FOUR GIRLS AT COTTAGE CITY

HAWKINS

BSL

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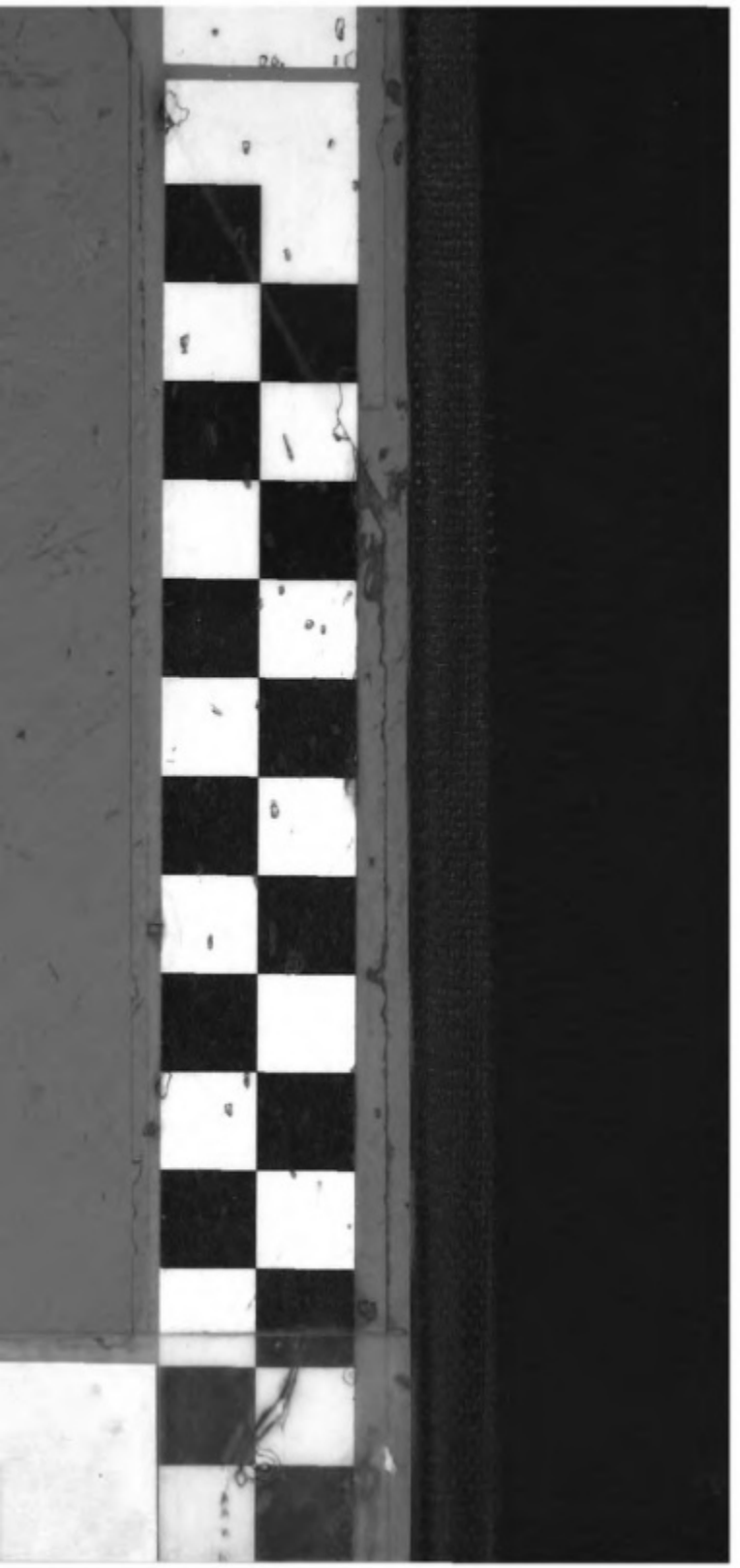

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TO

DEAR AUNT LOTTIE

WHOM I HAVE OFTEN AND
TRULY CALLED MY

'Second Mother'

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.
THE REWARD,
"WELL DONE, THOU GOOD AND
FAITHFUL SERVANT,"
WILL SURELY ONE DAY
BE HERS.

The Author.

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PREFACE.

If you who read this book, should meet with my four girls who spent three such delightful weeks at that beautiful resort, Cottage City, ask them "if such and such a thing of which I write" did actually happen. They would answer for the most part "yes" and give you a smile with the answer. The cottage at which they stopped is easily found, but the dear old people who made it so pleasant for them, are gone—never to return. "Mother" and "Grandpa" clasp hands in a better country than this. The story of Charlotte Hood is but little changed, although it was not related to our young people and is known to but one of them. Yet it is only one of the many sad stories that may truthfully be told of lives that are lost and homes made desolate on the shores of bleak Cape Cod. How many aching hearts have been lulled to eternal sleep by the solemn music of the old Atlantic. If any discontented one, after reading the life of Charlotte Hood, will say to herself, "I am thankful it is as well with me as it is," the Mission of this Book will have been fulfilled.

THE AUTHOR.

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Four Girls at Cottage City.

CHAPTER I.

"What a shame it should rain this day, of all days, Net! Yesterday was a perfectly delightful day, and now—just look here!" and Jessie Dare drew back the window curtain and looked over her shoulder at her sister, who was lying snugly down between the sheets with the calmest of all calm faces, which was, to say the least, very exasperating to the troubled Jessie.

"Well, never mind, Jess; we can't help the weather. Come back to bed—we needn't get up yet," and Garnet turned comfortably over and prepared herself for a few minutes more of that sleep which was one of her greatest luxuries, and which came as easily to her as it does to a kitten.

"Come back to bed and run the risk of losing our train? Not much, Miss Dare. You just vacate that bed just about as quick as you can do it; if you can't do it alone, I'll furnish assistance," and like a flash Jessie ran around to the other side of the bed, and before Garnet had had hardly time

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enough to open her great dark eyes and make a feeble protest against such treatment, Jessie had her out on the floor, and was issuing forth her commands in true military style.

Garnet paid little attention to them, however, but went around in her quiet, calm way, well knowing that she would be the first to announce herself ready, although Jessie was already partly dressed.

And so she was. Jessie had so much running around to do (her tongue keeping remarkably good time with her feet) flying to the window every now and then to peer with anxious little face out into the gray, misty, rainy morning, losing her brush or ribbon, or pin, and calling on Garnet to help her find it, until at last Garnet stood ready to go down to the dining room, while Jessie had a good five minutes' more work before her. Garnet good-naturedly rendered assistance to her careless, but lovable little sister, and the two girls descended the stairs and entered the dining room together.

Mrs. Dare looked up with a smile. "It is too bad you have not a better day for your journey, my dears," she said, sympathizingly. "Do you think the other girls will venture out?"

As if in answer to her question, the door-bell rang. Jessie ran down stairs and opened the door. A slender, blue-eyed girl stood on the steps, holding a huge umbrella over her head, which was little protection from the driving sheets of water. Jessie

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greeted her with a laugh in which joy and fear were most comically intermingled.

"Oh, Allie Hunt! If you don't look too comical for anything—just like a toad under a cabbage leaf. Come right in out of all this rain!"

She drew Allie, who had looked a trifle indignant at being compared to a toad, into the hall and shut the door; then she went on: "You don't mean to tell me, Allie Hunt, that you have come to say you are not going? because if you have, you can save yourself the trouble of saying it—I won't listen to it."

Allie laughed her low, lady-like laugh, (everybody *did* laugh at Jessie's little sayings.) "I didn't come to say any such thing, Miss Jessie, I only came to see if the rest were going."

"Well, you just believe the rest are going. We wouldn't stay away for this little rain."

"I thought it was a pretty big rain while I was coming down here; but I can stand it if the rest can. Have you heard from Vera? She may not come."

How Jessie laughed! "Vera Earle not come? That shows you do not know her as well as I. She will come if she is not sick in bed."

"Well, then, I may as well go back and get ready."

"Yes, and you be sure and get to the depot in time."

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"Oh, yes, sure."

"An hour after found the three girls standing in the ladies' waiting room of P—— depot, looking with anxious eyes out into the driving rain. In spite of Jessie's repeated assurances that she knew Vera would come, her sparkling little face was just the least bit shadowed with the cloud of nervous fear that she *might* not come after all—it did rain so.

A low exclamation from Garnet caused her to turn quickly; the next moment she was running across the wide room, regardless of the many eyes watching her, and holding out both hands to a tall, gray-eyed girl who was just coming from the side entrance. Jessie's girlish voice rang out sweet and joyous."

"Oh, you darling—you *have* come. I *knew* you would; what made you so late? We had almost given you up." And Jessie clasped her hands around her tall friend's arm and hurried her forward to the other two girls.

Then began such a chattering and laughing as would have done any one's heart good to hear. The two gentlemen, Vera's brother, and Garnet's and Jessie's brother-in-law, procured the tickets, attended to the baggage and then hovered around the "outskirts," so to speak, listening to the gay chatter, with superior smiles on their faces, until the whistle of the approaching train resounded, when all was bustle and confusion.

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"Good-bye, Philip!" "Good-bye, Jessie!" "Good-bye, Herb!" "Good-bye, Vera!" "Good-bye, Good-bye, Good-bye! Be sure and send postals just as soon as you arrive."

"Dear me, Vera, do tell me if there is a smooch on my face," exclaimed Jessie, impatiently, as the four girls entered the car and stopped at two seats near the door. "That great lummax of a man brushed his dirty old gossamer right against my cheek."

Vera turned with her hand on the half-turned seat. "Nothing there but roses, Jess," she said, and over went the seat.

"You'll spoil the child Vera," said Garnet, settling her plump little form comfortably upon the seat facing Allie and Jessie, and making room for Vera beside her.

"Child!" pouted Jessie. "What do you call yourself, Granny?"

"I am three years your senior," replied Garnet, calmly. "And therefore feel responsible for your behavior while away from home."

"H'm. You be responsible for your own behavior and I'll look out for mine. Hey, Allie?"

Vera laughed outright. Allie smiled her sweet, pretty smile and threw Jessie's gossamer up into the rack with her own.

"My sakes!" exclaimed Jessie. "I have just this moment thought of it, Allie! We are going

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off with two sedate school-marms. We'll have to behave or we'll have curtain-lectures read to us every night."

"Girls who are seniors in the High School should never OBLIGE any one to deliver curtain-lectures to them."

This was in Vera's clear, proud tones. Jessie acknowledged the reproof with the pretty respect she always showed to Vera. She had a girlish, but, nevertheless, very deep and loving admiration for Vera, and Vera loved the impulsive young girl with all the strength of her strong heart. She was only five years her senior, but she felt fifty at times.

"Now look here, girls," said Garnet, in her matter-of-fact voice. "Suppose we give our tickets up to one, and let her keep them until we need them. What do you say?"

"Depends upon whom that one will be. If it is my sister Garnet Maria, Jessie says 'No, thanks;' but if it is Vera—" said Jessie.

"Yes, let Vera keep them," said Allie, passing her's over.

"I didn't have the least idea of offering myself as banker for the party," said Garnet. "I'm careless about such things and know it. Others are careless and *don't* know it; or if they know it, wont acknowledge it." ("That's me," murmured Jessie, making up a face.) "Besides my reticule is

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about full and I've no outside pocket." ("Have you an inside one with fifteen *cents* in it?" asked Jessie, innocently.) Garnet passed over this slangy question as being unworthy of notice. "Vera, yours has a nice long pocket with a clasp. Do you dare to take the responsibility?" "Yes, and I'll add to the responsibility by keeping your purses for you if you would like to have me. We'll call it the bank," said Vera, opening her reticule to show how much room there was in it.

In flew Jessie's dainty little purse before the words were hardly spoken. The silver clasp struck against a bottle.

"Got a 'shothecary pop' in there?" asked Jessie, bending over and peering in.

Vera dashed a fine spray of violet water into the pretty, laughing face. Jessie sprang back, a little startled, then leaned forward again, shut her eyes and puckered up her rosy little mouth.

"What you might call a 'mute appeal,'" said Vera, with a laugh, and dashed a second spray into Jessie's face. Then she put the bottle back into her reticule and closed it with a decided little snap. "No more this time, Jasmine. Perhaps you'll need a shower of it before we get to Cottage City. It looks as if it might be decidedly rough on the water."

Jessie pushed her white tennis cap on the back of her dark head, and nestled down in the corner of

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the seat. "I hope *I* shan't be sick," she murmured. Then she commenced to laugh. "But I bet a cookie Net will. She ate the biggest breakfast you ever saw. I kept telling her to stop, but she seemed to think she must either eat or die—one of the two."

Vera and Allie laughed. It was an old joke among them that if Garnet could sleep she was perfectly happy.

"I think I shall eat whenever I am hungry—sea-sick or not sea-sick," returned Garnet, not in the least displeased. "And that makes me think."

She leaned forward suddenly and pulled a bag out from somewhere. She put her hand into it, drew out a fruit cracker, opened her book, and commenced to take comfort. "Help yourselves, girls," she said, taking her first bite; and then the girls', that so far as *she* was concerned, conversation had stopped for an hour.

Jessie gave her cap a savage little pull that brought it over one ear, and nestled still farther down in her seat. "Thank goodness that I'm not blessed with such an enormous appetite," she said, spitefully. "Give Net a bag of fruit crackers and a book, and she'll munch and read away forever and the day afterward."

No one spoke. Allie smiled a little and Vera gave a little reproving shake of her head. The rain came dashing against the window, the train

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sped along through the gray, wet, cheerless country. In a little while Vera had drawn "Tale of Two Cities" from her travelling bag and was lost to everything around her. Allie sat with "Judge Burnham's Daughters" open in her lap, but her blue eyes were looking out into the dim, rain-lashed country. She was thinking of her father and wondering how he would get along without her. Jessie made two or three attempts at conversation, but Garnet and Vera never even heard her and Allie only answered with an absent smile. After a few moments of this, Jessie sprang out of her seat and crossed the aisle with something that sounded like "dull old party." Half an hour later, when the conductor came through for tickets, she was sound asleep with her head against the window and her white cap resting on one ear. The conductor looked at her and then answered the smile on the girls' faces with one that was very pleasant. "There is a tired little girl so soon," he said, and passed on.

"Let us be thankful that Jess did not hear that," said Garnet, closing her book and putting away the bag of crackers (or what was left of them).

"We won't tell her," said Vera, looking across at the girlish figure with a smile. Then she rose, stepped across the aisle and laid her fair face lightly against Jessie's rosy one. The big black eyes opened lazily, then smiled up into the gray ones.

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"We've come back to the land of the living, little girl. Will you join us?" said Vera.

Jessie caught her cap just as it was disappearing over the back of the seat. "I am not sure that it is safe to," she said.

Nevertheless she followed Vera back to Garnet and Allie. Vera looked at her watch. "What time is it?" asked Allie.

"9:30," replied Vera.

"We'll get to New Bedford in about twenty minutes," said Garnet.

"Where's the 'bank'?" asked Jessie, rather loudly.

Vera made a frantic clutch at her reticule, while Garnet gave Jessie's foot a warning touch with her own. Jessie looked at her questioningly, and Garnet rolled her large eyes around until they rested on a big, rough looking man two seats in front of them, on the opposite side of the car. Vera and Allie followed the rolling eyes with their own, and unsuspicious Jessie blurted out: "What of it?"

Then Garnet leaned forward, and the three heads, one black, one brown and one golden, gathered close around the curly one.

That man has been looking over here for the last half hour. He may be all right, but we had better not say too much about the 'bank.'"

Garnet's low tones were full of deep, mysterious caution. She sat back in her seat and looked

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carelessly out of the window, as if to convince the "suspicious looking character" that what she had said had no reference to him at all. The other girls gave each other a solemn look and sank slowly back into their respective places, but Vera's small hand took a firmer clutch of the handle to the "bank," and her face betokened desperate determination.

"He'll have to step over your dead body to get it; won't he, Vera?" giggled Jessie, and Garnet frowned at her for her indiscretion.

"New Bedford!" shouted the brakeman. "Boat ready for Cottage City on the left."

Our four girls scrambled to their feet and commenced a frantic gathering together of their "belongings." They buttoned up their gossamers, pulled the hoods over their heads, tucked their books under their arms, clutched their reticules, and hastened out. The "desperate character" had disappeared.

Vera and Allie, who had never taken the trip before, followed close upon the heels of Garnet and Jessie. The blinding mist flew into their faces and the wind blew their gossamers wildly about them, but, fortunately, they had but a short distance to go and were soon on the boat, pushing their way among the wet, chattering crowd.

Vera stopped irresolutely before the cosily appointed saloon. "Shall we go in?" she asked.

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Jessie sprang lightly up the stairs. "I am answered," said Vera, laughing, and followed.

"I *do* wish it didn't rain; then we might sit on deck," sighed Garnet, as she laid her bundles on one of the side seats and drew up a camp stool in front of them.

For an hour they sat there, laughing and talking, though quietly, then Vera stood up and drew her light brown peasant cape about her. "I am going on deck for a few moments, at any rate. Does any one else want to come?"

"Let's all go," cried Jessie.

The rain still came down in torrents; the wind blew a gale. Nothing could be seen, before, behind or on either side. The girls tied their hats on with their veils, and clung to the posts and to each other.

"My! But it more than blows; eh, Er?" cried a merry voice near them, and a young man, with his coat collar turned up and his head very much on one side, (probably with an idea of keeping his hat on,) went past them with a rush, followed by a slender young man with his hands in the pockets of his "Prince Albert."

"Fred Travers!" exclaimed Jessie, speaking the name very loud in her excitement.

The young man who had spoken, turned his head, stared a moment, and then came forward, hat in hand.

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"Jessie! Is it really you? And Garnet? I am delighted."

"Who *ever* thought of seeing you here," cried Jessie, shaking hands.

"My friends, Miss Earle and Miss Hunt," said Garnet, in her low, quiet tones. "My cousin, Mr. Travers, ladies."

Vera and Allie acknowledged the introduction as best they could under the circumstances. Fastidious Vera, with one arm around a post, indeed attempted a bow, and was blown completely around the post for her pains. If it had been anyone else Jessie would have gone into convulsions, as it was she sprang to Vera's assistance, but Cousin Fred was before her and offered his arm as substitute for the post.

"He of the Prince Albert" was all this time seen to flutter suspiciously near and cast imploring glances at Fred. Fred, taking pity upon him, led the girls to some seats in a sheltered corner and asked their permission to bring his friend to them to be introduced. The favor was graciously granted, and in a moment more "My friend Mr. Richards" was bowing gravely before them.

Fred Travers was a tall, finely-formed young man, with light-brown curly hair, merry dark blue eyes, and a very pretty light (very *light*) mustache and side-tabs. Vera, looking at him, smiled to herself as she thought, "One might think 'Miss

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Mowcher' had been at work there putting up a scaffolding for a pair of whiskers." The young man's face was handsome, but it was a good face as well; a pleasant face and a frank face. He had besides, perfect teeth, even, white and good shaped.

Erfort Richards was his exact opposite in every particular. He was of medium height, but slender, with a smooth dark face, a handsome pair of dark eyes, a small mouth with thin sensitive lips, and a straight, handsome nose. His forehead was broad and very white, and he wore his thick, dark hair brushed carelessly back. His hands were brown and slender, but the fingers looked firm and strong as steel. His face was full of poetry — dark, wistful, and melancholy. He looked like a great thinker; yes, and a great dreamer too. He took his seat near Garnet and spoke but little. When Jessie made the others laugh at her bright sayings, a faint, flickering light passed over his dark face, touching the sensitive lips and just lighting the deep eyes for a moment. It could scarcely have been called a smile, rather the shadow of one.

"How long do you intend to stay at the city?" asked Fred.

All eyes turned towards Vera. "Three weeks," she answered.

"What is your Hotel?"

Terrible question! All eyes turned to Vera again, and there was a dead pause. The fact was,

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that the girls did not really know where they were going—certainly not to any hotel. They were going to trust to luck in finding a good place at the lowest possible price, for our girls were far from being rich girls. But, of course, it would never do to let these gentlemen know their situation. What would they think of them! "And Vera is so terribly honest," groaned Jessie in spirit.

But Vera was proud as well as honest. She met Fred's question with a fair, unruffled face and calm gray eyes. "We have no Hotel. We are intending to stop at a private cottage," she answered steadily, and Jessie murmered to herself: "Praise the Lord! If the inquisitive thing wont ask at *whose* cottage."

But Vera's heart was beating fast, despite her calm face, at this very same thought. "I must confess that this wind is a little too much for me," she said shivering. "Suppose we go inside."

Accordingly inside they went, Fred saying on the way: "We are going to put up at the Wesley."

On account of the stormy passage the boat did not reach Cottage City until nearly 2 o'clock.

"Let me see to your trunks," said Fred.

"No, thank you, Fred," said Garnet, with an earnestness that rather surprised him. "We will not trouble you to do that. We are not quite ready to go up just now," and she smiled very pleasantly as she said it, as though she were anticipating some secret pleasure in staying down there.

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Fred looked around—saw the wet, dismal wharf, the hurrying, impatient people making for their various destinations as fast as their feet could carry them, and then looked at our four girls with an open look of astonishment on his face. But he was too much a gentleman to stay where it was very obvious he was not wanted.

"I don't believe those girls know where they are going," he said, speaking his thoughts aloud in his perplexity.

"It surely isn't for us to ask them," said Erfort gravely, slipping his arm through Fred's and hurrying him along.

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CHAPTER II.

"Now girls, what shall we do first," asked Garnet, briskly.

"I should think you'd know what *you* want to do first," said Jessie.

"What is that?" asked Garnet innocently.

"Find a restaurant," replied Jessie with a feeble laugh. (Jessie had felt the motion of the boat a little too plainly to feel just well.)

Garnet turned and looked at her little sister very gravely for a moment. "I will dear, when I have found a bed to put you into," she said.

"It is very plain to me," said Vera, "what we must do. Follow me." Then she turned to an express man standing near. "We will leave our baggage here for a short time," she said, a trifle haughtily, (but Vera always spoke in that way to strangers). "We will probably be back or send for them in about an hour."

"How much of Cottage City do we own, Vera?" asked Jessie, very pale now, but still having life enough to jest. "I should think we owned the whole of Circuit avenue — shops and all, with a little of Ocean avenue thrown in."

"Well, no matter if everyone *doesn't* know where we are going," said Vera, grandly.

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"My gracious, if they do I wish they would kindly tell us, for I'd like to go there," replied Jessie.

This made the girls laugh, and despite wet skirts and dripping umbrellas, the walk up Circuit avenue did not seem so very long. They turned into one of the shorter avenues and "took stock," as Jessie called it, of the cottages. Only one bore the placard "Rooms to Let," and before this one they halted.

"It doesn't look as though it had many rooms, anyway," said Vera, "but we may as well try."

She tapped on the door and it was immediately opened by a pleasant-faced, middle-aged woman.

"Come right in out of the rain," she said at once, and the girls were only too glad to accept the invitation.

"We saw by your card that you have rooms to let," said Vera, sitting very upright on a hard little lounge, and holding her wet umbrella out as if she were popping corn with it. "We are in search of rooms—either two small ones or one large one with two beds. Do you think you can accommodate us?"

"I think so," replied the lady. "Excuse me for one moment, and I will see," and she left the room.

"Anybody'd think she kept a hotel," said Jessie, in a stage whisper.

"Jessie!" said Garnet, warningly.

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In a moment the lady came back. "This way, please," she said.

Vera went first, and stopped short before a pair of very steep, very narrow stairs. She looked up at them and then at the lady with such a perfectly astonished face, that Jessie, bringing up the rear, giggled hysterically. This recalled Vera to herself.

"Excuse me; shall we go—go up?" she asked.

The lady bowed, a little stiffly, and Vera, fearing that she had offended her, started to run lightly up the stairs. Alas! She stubbed her toe on the second one, tried to save herself by clutching at the place where the bannisters should have been, and fell sprawling, hitting Garnet who came immediately behind her, with her feet as she did so. Garnet dropped easily and quietly onto her knees. When the girls had picked themselves up the lady had vanished.

Vera stalked majestically up the stairs, the rest following. In the middle of a low, small room, which two narrow, dyspeptic looking beds almost entirely filled, Vera stood still and looked scornfully about her.

Jessie threw herself on one of the beds and laughed until she cried. Garnet and Allie sank wearily down on the other and looked at Vera. Vera watched the writhing Jessie for a moment and then a laughing light crept into her gray eyes and

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around her red lips. The girls took courage at this and smiled in sympathy. Vera was going to assume the character in which they all loved her the best. When she chose she could keep all about her in perfect gales of laughter. Jessie's light at these times paled like the light of the moon before the sun.

Vera made a low bow towards the door, as though dismissing some person, and laid her "belongings" on the floor. "We'll bide here a bit, my maids," she said drolly, "before presenting our declination of the room to our friend in the lower regions. May the saints forgive me, but I'm very much thinking that her place in the after-life will be in the lower regions, if she has those kind of stairs put up for innocent people to break their necks upon. I wonder," she added gravely, "if she really means to give us to understand that this room is at our command? *Is* she as mad as that?"

"This is the room she evidently means for us to take," said Garnet. "No clothes-press, but — can you complain?" and she pointed to the hooks and nails that were driven into the beams and walls.

"If I were to open my eyes in the morning on-to one of my dresses hanging on one of those hooks," said Vera, "I would imagine it was myself suspended by the neck and would wonder when I could have done the deed. No. Let those of us who like the surroundings, stay. I go. Let

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me put the question: All those in favor of stopping at this station raise the right hand."

Not a hand went up.

"Contrary minds, the same sign."

Up went all the hands, Jessie raising both of hers.

"We will go," said Vera.

"And the sooner the better," added Jessie.

"You tell her, Vera," said Garnet.

"Yes, I'll smooth it over," answered Vera.

And she did; expressing herself in such a pretty, lady-like manner that the lady was not at all offended, and wished them all success, as she followed them to the door.

"Jessie," said Vera, where was it you and your mother stayed the time you came here three or four years ago?"

"Sure enough!" exclaimed Jessie, "How stupid in us Garnet, not to have thought of it. Let me see." She stood still in the middle of the street, her umbrella over her shoulder, and puckered her forehead into a dozen little wrinkles. "Oh, dear, dear, dear, where was it?"

"Don't stand in the middle of the street, Jess," said Garnet. "People will think you have struck an attitude for their especial benefit."

"Let them think," retorted Jessie. "Why couldn't you have kept still, Net Dare, for another minute? I was just thinking of it."

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"Was it Trinity Park?" asked Allie, absently.

"Right you are, Al!" exclaimed Jessie, elegantly. "Whatever made you think of it?"

"I happened to look up and see the name," nodding her head towards a sign-post.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Jessie. "Here we are, and I verily believe that is the self-same house before us—the one on the corner. There used to be the *darlingest* old lady and gentleman there when mother and I were down that summer! Let us try, anyway; it *looks* like the house."

"Rooms to let, anyway," said Vera. "There's a card in the window."

There were two front doors, both opening onto a wide piazza with a low railing around it. One of the front rooms projected out some little distance ahead of the other. As the girls went up the neat walk and ascended the steps, the green blind-door of one of the parlors opened, and a tall, white-haired gentleman stood on the step. His broad shoulders were bent with age, and the hand that held back the door, trembled; but the smile that lighted the worn face and shone in the dim blue eyes, was a bright and cheery one.

"Are you in search of rooms, young ladies?" he asked, and his voice was very quavering.

"Yes, sir," answered Vera. "Have you any to dispose of?"

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"I think mother has," he replied. "Come right in, out of the rain. Mother is up stairs; but sit down, please, and I'll call her," and he walked slowly and unsteadily out of the room.

"'Mother' is evidently the ruling spirit," whispered Vera, sitting down with Garnet on a low, comfortable lounge.

"I like here," said Garnet, decidedly. "And I do hope 'Mother' can accommodate us."

"I wish she'd hurry up," said Jessie. "My feet are wet."

"He looked like a nice old gentleman, didn't he?" observed Allie.

"'Sh," said Vera, warningly. "Here they come."

Steps were heard, slowly approaching the door. It opened, and "Mother" stood on the threshold.

Four fair, girlish faces, were turned expectantly toward the spot where she stood; four pair of bright, girlish eyes, were lifted to her face; and four warm, impulsive, girlish hearts, were at once laid at the trembling feet of "Mother." But even while the girls looked at, and loved at once, the pale, refined, gentle old face, framed with its soft waves of silvery hair, they couldn't help noticing, that while one slender hand patted nervously the pale blue cap that had evidently been put on hurriedly, the other rested on the arm of, and held determinedly back, her husband.

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"Mr. Atherton tells me you are in search of rooms," she began, and when the girls heard her voice, they wondered how they could have thought Mr. Atherton's was quavering; it was strong, compared with "Mother's."

"I have some rooms that are very good. Would you want two single ones or one large one?"

"We would prefer one large one, if you have it," replied Vera.

"Well, I have. Will you walk up stairs?"

"Mother" led the way up a pair of "christian stairs," as Vera called them, and opened the door of a room, the sight of which elicited little cries of delight from the girls. "Mother" heard the cries with a pleased smile.

"Yes, I think you will like this room," she said, with childish pleasure.

"Like it!" said Vera. "It is perfectly lovely."

It was a good-sized, square room. A double door, half glass, opened on to a cunning little balcony. On one side of the room there was a window with inside blinds. Two beds were in the room, a rocking-chair, two common chairs, a table, and a washstand. To the girls great delight there were two good-sized closets.

"We will go right down to the wharf and have our trunks sent up," said Vera.

"Yes, you and Net do that and Allie and I will send postals home," said Jessie.

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"Wait just a minute and I'll write a line to mother, and you can drop it in for me," said Vera.

When the girls went out they found the rain had stopped to a considerable extent, but the streets were very wet and muddy, and their walk down to the wharf was anything but a pleasant one. When they returned to the cottage they found their room empty — Allie and Jessie had not come back.

"Just like that lazy little Jess," said Garnet. "She means to stay away until the room is ready."

"Here are some sheets and pillow cases," said Vera. "Suppose we begin on the beds?"

"All right. You take that one and I'll take this."

Vera stood in the middle of the room and shook a pillow into its case. "I consider it a great streak of luck — our getting such a good room," she said. Then she stopped with the pillow in mid-air, and a look of horror on her face.

"Come right up. The girls are at home — I hear them talking. Yes, here they are," and Jessie threw open the door and walked into the room followed by Allie and — oh, horror of horrors! Cousin Fred and Mr. Richards! Vera sank on the bed she was making, holding her pillow in her lap as though it were a baby. Garnet, after bestowing a look on Jessie that was meant to annihilate her, sank on her bed also, and glared wildly on the unwelcome visitors. Mr. Richards saw their mis-

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take in accepting Jessie's invitation to "come up and see their room," and drew hastily back into the passage, but Cousin Fred came right in and looked about him with delighted eyes.

"What a splendid room," he cried, admiringly. "Just as pleasant as it can be. Beats ours all to hollow, Er," and he sat himself down comfortably on the foot of Garnet's bed.

Vera had assumed her "dignified manner." She was all proud reserve in a moment; yet the reserve was just touched with a sweetness that made her very charming. She rose quietly from the bed.

"Wont you come in, Mr. Richards?" and she placed a chair for him as she spoke. "I think, Mr. Travers, you will find this seat more comfortable," offering him a chair, also. "You must excuse our disorder, but we have scarcely had time to settle."

"Oh, I told them they would find everything topsy-turvey," said Jessie, easily, throwing her gossamer over the foot-board, and her hat on the bed. "Haven't you two lazy girls got the beds made yet?"

"I feel that I have committed an unpardonable offense," said Mr. Richards, gravely. I regret our thoughtlessness exceedingly.

"Oh, it is all right," said Garnet, feebly.

Fred, who had looked a little blank at what his friend had said, brightened up at this. "Of course

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it is all right. You don't care for your cousin."

Vera might have reminded him that *she* could claim relationship with neither him or his friend, and Mr. Richards might have done the same with regard to the girls, but they thought it best to say nothing.

The gentlemen stayed about half an hour. Fred would have stayed until dark, had not Mr. Richards, insisted upon their going.

"I suppose you will take in most of the band concerts, won't you?" asked Fred, as they rose to go.

"Well, we hope to, but we do not know whether we will venture out to-night or not," replied Garnet.

"It will be decidedly damp," said Fred. "We shall hope to see you to-morrow."

"We shall be glad to have you call."

"Perhaps the weather will permit our entertaining on the piazza," said Vera, smiling.

"That would be very pleasant," said Mr. Richards.

Jessie showed the gentlemen out. It was the punishment that Vera inflicted upon her for showing them *in*. When she came back, quiet little Garnet turned on her with her black eyes blazing. "Jessie Dare, you don't know *any*thing. You are worse than any baby."

There were two pairs of black eyes blazing now. "I'm not to blame for taking after my sister,"

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retorted Jessie. Then she added, vehemently: "For pity's sake, don't begin to jaw, Net, but let us have something to eat, I'm starving."

Garnet's eyes lost their fire, and she grew calm. Jessie chuckled wickedly. "I thought the eating dodge would quiet her," she whispered to Allie.

Vera and Garnet finished the bed-making, and then the bags of sandwiches and crackers were produced. Vera and Garnet sat on one bed, Jessie and Allie on the other, and "fell to."

In the midst of the feast, there came a low knock on the door. "Who now?" said Vera, putting the hand that held the sandwich, back of her, and going to open the door. "Mother" stood in the passage, with "Grandpa" peering over her shoulder.

"Excuse me, please, but is there anything more that you want? If there is, tell me, and I'll bring it to you."

"Oh, no, thank you," said Vera, gently. "We have everything needful."

"Will you have another quilt? The nights are quite chilly just now. Mr. Atherton will get you one if you would like it."

"Oh, yes, yes," quavered "Grandpa," over "Mother's" shoulder. "I'll get you one."

"Oh, but really, we do not need another," said Vera, earnestly. "You have made us quite comfortable."

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"Well, I'm glad to hear it. Now you must make yourselves right to home — just as if you belonged here," went on "Mother," and the girls smiled and nodded their heads, and *tried* not to think of the sandwiches.

"Mr. Atherton and me both like young people, and you're welcome to any room in the house."

"Thank you; thank you," chorused the girls.

"Yes," smilingly assented "Mother," looking more childishly pleased than ever, "when you get tired of staying up here, go down in either of the parlors. I've got a bed in one, but that needn't make any difference."

"No, no, that needn't make any difference," echoed "Grandpa," coming out from behind "Mother" a little way; but the slender, aged hand quickly forced him back again, and he retired obediently.

"We haven't anyone here just now, and perhaps we shan't have for a week or two, but you can't tell. When they come they generally come all together; but you shall have your first choice of the rooms, anyway, no matter how many come."

Just here, Vera almost upset the girls' gravity, by moving her head, so that the door came between it and the old people, and taking a good bite out of her sandwich. The mouthful disposed of, she showed her face to them again, smiling sweet, and full of gentle interest. Still, "Mother's" small

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talk rippled on, uninterruptedly, like the gentle murmuring of a brook, over its mossy bed, and at stated intervals, Vera's head disappeared behind the door, and she continued her surreptitious lunch. It made Jessie feel almost murderous, as for Garnet, who can describe *her* agony!

At last the gentle murmuring grew fainter and fainter and finally died away all together. Vera's head came from behind the door and Vera's smile was the last the two good old people saw as they moved away — "Mother's" hand still resting on the arm of, and gently propelling onward, "Grandpa."

"Oh, Vera, you wretch!" cried Jessie. "How *could* you?"

"Couldn't help it, Jess. I am but human."

"They are a dear old couple," said Jessie, taking a bite that surely made up for half a dozen held back, "but most terribly long-winded." And Garnet did not even reprove her.

At 6 o'clock the girls once more donned their hats and waterproofs. They had put a towel on the back of the rocker and caught it up in one corner with a bright bow of ribbon. They had spread another towel on the table and put their books and work-boxes on it. They had hung their clothes up in the closets and arranged their bottles, brushes, combs and sponges on the washstand, and on the narrow ledge that ran along either side of the room under the eaves. Vera and Garnet had spread

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their bright red shawls on the foot of each bed, and the room looked very cosy and homelike. Then they had sat in the dim twilight and talked, and sung snatches of low song, until the electric light, in the park opposite their room, had flared up suddenly and brightly and warned them that it was high time to be looking out for their "resteraunt." They did not need a lamp, for they opened the door and the electric light flooded their room with its moon-like brightness. They locked the other door and went quietly down the stairs and out of the side entrance, which "Mother" had informed them would belong exclusively to them.

The rain had ceased, but the air was full of a damp, drizzling mist. Just before them on the corner they saw a sign "Bridgett's Dining-Rooms." Jessie read it aloud, pronouncing "Bridgett's" with the emphasis on the first syllable. None of the others knew but what it was right.

"Well, let us go in and see 'Bridgett,'" said Vera. "Perhaps she can give us a plate of baked beans."

The very mention of this "home-dish" made Jessie and Allie murmur words of delight, but Garnet could only express her consent with a groan. It spoke volumes though.

"And now," said Vera, an hour later, as they walked slowly up Circuit avenue and looked into the lighted windows, "let us go to the concert."

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There were very few promenaders when they reached the park. The girls found a seat under one of the trees, spread their gossamers upon it, put up their umbrellas and sat there, patiently waiting for the band to begin. By and by a little boy came around with programmes and gave them each one. The people commenced to come by ones, and twos and threes, some bringing their camp-chairs with them, other leaning against the trees or walking slowly up and down. Little twinkling lights of red and green and yellow, like fairy lamps, commenced to move quickly to and fro, meeting and passing other twinkling lights of red and green and yellow.

"The bicyclists are beginning to turn out," said Garnet. "I thought we would see them."

The musicans took their places, the leader stood before them with his baton raised, a pause — up went the baton, down it came again, now on the right, now on the left — then a burst of glad music, and our girls felt that they were really at Cottage City. Promenaders walked to and fro, laughing and talking, despite the drizzling mist, more fairy lamps twinkled on the avenue. Two or three little boys with baskets on their arms, went from chair to chair. "Corn-bars; nice corn-bars, strawberry, vanilla, coffee and chocolate. Have some, ladies?" Our girls thought they would. By the time they were eaten, "home" was

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proposed. On the way back they stopped at a drug-store and invested in a pound of candy, each girl buying a quarter. Garnet bought chocolate-creams; Vera, nougats; Jessie, chocolate-almonds; and Allie, caramels.

"We'll save them for to-morrow," said Jessie, putting one slyly into her mouth.

"Yes, we'll want something to do all day," replied Vera.

"Aren't we going to morning services?" asked Allie, timidly.

"Well, yes, we might as well," said Garnet. "The tabernacle is right opposite the cottage."

"Yes, we'll go," said Vera. We wont sit very far down, and if we get tired we can get up and go out."

"I'll go on that condition," said Jessie.

They entered the house noiselessly for fear of disturbing the old people, but as they reached the top of the stairs, "Mother" came out of her room with a flannel night-dress on and a light in her hand. Jessie could be heard to faintly groan — she thought they were out there for half the night; then her spirits grew lighter as she thought of the package in her hands. If she grew *too* tired — but "Mother" did not keep them in the passage long.

"I forgot to give you a lamp," she whispered, as tho' some one lay asleep very near them, but the girls saw "Grandpa" peering from his room at

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them over "Mother's" shoulder. "Mother" put her hand out and held him back.

"Take this one. I am undressed and Mr. Atherton can undress in the dark. Did you have a good supper?"

"Yes'm; very good," answered Vera.

"Where did you go? They have some real good baked-beans every Saturday night at 'Bridgett's'—on the corner here." "Mother" put the emphasis on the last syllable, and the girls nudged each other softly at their mistake.

"That is where we went," said Garnet.

"Yes; it's a real good place," said "Mother." "I hope you will sleep well. Good-night."

"Good-night," answered the girls.

"My!" said Jessie. "There isn't much to 'Mother' when she is in *dishabilly*, is there!"

Vera laughed merrily as she set the lamp on the table. "No, there isn't," she said. Then she turned a face half laughing, half serious towards them. "Girls, how long do you suppose 'Mother' has been holding 'Grandpa' back with that little slender hand of hers?"

"I bet she didn't do it when he popped the question," said Jessie, with more force than elegance.

"I guess she commenced holding him back when the question as to who should rule was first brought up," said Garnet, disappearing into one of the closets to hang her dress up.

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"'Grandpa' seems to yield to it pretty well," said Allie, from the other closet.

"Yes, 'Mother's' victory seems to have been complete," said Vera, sitting down on the bed and beginning to unbutton her boots. "Who would imagine such a will-power in a delicate body like her. And such a hand as *she* has! Truly it is a 'velvet hand in an iron *glove*.'"

"Poor 'Grandpa' looks as though he realized it fully," said Jessie.

"Speaking of delicate bodies with iron wills," said Allie. "Don't you think that in nine cases out of ten you will find they go together?"

"Yes, I do," said Vera, decidedly. "You can never judge by appearances. Those who look as though they were born to rule are generally the ones who *are* ruled. You will very often find the spirit of a mouse concealed in the frame of a large woman, while your little, slender, wiry one is as courageous as a lion. I wonder how it is? And the rule holds good with the other sex, only timidity in a man is a hundred times more contemptible than in a big woman. The woman's sex excuses her to an extent, but what is more despicable than a cowardly man — especially if he is a big one? *Garnet!* what are you doing in that closet so long?"

"Listening to your learned discourse for one thing, and —" here she appeared in the doorway

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bearing something in her hands, "getting the alcohol lamp out to make some cocoa, for another."

"Garnet, you are my dearly-beloved sister," said Jessie, enthusiastically. "I choose the biggest cup."

"Where shall I set it?" asked Garnet, standing still in her white night dress, and looking around.

"Put it on here," said Vera, drawing forward a chair. "It is steady."

"Now you three, make some spills out of that paper on the floor," said Garnet, pouring some alcohol in the basin of the lamp. "We haven't any matches to spare; and for pity's sake close that blind, some one; I don't care about the young gent next door having a view of me just now."

"Sure death to him if he did," said Jessie, obeying the command.

Garnet, on her knees, gave her undivided attention to the burning alcohol, the other three girls crouched on the floor around her and watched the process with deep interest, each one holding a spill in her hand.

"My, but it shmells goot," said Jessie, skinning her little nose up, until it well-nigh disappeared from view.

"Well, we haven't *goot* our cups ready," said Vera; and Jessie, with a gasp, fell over on the floor as if the miserable little pun, had stricken her lifeless.

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"Don't, Vera," groaned Garnet. "I want some appetite left for the cocoa."

"Never fear but what you will have some, my dear," returned Vera. "It will take more than a pun to spoil that."

"I'll give you the first taste, Vera," said Garnet. "You deserve something. Pass your cup."

"I will. A c(o)uple of them, if you say so."

"Drink it quick, dear," said Garnet, soothingly. "It *may* have the desired effect. Ready, Allie? Now, Jess! Have some, Garnet? Yes, I will, thank you."

I think you would have laughed if you had seen those four girls (young ladies, rather), sitting on the floor in their night dresses, their knees drawn up to their chins, and the cups of steaming cocoa in their hands.

Vera held her's up above her head. "I drink to our adopted grand-parents," she said, in a low, clear voice.

Jessie spoiled the effect by saying, reproachfully: "Oh, why didn't you do it before? I've drunk all mine. Give me some more, Net."

"Are you intending to make any more toasts, Vera?" asked Garnet, gravely. "Because, if you are, I'll put some more water on."

"I have done my did," said Vera, rather vaguely, and Jessie choked so that her cocoa was spilled all over her night dress, and Garnet had to slap

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her back, saying as she did so: "Get into bed, every one of you. Some of the alcohol must have gotten into Vera's cocoa, and it's gone to her head."

Vera held her cup out coaxingly. "Just a drop more?" she pleaded.

"Not one," answered Garnet, sternly. "Come, put yourselves into that bed." And Vera obeyed, murmuring faintly. "It's too *bed* of you, Garnet."

"What's that?" giggled Jessie, lifting her head from her pillow. "Say it again, Ve."

"She'll do no such thing," said Garnet, hopping into bed beside Vera. "Go to sleep, Jess."

"Say it again, Vera," urged Jessie.

"Can't, I'm dead," said Vera, in an exhausted tone. And Jessie was obliged to lie down and content herself with laughing at something she had not heard.

"Wont some one get up and open the blind-door, so that the electric light will shine in?" asked Allie. "I would, only I am on the back side."

Garnet was out of bed in a moment. "Thanks," murmured Allie.

Fifteen minutes later, the silvery, moon-like radiance rested softly upon the four girlish faces lying calm and untroubled on their white pillows. It touched, and lingered lovingly upon Jessie's small, childish face, and showed the smile, still

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lingering on the red lips. It lighted Allie's pale, quiet one, beside it. It seemed to hover pityingly over Vera's pillow, softening the proud lines of the white face, resting upon it, and turning to silver the golden hair. It seemed to change the expression of Vera's face entirely, making it one of almost childish trust and restfulness. An expression her face never wore in her waking moments. Anyone seeing it, well might think, "That will be the look it will wear in death."

The light, falling on Garnet's face, betrayed none of the girl's inward thoughts. The expression seen upon it, was simply one of a contented mind and perfect bodily health. *Was* there nothing more ?

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CHAPTER III.

The next morning the girls were awakened by the sun shining brightly into their room.

"Oh, what a lovely morning," cried Jessie, jumping out of bed and going to the door that led out on the balcony. "Girls, do come and look. It is perfectly lovely."

And indeed it was. There was a large tree before the house, whose branches almost rested on the roof. Between the leaves, could be seen the Methodist tabernacle, with its sloping red roof, old fashioned pulpit and rows of white, empty seats The lovely green grass in the park, fairly shone with the rain drops that still lingered upon it, and the leaves of the trees also glistened with them. The birds were singing, and from one of the cottages near, came the sound of a piano and the clear, full tones of a woman's voice, singing. Some children were walking through the park, and the the sound of their voices was music, too.

While the girls stood with their arms around each other, enjoying the perfect beauty of the scene, the loud notes of a bell startled them. They came from the church near by. Garnet looked at her watch that lay upon the table.

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"Eight o'clock. That bell is for morning prayers; don't you remember, Jess?"

"Yes! they have only a very few minutes for them, though."

"Ten," said Garnet, beginning to dress.

Vera turned from the door with a softened look in her gray eyes. Somehow or other the whole scene of this glorious Sabbath morning, impressed her solemnly, and the sound of the bell calling all to prayers, added to the solemnity.

"I think I would like to attend an early service like that," she said, softly.

"Well, we will to-morrow morning, if we can get up early enough," said Garnet.

"I would like it too," said Allie.

"Umph! I don't know as I care about getting in with a lot of shouting Methodists," said Jessie, holding her head down and letting the glorious mass of hair fall over her face.

"Just look at that child's hair," said Vera, standing with her brushes poised above her head, while she gazed admiringly. "Do let me arrange it for you, will you, Jess?"

"With the greatest of pleasure," said Jessie, with alacrity, sitting down on her trunk.

"Doesn't anyone go to the church but shouting Methodists?" asked Allie.

"Yes, of course they do," answered Garnet. "Jess was only joking. Anyone goes who wants to."

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"I suppose we are all going to the meeting in the tabernacle, aren't we?" asked Vera, putting a pin into Jessie's head a little more deeply than she meant to.

"Ow! That's my scalp you are boring into, Vera," squealed Jessie,

Vera made haste to pull out the offending pin. "Excuse me, Jess, but you hair is so thick it seems impossible for a pin to go through it."

"Well, it can, just the same," murmured Jessie, in an injured tone.

"I am going to meeting for one," said Garnet.

"So am I," said Vera.

"And I," said Allie.

"Well, then I suppose I must," said Jessie.

"You know you want to, Jessica," said Vera, lovingly, giving the glossy braids a final pat.

"Much obliged to you, ma'am, for doing my hair," said Jessie, getting off the trunk and making a low bow. "It feels splendiferous."

"It feels as it looks then," said Garnet. "I wish I could do something with my mop."

"I wonder if we will see the young men at church," said Jessie.

"Such a thing cannot concern a child like you, at any rate," said Garnet, at which reproof Jessie could only reply, lamely: "Hh! Child your own self."

"The first thing we had better do," said Vera, "will be to get some breakfast. 'Mother' said

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"Which would you rather do, Al and Jess," said Garnet, as they rose from the table, "wash the dishes or make the beds?"

"Let us take turns," said Vera. "We'll wash dishes this morning, and they can to-morrow morning."

"A good idea," said Garnet. "Now get to work, for there is no time to spare."

"Yes, its almost church-time," said Vera.

"Oh, bother church!" muttered Jessie.

"Jessie!" said Garnet, reprovingly.

"To tell the truth I don't care particularly about going myself," said Vera, putting the plates together. "But I suppose we might as well go; it will help kill time at all events."

"Yes," said Garnet. "and if we grow tired we can leave quietly."

When the girls were ready they looked each other over critically to see that everything was all right. A fairer sight could scarcely be asked for than they in their pretty summer dresses. Vera was dressed all in soft black, that made her white skin and golden hair look perfectly lovely. Allie wore a pretty, cool looking dress of white and nile-green. Garnet and Jessie wore cream, which was most becoming to their rich complexions and dark eyes.

They took their places near the entrance. When the hymn "Nearer My God to Thee" was

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sung, their voices joined in the harmony, and very sweet they sounded too. Yet, while they sang, their eyes roved carelessly from one part of the tabernacle to another, and when they saw the tall, bent form of "Grandpa" walk slowly up the aisle to one of the front seats, they nudged one-another and smiled.

"Though like a wanderer,
The sun gone down;
Darkness come over me,
My rest a stone."

The grand melody floated up to the dark dome of the tabernacle, but our girls' hearts beat calmly and regularly in their bosoms. Allie alone felt a name-less longing. What was it?

"Yet in my dreams I'd be,
Nearer my God to Thee."

Vera's gray eyes, roving carelessly around, fell upon a pale face lifted to Heaven, and she stopped her singing to gaze in wonder. The blue eyes, that looked as though they knew well what it was to be filled with bitter tears, were full of a soft, radiant light now. The pale lips were slightly parted and quivering a little.

"Nearer, my God to Thee,
Nearer to Thee."

The face was fairly luminous now and the next moment it was hidden from sight in two small,

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neatly-gloved hands, as the voice of the minister fell on the sudden silence.

"Oh, God, who takest away the sins of the would"—

Garnet softly touched Vera on the arm to remind her, and the golden head bowed itself immediately, but not one word of the beautiful prayer did Vera hear. Whose was that pale, radiant face? What deep sorrow had come into her life? The story of it was written in the luminous eyes, the quivering lips, the pale, peaceful face.

"What a heartlessly long sermon!" said Jessie, as they passed out from the cool duskiness of the tabernacle to the warm, bright sunlight. "I do think that minister ought to be arrested for cruelty to animals."

"What are you looking so sober about, Vera?" asked Garnet. "Are you thinking of the sermon?"

"There was but one sermon for me this morning," replied Vera.

"Conscience!" groaned Jessie. "How many would you have?"

"I don't mean the sermon the minister preached."

The girls turned and looked at her wonderingly.

"I found my sermon in a face this morning," was Vera's answer to the question so plainly asked.

"Why, good-morning, ladies," said a cheery voice, and "Cousin Fred" and Erfort Richards sauntered up.

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"A miraculous discovery made, gentlemen, by our friend Vera," said Jessie.

"What is that?" asked Erfort, calmly taking the bunch of lace flounces, that served as a parasol, from Jessie's hand and using it for a cane.

"Why, she found a sermon in a face this morning."

"Cousin Fred" stepped quietly up to Vera. "Explain the mystery, Jess," he said.

"Oh, let Vera do that," replied Jessie.

"Does it seem such an impossible thing—finding a sermon in a face?" asked Vera. "Well, did any of you notice a lady, a small, slight lady with a pale face."

"Oh, did she have on a lovely white lace dress and a hat just one bed of pansies?" interrupted Jessie, turning around with an animated face.

The flickering smile passed over Erfort's face at the question, just touching the lips and lighting the dark eyes for a moment, and then vanished.

"No," replied Vera, "the truth is I didn't notice her dress, but she had large, blue eyes, and she seemed to be so interested in the sermon, and while they were singing "Nearer My God to Thee," I could not keep my eyes off her face — it was fairly radiant. That woman has suffered — I know she has, but whatever her sufferings have been, she has passed through them bravely and is feeling perfectly at rest."

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"Why, Vera!"

Jessie had stood still and was staring at Vera with all her eyes. Fred looked ill at ease and was eyeing Vera askance. Was she one of these religious girls? He had liked her very much the day before, but if she was going to be religious it would spoil all the fun. Erfort seemed to be intensely admiring the fantastic pattern of Jessie's parasol handle.

"What's the matter, Jasmine?" asked Vera.

"Well, that is just what I want to know," returned Jessie. "What are you so solemn about?"

"I am not solemn," replied Vera. "That is, I do not think I am; and yet, that face as I watched it, made me feel strangely. It somehow made me feel as though I would like to meet with the lady and talk with her."

"Perhaps you will meet with her," said Erfort, quietly.

"Oh, I hope so," replied Vera, warmly.

"Advertise for her," said Jessie, tilting her head back and looking at Vera over her shoulder with laughing eyes. "I'll do the composing. Ahem! 'Wanted:—Knowledge of the whereabouts of a small, slight lady, with a pale face, luminous blue eyes, and a general aspect of one who has fought the battle of life bravely and is now patiently waiting to have her name erased from the great roll-call. The person who will give the desired information will be liberally rewarded.'" Jessie held out a little

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hand. "Ten cents, please, Vera," she said; but Vera did not smile.

"But I mean it, Jess. I would really like to know who she is."

"I noticed her," said Allie's quiet voice.

"Cæsar's Ghost!" exclaimed Jessie, in horrified tones.

"Jessie!" came from Garnet, in reproving tones.

Fred laughed. "You'll get yourself in trouble, Jess," he said, glad to have a chance of changing the tone of the conversation.

"Hh; is that so?" retorted Jessie, but she said no more, and walked along by Erfort.

"Won't you come in?" asked Vera, as they reached the cottage. "'Grandpa' and 'Mother' have given us permission to use the front parlor, so we can entertain our friends in there."

Fred seated himself comfortably on the steps and just as he opened his mouth to say, "Oh, yes, thank you, we'll stay," Erfort said, "Thank you, but by the time we get back to the hotel, it will be our dinner-hour, and I suppose it is the same with you, ladies. If you are willing, we will call around this afternoon. Come, Fred."

Jessie skipped into the house, twirled herself around on one foot, made a sweeping courtesy to the door, and said in her most ceremonious tones. "Ah, yes, Mr. Richards, it *is* our dinner-hour. Come, ladies, we will repair to the dining-room of

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Hotel d' Atherton and — lunch off fruit crackers and chocolate creams."

And with a laugh, the four girls ran lightly up the stairs to their room.

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CHAPTER IV.

It is the afternoon of the next day, and again it is a pouring down rain storm. The girls are in their room. Vera is sitting in one of the rocking chairs, with a volume of Tennyson on her lap. Garnet occupies the other rocker, with a little volume called "Sea Music," in her hand. Allie is lying on one of the beds, with one hand under her cheek, and her blue eyes looking steadily at "nothing." Jessie is sitting on the foot of the other bed, one of her feet under her, the other swinging rather violently back and forth, between the bed and the floor; her elbow is resting on the foot-board, her cheek is in her hand and her large black eyes are roving restlessly around the room. The exhaustless bag of fruit-crackers, holds its conspicuous place on the table, between Vera and Garnet, and every once in a while, first one little white hand and then the other, of the two readers, wander absently to it, disappear for an instant, and then withdraw itself, (and a cracker). They munch, and read, and rock, and are happy.

Poor Jessie! She is very human, and can bear it no longer. The swinging foot goes the least bit higher in its upward motion, and when it comes

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down, it brings Garnet's book with it; then Jessie throws herself backwards on the bed, partly to laugh and partly to escape the angry light of Garnet's dark eyes.

"You are certainly growing more lady-like every day," is Garnet's sarcastic comment, as she stoops to pick up her book.

"Oh, bother!" retorts Jessie. "Why don't the crowd wake up then? I never saw such a dull set! You two girls would be perfectly happy on an island, all by yourselves, if you only had a book of sentimental poetry and a bag of fruit crackers. *I* call it downright selfish in you. I don't know what *you* call it."

"Oh, Jasmine, don't speak lightly of Tennyson. I am reading the 'Lady of Shalott' for the eighth time, and it grows more beautiful every time I read it," said Vera.

"Ugh! His poetry is too ancient for me," replied Jessie.

"Ah, that is just the beauty of it. And he expresses himself so prettily. There is only one fault I can find with him."

"What is that?" asked Garnet.

"He makes his women too weak."

"Physically, intellectually, or morally?"

"Oh, morally. His description of them as they are *physically*, suits me exactly. Tall, slender, fair and proud! But weak — too weak."

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"They had one rare qualification. They knew how to suffer in silence," said Garnet, thoughtfully.

"The fate of all true and pure women," answered Vera.

"*You* always make me think of Guinevere, Vera," said Garnet, lovingly. "I am going to call you that."

Vera raised both white hands in horror. "I beseech you not to, Garnet. Call me anything but that. Why, she was his weakest heroine."

"She proved herself to be strong at the last, though, Vera. And see what she suffered. Poor woman! She was a very woman in her suffering."

"Yes, the queen was indeed lost in the woman, in more sense than one. She deserved all the suffering she had to endure and she had no one to thank but herself."

"What's this all about, anyway," asked Jessie, who was sitting up on her elbow by this time, and listening to the conversation with interest, as was Allie. "Tell me all about it, Vera, I hate to read, but I like to listen to stories," and she drew her mouth down and rolled her eyes around, like the baby that she was.

"Well, I'll tell it to you," said Vera, closing her book and leaning her head back against her chair.

Garnet closed her book, rested her elbow upon it, leaned her head upon her hand, and prepared to listen. Allie and Jessie fixed their eyes upon

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Vera, and so with the rain falling heavily on the roof, and the wind moaning low among the branches of the great tree, Vera told over, the beautiful story of "Queen Guinevere," and as Garnet watched the intensity of feeling expressed in the fair face, she thought: "She *does* make an ideal 'Queen Guinevere,' whatever she may say."

Story of "Guinevere."

"I will begin with 'The coming of Arthur.' The first four lines are these:

> "'Leodogran, the King of Cameliard,
> Had one fair daughter, and none other child;
> And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,
> Guinevere, and in her, his one delight.'"

"Before Arthur came to the isle of Cameliard a great many petty kings had ruled, and were always waging war upon each other, wasting all the land. Aurelius lived before Arthur came, and he fought and died; then came King Uther, and *he* fought and died. But neither of these kings could make the kingdom one. But when King Arthur came, he made a realm and reigned. All recognized him as their head and king. But the island had become such a waste that wild beasts rooted in the fields and even wallowed in the gardens of the king. And sometimes a wolf would devour a child. King Leodogran had heard of Arthur newly

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crowned, and he sent for him to come and fight the the beasts, altho' some said that Arthur was not Uther's son. So, Arthur came. And when he passed the castle walls, Guinevere saw him, but she did not know he was a king, for he did not wear any sign of his kinglihood, but was dressed as a simple knight. But Arthur saw and knew her, and fell in love with her on the spot. But he passed on, and pitched his tents beside the forest. And he drove out the heathen, and slew the beasts, and filled the forest, and made broad pathways for the hunter and the knight, and then he went back, for while he was there, some of the great lords and barons were jealous of him, and they colleagued with some of the smaller kings to bring doubts as to his really being Uther's son, and his right to rule them. They said he did not resemble Uther, and they declared he was not Uther's son, but Anton's. But Arthur thought of nothing but Guinevere. He loved her with all the strength of his being, and he was a very strong and noble man. But he went to fight a great battle with these jealous barons and kings, and first it seemed as though they were going to win the fight, and then as tho' he was to be the victor. But Arthur seemed to be possessed with superhuman strength, and threw all the kings, and the victory was his. He was so overjoyed that he laughed aloud, and he said to his favorite warrior, whom he loved and honored most: "

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"'Thou dost not doubt me king,
So well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day.'"

"And the warrior replied:"

"'Sir, and my liege, the fire of God decends
upon thee in the battle field:
I know thee for my king.'"

"Then they swore on the field of death a deathless love, and Arthur said:"

"'Man's word is God in man:
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death!'"

"And this warrior was 'Sir Launcelot.' Then Arthur asked Leodogran to give Guinevere to him to be his bride, and Leodogran liked and admired him, but he was doubtful as to his birth, for some declared he was son of Gorloïs, or else the child of Anton, and no king. Or else base born, so Leodogran didn't know what to do. He sent out knights to learn the history of Arthur's life. He consulted with everyone whom he thought would know, but he received but little satisfaction. He sent for the 'Queen of Orkney,' for she was Gorloïs' daughter, and asked her if she were not Arthur's own sister, but she either could not or would not tell him. At last he sent word to Arthur that he might have Guinevere for his queen. When Arthur received this word he bade Sir Launcelot to ride forth and bring the queen, and he watched him leave the gates. This was in the

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latter part of April, and in May he returned with Guinevere. They were married, and at the shrine they swore a deathless love, and Arthur said:"

"'Behold, thy doom is mine.
Let chance what will, I love thee to the death.'"

"And the queen replied with drooping eyes:"

"'King and my lord, I love thee to the death.'"

"After his marriage, Arthur fought and won twelve great battles, and made a realm and reigned. One of the maidens of the queen's court was named Enid, and was wife to Geraint. She loved the queen and the queen loved her, and often the queen would deck Enid with her own white hands, and she would be the lovliest lady at the court — next to the queen herself. But now arose whispers of the guilty love of the queen for Sir Launcelot, and, although there was no proof of the truth of this, yet Geraint was fearful lest his young wife's honor should be sullied through her great love for the queen. So he went to the king, and, under pretext of desiring to go to his princedom to save it from bandit earls and assassins, he asked permission to take his wife and go hence, and the king, after musing awhile, allowed them to depart." (Here Vera stopped to say, "The poem of Geraint and Enid is beautiful, but I cannot do it justice. It must be read carefully to be appreciated.") Sir Launcelot was ordered by the king to go and

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search for the last and largest of the eight diamonds that was to be put into the center of the crown that was to be presented to the queen. On the morning of his departure the queen was sick, and Arthur asked her if she felt too sick to look upon Sir Launcelot before he went away. She lifted her eyes then and Sir Launcelot read in their depths:

"'Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more than many diamonds.'" And he yielded and told the king that the wound he had received a long time ago was not yet healed, and the king looked first at him and then at her and went his way, and then the queen and Sir Launcelot talked together and the queen was in a bitter mood so that he left her and went away angry. He went to the 'Castle of Astolat' where dwelt"

> "'Elaine, the fair; Elaine, the lovable,
> Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,'"

"With her father and two brothers. And when he reached the castle gate the old dumb keeper let him in. And Elaine's father and two brothers greeted Sir Launcelot kindly and hospitably. And Elaine when she looked into his face read there the guilty love he had for his queen, but she loved him, although his face was seamed with an old sword cut and he was twice her years, yet"

> "'She lifted up her eyes
> And loved him with a love that was her death,'"

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"In the morning he departed with her brother, and while he was standing at the castle gate stroking his horse's mane, Elaine came down the tower stairs and stood before him. She asked him to wear her 'favor' to the tourney. But he told her that he had never worn a lady's favor. She begged him to wear her's, and he said he would and asked her what it was. She told him it was a red sleeve, broidered with pearls, and she brought it, and while he bound it on his helmet he said:"

"'I never yet have done so much
For any maiden living.'"

"And the words filled her with great delight. And he gave his shield to her and asked her to keep it until he came again. And Launcelot went to battle and it reached the queen's ears how he wore a red sleeve, broidered with pearls; and the queen threw herself down on her couch and writhed in agony and called him 'traitor,' for she thought he loved someone else; and in a little while she heard that it was the 'Maid of Astolat.' And the queen moved about her castle, pale and proud. But the poor little 'Lily Maid of Astolat,' unconscious of how her name was being bandied about at court, stayed in her turret window beside the shield, and watched for Launcelot's return. But he did not come for he had been wounded in battle, and Elaine told her father she must seek for him, and he gave her a guide saying:"

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"'Being so very wilful, you must go.'"

"And as she went, the words kept singing in her heart, only the last one was changed:"

"'Being so very wilful you must die.'"

"She found Sir Launcelot in a cave wounded and sick, but her red silk sleeve still fluttered from his helmet, only it was tattered and torn, and half the pearls had been shot off. She nursed him every day, and every night she went to stay with her kin in the city. Launcelot was not always gentle with her, but sometimes gruff, but she bore it very meekly—she loved him so. And Launcelot thought to himself that if he had only met her before she might have made the world beautiful to to him, but now—"

"'The shakles of an old love straightened him.
His honor rooted in dishoner stood.
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.'"

"When Launcelot was better the three returned to Astolat, and Elaine dressed herself in her most becoming attire, and came and stood before Launcelot. She hoped he would tell her that he loved her, but he only bade her tell him what he could give her to repay her for her kindness to him, and he said:"

"'Delay no longer, speak your wish,
Seeing I must go to-day.'"

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"Then poor Elaine forgot everything but her love, and she cried passionately:"

"'I have gone mad. I love you; let me die.'"

"'Ah, sister,' answered Launcelot, 'what is this!' And innocently extending her white arms —'Your love,' she said, 'your love — to be your wife.'"

"But Launcelot told her he would never marry, for had he been going to he would have wedded earlier in life. Then she implored him to take her with him, that she might ever see his face, but this he could not do. He told her it was not love she felt for him, but 'love's first flash in youth,' and he told her he would always be her friend and knight, but more than that he could not. But she only grew deathly pale, and saying:

"'Of all this will I nothing,'"

she fell, and they carried her swooning to the tower." "And her father said:"

"'Aye, a flash
I fear me that will strike my blossom dead.
Too courteous are you fair Sir Launcelot, I pray you
use some rough discourtesy
To blunt or break her passion.'"

"So, Sir Launcelot stayed over till the next morning, and Elaine heard his horse's hoofs upon the stones, and she flung open her casement and looked down and she saw that her sleeve was gone

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from his helmet. And she knew that he knew she was looking at him, but he did not glance up. 'This was the one discourtesy that he used.'

"So he went away, and Elaine sat in her tower alone, and her father came to her and said: 'Have comfort,' and her brothers came and said: 'Peace to thee, sweet sister,' and she greeted them calmly. And she made a song and called it 'The Song of Love and Death.' And when Elaine knew she was going to die, she sent for her father and and brothers, and told them she wanted to write Sir Launcelot a letter, and that after she was dead they must make her body ready for the grave and lay it upon a barge, with the letter in her dead hands, and let their dumb old keeper steer her down the river to the gates of the queen's palace, and then bear her into the hall and set her down among them, and after her long voyage she would rest. And they promised to do as she asked. And so she died. And her two brothers laid her upon the barge, and set a lily in her hand, and spread a silken coverlet over her, and kissed her quiet brow and said with tears:"

"'Sister, farewell forever. Farewell, sweet sister.'
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead
Steere'd by the dumb went upward with the flood—
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter—all her bright hair streaming down—
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold

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Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white,
All but her face, and that clear-featured face
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,
But fast asleep and lay as tho' she smiled.'"

"That day, Sir Launcelot craved an audience of Guinevere, to give to her at last, the costly diamond, and she granted it to him; and when she appeared before him, pale and proud, he knelt before her. And the queen was angry with him, and took her diamonds from her neck and arms, and telling him first to give them to the maid he loved, and then crying that she should not have them, she flung them from her through the casement into the water below, and it was then that the barge, bearing Elaine, passed under the window, and when they had brought her in, they gave the letter she held in her hand to Sir Launcelot, and this was it:"

"'Most noble lord, Sir Launcelot of the Lake,
I, sometimes called the Maid of Astolat,
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return,
And, therefore, my true love has been my death.
And, therefore, to our Lady Guinevere,
And to all other ladies, I make moan.
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
Pray for my soul, thou too, Sir Launcelot,
As thou art a knight, peerless.'"

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"Sir Launcelot read it aloud, beside the dead Elaine, and before all the lords and dames, and king and queen, and he told them all her story. Then was the queen happy, for she knew he loved only her, still. And Arthur ordered Elaine's body to be put into a costly tomb, and for the story of her voyage to be blazoned on it, in letters of blue and gold. Then Sir Launcelot drew apart, and when the queen passed him, she said: 'Launcelot, forgive me; mine was jealousy in love.' He answered: 'That is love's curse; pass on, my queen, forgiven.' And Arthur came and put his arm about Sir Launcelot's neck, and sympathized with and consoled him in his trouble. He did not know how Launcelot was wronging him. And Launcelot was conscience-smitten and went away and mourned bitterly. After a while it became known to Arthur how he was being deceived, and his anger and sorrow were deep. Then the queen fled the Court, and took refuge in a convent at Almesbury, and had no one with her save a little maid—a novice. And this is how Arthur learned of her sin. Sir Modred hated Sir Launcelot, and he watched him and the queen, and one morning, when the royal party had been a-maying and had returned, Sir Modred climbed to the top of the garden wall, to spy some secret scandal if he might. Sir Launcelot came by, and seeing him, and understanding why he was there, took him by the heel, as one

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would pluck a caterpillar, and cast him down. Then he helped him to rise, but the prince went away with vengeance in his heart. Sir Launcelot told the queen, but at first she only laughed, then she grew afraid. They used to meet in the tower, and she begged him to fly to his own land, but he would not. At last, one day they agreed upon a night of parting. It came, and they met in the tower for the last time. But while they were bidding each other an affectionate farewell, Modred brought his men to the foot of the tower and cried out: 'Traitor, come out; ye are trapt at last!' And Launcelot rushed out and leapt on him, and hurled him headlong; and he fell, stunned, and his men took and bore him off and all was still. Then Sir Launcelot and Guinevere bade each other a long farewell. He begged her to go with him to his castle beyond the seas, but she would not. He said his was the shame; but she said, no, it was her's, for she was a wife and he was unwedded; so they parted. He went to his own land and she to the convent in Almesbury—fled all night upon the horse he had sat her upon. She told the sisters at the convent that her enemies pursued her, and they believed her and took her in. They never knew her name, for she talked only with the little maid. And one night she was listening to this little maid, who pleased her with her babbling talk, when there came a rumor wildly blown

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about, that King Arthur was waging war on Sir Launcelot. Then she thought 'With what a hate the people and the king must hate me.' And she bowed her head upon her hands, and the little maid who did not like the silence said: 'Late, so late! What hour, I wonder, now.' And when the queen did not answer, she began to sing a little air that the nuns had taught her. 'Late, so late.' And when the queen heard this, she lifted her head and asked her to sing the whole of it to her, and she did, and this is the song:"

"'Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.
No light had we; for that we do repent;
And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.
No light; so late! and dark and chill the night!
O, let us in, that we may find the light!
Too late, too late? ye cannot enter now.
Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
O, let us in, tho' late, to kiss his feet!
No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now.'"

"And after she had sung it she commenced to talk with the queen about the news they had heard. And she told the queen how the king thought Sir Launcelot had the queen in his castle, and that was why he had gone to fight him, and the little maid spoke in loving words of the king — so good,

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so kind and noble as he was — until the queen moaned to herself: 'Will the child kill me with her innocent talk?' And in listening to the little maid, she seemed to go back to the time when Arthur had sent Launcelot for her, and of the pleasant talk they had had together on their journey, and when she had first seen the king how she had thought him 'high, self-contained and passionless.' But while she brooded thus, there rang a cry through the convent: 'The King!' And while she sat and trembled, armed feet came through the long gallery from the outer doors. Guinevere threw herself on the floor and hid her face in her white arms, and when the king came thro' he saw and stopped before her. Then came silence, and then she heard his voice"—

> "'Liest thou here so low, the child of one
> I honored? happy dead before thy shame!
> Well it is that no child is born of thee:
> For think not, tho' thou woulds't not love thy lord,
> Thy lord hast wholly lost his love for thee?
> I am not made of so slight elements;
> Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame.'"

"He paused, and in the pause she crept an inch nearer, and laid her hands about his feet. And he said:"

> "'Yet think not I have come to urge thy crimes,
> I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere;

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I, whose vast pity almost makes me die
To see thee lying there; thy golden head,
My pride in happier summers, at my feet.
And all is passed, the sin is sinn'd, and I,
Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God
Forgives: do thou for thine own soul the rest.
But how to take last leave of all I loved?'"

"Then Arthur goes on to give expression to his deep sorrow, and his last words were:"

"'But hither shall I never come again,
Never lie by thy side, see thee no more.
Farewell!
And while she grovelled at his feet,
She felt the King's breath wander o'er her neck.
And in the darkness, o'er the fallen head,
Perceived the moving of his hands that blest.'"

"Then the queen struggled to her feet and made her way to the casement, that she might look once more upon his face, and she saw him on horseback at the door, and the sad nuns stood near him with a light, and she heard him tell them to guard and foster her evermore. His helmet was lowered so she would not see his face which was like an angels. Then he rode away, and Guinevere stretched out her arms and cried: 'Oh, Arthur!' Then she knew how great for him her love was and she moaned:"

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"'Is there none
Will tell the king I love him tho' so late?'"

"Then the little maid and the nuns came in and stood around her, weeping; and she told them that hereafter she would make her home with them, doing all the good she could."

"'They took her to themselves, and she
Still hoping, fearing, is it yet too late?
Dwelt with them, till in time their Abbess died.
Then she, for her good deeds and her pure life,
And for the power of ministration in her,
And likewise for the high rank she had borne,
Was chosen Abbess there, an Abbess lived
For three brief years, and there an Abbess passed
To where beyond these voices there is peace.'"

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CHAPTER V.

A long drawn sigh from the three girls, as Vera finished, and then silence. Tender-hearted, impulsive Jessie was crying, but so softly that the others did not hear her.

"What a sad, sad story," said Allie, gently.

"Yes, it is sad," replied Vera, "but I don't pity Guinevere one bit."

"Oh, Vera," said Garnet, reproachfully.

"Well, I don't. Nor any other woman who proves herself so faithless. Such a grand man as King Arthur was!"

"He was too grand," said Garnet, with unusual bitterness. "I can imagine just how he looked down on the poor, fallen queen, who lay at his feet with her golden hair sweeping the dust. 'I, whose vast pity almost makes me die.' Ugh! If I were a man I would say: 'Pity be snooked.'"

"Well, Garnet Dare, I would like to know who is using elegant expressions now!" cried Jessie, taking her handkerchief down from her eyes. "But what became of King Arthur, Vera?"

"Oh, he fought and won many battles, and at last he was severely wounded, and — and — well, I

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can't just tell you where he went, but while he lay wounded on some beach, talking to one of his knights, a barge sailed slowly up to him, in which were seated three beautiful queens. They took Arthur into the barge and he sailed away with them to some beautiful, warm country." ("Oh, he died, then, did he?" interrupted Jessie, wickedly). Allie laughed softly and even Garnet smiled, but Vera replied, innocently: "No, he didn't die. There was one of the three beautiful women taller and more lovely than the others, who smoothed his forehead and —"

"Hh! I bet a dollar bill he up and married her before he'd known her a month. Just like a man," said Jessie, with infinite contempt.

"Oh, Jasmine; what do you know about men?" asked Vera, with a laugh.

"Hh! all I want to."

"You know what Josiah Allen's wife, Samantha, says about the men," said Garnet. "Or more particularly about her's. 'Josiah looked good to me. Men are nice creeturs, but you don't want to see too meny of them to once; likeways with wimmen.'"

"Well, Samantha gets about right about our not wanting to see 'too many of them to once,'" said Jessie. "I've never seen any man yet who looked good to *me*."

"That's strange," said Vera, in mock surprise. "Such an antiquated fossil as you are."

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"Superfluity of words, my dear," reproved Jess, grandly. "A fossil is necessarily antiquated." Then she buried her head in the counterpane, to escape the cracker that Vera threw at her.

"Doesn't Mr Richards look good to you, Jess?" asked Allie, innocently. "I think he is real nice looking."

"Oh, he's nice looking enough," said Jessie, carelessly, "but he's stiffer than a ram-rod."

"Say, girls," said Vera, suddenly, "do you think it is wicked to go to the theatre?"

Up sprang Jessie on the bed, and gazed at Vera with big, shining eyes. "What!" she exclaimed. "What did you say, Vera Earle?"

"I asked you," repeated Vera, "if you thought it was wicked to go to the theatre."

"Well, not much," replied Jessie, emphasizing her words with a pound of her little fist on the foot-board. "But I would think it mighty wicked if I *couldn't* go."

"Jessie, will you *please* stop using that word?" asked Garnet.

"What word?" Knowing all the time what it was.

"Mighty. You know it is not only unladylike, but actually wrong."

"Yes, that's so," with unexpected meekness. "I won't use it again."

"But *do* you think it is all right to go?" asked Vera.

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"Jessie has already answered for herself," said Garnet. "*I* certainly think there is not the least bit of harm in going to a theatre, unless the play is immoral. That, of course, would be apt to have a dangerous effect on one's mind, just as immoral books have. But, as for there being anything wicked in the ordinary theatre, I cannot see the reason."

"You don't think it is wicked, do you, Vera?" asked Jessie, suddenly.

"What a question, Jess," said Garnet, with a low, amused laugh. "When we all four go to one every Saturday afternoon almost as regularly as Saturday afternoon comes."

"Hear Net," said Jessie. "Anybody would think we were female Cæsars."

"Well, we go to the theatre on an average of once a month," retorted Garnet, whether we are female Cæsars or — or male Cæsars," she added, rather lamely.

"Yes, you bet we do," said Jessie, "if we do have to get seats in 'nigger heaven.'"

Garnet looked most indignant. "The idea!" she exclaimed. "I wouldn't say such a thing even in joke, if I were you, Jessie."

"An' sure, I'm *not* saying it in joke. I'm in deadly airnest, be jabbers. But you do not answer me, Vera. Have you changed your mind about going to the theatre? Give me your handker-

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chiefs, girls, I shall need them if she tells me she does."

"N—o," replied Vera, "I don't know as I think it is *wicked* really, but—"

"N—o—o—o," mimicked Jessie. "What do you mean by your prolongation of the vowel O, Vera Katherine Earle? You appear to be in doubt. Answer me; but don't you dare to tell me you think it is wicked to go to the theatre, or I'll throw the pillow at you," and she raised it threateningly.

Then she turned suddenly to Allie. "What are *you* looking so solemn about, Miss Hunt? Are you going back on the theatre too?"

"Don't look so savage, Jessie," replied Allie, smiling; then she added, softly: "I don't know as I would miss such a great deal if I *did* go back on it. Do you think I would?"

"Well, of course I can't answer for you," replied Jessie, laying down the pillow with a curiously disappointed look on her little face. "But I know *I* wouldn't care to live if I couldn't go to the theatre—*that's* sure."

"Oh, Jasmine!" exclaimed Vera. "Isn't that a little strong?"

"No," replied Jessie, drawing her rosy lips together in a little, straight, determined line. "Not a bit too strong to express my feelings."

"Well," said Vera, "I *have* noticed this one thing, when I have come from the theatre lately

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I have felt just a little dissatisfied. At first I laid it to the play — I thought it must be they were not as good as formerly, but I found that that couldn't be the reason, for — you remember the last one we went to, Margaret Mather in 'Joan Of Arc?'" (Both Garnet and Jessie nodded; Jessie very emphatically.) "Well, of course, that was a grand play and it was grand acting, but if you'll believe me, girls, I actually felt that same dissatisfied feeling that I had felt before. Now, what made me?"

No one answered. That Vera, or any one else, could feel in that way after seeing such a grand thing as that play was, was a thing perfectly incomprehensible to Jessie. Garnet's deeper mind could not find a reason. Vera was honestly troubled. She could not answer the question of her own restless heart. Only Allie's pale face flushed; she looked at Vera with eager blue eyes, and once or twice her lips trembled as though she would speak, but it seemed as if she could not and in a moment more it was too late, for a low knock sounded on the chamber door, which all recognized as being "Mother's," and then the door was softly pushed open and the fair, wrinkled face peered in. From force of habit the girls looked past "Mother" and smiled at each other to see the fragile hand holding "Grandpa" back. But he caught a glimpse of the pretty picture in the chamber, and it did his dear old eyes good.

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"Come right in, 'Grandma,'" cried all the girls together, "and 'Grandpa,' too." And Vera and Garnet drew their rocking-chairs forward.

"Well, well; thank you, thank you," replied "Mother," in her eager, trembling tones. "I only came up to tell you — now Mr. Atherton, you had better not come in," she broke off to say to "Grandpa," as he was pushing eagerly forward.

"Oh, yes, *do* let him come," pleaded the girls, and "Grandpa" thanked them with a happy smile.

"Well, I declare!" replied "Mother," secretly pleased, but still dictatorial, "then come in and sit down here side of me. As I was saying, children— you don't mind my calling you children, do you?" ("No, no; certainly not," murmured the girls.) "Well, as I saying, I only came up to tell you — oh, last night Mr. Atherton and me heard you singing. It *was* you, wasn't it?" The girls thought for a moment. "I'm pretty sure it was you," went on "Mother," "because it sounded as if it came from this room. First you went w-a-y up and then you came w-a-y down, and kind of quirked your voices once in a while, and you said something about 'neater, on neater' — guess the song must have been about clean habits or something. Wa'n't it you?"

Well it was for the dear old souls that their eyes were dim and the twilight deepening. No one could answer except Allie.

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"Yes, 'Grandma,' we were singing and the piece you refer to was 'Juanita,' 'Nita, Nita, Juanita.' We'll sing it for you sometime if you want us to.

"Oh, will you? Well, that will be nice. Me and Mr. Atherton love to hear young people sing. That must be a pretty piece; but do you know 'Nearer My God to Thee?' and 'Jesus, Lover of My Soul?'"

Oh, yes, of course, the girls knew them.

"Well, somehow or other I like them two old pieces better than anything else. Would you just as lief sing one of them now?"

Oh, yes; they would sing them both. The dusky twilight gathered, the rain pattered softly against the glass doors, the wind moaned drearily among the huge branches of the tree, but the beautiful girlish voices rose above both rain and wind: "Nearer, my God to thee, nearer to thee." Vera could see, shining clear and pure through the coming darkness, the pale, illuminated face she had seen and watched in the tabernacle, the pale lips quivering, the blue eyes raised to Heaven. "Jesus lover of my soul." Vera still saw the face. Was the peace that she saw written upon it, the "peace that passeth all understanding?" "While the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is nigh." "Mother's" wandering hand sought "Grandpa's," folded upon the arm of his chair, drawn close to her side, and there it rested. After

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the sweet voices ceased, it was very quiet in the room. "Mother" broke the silence.

"Ah, that is a beautiful hymn; a beautiful hymn." And "Grandpa" murmured: "Aye, a beautiful hymn."

"Yes, I think it's pretty," said Jessie, pleasantly, but carelessly.

The tone more than the words, jarred on Vera. Why was it? Only because she had been feeling for a few minutes strangely happy—peaceful, glad.

"Me and Mr. Atherton have morning prayers," went on "Mother." "Wont you join us?"

Jessie made a comical face, which no one saw. The others answered at once: "Oh, thank you; we will be very happy to."

"You might sing those pieces again," said "Grandpa," timidly.

"Yes, we will," answered Garnet, kindly.

"Hadn't we better have a light," queried Jessie, just here.

"Oh, 'Mother,'" whispered "Grandpa," "you didn't tell them."

"Land, I forgot!" replied "Mother." "Them pieces put it all out of my mind. We came up to tell you, children, there are two young gentlemen down stairs, and they wanted me to ask you to come down."

Jessie, on her way to the stand for a match, gave Vera's shoulder an expressive nudge.

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"I'll go right down and tell them you're coming." went on "Mother." "Come, Mr. Atherton!"

At the door she turned and asked, anxiously: "You wont forget to-morrow morning, will you?"

"No, we wont forget."

"My conscience!" exclaimed Jessie, as soon as "Mother" and "Grandpa" were out of hearing, "I wonder if those two young men are blessed with a good stock of patience."

"This is a good test for it if they are," said Vera.

"Wonder if they heard us warbling?" said Jessie. "Quirking our voices, as 'Mother' says."

"I can imagine just how the two young men have spent the last half hour," said Garnet, standing before the glass and brushing her curly hair. "Fred has walked not *less* than a couple of miles. I'll wager he has kept up a continual march round and round the room, with his hands in his pockets and a most portentious frown on his usual sunny brow, while Mr. Richards has been sitting calmly in his chair with his legs crossed, watching his uneasy friend with a half amused, half superior smile on his mobile countenance."

"Well, get away from that glass for half a minute, will you?" said Jessie, giving Garnet a gentle poke with her comb. "Somebody else wants to look bewitching as well as yourself."

"Oh, certainly," replied Garnet, in her politest tones, moving away accommodatingly.

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"Now, get huffy," said Jessie, in injured tones. "You *are* the queerest girl, Net Dare. Nobody can say anything to you but what you get mad."

"Have I expressed my displeasure at anything?" asked Garnet, haughtily.

"Yes, you have," snapped Jessie. "If you didn't in words, you did in actions, and I'd a good sight rather anyone would give me a good blowing up and be done with it than to be so plaguey polite with their 'Ce-r-tainly, Ce-r-tainly,' and Jessie imitated Garnet to perfection. "I find that people who are so dreadfully polite can be about as ugly as they make 'em. And it isn't politeness, anyway, it is nothing but sarcasm, and you know very well Net Dare, that sarcasm is indicative of low breeding—"

"Jessie Dare!" interrupted Garnet's low voice trembling with passion.

"Just wait until I finish, will you?" said Jessie, breathlessly. "I don't mean low breeding exactly, but it shows very poor taste. Doesn't it, Vera?"

Vera, who had been first craning her neck to look in the glass over Jessie's head, and then dodging under and around her raised arms, hardly knew what to say to this sudden appeal, so she "avoided the question."

"I say we had better go down to the parlor before your cousin wears the carpet entirely out in his impatient walking."

"It is *certainly* time to go down," remarked

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Garnet, meaningly, and Vera could not help thinking, as they went slowly down the stairs, how utterly unlike the two sisters were; and wondered if Garnet conducted herself in *just* the right way towards Jessie.

Their two natures were so entirely opposite. Jessie, quick, passionate and impulsive, yet, oh, so lovable and generous to a fault; Garnet, just as passionate, but possessing a wonderful capability of governing her passion—proud, reserved, not easy to be understood by even her nearest and best friends. Vera often wondered at the wonderful amount of self-control contained in the small body.

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CHAPTER VI.

When the girls entered the parlor they found the state of affairs to be just as Garnet had predicted they would be. Fred was walking the floor with his hands in his pockets, and Mr. Richards with his hands ditto, sat in a chair and watched his friend with a smile half amused, half superior. Fred turned around as the door opened and made a low bow.

"Ah, most delighted to see you, *at last*, ladies," he said, not trying to conceal his vexation. "Our aged friends are rather swift, are they not? It would not be a bad idea to suggest a telephone to them, would it?"

"Don't be disrespectful to old age, Fred," said Garnet, reprovingly.

Fred turned and looked at his cousin. "You are not in love with the reverend, are you Net?"

"I am not very far from it," replied Garnet. "They are two very lovable old people, and should be treated with all possible respect, as indeed *all* old people should."

Garnet was quite serious. Fred gave a low whistle and cast an expressive look at Jessie. Jessie laughed.

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"Net is on her high horse to-night," she said, carelessly. "I advise you to let her alone, Fred. She is unapproachable when in the present state." Garnet took her seat on the sofa beside Vera, and Vera saw a look of pain on her face, but the small mouth was set in one narrow, stern line. Vera looked at Jessie reproachfully, but Jessie, not dreaming of such a thing as Garnet's feelings being hurt by *her*, answered the look with a smile.

"She is nothing but a child," thought Vera. "She is—"

"Miss Earle, I have some pleasant news for you," said a quiet voice at her elbow. Vera gave a start and looked around.

"Pleasant news?" she repeated, smiling. "Tell it to me at once, please. I do love pleasant news."

"Oh, don't I wish I was pleasant news," said Fred, longingly, from the other side of the room.

Vera laughed and blushed. Mr. Richards looked at Fred gravely for a moment, then turned to Vera.

"Then I am deeply thankful," he said, in a low voice, "of having the power to make you happy. Can you guess what it is?"

Vera's red lips parted in a smile, showing her lovely white teeth. "Oh, do not ask me to guess, Mr. Richards. I forfeit my right of being a Yankee when I try to do that. Please tell me."

"I have found your sermon."

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Vera looked perplexed. "My sermon, Mr. Richards? What do you mean?"

"Have you forgotten so soon? I have discovered who the owner of the 'speaking face' is."

Vera's face flushed with pleasure. "You have, really, Mr. Richards, and so early? Oh, how nice that is! Who is she? Where does she live? How did you find it out?" And Vera sat up very straight and clasped her white hands and looked at Mr. Richards with shining eyes.

Jessie came hurrying over, with Fred close behind her. "What's the matter, Vera?" she asked, seating herself in Garnet's lap and putting one arm around Garnet's neck, and Vera noticed even then, how closely and lovingly Garnet held her little sister to her.

"Why, Mr. Richards has really discovered who my 'lady of the tabernacle,' is," she replied. "Will it be possible for us to become acquainted with her?" she asked, turning to Erfort.

"I think so," he replied, gravely. "If you care to."

"If I care to!" repeated Vera. "Certainly I will care to, for she has the loveliest face I ever saw."

"How in the deuce did you find out about her, Er?" asked Fred, his astonishment getting the better of his politeness.

Erfort smiled. "I will explain that later, I will tell you who she is first."

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"Oh, do hurry," cried Jessie, impatiently. "Who is she?"

"She is a laundress."

If he had said: "She is a murderess," the effect would have been scarcely more startling. The girls opened their eyes, in surprise.

"A laundress?" repeated Vera, faintly, and Jessie exclaimed: "Well, I never!" while Fred, I am sorry to say, gave vent to the elegant expression: "The divil!" and then begged the ladies' pardon in the same breath. Allie alone seemed unaffected by the startling announcement.

"She is none the less a lady for all that, is she?" she asked, softly. "It certainly cannot make her face any the less lovely in its expression, Vera."

Perhaps for the first time since he had met with her, Erfort Richards looked Allie squarely in the face, and his look was most complimentary, although Allie did not notice it.

Vera pulled herself together at Allie's question. She was ashamed of herself for expressing any surprise or consternation. "Certainly she is none the less a lady," she said, a trifle haughtily. "Her vocation can make no difference to her character. I was only a little surprised, that is all."

It was one of Vera's characteristics to hide her disagreeable feelings, of whatever nature, under an assumed haughtiness of manner. It had always

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proved a perfect shield from any unpleasant remark. If she had been told that there was danger of people misjudging her — that they might think her proud, and even heartless; not willing to acknowledge herself in the wrong when she knew herself to be, she would have been utterly surprised. And yet there were many — very many — who found it impossible to love her, simply because they did not understand her. She knew herself, but, alas, others did not, except a very few, who had learned her for themselves after years of friendly intercourse, and who loved her through and through for what she was. Strange to say, Mr. Richards thus early understood her perfectly; as well after three days as he would have done after three years. But to poor Fred she was a perfect enigma. First she was a flame of fire — all light, laughter and fun; then she was an icicle — cold, proud, stately as a queen; repelling those about her with a glance, a gesture. He had called her a conundrum to Erfort, the night before, but said he shouldn't "give her up."

"But you haven't told us where she lives," said Garnet.

"She lives in a little cottage back of Circuit avenue," replied Erfort. "Her name is Hood—Charlotte Hood—and she is a widow."

"Any children?" asked Jessie.

"One; a boy."

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"I suppose he trots around with the basket," said Fred, carelessly.

"No. She goes for the clothes herself and takes them back again."

"The lazy little beggar!" said Fred. "The kid, I mean," he explained, "to let his mammy do all the work. I must say she shows very poor judgment in bringing her child up, for all of her angelic expression of countenance."

"We can very easily come to know her," said Garnet. "Perhaps we can get her to do a little work for us."

Jessie came very near betraying the whole party by saying: "It *will* be prescious little work we will be putting out."

"Will you take us to her cottage to-morrow, if it is pleasant?" asked Vera.

"With pleasure," replied Erfort. Now I will tell you how I found her out. I went to walk this morning—although it *was* rather a wild one. I went down towards the beach, and, while I was standing under the tower watching the waves, I noticed a lady coming towards me. That she *was* a lady, despite the big basket of clothes she carried, was plainly evident. When she was very near to where I was standing, an unusually fierce gust of wind struck her. It knocked the heavy basket up against her, her foot somehow slipped and before I could barely start forward to help her she had

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fallen to the ground. I assisted her to rise, and was glad to find she had not hurt herself. I had a very short conversation with her, during which she told me about her boy, and — well, that's all."

Fred laughed and rose from his chair. "So you were out mashing the washwoman while I was sleeping the sleep of the just. Business must have been dull if you couldn't find any one better to flirt with, Er, my boy. Come, Jess, I'll teach you that new step I spoke to you about. The old people won't hear us."

"All right," cried Jessie, gleefully, slipping off Garnet's lap, and, while Garnet and Allie watched the "lesson," Vera turned to Erfort with shining eyes.

"No, that was *not* all, Mr. Richards. There was more to it than that."

"Yes?" he said, questioningly; but Vera saw the deep red just showing through his dark cheek, and she went on boldly.

"You helped the poor woman home with her basket."

He did not deny it; he only smiled.

"Why didn't you tell us? It was a generous, manly act."

"Thank you, Miss Earle."

Vera looked at him for a moment — at the dark, tender face, with its thin, sensitive lips and dreamy eyes, and in that moment she saw beneath the sur-

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face into the heart. She held out her white hand and he grasped it firmly. No words were spoken by the lips, but the warm hand-clasp spoke volumes. It said for each: "I understand you, and I respect you;" and then they, too, turned their attention to the "lesson" in progress.

"One, two, three and a *hop*. One, two, three and a *hop*. *One*, two, three. *One*, two, three. *One*, two, three. *One*, two, three. One, two, three and a *hop*," counted Fred, as he guided Jessie lightly, but firmly around the room, and Jessie, with her brilliant little face all flushed and glowing with the heat, and her big black eyes sparkling with the fun and excitement, now giving a little gasp of delight at getting the correct step, and now one of dismay at making a mistake and bringing one of her little feet down squarely upon Fred's. Vera laughed softly. "Jessie's face is full of lights and shadows, as it were," she thought, and turned to Erfort to express her thoughts in words.

He was watching Jessie with the peculiar flickering smile he seemed to reserve for her alone.

"Hadn't you better rest awhile Jessie?" asked Garnet, just then. "You will get too tired."

"Oh, yes, in-just-one-minute," gasped Jessie. "I've-al-most-got-it."

"You've gotten it pretty bad, haven't you?" asked Vera, laughing. "Come here and sit down immediately, Jessie Dare; you look ready to drop!"

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Fred gave Jessie a parting whirl, which brought them both near the sofa. She dropped panting between Garnet and Vera, and commenced to fan herself with her handkerchief. Mr. Richards gravely offered her his bicycle cap. She took it with a smiling "You are too kind, Mr. Richards."

"Miss Earle," said Fred, "wouldn't you like to try a waltz with me? I'll whistle."

"Some time I will, but not now," she replied pleasantly. "I want to ask you and Mr. Richards a question."

"I'm your obedient servant," said Fred, drawing an ottoman to her feet and seating himself upon it. "What is your question? I am all attention."

"I want to ask you if you believe in theatre-going," she said, gravely.

"Oh, for pity's sake, don't start that up again," said Jessie, impatiently. "We had it going for about an hour up stairs."

"Well, I have your opinion, now I want the gentlemen's.

Fred had already pretty well expressed himself in his usual way — a low whistle. Vera turned to Mr. Richards. He had drawn a magazine from his pocket, and was turning the leaves rapidly.

"Quite a coincidence," he said, as Vera turned to him. "I was reading only this afternoon an article in here — let me see — who was it by? Some divine or another — ah, here it is. Will one of you

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ladies be kind enough to read it aloud? It may give you a new idea. It is upon the question of theatre-going," and he passed the book to Vera.

"You read it, Net," said Vera, passing it on to her.

Garnet took the book, which was "Munyon's Monthly Magazine," and read: "'The Common Sense View of the Theatre. By Rev. Madison C. Peters. Extracts from a sermon preached Sunday morning, February 1st, 1891. That they use this world as not abusing it — 1 Cor. vii: 31. The theatre owes its origin to religion. In Greece, India and China the drama was originally a religious ceremony, and it was intended to promote religion. In the course of time the drama ceased to be a religious ceremony, and became a work of art.'"

"'Every student of church history knows that the modern drama sprang originally from the church. In the dark ages the priests put the whole of theology on the stage, and in this way, the rude and unlettered mob that gathered on Saints' days, were taught in an effective way the truths of religion, so that in the Christian era, the first theatres were the churches, and the first actors the priests.'"

"'But secular competition grew apace, and in 1378, the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's Cathedral, petitioned Richard II to stop certain

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dramatic performances, which were being gotten up in London, outside the church. Why? Because the Cathedral clergy of St. Paul's had spent so much money on church scenery and costumes inside the Cathedral, they were eager to crush all secular competition.'"

"'In Elizabeth's reign the secular drama had grown so popular that a preacher exclaims: 'Woe is me! At the play-house it is not possible to get a seat, while at the church vacant seats are plenty.' The clergy did not object to the principle of acting, or because the play was immoral, except when it satirized the drunken and smoking rector. Nor did the clergy object to the play because it hurt the people, but because it pleased them. They groaned when the people shouted.'"

"'God has implanted a dramatic element in most of our natures, recognized and cultivated it in the Bible. It is not something built up outside of ourselves by Thespis and Æschylus and Sophocles and Euripides and Terence and Plautus and Seneca and Congreve and Farquhar and Corneille and Alfieri and Goldsmith and Sheridan and Shakespeare. Man is not responsible for the dramatic element in his soul, but for the perversion of it.'"

"'If vacant seats are so plenty in the church, whose fault is it? The human mind is the same in the pew as in the theatre. The world suffers more from too little dramatic power in the church than

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from too much outside of it. A preacher asked Garrick, the tradgedian: 'Why is it you are able to produce so much more effect with the recital of your fictions than we do by the delivery of the most important truths?' 'My lord,' said Garrick, 'you speak truths as if they were fictions; we speak fictions as if they were truths.' And, wherever to-day, all Christendom through, there is a man in a pulpit with graceful gestures, modulated voice, elegant expression, appropriate emotion and graceful action; wherever you find man as natural and impressive, as audible and interesting as the actor, you will find a full church. Let the preachers work at the people with the same power, intelligence and will as the actor is obliged to work at the public; depend upon it their achievements will be in proportion. The actor does not grumble because the people wont come to the theatre. He says: 'I am to blame.' People don't come to church because they are not interested. Let us learn from the actor how to read and how to infuse life into our service.'"

* * * * * * *

"'Other things beside religion are good. Dickens' works are eternal arguments against injustice, and in writing novels he was as well employed as in preaching the gospel. Mendelsshon, by his sublime compositions, did better serve the

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world than going out as a missionary to China; and Shakespeare served the world and his Maker better as a dramatist than as a bishop, preaching sermons that nobody wanted to hear. The arts and sciences must go hand in hand with religion and morality."

"'The charge that religion is scoffed at on the stage is false. Hypocrites and charlatans occasionally furnish subjects for its characterization. The cause of religion does not suffer when its spurious representatives are held up to ridicule and contempt.'"

"'The theatre is here to stay. Reform is the note of the future. Eliminate the bad. Encourage the good. The shameful postures, the female attire, or rather the lack of it, the compromising attitudes, the silly things accepted, the commonplace persons admired and commended — thunder as much at these as you will. Let ridicule, sarcasm and denunciation exhaust their armories upon these abuses, these positive evils.'"

"'Can I go to the theatre?' asks the Christian. I answer: 'If you *can*. Let every man be persuaded in his own mind.' Refuse to do or go where your conscience forbids, but refrain also from condemning your neighbor, whose conscience may not require him to walk in the same path you have marked out for yourself.'"

"'All actors are not moral. All preachers are not moral. There are bad men in all professions.

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There are men and women on the stage whose characters are as spotless and their lives as beneficent as any in our churches. Crimes are committed on the stage; so they are in the Bible. Goodness and badness are put in opposition in both books and plays.'"

"'Charles Lamb once wrote a play for the stage, and he went to see it enacted. The play was condemned, and loudest hissing came from the gallery where Charles Lamb sat, and the audience looked and saw that it was the author of the play who was hissing his own production.'"

"'If at last we are compelled to look back upon a wasted life, we ourselves will be the severest critics. And remember this, when you go out of this world and your life has been wasted, no encore can ever bring you back to re-enact it. 'As the tree falleth, so it lieth!' Your character in the last moment will be your character through all eternity. Mr. Palmer, the London actor, dropped dead on the stage while quoting the words of the play: 'O, God, is there another and better world?' I do not know what will be your exit, but in that hour there will come before you all that you have been and all that you might have been. O, men and women of the theatrical profession, to whom these words may come, prepare for the closing scenes of this life, when the footlights will be the burning world, the orchestra the resurrection

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trumpets, the tragedy the upheaval of a world of graves, and the closing scene the dispersing of the audience to their everlasting homes of gladness or sorrow.'"

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CHAPTER VII.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Fred. "Doesn't that advocate theatre-going?"

He addressed the whole party, but looked particularly at Vera. She answered him.

"It does, and it does not. You see it says: 'Can I go to the theatre?' the Christian asks. I answer: 'If you *can*. Let every man be persuaded in his own mind.'"

"Then I take it that one can go to the theatre and not be in danger of everlasting punishment, so long as their conscience tells them they are all right," observed Jessie, blunt, but to the point. "I don't think my conscience will trouble me much. Isn't that the idea, Vera?"

"I suppose so," answered Vera, thoughtfully. "But what I don't understand is *why* it should seem wrong to some and not to all. I know some good people — Episcopalians and Universalists — who go to the theatre every week of their lives, as regular as clock-work; and they not only go to the theatre, but they go to balls and dance until 2 o'clock in the morning. Sundays they go to church all day and *enjoy* going too, and their lives are all that seem good and just, as they should be."

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"Well, those two denominations believe in having a good time," interrupted Jessie. "It's easy enough to belong to *their* church."

"No," argued Vera, "but they are *really* good people; much better than some Baptists that I know. *They* stay at home from all such places from one year's end to the other. If a member of *their* church went to such places their names would be crossed off the church book. How is that? Aren't one class just as good as another? If it is right for people of one denomination to go, why isn't it right for those of another?"

Vera seemed to appeal to Mr. Richards. He answered her.

"I can only use the same quotation you used a moment ago: 'Let every man be persuaded in his own mind.' Speaking of different denominations, I look at it in just this way. Now take the Baptists for instance — and just here let me say, their's is the belief I have the most confidence in, although I have no word to say against any other — their church laws are different from most other denominations. Anyone who enters that church should enter it with their eyes open. They should be ready and willing to accede to the requirements they make. Now, the Baptists do not think that he who has professed himself ready to try to live a Christian life, ought to find pleasure in the enjoyments that the world offers him. You know the

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Bible tells us that we cannot serve both God and mammon. Either we must hate the one and love the other, or vica versa. I do not think that it really means that we are to hate in the ordinary sense of the word; but I think it means that we ought to find so much pleasure in serving God and keeping our hearts so full of love for Him, that there will be no room in them for anything else. It is simply impossible for us to live in this beautiful world and not love the things that are in it, and God does not expect or wish us to do so, or he would not have made it so beautiful. It is not that the ordinary pleasures of the world are so *wicked*, but there is danger of our thinking so much of them, that we have no time to think of the giver of every good and perfect gift. That is where the sin comes in — in thinking too much of the world and not enough of God. Now, just for a test. Please do not think me impertinent, for I do not mean to be so, but I want to ask you all a question. How often during the day do you stop to think how good God is to you?"

Not an answer, but over each fair face a burning blush commenced to spread. Fred felt half ashamed and half angry. How long since had Er turned preacher?

"I, myself," continued Erfort, after waiting a moment, "freely acknowledge that I have seldom, in former days, given it a thought. Our days are

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filled up with something — pleasure, business, almost every moment excitement or work of some kind. What time is left for serious thought? I haven't a doubt but that every one of us say our stated prayers at stated times, but apart from that, what thanks do we give for all our mercies? Forgive me if I have taken upon myself the role of preacher. I would not speak so freely if I did not feel so deeply."

Another pause. Erfort spoke again. "I know I have wandered from the subject somewhat — I beg your pardon for doing so. You asked me, Miss Earle, why it seemed wrong to some and not to others, to enjoy the pleasures of the world. I can only answer for myself. I have always enjoyed society and have always moved in it to a great extent. I have enjoyed both theatres and balls — such things have always seemed perfectly right to me. One must follow according to the dictates of his own conscience."

"Why not follow according to the Word of God?" asked Allie, gently.

Erfort started, then bent his eyes thoughtfully to the floor.

"Look here!" cried impulsive Jessie, "you needn't try to convince me that there is any sin in dancing and going to the theatre and having a good time in general, for you can't do it. There isn't half as much sin in going to see a good play, sitting

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there and enjoying yourself, and coming away feeling light-hearted and happy and friendly towards everybody — your enemies as well as your friends — just because you have been having a pleasant time, as there is in going to church and hearing, or trying to hear, a sermon that is so dry that it makes you thirsty to listen to it, and so you look about the church and fasten upon any one, or anything, to take your mind up while you're obliged to be there. Just as like enough your eyes will chance to fall upon some one whom you detest and that some one has a hat on that you do *not* detest — quite the contrary — and you sit and hate and admire all in the same moment. Then, while the minister is praying his everlastingly long prayer, you get tired and take another eye-tour around the room, and you see some one else, whom you know to be the most deceitful person in the community, bent almost double in her seat, with her hand on the pew in front of her and her handkerchief up to her eyes, looking as meek a Moses. You come out of that church feeling cross and hateful towards everybody. Now, which is the worst — to go to a place that makes you feel happy, or to one that makes you feel as ugly as sin?"

"Well, Jess," said Garnet, "it seems to me that the fault, as you represent things to us, lies in the minister. This article here says: 'If vacant seats are so plenty in the church, whose fault is it?

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The human mind is the same in the pew as in the theatre.' If the ministers made their sermons as interesting as the actors their plays, there would be no danger of the people becoming disinterested and staying away from church. The fault is in the minister."

Erfort raised his eyes from their thoughtful study of the carpet. "No," he said, gravely, "the fault is not in the minister; it is in our own sinful hearts."

"Oh, get out!" cried Fred, springing from his hassock and commencing a rapid walk around the room. His fair face was flushed, his blue eyes full of doubt and trouble. "You'll get me as nervous as — as a woman, with your funereal talk. Let's drop it and go at something a little more lively. Jess, will you let me try to mesmerize you?"

"Oh, dear! Anything, Fred, to put a stop to this talk. I am as bad as you — it makes me nervous."

Erfort leaned back in his chair, and his face resumed its usual "society" expression. Vera looked troubled; she wished they would talk longer on a subject that was becoming interesting to her. Garnet rose from the sofa; it was difficult to tell what *her* feelings were. She crossed the room with a busy, bustling air that she assumed at times, and that sat very prettily upon her, and when she reached the door she turned and said: "I'll be down in a minute," and disappeared.

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"I bet she has gone after the cocoa pot," whispered Jessie to Vera.

Sure enough, in a few minutes Garnet's voice was heard: "Open the door, please." Both gentlemen sprang to open it, and in walked Garnet, both arms laden — the alcohol lamp, the cocoa pot, matches and bottle. Fred raised both hands in mock surprise.

"What's coming!" he exclaimed. "A tea-party?"

"The next thing to it," answered Vera, taking the books, etc., from the table. "Garnet will give you some cocoa that will make you long for more."

And she did. A pleasant hour was spent in talking, laughing, and drinking the delicious beverage, and then the gentlemen left for their hotel, promising to call around in the morning and take the girls to the home of the poor laundress.

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CHAPTER VIII.

"Girls," said Garnet, about 7 o'clock the next morning, as they all four lay in bed, trying hard to feel like getting up, "I've made a discovery."

"Found a bedbug?" asked Jessie, yawning; "or a cockroach?" she added, pleasantly.

Allie, who was mortally afraid of both pests, gave a little gasp and turned quickly over on her side.

"Allie has," went on Jessie, taking a wicked delight in her friend's terror. "Is it crawling up from the foot, Al?" she asked, concernedly.

Poor Allie squealed outright, and commenced to squirm, at which Jessie, immensely tickled, laughed immoderately.

"For shame, Jessie," said Garnet, indignantly. "Come and get into bed with us, Allie."

"No you don't," said Jessie, catching hold of Allie's night-dress, as she was about to gladly accept Garnet's invitation. "You just stay here with your mother, young lady, and —" here Jessie took a firm grip of Allie's arm — "she'll keep the nasty little bedbugs and cockroaches away — yes, she will."

"Oh, J-e-s-s-i-e, p-l-e-a-s-e," almost sobbed Allie.

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"Oh, no, I won't plague you," said Jessie, quickly contrite. "But what a little goose you are, Al. You should control yourself; pray, control yourself. Doesn't that sound dignified enough to come from the lips of my senior over there? Hey?"

"Stop your nonsense, Jessie, and let me talk," said Garnet.

"Oh, certainly. We will listen to the lips of wisdom now. Attend! Please proceed to article I., Miss Dare, as they say at the Normal," and Jessie cuddled herself down beside Allie and assumed a very attentive expression.

"Now for your discovery, Net," said Vera.

"Well, I have just discovered that this cottage is the same described in 'Megda,' where she and 'Del' and 'Laurie' came that summer, and this must be the very room they occupied."

"Eureka!" cried Jessie. "Garnet, my dear sister, what a great head you have."

"I've read that book," said Vera.

"Which character did you like best?" asked Allie.

"'Laurie.'"

"So did I."

"I liked 'Megda' best," said Garnet, "though 'Ethel' was lovely."

"And *I* liked 'May' best," said Jessie, emphatically. "She was the bravest one of all, for she

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was brave enough to live and die an old maid for the sake of someone else, and that is what I call a brave deed, *in*-deed."

The girls laughed. "Oh, wait until you read the sequel to the book," said Vera, "perhaps 'May' will be married in that."

"Is there a sequel to 'Megda,'" asked Allie.

"Not yet, but there is going to be."

"An' phwere did yez get the news, Vera?" asked Jessie.

"I advise you to stop practicing that dialect, Jess," said Garnet. "You'll use it some time when you don't mean to."

"Well, I've just gotten so I can talk it pretty well," said Jessie. "I want to surprise Prof. Bancroft when I begin lessons again in the fall."

"What time were our young men going to call?" asked Vera.

"Dear me, if I hadn't forgotten every word about them," exclaimed Garnet, springing up in bed. "Get up, Vera, quick, before I step on you."

"Oh, crawl over the foot-board, Net," yawned Vera.

"You lazy ghost, take that," and Jessie threw a pillow at Vera, and, for a wonder, hit her.

"Re*w*enge," muttered Vera, and arming herself with all three pillows, commenced a vigorous attack on the enemy.

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"Are we going to have any breakfast this morning?" asked Garnet, calmly.

"You might know Net had struck upon her feet," cried Jessie, in smothered tones, for Vera was burying her in pillows. "She thinks of her little 'stummick' the first thing. Oh, horrors, Vera, let me up. I never thought before," she said, sitting on the edge of the bed and pushing the hair out of her eyes, "what poor 'Desdemona' must have suffered, and what an old brute 'Othello' was."

"Oh, do hurry, girls," pleaded Garnet. "We certainly won't have time to get breakfast and get cleaned up."

"Well, you and Vera go out and buy the stuff, and Al and I—*won't* cook it," said Jessie, with a hideous grimmace.

"That's true enough," said Vera. "We don't want you to. You and Al clear up the room and Net and I will get the breakfast."

"What are you going to give us?" asked Jessie, anxiously.

"What have you down on the bill of fare for to-day's breakfast, Net?" asked Vera.

Garnet referred to her paper with the gravest face imaginable. "Egg omelet," she replied, briefly.

"Egg omelet it is then," said Vera. "And I'm the girl that can make it."

"Conceit," said Jessie, giving Vera's golden braids that were hanging down her back, a loving pull.

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"Ready, Vera?" asked Garnet.

"Almost; just as soon as I twist my hair up. You *are* the quickest little thing, Net."

Garnet smiled. She stood ready with her round sailor hat and soft red shawl on. Vera twisted up her beautiful hair, put her hat on, threw her peasant cape over her pale blue wrapper, and announced herself ready.

"Let us go to the market around the corner," said Garnet, as they went out of the house.

"Anywhere," replied Vera.

"How many eggs will we need?"

"Well, to tell the truth, three will be plenty, but I hate to ask for so few, don't you?"

"Yes, but I guess they are used to all kinds of orders. Will you ask?"

"Yes," Vera answered, rather reluctantly. "You have the pocket-book, haven't you?"

"Yes."

The order was given, and the clerk didn't even smile, as the girls were very much afraid he would do. As Garnet took out her pocket-book to pay him, the clerk asked with a smile: "Are you cashier?"

"Yes," answered Garnet.

"And you," he added, turning to Vera, "are the teller?"

Quick as a flash came the answer. "Yes, I tell(h)er what to do."

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"Poor Vera! The next instant her face flushed crimson at what she had done. Made a pun before an entire stranger! She felt as though she would like for the floor to open and swallow her. The clerk laughed heartily, and so did Garnet — she couldn't help it. Without another word Vera took Garnet's arm and walked haughtily out of the market. Hiding her embarrassment under a haughty demeanor, you see.

"Don't tell the girls, Net," she said, imploringly, and Garnet promised she wouldn't.

Vera's omelet was delicious. Jessie said, teasingly: "It was a bit thin," to which Vera retorted: "Lave it alone, *thin*."

At 9 o'clock the gentlemen called. "We had better go right down," said Mr. Richards. "She may be too busy to see us if we wait."

The girls put on their hats, took their parasols, and then they started. After fifteen minutes walk Mr. Richards said:

"Do you see that smoke curling up among those trees?"

Yes, they all saw it.

"Well, that comes from her cottage, and there it is."

It was a very small, very poor, but very neat looking cottage, painted brown. A neat wash house stood a few feet from it, and it was from this that the smoke was rising. Thinking that

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they would probably find Mrs. Hood in this building, our party walked up to the door and looked in. The fire was burning, the boiler of water was heating over it, and the tubs and a large basket of clothes stood in the middle of the floor, but there was no one there.

"She must be in the cottage," said Erfort, speaking in a low tone, though he did not know what made him, unless it was because it seemed so quiet around there. There were some tall pine trees on one side and at the back of the cottage, and they gave the place rather a lonely look.

The rest followed Erfort as he went towards the half-opened door, but just as he raised his hand to knock, a low, moaning sound, fell on their ears. Erfort dropped his hand, and they all bent their heads to listen. Another low, moaning sound, and a suffering child's voice: "Oh, mamma!" the very tones of which drew the quick tears to every pair of bright eyes outside.

"Mamma knows it, darling, and she is so sorry for her baby-boy. There, lay your head on mamma's shoulder, prescious, and she will sing to you."

The voice was low, sweet and clear. "What shall mamma sing, dear?"

"The pretty one, please."

"'Nearer, my God to Thee,
Nearer to Thee.
E'en tho' it be a cross
That raiseth me.

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Still all my song shall be,
Nearer my God to Thee,
Nearer my God to Thee,
Nearer to Thee.' "

"Oh, that is pretty, mamma; please sing the next verse. It— O–h!"

It was a sharp cry of pain, wrung from the suffering child. It cut into the listeners' hearts like a knife, and before Erfort realized what he was doing, he had started forward and pushed the door wide open and they all looked into the room. It was a small, poor room, devoid of almost every comfort, except one or two rockers, a small case of books, and a clean, white bed. On this bed lay a little form; they could just see the outline of it, that was all, for the mother was bending over it in speechless agony and her arms were clasped tightly around it.

"M-a-m-m-a! M-a-m-m-a!"

"Yes, yes, darling, mamma knows. Oh, my Father in Heaven, if you would only let me suffer for him! Robbie, prescious, look at mamma. Don't you feel her arms around you? Oh, my baby, speak to me."

Erfort could bear it no longer—he rushed into the room and the others followed. What they saw they will never forget to their dying day; and Fred, careless, light-hearted Fred—put his hands up to his face and sobbed like a baby, for his

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thoughtless words of the night before came back to him with cruel force. There lay the "lazy little beggar," "the kid," "the boy who let his mammy do all the work;" oh, how the remembrance of his words wrung Fred's really tender heart.

He lay there, his little slender form writhing in his mother's arms, his little arms clasped tightly around his mother's neck, with the small hands griping each other convulsively. His golden head was on her shoulder, but his face was towards them, and it was terrible to look at — deathly white and distorted, with the blue eyes rolled up until nothing but the whites were seen. But, thank God! the fearful struggle was as short as it was severe; if it had not been, the child could never have lived through it, and the stiffened form nestled back into the mother's arms. Without turning her head, but keeping her cheek pressed against the golden curls, the mother laid him gently down upon the pillow, where he lay with closed eyes and panting a little. The mother's hand brushed softly the pretty hair, all wet with the cold sweat of agony, back from the white forehead. "My baby, my baby!" was all she said, but the tones of her voice spoke volumes.

It was a strange position for our young people to be in, and their voluntarily putting themselves into it was still stranger, but they never thought of that.

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They thought of nothing but what was before them, and the mother seemed unconscious of their very presence for some moments, and then she raised her head from the pillow and looked at them, but none of the agony that had been so plainly expressed in her voice was visible in her face. It was pale — very pale — but as pure and shining as at the tabernacle. She smiled at Mr. Richards, and held out a thin, work-worn hand to him. He advanced to the bedside and took her hand with all the manly grace he was capable of, and that was by no means little.

"I hope you will pardon our intrusion, Mrs. Hood," he said, with deep respect. "We did not mean it as an intrusion. The ladies were anxious to see you, and as I knew where you lived I came with them — my friend and I. We — we heard the sounds outside and it made us all feel so badly that we could not refrain from coming in. Will you let me make you acquainted with my friends?"

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Hood. "I shall be most pleased to meet with them, and no apology is needed."

"Thank you," replied Erfort, and then he introduced the girls and Fred.

Robbie opened his eyes just as Jessie stepped forward to shake hands with his mother, and they fell immediately upon her face. He smiled and put up his poor little hand.

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"What a pretty lady," he said.

They all smiled, except Jessie, and she leaned over him and kissed him with a tender light in her beautiful eyes, and a softened look upon her brilliant face, which made her, for the moment, perfectly lovely.

"If I could only have her picture as she looks now," thought Erfort.

It may seem strange, but from the moment that Jessie left that humble little cottage her heart was changed, although she scarcely realized it at the time, and, indeed, not for long days afterwards. God has wonderful ways of changing the human heart, and there are scarcely two hearts that experience this change alike. I once heard a minister —an earnest-hearted, zealous young man—give the following experience: "I had a friend, and this friend was one of the happiest christians I ever knew. He was conversing with me one day, and he said: 'Oh, I shall never forget the day that my heart was changed—really changed. I had been feeling tired and discouraged, and I went into my room and I knelt down and prayed. I prayed with all my heart for light, and even while I prayed the light came. It filled my heart and it seemed as if it filled the whole room. It was fairly poured upon me. Oh, I felt so happy! It went through my whole being. I cannot begin to tell how glad and happy I felt.' When I heard him

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tell me that, my heart sunk within me, and as I went from him, I said to myself: '*I* never had such an experience as that, yet I have thought myself consecrated to the Master's service for a long while. Is it possible that I have been all along mistaken? Has my heart never been changed? Why did not the change come to me as it did to him? I was unhappy. I tortured myself with vain thinking and vain questioning, and then I made it a subject for prayer and the truth was revealed to me. Seldom do two persons experience religion alike. To one the light may come suddenly, as it did to my friend, though I do not think many are blessed with such a manifestation of the Spirit, and to another it may come gradually, yet, thank God! none the less surely."

I have so often thought of this. It answered a question that my own heart had often asked, and never before found an answer to. The light did not burst suddenly upon Jessie. Indeed, the only feeling she was sensible of, was an indefinable one. Her heart felt softened, but she thought it had been touched with pity for the suffering she had seen. So it had, but God was the one who had filled her heart with this pity. He, who is all wise, took this way of manifesting Himself unto her. He had commenced to work the change in her heart and He never makes any mistakes.

Mrs. Hood followed our young people to the

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door. She told them that her boy was nine years old and had been a cripple and a great sufferer for four years. Robin was on a vessel one day and had fallen down the cabin stairs. He had never walked since, and his suffering had been terrible.

Vera could not keep her eyes off the pale face. There was something about it that completely fascinated her. It may seem amusing, but all she could think of when looking at it, was a waxen taper. There seemed such a soft luminance upon it. Was it to be the taper that would light the path that Vera's young feet were to tread on their way to the "better country?" Was this the light that would guide her out of the night of doubt and uncertainty into the blessed day of light and glory?

As they were about to leave the cottage, Mrs. Hood caught the longing look in Vera's gray eyes. What made her guess at the desire that was in the girl's heart, and that she longed to express but did not dare? She could not tell; Vera could not tell; no one can tell — only God knew why.

"You will come and see me again," Mrs. Hunt said.

No one heard but Vera, to whom the question was addressed, and she answered, quickly: "I will."

No one talked much going home. Nothing had been said about any work being done—it had completely slipped their minds. As they approached

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their cottage, Fred, looking up, caught a glimpse of "Grandpa" and "Mother" standing a little back from the half open door and peering out at them. He turned to the girls with a laugh.

"Our aged friends act as if they had a mortgage on you, young ladies. They seem to keep their eyes upon you."

Jessie stopped short with a little cry, looked rapidly and anxiously into each face, opened her lips as if to speak, and then walked on. They had all stopped when she stopped and looked at her, but Allie seemed to be the only one who had understood. She had answered Jessie's look with one full of self-reproach. Fred commenced to sing in a low voice:

"It stopped — short — never to go again,
And the old man died."

"What was the matter, Jess?" asked Vera. "Have you forgotten something?"

"We've all forgotten something," replied Jessie, with a gravity that was something entirely new for her, and as she spoke she looked at Vera and then towards "Grandpa" and "Mother," still standing in the middle of the kitchen. Vera turned to the gentlemen.

"Thank you very much for your kindness in taking us to Mrs. Hood's," she said, in her stateliest manner.

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The gentlemen took the "hint" at once, although Fred, as he said to Erfort afterwards, felt as though he had had cold water poured down his back.

"Wouldn't you like to go down to the beach and watch the bathers?" asked Erfort, as they turned to leave. "The band gives a concert every day at 11, you know."

Vera's red lips curled. "No, thank you," she answered, somewhat curtly. "We do not care for that pastime."

(Fred felt the cold water again.) "You object to the bathing?" asked Erfort, quietly.

"No, I object to the bathers," answered Vera, quickly, and then her fair face flushed scarlet.

"Good-morning," she said, haughtily, and without another word she turned and entered the cottage.

Garnet came to the rescue with her sweet, womanly tact. "Vera is greatly opposed to the manner of bathing here, and I must confess there are some things about it that we all find to object to. "Will you come in?"

The gentlemen declined the invitation, for they knew it had been given only out of politeness, but they asked and obtained permission to call in the evening and accompany the girls to the "band concert."

When the girls entered the cottage they found Vera standing before "Grandpa" and "Mother"

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with her hat in her hand, talking very earnestly. She turned as they entered.

"I was telling 'Grandpa' and 'Grandma' how sorry we were for forgetting what we had promised them last night," she said. "We will sing to them now if they would like to have us, won't we?"

"Certainly," they answered.

Vera sat down in a chair by the window and drew Jessie down into her lap; Garnet took the chair at the other window; Allie seated herself near her; "Grandpa" and "Mother," each took a large, old fashioned rocker, and then the girls sang to them: "Nearer My God to Thee," "Jesus Lover of My Soul," "Just As I Am," "I Hear Thy Welcome Voice," "There Is Rest For The Weary," "There Is No Name," and "There'll Be No Parting There," and "Grandpa" and "Mother" sat and listened to the beautiful voices, and as they listened their aged hearts were filled with tender memories of the dear old "long ago" when they had sung those same sweet hymns, with voices just as fresh and clear and strong, and before their dim eyes there seemed to rise a picture of the Home they were travelling towards and fast approaching, the beautiful "Home of the Soul" where there is indeed "rest for the weary."

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CHAPTER IX.

"Come, Jessie," said Vera, about 7 o'clock that evening, "you won't be ready when the gentlemen call for us, if you don't 'roughe' yourself, as 'Sairey' says."

Jessie was lying on the bed with her hands up over her head and her large black eyes fixed upon the ceiling.

"It doesn't make any difference whether I'm ready or not when they call," she replied, coolly.

Vera turned and looked at her; so did Garnet, who was kneeling before her trunk looking for some lace to sew on the neck of her dress. Allie was standing before the glass, rather listlessly combing out her brown 'bangs.'

"It won't make any difference whether you are ready or not," repeated Vera. "Why — why not?"

"Because I'm not going."

Vera sat down on the edge of the bed, with her handkerchief in one hand and her cologne bottle in the other, and stared at the composed face on the pillow; but Garnet, after that one backward glance, bent over her trunk again, without a word, but her

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small lips were drawn into their straightest line.

"Jessica Dare!" exclaimed Vera, using the name she always used when particularly astonished at Jessie's vagaries. "*Why* aren't you going?"

"Because," was the "woman's reason" given.

"But why?"

"Because I'm *not*."

"But *why?* Don't you want to hear the concert? You love band music. What is the mattter?"

"Nothing."

"Don't fib, 'Jasmine,'" said Vera, gravely.

"Well, then, I'll tell you," cried Jessie, springing up and turning a very pale little face, lit by two gleaming black eyes, upon Vera. "I'm not going because I'm tired to death of having those two fellows tied to our apron strings everywhere we go. We can't move but what 'the *gen-tle-men* will *call* for us at such and *such* a time.' I'm tired to death of it. When we came down here I thought we four girls were going around together and have a good time. There's no fun when there's a parcel of men around. I wont go out with them again — see if I do. I'll stay cooped up in this room all the time I'm here, first."

It would be impossible to describe the scorn expressed in the fair young face and in the ringing, girlish voice. Vera looked very much astonished at first, and then burst into a rippling laugh.

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"Oh, Jessica, Jessica," she cried, swaying her body backward and forward on the bed. "Oh, Jessica, Jessica!"

That was all she could say, and she laughed and laughed. No one could hear Vera Earle laugh very many moments and not be actually obliged to laugh too. Allie leaned against the wash-stand and laughed until she held her sides. Garnet, after a stern, but unfailing effort to keep her face straight, soon lay full length on the floor and spread both arms out in utter abandonment to her mirth, and Jessie, after looking very indignantly at all three, threw her arms around Vera's waist and over they went on the bed together. No one tried to restrain her merriment, and peal after peal of laughter rang through the cottage. "Grandpa" and "Mother" in the back kitchen, taking their quiet cup of tea together, heard it, bent their heads to listen, and looked at each other and smiled. The sound did their old hearts good.

Vera was the first to sit up and dry her eyes. She leaned against the foot-board, utterly exhausted.

"You make me laugh like that again, Jessie Dare," she gasped, "and — and — you'll wish you hadn't."

"For pity's sake, what did I do?" asked Jessie, with big eyes. "I didn't do anything."

"No, I should think not," retorted Vera. "I

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hope when you are twenty-seven you will be as indignant at having a 'parcel of men' around as you are at seventeen. Oh, Jessie, such scorn!"

"When she's twenty-seven," remarked Garnet, rising from her undignified position on the floor, "she'll be just as indignant over *not* having even *one* man around."

"Oh, she will, hey?" muttered Jessie, taking the pillow into her arms and hugging it up to her. "Don't you be so sure of that, Miss Dare."

"Jess and I are going to keep 'old maids'' hall, aren't we, Jess?" said Allie.

"Well, you better believe we are," answered that young lady. "Let's try it to-night, will you, Al?"

"With pleasure," replied Allie.

"Oh, don't you want to go out either, Allie?" asked Vera, rather anxiously.

"No, I would prefer to stay at home with Jessie."

Vera turned and looked doubtfully at Garnet. Garnet's face was flushed and her large, black eyes sparkled angrily, but she tried to speak calmly.

"Well, I must say, Jessie, you are behaving very childishly."

"Well, why?" flashed out Jessie. "I'm not going anywhere I don't want to go, am I?"

"It seems not," replied Garnet, still holding her temper under control. "But I think you are doing a very foolish thing."

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"Oh, well, we can't all be wise," replied Jessie, changing her high, petulant tone all at once to a low, careless one. "I don't want to go, and I'm not going; so that is all there is about it."

"Very well."

Garnet's voice was low, deliberate, haughty. Jessie sat and looked over her pillow at nothing in particular, with gloomy eyes.

"Never mind," said Vera, cheerfully, getting up and going to the clothes-press for her hat. "We won't stay long."

"Hark! Isn't that your cousin's whistle?" said Allie.

"Yes," answered Jessie, quickly. "I heard him. He whistled 'Little Fisher Maiden.' There he is again. Well, that's one way to call you out," and she slipped off the bed and went to the glass doors. "Shall I tell them you will be down in a minute?" she asked, turning her laughing face towards Vera and Garnet.

She was entirely changed. All traces of petulance and vexation were gone — passed from her face, yes, and from her whole being in that one instant of time. She was her other self now — her sweeter self — bright, loving, happy, warm-hearted. To use her own words, "she felt all right," and took it for granted that Garnet must, and everyone else, for that matter; but Garnet was very grave; her deeper nature — a nature intensely

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deep in all things — had no sympathy with her sister's light changeable one. She knew this, and didn't think to ask herself if Jessie knew it. Jessie irritated Garnet, and Garnet irritated Jessie. How often are two members of the same family blessed with entirely different natures, and when they come in contact — as they must necessarily do many times a day — they cannot help clashing.

"Yes, tell them we'll be down in a jiff," said Vera, hurriedly and thoughtlessly.

Jessie leaned over the railing. "Hm!"

It was the most delicate little cough imaginable, but Erfort and Fred, walking slowly up and down in front of the cottage, heard and looked up quickly.

They saw a little white face, lighted by two brilliant black eyes and crowned with a mass of dark hair, peering eeriely down at them through the branches of the big tree. They raised their hats, but neither spoke.

"Vera says she and Net will be down in a jiff."

O, wicked little sprite! The tone was low, but, alas! distinctly audible to the three girls. Vera held her fleecy fascinator over her golden hair and gazed with horror-stricken eyes out on the balcony; Garnet sank, speechless on a chair. Jessie looked at them over her shoulder from where she stood, but she did not venture in.

"Hurry, girls; they're waiting," she called, softly.

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Vera gave her one reproachful look and disappeared. Garnet rose, and if a glance could have sent Jessie over the railing, she would immediately have gone headlong.

"Oh, Jessie, that was too bad," said Allie, as the door closed.

"Oh, phooh! no it wasn't either," replied Jessie, stepping through the door and seating herself on the bed in her favorite attitude. "They ought to be taken down a peg once in a while — especially Net."

"I will make you an apology, Vera, if that will do any good," Garnet was saying in smothered tones, as the two girls hastened down the stairs.

She was extremely angry, but as ever, her voice was under her perfect control.

"Oh, never mind," said Vera, with a little laugh, "the child didn't mean any harm."

"Child!" repeated the low, thrilling voice. "Do you call a girl seventeen years old, a *child*?"

"Jessie is a child in every sense of the word," replied Vera, and then they stepped out into the lighted street.

Fred and Vera walked together, and Erfort and Garnet. The two former chatted gaily and seemed to be becoming friends fast, but with Erfort and Garnet, conversation lagged. Here were two natures very much alike. Neither possessed particularly brilliant conversational powers, but both

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were deep thinkers and earnest students of both "Mother" and human nature, and yet Erfort did not understand Garnet any more than she understood Jessie, while Garnet, with the natural keen perception that all women are blessed—or cursed with—I know not which to call it—understood Erfort thoroughly.

Her mind was with the late scene in the chamber and she *could not* tear it away, although she knew as well as though he had told her, that her companion was putting her down as one very odd and reserved, if not actually stupid.

Poor Garnet! Her proud heart beat in hot rebellion against such judgment, but try as hard as she would, not one thing could she think of to say, and her only reply to his remarks—few and far between—were monosyllables, cut off short and "spinster-like," from her small, tightly closed lips.

"What a difference between the two sisters," thought Erfort, as he spread her gossamer for her over the seat; and declining with a smile the one quarter inch of board that she offered him beside her, leaned carelessly against a tree and waited for the concert to begin.

"Jessie is as bright and sparkling as the loveliest waterfall, and as brilliant. She is all life and fire; but this one—" and he looked down on the small, dark head that was almost touching his knee, with a smile, half amused, half disdainful.

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The face he could not see, for it was turned completely away from him, but if he had seen it, it would have told him nothing. It wore its usual look of calm, undisturbed repose. Not one trace upon it of the fierce rebellion going on in the poor, passionately beating heart. Even he, who prided himself on his self-control, could not have conceived of such wonderful power as Garnet possessed.

After an hour — during which Garnet had not spoken, except when directly appealed to by one of the others — Vera proposed going home.

"Oh, by the way, Miss Vera," said Erfort, as they turned to go. "I saw Mrs. Hood this afternoon."

"Did you?" asked Vera, eagerly.

"Yes, and *I* saw something too," put in Fred, eagerly, for he feared a "serious turn" to the conversation. "Guess what."

"Oh, don't ask us to do that," said Vera. "We are not mind-readers." "No; but that was just what it was," was the rather vague reply.

Both girls turned an inquiring face towards him, and Erfort, stepping forward, gravely put his hand on his friend's forehead.

"Not particularly hot," he remarked, gravely, as he fell back again. "No peculiar sensation there, is there, Freddie?"

Fred had turned in surprise, but at Erfort's question he broke into a merry laugh. "No," he

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