvel that I did not."

"I am very, very sorry, Miss Pugsley," said Miss Russell, gravely. "If I knew who had done this—"

"But I tell you I do know, Miss Russell!" cried Miss Pugsley, vindictively. "I tell you that there is only one girl in the school who is capable of all this, and that girl is Grace Wolfe!"

There was a moment's silence.

"Have you found Grace in your room at any time, Miss Pugsley?" demanded Miss Russell.

No, Miss Pugsley had not, but that made no difference. Grace had done the things, there was no shadow of a doubt of it.

"Have you been careful to lock your door when you left the room?"

"Miss Russell, you know that locks and bolts make no possible difference to Grace Wolfe. The girl is cut out for a malefactor. I prophesy that she will be in State's prison before she has been out of school a year."

"I must request you not to speak in this way of any of my young ladies," said the Principal, sternly. "You have been the victim of some very malicious practical jokes, Miss Pugsley. I shall look into the matter thoroughly, and shall do my best to discover the offender, and shall punish her—or them—as I think best." She laid a slight emphasis on the last words.

"Then you refuse to expel Grace Wolfe?" said Miss Pugsley, quivering with anger.

"On such evidence as you have brought forward to-night? certainly," said Miss Russell, with some severity. "I have no proof whatever that Miss Wolfe played any of these pranks, though I admit it is probable that she may have done so. You found the bandbox outside your door, where Bridget admits she left it several days before. You left your door unlocked on a rainy half-holiday, when sixty or more girls were constantly passing and repassing; there are half a dozen girls, I am sorry to say, who might have been tempted by the open door to play some prank of the kind which seems so clever to children, and so silly to older people."

Why did Miss Russell look toward the window as she spoke? But now she was looking at Miss Pugsley again.

"You and Grace are not friends, I know, Miss Pugsley," she went on. "I am sorry for it, for I think all the rest of us feel how much that is fine and noble might—may still be brought out of that untamed spirit. She has never known a mother, remember. The name of the

Scapegoat, which she has given herself, may, I sometimes think, reflect blame on the rest of us as well as on her. It is true that, whatever mischief is afoot, it is sure to be laid at Grace's door. This is mainly her own fault, of course—"

"I should think so!" snorted Miss Pugsley.

"But not entirely," the Principal went on. "There are other mischievous girls in the school. I should like to know how Grace has been doing this month in her various classes," she added, turning to the other teachers.

On this point the testimony was unanimous. Grace Wolfe led many of the classes; she was well up in all, and had passed her examinations in a way that did credit both to her intelligence and her industry. Thus testified every teacher, except the small brown mouse who taught drawing in Pentland School. This mouse, Miss Mink by name, had crept away silently, and left the room, after one glance at the hand-glass; she knew that but one hand in the school could have drawn that monkey, and though her heart swelled with pride, she feared for her darling pupil.

There was a pause after the teachers had given their testimony; then Miss Pugsley returned to the attack.

"I certainly hope justice will be done, Miss Russell," she said, with a smile of sweetened vinegar. "It would be a great pity, wouldn't it, if the school got the reputation—he! he!—of injustice and favouritism?"

"It would," said the Principal, gravely.

"But there is another matter that I feel bound to speak of before we separate," Miss Pugsley went on. "Are you aware that room No. 18, in corridor A, the room formerly occupied by Miss Lightwood, is again being used as a place of exit for parties of students going on lawless expeditions?"

The Principal looked at her steadily.

"I fear that is true," said one of the other teachers. "I had meant to speak to you before about it, Miss Russell, but waited till to-night."

"Of course it makes no possible difference to me!" cried Miss Pugsley. "It is not my corridor, and I have no authority there; but as long as one is in the school, of course one must consider the honour

of it, you know, and I am glad some one else is here to bear me out in *this* complaint."

The Principal still looked at Miss Pugsley; teachers who had been long in the school were glad that she was not looking at them in that way.

"I have heard of this matter before," Miss Russell said, at last. "I am going to devote my own time to investigating it, and think I shall need no help; though I thank you," it was to Miss Ivors that she spoke, "for bringing it to my notice, as it was right for you to do. I think I need not detain you longer, ladies."

When the teachers were gone, Miss Russell stepped to the window and said, softly, "Grace!"

There was no reply. An owl hooted in the distance; a bird chirped somewhere near by. That was all.

"Grace!" said the Principal again. "If you are there, I wish you would come in and let me speak to you."

Still no reply. After waiting a moment, the Principal closed the window with a sigh. On leaving the room she paused a moment to look at the photograph of a lovely young woman, in the dress of twenty years ago, which stood on her desk.

"Dear Edith!" said Miss Russell. "My first pupil! I'll keep your girl for you, Edith, if I can!"

Was Grace Wolfe outside the window when the Principal called her? Who can tell? It is certain that ten minutes after she was at the supper in Bedlam.

The tenant of Bedlam, Miss Cornelia Hatch (familiarly known as Colney Hatch, in remembrance of the famous English Insane Asylum), was not actually mad, though many of the scholars thought her so. She was a special student of natural history, botany, and zoology; she was absent-minded and forgetful to the last degree. When she came into class, she often had to be brought there, some good-natured classmate dragging her away by main force from her private experiments. If she did remember to come of her own accord, she was apt to have a half-completed articulation hanging around her neck, or a dried frog skin stuck behind her ear for safe-keeping. Her hair was generally untidy, owing to this habit of sticking things in it while she worked; you never could tell what it would be,

vertebræ, or seaweed, or pine-cones, but you could safely reckon on finding something extraneous in Colney's ruffled black hair. As for her clothes, she was usually enveloped in a huge brown gingham apron, with many pockets, which held snakes, or eggs, or roots, or anything else that would not go comfortably in her hair. When the apron became too dirty (she had had two at the beginning of the term, but one had been destroyed in an explosion), Miss Carey took it away and washed it, while Colney went around looking scared and miserable in a queer flannel gown of a pinkish shade. Report said it had once been brown, but that the colour had been changed by the fumes of something or other, no one knew what. Sometimes she had buttons on frock and apron, more often not. Periodically, Miss Carey or the Owls descended upon her, and sewed on her buttons and mended her up generally; and she was very grateful, and said how nice it was to have buttons. But she soon pulled them off again, because she never had time to do anything but tear her clothes off when she went to bed, and drag them on again when she got up. When a button flew off, she pinned the place over, if a pin was in sight; if not, she went without; it made no difference to her, and she was not conscious of it in five minutes. Miss Russell, and most of the teachers, were very tender with Colney. She was poor, and meant to work her way through college; even now she paid part of her schooling by stuffing birds and setting up skeletons for one of the college professors. If she did not kill herself or somebody else before she graduated, Miss Russell looked forward to a distinguished career for the tenant of Bedlam; so, as I have said, she was tender and patient with her; and good Miss Carey mended her when she could, and saw that she remembered to eat her dinner, and Miss Boyle and Miss Mink rejoiced over her, and Miss Cortlandt led her gently through English literature, giving her Walton and Bacon and all the scientific men of letters that she could find. Only one teacher failed to do her best to smooth poor Colney's path through school; that was Miss Pugsley. Rhetoric was simply an empty noise to the girl. She never by any chance knew a lesson, and Miss Pugsley lashed her with so cruel a tongue that Peggy used to ache and smart for her as well as for herself, and would get hold of Colney's hand and hold it and squeeze it, growing red the while with pity and anger. But Colney never noticed it half as much as Peggy did; she used to look at the

angry teacher for a few minutes in an abstracted kind of way, and then retire within herself and make imaginary experiments. This was what happened on the dreadful day when Miss Pugsley said:

"The subject of this sentence is *I*. How do we go to work to form the predicate, Miss Hatch?"

Cornelia started, but replied, instantly:

"By mixing one part hydrogen with three parts—"

"Indeed!" said Miss Pugsley, with ominous calm. "And what happens next, pray?"

"It turns green, and explodes with a loud report."

And this was exactly what did happen. Poor Colney!

Peggy Montfort did not form one of the party in Bedlam that night. The room lay at the extreme end of the corridor, round a corner, so that it was in a manner shut off from the rest of the wing. It was an extraordinary place. Stretched on the walls, dried or drying, were specimens of every possible variety,—bats, frogs, snake skins, bird skins. Along the mantelpiece were jars and bottles, all containing other specimens preserved in spirits. In one corner stood part of a human skeleton. It stood on one leg, with a jaunty air, having indeed but one leg to stand on; both arms were wanting, but the skull, which was a very fine one, made up for much. On account of this fragmentary skeleton, few of the younger girls ever dared to enter Bedlam, and some of them would run past the door with face averted, and beating heart, fearing lest the door should be open and they should catch a glimpse of the gruesome thing. But this object was the pride of Colney's heart. She could not, of course, afford to buy a whole skeleton, so she was collecting one, bit by bit; even Peggy had been quite uncomfortable one day, when Colney had told her, hanging over each bone with delight, where and how she had come by each one. It was always honestly, one could be sure of that.

Everywhere in the room, underfoot and overhead, were setting-boards and pill-boxes, blowpipes and crucibles. One could not move without upsetting something; and yet it was here that the Gang came to have its annual supper.

Colney Hatch was dissecting a mouse. She was perfectly happy, and oblivious of the world, when the door opened, and in came fluttering the wild spirits of the junior and sophomore classes. Last

year the sophomores had been freshmen, and must not know anything about the Gang, save in wondering envious whispers and surmises. Next year the juniors would be seniors, and they too must forget that such a thing as the Gang had been, and think only of dramatics, examinations, and graduation. Such had been the unwritten law at Miss Russell's, since time was.

Here were Vanity and Vexation of Spirit, one smiling and dimpling, the other with her usual air of blasé superiority. Here was Blanche Haight, the leader among the sophomores; here were six or eight girls, in fact, chosen from the two classes for the same characteristics, lawlessness and love of fun; last but not least, here was Grace Wolfe, the acknowledged leader and queen of the Gang, when she deigned to be so.

Grace was in her wildest mood to-night. She danced solemnly around poor Colney, who looked up in dismay from her mouse as the silent crowd came pouring in, and assured her that her last hour was come.

"We are the Secret Tribunal!" she cried. "We have come to make a pile of all your rubbish, Colney, and burn it, with you on top, like the Phœnix. I am sure you would come up out of the ashes, if we left the mouse out for you to finish."

"Oh, do be careful, please, Goat!" cried Colney Hatch. "Don't sit down on that frog, he isn't dry! Dear me! do you—do want anything, girls?"

"We want your room, my love; and your company!" replied Grace. "Yet we are merciful. Here!"

She twirled Cornelia's chair around, and set her with her face to the wall; then moved the lamp so that its light fell on the board in her lap.

"There!" she said. "Finish him, poor old dear, and we'll wake you up when supper's ready. Now then! who's brought what?"

Then, from pockets, from surplice folds, from shawls and cloaks hung carelessly over the arm, came forth a strange array of articles. One had brought a chicken, one a cake. Here was a Dutch cheese, a tin of crackers, a bottle of coffee, a bottle of olives, and a box of sardines. Grace herself told in high glee how she had met one of the teachers in the corridor, and had stood for five minutes talking about

the next day's lesson. "And with this under me cloak the while!" and with a dramatic gesture she produced and held out a dish of lobster salad.

"If it had been potato," she declared, "I had been lost; the onion had betrayed me. Blessings on the bland, the seductive mayonnaise, which veiled the ardent lobster and his smell. She did smell it, however, and said, so cheerfully, poor dear, that Miss Carey was evidently going to give us a surprise to-morrow, for she smelt lobster. It was Miss Cortlandt, too; I did want to say, 'Oh, come along, and have some!' She is a rectangular fragment of baked clay, used for building purposes, Miss Cortlandt is."

"What do you mean, Goat?" asked some one.

"I never use slang, as you know!" replied Grace, gravely. "It argues a poverty of intellect, as well as a small vocabulary. I suppose you would have said she was a brick, my child."

"Oh, Goat, how funny you are!" giggled the girls.

"Not at all, I assure you," said Grace, unmoved. "But I pray you fall to! Have some salad, Vanity? yes, I'll take a wing, thank you."

"Isn't this perf'ly fine?" cried Viola Vincent. They were all seated by this time, some on the floor, others wherever they could find a few inches of spare room, and were dispensing the viands with reckless liberality. "I say! I wish we had these every week, instead of only once a year. Why, it's just as easy! Oh, what an elegant cream pie! Give me some!"

"No!" said Grace Wolfe, with emphasis.

"Why not? What's the matter, Goat?"

"I will *not* have pies called elegant while I am leader of this Gang," said Grace. "Take my life, if you will, but spare my feelings!"

"All right," said Viola, cheerily. "Your own way, Goat. I'd just as lief call it dandy, and it *is* dandy, you can't deny that."

"Perhaps the Goat is thinking of succeeding her Puggy in the rhetoric chair!" said Blanche Haight, with a sneer.

"Perhaps I am thinking of stopping your—" began Grace; but she checked herself, and turned away abruptly.

"Look at Colney!" said Vivia Varnham. "Isn't she too perfectly killing? She doesn't know we are here, I believe. Look at her hair,

girls! It gets more ratty, not to say woozzy, every day. I wonder when she brushed it last."

"Possibly when you brushed your manners," said the Scapegoat. "Colney is our hostess, I beg to remind you. And nobody giving her a bite of supper!"

She rose from the floor, piled a plate with good things, and went over to the corner where Colney Hatch was bending over her mouse, conscious of nothing else.

"Here, Colney; here's your supper."

"Oh, thank you, Grace," said Colney, looking up for a moment. "But I can't, you know. Both my hands are full, you see."

"Then open your mouth," commanded the Scapegoat, in tones of authority.

Colney obeyed meekly, and Grace stood over her, feeding her like a baby with the choicest morsels, and now and then casting a glance over her shoulder at the others. Grace's gaiety was fitful to-night, certainly. When she first came in she had been the life of the party; now, as she stood there in the corner, her brow was overcast, her eyes gloomy. What ailed the Lone Wolf?

What were they saying over there? They, at least, were at the very height of glee, breaking into gusts of giggling, into whisperings ending in squeaks and smothered screams.

"To-morrow night? Hurrah! Through Broadway, of course."

"Freshy? Oh, Freshy won't say anything. She wouldn't dare to, in the first place."

"She'd dare fast enough," said Viola. "She isn't afraid of anything, Freshy isn't. But she's safe, she won't say anything."

"What's all this?" demanded the Scapegoat, coming back with the empty plate. "Plans? Does one hear them?"

"The apples are all gone," said Kitty Green. "We're going for some to-morrow night, Goat. You'll go, too, of course?"

"Going out through Broadway," said Viola. "We haven't been out for more than a week, and the moon will be nearly full to-morrow. It'll be perf'ly fine, Goat, won't it?"

"Veto!" said Grace, calmly.

"Veto? Why, what do you mean?"

"What's wrong?"

"What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened. Boots are no longer free, that's all."

"Do speak English, Grace Wolfe! What do you mean?"

"There—are—to—be—no more—free-booting expeditions—through Broadway. Is that sufficiently plain, or shall I spell the words?"

Blanche Haight rose to her feet, several of the other girls following her. "What is the matter with you to-night, Goat?" she said. "We don't seem to succeed in satisfying you. Aren't we good enough company for you, perhaps?" And Blanche sneered in her own particular manner, of which she was proud.

"I make no remarks," said the Scapegoat, in her quietest tones. "I have not been personal. I merely say, while I lead this Gang, there will be no more expeditions through Broadway."

"And how long do you suppose you will lead this Gang, if you play the part of Pope and emperor?" demanded Blanche.

The other girls began to murmur and protest at this. "Listen to the Goat!" said one and another. "She must have some reason, or she wouldn't act so."

But Grace seized her opportunity.

"How long?" she repeated. "Not an hour! not a second! I resign. My last act is to break up this meeting. To your tents, O Israel!"

Then arose such a confusion of whispering, exclaiming, disclaiming, entreating, protesting, that no one voice could be heard. The owner of the room, fairly roused for a moment (but indeed she had finished the mouse), turned round to see what was wrong. For a moment she saw the two leaders, Grace and Blanche, facing each other, the one pale and quiet, the other red with anger, her eyes darting spiteful flames. Next moment, Grace made a single quick movement, and the room was in darkness. She had blown out the lamp.

"To your tents!" she repeated, sternly. And, hurrying, whispering, stumbling over the remains of their feast scattered on the floor, the frightened girls obeyed.

CHAPTER X.

TEACHER AND PUPIL.

The day after the escapade was the worst one that Peggy Montfort had ever known. She was too strong and healthy to lie awake all night, though it was much later than usual before she ceased to toss in uneasy wretchedness and lay peacefully sleeping. When morning came, she woke, and for a moment greeted the bright day joyfully. Then remembrance came like a hand at her throat, and she shivered, and all the blue seemed to fade away, and leave nothing but cold, miserable gray over all the world. What had she done? What would Uncle John and Margaret, what would Brother Hugh think, if they should know this? Slowly and heavily she dressed and went down to breakfast. There, it seemed as if everybody knew what she had done. Miss Russell's eyes rested thoughtfully on her as she bade her good morning; Peggy shrank away, and could not meet the gaze. If she did not know now, she would soon. "An honest, steady, sensible girl!" Well, Miss Russell would find she had been mistaken, that was all; and of course she would never trust again where she had once been deceived. And yet Peggy knew in her heart that there was no girl in the school who was so little likely to do this thing again as herself. She was by nature, as I have said, a law-abiding creature, with a natural reverence for authority. To have set the law at defiance was bad enough; to have done it secretly, and betrayed the trust that had been placed in her, that was worse! That was beyond possibility of pardon. Thus argued Peggy in her wretchedness; and all through the morning she went over it again and again, and yet again, seeing no help or comfort anywhere. Bertha Haughton, always quick in sympathy, saw the trouble in her friend's face, and came over in "gym" and begged to know what was the matter. Wasn't Peggy well? Had anything happened to trouble her? Peggy shook her head; she could not tell even this good friend—yet. There was some one else who must be told first. She promised to come to the Owls' Nest later in the day, and Bertha was forced to be content with this, and left her with a vague sense of uneasiness and a feeling that somehow little

Peggy had grown suddenly older and more mature. Yes, there is nothing like trouble for that!

It was almost a relief when the summons came.

"Miss Montfort, Miss Russell would like to see you in the study."

Peggy steadied herself for the encounter, and went quietly. If only she could be met with a cold look, it would be easier, somehow—but no! the Principal's gray eyes were as kind as ever, her smile as gravely sweet, as she said, pleasantly, "Good morning, Miss Montfort. Good afternoon, I should say; I forgot how late it was. Sit down for a moment, will you? I want to ask you about something."

Peggy did not want to sit down. She wanted to stand still and go through with it, and then get away to her own room. But there was no disregarding the request, so she sat down on the edge of a chair and set her teeth.

"I hardly know where to begin!" said Miss Russell. "I am going to take you into my confidence—Peggy."

Peggy shivered a little, but said nothing, only set her teeth harder.

"There has been a good deal of trouble," Miss Russell went on, "a good deal of trouble in former years with the room which you now occupy. The girl who occupied it was—was wild and undisciplined, and took pleasure in breaking bounds, and in inducing others to do so. She—there were a number of girls who used to go out without leave, by way of the fire-escape outside the window."

She paused a moment, and looked at Peggy, but Peggy made no sign.

"That girl—left the school last year, not to return; but there are several still here who used to share in those wild pranks (undertaken in mere thoughtlessness, I am glad to think, and not with any evil intent), and I have been afraid—in fact, it has come to my ears, that the room was again being used for the same purpose."

She paused again; but still Peggy was silent. What could she say? Besides, no question had been asked her—yet!

The question came. "You are silent, Peggy. Do you know anything about this matter?"

"Yes, Miss Russell!" said Peggy, faintly.

"I feel," said the Principal, in a tone of regret, "that I have been to blame in not warning you of this beforehand, and putting you on your guard. I had hoped that when Bil—when the young lady of whom I spoke was gone, the whole thing would die out; it is a distressing thing to warn a pupil against her schoolmates. Still, I feel that in this case I ought to have done so. I place entire confidence in you, Peggy. I am sure that you would not yourself break the rules of the school; but you may have been put to inconvenience and distress by the lawlessness of others. I am very sorry if this has been the case."

Peggy shut her eyes tight, and said "Margaret!" twice to herself. Then she looked at the Principal.

"Miss Russell," she said,—she tried to steady her voice, but it would come strange and shaky,—"you are mistaken about me. I am not the kind of girl you think I am. I—I went out last night without leave, by the fire-escape."

There was a silence.

"Who induced you—that is, with whom did you go?" asked Miss Russell, presently.

"I—I didn't say that any one else went."

"No, my dear, you did not say so. But—" and here Miss Russell rose, and, crossing the room, laid her hand on Peggy's shoulder; "if I know anything at all of girls, you did not go alone, and you did not go of your own motion. And—Peggy, if you were not the kind of girl I thought you, you would not be feeling as you do now about the whole thing."

This was too much. Peggy could have borne, or she thought she could have borne, anger or scorn, or the cold indifference that is born of contempt; but the kind tone, the look of affectionate inquiry, the friendly hand on her shoulder,—all this she could not bear. She covered her face with her hands and burst into a passion of tears.

It seemed hours that she wept, and sobbed, and wept again. It did not seem as if she could ever stop, the tears came rushing so fast and so violently; but however long it was, Miss Russell did not try to stop or check her, only stood by with her hand on the girl's shoulder, patting it now and then, or putting back with the other hand—such a

soft, firm, motherly hand it was!—the stray locks which kept falling over Peggy's face as the sobs shook her from head to foot.

At last, however, the storm abated a little; and then, while Peggy was trying to dry her tears, and the choking sobs were subsiding into long, deep breathings, Miss Russell spoke again.

"Peggy, we teachers have to go a good deal by instinct, do you know it? It is not possible for me, for example, to know every one of seventy-odd girls as I ought to know her, by actual contact and communion. But I have acquired a sort of sense,—I hardly know what to call it,—an insight by means of which I can tell pretty well what a girl's standard of life is, and how I can best help her. I know that now I can best help you and myself by saying—and meaning—just what I said before. I place entire confidence in you, Peggy Montfort."

Peggy looked up in amazement; could she believe what she heard?

"To some girls," the Principal went on, "the taste of stolen fruit is sweet, and having once tasted it, they hanker for more. To you, it is bitter."

"Oh!" said Peggy; and the gasping exclamation was enough.

"Very bitter!" said the Principal. "I speak not from impulse, but from experience, when I tell you that there is no girl in the school to-day whom I could sooner trust not to commit this offence than you, who committed it last night."

Her own thought, almost her own words. Peggy raise her head again, and this time her eyes were full of a new hope, a new courage.

"I believe that is true, Miss Russell," she said, simply. "I had thought that myself, but I didn't suppose—I didn't think—"

"You did not think that I would know enough to understand it!" said Miss Russell, smiling. "Well, you see I do, though we both owe it partly to dear Emily Cortlandt, who reminded me of my duty and of your position. Now, Peggy, I have a recitation, and we must part. I put you in charge of 'Broadway,' fully and freely. No one must come in, and no one must go out, by that window. And if you have any trouble," she added, with a smile, "if you have any trouble and do not think it right to tell me, call for the Owls, and they will help you. Good-bye, my child!"

She held out her hand, and Peggy took it with a wild desire to kiss it, or to fall down and kiss the hem of her gown who had shown herself thus an angel of sympathy and kindness. But the Principal bent down and kissed the girl's forehead lightly and tenderly.

"We shall be friends always now," she said, simply. "Don't forget, Peggy!"

She was gone, and Peggy took her own way in the opposite direction, hardly knowing whither she was going. Her heart was so full of joy and love and gratitude, it seemed as if she must break out into singing or shouting. Was ever any one so kind, so noble, so lovely? How could any one not try to do her very, very best, to deserve the care and friendship of such a teacher as this?

Passing as if on wings through the geometry room, she saw a figure crouching over a desk, and was aware of Rose Barclay, bent over her book, and crying bitterly. Nothing could hold Peggy back in that moment of exaltation. In an instant she was at the girl's side. "Let me help you!" she cried. "Please let me; I know I can."

Rose Barclay looked up fiercely. "I asked you to help me, once!" she said. "I am not likely to ask again. Go away, please, and let me alone."

"No, I won't!" said stout Peggy. "You never would let me explain, but now you are going to let me. I couldn't show you my example, and I wouldn't, and I never will; but I could make you see how to do your own right, and that's what I am going to do now."

Down she sat without more ado; took the pencil from the unwilling hand, and set to work on an imaginary problem. Rose Barclay sat still for a moment with averted face, pride and shame doing their best to silence the better voices within her. At length she stole a glance at Peggy's face, and there beheld such a shining expanse of goodwill and friendliness that Pride and Co. gave up the battle, and retreated into their dens. Heaving a long sigh of relief, she bent forward, and soon was following with all her might Peggy's clear and lucid explanation.

"Why, yes!" said Rose, at last. "Why, I do see. Why, I do believe I could do that myself."

"Of course you can!" said Peggy. "Here, take the pencil, and I'll give you one."

She did so, and, after some screwing of the mouth and knitting of the brows, Rose actually did do it, and felt like Wellington after Waterloo. Then, at Peggy's instigation, she tackled the actual lesson, and, steered by Professor Peggy, went through it triumphantly. Then she turned on her instructor.

"What made you come and help me, Peggy Montfort? I've been perfectly hateful to you, you know I have. I wouldn't have helped you, if you had acted the way I have."

"Oh, yes, you would," said Peggy, good-naturedly.

"Why—why, you have been crying, too!" said Rose, examining her benefactress more closely. "Peggy, you have been crying awfully, I know you have."

"Yes, I have," said Peggy; "I have cried my eyes out, and I never was so happy in my life. Come on, and have a game of ball!"

CHAPTER XI.

DECORATION—AND OTHER THINGS.

The Junior Reception was "on." In fact, it was to take place this very evening, and an air of subdued excitement hung over the whole school. All the other classes were invited, as well as the Faculty and many friends from outside; it was sure to be a delightful occasion. Peggy was fortunate enough to be one of the auxiliaries called in by the Snowy Owl to help in the decorations, and she counted it a high privilege, as indeed it was. As a general thing, there is more sympathy between juniors and freshmen than between any other two classes in school or college; various reasons may be assigned for this, but it remains the fact. Besides this, however, Peggy felt a very special bond with the "Jews," because her dearest friends were among them. This had come about partly from the accident of her coming late to school, and so being put into the junior corridor; but it was still more due to her making instant acquaintance, as we have seen, with the Fluffy Owl, and through her with the beloved and powerful Snowy. These two girls, through their wise and gentle ways, were a power for good in the whole school, and especially in their own class. They were queens of the steady and right-minded majority, while Grace Wolfe led the wilder and less disciplined spirits. The Owls went their quiet way, and troubled themselves little, less perhaps than they should have done, about the doings of the "Gang." They were busy with study, with basket-ball, with a hundred things; they could not always know (especially when pains were taken that they should not know) what tricks the Scapegoat and her wild mates were up to.

Both Owls had a real affection for Peggy, and though they knew nothing as yet of the recent escapade, they felt that it would be well to keep her rather under their wing, the more so that Grace had undoubtedly taken a fancy to the child, too.

"She's too fascinating!" said the Snowy. "We shall have the Innocent falling in love with her if we don't look out, and that would never do!"

"Never!" said the Fluffy, shaking her head wisely; but she added, in an undertone, "If only the mischief isn't done already!"

So the two asked Peggy to help them in the work of preparing the gymnasium for the great event, and she consented with delight. She was making plenty of friends in her own class, oh, yes; especially now that she and Rose Barclay had made it up. She was the one stay and comfort of poor little Lobelia Parkins, and was devotedly kind to that forlorn creature, taking her out to walk almost by main force, and presenting to all comers a front of such stalwart, not to say pugnacious, determination, that no one dared to molest the girl when Peggy was with her. Spite of all this, however, her heart remained in Corridor A, and she would have left the whole freshman class in the lurch at one whistle from the Owls—or, alas! from the Scapegoat.

But all this is by the way, and does not help us to get up the Junior Reception.

There had been an early morning expedition to the neighbouring woods (not, however, through the fire-escape), and Peggy and the Owls had returned each with a wheelbarrow-load of boughs and ground pine and all manner of pleasant woodland things. The leaves had turned, and were glowing with scarlet and gold and russet. These were put in water, lest they should begin to curl and wither before night; while the evergreens were heaped in a corner and left to their fate. Now it was afternoon, and the girls, released from their tasks, had flown to the scene of action. Already the gymnasium began to assume a festive appearance. Several garlands were in place, and on the floor sat six or eight juniors, busily weaving more. Ladders stood here and there. At the top of one stood the Snowy Owl, arranging a "trophy," as she called it, of brilliant leaves, on another, Peggy was valiantly hammering, as she arranged in festoons the long folds of green and white bunting that the Fluffy handed up to her. The Fluffy was a curious sight, being swathed in bunting from head to foot. When Peggy demanded "more slack," she simply turned around a few times and unrolled herself, thus presenting the appearance of an animated spool.

"It's effective," said Gertrude, surveying her from her perch, "but I can't say that it looks comfortable. How ever did you get yourself into such a snarl, Fluff?"

"Why, I was measuring it, don't you know?" said Bertha, "and it got all into a heap on the floor, and there was so much of it I didn't know what to do. So I began to roll it round and round myself, and the first thing I knew I was the cocoon-thing you see before you. I feel as if I ought to come out a butterfly, somehow."

"They are lovely colours!" said Peggy. "There's nothing so pretty as green and white. How do you choose your colours? We haven't chosen ours yet, but I suppose we shall soon."

"The Snowy chose them," said Bertha. "They were Sir Somebody-or-other's colours at the Siege of Acre. I wanted scarlet, because that was Launcelot's—"

"Fluffy! it was nothing of the kind!"

"Well, you know what I mean, Snowy; don't make a cannibal meal of me. Scarlet was Elaine's colour, and Launcelot wore it; that was what I meant."

"I thought—" said Peggy, timidly, "I thought she was the Lily Maid; I thought she wore white."

"Did, herself," said the Snowy, with her mouth full of tacks. "But she gave him a scarlet sleeve embroidered with pearls, and he wore it on his helmet, and that was what made Guinevere throw the diamonds into the river."

"Oh!" said Peggy, meekly. She had tried to read the "Idyls of the King," but could not make out much except the fighting parts.

"Never understood why they had sleeves so often," said Bertha, abstractedly bunching the green and white draperies. "Never could see how they got the sleeve on the helmet in any kind of shape. What sort of sleeves did they have then, anyhow? Why, they were those tight ones, weren't they, with a slashed cap at the top? Well, now, Snowy, that would look perfectly absurd on a helmet, you know it would."

The Snowy deigned no reply; or perhaps the tacks were in a perilous position at that moment. Bertha went on, thoughtfully:

"A balloon sleeve, now, would be more sensible; you could slip it over the helmet, and it would look like—like the shade of a piano lamp. But somehow, whenever I read about it, I see a small, tight, red sleeve, spread out like a red flannel bandage, as if the helmet had a sore throat—"

"Fluffy, you are talking absolute nonsense!" said Gertrude, regaining utterance. "And after all, they had gloves oftener than sleeves; not that that makes it much better. For my part, I always think of a glove with all the five fingers sticking up out of the middle of the crown, as if they had tried to be feathers and been nipped in the bud."

"Feathers don't bud!" said Bertha, handing up more slack.

"But the real thing," Gertrude went on, "the beautiful, graceful thing for the knight to wear, was the scarf. He could do anything he liked with that; tie it around his helmet, or across his breast,—that was the proper way of course,—or around his waist.

"A green scarf, that is what I would have! Very soft, so that it would go through a finger-ring, and yet wide enough to shake out into wonderful folds, you know, so that he could wrap himself up in it, and think of me, and—what's the matter, Peggy, why do you sigh?"

"Did I sigh?" said Peggy, looking confused. "It was nothing, Snowy. I was only thinking—thinking how stupid I was, and how Margaret would like all the things you talk about."

"Meaning sleeves?"

"No, oh, no! but about knights, and chivalry, and all that kind of thing. Margaret loves it so! She used to try to read Froissart to me, but it always put me to sleep. I suppose you like Froissart, Gertrude?"

She spoke so wistfully that Gertrude took the tacks out of her mouth (she should never have put them in; a junior should have known better!) that she might reply the better.

"Why, Peggy, yes, I do like Froissart, but it never troubles me when people don't care for my kind of books. You see, there are so many kinds, such an endless variety, and good in so many different ways. Now you, for example, would like the Jungle Books, and the 'Cruise of the *Cachalot*,' and all kinds of books of adventure."

"I don't know what is adventure if Froissart isn't," Bertha put in.

"Yes, but it's all too far away, too remote. I know how Peggy feels, because I have a cousin who is just that way. She used to think she should never read anything at all; then one day she got hold of Kipling, and the worlds opened, and the doors thereof. Just you

come to me for the Jungle Books some day, Innocent, and you'll see. Look here, I want lots and lots, and again lots more leaves. Where are they all? I don't see any more, but there must be any quantity. I brought in a whole copse, myself."

"We put them all into the old swimming-tank, don't you remember? Oh, no; you went in before we had finished this morning. Well, they are there. Stay where you are, Snowy, and Peggy and I will get a couple of loads."

The two girls ran down-stairs to the lower floor. Part of this was taken up, as we have already seen, by dressing-rooms, but it was only a small part. The larger space was occupied by the great swimming-tank, five feet deep, and twenty by thirty feet in area. The tank was not used now, but the water was still connected, and could be turned on by special permission. Now, accordingly, the water in the bottom was about two feet deep, and the whole surface was a blaze of autumn colours, great branches of maple, oak, and ash covering it completely.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said Bertha. "Like a little sunset sea all alone by itself, without any sun to set. The next question is, how are we to get at them?"

"Oh, that's easy enough!" said Peggy. "I can reach them easily from the edge, and I'll hand them over to you."

Suiting the action to the word, she climbed up on the broad marble slab which formed the edge of the great tank.

Then, bending down, she brought up a great branch of golden maple, fresh and dripping. She shook it, and a diamond shower fell back on the dark space left vacant; then another branch floated quietly over and filled the space again.

"You'll be wet through!" said Bertha. "I don't suppose you care?"

"No, indeed! I'd rather be wet than not, when I'm doing things."

"I'll remember that," said Bertha, slyly, "and come round with a watering-can next time you are reciting your rhetoric. Give me some red now; oh, that is a beauty! There! that's enough for one load; unless you see just one more little one that is superlatively beautiful."

"That is just what I do see! Hold on a minute! this is such a beauty, you must have it, if I—oh!"

Peggy had been leaning as far as she could over the broad tank, fishing for the gay branch, which floated provokingly just out of reach. At last she touched it—grasped it—drew it toward her; when all in a moment she slipped on the marble, now wet and glossy with the falling drops, clutched the air—slipped again—and fell headlong into the tank, with a mighty splash.

Bertha shrieked. There was an answering shriek from above, and Gertrude, followed by all the other girls, came flying down the stairs.

"What has happened? What—where is Peggy?"

"In the tank!" cried Bertha. "Oh! dear me, what shall we do? Peggy, are you much hurt?"

"No; I—think not!" spluttered Peggy. "I came down on my nose, that's all. Feels as if it was broken, but I don't know—no! It doesn't crack when I wiggle it. It's bleeding a good deal, though. Perhaps I'd better stay in till it stops."

Bertha tried to climb up to the perch which Peggy had so suddenly left vacant, but in vain; her legs were far too short. Gertrude, however, came with a flying leap, and scrambled cat-like up the side of the tank. Looking down, with the kindest heart in the world, and a world of sympathy to fill it, she still could not help bursting into a peal of laughter. Peggy, sitting in the tank, crowned with gold and scarlet leaves, and dripping like Undine, was certainly a funny spectacle.

"Oh, do forgive me for laughing, Peggy dear!" cried Gertrude. "You—you do look funny, but I'm dreadfully sorry."

"Well, I'm laughing myself," said Peggy, "I don't see why you shouldn't. But did you ever hear of a water-nymph with a nosebleed? If I could only get at my pocket—"

"Here, take mine," and Gertrude dropped her handkerchief, which Peggy caught adroitly.

"My dear," Gertrude went on, "it seems so strange to have some one besides me falling about and dropping herself. I used to be the one, always. They called me 'Dropsy' at home; and I fell in here last year, Peggy, and I know exactly how it feels. Here! take my hand and scramble out."

Peggy, still sitting in the water, which covered her to the waist, looked about her thoughtfully. "It seems a pity, now I *am* here, not to have some good of it," she said, philosophically.

"If it were only a foot deeper, or I weren't bothered with all these petticoats, I might have a good swim. However, I suppose I may as well get out—if I can. Take care, Snowy—oh! take care!"

Alas! for the Snowy Owl! After all, she was still Gertrude Merryweather. The marble was wet—she bent down to take Peggy's hand—here was another tremendous splash, and two Undines sat in the tank, gazing speechless on each other. This was too much for the composure of any one. Both Peggy and Gertrude sat helpless, shaking with laughter, and absolutely unable to move. Bertha, outside, fairly went into hysterics, and laughed and screamed in one breath; while the other girls raised such a clamour of mingled mirth and terror that Emily Cortlandt, who had just come in to take a look at the decorations, came running down-stairs, dreading she knew not what.

One look over the edge of the tank, and Miss Cortlandt was not so very much better than the rest of them; but she recovered herself sooner. Wiping her eyes, she proceeded at once to the business of rescuing the two involuntary divers. It proved impossible for them to climb up, the sides being too slippery, and the flying leap being out of the question in two feet of water. She brought a short ladder, and in another moment first one nymph and then the other came up from their fountain, and dripped little rivers on the floor.

"Is either of you hurt?" asked Miss Cortlandt.

"Not I!" said Gertrude, ruefully. "I fell on top of poor Peggy, and she makes a perfect cushion. How are you, Peggy? Did I half kill you?"

"Not a bit! I think perhaps I've sprained my wrist a little, but that was when I went in myself. No, I'm all right; truly I am, Miss Cortlandt. I'll just go and change my clothes, and then come back and finish."

Emily Cortlandt did not come of amphibious stock. "You will do nothing of the kind!" she said. "You *ought* to go to bed, Peggy, and Gertrude, too; but I suppose you would think that a terrible piece of injustice."

"Yes, Miss Cortlandt, we should!" replied both girls, in a breath.

"And I know that you have both been brought up more or less like whales; so I'll let you off with camphor pills and peppermint drops. Those you *must* have. Run along and change everything—everything, mind!—and I'll come around in five minutes and dose you. Run, now; make it a race, and I'll add hot lemonade to the stakes,—first prize and booby prize!"

"Yes, Miss Cortlandt," cried the two Undines; and off they set in a shower of spray, with the other girls at their heels.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ADVENTURE.

It all came from Peggy's forgetting her handkerchief. That was nothing remarkable. Rapidly though our heroine was developing, there was still plenty of the old Peggy left; and when she looked up at Miss Russell with a certain imploring gaze, the Principal was apt to say, without waiting for anything further: "Yes, Peggy, you may; but do try to remember it next time!"

But this time it was well that Peggy had not remembered it. She stumbled across the long dining-room quite in her own way, stubbing her toe against a sophomore's chair, and sending the sophomore's spoon clattering to the ground. Stooping, in confusion, to pick it up, with muttered apologies, she encountered the sophomore's head bent down for the same purpose, and some mutual star-gazing ensued. Finally she did manage to get out of the room, after cannoning against the door and taking most of the skin off her nose, and made her way up-stairs ruefully, rubbing the places that hurt most, and wondering where in her anatomy lay the "clumsy bone" that her father always talked about. "And it isn't there all the time!" said poor Peggy. "Sometimes I don't fall into anything for days, and then, all at once, it's like this!"

Shaking her head dolefully, she reached her own room, got the handkerchief, remembered with a great effort to shut the drawer, and came out into the corridor again—to come face to face with a man emerging from the opposite room.

The opposite room was Vanity Fair; and the man's hands were full of trinkets and knickknacks, and his pockets bulged in a suspicious way. He cast a wild glance over Peggy's shoulder at the open door of her room and the fire-escape beyond; evidently he had entered by that way, and counted on the dinner-hour's keeping every one below stairs till he got safe away. Now, however, baffled in this, he turned down the corridor with some degree of composure.

"Stop!" said Peggy. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"I'm the plumber, miss," said the man, still walking away.

"Put down those things!" cried Peggy. "Do you hear? or I'll call the police!"

Apparently the man did not hear, or else did not fancy the idea suggested to him, for he began to run down the long corridor as fast as he could go.

So it came to pass that the school, waiting peacefully for its pudding, heard a sound of hasty feet scurrying down the stairs. Then, all in a rush, came past the door the flying figure of a man, with Peggy Montfort in hot pursuit.

"Stop thief!" Peggy shouted it once, and then prudently saved her breath. The man fumbled for an instant at the front door, gave it up, darted into Miss Russell's study. Crash went a window; he was out, with Peggy at his heels, and away across the lawn.

"Stop thief!" the cry rang through the school; and, lo! in the twinkling of an eye there was no school there. The long dining-room was emptied as if by magic; the front door flew open, and out streamed the seventy maidens, all crying "Stop thief!" all running their very best to come up with the flying pair.

There were some good runners at Pentland School; but after the first few minutes of running together, jostling and pushing, two girls drew rapidly away from the rest, and soon left them far behind. Gertrude Merryweather and Grace Wolfe had long been friendly rivals in what they called the royal sport of running. Perhaps neither of them was sorry of this opportunity for a "good spurt." Certainly it was a pretty sight, the two tall, graceful creatures, lithe and long-limbed as young greyhounds, speeding over the ground, their arms held close at their sides, their eyes flashing, youth and strength seeming to radiate from them as they ran. Now one drew ahead a little, now the other; but for the most part they kept side by side, for both were running their best, not only for the joy and honour of the thing, but because it was necessary to arrive, to help Peggy and catch the thief.

The thief was evidently not a trained athlete, but he was doing his best. He had cut himself a good deal in smashing the window, and had thrown away part of his booty, hoping that his relentless pursuer might be content, and might stop to pick up the brooches and belt-buckles that lay at her feet; but Peggy never looked at them, and

held on straight after him, gaining, undoubtedly gaining. The man doubled back across the lawn, hoping to reach the gate and safety; but Peggy headed him off as quietly and coolly as if he were an unruly steer in the home stock-yard. Again he doubled, and again the girl was running in a diagonal to cut off his approach to the wished-for retreat. But now he caught sight of the two tall avengers bearing down upon him, and the school in full cry behind. He made a desperate spurt and reached the gate; it was half open, and as he rushed through he slammed it behind him with a hoarse shout of defiance. But much Peggy cared for gates! She was over in an instant, and at his heels again. And realising this, the rascal suddenly changed his tactics. He stopped short, and, turning on Peggy a villainous face, bade her with an oath, "Come on, and see what she would get for it!"

The words had not left his lips, when a ludicrous change came over the man's face. He uttered a wild yell, and fell headlong, almost at Peggy's feet. When Peggy saw this, she knew what to do; and when Grace and Gertrude came flying up a moment after, they found her sitting quietly on the rascal's head, and telling Colney Hatch to go for the police.

Colney had been watching the evolutions of a new and extremely interesting spider. The spider had made her web in the hedge beside the road; and Colney, as soon as morning recitations were over, had hastened thither, and sat down under the hedge to watch, undisturbed by thoughts of dinner or of any other known thing. So watching, it came to pass that she heard the sound of rushing feet so close that it actually did disturb her; and looked up to see an extremely ill-looking fellow in full flight, hotly pursued by Peggy Montfort. When he turned to bay, it was within a foot of the spot where Colney sat under the hedge; and without more ado Colney stretched out her long, lean hand, and, grabbing the fellow by the ankles, "tripped up his heels, and he fell on his nose."

Presently up came the school, panting and breathless; with them Miss Cortlandt, who had been saying to herself that if she ever let herself get out of practice in running again she would know the reason why. Finally, up came William the chore-man from one direction (for Miss Russell had gone straight to the kitchen and given the alarm there), and the next-door neighbour from the other;

whereupon Constable Peggy got up from her uneasy seat, and handed over her prize to the tender mercies of his own sex.

"Git up, ye varmint!" said William, stirring the prostrate figure with his foot. "Git up, and say what ye've got to say for yerself."

The man got up, bewildered, and shaking his head as if he expected it to come off.

"She 'most killed me!" he spluttered. "I ain't got no breath left in my body."

"Small loss if ye hain't!" retorted William. "What's he ben doin', gals?" William never *would* say "young ladies," which distressed Miss Russell; but he was *so* valuable, as she said.

"Stealing!" said Peggy, briefly. "I met him coming out of one of the rooms."

"I snum!" said William. "You're a nice kind o' harmonium, ben't ye? Tu'n out yer pockets!"

"She sot down on my head!" muttered the man. "Somethin' come up out o' the ground at me and knocked me down, and then she sot down on my head. I'm 'most killed, I tell ye!"

"Well, who cares if ye be?" replied William, with some irritation. "It's a pity she didn't finish the job, that's all I've got to say. Tu'n out yer pockets, will ye?"

The man obeyed unwillingly, still muttering; and out came a mass of lockets, pins, and chains, enough, in spite of those he had thrown away, to furnish half the girls in the school.

After searching to see the surrender was complete, William adjured the next-door neighbour, a stout and silent person named Simpson, who had been standing by, to "take t'other arm, and we'll walk him down to the lock-up jest as easy!" The thief begged and prayed, and, finding that useless, took to cursing and swearing; whereupon William and Mr. Simpson marched him off in short order, and all three disappeared around the turn leading to the High Street.

The school was left standing in the road, still panting with haste and excitement. They had been silent during William's colloquy with the man, but now the strings of their tongues were loosened, and the flood of speech broke loose.

"My dear!"

"My *dear!* I never was so excited in my life, were you?"

"Where did he come from?"

"Who saw him first?"

"Why, Peggy Montfort, of course! Didn't you see her?"

"No; I just ran, because every one else was—"

"Perfectly distracted! I never heard of such a thing."

"He was in the closet—"

"No; he was on the stairs—"

"Just getting out of the window—"

"With just her bare hands, I tell you. Just took a—"

"Pair of earrings, nothing else in the world."

"But who was he—where did he come from? What does Peggy say about it?"

"Girls! *girls!*" cried Miss Cortlandt. "Will you please be silent for a moment? Peggy has not had a chance to say a word yet, and I for one want to hear her story. Have you got your breath yet, Peggy? because we all want to hear, very much indeed."

"There isn't much to tell," said Peggy, blushing. "I went up to get my handkerchief,—I had forgotten it,—and as I was coming out of my room, this fellow was just coming out of the other room."

"What other room? Whose was it?" cried a dozen voices.

"Why, Van—I mean No. 17, Miss Vincent and Miss Varnham's room."

"Oh! oh!" a shrill scream was heard; and Viola Vincent pushed her way through the crowd of girls, and threw herself upon Peggy.

"My Veezy-vee!" she cried. "It was my room! V., do you hear? It was our room that horrid wretch was robbing. My dear, if we had been there we should have been murdered in our beds, I know we should. Peggy Montfort has saved our lives. Isn't it perfectly awful?"

"That she should have saved your lives?" asked the Snowy Owl, laughing. "Come to your senses, Vanity, and don't strangle Peggy. She's black in the face, and I shall have to set about saving her life if you don't let her go."

Released from Viola's embrace, Peggy gasped, and shook herself like a Newfoundland puppy.

"Don't be ridiculous, Vanity!" she said, looking at once pleased and shamefaced. "It wasn't anything, of course; it was just what any one else would have done. But do look out for your things! They are scattered all about the lawn; he threw away a lot of them when he first came out, and we shall be stepping on them if we don't take care. Oh! oh, please don't say anything more about it. It was just the merest chance I happened to go up." This was to Vivia Varnham, who, trying to overcome her ungraciousness, was expressing her gratitude for what Peggy had done. It was evidently an effort and was not pleasant for either girl.

The girls scattered over the lawn, picking up here a hairpin, there a brooch or buckle. It really seemed as if Vanity Fair was stocked like a jeweller's shop. Gertrude Merryweather, standing by Peggy, uttered an exclamation. "My dear! Peggy! Why, you are all over blood! You are bleeding now. What—where—oh! oh, Fluffy, *look* here!" Bertha came running, as Gertrude lifted Peggy's arm, which was indeed dripping blood. Both girls exclaimed in horror, and Bertha turned quite white; but Peggy looked at it coolly.

"Oh!" she said. "That must be where I went through the window after him."

"The window?"

"Yes, didn't you hear the crash? He smashed the window in Miss Russell's study and got out, and I followed him, of course. It isn't anything. Why, I didn't feel it till you spoke."

"That is excitement!" said the Snowy Owl. "You must come in and be bandaged this minute, Peggy! Come right along to the Nest; I have bandages and lint all ready."

The Snowy Owl was all on fire with ardour and sympathy. Peggy looked at her in surprise, but the Fluffy Owl laughed. "You have struck the Snowy's hobby," she said. "She is going to study medicine, you know. Go along; she will be happy all the rest of the day, bandaging and cosseting you."

"But it doesn't hurt!" said Peggy, still wondering.

"Never mind!" said the Snowy Owl. "It ought to hurt, Peggy Montfort, and it will hurt in a little while. Come along and be bandaged!" and, meekly wondering, Peggy went.

CHAPTER XIII.

PEGGY VICTRIX!

"Well, it certainly was a great success!" said the Scapegoat. It was the day after the reception, and she had drifted into the Owls' Nest toward twilight, and now stood by the mantelpiece, swaying backward and forward in the light, wind-blown way she had.

"A great success!" she repeated, thoughtfully. "Why, it was actually pleasant! How did you manage it?"

"We didn't manage it," said honest Bertha. "It just came so. Everybody was ready to have a good time, and had it; that was all."

"More than that!" said Grace, absent-mindedly. "There has to be a knack, or something, and you have it. I haven't. I couldn't do it, even if I wanted to, and I don't think I do."

"Do what?" said the Snowy.

"Be an Owl!" said Grace. Suddenly she left her hold of the shelf, and turned upon them almost fiercely.

"Why should I?" she exclaimed. "Tell me that, will you? It is all natural to you. Your blood flows quietly, and you like quiet, orderly ways, and never want to throw things about, or smash a window. I tell you I have to, sometimes. Look here!"

She caught up a vase from the shelf, and seemed on the point of flinging it through the closed window, but Gertrude laid her hand on her arm firmly. "You may have a right to throw your own things, my dear," she said, good-naturedly. "You have no possible right to throw mine, and 'with all respect, I do object!'"

Grace gave a short laugh, and set the vase down again; but she still looked frowningly at the two girls, and presently she went on.

"It's all very well for you, I tell you. You have a home, and a—my mother died when I was five years old. My father—"

"Grace, dear," said Gertrude; "come and sit down here by me, and tell me about your mother. I have seen her picture; she must have been lovely."

But Grace shook her head fiercely.

"My father is an actor, and I want to be one, too, but he promised my mother before she died—she didn't want me to be one. What do I care about all this stuff we are learning here? I tell you I want to take a tambourine and go on the road with a hand-organ man. That would be life! I would, too, if I only had the luck to have hair and eyes like yours, Fluffy."

"You could wear a wig, of course," said Bertha, soberly. "The eyes would be a difficulty, though, I'm afraid."

"Well, I am here now! and I'm supposed to stay another year, and then go to college. Four—five years more of bondage, and tasks, and lectures on good behaviour! Am I likely to stand it, I ask you?"

"I hope so!" said Gertrude, steadily. "It would be a thousand pities if you didn't, Grace, and you know it as well as I do."

"And if I do, it must be in my own way!" cried the wild girl, swinging round again on her heel. "And if I can make things more endurable here—if I can get rid of—it must be in my own way, I tell you. Snowy, you are like your name, I suppose. You are white and gold and calm,—I don't know what you are, except that we are not of the same flesh. I tell you, I turn to fire inside! I must break out, I must go off when the fit comes on me. I do no harm! It doesn't hurt anybody for me to go down the wall and cool myself with a run in the fields. Why can't I be let alone? I am not a child! I tell you it is the way I am made!"

The Snowy Owl rose, and, going to the fireplace, laid her arm around Grace's shoulder.

"You are making yourself!" she said. "It's your own life, Wolf; are you making it worse or better?"

"I'm not doing either. I am taking it as it comes, as it was meant to come."

Gertrude shook her head quietly.

"That can't be!" she said. "That is impossible, Wolf. We have to be growing one way or the other; we can't stay as we are, for a year or a day. And there's another thing: you don't seem to think about the others, about the effect on the school. If you are to break the laws, why should not every one do the same?"

"Because they are different!" said Grace, sullenly.

"You don't know that! They may have the same temptations, and be stronger than you to resist them. You ought to be a strong girl, Grace, and, instead of that, you are weak—as weak as water."

"Weak? I!" cried Grace, her eyes blazing. "If any one else had said that to me, Gertrude Merryweather, I would—"

"But no one else would say it to you!" said Gertrude. "Because no one else—except Miss Russell—cares as much as I do—Fluffy and I. We love you too much, Grace, to flatter you and follow you, as most of them do. I tell you, and you may take it as simple truth, for it is nothing else, that which you think strength is simply weakness,—lamentable weakness. And as for your influence on the other girls—just listen a moment!"

Taking up a little book from the table, she opened it—indeed it seemed to open of its own accord at the place—and read:

"'Little thinks, in the field, yon red-cloaked clown
Of thee from the hill-top looking down;
The heifer that lows in the upland farm,
Far-heard, lows not thine ear to charm;
The sexton, tolling his bell at noon,
Deems not that great Napoleon
Stops his horse, and lists with delight,
Whilst his files sweep round yon Alpine height;
Nor knowest thou what argument
Thy life to thy neighbour's creed hath lent.
All are needed by each one;
Nothing is fair or good alone.'"

There was silence when she finished reading. Then—"What is that?" asked Grace, stretching out her hand. "Give it to me!"

"Emerson. Take him home with you, and let him talk to you; he speaks well."

Grace took the book, looked it over, and dropped it into her pocket. For a moment she leaned her head against Gertrude's arm, and a sigh broke from her involuntarily. Then, all in a moment, a change came. Her face lightened in an indescribable way, and her eyebrows lifted with a look that both girls knew well.

"And have you heard the news?" she said. "There is a rumour that my Puggy leaves me at the end of the term. How to exist, I ask you, without her? Othello's occupation would be gone indeed."

"No! is it true? Why is she going? What does it mean?"

Grace shrugged her shoulders with an elfish gesture.

"How should I know? It appears she sees ghosts. A ghost must be hard up, one would think, to visit my Puggy; there ought to be an asylum for impoverished spectres. Would you subscribe for it, Owls? Good-bye! I must go. You mean well, and I don't bear malice. Oh! by the by,—" she came back for an instant, and stood balancing herself on one foot and looking round the edge of the door, and she certainly looked hardly human,—"I forgot the thing I came for. Stand by the Innocent this evening, will you, if she should get into trouble? I am sent for to the study, and shall be in for a good hour's lecture, and then bed."

"What do you mean, Goat? What is it?" asked both girls, anxiously. But the Goat was gone.

Peggy was enjoying herself extremely. She had learned all her lessons, for a wonder, and now she had curled herself up in a corner with the "Jungle Book," and the rest of the world was forgotten. There was nobody, there never had been anybody, but Mowgli and the Wolves. She had hunted with them, she had slain Shere-Khan, she had talked with Baloo and Bagheera. Her outdoor nature had responded in every fibre to the call of the Master of Magic, and he filled her with joy and wonder. As the Snowy had said, the worlds were opening, and the doors thereof.

Things being thus with her, she hardly heard her own door open softly. Before she had torn her eyes from the enchanted page, the room was filled with silent, flitting figures—as it had been often filled before. The girls nodded to her with silent laughter and friendly gestures. In another moment they would have been at the window; but Peggy was not dreaming now. In an instant she had sprung from her corner among the cushions, and stood before the window, with arms outspread. "No!" she said.

The girls recoiled, paused, in amazement. There were six of them: the two V's, Blanche Haight, and three other sophomores. Peggy saw

with a throb of joy that Grace Wolfe was not among them. That would have made it harder.

"What does this mean?" asked Vivia Varnham, with her cold smile. "You have never made any trouble before, Peggy; isn't it rather late in the day?"

"Oh, she's only in fun!" cried Viola Vincent. "Aren't you, Veezy-vee? Why, she's acting, girls, and she does it elegantly. It's perf'ly fine, Veezy-vee. I didn't know you had it in you."

"No, I am not acting," said Peggy, quietly. "I am sorry, girls, but you can't go out. You never can go out again, so long as I am here."

"Upon my word!" cried Blanche Haight, who had not spoken yet. "This seems to be a pretty state of things. Perhaps you are not aware, Miss Montfort, that this exit was used, long before you came to adorn the school with your presence. We acknowledge no right of yours to forbid us the use of it. Stand out of the way, please."

For a reply, Peggy backed against the window; her face assumed an expression with which her family was acquainted.

"When Peggy looks dour," Jean used to say, "look out for rising winds and a falling barometer!"

Then Viola came forward, and began to plead, in her pretty, wheedling way.

"Let us go, just this once; that's a dear, good Veezy. I know what has happened; Miss Russell has found out, hasn't she?"

Peggy nodded.

"And she has spoken to you, and of course I know just how you feel. But you see, Peggy, we have an appointment this time, truly we have, with some college girls, and you wouldn't make us break it, would you, Veezy? Of course you don't want us to go, and we won't again,—at least most probably we won't, if it is going to get you into trouble. But we really *have* to go this time, Peggy, dear, so do be nice and sweet, and let us pass."

"No," said Peggy. "I'm sorry, Viola, but it's no use. Nothing you can say will make any difference."

"Possibly not!" said Blanche Haight; she pushed Viola aside without ceremony, and came close to Peggy.

"Possibly nothing we can say will make a difference, Miss Montfort, but something we can *do* may make a good deal. I ask you, fair and square, will you come away from that window? We are six to one, and I give you the chance of settling this in a quiet and friendly way. Will you come away from that window?"

"No," said Peggy, "I will not. Is that square enough?"

"Then, girls," said Blanche, turning to her followers, "we must help ourselves. We shall see whether one freshman is going to block the way of the Gang! You take one arm, Viola, and I'll take the other."

"Oh, don't hurt her!" cried Viola. "Don't hurt her, Blanche. I'm awfully fond of Peggy. I know she only means to do what she thinks she ought to. Peggy, do give up! You are all alone, and there are six of us. Do give up, Peggy; for my sake, Peggy! I—I'll give you my gold bangle, the one with the locket, if you'll only give up, Peggy!"

Peggy smiled, and said nothing. She could not be angry with the little butterfly, but there was no use in wasting breath; she might need all she had.

Blanche Haight seized one arm, Vivia Varnham the other, and tried to drag her away from the window by main force. With her favourite Newfoundland-dog motion, Peggy shook them off, planted a quick blow here, another there, and her assailants staggered back for a moment. In another instant, however, they returned to the attack, and this time the other sophomores joined, and all five threw themselves on Peggy. Once more she shook them off, but they closed in again, and a struggle began, all the more fierce that no word was spoken, no cry uttered. No cry, that is, by the combatants. When the five set upon Peggy, Viola ran in and made an effort to pull them off, with piteous entreaties. But no one paid the smallest heed to her, and the poor little butterfly, frightened and distressed, burst into tears, and ran away.

At the same moment, any one who had been listening in quiet might have heard a singular sound that seemed to come from above, from outside—no one could tell from where; the cry of an owl, followed by a long, low howl. Three times this was repeated; and many a junior, studying under her lamp, looked up and said, "What

is up now, I wonder?" for the sound recalled freshman days, before the Lone Wolf and the two Owls had come to the parting of the ways.

Three minutes later, two figures, speeding silently along Corridor A, were met at a turn by a third, which flung itself sobbing upon them.

"Oh, Snowy, oh, Fluffy, they are killing Peggy Montfort! I was coming to call you—oh, be quick! be quick!"

Without stopping, somehow the Snowy Owl managed to open a door and thrust Viola in. It was to be noticed that neither girl looked at her. They ran on, swift and silent.

Indeed, it was time! Peggy's lip was bleeding, where Vivia Varnham's head had struck against it as she fell, tripped by a pretty trick that was learned on the Western farm. Her hair was dragged down and hung in her eyes, her dress was torn in a dozen places. With one of her sudden movements she had thrown off her assailants, and stood for an instant alone, looking the very Spirit of Battle, with blazing eyes and scarlet cheeks. Blanche Haight rushed at her again, and this time Peggy seized her around the waist in a deadly grip. The others closed in once more, furious, determined this time to finish with the insolent freshman. It was like to go hard with Peggy Montfort this time.

What happened? A flash, the glance of an eye, and all was changed. The assailants fell back, staggering across the room, gasping and staring; and the Snowy and the Fluffy Owl were standing shoulder to shoulder with Peggy, one on either side, with stern and angry looks.

For a moment there was dead silence, save for the hard breathing as Blanche Haight tried to wriggle out of the iron grasp that held her—in vain! Then Gertrude Merryweather spoke.

"Miss Varnham, Miss Floyd, Miss Johnson, Miss White, Miss—who is this?—Miss Haight. Found out of bounds and out of hours, making a disturbance in the rooms. To be reported to the Principal. Go to your rooms, if you please!"

Was this the Snowy Owl, gentle and friendly, beloved of all? No! it was the Junior President and the Monitor of Corridor A. She might have been an avenging angel as she stood there, tall and white and severe.

Her face softened as she bent over Peggy. "You can let her go now!" she said. "We are here, Peggy, Bertha and I. It is all right! Let her go, child!"

Slowly and reluctantly Peggy loosed her hold, and Blanche, half-fainting, dropped upon the bed. She looked with feeble venom at the two rescuers.

"Spying, eh?" she whispered. "Very dignified, I'm sure, for a president. That little sneak Viola Vincent was here too, mind! Put her down in your precious report."

"I don't see Miss Vincent here!" said Gertrude, coldly. "Go to your rooms, if you please! I think I understand the case thoroughly, Blanche, thank you. Will you go, or shall we help you?"

But Blanche preferred to go unaided. Silent as they had come, they slunk away, flitting like shadows along the corridor. And when they were gone, the two Owls sat down on the bed and took Peggy between them, and rocked, and petted, and soothed her; for lo! the Goddess of Battle was crying like a three years' child.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON SPY HILL.

Things were quietly managed at Pentland School; there was never any outcry, any open flurry of excitement and gossip. Many of the scholars never knew why five girls left school in the middle of the term. The seniors who did know shrugged their shoulders, and said it was a pity to have such things take the girls' minds off their parts—looking at everything from the point of view of Senior Dramatics. The juniors looked pretty sober for a week, even the sophomore spirits were dashed for the time. But nothing was said openly, and after awhile the scared whisperings died away, and work and play went on as usual. Poor little Viola Vincent mourned deeply the loss of her mate. She herself had escaped with a severe reprimand, having gone to Miss Russell to plead Vivia's cause, and confessing frankly her own share in the escapade. Vivia was anything but an agreeable girl; but she and Viola had grown up together, next-door neighbours and companions from their cradles, and Viola was lost without her. She threw herself upon Peggy for consolation, and Peggy found herself in the curious position of protecting and comforting a junior, and a girl two years older than herself. Viola would come in, and, curling herself up in the corner of Peggy's divan, declare that she had come for a good cry. A few sniffs would follow, and then perhaps actual tears, but more likely a river of speech.

"It's no use, Peggy! I cannot live! I simply can *not* live on in this way. I know V. was horrid to you—yes, she was! Oh, I am not blind, you know, if I am a goose! She was horrid to most of the girls, I know she was, but she was good to me, generally, and it didn't matter much if she wasn't. I was used to her little ways, and I didn't mind. And I have always had her, you see, all my life, and I don't—see—how I *can* get along without her. I wanted to be expelled, too! Yes, I did! that was why I told Miss Russell about my being there and all; I thought she would be sure to send me away, too. I think it was very unjust of her not to, I'm sure."

"Viola, don't talk so! You had nothing to do with the—the attack, or any violence. You would have gone away quietly when I said you could not use the window; you know you would."

"How do you know I would have? I might have torn you limb from limb, Peggy, for all you can say. What are you laughing at?"

For this statement, coming from a small person with a grasp about as powerful as that of a week-old kitten, was too much for the stalwart Peggy's composure.

"You don't know what I am when I am roused!" Viola went on. "I'm awful, simply awful!" And she opened her blue eyes wide, and looked like a tragic baby.

"But—my! Peggy, how you did look that night! I wonder this whole room didn't turn blue with fright. I was frightened almost to death; I wonder I'm alive to-day. Well, wasn't it too perf'ly awful for anything, the whole thing?"

"It was pretty bad!" Peggy assented. "But it's all over now, Viola; I would try not to dwell on it too much, if I were you. Of course I know how you must miss Vivia, and I'm dreadfully sorry about it all. But just think how dear the Owls have been to both of us."

"Haven't they?" cried Viola, drying her tears, her eyes brightening. "Aren't they too perfectly lovely for anything, the Owls? I think the Snowy is just the sweetest thing that ever lived in this world, don't you?"

"I think she's one of them," said honest Peggy. "But I'm just as fond of Bertha. She was my first friend here, my very first."

"Oh, how funny you were that first day, Peggy!" cried Viola, laughing now, her sorrows forgotten for the time. "You were too killing! I thought I should have died, when you went tumbling all over yourself. You *were* killing, weren't you, now?"

"You seem to have survived!" said Peggy, good-naturedly. It was not pleasant to be laughed at, but no one ever minded Viola.

"Where are you going?" demanded Viola, as Peggy got out her "Tam" and pinned it on with a resolute air. "Peggy, you are not going out, just when I have come to see you? I was so lonely, and I wanted some one to talk to; and now the minute I come, you get up and go away. I must say I don't think you are very polite." And Viola pouted and looked like a child of six instead of a girl of sixteen.

"Viola!" said Peggy. "You have been here an hour and a half, do you know it? and I must have a walk; I haven't been outside the door this afternoon. Put on your Tam and come along with me! You'd feel ever so much better if you would take more exercise."

"Oh, no, I shouldn't! and I cannot see what you want to be walk, walking, all the everlasting time for, Peggy Montfort. What's the use of it?"

"The use?" cried Peggy, with sparkling eyes. "Why, there's all the use in the world. In the first place, it makes you strong and healthy, and keeps you well."

"Oh! but gym does that! We have to do gym, and I don't mind that; in fact it's rather fun, only it spoils your figure dreadfully."

"But gym isn't enough, if you don't take any other exercise," said Peggy. "And besides, V., just think of the *joy* of walking and running. Why, you see all the things growing, and breathe the air, and—and—hear the birds, and the water, and—well, I shouldn't want to live if I couldn't walk, that's all. Come along, and you'll see!"

"Oh, I can't, I'm too tired."

"You are tired, because you have been sitting in the house all day. And you are pale, and—"

"No! am I?" cried Viola, running to the glass. "I'm so glad! I just love to be pale, it's so interesting. It makes my eyes look larger, too, doesn't it, Peggy? They do look very large to-day, don't they, Peggy?"

Peggy sighed. "You do discourage me, Viola!" she said. "Well, good-bye. I must go. The others are waiting for me."

"What others? Who else is going? What are you going to do?"

"Why, I told you! We are going to walk."

"Yes, but what *for?* Are you going to the shops, or going to see somebody? I can't see *any* sense in just stupid walking, without any object. And you didn't tell me who was going."

"You didn't give me a chance. Well, Rose Barclay is going, and two other freshmen whom I don't think you know, Clara Fair and Ethel Bird—and Lobelia Parkins."

"Peggy Montfort! why *do* you go with that little animal? I've told you before that I could not, for the honour of the corridor, have you

seen with a creature that looks like that. Let her go with Colney Hatch if she wants company; they'd be two of a kind."

"Colney Hatch is one of the brightest girls in school, Miss Cortlandt says so!"

"Very likely; but that doesn't make her a fit associate for you, my Veezy-vee. You never seem to understand about different sets. I want you to belong to the smart set, and you won't."

"Do the Owls belong to it?" demanded Peggy, turning red.

"Peggy, how dense you are! The Owls don't belong to any set because they won't. Of course they could belong to any set they pleased."

"Does Grace Wolfe belong to it?"

"The Goat? Why, she used to; but she's so awfully queer, you know; the Goat has grown too awfully queer for anything. She stays by herself mostly, ever since she cut loose from the Gang. And Vivia is gone," she wailed, "and Blanche Haight,—Blanchey was not very nice, but her gowns fitted like a seraph's, and the style to her hats was too perfectly killing for anything, you know it was. And now there isn't any one, not a single soul, that I care to talk to about clothes. I've had my pink waist done over, and it's simply dandy—the sweetest thing you ever saw in your life; and nobody cares. I am so unhappy!"

"I haven't seen that new hat you told me about!" said Peggy, with a happy stroke of diplomacy. If any one had told Margaret Montfort that her Peggy would ever develop a talent for diplomacy she would have opened her eyes wide indeed; but one learns many things at boarding-school.

Viola brightened at once.

"No! didn't I?" she cried, her whole manner changing. "Would you like to see it, Peggy? It is really too cute for anything, it just *is!* What makes you shut up your mouth that way?"

"Oh, nothing! Well, yes, it is something. You won't mind if I tell you? Well, I used to say 'cute,' and Margaret showed me what bad English it was, and how silly it sounded. So I made up my mind to stop it, and every time I wanted to say it I screwed up my mouth and counted ten. Just the same with 'elegant.' I've broken myself of that, too, but it was hard work."

"Elegant! simply elegant!" repeated Viola, thoughtfully. "The Goat won't let you say that, either, or the Owls. What's the use of being so fussy? besides, elegant is a real word, they can't say it isn't, so now!"

"Oh! of course it is, and it has its real use. You can speak of an elegant dress, or an elegant carriage, and then it's all right; but I used to say I had had an elegant time, don't you know? and talk about elegant cake, and all that kind of thing. And when once you have learned better, it does sound awfully silly."

"Well, they make just as much fuss about 'awful,' and there you are saying that, and you say it all the time."

"I know!" said poor Peggy, hanging her head. "I know I do, though I try awfully hard not to. There! that's the way it is. It does seem as if I couldn't get over that, but I'm going on trying. And if you don't get your hat this minute, V., I shall go without you. I can't wait any longer. It's awfully—it's *very* late."

"Why, I'm coming, as fast as I can; how impatient you are, Peggy! You aren't half as fond of me as I am of you, or you would not be in such a hurry to get away to that little fright. There, here it is! Now isn't that dandy, simply dandy? I do think it is too perf'ly sweet for anything!"

It was a pretty hat, and Viola certainly looked charming in it. She was so pleased with her appearance that she could not resist the temptation of "showing off" to the other girls; so she followed Peggy down to the lawn, where a little group was already gathered. At sight of a junior, even so unformidable a junior as Viola Vincent, poor little Lobelia Parkins shrank into a small knotted heap of misery. Through Peggy's intercession, Rose Barclay and the two other freshmen had been kind to her, and had agreed to let her share their walks, which they took now semi-weekly under Peggy's leadership. None of them cared for her, or felt much interest in her, but they did care for Peggy Montfort, partly because she was the strongest girl in the class, partly because of the fame that had accrued to her since her exploit in resisting and breaking up the famous Gang; but mostly, perhaps, because everybody felt and said that Peggy Montfort was "all right," which in schoolgirl parlance meant that she was a cheerful, kindly, and right-minded girl. So, though her chief friends were still among the juniors, she was well known and well liked in her own class.

Peggy took Lobelia's hand, and drew it resolutely through her arm.

"We'll lead the way!" she cried. "Rose and Viola, you two come next, and Clara and Ethel bring up the rear. How's that?"

All agreed to the arrangement; and the six started off in high spirits.

"Where are we going to-day?" asked Rose Barclay. "Don't kill us, Peggy! I haven't got over being stiff yet, from the last tramp. It was jolly, though."

"It was splendid!" chimed in Ethel Bird. "Why, I had no idea what pretty places there were about here. Shall we go to the woods again?"

"I thought of going up Spy Hill!" said Peggy. "It isn't very high, and there's a lovely view from the top."

"Oh, I never can get as far as that!" cried Viola, aghast. "You said a little walk, Peggy, and that is miles and miles, I know it is. Oh, I think I'll go back."

"Oh, don't!" cried Rose, in a tone of heartfelt interest that won Viola's susceptible heart. "It isn't very far, truly it isn't; and I want to ask you where you got that hat. It is too perfectly lovely for anything! I've got to have a new hat, and I do wish—"

"My dear!" cried Viola, dimpling all over with pleasure, "I'll tell you all about it. You see—"

There was no more trouble with Viola. Peggy chuckled, and started off at a round pace, the others following.

The two Owls, standing at their window with arms intertwined, just thinking of taking a little flutter in the cool of the afternoon, looked after them with friendly eyes.

"What's the matter with Peggy Montfort?" said the Fluffy to the Snowy.

"*She's* all right!" said the Snowy to the Fluffy. And then they looked at each other sternly, and shook their heads in grave rebuke. "My dear," they said both together, "we are surprised!"

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT WAS THE MATTER WITH LOBELIA PARKINS?

"Lobelia, I insist upon knowing!"

"Oh, Peggy, please don't ask me!"

"But I will ask you. I do ask you. What is it that you are afraid of? I shall find out sooner or later, so you might as well give up at once and tell me."

Lobelia looked around her uneasily. She and Peggy were sitting in a cosy little hollow under the lee of a great brown rock, waiting for the others to come up.

"Come!" said Peggy. "There's nobody behind that rock. What is the matter with you, Lobelia Parkins, and why don't you sleep? Out with it!"

Lobelia sighed, and twisted her buttons. "I—I never am a very good sleeper," she said at last. "I—I'm nervous, Peggy. And then—"

"And then, what?"

"Oh, dear me! I can't tell you. You won't believe me if I tell you. Things come into my room and frighten me."

"Things? What do you mean, Lobelia?"

"I don't know what I mean!" cried the poor girl, looking about her again, as if in dread of some unseen terror. "I don't know who it is, or what it is. Something—or somebody—comes through my room at night and goes out of the window."

"Ah!" said Peggy. "Well, go on. How long has this been going on?"

"Oh, ever so long! At first—Peggy, you will feel badly if I tell you this."

"Well, then, I've got to feel badly," said Peggy, stoutly. "Though I can't see what I have to do with it—so far. I'll have plenty to do with it from now on!" she added, significantly. "Go on, Lobelia."

"Well, you know that time you were so good to me, Peggy; when Blanche Haight and those others were teasing me, and you came in like a lioness and drove them off. I never shall forget it as long as I live, Peggy, never!"

"Nonsense!" said Peggy. "It wasn't anything at all. Don't be absurd, Lobelia. Well, what since then?"

"It began after that. She—I know that it used to be Blanche Haight then—she used to come in after I was in bed, and frighten me. She had a sheet on, and at first I thought it was a ghost, and I fainted the first time, I think; and then she used—she used to make faces and pinch me, and one time I saw her ring, and so I knew who it was."

"The cowardly brute!" muttered Peggy. "It's well for her that she's out of this school. Now, Lobelia Parkins, why, in the name of all that is feeble-minded and ridiculous, didn't you tell me this before?"

"Oh, I couldn't!" said Lobelia. "I had given you enough trouble, Peggy. And besides—"

"Well! besides what?"

"I was afraid! I was afraid she would kill me if I told."

"My goodness gracious *me!*" cried Peggy, bouncing on her mossy seat, till Lobelia shrank away scared and trembling. "Do you think we live in the Middle Ages, Lobelia Parkins? This is what comes of reading history; it puts all those old-fangled notions into your head, till you have no sense left. I know! You had all that stuff about Florence and Rome, and poisoning, and all that. I had it too; awful stuff, and probably two-thirds lies. History is the father of lies, you know; somebody says so somewhere."

"I—I thought it was Herodotus who was called that," Lobelia ventured, timidly.

"Perhaps it was; it's all the same."

"No, I am wrong. Herodotus was called the father of history, and then some other people said he was the father of lies; but now it has all come true, so he isn't any more!"

Lobelia, who was stupid and painstaking, proffered this lucid explanation painfully, and then gasped; it seemed a liberty for her to explain anything to anybody.

"Who cares?" said Peggy. "He's dead, anyhow. Oh, how it used to provoke my dearest Margaret when I said that. I only mean, I never see how it can matter so much as people think. But you are not dead, Lobelia; and the idea of your being killed, here in this school, in the nineteenth century! Why, it is absurd, don't you see? It is funny! You must laugh about it, my dear!"

Lobelia, with an effort, produced a watery smile; seeing which, Peggy's mood changed, and she laid her hand instantly on the skinny, shrinking arm.

"My dear, don't think I was laughing at *you*," she cried, warmly. "No; I am going to be furious in a minute, when I get round to that part again. Well, but Lobelia, Blanche Haight is gone now, and a good riddance, and yet you say you are still afraid. What are you afraid of?"

"I—I don't know who it is now!" said Lobelia. "But some one comes through, just the same."

"How do you mean, just the same? some one pinches you?"

"No! oh, no! this person never speaks to me or looks at me. It—she—only wants to go through the window. It has something light gray over its head and shoulders. It goes down the fire-escape and stays about half an hour, and then comes back. I—I don't mind it so very much, now. I dare say it's all right, only—I can't sleep very well, you know."

"I see!" said Peggy. "Well, I think we can settle that matter, Lobelia. Hush! here come the others. We won't say anything more about it now. Well, girls, how did it go? Isn't it a lovely little scramble?"

Rose Barclay and Viola appeared, with the other two just behind. Viola was panting, and her delicate colour was deepened by exertion till she was almost as rosy as her companion.

"My dear!" she cried. "You are responsible for my life! I am killed; simply killed, Peggy Montfort. I shall never recover from this awful fatigue, I know I shall not."

"Nonsense!" said Peggy, briefly. "Here! sit down here, V., and get your breath; you'll be all right in a minute. It wasn't bad, was it, Rose?"

"It was a bit stiff in one place!" Rose admitted. "I rather think we took the wrong turn, Peggy. Did you say left, after the big pine?"

"No, right; you didn't come up that bank? Poor little V.! no wonder she thinks she is killed. Let me take your hat off, V., and get you some water or something."

But Viola refused to part with her hat. She sat panting and crimson, and seemed really exhausted. Peggy eyed her with remorse.

"I couldn't know that you would take the wrong turn, could I?" she said. "I'm awfully sorry!"

"Oh, but it was fine!" said Ethel Bird. "How do you find out all these places, Peggy? This is just lovely, isn't it?"

"By looking," said Peggy. "I like to poke about, and I came on this the other day. See, here's a little baby spring, trickling right out of the rock here. Isn't it pretty? and the water is clear and cold as ice. Shall I make you a leaf-cup, Viola? The best way, though, is to put your mouth down and drink, this way."

"Oh, I never would do that!" cried Clara Fair. "Why, a snake might go right down your throat, Peggy Montfort; truly it might. There was a man—"

"Oh, don't talk about a man!" cried Rose Barclay. "How could you, Clara? You remind me of my German lesson."

"I never said a word about your German lesson," said Clara, who was literal and matter-of-fact.

"No, but you reminded me," said Rose, who was imaginative and poetic. "All the morning I was saying to myself:

"'Der dickere Mann,
Des dickeren Mannes,
Dem dickeren Manne,
Den dickeren Mann.'"

"You seem to have learned it, anyhow," said Peggy, laughing.

"Oh, but that isn't all!" said Rose. "There is more horror. It goes on, you know:

"'Die dickeren Männer,
Der dickeren Männer,
Den dickeren Männern,
Die dickeren Männer.'"

"I think foreign languages are the silliest things in the world!" declared Peggy. "Well, I do! Such perfect foolishness as they talk! I have no patience with them."

"Well, but Peggy, they aren't foreign when they are at home!" protested Ethel.

"Well, then, I wish they would stay at home. I don't know whether German is so bad, though that sounds awful, all that you said just now, Rose; but I have French; and I have to try to mince and simper, and twist my mouth up into all kinds of shapes, just saying things that are too silly to *be* said. I wish there was a law that no one in this country should ever speak anything but English. It would be ever so much more sensible."

"So it would!" assented Rose. "I say! what a pity we didn't think to bring something to eat! I'm awfully hungry, walking all this way."

"All this way, Rose!" said Peggy. "Why, how far do you think it is?"

"Oh, four or five miles, I'm sure!"

"Well, it isn't two. Look here, girls, what is the reason none of you seem to know how to walk?"

"What do you mean? We have walked, haven't we? Here we are."

"Oh, you call this a walk! that's just it, I tell you. You walk a mile, or two at the very most, and you think you have done something wonderful; and poor Viola is all tired out, and says she will never come again. Well, but this isn't what *I* call walking, you know. Why, I went with the Owls the other day, and we walked fifteen miles if we did a step, and it was perfectly glorious. *That's* what *I* call walking, and I do wonder how it is that none of you ever learned. You are all strong and well, aren't you?"

Yes, they were all strong and well; except Viola, who still declared she had got her death, and should never recover.

"Well, but what's the use?" asked Rose. "I think this is great fun, to come to a pretty place like this, and sit and talk and look at the view; but just to go on walking and stalking along the way you and the Owls do,—what's the use of it? We are not ostriches, and why should we pretend we are? Besides, it takes such a lot of time."

"And what would you be doing with your time?" asked Peggy, hotly. "Reading stories, or just sitting, sitting, and talking, talking. My goodness gracious *me!* the way some of the girls just sit around all their spare time, doing nothing, makes me tired. Why, if I hadn't stalked, as you call it, how would you have come here to-day, and seen the prettiest place you ever saw since you came here—for it is, and you can't deny it, girls. I do hate to see people doing nothing. I don't much care what they do, so long as it is *something!*"

"Peggy, you're getting very ferocious, do you know it?" said Clara Fair. "And, after all, we did come, and now we are doing just as much as you are, and why are you shouting at us?"

"I won't shout any more," said Peggy, laughing. "I suppose we all have our hobbies, haven't we? Walking is one of mine; and you are going to like it just as much as I do, girls, before we get through the term. Why, there are about twenty of the loveliest walks, and none of them—hallo!"

Peggy stopped abruptly, and seemed to listen.

"What's the matter?" asked Rose. "I didn't hear anything."

"I thought I did," said Peggy, quietly. "Be still a minute, will you?"

She bent her head. There was a moment of perfect silence; then, somewhere close at hand, a singular dry, rattling sound.

"What a queer noise!" said Ethel. "What is it?"

"It's time to go home, girls!" said Peggy. "You'd better start along, and I'll come behind you. Come, Viola, give me your hand—so! Now take her, Rose, and hurry along! Lobelia, go with them, will you?"

"What upon earth is the matter, Peggy Montfort?" asked Rose, eyeing her curiously. "What do you want to get us out of the way for? I believe you have found something, and want to keep it to yourself."

"Rose, *please* go!" said Peggy, earnestly. "I am coming, I tell you. No, not there! that way—along by the big pine. Keep away from the rock—so! Now hurry, and I'm coming right along."

The girls hardly knew why they obeyed; but there was such a singular earnestness in Peggy's look and gesture that they did not stay to question her, but one and all—or so it seemed—turned and hastened down the side of the hill.

No sooner were their backs turned than Peggy, whose keen eyes had been fixed all this time on one spot, moved swiftly behind a great rock that stood close by. There, stooping, she sought with eager hands and eyes; sought and found a stout stick. She tried its strength—it was strong and tough. Then warily she came back, and looked once more at the pile of withered leaves that had riveted her attention before. The pile seemed to move—to undulate; and from it came once more the dry, rattling sound. Something reared itself, brown and slender; at the same instant a shriek rang through the wood. It did not come from Peggy's lips. Like a flash, the girl had

sprung forward, and caught the snake's neck under her crotched stick, just as he was raising himself to strike. Pinned firmly to the earth, the creature could only twist and wriggle in impotent rage. Looking around coolly, Peggy saw Lobelia's face peering around the trunk of a tree, pale with horror.

"Well!" said Peggy. "You are a nice obedient child, aren't you? Since you are there, you might get me a good stone; he's all right; he can't get his head round."

Gasping and trembling, Lobelia found and brought a stone, which she held out at arm's length.

"Oh, Peggy!" she whispered. "Is it—is it a rattlesnake?"

"That's what!" said Peggy, relapsing into slang in the absorption of the moment. "He won't be a rattlesnake much longer, though. There! now you can look, Lobelia; he's dead. I tell you he's dead, as dead as Julius Cæsar. What are you crying for, child?"

Lobelia came forward, trembling and cringing.

"Oh, Peggy, I knew it was. I didn't say anything, because I thought you wouldn't want me to—"

"Quite right," said Peggy. "Sensible rabbit!"

"And—and I am terribly afraid of snakes—oh, I was sure you would be killed, Peggy!"

"And so you came back to be killed with me? Lobelia, what a foolish girl you are. There, there, don't cry. Why, the snake isn't crying, and he really has been killed."

"Oh, Peggy, if you had been killed, I should have died. I shouldn't have needed any snake to kill me."

"Nonsense!" said Peggy, gruffly. "Lobelia, do stop crying. My goodness gracious *me*, come along, or we shall have them all back again after us. I'm going to bring him too, and get Colney to dry him for me. He's a beauty! look at him, Lobelia! Not look at him? Why, I tell you he's dead, as dead as—who was he?—the Father of Lies! Come along, now."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TERROR BY NIGHT.

All was quiet in No. 18, Corridor C. It was the room directly above Peggy; and was tenanted, as we have seen, by Lobelia Parkins. Lobelia was in bed at this moment, though it was before the usual bedtime. She had felt ill and dizzy-brained for several days, and Peggy had begged her to go to bed early and get a good long sleep. Peggy herself lay on a mattress on the floor. It was against the rule, but for once the law-abiding Peggy was wilfully breaking the rule. She felt strong in Miss Russell's confidence in her; and she meant to find out who and what it was that was "frightening Lobelia silly," as she expressed it. Accordingly, here she was, in her wrapper, with a blanket rolled around her. The night was warm, and the window was thrown wide open, Peggy having been brought up to love fresh air. Lobelia shivered, but would rather have frozen stiff than say a word, if Peggy preferred to have the room cold. Each girl hoped the other was asleep. Lobelia hardly dared to breathe; she lay still as a mouse, feeling a delightful sense of comfort and security, such as she had not felt since she came to this nightmare of a place. Not to be alone any more, with the night and the terrible things it brought; to have this friend, so strong, so kind, so helpful, lying close beside the bed, ready to help, to comfort,—Lobelia's poor shrinking spirit took courage, and she held her breath now and then, for the pure pleasure of hearing Peggy's calm, regular breathing. Surely she must be asleep! She could not breathe like that unless she were sleeping quietly. Oh, might nothing happen to break her friend's rest!

Peggy was very nearly asleep, it was true. She had meant to stay awake as long as there was any possibility of any one's coming into the room. She was valiantly wide awake at first, and lay blinking at the moon, which Was shining in the most obliging manner full upon the spot where she lay. Peggy wondered what those mountains were like which made the strange figures on the broad, silver disk. They must be tremendous! Think of them, miles high, with deep, awful valleys between, and all dead and white and dry like bone. And all they seemed to be good for now was for us to make faces and things

out of, and stories—to please—the—children. Peggy was getting very sleepy. She opened her eyes wider, and stared harder at the moon. It seemed to be staring back. They were certainly eyes, not—mountains—and one of them was winking at her; and now she seemed to hear a sound, a voice, coming from far, far—ages away, and saying, whispering—

Then, all in a moment, sleep, and the moon and its mountains were as if they had never been.

The door opened, swiftly and noiselessly, and some one darted in,—a tall, slender figure, with gray drapery over the head and shoulders. It turned and halted, facing the door. Peggy sprang up in bull-dog silence, and was about to fling herself bodily on the intruder; but an arm thrown out, a familiar gesture, a whispered word, checked her, and she stood motionless, hardly drawing breath. Next moment footsteps were heard in the corridor, as of some one hastening, and making every effort to be silent. The door was pushed hastily open, and Miss Pugsley stood on the threshold. She was panting, and her dress was disarranged.

"Ah!" she cried, in a spiteful whisper. "I have caught you at last, have I? I know you, miss! No need to hide your face! I know you well enough, and this is the end of your fine doings. Lift up that veil, I command you!"

The gray figure advanced toward her one step, and lifted the veil; and even Peggy's stout heart turned to water within her. Miss Pugsley recoiled with a wild shriek from the waxen countenance, the hollow burning eyes, the fleshless, grinning lips; recoiled, staggered, and fled back moaning along the corridor. The gray figure dropped its veil and darted in pursuit. Peggy, running to the door, saw them vanish around the corner; then she returned, to find Lobelia fallen into a dead faint, her head hanging over the side of the bed.

As she bent over her anxiously, rubbing her hands and trying to rouse her, a single board creaked in the corridor; next moment the gray figure entered again, this time quietly and without hurry. The veil was thrown back, revealing a well-known face. The hideous death's head was now carried in the hand.

"Sorry if I alarmed you, Innocent!" said Grace Wolfe. "What in the name of unreason are you doing here?"

"Oh, Grace, she has fainted!" cried Peggy. "Help me! Bring some water, do!"

Grace vanished again, and was back in two minutes with water and smelling-salts. As they bent over the unconscious girl, bathing her temples and holding the salts to her nose, a few hurried sentences were exchanged.

"What was it? What have you there, Grace?"

"Oh, nothing; merely Colney's skull; not her own, you understand, but that of her charmer."

"But—but the eyes glared! I saw them glare, like fire."

"Phosphorus, my sweet babe! Hast no chemistry to thy name? 'Twere well to mend thy ways."

"And why—what were you doing, Grace? Oh, see what you have done! Look at this poor child, and tell me why you came to play such pranks in her room."

Peggy's voice was stern enough. She forgot her love and admiration for Grace; she only saw what seemed like wanton cruelty toward a forlorn and helpless creature, and her blood was up.

Grace shrugged her shoulders.

"I am sorry," she said. "I am even very sorry, Innocent. What more would you have? I didn't mean to come in; indeed, I had no thought of the little creature at all. I had a vow that the next time that woman looked through my keyhole she should repent it. I think she did. If she does it again, I'll shoot her; I've just told her so."

"Why—how did you know? What did she do?"

"Oh, child, I can't always tell you how I know things. I feel them in my bones. This is full moon, and it was borne in upon me that she thought I would be up to something to-night, and would be upon the watch; so I went on the watch, too. I arranged a pretty scene of confusion in my room, open window, things all thrown about,—just as it would look if I had been having a lark; left the light burning, went and borrowed this soulful smiler, and treated it a little,—no, Colney knows nothing about it; no use in getting her into trouble; then I took my mosquito-netting mantle, and hid in the broom-closet near my door. Sure enough, I hadn't been there long when along comes my Puggy, in felt slippers, and looks in at my keyhole. I waited, to make sure, then I came gliding past, without

observing her, you see, corridor being pretty dark. She observed me, however, and pursued. I led her quite a pretty dance, till I thought her breath would be getting short, and then I turned in here, partly because it was handy, partly because—well, I have been in the habit of passing through here, when the kid was asleep. See! she's opening her eyes. Speak to her, you! She's more used to you."

Peggy lifted Lobelia's head into her lap. "How are you now, dear?" she asked, stroking the thin hair affectionately. "Lobelia, it's Peggy! You are all right; there's no one here, no one to hurt you. That—that was only a trick, Lobelia."

Lobelia moaned, but made no reply. Grace leaned forward. "Peggy is right," she said, softly. "It was a trick, Lobelia, and not meant for you at all. I—I never thought about you, I'm afraid. Do you feel better now? I'm truly sorry, my dear."

There was no answering look of intelligence in Lobelia's face. She lay shivering, with wide, frightened eyes.

"Oh, Grace, I'm afraid she's ill!" said Peggy. "See! she doesn't seem to know us. What shall we do? Lobelia! Do look at me! Do speak to me! Oh, Grace, what shall we do? Where are you going?"

"I am going to call Miss Russell," said Grace.

Miss Russell came presently, and looked very grave when she saw Lobelia's face, which was now flushed with fever, her eyes still staring wide, as if they saw some dreadful vision.

"What has happened?" she said, briefly. "I must have the truth!"

Grace told her the truth, every word, not keeping back anything: merely adding that Peggy had nothing to do with it all.

"And what were you doing here, Peggy?" asked Miss Russell.

Peggy explained. "I meant to tell whatever I found out, to-morrow, Miss Russell," she added. "I thought you would want me to discover what—what had been going on."

Miss Russell nodded. "Go to your rooms now, girls," was all she said. "Or—no; Peggy, ask Miss Cortlandt to send at once for Doctor Hendon. Grace, you will remain in your room till I come to you."

Grace tried to rise in obedience; but the sick girl grasped her dress, and held it tight. "Don't leave me," she said, in a hardly audible whisper.

"You don't want me, you poor thing!" said Grace; and though she spoke low, her tone was very bitter. "Let me go, and you shall never see me again. Don't trouble about me, Miss Russell. I'll pack my trunk, and be off in the morning before any one is awake."

"You will do as I tell you," said Miss Russell, quietly. "Peggy, go quickly! Now, my poor child, let me take your hand. Move softly, Grace, and I think you can slip away."

Grace tried once more to loosen the hold of the cramped, skinny hand, but Lobelia only clutched the tighter; and now, in her delirium, she caught Grace's hand with her other one, and held it tight, tight. "Don't leave me!" she muttered. "Peggy, Peggy, don't leave me!"

Upon this, Grace looked up at Miss Russell; the hard, defiant look was gone, the wild blue eyes were swimming in tears. "Let me stay," she murmured. "Miss Russell, let me stay with her. I'll go away after she gets well. She thinks I am Peggy, and you know I am a good nurse. Let me stay and take care of her, and I will bless you all my life, even if I never see you again."

"You shall stay," said Miss Russell. "My poor Grace, this may be the hardest and heaviest punishment I could give you. You shall stay, and see what your cruel and wilful carelessness has brought to pass. God help us and you!"

CHAPTER XVII.

WAITING.

In the dreadful days that followed, Grace Wolfe hardly left the sick girl's side. The doctor came, and pronounced the trouble a brain fever, brought on by fear and worry. A trained nurse came and took charge. Lobelia submitted to her care, but her one conscious instinct was that of clinging to Grace. Whether, as seemed most probable, she took her for Peggy, or whether she simply felt and craved the magnetism of the wild girl's touch and presence, they could not tell; but she was never quiet save when Grace's hand was resting on her. Her aunt came, her sole living relative; and seeing her, poor Lobelia was explained. Prim, fussy, and forbidding, her rich dress showing the same utter tastelessness that marked that of her niece, Miss Parkins was not the woman one would have chosen to be the mother of a girl like Lobelia. She looked at the sick girl, and said it was very unfortunate; she was always having illnesses, and had given them no end of anxiety.

"She has had everything that money could buy!" she said, over and over. "It has never seemed to make any difference; her mother was the same sort of person, unreasonable, always wanting what she couldn't have. My brother had a great deal of trouble with her, and Lobelia is like her. I have tried to do my duty by her. Do you think she will get well, doctor?"

"Yes, I do think she will get well!" replied Doctor Hendon, glaring at her in a way that made Miss Russell feel alarm for her safety. "I think she will get well if she stays here, and has care and tenderness and sympathetic treatment. You are her sister?" He turned upon Grace, who sat beside the bed, passing her light hand over the sick girl's forehead with smooth, regular strokes.

"No," said Miss Russell. "This is one of the pupils, Miss Wolfe. She—was in the room when this attack came on, and Lobelia has clung to her from the first in a singular manner. I did not dare to remove her, and so, as you see, she has simply stayed here, helping the nurse."

"I see!" said the doctor. "I suppose she was—hum! stay close by her!" this was to Grace. "You have a touch, I see. Probably you have been kind to her,—poor, forlorn, miserable little creature as ever I saw in my life!" The last words were hurried out as if they were one, in a gruff, not to say savage whisper.

Grace looked up at him. "I am the cause of her illness," she said, quietly. "I have never been kind to her, or taken any notice of her. I have come through her room, using it for a passage when I was breaking bounds, and have frightened her—to death."

The doctor looked at her under his bushy eyebrows. "That may all be so!" he said. "All the same, you may now have the chance of saving her life. Stay by her, that's all I have to say to you."

"And what have you to say to me, doctor?" asked Miss Parkins. "I have a great responsibility. Lobelia will inherit a large fortune if she lives. She has had everything that money—"

"You can go home!" said Doctor Hendon, with a sudden movement suggestive of biting. "Go home, and stay there—I—mean, have things ready for her when she is ready for a change. Good morning! Ya-ouw!" this last was a manner of snarl with which he favoured Miss Parkins as he trotted out of the room. The lady stared after him. "Is he a little touched?" she asked. "He doesn't seem quite sane."

Miss Russell assured her that Doctor Hendon was eminently sane, and got her out of the room as soon as possible.

Grace remained, and hour by hour kept her watch at the sick girl's pillow, laying her magic touch on the burning brow, singing the soft songs that seemed more than anything else to soothe the sufferer. So sitting, hour by hour, day after day, the old life seemed to slip away from Grace Wolfe. She felt it going, felt the change coming on spirit and thought, but made no effort to hinder the change. All the restlessness, the wild longing for freedom, the beating her head against the friendly bars,—where was it now? She was content to sit here, watching with the nurse the changes that came over the face of their patient. They talked together in low voices which soothed rather than disturbed; one asking, the other relating, the woman of experience and the eager girl exchanged thoughts and confidences. Many times in the day the girls came to the door, Peggy and the

Owls, and now and then an anxious, frightened freshman. Peggy had longed to assist in the nursing, but she had too heavy a hand, and hers was not the gift. Gertrude Merryweather had it, and she sometimes took Grace's place, and sent her down for a breath of fresh air and a run with Bertha or Peggy on the lawn. Grace went obediently, for she knew she must keep up her strength; but she was always back again at the first possible instant, and her thoughts never seemed to go with her, but stayed at her post.

"My dear," said Miss Russell once, "I cannot let you wear yourself out. Let Gertrude watch to-night while Miss Carter rests!" But Grace only said, "I'd give my life if I could, Miss Russell. She's going to get well if my life can do it!" and Miss Russell, looking into the blue eyes and meeting the spirit of resolution that shone there, could only kiss the girl's cheek and pass on.

Lobelia was very ill, and a shadow hung over the whole school. Lessons went on as usual, but the girls spoke low in their recitations, and there was an unconscious hurry in both teachers and pupils, all anxious to get through, to ask and hear the last tidings from the sickroom. In those days, too, teachers and pupils learned to know each other as never before. The grave women who cared so much—so strangely much, it often seemed—whether a lesson were well or ill learned, who made such a fuss about trifles, and set such hard tasks, and made such unreasonable rules, behold! they were just as anxious and troubled as if Lobelia had been one of their own number, instead of the most insignificant freshman in the whole school. Miss Boyle was not simply a mathematical machine, Rose Barclay found out. She really cared about them, cared enough to call them into her room, and want to hear all about that last walk, when Peggy had killed the rattlesnake,—oh, how brave Peggy had been,—and how poor Lobelia had seen it, too, and with her inborn terror of snakes had perhaps got the first panic that, after brooding and brooding, and being added to the terror by nights, had ended in this.

Miss Pugsley was gone. Her departure had hardly been noticed, was well-nigh forgotten by this time; but Colney Hatch found Miss Mink sniffing mouse-like sniffs in a corner, and wept with her, and offered her a live bat that she had just caught, by way of consolation. But their tears were for Grace, for they hardly knew Lobelia save by sight.

As for Miss Russell and Emily Cortlandt, they were the life and stay of the school in these days. Steadfast and cheerful, always hopeful, bringing forward every favourable symptom and sharing it with the whole school; not a girl of all the seventy-odd who did not feel their sympathy and friendship like strong hands ready to take theirs and uphold them.

One day, when things were at the worst, Peggy found Viola in her room, crying on the divan.

"What is the matter?" she asked, rather briefly. Viola's troubles seemed microscopic in this time of heart-wringing anxiety.

Viola raised her head, and her eyes were red with weeping.

"They say she's going to die, Peggy!" she said.

"Nonsense!" said Peggy, gruffly. "Who says so?"

"Oh, all the girls. They say Doctor Hendon shook his head when he went out this morning; you know that's a very bad sign. Oh, Peggy, I wish I had been good to the poor little thing. You have always been good to her. I don't believe you suffered as much as I did from her clothes, but I wish I had been good to her all the same. Peggy, if she gets well, I'm going to do over her hats for her, and try to make her look different. Peggy, where are you going? Don't leave me! Lobelia is going to die, and I feel so frightened."

"I don't believe she is going to die," said Peggy. "I am going to the study to see Miss Russell; come with me if you like, V."

Viola crept along beside her, cowering in Peggy's shadow as they passed the door of the sick-room. Peggy paused to listen. From within came the sound of soft singing, and the faint rustle of a wood fire. What was Grace singing? one of the quaint French songs that she loved,—

"Trois anges sont venus ce soir,
M'apportaient de bien belles choses;
L'un d'eux avaient un encensoir,
Le deuxième un chapelet de roses.
Et le troisième avait en main
Une robe toute fleurie,
De perles, d'or et de jasmin,
Comme en a Madame Marie.
Noël! Noël!

Nous venons du ciel,
T'apporter ce que tu desires;
Car le bon Dieu,
Au fond du ciel bleu,
A chagrin lorsque tu soupires!"

The two girls crept softly past, Viola wiping the tears from her eyes. They went down to the study, and, knocking gently, were bidden to enter. Miss Russell and Miss Cortlandt were sitting together, and at their feet sat the Snowy and the Fluffy Owls, curled up on two hassocks. Peggy looked in timidly.

"Come in, Peggy!" said Miss Russell's cheerful voice. "Who is that with you? Oh, Viola? come in, my dear! Do you want anything?"

"No, Miss Russell," said Peggy. "I—I just wanted to come in, that was all."

"So did we!" said the Fluffy. "We just came, and we feel so much better. Sit down here, Peggy."

She patted the floor beside her, and Peggy and Viola sat down. Peggy heaved a sigh of relief. "I thought you would let us come," she said. "It's so dreadful not to be able to do anything, isn't it, Miss Russell? If we could help in any way, or feel that we were doing anything at all, it wouldn't be so bad. I came by the door just now, and Grace was singing, and it all sounded so quiet and peaceful. You think it is all going well, don't you, Miss Russell? You don't think she is worse to-day, do you, Miss Russell?"

Miss Russell put back Peggy's hair, which had fallen into her eyes as she looked up eagerly. "Dear," she said, "I was just telling Gertrude and Bertha how it is. Doctor Hendon thinks there will be a change to-day; he thinks the crisis is coming. It is a time of great danger, but he has good hope, and we must have it, too. And, girls, you are all longing to help; now, you can help us to-day. You can help very much indeed. The house must be kept absolutely quiet this afternoon. The girls are in their rooms now; but if you could get them off for a walk, some of them, and send the rest to the gymnasium, you would be doing us all a service. Miss Cortlandt is going to the gymnasium, and she will give them a drill, or let them dance, if they like—you don't think they feel like dancing? No more

do I! I shall not leave Lobelia's room myself till the change comes; I am going back there now, as soon as the doctor comes. Ah! there he is now! Remember, dear girls, quiet; and for the rest, hope and patience—and trust!"

She kissed them each in turn, quietly and gravely, and was gone. Turning to Emily Cortlandt, they saw that her eyes were full of tears; yet she spoke cheerfully. "Miss Russell is so wise, girls!" she said. "I am sure you will do all you can—it is an anxious time. One thing she forgot to say,—I wouldn't let the other girls know, if you can help it, how grave the danger is. Some of them are nervous, and might have hysterics, or even be ill. Viola, my child, you look very pale. Don't you feel well?"

Viola was trembling all over. She came close to Miss Cortlandt and nestled up to her like a little child. "I'm afraid!" she said, simply. "I never was near where anybody died. I'm dreadfully afraid, Miss Cortlandt."

Very gently Emily Cortlandt spoke then to the frightened child, and to the other three girls, whose strong, sensible faces were grave enough, but who were able to possess themselves in courage and quiet. She told them some of her thoughts, the thoughts of a gentle Christian woman; of the hope and love and promise that made death seem to her only the white door that led into life, a life toward which we must all look, and for which we must shape ourselves as we pass through this world of joy and sorrow. She told them of young lives which had seemed cruelly cut off here; and of how it was her thought that death had been to them not the end, but the beginning; and of the lovely light they had shed behind them, of gentleness and hope and love. Then she spoke more brightly, and told them how strong, after all, life was in the young, and how one could always hope, while even a spark remained. Doctor Hendon had good hope, she repeated, and they must have it, too.

"And now," she said, "I must go, and you must go, too. Find the girls quietly, and bring them to me, or take them out for one of your good walks; and let us, whatever we do, do it cheerfully!"

Faithfully the Owls and Peggy laboured, that November afternoon. First they soothed and comforted Viola, finishing the good work that Miss Cortlandt had begun; and they induced her to go to the gymnasium and take a party with her. Then they went

about softly from door to door through the corridors, not spreading any alarm, merely saying that Miss Russell thought they would all better go out, as the afternoon was so fine, and that they were to go quietly, as Lobelia might be asleep. Before long, without noise or confusion, the whole school was out, either in the gymnasium or on the road. The walkers divided into three parties, Peggy leading the freshmen, Gertrude the juniors, while Bertha marshalled the sophomores, who came like lambs, half proud, half shy, at being under the leadership of the renowned Fluffy. The seniors, of course, could be trusted to take care of themselves. They were a small class, and somehow—as happens in every school with one class and another—had never made themselves a power; they had gone now with the rest to the gymnasium.

Peggy, as she walked at the head of her troop, tried to feel her cousin Margaret's hand in hers. Always humble, and distrustful of her own powers, she tried hard to think what Margaret would do in her place. She would tell stories, probably, wonderful stories of heroes and great deeds. Ah! but Peggy did not know the stories in the books; they never stayed by her. Well, then, she must tell what she did know! She found herself talking about her home life, the home on the great Western ranch; of her father and brothers, and the many feats in their strong, active life. Here, if she had only known it, were stories better than any in Margaret's books. How Brother Jim hunted the white wolf for three days in the mountains; how Hugh set the trap for the young grizzly, and more wonderful, how he tamed him and made him his friend and servant; how Father Montfort saved the three men who were snowed up in Desolation Gulch, and brought them out one by one on his shoulders, just as their last biscuit was gone and they had sat down to die,—on and on went the tale, for it was a story without an end. On and on went the girls, too, unconscious of their going, forgetting to think they were tired, forgetting everything save the joy of listening. The shadows were lengthening fast when Peggy, still relating, turned her face homeward, wondering with thankfulness, as she noted the position of the sun, how she had been able to take them so far without once hearing a groan or a sigh of weariness. She looked around, and saw only sparkling eyes and rosy cheeks. "A month ago," she thought,

"they would have said I had almost killed them. They really are hardening, and I'm so glad!"

"Oh, go on, Peggy!" cried Rose Barclay. "You are never going to stop there! What became of the one with the wooden leg? We must know!"

On went the story, and on went the girls; the sun sank lower and lower, the shadows crept longer and longer, the air grew cool and thin with the coming night. The man with the wooden leg had chopped it up for fuel, and Father Montfort had brought him and all the others in triumph to the ranch, and set them down by the fire, when— "Oh, dear me!" cried Ethel Fair. "What a shame, girls! Here we are at the gate. I say! let's go on a little farther, Peggy."

But Peggy was wise, and knew when to stop; besides, now that she was near the house again, the anxiety and distress that had been lulled by the walk and the story-telling, came back like a flood, and filled her heart. They were crossing the lawn; what tidings would greet them at the door? Some one was standing there now; Miss Cortlandt, was it? no, Miss Russell herself. She was waiting for them with the news; would it be good or bad? Peggy hung back for an instant; then she walked steadily forward. "Quiet, girls!" was all she said. "I think Miss Russell has something to tell us."

They were at the foot of the steps now; and Miss Russell was coming down to meet them, running, the grave and stately woman, to meet them, like a girl. Her hands were outstretched, her face was all aglow with joy, the glad tears ran down her cheeks.

"It is over!" she whispered. "Softly, my dear children. Come softly in. The crisis is over, and the child will live! Come with me, and let us thank God together!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END AND THE BEGINNING.

It was a month later. The first snow had fallen, and the lawn was white with it, and all the trees and bushes powdered with frost. Coming out of the class-room one day, her heart singing of sines and cosines and tangents, Peggy found the Snowy and the Fluffy waiting for her at the door, with radiant faces.

"Oh, what?" cried Peggy. "A letter?"

"Yes," said Gertrude. "It has just come, though the postmark is two or three days ago. Where shall we go to read it? Your room, Peggy? So we will; it's nearer than the Nest, and I know you can't wait."

Grace's letters were indeed things to wait for in those days. She had gone to Lobelia's home with her; for, on coming to herself, the invalid had still clung to her new friend, with a persistency strange in one so timid and fearful. Convalescence came, with its unwilling fretfulness, its fits of unreason. Still Lobelia clung to Grace, and no one else could make her listen and obey. The nurse laughed, and said she might as well go, and leave her diploma with Miss Wolfe; yet stayed, for the two worked together in pleasant harmony and friendship. At last, Doctor Hendon ordered a change of scene, and now, too, Grace must go with her. The Parkins mansion was within driving distance of Pentland; the whole school had turned out to see the departure, the sick girl lying on cushions, her thin face already showing the signs of returning health, and really transfigured by the light of love and gratitude that beamed from it, as she looked from Grace to Peggy, and back again to Grace. She beckoned to Peggy, who pressed to her side and bent over her. "What is it, dear?" she whispered.

"Peggy!"

"Yes, Lobelia."

"Peggy, you don't mind?"

"Mind what? I don't mind anything, now that you are getting well."

"You—you were my first friend, the only friend I had. You don't mind—that I love her? I couldn't help it, Peggy. She kept me alive, you see. Often and often, when I was drifting away, and ready to die, she held me, and would not let me go. You are sure you don't mind, Peggy?"

Peggy kissed her heartily, and told her not to talk nonsense. "If you didn't love her," she said, "I'd have nothing to do with you, Lobelia Parkins. Do you hear that? Nothing! I wouldn't speak to you in the street, if I met you."

Lobelia smiled, and leaned back on the cushions with closed eyes and a look of absolute content. "You are so funny, Peggy!" she murmured. "She is funny, too. I like people who are funny. Good-bye, and thank everybody. Everybody is so kind!"

The carriage drove away, and the last thing the girls saw was Grace's face, looking down at her charge; grave as ever,—Grace rarely smiled, and they hardly knew the sound of her laugh,—but bright as Lobelia's own with love and purpose and gladness. So they passed out of sight.

And since then had come letters every week, telling of the child's progress; one to Miss Russell always, and one to the Owls or to Peggy. It was one of these that Gertrude took from her pocket now and opened, as they sat together on Peggy's divan.

"You see, it is dated three days ago; probably been carried in a pocket, from the look of it."

"Dear Snowy, also Fluffy:—Tu whit! She has been gaining so fast this week, we shall soon forget she has been ill at all. She can eat anything she likes, and she likes a great deal. Miss P. keeps exclaiming at her appetite. Apparently the child never ate anything before she went to school. The rule of the house is, or was, one shredded wheat Abomination for breakfast, one chop for dinner, one smoked herring for supper. All this served on huge and hideous silver dishes. This order is changed. Miss Parkins almost fainted when I ordered the first meal. She weeps every day over the butcher's book, but the child fattens apace, and all is well. I had to frighten her—the aunt—a little, though, before things went smoothly.

"Yesterday we explored the house, the Babe and I. The amazing thing is that she lived at all after she got her eyes open. Apparently every article cost a thousand dollars; most awful old mausoleum you can imagine; you never saw such a place, for there couldn't be two. The bed I sleep in has all-round curtains of apple-green plush, with bead fringe three inches deep. The mantelpiece and table-top and so on are gray marble, and the ornaments are two deformed gilt cherubs holding a slop-jar with a clock-face in the middle of it. Also two unspeakable alabaster jugs, three feet high, and two Parian busts under glass cases. They are supposed to be Luther and Melanchthon; I think they are Lucifer and Mammon. Well, the poor little thing is used to it, and doesn't know what is the matter. Wait till Monday week,—I mean till some future day,—and she shall know, but not now. She doesn't think it a homelike house, she says!

"I shall be coming back almost any time now, as soon as I can get away. It's dreadful to leave her,—'I'm wae to think upo' yon den, e'en for her sake,'—but I must get back before exams, and she is really all right, only not of course wholly strong yet. She will come back next term; and meanwhile she is to travel with an old servant who was her nurse, and who has some spark of humanity in her composition.

"I'm coming back, I tell you; at least, something is coming back. I don't say whether it will be the Goat or the Wolf, or what; I'm pretty sure that—

"'Lawk a mercy on me,
This is none of I!'

"Good-bye, you feathered things! How do feathers feel? How do you get about? There are good points about the creature, I can see that; you can see in the dark—but so could the Wolf! and it would be nice to be able to ruffle up your feathers and put a tongue in every wound of Puggy's—but she is gone, isn't she? Alas! and if you don't know Shakespeare when I talk him, why, you are an ignorant set, and don't deserve your names. This is for the Innocent, too, mind! Give her my love, and tell her—never mind; I'll tell her myself.

"So no more at present, Respected Fowls, from your most obedient, humble servant,

"The Hybrid."

The three girls were silent for a moment after Gertrude had folded the letter again. Then, "Do you suppose she will really be changed?" asked Peggy. "I—I don't think I want Grace to be changed, do you, girls?"

"That depends!" said Bertha, with her chin on her hands, in her favourite judicial attitude. "Of course it would be despair if we should lose her real, true self. If she could only stay Grace Wolfe, and change her point of view, why, then—"

"That is just what she will do, I feel sure of it," said Gertrude, earnestly. "She has been through an experience—oh, we can't know what it has been, girls, because we are just plain people, you know, and Grace is—well, I think she has genius, or something very like it. If only the power and the sweetness and brightness are turned into helping, you see, instead of hindering—oh, how much she can do! and I believe she's going to do it, too. But come, Fluffy, I must go home. Won't you come, Peggy? We have half an hour before study-time."

Peggy followed only too gladly along the corridor; it was always a treat to spend half an hour in the Owl's Nest. Gertrude was first; she opened the door of her room, and paused on the threshold with a low cry. Bertha and Peggy hurried forward and looked over her shoulder—to see a strange sight.

Something—or somebody—was sitting on the window-seat. Something gray and soft. It had a round feathered head, with two feathery horns jutting from it; it had round bright eyes, which blinked curiously at the astonished girls. Below the head were—arms, were they, or wings? They were feathery too, and they drooped over something that might be a skirt, though no feet were visible. In the gathering twilight the figure sat on the window-seat and blinked, looking like nothing that was in heaven or earth; and the three girls stood and stared, holding each other's hands. Presently the silence was broken.

"Bubo Virginianus!" said a grave, melodious voice from under the feathers. "The Great Horned Owl. Description: Large and strongly organised; ear-tufts large, erectile; bill strong, fully curved; wing rather long; third quill usually longest; tail short; legs and toes—"

"Grace!" cried Gertrude Merryweather.

"Tu whit!" replied the figure. "I may also in this connection remark, tu whoo! This well-known bird is a resident in all the New England schools—I should say States—throughout the year. It is not so common in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island as in the other States, where, in the vast tracts of forest, it is quite abundant. Samuels. Easy there! spare the Plumage!"

The three girls had flung themselves upon the strange figure, which flapped its arms for a moment, as if contemplating flight. Then, waving them off with one arm, it lifted the feathered head, and gazed at them with melancholy blue eyes.

"Tu whit!" repeated the Scapegoat. "I may be allowed, *in* this connection, to repeat, tu whoo! Don't kill me, Innocent; I should be less useful dead."

It did seem as if they would hug her to death. They laughed, they cried, they questioned, they talked, all in one breath; no one would have recognised the sedate Owls or the sensible Peggy. Grace regarded them with grave benignity, as she untied the owl's head, and loosed the feathered cape from her shoulders.

"Rather neat, I thought?" she said, turning the head around on her hand. "The beak is a little wobbly, but the general character—eh?—is pretty good? I couldn't manage the toes and claws; there wasn't time, and, besides, they would have excited remark, even if the weather had been warm enough to make them comfortable for travelling. Well, my Snowy, my Fluffy, how is it? Is there room for another Owl in the forest?"

"Oh, Grace!" cried Bertha.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Gertrude; and their arms were around her again, while Peggy sat down on the floor and fairly burst into tears.

Grace was silent for a little, her head resting on Gertrude's shoulder. When she spoke, her voice had not its usual even flow, but hesitated, almost faltered, now and then.

"I am going to try!" she said. "It will take a long time, my Owls, and you will have to be very patient with me. I shall probably never be wholly domesticated, but—but you will help me, and the Innocent here will help me; won't you, Innocent?"

"Oh, Grace, if I only could? but what can I do? I don't see how I can ever do anything!"

"You began it all!" said Grace. "The way you looked—that night I made you go out, little Peggy. You didn't know, but the face of an Innocent can be a terrible thing, and I saw, and knew—things I hadn't known before. No need of going back to that now. But—Snowy—Samuels says I make an amusing pet in captivity. You'll try me?"

"Won't we!" cried the Snowy Owl. "Grace, dear, we'll all try together. Oh, we all have to keep trying, don't we, all our lives long? It wouldn't be worth anything if we didn't have to try, to work and fight for it. It shall be we three against the world,—the Snowy, the Fluffy, and the Horny. No, we four, for what should we do without our Peggy? Get up, Peggy, you ridiculous child; stop crying, and come and sit here close by us."

"Oh!" cried Peggy. "Isn't there some kind of Owl that I could be? I am too stupid, of course, but I might be a screech-owl, don't you think so, Snowy?"

Grace held up her hand. "Forbid the thought!" she said, gravely. "Who would get us our mice? We must have a Human Being connected with us. I think of moving into Bedlam, as Colney has a fine assortment of mice on hand generally. I refuse bats, probably on account of the strong musky odour, but a mouse dragged across the floor of my cage fills me with excitement. Samuels, part of it at least. No, we must have a Human Being in the Owlery, and that Human Being must be the Innocent. We Four against the World, then! Hands on it, my Owls!"

The four girls stood up, and, joining hands, looked in each other's faces. "We Four against the World!" they repeated. "The Snowy, the Fluffy, the Horny, and the Innocent; Hurrah for us!" and the shout they raised brought the whole corridor running to see what was going on.

THE END.

THE END

Peggy

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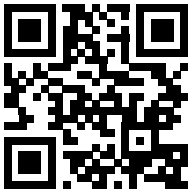

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