

DELPHINE OF THE
'EIGHTIES

IRENE H. MOODY

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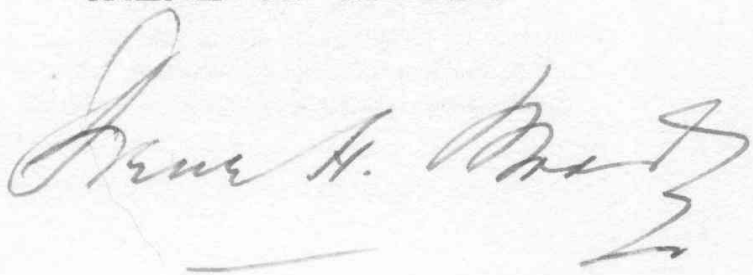
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DELPHINE OF THE 'EIGHTIES

BY

IRENE H. MOODY

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Irene H. Moody", with a horizontal line underneath.

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To
MY BELOVED MOTHER,

*Whose great sympathy, quick understanding,
keen sense of humor and impartial judgment
made her also the perfect friend and companion
she proved to be to the very end of life.*

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Delphine of the 'Eighties

CHAPTER I.

Babies.

“I don't like bald-headed babies, Mary Ann. They're not finished. Are they? I like your baby, but I don't like Ellen's.”

The great brown eyes surveyed the infant on its mother's lap with complete approval, and the small hand passed with thistledown touch over the baby's flaxen curls.

It was an Ontario summer's day, with all that means in drowsy heat, flitting birds, humming bees, and warm, sweet odours of grass and flowers.

The child, standing by the side of the young mother, haunted one with a sense of “other-worldliness.” One wondered whether the quality were spiritual, racial, or simply that of an unusual personality. In fact, something of all three had contributed their portion to this little daughter of Canada.

Born of an English father, whose ancient lineage was modern as compared to the French ancestors of his wife, whose genealogical tree traced the old Norman family to the twelfth century, Delphine Avery was an interesting blending of the outstanding characteristics of the two races, and patrician as a matter of course.

But personality was a very strong factor in this child of the New World, and revealed itself in many and varied ways.

The baby-days of plump contours with their attendant dimples, were memories only, and this summer day saw her an elf-like slip of a child, whose face seemed mostly eyes and long, curled lashes. The nose was too strongly-cut for beauty, but indicated strength of character. The small ears were well placed and set closely to the head—the full lobes coral-pink against the dark background of her hair. The rounded chin, emphasized but not unduly prominent, added more strength to the speaking eyes and sensitive mouth, with just a hint of daring in its slightly elevated carriage. The broad, full forehead was almost hidden under the mass of reddish-brown curls that framed the proudly winsome little face that somehow gave

one the impression of a flower lifting its head joyously to the sun's sweet kiss.

Latent motherhood revealed itself strongly in the protecting, adoring gaze of the child as she gently caressed the baby's dimpled knees and pink feet. Then looking up to the woman's face, she said earnestly, "It's a terrible thing not to love a baby, isn't it, Mary? I'm sorry for Ellen's, but I just can't love it. Poor baby! Ellen loves it, but she would anyway. She's its mother. Mothers always love their babies, don't they? But fathers don't—not always. Father doesn't love me, Mary."

"What nonsense, child! Of course he does."

"No, Mary. Not really truly. Just a little. You know he doesn't crunch me all up in his arms and hold me tight like mother does while her eyes get big and soft."

A haunting touch of sadness shadowed her own as she spoke, for with the almost uncanny intuition of childhood, she knew that she had yet to win her way to the heart of the father she worshipped.

Intensely English in certain aspects of his character, James Avery had come to Canada with little more than his girl-bride, his own two hands and a willingness to battle for all that he could wrest from Fate.

With his mother and sisters to be cared for from the returns of a greatly impoverished estate, he would not permit enforcement of his legal claim to the property as the eldest son. Opposing his will to that of the family advisers, as well as to English precedent, he had said "No! That which I earn, I shall have to enjoy. An Avery does not sacrifice the women of his household to secure his own comfort and well-being." And his girl-bride, with even less of the world's wealth, an equally lofty pride, and a much greater courage, had placed her hands in his and said "Thy ways shall be my ways"; and the "ways" had led to Canada when life was still primitive, rough and strange to the two young people for whom "home" had meant the well-ordered routine of long-established traditions, a certain comfort in living achieved through constant care, and more than all, friendly intercourse with the people of their own class of culture, because though poor, they "belonged."

The man did not feel the difference so keenly as did the sensitive girl. Men rarely do, and James Avery differed little from his fellow-men in that respect. With neither friends nor connections, but filled with the optimism of youth and ignorant of the conditions of the new world, he had brought his

girl-wife to the new London and the privations that walk close companions to a lean purse and untrained hands.

But English tenacity of purpose, and pride in thorough accomplishment, led young Avery to persevere in the work that he found, till his very real ability with men and in business dealings caught the ever-alert eyes of a man of affairs, with the result that at twenty-seven James Avery was set up as a merchant in a smaller city in the province—Farborough—a railway centre of unusual activity and competition.

With no assets other than his integrity and native ability, he shouldered the burden of a business that would make or break him in a very few years, with far greater trepidation in his own mind than in that of his backer, but with the support and intelligent co-operation of an unusual character in the woman his girl-wife had become.

The years had left a deep impress on the girlish Elizabeth Avery. The babies had come, and blessed her for a brief space and then passed on—a daughter and three sons—till life seemed more of pain and sorrow than any possible future joy could recompense.

The fifth child's coming had brought to the mother only the shrinking wonder, "How long will *it* live!" while the father's relatives questioned "Why Elizabeth wanted to have another child!" and the father himself, immersed in his business venture and not overjoyed at the promised advent, hoped it would be a son, and then ceased to trouble—finding plenty else to engage his absorbed attention.

And so the months crept on, while the young mother grew weaker, though no word of complaint passed her quiet lips.

Early winter brought to her arms a wee mite all eyes and feeble cry—almost too tiny to carry the life-spark that barely flickered in the fragile body; and the mother was also plainly losing out in this, her fifth journey to the Gates of Death.

The newcomer was a girl, and the disappointment to the father was greater than he would ever reveal, except that for him the child hardly existed. In his man-way he tried to rally his wife to his love and his need, but she knew the bitterness of the blow to his desire for a son and the whole seemed too much at last to face. She slipped further and further down the way to rest and forgetfulness.

Unexpectedly, the baby rallied. Hunger became manifest, and the cry for the mother stronger and more insistent, till some realization pierced the

woman's apathy. The baby—her unwanted, helpless girl-baby—was going to live; and unless she stayed, there would be no one to love the little one along the path of childhood to womanhood and life. Never such tonic in all the world as the cry of her child to the real mother-heart. With one deep sigh, Elizabeth Avery put aside the beautiful idea of rest and forgetfulness, and with the faintly-uttered word, "Delphine," weakly drew the small bundle nearer to her own body, falling into the quiet sleep that meant life for her and for her baby girl.

The bit of humanity with its old French family name, grew and thrived; though for long so tiny and fragile that "Petite" as she came to be called, seemed a more than usually suitable pet-name. And with such a mother, it was no wonder that Delphine loved babies, but she liked them "finished" in the way of curls.

From the time she could talk, it was a difficult matter to get her past a baby who for the time being might be unattended, for it would be "Oh mother! *There's* a baby nobody wants, let's run off with it! Quick, oh, quick!" Then would follow a wild rush for the baby-carriage, curls flying, cheeks crimson, eyes black with excitement, small body quivering with eagerness and hope. And it took all Elizabeth Avery's genius of motherhood to make the child understand that the infant did belong to someone, and that it could not be theirs just for the taking; then to quiet her with the story of the dear little ones who had come for a while and left again and whom she would see some day if she were good, for Elizabeth lost no opportunity to guide her small daughter in the way of right thinking and true living. But it always remained a supreme wonder to Delphine that anyone who owned a baby could leave it unprotected, even for a moment.

And so on her homeward way from "Mary Ann's," Delphine's mother-instinct was once more aroused at the sight of a tiny baby sound asleep in its carriage on the sidewalk of her own home-street. The child, after one ecstatic look, tried to pass on, but the enormity of leaving the helpless piece of humanity alone was too much for her, and she hovered around like an anxious bird with its birdlings. As she gazed and adored, wondering whose it could be, a thunderous noise shocked her into a startled glance up the street, to behold a great bay horse pounding down the sidewalk at a wild gallop, and she and the baby directly in its path.

For one paralyzing moment the child's heart seemed to stop beating; the next, instinct urged flight; but stronger and more dominating, protection for the helpless infant held her, and with face ghastly white, body tense and arms outstretched, she tried to shield the carriage from the onrushing animal.

To the small child, it appeared mountainous in size and frightful in strength; and for the moment speechless she stood her ground, though fully expecting to be trampled under the pounding hoofs. Just before the possibility could become reality, something seemed to break in her nerve tension, and throwing out her arms almost into the face of the already frightened horse, she uttered one piercing scream. The animal swerved from its course, its hoofs just missing the child and carriage, while Delphine crumpled into a small heap by the now crying baby.

The noise and scream brought the baby's mother and her friend rushing from the house. While maternal arms hushed the infant, friendly hands lifted the unconscious Delphine and carried her through the gathering crowd toward her own home, where James Avery, having finished the day's business, was seeing to the care of his own beautiful mare.

With a queer pang at his heart, he took the child from the neighbour's arms, sent a boy scurrying for the family doctor, who lived close by, and carried Delphine up to their home, assuring his wife, "Don't worry, Beth. She's alive"—though he was not too sure of this himself.

As he laid the little one on the couch, she drew a long sobbing breath and opened her eyes. Then clutching at him in a paroxysm of terror, she burst into a storm of tears, while "Oh, father! The horse! The baby! Hold me! Hold me!" mingled with her sobs.

By degrees, some comprehension of the child's fear and endeavour was arrived at, and James Avery admitted in his heart that no son could have acquitted himself more worthily than this little unwished-for daughter of tender years in her first real test in life. Had he been more observant he would have been stirred by the look of peace and shy happiness that dawned in the child's eyes as he folded her closely to him, murmuring "My little girl!" He would have been quite incredulous had he been told that for many a night those precious words were the last in Delphine's mind as she sank into sleep. But for the rest of life, and though she was taught to drive at a very early age, a horse unharnessed and running at large was a source of utmost terror, and yet subtly connected with this terror a feeling that in this was a potent means of winning her father's approval and regard.

CHAPTER II.

Flowers.

The Averys lived in a large apartment above James Avery's place of business. The six rooms occupied two floors, were unusually spacious and, with their lofty ceilings, gave the impression of dignity and repose. The solid old English furniture contributed to the keynote—the whole effect, while old-fashioned and somewhat worn, being that of harmony, quiet taste and homelike qualities.

When Delphine came down to breakfast the morning following her fright, she seemed to have thrown off any ill-effects, except that her colouring was somewhat less brilliant than usual.

With all the intensity of her ardent nature, Delphine adored life and beauty, sunshine and flowers. Her flying feet took her first to the verandah that crossed the end of the dining-room, where plants in pots and boxes, lovingly cared for, did their utmost to give their owners a suggestion of a garden, which was all that could be procured under the limitations of an apartment.

The group that was dearest to the child's heart was an oblong box containing portulaca, the tiny pansies (called "Johnny-jump-ups") with their inquiring faces, the yellow bloom and haunting fragrance of the soft green musk—the whole overrun and intertwined with a delicate creeper whose pale mauve blossoms sprinkled the box like a scattered handful of amethystine crystals.

Lovingly the small fingers touched and caressed the favourites, the while she talked to them as though certain they would understand.

"You dear wee Johnny-jump-ups! You haven't wiped your faces this morning! But you do smile so sweetly, I know you're very happy! Blue Johnny! You're just as lovely as yesterday. Don't get tired too soon and go to sleep!—Oh! Oh! An all-yellow one! With black whiskers! I never mind pansy whiskers!

"I can't pet you by name, Musk dears. But you're very sweet to-day. Father would love to smell you. Father loves you best of all the flowers, Musk—even better than the fuchsia with the pleated white skirts!

“And our little purple bunny-creeper! I could kiss every one of your bunny-mouths, only you’re so tiny I might swallow you!—Oh, there’s mother!” as she heard her mother’s voice addressing the housekeeper.

As she flitted indoors, she paused for a moment to examine a bottle standing on the window-ledge—then joyously,

“Oh, mother! Look! The myrtle is growing, after all!” And Delphine ran to her mother with the bottle of bright pebbles immersed in water in one hand, while in the other she exhibited triumphantly a small sprig of myrtle, at the end of which a tiny rootlet still wet from its watery bed bore evidence of the fact.

“But, Petite dear, it can’t grow if you disturb it like that!” And Mrs. Avery laughed in spite of her fear for the precious slip of myrtle that had been a little suggestion of the old home, and she had been endeavouring to achieve a strike in water as more sure than the slower earth.

“Oh, mother! I didn’t mean to hurt it!” while the sensitive lips quivered and the eyes grew bright with tears.

“I know, chérie. But we’ll put the darling back, very gently, so the little new root won’t get broken, and then when we look another time, we’ll just peep in the side of the bottle. Shan’t we? Then when the root gets long, we’ll plant it in warm sweet earth so it will grow strong and make flowers. Won’t that be lovely?” And after replacing on the window-sill the bottle with its precious slip and taking the child’s hand in hers, the mother led the way to the dining-room.

After breakfast, Delphine asked to be allowed to play that afternoon with a little chum in the neighbourhood, Nessa Wood, the younger daughter of a widow with three other children. Mrs. Wood had had a great struggle to bring up and educate her family, and many a time the kindly eyes of the Averys had seen the needs of Delphine’s playmate and had quietly filled them, sending her home with a new pair of boots, or mittens, or winter coat, as the case might be, to receive the devoted gratitude of the overworked mother.

To Delphine, this care of her little friend was natural and right. From earliest years, her mother had told her many of the traditions of the two old families, till the phrase “Noblesse oblige” had become an integral part of the child’s life, and she extended it naturally to cover flowers, and babies, stray cats and lame dogs, as well as her human friends.

When Nessa came for Delphine, she begged Mrs. Avery's permission for the two of them to go to the "Flats" or meadows in the valley of the little river called "Willow Creek," which lay on the west side of the city. This was in the nature of a treat, as the Averys were much averse to children being any distance from home without the guardianship of some older and more responsible person. The "Flats," too, were a source of great delight, as the wild flowers were plentiful, and the water a joy that never palled.

Permission granted, the two children romped away on their excursion. Reaching their beloved haunt, the gathering of the dainty blooms began with much gleeful shouting when particularly fine or scarce beauties were discovered. Then some other children arrived, and after a few minutes' desultory picking, someone suggested, "Let's go down to the creek and wade!"

A wild scamper for the river ensued, and the shoes and stockings of the newcomers were discarded in a twinkling.

"Come on, Delphine! Come on, Nessa!"

Reluctantly, Delphine admitted that her mother would not like her to do so when no grown-ups were present.

With no restrictions for herself, Nessa was inclined to remain on the bank with her chum, but the urgent "Aw, come on. Let's have some fun!" "Oh, my, but the water's warm!" "O-o-h isn't the mud squishy!" "Oh, look at the shell!" pointing to a piece of driftwood where an abandoned snail-shell gleamed whitely on the dark background.

This last proved too much, and Nessa hurriedly bared her feet, coaxing, "Come on, Del. Nobody'll know!"

The flushed little face grew warmer under the temptation. The stream looked so clear and inviting, and little spirals of sediment curled up through the water wherever feet ventured up and down the river bed. It was very hard to be left alone, and the suggestion that "Nobody'll know" accomplished its purpose. With cheeks still redder, eyes black with daring, and the red-brown hair lying in moist rings on her forehead, Delphine hastily unbuttoned her shoes, pulled at her stockings and in a flash was paddling around to her supreme content, feeling the oozy mud with exploring toes, and searching for another snail-shell, which seemed such a trophy to add to the wildflowers.

A prone old tree-root further up the creek produced the coveted good fortune, and Delphine shrieked with delight while the others gathered

around to see the new “find.”

Perching herself on a projecting branch while Nessa held the treasure, Delphine drew her feet out of the water to rest them for greater comfort on the bole of the tree, and had just taken the shell into her hands when one child cried in horror-struck tones:

“Oh, Del! Look at your feet!”

All eyes focussed to see the fat, black, slimy bodies of three fair-sized leeches clinging to pink toes and instep.

Delphine’s fastidious fingers, that revelled in fluffy caterpillars which curled confidingly in her small palm, shrank from the glossy, wet, black strangers that somehow seemed to be getting larger as one looked, but a bunch of dried twigs huddled in the fork of the root provided a substitute for the reluctant fingers, and seizing one she made to brush the unwelcome adherents back into the water. But they wouldn’t brush off! And one youngster breathlessly informed the terrified child, “They’re blood-suckers! And you can’t get them off! And they’ll suck and suck till all your blood’s gone, and then you’ll die!”

Delphine’s thoughts flew to her beloved father and mother. Never to see them again! And all because she had disobeyed!

And the dear home seemed suddenly far away and oh, so happy and safe! Her flower-friends! And Empsey, the housekeeper! And Topsy, the cat! And her own wee bed! And then once more, father and mother! Never to see them again—for the ugly black things were getting fatter!

But Delphine was no craven. Fingers worked and pulled—only to slide off the slippery black bodies, while the scared children looked on, and slow tears dripped down the tragic little face. Another try, and another—but no use. Still the creatures clung!

Then a sudden idea. She raised her foot till she could take hold of the leeches covered by the skirt of her cotton frock. This tended to dry the clinging bodies; and their drinking capacity having been reached, one after another relinquished its hold and was thrown as far away as the shaking little hand could achieve.

“Oh, say! Wonder if there are any on us!” And scared children lifted their feet clear of the water, half-dreading and yet half-hoping that such might be the case—for now the impossible had been accomplished some of the more venturesome wanted to share the experience.

No other could claim to be a victim, and excitement began to ease off, while Delphine, with white face and set lips, dropped into the water to make her way to the land.

A sigh of exhaustion escaped when she arrived to find no other intruder had adhered during the short passage. Stockings and shoes were as hurriedly donned as quivering fingers would work, and when Delphine and Nessa, having parted from their companions at the foot of the hill, were alone again, the former said in a small, shaky voice, "I s'pose *God* knew, Nessa," while the other child was too awed by the thought to make reply.

They were almost home before either recalled that the flowers they had gathered in such joy had been left behind, and the precious shell forgotten and lost during the exciting episode.

On reaching home, Delphine went straight to her mother's arms, and told her all of the day's events, ending with the words she had said to Nessa, "I s'pose *God* knew, and I'm sorry, mother!"

"My little one, you must trust father and mother when they say something is not good for you, for they've lived longer and have learned. They won't forbid anything that's desirable, but only those things through which trouble may come to little people. There is no danger in the leeches. They are not nice to look at or to feel, but they can perform a great service to certain sick people, but that is for a doctor to say when and where. When they drink all the blood their little bodies can hold, they just drop off. So they would not have taken all your blood, dear. But where the real danger in the creek lies, is in unexpected holes into which a child might fall and be drowned because too scared or inexperienced to know what to do."

And Beth Avery, realizing that the child-mind appreciates keenly justice or its lack, enhanced the faith the child already reposed in her by saying that there would be no punishment for disobedience, as the retribution of the afternoon had been punishment in itself.

Never for fear of injustice would confidence be withheld from Elizabeth Avery, nor would the standard of truth be lowered by the foolish taking advantage of a child's ignorance to point home a lesson through a lie. Trivial things, some would say, but having an incalculable effect in character-building for the years to come.

CHAPTER III.

The Old Maid.

In a great old garden, a block away from the Avery's home, nestled a tiny old-fashioned cottage, as weather-worn and forlorn as its surroundings.

At some remote period, the grounds had had well-kept, grassy lawns, and there remained evidences of clumps of old-time flowers around the house, along the fences, and bordering the approach to the front door.

A few sickly leaves of ribbon-grass struggled for life amongst the common variety that had overgrown and almost choked it. Straggling leaves of peonies that had once borne gorgeous red and pink blooms, were all that remained to tell of past glory. Lad's Love and Sweet Mary barely existed amongst the weeds. But here and there nourished rose-bushes, with old-fashioned pink and red roses, and one strangely fresh and well-nurtured yellow briar. Unpruned, they seemed to luxuriate in their wildness, and the air was sweet with their fragrance, and humming with the drone of visiting bees.

Four huge apple-trees—gnarled, twisted and ancient—lifted their great boles and mighty branches in appeal to the elements for the aid that should have been theirs from human care.

The windows of the little house looked blankly out upon the neglect and decay like the cataleptic stare of a human being past all sense of sympathy, or even understanding.

The blinds were drawn, apparently never to be raised again—except one, which might have been in the kitchen. But it was so heavily screened with muslin as to be almost nun-like in its aloofness and severity.

A slender slip of a woman lived in the dying place—a Miss Edwards—familarly known to the young fry of the neighbourhood as “The Old Maid.”

Old or not old in years, she appeared so, for she clung to the fashions of a bygone age. Hair parted and drawn smoothly and sedately over her ears and coiled in a chignon at the neck, eyes grey and sad, full skirts over the old-time crinoline, with tiny feet in worn but neat shoes peeping from under the hem, she and her garden transported the rare observer to an earlier period and almost another world.

No one ever saw her leave the house. The butcher, baker, the market-gardener and the grocery cart called at relatively long intervals, and modest purchases were made with the door barely open, and that was all.

There was mystery there, and even the small children sensed it. They loved to play in the great garden, to climb the ancient trees, and when the roses were very profuse, to ask shyly if they might pick some.

The pale, quiet face of the woman, barely showing through the narrow opening of the door, always appeared to dim and withdraw still further when she saw who her callers were, and she would answer:

“Yes, the pink and red ones, children.”

“Thank you, Miss Edwards.” And the little ones would instinctively tiptoe down the steps—her quiet unconsciously communicating itself to them.

One day, a short time after the leech experience, as Delphine and Nessa were returning from an errand for Mrs. Wood, the roses were most alluring, and the children decided they would ask the “Old Maid” if they might pick some, and also play in the garden for a while.

Receiving the usual permission they, childlike, gathered their flowers first.

“I think roses the loveliest flowers in the world, Nessa! And when I’m grown up, I’m going to have a pink satin dress just the colour of this rose, all shining and lovely—and a great big bustle! Mother said I could!” (Mrs. Avery’s reply had really been: “Yes, dear, if you want it when you’re grown up, we’ll try to let you have it,” for with her intuitive wisdom, she satisfied the child’s longing of the present, feeling very sure that when the time arrived neither pink satin nor bustle would be the acme of desire.)

There was nothing for Nessa to say to this wonderful promise, so she replied:

“I like the yellow ones! Wonder why she never will let us touch those!”

“Oh, they must be her favourites! But isn’t she good to let us have the others!”

And as they chattered on, they did not dream that rebellious eyes above trembling lips watched them through the edge of the drawn blind, while a mutinous heart clamoured, “Why shouldn’t I have had children like these! Why should mother have sent Roger away when he loved me so, just because he wasn’t rich! Why should she make me live on like this, just so

the land should not go out of the family! Family?—strangers! Living?—existing! Why, I'm hungry—not only heart-hungry but body-hungry, and cannot do anything to earn for myself. Mother! Mother! How could you have been so cruel! Oh, Roger! Roger! Will you never return? Every time a knock comes to the door, I think 'This time it is he!' But it never is! It's just some other woman's children asking for flowers. But not your roses, Roger. The sweet, sweet yellow briar, that hurts so, but is sweeter and lovelier than all! You always said that I had the perfume of a briar rose, and I always thought them so like you—wayward, thorny, difficult to handle, but beautiful and very, very dear.

“You'll never know how I've tended it, Roger. I've kept half my tea for it—for tea is good for flowers—and the meat bones I could make into soup, I've buried near it to feed it, and I've done it after dark so nobody would see. And, oh, Roger! I want you to know when you take your first step into the garden when you come back for me, that I've always remembered you—always loved you, by the care I've given the briar rose!”

The woman forgot the children in the unusual relief of the bitter lament, the poignant yearning of the words that had broken her customary silence.

She left the room, which was empty and bare of all furnishings; through the hall, equally denuded; through a third room which had been the dining-room; past an empty bedroom; and one with a quaint old dressing-table, a chair, and a bedstead rounded high with its feather bed, the warmth of which had eased her many a night when hunger almost routed sleep; then out to the kitchen. Here a stove—clean by washing, not blackleading—a plain deal table, a chair and a “Boston” rocker standing on boards that were white from constant scrubbing with sand and a flat stone, was all the “home” left to the lonely woman.

Years that would have been an age to the children playing in the garden, had elapsed since girlhood had brought love and a lover to the small but well-furnished house. To the autocratic mother, however, Roger Brownlee was not her daughter's equal in birth or in wealth. So with ruthless disregard of anything but her own wishes, she even had refused him access to her home. And with quick reaction of his impetuous nature, young Brownlee had decided to go away and make a fortune, then come back and demand his sweetheart, enforcing his demand with wealth and the acclaim of men.

Even the enthusiasm of youth and love receives its reward charily at times, so the years that had taken the man across the continent and then to Australia, had seen the girl left orphan. Financial reverses had wiped out the

bulk of the inheritance from her mother, leaving scarcely enough income to keep life in her body, and that was all.

Piece by piece of silver, of bric-a-brac, of furniture, as well as picture after picture had been sold, so quietly that the proceeds were meagre beyond all reason; and this extra money, so carefully hoarded, had helped the girl through the years that brought womanhood, silver strands in the dark hair, the retiring loneliness and mystery that, linked with time, had evoked the title of “Old Maid.”

Of this crowning blow to her pride and sorrow she was not aware. And fortunately so, for she could not have credited that there was no derision, no scorn, no contumely allied with the sobriquet—only the thoughtless, casual cruelty of happy, indifferent people.

Loneliness, pain and pride—with only a wall between the sufferer and the gleeful hearts of the neighbours’ children and the neighbours themselves.

With the growth of the young town, old acquaintances had moved away or died, and newcomers were repelled by the aloofness that poverty had bred.

Unaware of the psychic storm shaking the occupant of the lonely cottage, the children were strolling under the old apple-trees, their precious roses tightly clasped in hot, moist, little hands.

Nessa decided that she must climb one of the trees, to sit in a crotch of one of the lower limbs. This she proceeded to do, while Delphine, having spied a hole in the trunk, hunted up a piece of a branch, and began digging into the aperture, dragging out by means of its rough end, earth that was granular and very dry.

This was fascinating indeed, and the digging proceeded with much vigour until, just as Nessa was about to reach her objective, a huge, fat, white worm came out with the dark earth, and Delphine called an excited

“Oh, Nessa! Look! Look!” And Nessa “looked” with a sudden, jarring fall to mother earth.

“Nessa! Nessa, darling! Did I make you fall? Are you hurt? There won’t be any worm for you to see now, ’cause you’re heavy and you’re on the worm!”

“Oh, gracious! Is there any on me?” And scrambling to her feet, the bruises forgotten, Nessa began peering over first one shoulder, then the

other, while she held out her skirt by the hem to secure a better view.

Delphine caught sight of it first. “Just a little greeney-wet mark down there. It won’t show! Well, it’s dead now, and I never could have killed it. But I wish you had seen it first!”

They eyed its remains distantly, then:

“I’ll ask father what it is! But I’m sure Miss Edwards will be glad it’s out of her dear old tree. It might have spoiled all the apples if it had stayed there!”

At the evening meal, Delphine told her parents about the white stranger and asked what it was. Her father explained that in all likelihood it was what is commonly called a “borer,” a grub that eats its way into the heart of a tree, breeds there, and finally destroys it.

After the child had gone to bed, he said to his wife:

“Beth! We’ll have to have a house with a garden for that child. An apartment is no place for a little one. No opportunity to explore and experiment, and I won’t have her going to other places for the instruction she should receive with us.

“How she would love the dear old home! I never realized how much knowledge I absorbed there every day of my life. Old ‘Tit-bits’ in the garden, ‘Crackey’ amongst the livestock, gave me many a lesson in a good homely way when I did not imagine I was being taught!

“We’ll have to keep a sharp look-out for a place with plenty of ground where her friends can come to play with her, and where there’ll be room for all. What do you say, Beth?”

The mother raised quiet eyes—“I think you’re right, James”—while in the background of her thoughts she yearned for those others who would have made such a joyous chorus of play, had Fate not intervened.

CHAPTER IV.

Friends and Otherwise.

During the period that the Averys spent in London, Ontario, they had made the acquaintance of a Scotch family by the name of Waldie. There were eight young people in this house, ranging in age from a little older than the Averys to three young children—the youngest but a few months the senior of Delphine.

One of the girls, Mern, especially attracted Elizabeth, and there developed a very deep friendship between the families. The two young women with so much in common became like sisters, and indeed, so devoted were they, that when the little Delphine was born and the mother so near to death, the generous, loving heart of Mern Waldie prompted the offer to take the helpless infant if it survived the mother, and bring it up as her own, an offer that was to bind the women one to another, for all of life to come.

To Delphine she was “Auntie Mern,” and the little one adored the acquired relative only less than her beloved mother.

Mern Waldie was a girl of unusual charm. Exceptionally fine blue eyes and a very attractive mouth made her interesting to even the casual observer; but her voice was captivating, and exercised its influence on the sensitive child. Clear, sweet, with a lilting quality that suggested song, it fascinated all who knew her; while her laugh, with a note in it all her own, was such pure joy that to listen to it once was an incentive to hear it again.

The older members of the Waldie family were away from home, but the beauty of the group—Jeannette—was to be married, and Mrs. Avery and Delphine were to attend the wedding.

A visit to London was quite an event. Arriving at the Waldie’s, Delphine, after a rapturous meeting with “auntie,” was taken into the garden by Mern’s father—a grey-haired Scotchman whose speech carried just the faint touch of Keltic that the child’s musical ear delighted in and whose love for children, and especially his “Petite,” was recognized by all who knew him.

There was much to see, and many old friends to visit. First, the cairn of stones (that was a monument to an old pussy-cat friend), now a mass of trailing periwinkle; then Nobby, the reigning feline; the black squirrel who

revelled in nuts and whirling on his cage-wheel; and the Shetland pony, whose love for sugar and apples was insatiable.

Then there was the friendly chicken who came and tweaked the shoelace of her owner when she wanted a sod upturned for a worm-luncheon; and the robin who would perch on his shoulder, if one kept very, very quiet, and loved it hard all the time.

The day passed gloriously for the small child and her "Uncle Mern," as she sometimes called him. Then the time for the wedding arrived.

The bride was all the heart could desire in loveliness and appeal. Black curly hair, short from recent illness, framed a beautiful face. Deep blue eyes with wonderful curled lashes, had a wistful look that always made Delphine think of violets. She was tall, slender, and the embodiment of grace; and in her white satin gown, veil and orange-blossoms, looked more flower-like than ever.

Mern had planned a surprise. Her clever, artistic fingers had created a robe duplicate in design for Delphine who, with her own small brother, were to be flower-bearers as miniature bride and groom.

Excitement ran high, and by the time the bride and children were ready for the ceremony, Petite's face was like a crimson rose, though the unaccustomed lateness of the hour made eyes heavy and aching from the Sandman's nightly visit.

"Now, Allan, you and Petite go first and scatter the flowers, then Jeannette will come next with father." And Mern, well pleased, viewed the group with the approval of the artist.

But Mern had calculated every thing but one—the exciting, exhausting day Delphine had experienced.

Utterly weary, the bride-in-miniature with her tiny groom, looking like two animated dolls, proceeded into the drawing-room, dropping flowers on the way, to find a veritable host of people who exclaimed and applauded the attractive picture. Startled eyes took in the strangeness, and she found herself the centre of attraction—the bride had not yet appeared. Allan, the flowers, Jeanette and Auntie Mern were all forgotten as the little figure flew to her mother's side and buried her scared face and shaking body against the comforting shoulder. The child who could protect a helpless infant from a runaway horse was overcome with an agony of shyness before the laughter and applause of strangers.

Elizabeth picked her up, and slipping quietly out of the room, took her into Mern's bedroom. Undressing her, she tucked her into bed and the child was asleep before the mother left.

The next morning Allan jeered at her for her flight, and Delphine began to realize that she had upset her beloved auntie's plans; and with the realization came the instinctive thought "What would father think! Would he be exceedingly disappointed in his daughter?"

A very distressed small girl sought her mother and Mern Waldie as they sat discussing the events of the evening, and Mern gathered the child into her arms:

"My sweetheart! Allan is wicked to tease, for you scattered the flowers beautifully. And I didn't know you were so tired, you poor wee thing! What's that, dear? Father? Oh, *your* father! We'll tell him what a sweet little bride you made, and how nice you made Jeannette's path with flowers, and we just won't say anything about your being frightened. It didn't really matter, darling!" And comforting the child, Mern Waldie forgot her own disappointment, and understood for the first time the little one's yearning for her father's approval.

When alone again with Elizabeth, she continued: "Don't say anything to James, Elizabeth. I've given my promise, and it would break the child's faith if my word were not kept. I should have known better than to expect those babies to have the endurance of adults. Had it been a day wedding it would have been all right."

In spite of all the comforting, Delphine had gained an impression that if she were to secure her father's regard, she must never allow fear of any description to control her. This thought she carried with her so deeply imbedded in her subconscious mind that it grew and developed steadily. The tendency in all probability was somewhat accentuated in her case as, being an only child, she often played alone when thoughts of her idolized father came more frequently than would have been the case had she enjoyed the constant companionship of, and mental interchange with, others of her own age.

The result was that gradually she became able to face quietly and apparently unafraid, events and circumstances that in reality caused sheer panic in heart and mind.

Instead of returning to Farborough with her mother, she was allowed to remain till the end of the week with some other former friends of her parents

—Rosemarie and John Lord—a childless couple who were exceedingly fond of small Delphine.

If life proves hard at times to grown people, why do they so seldom realize that childhood, too, has its tragedies, and more, why do those who should know better seek to tease and torment little children because they find it “fun” to do so?

The next day when John Lord, returning from business, saw Delphine’s most precious doll-baby on the verandah, he tied a string around its neck and hung it on the door-handle.

While waiting to be summoned to dinner, he joined Delphine in search for her doll, pretending to be greatly surprised to find it suspended to the handle of the door.

Delphine, indignant at the treatment accorded her own dear “baby,” tried with futile fingers to undo the knot, while Lord taunted—

“You needn’t do that, Del. She’s been hung, so she’s dead now. All you can do is to bury her! Come on! We’ll get the spade and make a hole for her in the garden!”

He prepared to take the doll from the child, but was prevented by a veritable little tigress.

“Oh, you horrid, hateful man! You put her there! And she isn’t dead—my baby! Look at me, dolly dear! She isn’t dead, and you shan’t bury her when she isn’t dead!”

And black, horror-struck eyes flashed agonized terror at the huge man towering above her while she stood her ground, clasping her precious “baby” to her quivering body.

This was the scene that confronted Mrs. Lord when she came to call them to the dining-room.

“Why, Petite! What is the trouble, dear?”

“He mustn’t bury my dolly when she isn’t dead! Must he, Mrs. Lord?”

And the man laughed immoderately at the tragic figure, while his wife remonstrated:

“John, John, don’t tease the child!” Then, “No, dear. Your dolly won’t be harmed. He’s only teasing you, dearie! Now come to dinner.”

And neither appeared to notice that the child swallowed her food with the utmost difficulty, though she sat straight and tearless throughout the meal. But bedtime found dolly clasped tightly to her little mother-heart, and her face then was not entirely free from traces of her grief.

Once more before she left, Delphine and John Lord crossed swords, to the man's delight and the child's dislike and distrust.

Delphine was talking about her flowers, her cat and the horse, and as her parents were to drive to London for her that evening (Saturday), returning to their home the following day, she remarked concerning the horse:

"Polly won't have any Sunday this week. Mother says Saturday is Polly's Sunday!"

"Then your mother's a Jew!"

Poor Delphine had no idea what being a "Jew" meant, but the tone was enough. Contempt and derision connected with her loved mother brought a blazing fire of anger from her small daughter.

"She *isn't* a Jew! She *isn't* a Jew! And you *shan't* say things about my mother! I'm not going to stay here another minute! I'm going to my Auntie Mern. She won't hurt my dolly and say things about my mother!" And in a passion of tears, for she felt utterly helpless in the face of this last insult, and not waiting even for her hat, she rushed down to the gate, clasping her doll as she ran and was away up the street before the astonished people could fairly realize what had happened.

Mrs. Lord was the first to think connectedly.

"John! Follow the child at once. Whatever will the Waldies think to have her rush in in that condition! Why do you tease so, John! Can't you remember she's only a child? And you know how passionately devoted she is to those she loves! Why did you do it?" While the man replied somewhat lamely and shamefacedly:

"I didn't know she'd flare up like that! She's a little spitfire and she looks great when she's mad, but I didn't mean to get her going like that."

Arriving at the Waldies', he found the child nowhere in sight, for Mr. Waldie had taken her to the back garden to see some little chicks that had been late in hatching. But Mern Waldie faced big John Lord with an angry light in her great eyes.

"Mr. Lord, would you kindly tell me what has happened? I think I have it straight, from Delphine, but I would like to be sure."

For once in his life, John Lord was abashed, as he acknowledged that his love of teasing had led him into thoughtless cruelty, and he pleaded to be allowed to make amends.

But the gentle Mern could not see it that way. A little child had been tormented, had sought sanctuary in her home, and there she should remain until her natural guardians claimed her.

A cold fury at the brutality that would inevitably leave some mark on the developing soul of the child, dominated the girl as she icily replied:

“No, John Lord! You’re not fit to have the custody of any helpless thing!” And Lord was to ponder this for many a day, till he began to wonder if there might be some reason in the scheme of the universe that had denied to his hearth the laughter of innocent little ones.

The Averys faced a difficult problem when they arrived and heard of the untoward events of the past two days.

John Lord met the situation squarely and apologized for his conduct. But even that did not make clear immediately the proper course for them to pursue, and they discussed it for considerable time after reaching the seclusion of their bedroom in the Lords’ home.

The next morning saw the parents at the Waldies’, where they thanked Mern for her care, and privately commended her for her stand. Then, taking Delphine, they returned to the Lords’ for luncheon, after which they were to leave for their home-town, Farborough.

On the way there, James Avery took his daughter by the hand and talked as they walked.

“Delphine, dear, Mr. Lord is sorry he teased you about your dolly and about mother, and I want my girl to remember the motto of her race, ‘Noblesse oblige.’ Mother has made clear many times how it should be applied to our daily life, and this is one time, for we shall accept his regret and try to think no more about it. Can my daughter do that?”

“I’ll try, father. But oh, father, dear! Don’t let him touch me. He has such horrid hands!”

And here another instinct came to the surface in the developing child—intuition as to character from the shape of a person’s hands; and the time came when, following this intuition, progress and happiness were the result, but ignoring it, chaos, sorrow and great suffering were to be her portion until

courage of the highest order brought her back to the path in life which, for the sake of others, she must tread.

CHAPTER V.

A New Concept.

School was to commence for Delphine, and she looked forward to it with greatest interest.

Nessa had told her much about it as she had been attending for a year, and it was expected that Delphine would not need to enter the "baby class" as her mother had given her considerable preliminary training, so that already she knew the alphabet, could read some of her story-books, was familiar with numbers and the simplest forms of addition and subtraction.

The expectation proved correct, and Delphine entered the second grade, which was in charge of one of the sweetest women the child would ever contact.

With the same name as Delphine's mother, Beth Paul became the guiding light of the little one's public-school life. Of Scotch descent, with a wealth of red-gold hair, the bluest of blue eyes, gentle tender ways and a voice that was low and sweet and kind, whether sounded in praise or blame, she had a knowledge of child psychology that was unusual in the days when the discipline of authority was far more prevalent than that of love and interest. To Delphine, school was a never-ending source of pleasure, and possibly much of this was due to the loving influence of this first teacher. The class songs were the height of joy, and she possessed an unusually promising voice for one so young.

Beth Paul believed in winning children to exercise a measure of self-control which she stimulated by approval and trust to become, as the term progressed, the orderly behaviour of children who did it because they loved and desired to please her, till good conduct became a matter of habit rather than discipline.

With all her gentleness, Miss Paul was not to be imposed upon, and while restless little bodies were occasionally given relief by being allowed to go out into the hall to sharpen a slate-pencil, this privilege was rare, and there must be real need before it was granted.

One day, Delphine conceived the idea that she just must be allowed the importance and change incidental on the coveted permission, but when Miss Paul considered the pencil in question she replied:

“No, Delphine. Your pencil is quite sharp enough, dear.” And as she turned to another child, the pencil was put into the owner’s red mouth and deliberately bitten to break the point.

“Oh, Miss Paul! I’ve broken my pencil. May I go now?”

A quick glance, then, “Yes, dear. We’ll go together,” and then taking her by the hand, the teacher led the way out of the room.

When alone, she put her arms around the little one, drawing her to her breast, and said:

“Delphine, you bit the end off the pencil, dear. Was that right? Then you said you had broken it. Was that truthful? Am I not to be able to trust my Petite? Shall I always have to wonder if she is telling me the truth?”

“Oh, no, no! Miss Paul! I’ll never do it again, never! Please trust me! Please! I love you so, teacher!”

“Then be truthful always, my darling. Not because you love me or anyone, but because it is right, and you will always be trusted and believed. Will you promise me never to forget that Delphine?”

The promise was earnestly given, then:

“Come, dear. We must go back, and the pencil will have to do as it is to-day.”

Thus, through love and understanding, there was brought into the child’s consciousness a passion for truth that led into some difficult situations but carried her through in triumph at the end.

One of the children in Delphine’s class attracted her greatly, though one might wonder at first what was the drawing factor.

Jean Carruthers was a little harum-scarum, always up to some dare-devilry, and following, if not leading, the most venturesome boys in the neighbourhood.

One Saturday afternoon Delphine, together with several other children, were invited to a “party” at Jean’s home—a roomy old house with a large garden and a huge barn.

The girls had a wonderful time, and ended the afternoon with a romp in the hay-mow. They were at the height of their fun when Jean caught sight of her father. Without a moment’s hesitation she ran to the open loft-door, straddled (face down) a long pole resting against it, and shot downward just as her father reached the foot of it.

“Well! Here’s my boy!” He swung her up to his shoulder, where she immediately proceeded to stand as unconcerned as if it were the barn floor.

“Aren’t you little girls afraid to play with such a rough-and-tumble as this boy of mine?” giving Jean’s cheek a pinch as he set her down.

Then began a playtime which to Delphine was amazing. What wouldn’t she give if her father would romp with her like that! To be free to pull his hair and tease back! To have him so evidently adoring all her pranks and her small self as well. The thought made her grow quite breathless.

This comradeship between father and daughter was so new and strange that, happy as the afternoon had been, Delphine went home with a sick feeling of something wanting in her contact with her own father. Not that he was cold or harsh, but the oneness she craved was not there, and for the first time she realized just what the relationship might mean.

The thought remained, and whenever her eyes fell upon Jean in school, the day of vivid enlightenment returned to her—the frequency of the thought making the desire all the more intense.

Just at this time, an epidemic of whooping-cough began to seek its victims amongst the younger children, and Delphine was not to escape. This meant the cessation of school life and separation from her beloved teacher.

The child lost weight and strength rapidly, and there seemed no diminution of the racking cough.

There came a day when she was too weak and ill to rise, and when the doctor came he found her in her mother’s arms.

“Why, Petite! This won’t do! I’ve got a new baby I want you to see, but you can’t go in your nightie!”

A flicker of a smile appeared and was gone again. It was a sick Delphine who could not be stirred by a new baby!

When Dr. Dalton was alone with Mrs. Avery he said:

“That child can slip away from life very easily, Mrs. Avery. She’s just a little too spiritual to suit me, and now she is plainly drifting out. You and Jim will have to put your heads together and see what you can plan to stimulate her interest in life. What does she care for most?”

“Her father,” came the quiet reply.

“Then it’s Jim’s problem. Can he solve it?”

“He always wanted a son, Doctor.”

“Then she senses it! Confound these psychic conditions! Sometimes we know enough to recognize them, but even then we know very little how to meet them successfully! I’ll have a talk with Jim. In the meantime, give her something to look forward to—simple things, that’s all that’s necessary for a child, but let them be every day. Make her feel there’s always something interesting just ahead, and if we can build up her strength in the meantime, we’ll pull her through.” But the kindly heart of the man was worried, for he was very fond of his friend Jim’s small daughter.

He had his talk with the father, beginning characteristically:

“Jim, you’re going to lose that child of yours!”

“Delphine! Why, John, I never heard of a youngster dying from whooping-cough! Do they?”

“If that were the only thing, I wouldn’t worry. But that child is literally dying for you!”

“For me! What under Heaven do you mean?”

“Just what I say! She idolizes you, and you aren’t interested. That’s all!”

“Not interested! Why, you’re crazy, John! Of course I’m interested. She’s my child!”

“Then you’d better show it more! She loves her mother, but you are the breath of life to her, Jim, and she has a remarkable capacity for loving. But she’s got to have some definite response, or she’ll wilt like a starved plant. I’m not so sure that she isn’t on the way now. Get busy! Make her feel it, and we’ll watch the results!”

There ensued for Delphine days of wondering delight, when her father made a point of giving her some definite attention after the evening meal—taking her into his arms while he read the paper, or telling her stories of his own childhood, of his parental home or English traditions, and speaking casually of the time when they would visit the Old Country, which latter brought a real sparkle to the childish eyes.

Sunday morning, too, became a time to anticipate and wonder about, for beside his bed was always some small gift for the little daughter.

One event of great importance remained vividly in the young mind—a visit from Miss Paul. Whatever by development the young teacher had

accomplished in the period of actual school life, was intensified by this unusual act of love.

With her gentle voice and smile, she had said “We missed our Delphine, Mrs. Avery. And ‘Merry Sunshine’ never seemed quite so bright and happy without your voice, Petite dear!”

What amazing happiness! And had Father missed her singing at home, she wondered! And all of a sudden she wanted to sing! And gradually she began to regain her strength. The cough became less troublesome, the intervals between were longer, and at length the very real danger was past.

Dr. Dalton was relieved, but he ordered “country life and out of doors for a while.” So Delphine was taken some twenty-five miles away to where another English family were doing their part to build up the great Dominion by that most foundational method, farming.

They were by no means strangers, being amongst the favoured few whom Delphine had adopted as relatives to fill that need which was but the natural longing of a lonely child inheriting the race instinct of two old families.

With “Auntie” and “Uncle” Lane and their two sons, she settled down to a happy autumn of new interests and activities—all of which bade fair to the accomplishment of the desired result, while an occasional Sunday visit from her parents told her all the home news her eager devotion could desire.

CHAPTER VI.

The Lanes.

“May I milk a cow, Auntie Lane? I have my cup.” And a small face pleaded eagerly.

“All right dear. Try Daisy. She’s quiet, and I don’t think she’ll mind.”

Dancing feet carried Delphine amongst the animals contentedly chewing their cud as they waited for the evening milking.

Placid old Daisy turned her white head in wonderment as the tiny fingers grasped a teat and endeavoured, in the approved fashion, to draw down the milk from the heavy udder. But she didn’t object, for the touch was gentle and she was accustomed to seeing the little figure in the barnyard and the fields.

A feeble stream at last awarded the persistent efforts, but small hands began to tire, and finally she could squeeze no more, and the cup was only half-full.

“Oh, Daisy! This milk isn’t at all nice!”

“What’s the matter with Daisy’s milk, Petite?” called Fred from his milking-stool close by.

“Oh, Fred! I like soapy milk, and this is all plain like the milkman’s at home!”

A shout of laughter greeted this surprising statement, while the boy called “Oh, mater! Delphine wants soap in her milk and Daisy doesn’t supply it!”

“Fred Lane! You know what I mean! *You* make the milk soapy but I can’t, and it isn’t nearly as nice without!” Another shout greeted this remark.

“Say, Will! Del says I put soap into Daisy’s milk. And she wants it soapy or not at all!”

More laughter as Mrs. Lane approached. “What is it, dear? What is the matter with Daisy’s milk?”

“Oh, nothing, Auntie Lane. But uncle and the boys can make it soapy and I can’t.”

“I wonder if I can!” And Mrs. Lane approached the mildly-interested Daisy. But Mrs. Lane was not an experienced milker, and Daisy thought that somehow she wasn’t getting her usual consideration, so she would not assist, and Mrs. Lane too had to cease, much to the amusement of her young sons.

“Come, Del. Let me have a try!” And taking his stool, Will approached the old cow.

The touch was different and Daisy recognized it. The milk came swishing down in strong heavy streams that brought to the surface the foam that looked like the richest lather.

“Oh, Will! You’re a darling. I do love soapy milk!” And she began to sip the warm drink which, by daily occurrence, was bringing back the roses to the pale cheeks.

“Bring Dick, then, Del.” And off the child flew to return presently with a tiny black pig tucked under one arm.

The one of a large litter who had had the misfortune of being the “one too many” and blind at that, the small pig had been doomed to death, but Delphine’s pleading had mitigated the sentence for a while. In the meantime, it had become her especial pet and charge, and though unable to see her, would follow her voice whenever he heard it, with the result that it was rarely far away. Undoubtedly it would have died a natural death but for the assiduous, pitying care of the child. A dozen times a day she would turn up at the house with Dick under her arm. “Auntie Lane, Dick wants a drink.” And milk would be forthcoming, and Delphine would feed it with a spoon. Then at milking time the boys would take great delight in squirting the warm fluid into Dick’s open mouth while his small guardian held him out for this unusual method of feeding.

As frequently happened, Dick got as much this evening over his face as inside his mouth, and Delphine protested.

“Please be careful, Will. Dick’s hankys are almost all used up, and he’s got to have his face wiped when you make him so wet! Poor little Dick! But isn’t he getting fat! And he’s growing so fast, he’s getting ’ceedingly heavy!”

The two big youths thought it great fun to joke the child about her queer pet, but Delphine was not to be upset in the matter.

“Never you mind, Fred Lane! I love Dick and he loves me, and I’m going to take care of him as long as he needs me. If you didn’t have a

mother and a nigger mammy took care of you, you'd love her and she'd love you! So there!"

Boyish laughter rang in the evening air.

"Oh, Del! You make my sides ache! So I'm a pig and you're a nigger mammy! What will our respective maters say to that!"

"You know essactly what I mean, and I won't 'scuss it with you!" And in all the offended dignity of her few years, she took Dick under her arm and departed from the barnyard.

The following day, the boys had another laugh at Delphine's expense, though it was no joke to her, and they were far from realizing that they were but deepening her love for helpless creatures, stimulating her mother-instinct, and making more real the family traditions of "Noblesse oblige."

The Lanes were clearing stumps from a pasture preparatory for seeding the following year, and had just achieved the upheaval of a magnificent specimen. Amongst the roots they found the nest of a field-mouse with several tiny baby mice, scared to their little hearts by the noise and light of day.

"Del, oh, Del! Come and see the little birds!"

Flying feet brought the eager face to the boys and the upturned root, and Fred deposited in the cupped hands a wee thing covered with downy grey and with frightened black eyes looking everywhere for a place to hide.

"Oh, you darling birdie! I won't hurt you, you dear sweet! I'll just love you and love you!" And saying this she bent her head and kissed the trembling animal.

"Oh, Del! You kissed a mouse! You kissed a mouse! Oh, Del. You can't kiss me. You kissed a mouse! Oh, Del!" And mischievous Fred began capering around like a youngster.

The face of the child crimsoned to her hair, then—

"You *said* it was a bird! And it doesn't matter if it is a mouse; it's little and helpless and frightened, and I love it." And bending her head she touched the shaking animal again with her lips.

Her face still flaming with colour, and struggling hard to keep from crying, she put the tiny creature carefully back with its family, then turning wrathfully on the teasing boy—

“And I don’t care what you say! You told a story! And I’ll never kiss you again, ever, ever, ever, as long as I live.” And turning, she flew as if her feet had wings—out of the field, down the lane, through the barnyard, picking up the startled Dick on her way, and down into the orchard to a favourite spot where she had what she called her “cubby-hole.”

With Dick beside her, she wept out her anger and chagrin.

“Oh, Dick dear! They told me it was a birdie, and I kissed it, and it was a mouse! And mice are pretty, Dick, but you don’t kiss them any more than you kiss pigs! And I kissed it twice, Dick! And I won’t be disgraced! I’ll just remember the Prince who helped the ants and the ducks, and who won the Princess because he was always kind and good!” And longing for her mother’s understanding and her comforting arms, Delphine fought her first battle alone.

Much subdued, she found her way back to the farmhouse at supper-time, but when Fred tried to make up by asking for a kiss, she pushed him away without a word, and he was to feel the weight of her displeasure and broken faith for years to come. He had grossly offended, and she recoiled from his touch as if he had been a stranger.

She surprised her mother very shortly after her return home by bringing the Prince story to her and asking to have it read to her, for Mrs. Avery knew that Delphine could read it for herself. However, there appeared some reason, and there was. Delphine wanted the soothing and definite assurance conveyed by the story when read in her mother’s voice and expression. Her own somewhat halting performance could not suffice.

CHAPTER VII.

The Squirrel's Cache.

“Auntie Lane, when may we go to gather the nuts?”

“Almost any day now, Petite. Shall we have a look at our trees this afternoon?”

“Oh, goody!” Fairly dancing at the prospect.

At the end of the long lane and past several fields was the “bush,” as the wooded area of the farm was called.

Here in the summertime, when it was her good fortune to spend a day at the farm, Delphine used to revel in the lovely Ontario wild flowers, and she thought of this as they walked along.

“Auntie, the ground isn't happy in the fall like it is in the spring, is it?”

“What do you mean, dear?” she asked, for she found it most interesting to draw out the quaint fancies of the child.

“Why, in the spring it breathes, and its breath smells so sweet and ‘stirry,’ as if something were going to happen—just like when father tells me of when he was a little boy, or when I'm going to a party. And then the flowers begin to come. And your flowers are so different from the city flowers!

“I know a baby whose eyes are just like the blue phlox—flat blue all over. And I know another who has blue eyes like cornflowers—the dark part in the centre and the blue around it in a fringe. That baby *looks* like a cornflower, but the other is sky and sunshine.”

“What am I like, Delphine?”

The child looked shyly up at the matronly figure, tanned face and twinkling brown eyes and said:

“You're like a sunflower. And Uncle Lane with his blue eyes and fuzzy red beard is a marigold. And Will is like a Jack-in-the-pulpit, he's so sober sometimes. And Fred is like . . .”

“Well, dear. What is Fred like?”

“Fred’s like a sting nettle, auntie. It may be nice boiled, but it’s not nice to touch raw!”

It was impossible to keep from a chuckle at Fred’s expense, and Mrs. Lane enjoyed it heartily.

“And what are mother and father like, dear?”

“Oh, mother’s a rose, auntie. Can’t you see it in her face? And father’s an evergreen tree. Mother showed me one once with little new light-green shoots all over it like flowers, and that’s like father when I was sick. Then it turns all dark green again, but it never withers, and looks just the same, and smells just as sweet summer and winter. I love evergreen trees, auntie!”

Very much entertained, Mrs. Lane continued,

“You were going to tell me why the earth isn’t happy now, Petite.”

“Well, you see, after the spring flowers are gone, and the hot days come, it doesn’t breathe any more. It just purrs like Topsy when she’s dozing in the sun. Then, when the fall comes and it grows cold, it doesn’t even purr. It just gets hard and covers itself with frost and crawls away inside itself, and it must be almost smothered and it can’t be happy like it is in the spring. Can it? . . . Oh, auntie! *There’s* a red cloth tree!” And Delphine made straight for her objective a short distance from the edge of the bush which they were entering.

The hickories, which were the last nuts to be gathered, had a piece of “turkey-red” tacked to their trunks so that they could be distinguished readily amongst the forest of bare branches.

The young feet reached the tree first and began searching among the leaves for the treasures. A sharp frost the night before had brought to the ground a goodly harvest.

There were five trees in all, and they made the rounds, the basket Mrs. Lane had brought being almost full by the time they reached the fifth tree.

Of a sudden, Delphine called:

“Oh, auntie! Look what I’ve found!” And flushed and excited she pointed to a little pile of nuts on the ground at her feet.

“Then a squirrel or a chipmunk has been working for us, Petite. They often gather them together preparatory to taking them home, dear.”

“Oh, but auntie! If that’s their winter food, you wouldn’t take it! Would you?”

“They’ll find some more—plenty, before we’re up in the morning, Delphine. And likely they have many laid away already.”

“But ’spose they’d get hungry before spring came again, and the snow deep, deep on the ground, and nothing to eat! What would they do, Auntie Lane? Wouldn’t they just have to die?”

“I don’t know what they’d do, Delphine. But they’d never leave any nuts for us if we did not come and get them.” And Mrs. Lane placidly proceeded to transfer the squirrel’s pile into her basket.

But for Delphine the wonderful day was spoiled!

She was very quiet on the way home, her thoughts recurring time and again to the disappointment of the denizen of the wood when he returned to his treasure-trove to find it gone, and also to know that humans had done it!

When Fred brought some glowing red apples from the attic that evening—all crisp, and juicy and cold—and Will proceeded to crack some nuts, Delphine drifted over to the latter and said in a low voice:

“May I have mine not cracked, Will?”

“Why, Del! Those small teeth of yours can’t do anything with these hard little chaps!”

“I know, Will, but I’d rather not eat mine to-night. May I have them to put in my pocket?”

“All right, Petite.” And he scooped up a generous handful, and found they filled the two small pockets in her pinafore.

A feather-light kiss touched the brown, boyish cheek as she thanked him and ran away to her bedroom, where she transferred the nuts to the pocket of her red cloth coat.

Both Fred and Mrs. Lane noticed Delphine was not partaking of the cracked nuts, but when asked if she were not going to have some, she replied in the sedate way she sometimes used:

“Not to-night, thank you, auntie.” And no further comment was made.

The next morning, when the eggs had been gathered, Dick fed, and Mrs. Lane busy about the cooking, Delphine, in her red coat and bonnet, trotted off down the lane toward the bush.

Arriving at the last tree, where the squirrel’s cache had been found, she piled the nuts up in a little mound as near where they had been as she could

remember, and was just about to depart when a scolding chatter came from a nearby tree, and a black squirrel whisked further up and peeped out from a fork in the branches.

“Oh, squirrel! Here’s your nuts. Don’t scold me now, for I brought them back, and I think there are more than you had before. So you won’t go hungry this winter, and die because we took your food!” The small figure stood gazing upwards, earnestly addressing the black eyes that peered at her a few yards away.

“Good-bye, squirrel. We won’t take any more piles, for I won’t tell about them. I’ll just cover them with more leaves! Good-bye!” And back she trotted through the wood to the lane on her homeward journey.

About the second field, she encountered the bane of her life on the farm—the flock of geese. Try as she would, she could not overcome the panic induced by the hissing of the birds.

She waited now, thinking they would precede her, but when they caught sight of the bright clothing, they turned and made for her, hissing as they came.

There seemed to be only one thing to do, and she did it. She climbed the fence and dropped down into the pasture.

The great black and white bull had been let out for a little exercise, and this she knew, but he was at the far end of that side of the field, and while she had been warned against going into his particular domain, the immediate need appeared to justify it—and she had to get past those terrifying geese! Beside, the field on the other side of the lane was bordered by a deep ditch half-filled with water.

She kept close to the fence, and the geese followed on the other side.

For a few moments, she occasionally glanced backward toward the bull, but as he did not seem concerned, her attention became concentrated on the disturbing geese. If she ran, they ran, and it did not seem possible for her to get ahead.

She was a good way up the pasture when she saw Will galloping madly toward her across the field on the other side of the lane. Then his voice, strong and powerful, carried on the wind:

“Climb the fence, Del. At once!”

Accustomed to obeying, she did as she was told, but pointing to the geese, cried out:

“The geese are here, Will, and I can’t get by!”

Young Lane flung off the horse, took a great leap over the ditch, hurtled his tall body over the fence, dashed across the lane, scattering the geese as he ran and grabbed the child, fairly dragging her over the top bar.

And then, following the gaze of his sick eyes, she saw.

The great bull, catching sight of the small red figure, had started to trot toward it. Then the child had run to get past the geese. This had annoyed him, and he decided to oust the intruder.

Will Lane, taking a horse with him on his way to the house for dinner, saw the moving red, saw the trotting bull, did not wait for more, but leaping on its back sent the surprised animal at its utmost across the field. And if ever the lad prayed in his life, he prayed then to be in time. He was; and as he dragged Delphine to safety the bull rushed by.

For a moment he held her close, seeing in a flash a limp broken body in its blood-red garments, the sport of a ruthless brute! Then the reaction of youth made him shake the beloved child, exclaiming in a rough, hoarse voice:

“What do you mean by going in there? Haven’t you been told to keep away from the bull? What are you doing down here alone, anyway?”

“Why are you so angry, Will? I only went to take my nuts to the squirrel in the bush, so he wouldn’t die this winter, and coming home, the geese ran after me, so I got into the field to pass them. And the bull was away over the other end, and he didn’t seem to mind. Don’t look like that, Will, please!” And the small arms crept around the tanned neck, and clung as she buried her face on his shoulder, for she sensed the conflicting horror and relief, devotion and irritation that were warring within the disturbed youth.

“Del, dear. Never go alone amongst the cattle with those red garments on. And don’t come away down here from the house alone at any time. Now I want you to walk beside me, through the flock of geese. They *are* geese, Del, and they mean very little for all their unpleasant noise, and if you will not fear them they won’t fear you, for it is fear that makes them noisy and disagreeable. Come, now!” And taking her hand, he walked through the flock.

Of course they hissed, but somehow the understanding gave the child a new courage. They turned and walked back. Less fear on her part and on theirs. Then again, and once more. Then a small voice said:

“I think I can do it alone now, Will. I’ll think hard all the time ‘They’re just geese!’ and then I won’t be afraid.”

Squaring her chin, she did it. Then came back again. Then, happily:

“I’m not afraid now, Will. Thanks, oh, thanks, ever and ever so much!”

“That’s all right, girlie. And you can remember that most things we fear are just ‘geese,’ but bulls aren’t! We’ll leave them strictly alone to be managed by someone who knows all about them. We’re almost home now, so run along!”

Later in the day, Will manœuvred a few minutes alone with his mother, and asked:

“What did Delphine mean when she said she was taking some nuts to the squirrel in the bush so he wouldn’t die this winter, mater?”

And Mrs. Lane related the child’s opposition to taking the squirrel’s hoard which she had found, and continued:

“Sometimes, son, we see the truth of the Old Book’s saying, ‘And a little child shall lead them.’ I feel as if I had received that lesson to-day! There’s enough in the world for all, if only the stronger and more powerful would not take more than their fair share. I think I shall never again disturb the garnerings of our little forest people. What they have laboured to store up, shall be their property so far as I am concerned. Petite is a dear child, and often seems to carry in her loving heart a veritable message from the Great Spirit. I wonder how many of us bore that same message till the strife and competition of this supremely materialistic world of ours destroyed it, or covered it so with selfishness that it was choked and smothered, as Delphine’s ‘winter earth’ is to her! Ah, son, there is much that is beautiful and redeeming in our life, in spite of the materialism, and we have had a glimpse of it to-day, in the self-denial of a little child!”

CHAPTER VIII.

Preparations.

Christmas was to be enjoyed by the Averys at the Lane farm, as Dr. Dalton's orders had been that Delphine must remain there till the beginning of the New Year. So there were many mysterious trips to London, which was the large shopping centre nearest the farm.

Money was not plentiful, so gifts must be carefully chosen to secure the maximum of pleasure from a minimum of expenditure.

"Auntie Lane, what could I make for mother? I'm hemstitching a hanky for father."

"Would you like to learn to crochet, and make a mat for mother's bedroom table?"

"Oh, I'd love to, auntie! Could I make it in time?"

"I think so, dear. We'll do it in wool. That is the best way to learn, and it can be very attractive. When I go to town again, I'll get some pretty soft wool for it. How would you like to make it a pale yellow and green, like a primrose?"

"I don't know primroses, auntie. You see, we haven't a real garden at home, only a make-believe one. And we haven't primroses, though mother has often told me how they grow wild in the hedges in England and how very sweet they are."

"Then I'll show you, and I'm sure mother will love it. In the meantime, take this piece of soft string, and we'll get a crochet-hook and you'll learn how to make a nice even chain."

And Delphine was soon at work—little hands all crunched up, and small body tense, while she endeavoured to master the manipulation of hook and string. When she had finished the first chain, she brought it to Mrs. Lane.

"That's very good for a first attempt, Petite. And next time, try to hold the hook and cord not so tightly. Let it slip easily through your fingers. Never mind if the stitches are large, but make them all about the same size. Shall we try again? And we'll pin this on your bedroom curtain so you'll have it to see how much you improve with each piece you do."

The next day another was ready.

“Look, Auntie Lane! It *is* better. See! This is the first. Now I’m going to do another!”

The plan of comparison worked beautifully, and proved a constant source of stimulation to ever-increasing effort. Before the wool was bought, circles were being made, into which double crochet stitches were worked till a wheel was achieved. When the soft, double-Berlin wool arrived, the tiny hands felt more at home, and the work progressed in a very satisfying manner.

Mrs. Avery was to arrive at the farm a few days before Christmas, coming by rail to the nearest station, where she was to be met by Mr. Lane and Delphine.

It was a greatly-excited small person who “hippity-hopped” up and down the platform while waiting for the train, and when her mother appeared she flung herself into the open arms with:

“Oh, mother! It’s the beautifulest thing to see you! And you’re more like a pink rose than ever!” as she gazed lovingly into the sweet face.

“Am I a rose, my Petite?” while the colour in her face deepened. Then, turning, she greeted Mr. Lane.

Preparations for Christmas went on even more gaily for the advent of Mrs. Avery.

It was an accepted fact that the beloved Santa Claus came only to very young people, so Delphine was to be the only one to hang up a stocking. For the whole family, the Christmas tree was the important event, as the Averys wished to foster the spirit of giving in their daughter, rather than the somewhat selfish attitude of receiving only.

One morning Will planned to cut a young pine tree, and Delphine begged to be allowed to accompany him. But in the midst of the felling she was troubled.

“Isn’t it hard to take a tree’s life, just to be pretty for us for one day? I wonder if it minds! You know, my flowers feel it if they get thirsty, and they go to sleep quicker if they’re picked! Do you think this beautiful tree will be sorry to die for us, Will?”

“I don’t know, Petite. But we must remember that people have not been sorry to die for others to make their lives happier, and perhaps our pine tree may think it well worth while to have grown all these years to give us a more beautiful Christmas. What do you think?”

“Perhaps so, Will. But I believe we should love it very much all the time, and afterwards give it a beautiful death out of doors where it loves to be—not just let it die slowly. Don’t you?”

“What do you mean by a ‘beautiful death,’ Del?”

“Why, fire, Will. Mother told me how all the trees and flowers grow because of the sunshine, and store so much of it away inside them. And how coal is made from trees that grew long, long ago, when the earth was young. So when they are burnt, you see, the sunshine is set free again. And the fire takes the tree’s soul with it to God.”

“All right, Del! We’ll give it the ‘beautiful death,’ and make it look as lovely as we can on Christmas Day.”

She was happier when this was settled, but the observant youth noticed that, in the days that followed, the little hand went out in a fleeting caress whenever she passed the pine.

He made a special trip to London, and returned with purchases for the adornment of the tree—much to his mother’s surprise.

“Aren’t you spending more than you planned, Will? What about the College fund?” For Will had set his heart upon a University education, and the necessary money was being saved only through care and self-restraint.

The boy coloured. “I know, mother. But somehow I wanted Del to feel we had truly tried to make up to her tree for the loss of its life. She has some odd fancies, and yet they always have a truth in them. She should keep them—at least not have them destroyed by a lack of sympathy from us.” For he had told her of Delphine’s quaint observation when the pine tree was cut down.

“You’re right, son, and I’m content.” And the mother-love beamed on the boy of whom she was justly proud.

Christmas Eve found the tree placed in the sitting-room, where the boys were to trim it after Delphine had gone to bed.

As she said good-night, the child remarked: “I am so sorry you are all too big for Santa Claus to remember any more. I don’t think I shall like to grow up, when I shall have to say good-bye to him! But before the boys could reply, Mrs. Avery spoke:

“The spirit of Santa Claus is very loving, Petite, and never forgets. Even though one grows to be old and grey of hair, the love is always the same!”

“Then Santa Claus must be as loving as a mother and a father, musn’t he, mother dear?” And thinking of her own parents, Mrs. Avery assented with heart too full for speech, for suddenly she was overwhelmingly homesick!

It was after midnight when the tree was finished, and even in those days, when festive decorations were not so easily procured, it was a beautiful picture.

Will had secured from their grocer in the city the lead lining from the huge cases of tea from the Orient. With great patience, he had cut it into very narrow strips, about eight to ten inches long, and these had been hung all over the tree, giving it a frosty appearance when the light caught the gleaming strands.

Every branch was tipped with a silver or red ornament, while a beautiful silver star gleamed from the very top. This, together with numerous parcels wrapped in white tissue and tied with scarlet ribbon, made for a loveliness that was sheer joy to behold.

The boys had not hurried in the pleasant duty. Mr. Avery was expected, and as he would have to drive, would be very late.

They were sitting around the fire, viewing their handiwork, when sleigh-bells were heard. Mrs. Avery went into her bedroom, fearing Delphine would waken, and indeed she did—though only partially so—but hearing the bells, murmured “Santa Claus!” and was asleep again.

Meanwhile, the boys had gone out with a lantern to take the visitor’s horse and stable it. But on seeing Mr. Avery, they had other things to think of first.

Delphine’s father sat in the cutter huddled in the buffalo-robcs, his eyes hot and heavy, while he shook as with the ague.

“Why, Mr. Avery! You’re ill! And your clothes are wet! Whatever is the matter?” as they all but carried him into the kitchen.

“Cutter upset—fell into the river this side of the Mill Pond. My fault. Bridge unsafe. Detour too long. Thought I’d cross on the ice. Chill, I’m thinking” he uttered between chattering teeth.

“Fred, look after the horse! Will, call Mrs. Avery! Now, James, off with those wet clothes, while I warm some blankets by the other fire. Will, fill the water-bottles from the kettle, and then make some strong lemonade!” And events proceeded rapidly under Mrs. Lane’s quick guidance. When Elizabeth saw her husband, her heart seemed to miss a beat and then began to race.

Not a moment did she lose, but running for nightshirt and dressing-gown, began to assist in removing the clinging wet garments.

He was soon in bed, after a strong dose of quinine and a long drink of scalding lemonade.

With feather-bed, extra blankets, hot water-bottles, the medicine and hot drink, the fever at last broke in a drenching sweat. After making him comfortable with dry clothing and fresh, warm sheets, the weary but relieved wife and her hostess sought rest, leaving breakfast to Mr. Lane and the boys, who had then been sleeping for some time.

CHAPTER IX.

Christmas Day.

On Sundays and holidays the time for the morning meal was extended an hour, but when Will came into the kitchen he found his father ahead of him.

“We’ll get breakfast to-day, son. Mother and Mrs. Avery are not long in bed. They’ve had a pretty strenuous night, but I think Mr. Avery is safe now.”

“Poor Delphine! It will be a sorry Christmas! And yet, how much worse it might have been!” Will remarked as they proceeded with their infrequent duties. “Mr. Avery might have been drowned, or at least died from cold and exposure. Almost every trouble can be looked at that way if we wish. Can’t it, pater? Why, look at us, right now! Mother insisted that as boys had ten fingers and ten toes just the same as girls, that they should be able to cook if necessary, and things might be much more awkward than they are to-day had Fred and I not learned. Father, please see if mother is awake, and if so, tell her to sleep till noon. I’m going to cook the dinner! All the extras are done, and the turkey was prepared yesterday. Tell her I won’t disgrace her!”

As Mr. Lane left the room by one door, a little figure appeared at another.

“Will, oh, Will! Santa has been here, and look at my stocking! Father’s asleep yet, but where is mother? And where is auntie? And—Why, what are you doing! Oh, Will, what’s the matter?”

“Nothing very bad, sweetheart. But your father got a very severe cold last night, dear, and your mother and mine worked hard all night to get him well again, and now they are resting, and we want to keep everything quiet so they will all sleep for awhile. And you and Fred and I will cook the dinner. Shall we?”

Troubled eyes searched the youth’s face.

“Was father very ill, Will?”

“Yes, dear, but he will be much better when he wakes. So no fretting. Now tuck up your toes in that big chair by the fire, and see what Santa brought you.”

Reassured, the child obeyed, while Will proceeded to prepare her breakfast.

They were in the midst of the joys of the stocking, when Mr. Lane returned.

“Mother sends her love and thanks, Will, and says she will trust the dinner to us.”

“She’s a great mother, and my hands are going to tell her so!”

After breakfast was finished, Will enjoined:

“Now Del, you creep like a mouse into your mother’s room and get your clothes. Then you can dress by the sitting-room fire. If she wakes, whisper to her to stay in bed till noon, that auntie is going to do so, and we are to cook dinner. Be very quiet, so as not to wake your father.”

A few minutes saw these instructions fulfilled, and Delphine entering to dress in the same room with the Christmas tree, the beauty of which stirred her warm little heart to quick ecstasy.

“You lovely thing! You lovely thing! I never dreamed you’d look so beautiful! And how proud you look, Pine Tree! I just know now that you’re not sorry to give your life for us! And I’m loving you every minute, you dear, beautiful, wonderful tree!”

Meanwhile Will, with sleeves rolled up and enveloping apron on his big frame, was washing dishes and making preparations for the cooking of the Christmas dinner, while Fred and his father looked after the animals.

Mr. Lane entered the kitchen the same moment as Delphine, and was greeted with:

“Father, the turkey will take four hours, I heard mother say yesterday. After dressing it with sausage meat Fred prepared for her, it weighed sixteen pounds. It’s nine o’clock, so that it should go in at once. Here goes!” And into the great oven he placed the huge bird in its capacious roasting-pan.

“Now, potatoes will go in at twelve-thirty. Mother’s young carrots and green corn will need only heating and seasoning. It’s a jolly good thing she had me get them up from the cellar for her yesterday, so I know what she intended having.

“Then the pudding has been cooked and hung up for weeks. It’ll be frozen stiff, so we must get it in and have a pot of water ready for it. Then I

must baste the turkey—oh, yes! And make the soup! Plenty of stock, but what'll I put in it?

“Mother said always different vegetables from those for the dinner. So we'll put onion, turnip and cabbage, with a pinch of summer savoury. Does that sound good, pater?”

“It does, son. And remember it must be extra nourishing, for Mr. Avery should not have anything heavy to-day, and a good soup will mean much to him.”

The laughter fled from Delphine's eyes.

“But, Will! You said father would be all right to-day!”

“I did, Del, and he will be, I am sure. Only we shall have to keep him so by not giving him food that wouldn't be good for him after his night of sickness. See? Now wouldn't you like to help by setting the table? There's lots of time, and we'll be more likely to have everything right if we begin early.”

So, comforted, and with responsibility to take her mind from her anxiety, Delphine proceeded to her task.

A large Christmas cactus in full bloom centred the long table, and at either end a stand of apples—Jonathans and Greenings, polished till they shone—together with luscious-looking oranges, made the table bright and festive.

“Pudding sauce! However is that made! Don't believe I ever saw the mater do that! Can anybody help?” And the three men and the child gathered round the kitchen table in anxious consultation.

“I think she makes it something like gravy” was Fred's contribution.

“But it's sweet, booby! And where does the brown come from?” came from the chief cook.

It was the woman-child that gave the clue.

“I know it's like taffy at first, 'cause Empsey always gives me some.”

“Then that's sugar and butter and water! Good for you, Del! We'll get busy on that.”

With a vague idea of quantities, Will three-parts filled a four-quart copper saucepan with brown sugar, added what must have been a pound of butter, a quarter-cup of water, and set it on the fire to cook.

When it began to boil and suck down into oily-looking bubbles, Delphine declared that that was “taffy time,” and consequently secured a generous ladling on to a buttered plate. It was “taffy time,” but it was also the time that water to make the required consistency for sauce should have been added. But this, the child did not know, and the cooking process went merrily forward, until an unholy odour assailed the cook’s nostrils.

“The bally stuff’s burnt! Now, what was the matter with that? Something must have been left out, for mother’s doesn’t go that way! Suppose I’ll have to leave it for her to make! Mark against yourself, William. First failure! Wager there won’t be another, though!” And there wasn’t, for on everything else Will was on fairly familiar ground.

Dinner-time saw them gathered around the attractive table, with the exception of Mr. Avery, who was forced, through weakness and an attack of rheumatism following the immersion and chill, to remain in bed.

“Please let me wait on father. I can do it. I’ll be ’ceedingly careful!” And gravely Delphine carried in the tray with its cup of soup and thin slice of bread, which was all the Christmas dinner allowable after the fever of the previous night.

“The chef and his helpers are to be congratulated, indeed,” remarked Mrs. Avery, as course followed course—each perfection in its way. “And my hostess has every right to be proud of her family this day.”

Mrs. Lane beamed, but Will said ruefully:

“But I came an awful cropper on the pudding sauce, Mrs. Avery. Luckily it’s quickly made when one knows how, else the mater’s wonderful pudding would have lost its crowning touch.”

“That was a very small portion of the whole dinner, Will; and I’ll venture to prophesy you’ll never fail in that again!”

“You’re right there, Mrs. Avery. I’d stake a good deal on that!”

As the day progressed, there was an undercurrent of uneasiness, for Mr. Avery’s pain increased instead of abating.

Hot applications, frequently renewed, gave slight relief, but whenever the sending for a physician was mentioned, he vetoed it decidedly.

“This is Christmas Day. Let the man have it in peace. I’ll be better tomorrow. Then I’ll be home, and John Dalton will soon fix me up.

“We won’t worry about business to-morrow, Beth, nothing doing the day after Christmas. We’ll go home in the morning and I can be there by afternoon.”

Beth Avery said little to her husband beyond her assent, but to Mrs. Lane she voiced her fears.

“He doesn’t look to me like travelling to-morrow, Nancy. If he can’t I shall have to go alone, to open the office. But I am most reluctant to leave a sick man on your busy hands.”

“Beth, child! Don’t worry. They’re never too busy to help a friend in need. He’ll be right as a trivet in no time. Now enjoy the day for the child’s sake. We shall do our best, then leave the rest in higher Hands than ours.”

Amongst the treasures the Lanes had brought from their English home were several handsome candelabra, and these had been freshly filled. Following the evening meal at six o’clock, they were lighted and placed around the comfortable living-room where the pine tree queened it in its unusual beauty.

The soft glow of the candlelight gave an atmosphere of peace and rest to tired nerves and bodies, and even the sick man, looking through the bedroom door toward the group he might not join, felt their old-time benediction, and momentarily forgot the pain in thoughts of England and of home.

Delphine’s face was radiant joy and love. When the candlelight brought out the frosty glitter of the decorations, she ran with outstretched arms and, quite unconscious of her elders, poured out her beauty-loving, sensitive heart to the stately tree.

“Oh, Pine Tree, Pine Tree! You were lovely this morning, but you’re a fairy-story to-night! I know you’re happy! I know you’re happy! And I’m so glad, Pine Tree, I’m so glad!”

The father, listening, mused: “What a wealth of love the child carries toward everything. I wonder what the years will hold for her!” While the mother recalled “‘Friday’s bairn is loving and giving!’ Delphine is truly a ‘Friday’s bairn!’ ” And Will, touched to his boyish heart to see the response to his effort, caught her in his arms, whispering—“The Pine Tree looks content, Petite. Doesn’t it?” Then, swinging her to his shoulder, he said aloud:

“Take the highest parcel first, Del. Why, it’s for your father,” as he placed her on the floor, knowing that the bestowal of this, her own gift,

would fill to overflowing the child's cup of happiness.

Breathless and brilliant-eyed, Delphine waited for her father to open the package, and read the carefully-printed card enclosed.

"From my daughter—her first hemstitching. It's a very fine piece of work, sweetheart." As he examined the tiny, even stitches: "I can see you have taken great pains to do it well. I shall prize it always as my little girl's first effort." And, stirred out of his usual somewhat remote attitude, he raised the kerchief gravely to his lips, then reached out, drew the child closely to him with caress and kiss. And this she was to remember as one of the beauty-spots of her childhood.

She flew, as if on wings, back to her duties at the tree. There were gifts for everyone, and Will's blue eyes glowed when a long-coveted reference book came to him from the Averys.

Delphine's mother-heart was gladdened by two additions to her family of dolls—one a fair-haired, pink-cheeked, waxen beauty from the Lanes, and a most unusual black dolly, scarlet-gowned, and with kinky hair tied with a miniature bandana, from Mern Waldie, the accompanying note saying that she hoped that "Dinah," the darky maid, might do her duty by the fair-haired children on whom she was supposed to attend.

"Oh, mother! father! Look! Two dollies! This is the Princess. And she's forget-me-nots in her eyes, and apple blossoms in her cheeks! Isn't she just 'dorable? And, mother dear! Auntie Mern says that this is 'Dinah.' She looks just the colour of coal! But coal has sunlight away inside it, so Dinah must be a Princess in disguise. She's like a black pansy, and I think she's very beautiful!" And she bestowed her caresses impartially on the two.

Mrs. Avery's surprise and pleasure in her small daughter's gifts was a delight to witness.

"Why, my darling! Did you do all this yourself?" as she viewed the dainty, primrose-coloured mat. That such were neither used nor especially wanted, had no weight with her. It meant love, endeavour, knowledge and mastery of self to the far-seeing mother, and as such she welcomed it and treasured it.

"Auntie Lane taught me, mother. And it was just lovely learning. I'm to work in cotton next. That's harder, you know, but auntie says I may try now!"

"I'm sure you will master it, Petite. And these hands of ours are more valuable to the whole world with every new thing they can do and do well.

So you see, sweetheart, you have been doing something more than just working for father and mother. And we are very happy, my girlie.”

Altogether, it was a day of excitement and great joy for Delphine, and later, when she cuddled into bed, she said to her mother:

“This would be the wonderfulest Christmas I can ever ’member, mother dear, if father had only been well! But he’s all right now, mother, isn’t he?” Then she saw a shadow flit across her mother’s face, and little arms hugged passionately.

“We hope and believe so, childie. Say another prayer for him as you go to sleep, dear.”

“I’ve been ‘loving’ him well all the day, mother dear. And you’ve said there’s nothing in all the world like ‘loving’!”

“There isn’t, my precious! Nothing in all the world!”

CHAPTER X.

The Beautiful Death.

Beth Avery's intuition proved true, for her husband was in no condition to take the long trip home the morning after Christmas.

"Looks as if I'd have to let you go alone, Beth! The pains don't seem to ease off at all, and when the sharp ones come my leg seems to double up. Perhaps I'd better see the Lane's doctor. But don't worry about me. I'll get home as soon as I am able, and Delphine can run errands for me. I'll try not to burden these good people more than I can help."

"James, I want your promise that if you get worse, you will have them telegraph for me. I must have that before I will leave you."

"All right, dear. I promise. But I'm sure I'll be better soon."

Torn between necessity and desire, she left for home with a very heavy heart.

Mr. Lane, who drove her to the depot, summoned the physician on their way, so that Mrs. Avery met and talked with him herself before she left.

"Doctor Mitchell, if you find my husband's condition serious, I want you to let me know at once. If you think he may be moved, I would like to get him home. It would simplify much. But I'm hoping you can break the pain and bring him back to health very soon."

"My dear lady! I shall do my best."

It was meagre comfort, but at least she had seen the man, and this had given her a sense of security. She could trust him.

Meanwhile, at the farm, life had begun to resume its normal routine.

To the surprise of all, Delphine offered to remove the decorations from the tree that day.

"Why, Del, I thought you'd wish to keep it as it is for a few days."

"I think the pine tree would like it best not to wait, Will. It was so wonderfully lovely and happy last night, I think it would like to go in a 'glory-way'—while we're still loving and wanting to keep it. It would be hurt if we kept it and kept it, and then just burned it to get rid of it."

“You dear pet! Where do you get your wisdom from?”

“Is that wisdom, Will? I don’t know, it just comes from inside, I think.”

“You’re quite right, dear, and that is the Great Spirit which dwells within us all. Some day, I’m going to tell the world, Petite, that God isn’t a big man on a throne away in the heavens, but the voice within that tells us the good thing—the right thing—if we would only heed!” And lifted out of his shy reserve, the youth’s face glowed as from a great light.

“How are you going to tell the world, Will?”

“I don’t know yet, Petite. I must study and work hard before I can even begin.”

“Is God so hard to get acquainted with?”

He took a quick breath that was almost a gasp, and looking at her oddly, replied:

“No, man is!” And the train of thought thus started was to recur to him more than once in the years ahead.

The disrobing of the tree was a labour of love to Delphine. Gently, caressingly, she removed ornaments and frosty festoons, till it stood as it had in the forest, greenly beautiful once more.

When the boys had carried it out to the yard, Fred had a saw-horse and saw ready for its destruction, but when Delphine realized their intention, horror and indignation flooded her expressive little face, and rushing forward, she dragged the boys away with all her might, then standing with shielding arms outspread, voiced her protest in no uncertain manner.

“You shan’t do that! You shan’t do that! That’s wicked! And you promised me it would have the ‘Beautiful Death,’ Will! You know you did!”

Somewhat bewildered, he replied:

“But we’re going to burn it, Del, in a great big bonfire. Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“And kill it by little bits, first? That’s not going in a ‘glory way,’ and it’s not beautiful, either!”

“Oh, biff! Del. Whoever heard of a ‘beautiful death,’ or ‘glory way’ of dying?” from the impatient Fred.

“You don’t know anything about such things, but Will and I do.”

“But what do you want, child?” from the slower elder brother.

“Why, you mustn’t cut it, Will. It should stand like it always did, with its arms reaching up to the sky. You can fix it, can’t you?” with an appealing look that made the big youth ready to tackle anything.

“I think so, Del. We’ll try, anyway. Fred, bring the pick-axe, please.”

A few minutes saw a hole dug in the frosted earth. Into this was placed the bole of the tree, and some bricks brought from the wood-shed supported it in its position.

“Now, Del, how would you like it fired? Shall we pile some shavings, kindling and small wood around its base, and light that? It must have a good start, you see, or the flame would wipe off the green spines and then leave it standing bare and blackened, but not burnt.”

“I just knew you’d know how, Will! Of course that’s right.”

Just then the doctor’s cutter turned into the driveway and Will went to open the inner gate.

Mr. Avery had insisted on getting out to the sitting-room, where he sat wrapped in blankets, to protect him from all draught. He greeted the physician with—

“I’m the patient, doctor. Though it isn’t from Christmas festivities that I’m sending for you!” And he recounted the events of Christmas Eve.

“You were a lucky man to have two such women as your capable wife and hostess to look after you, Mr. Avery. You’ve escaped pneumonia by a hair’s breadth. You have a nasty attack of sciatic rheumatism, but I think we can break that fairly soon.

“I questioned your wife closely, and so could bring medicine with me. She’s intelligent and observant, so I got it right. Take this—instructions on the bottle—and in a few days you’ll be home.”

“Few days, man! I’m going home to-morrow!”

“We’ll see when to-morrow comes. Is this your daughter, sir?” as Delphine, having knocked for admittance, entered the room.

“Yes, this is Delphine, Dr. Mitchell.” And as the child approached and extended her hand, her eyes searched his face. She was inclined to like the kindly countenance, and feeling his fingers close on hers, looked down to see the hand of a born surgeon—small, with carefully-trimmed nails, firm but gentle. She was satisfied.

“Are you playing Christmas tree in the yard, Miss Delphine?”

Without hesitation, she replied:

“No, sir. We’re giving our tree the ‘beautiful death’.”

“The ‘beautiful death.’ Is there a ‘beautiful death,’ child?”

“Oh yes, sir. You see, the tree is full of sunshine, and Will says that is God inside. And it stands holding up its arms, and reaching up and up to the sun, looking so beautiful and stately. Then we cut it down just for our pleasure, so now we’re showing our ‘preciation by setting it free in fire.”

“You have found it, child. Fire, the ‘beautiful death’; fire of love, to submerge self. Fire of adversity, to spur one on to greater endeavour. Fire of life, sending the soul upon its upward way. Fire, the ‘beautiful death!’ So speaks the ‘God within!’ Forgive me, Mr. Avery, but ‘from the mouths of babes’ we oftentimes receive our greatest help. Now I must say good-day. If the pain has abated by to-morrow, you may go home, but go by train. Good-bye, little maid.” And as he patted the curly head, she asked earnestly:

“Will father be well to-morrow, doctor?”

“Much better, and well in a few days, I hope. May an old man have a kiss, little one?”

Instinctively the child had felt the sympathy and understanding, and reaching up her arms, she lifted her face as well.

As he picked her up and held her close, she whispered shyly, “I’ve been ‘loving’ father well, every minute, doctor. And I think you’d make a dear grandfather!”

“Then suppose we adopt one another.” “Mr. Avery, I would like to be privileged to hold the position of Honorary Grandfather to your daughter. I take it the grandparents have passed on?”

“The paternals from both sides of the family, doctor; and as Delphine’s choice of relatives is usually remarkable, we welcome you into our group, sir. May you never be disappointed in us.”

“I could not in my granddaughter, Mr. Avery. She is love incarnate!”

“She’s a whimsical mite, doctor. Well, good-day. I hope to be home to-morrow.”

As Dr. Mitchell left, Mrs. Lane, after the usual Christmas greetings, best wishes and a chat about her sick guest, asked:

“Could you take Fred along with you to the next farm, doctor? I’d like to send Mrs. McFarlane a jar of soup. Her husband may not be just as good a cook as my own men. Then he can walk back.”

So Fred left with the doctor, and as they waved a last good-bye to her newly-acquired relative, Delphine said,

“I’m saying grace inside of me, Will.”

“Saying grace inside of you! What do you mean, Petite?”

“’Cause I’m so ‘truly thankful’ Fred won’t be here when our tree gives out its sunshine. He doesn’t understand like you do, Will!”

Fully realizing the truth of this, Will made no comment, but struck a match instead.

“Will you light it, Petite?” offering it to her.

“No, thank you. You, please.” And again he understood.

As the fire reached up and enveloped the tree in a great flame, Delphine’s eyes filled with tears.

“Even the ‘beautiful death’ is sad, Will. Isn’t it? For something is going, and we’ll never see it again!”

“That’s our human, selfish way of looking at it, Pet. We must think of the tree’s happiness—not our loss, dear.”

And when the last embers glowed and grew grey where the little pile of ashes was all that remained of the beauty she had so loved, Will said:

“We’ll cover them with fresh snow, Delphine, so they will sink back into the earth when spring and warm weather comes again.

“And now, Del, we must visit the animals, and see if they are all safe and warm.” And off they went to the barns. The tension was relieved, and the little face was quietly happy when they came in for tea.

When Fred returned from the next farm, he was much chagrined to find he had missed the Christmas tree spectacle.

“Why couldn’t you wait for a fellow?” he asked his brother. “I wanted to see the funeral, too!”

“It would have been lost on you, old boy. It wasn’t a funeral. It was a sacrament!”

CHAPTER XI.

Being a Thoroughbred.

The second day after the doctor's visit found James Avery on his homeward journey—somewhat weak, and with an occasional twinge of pain, but with youth and a strong will to assist, he achieved his purpose.

To Delphine, the homecoming, after the months spent at the Lane farm, was a joyous event. Empsey, the housekeeper, was hugged till she fairly gasped. Topsy, the cat, received such vigorous loving that she ceased to purr, and stared at her mistress with reproachful, great green eyes, but, as usual, followed her all over the house afterwards.

And Nessa! Delphine could hardly wait for permission to visit her little chum. When at last she might go, she flew on winged feet to her friend's home, to meet her coming out with her sleigh.

"Oh, Nessa! Nessa! It's good to be home again. I had a lovely time at the farm, but home's best, isn't it? Where are you going?"

"I'm so glad you're back, Del! School's slow without you. And teacher is always asking when you're coming. I'm going to the Acklands. Their toboggan slide is dandy this year. Come on with me, Del. They'll all be so glad to know you're home!"

"Come back to my place, Nessa, while I ask mother, and get my sleigh." And back they trotted, to receive permission—for the Ackland boys were amongst the nicest children in the neighbourhood, and the tiny sister, Dora, was adored and "mothered" by all the girls.

The Ackland slide and skating-rink, were amongst the winter's delight for the nearby children. Mr. Ackland would not allow street-playing, but everything possible to their means, within reason, was fostered in house and garden, and the playmates were equally welcome to enjoy the fun with his own. The result was that he was bringing up lads whose inventive genius had every incentive, whose home-loving proclivities were fostered and stimulated, and whose sense of hospitality grew with every year of their age.

Their garden was on the crest of the hill overlooking Willow Creek and the Flats. A goodly portion around the house gave ample opportunity for games in the summer, and a rink in winter. Further away, the land fell off abruptly, and on this the slide was constructed.

To secure every possible thrill, it was commenced high above the ground level, and had a glorious “bump” half-way down, ending in a “stop” bank of snow built against a barbed-wire fence.

“Here’s Del Avery! Hooray!” And the boys and girls crowded around to welcome her.

“Come on Del. Go down with me.”

“Oh no, Del! Come with me!”

“No! I want her! Come with me, Del!”

Laughing and happy, eyes sparkling and cheeks glowing, she was a very attractive picture in her red bonnet and coat. And she distributed her favours whole-heartedly, but withheld as frankly as she gave.

“I’m going with Roy first. He made the slide. And it’s wonderful, Roy! Let’s go! I’ll go with you afterwards, Nessa, and then you, Jean, and then you, George, and then you, Hal. No I won’t go with you, Walter. You’re too rough!

“My! It’s high! You’re awfully brave, Roy! . . . Oh, wasn’t it wonderful! That’s a lovely bump half-way down! And we stopped just before we reached the fence! You *are* clever, Roy!”

Slide followed slide, with shouts of laughter when a spill came, or someone took an exceptionally high bounce into the air from the impetus of the “bump.”

Walter Nixon was the only disturbing factor; piqued at Delphine’s refusal he did his best, slyly and openly, to cause disaster. It came when Delphine took her second ride with Nessa. Nessa’s sleigh stood up about ten inches from the ground, but Nixon’s was a sled. As the two girls raised their feet and allowed their sleigh to begin to slip, the boy flung himself down on his sled, the greater impetus bringing him alongside just at the bump, when he deliberately steered into the front of the high-arched sleigh.

For a moment, sleighs and children mingled, then parting as though a giant hand had tossed them up into the air. Delphine was thrown to one side. Nessa cleared the bump, but hitting on the far side, rolled over and over down the hill, her face being just missed by the low-lying, sharp-pointed sled which, wrenched from its owner’s grasp, careened down the slide, over the stop-bank and half through the wire fence. Nixon sprawled in the centre of the slide but Nessa’s sleigh came out of the mêlée a mass of wreckage.

Delphine was first on her feet and, shaken though she was, tore down to her chum's assistance.

"Nessa! Nessa, darling! Are you hurt? Let me help you. And your poor sleigh! Oh, I hate that Walter Nixon! He did it on purpose, I know he did!"

And as the others gathered round, joined by the reluctant Walter, who realized he had gone just a little too far in his vindictiveness, she turned on him with:

"You're a nasty, mean, horrid, hateful beast! You're worse than a beast! Even my black pig wouldn't do as mean a thing as that. You've broken her sleigh, and I hate you, so there!" Then turning to her friend, continued, "Never mind, Nessa, darling! You can have mine. Don't cry dear. Are you hurt very much?" But beyond the scare and some bruises, there was slight damage, except to Nessa's sleigh.

Before they resumed their fun, Roy Ackland took part in the proceedings.

"You can go home, Walt. Del's perfectly right. You're worse than an animal. But you won't get the chance to be mean on our slide again, for you needn't come back either!"

Nessa was in grief about her sleigh, for she knew it had been bought for her only through her mother's hard work, but Delphine wouldn't allow her to dwell on it.

"Come on, Nessa! You take mine." And fearful that Nessa should consider it only shared, she added:

"I'm going to have some fine fun. I'm going down on the broom!" And sitting on the bushy end, holding the handle up in front, with her feet straight before her to escape the snow, off went Delphine to a chorus of shouts from the crowd.

Everyone was crazy to try it, and it appealed so much that before long a half-dozen brooms from nearby homes appeared as if by magic, and the wildest fun ensued, sleighs being decidedly in the minority.

The brooms began to achieve unexpected results, for where the sleds had cut the surface of the slide, the brooms brushed it clean and smooth, till the velocity of the "tobogganers" was increased amazingly, adding much to thrill and hilarity.

When Delphine reached home, her mother viewed her with dismay.

“Why, child! Wherever have you been? Look at your stockings! And your skirts! Why, you’re wet to the waist—underwear and all!”

To Delphine’s surprise, there were fully half-a-dozen jagged tears in her stockings, and she began to realize that her clothes were decidedly damp and chilly.

“Well, you see, mother, Walter Nixon ran into us and broke Nessa’s sleigh. So I gave her mine, and I went down on the broom. Some other children got brooms, too, and it got lovely and slippery; then we began to go through the barbed-wire fence, so I ’spose my stockings were torn then.”

“Broom, Delphine! ‘Went down on a broom!’ What do you mean?”

“You sit on it this way, mother, and hold the handle up, and stick your feet straight out—and go! It’s grand!”

“And gather the snow up your skirts on the way. That will be enough of brooms, Delphine. You must cease from that form of amusement. We cannot run the risk of having you sick again; and you can have a great deal of fun without anything quite so hoydenish as that. And I’m thinking you will have to do without another sleigh, since you gave yours away.”

“But, mother! That’s only ‘Noblesse oblige,’ and ‘Noblesse oblige’ is our motto, and it’s right, isn’t it?”

“Yes, dear. It’s quite right if you intend to sacrifice your own pleasure for another. But you should not make a gift and then expect father and mother to sacrifice in order to replace that which you have bestowed upon someone else.”

“All right, mother. I know Nessa will let me go with her lots of times. But I’m awfully sorry about the broom-rides. They’re such heaps of fun! Couldn’t I, if I am careful of my stockings?”

“No, dear. You could not avoid getting snow up your clothes, and that might cause a chill and severe illness, and we love our little girl too much to run the risk of that.”

Wet clothing was being discarded as the talk proceeded, and now she was ready to don warm, dry garments that really did feel good after the clinging, damp ones.

The next morning, as Delphine played with her dolls, a knock at the door was answered by Mrs. Avery, the housekeeper being busy elsewhere.

A forlorn-looking, small woman stood there—a Mrs. Dippy—known, perhaps, to the whole city as a beggar and a drunkard.

“Could you give me a few old clothes, Mrs. Avery, please? I’m very cold,” drawing her ragged shawl more closely around her.

“Come in, Mrs. Dippy, and I’ll see what I can find. Wouldn’t you like a cup of tea?”

“I wouldn’t trouble you, Mrs. Avery. If you happen to have a little change, I’ll buy some tea and bread on my way home, thank you.”

“I haven’t money to give, my poor woman. But you’ll have something to eat and drink before you go. Petite, ask Empsey to prepare a tray for Mrs. Dippy, please dear.”

While this was being done, Mrs. Avery produced some well-worn but clean and mended garments, which the woman could readily make use of—a warm woollen petticoat and a black cloth skirt and waist.

These she accepted with gratitude, but a peculiar glitter in her eye made Beth Avery enjoin:

“I want you to wear them, Mrs. Dippy, not sell them. Surely your husband makes enough to keep you both!”

“He does, when he isn’t drinking, ma’am. But he drinks most of the time. And he beats me when he’s drunk!”

This last caught the child’s ears as she returned with the tray of food, and saw the woman bare her neck to reveal ugly red marks running across her breast and shoulders.

She stood in round-eyed, horrified silence, then slipped quietly out of the room, while the woman ate and drank the simple meal. After Mrs. Dippy’s departure with her bundle, Delphine returned, and going up to her mother asked:

“Why does Mrs. Dippy’s husband hurt her, mother, and why does she have to beg for her living?”

“It’s a very sad story, Petite. She was of gentle birth, dear, and a well-educated and beautiful girl. She married a man greatly her inferior in every way, and her family disowned her. He drinks, and abuses her when under the influence of liquor, and she has taken to drink too. That’s what makes her face so swollen and blotched. Without money, without friends, and without love, she has sunk further and further, until you see her as she is to-day.”

“Hasn’t she a child to love her, mother?”

“No, dear. No one to love her now, and no one to respect her, for she has given way to her sorrow and tried to forget it in drink, and that means failure to live up to her traditions. For she, too, should have remembered that being born into a fine family demands a fine life in return.”

“Perhaps they didn’t have a motto like ours, mother. Could I do anything for her, poor thing?”

“I do not know of anything just now, dear. But always remember that if sorrow and trouble should come to you when you are a woman, you must face it as a thoroughbred—steadfast and courageous, fearless and true. And always try to see what lesson there is in it for you, pet, for there is always something for one to learn, if one only seeks to find.”

“So I mustn’t tear my clothes in play, or do things that might make me ill, for then you and father would have to pay! And I mustn’t mind if I kissed some mice because I thought they were birdies—for they all belong to God. And I must remember that my dolly wasn’t really hung—for she isn’t truly a baby! Yes, I think I understand, mother, and I won’t forget. Poor Mrs. Dippy!”

CHAPTER XII.

The Message of the Briar Rose.

Frost and snow gave way to patches of dry earth, which steamed as they grew in size under the warm spring sunshine. These were days of skipping-ropes and marbles.

Gradually these in turn yielded to ball games and playing house, flower-gardens and dolls' clothes, for June had arrived with all its subtle lure and wealth of promise—the "honey" moon of flowers and happy brides.

"Let's go ask the Old Maid for some roses, Del. They're lovely now. I passed there yesterday. And it would be dandy to play in the long grass, too."

Delphine was at Nessa's home, so the children asked permission of Mrs. Wood, and that granted they wended their way to the old garden in which they loved to play.

Before they reached the gate, they were surprised to see entering it a tall, red-haired man—undoubtedly a stranger. They did not realize that this was apparent in the cut of his clothes, and also his bearing, which suggested a kinship with the wide open spaces far from the confines of the small, eastern city street.

They watched him as he went up the pathway to the front door, glancing from side to side with quick, keen look, evidently amazed at the neglect and decay that met his eyes, except for one beautiful briar rose, fragrant from its foliage and covered with buds and blossoms of a rich, yellow tone, even more sweetly perfumed than its dainty leaves.

He strode over to it, while both hands reached out as though to take the thorny bush within his grasp, but only his big fingers touched a bloom here and there. His arms dropped to his side, and retracing his steps, he approached the front door, knocked and waited.

Again he knocked; again, and still again. Then, turning to the two children, who had halted just outside the gate, aware in some indefinable way that this was not their day at the little cottage, he inquired:

"Is Miss Edwards at home, children?"

"We don't know, sir, but she always is."

“Thanks, I’ll knock again,” and suited action to words.

“No answer. I think she must be away, for see! All the blinds are down.”

“They always are, except the kitchen.”

“Always down! Why are they always down?”

“We don’t know, sir, but they always are.”

“That’s queer! But perhaps the neighbours would know if she’s away. Guess I’ll ask.”

They watched him go to the nearest house. Had they been close enough they might have heard:

“Can you tell me if your neighbour, Miss Edwards, is out of town?”

“Miss Edwards? No. We don’t know her.”

“Not know Miss Edwards? Has she moved away? She hasn’t got married, has she?”

“No. She lives there, all right, but we don’t know her.”

“Don’t know your neighbour! Isn’t that somewhat strange?”

“Perhaps so, but we haven’t been here very long.”

“Oh, I see! Possibly someone else would know. Thank you and good-day.”

He strode to the nearest house on the other side, where a very similar conversation took place.

“Oh, shucks! I’ll knock again. Perhaps she was busy and didn’t hear.”

This he proceeded to carry out, but with a feeling of disquiet and uncertainty that amounted to dismay when once more his summons went unheeded.

By this time, two other children had stopped to witness the unusual activity about the old maid’s home, and curious eyes watched from behind the curtains of the two houses he had visited.

The man tried a third house, where he secured some further information, but not that he sought.

“She must be there all right. She never goes out. Her mother died years ago and she has lived very much to herself since that. My wife went to see

her one day, but she just talked for a few minutes with the door almost closed, and didn't ask her in, so she didn't go back."

"There must be something wrong. Would you be so kind as to come with me? I'm going to open that door."

"You mustn't do that, man! You could be taken into custody for breaking into another person's home!"

"My friend, I'm going to open that door, law or no law. You can suit yourself whether you stand by or not. I'm taking the blame."

"Are you related to her?"

"No, but I want to be! I came back to marry her. Her mother sent me away years ago because I had neither money nor position. I've both now. Had the money for years, and have been making my name in the financial world of Australia. I can top anything in this burg now. So I'm here for my wife. Satisfied? Will you come?"

"Yes, I'll come." And together they made their way back to the cottage.

"I'll knock again"—but only a hollow echo answered.

By this time, several more children were loitering outside the fence, and some women appeared when the great shoulders of Roger Brownlee thudded against the old door.

Physical strength, increased by the high-tensioned current of fear, achieved its object, and the lock gave way with a splintering crash. The hallway was absolutely bare, even to the floor.

With a catch at his breath, he opened the one-time parlour door. Another completely empty room, except for the drawn blinds.

Turning sharply back into the hallway he ordered:

"Keep that bunch out!" And, accustomed to being obeyed, left it to his companion, and strode further into the house.

The denuded dining-room gave him a sudden feeling of nausea. He opened another door—a bedroom—equally bare.

Great drops of sweat stood on his forehead. He hesitated before the next—something told him it was hers.

Gently he knocked, and listened. No sound from the closed room. Then his great hand turned the knob and pushed open the door. His eyes flashed

over the room, and found her in the great old-fashioned bed, her face showing sharply thin and pale in the dim light from the lowered blinds.

Advancing on tiptoe, he softly called her name.

“Rue! Rue, dear! Don’t be alarmed. It’s Roger. Rue, my darling. Wake up, dear. Roger’s here. Rue, Rue, oh, Rue!—My God! Not that! Not that! I won’t have it! She’s not gone! She’s not gone!” And falling on his knees beside the bed, he bowed his head in the storm of sobs that come to a strong man stricken to his very soul.

The man in the hallway, leaving a neighbour to guard the door from intruders, came haltingly into the empty dining-room.

The open bedroom door revealed the figure kneeling by the bedside, and the faint outlines of the white face above. The anguished sobs sent him away again, even more quietly than he had come.

Returning to his neighbour, he whispered:

“There’s trouble here, great trouble, I fear. Will you go for Dr. Dalton, and ask him to come at once? I feel I should not leave. Hurry, please!”

Twenty minutes saw the doctor appear with his little black bag. With a word to the man on guard at the front door, he entered the house. Quietly he found his way through the empty rooms and, sensing tragedy, reverently approached the bed and the kneeling form at its side.

“My friend! Can I be of any assistance? I am a doctor—Why, Brownlee! Man! Is it you?” And placing one arm across the shoulders of the mourner who had risen to meet him, he extended the other to touch the woman’s face, and shaking his head, gently drew down the worn coverlet, exposing her breast with its poor cotton night gown.

Releasing the man, he placed his ear over her heart. A few moments of breathless waiting for the lover, then the doctor’s face was raised—instinct with compassion—as he tenderly replaced the bedclothes over the still body, and turning, said:

“Too late, old friend. She has taken the long journey Home.”

“Too late! Too late! Oh, God! Where is Thy Justice or Thy Mercy! A farce, Thou God! a farce!” And raising clenched hands above his head, he shook them as in the very face of Deity.

“Roger, old chap! Don’t do that! Life serves blows out to us all. We’re hit, man, but it isn’t the buffets that count. It’s how we take them. Will you

come with me, Roger?"

"I can't—yet, doctor. But thank you just the same. What's caused her—going? Can you tell? She hasn't been ill, has she?"

"There may, or may not be, organic disease, but it would appear she had just wasted away." He watched Brownlee closely to see if the real significance of the statement reached him. It did not—then:

"We have not seen anything of her for years, Roger. Her mother died, and then, little by little—so gradually we have not noticed it—she withdrew from the city life. We did not know the reason, but it seems apparent, now. I'm heart-sorry, Brownlee. I'm a busy man, and time slips by rapidly when one's life is crowded. That's no excuse, but I am indeed heart-sorry to-day!"

"I'm not blaming you, Dalton. I've been busy, too. Busy making money to satisfy the demands of her brutal old mother. Then fame, which I need not have courted so long! Oh, I'm getting the lesson Dalton, never fear. I've been selling my soul for the things of this world. And she was my soul!"

"Come, lad! Come with me!"

"Not yet. Not yet. Leave me alone for awhile. I'll see you later. Tell the man outside to fix the door, and keep that rabble out. How long has she been—gone?"

"Roger! I'm sorry for you—not many hours, I think."

Sobs wrenched the deep chest again, and falling once more on his knees, Brownlee spread his great arms over the woman who could no longer respond.

Silently the doctor left the room, closing the door as he went.

At length the storm of grief subsided, and, raising his head, the man gazed at the white face, while his fingers touched it gently as a woman's. At last he apprehended the poverty, and his gaze swept the room itself.

On the neat dressing-table stood a cup containing a faded yellow briar rose. He stumbled over to it, with a great need to touch that which had been loved by her warm, living hands. And by its side he saw a book—an old, brown-edged portfolio, whose veined, marble-grey cover carried a square of one-time white paper pasted on its face.

Lifting it, he read "My Diary," and underneath, in an evidently later writing, "Private to Myself and Roger Brownlee."

Opening it, he began to read.

It had been commenced almost immediately after the death of her mother, apparently, and the first pages carried the yearning of years for her absent lover.

Presently he drew the one chair nearer the window, and sat down to read. His breath came deep and hard at times. At others, he doubled up his free hand, while eyes burned and lips tightened over clenched teeth. And again, love words slipped gently out, while tears streamed down his face and fell unheeded on his hands.

He sensed a world of things in the simple statement: "My cat, my last dear old friend, died to-day. Roger used to stroke her fur." He read of the autocratic mother's will, which made it impossible for the girl to sell the land which, though hers during her lifetime, was to go to unknown relatives at her death.

He cursed the tragedy of the lost income, and the sale of the furniture with its meagre returns.

"My God! How did she live on that! I've thrown away on one spree to make my name in financial circles as much as she had to live on for a year!"

His eyes blazed when he sensed her friendless years, then—

"I stayed away! I can't blame her neighbours! But they were here! I wasn't! Yes. But you loved her. They didn't!" he argued with himself.

He softened a little as he read of the visits of the children, then, realizing her frustrated motherhood, cursed her mother and himself unsparingly.

When he came to the story of the briar rose, and her self-denying gift of food and drink that it buoyantly might carry her message when he did arrive, he picked up the rose before him, stepped softly to her side, and gazing down into the worn face, while his eyes flooded with tears, addressed her:

"I got your message, Beloved. Love is stronger than death. Love is all of life, here and hereafter. I won't forget, my girl. I won't forget."

CHAPTER XIII.

Whose the Responsibility?

When at last he could bring himself to leave the room, he went to the kitchen door, took in its clean, orderly poverty and, turning sharply, made for the front hall.

“Thank you, my friend. I’ll take the key. Thank you.” And ushering him quietly but firmly out of the house, locked the door, then stood for a moment looking at the group on the front steps and at the gate.

With no formal address, he began:

“She’s dead—dead because you weren’t interested, and I was interested too much! Wonderful neighbours, you’ve been! So kind of you men to cut wood for a delicate woman, and clean her sidewalks of snow. So considerate of you women to make friends with a lonely girl in sorrow and evident poverty! Oh, you’re a beautiful lot! Only the children have been human to her. Bless their friendly hearts!”

Wide-eyed and horror-struck, Delphine listened to the bitter words, sensing the man’s emotion under his scathing denunciation. But on the mention of the children she spoke.

“Miss Edwards was always ’ceedingly kind to us, and let us play in the garden and pick her roses—all except the briar rose, sir.”

“Thank you, child. She would be kind. She always was. And she loved children.” Then, addressing the elders of the group again, he said:

“You can go, for you’re not going to see her. You didn’t care when she was alive and needed you, so you can take your new-found interest home with you. And when you say your prayers, if you ever do, you can thank your God that you’re not as other men are! I’ll say good-day to you. The garden will be glad to be empty once more.”

Some eyes flashed, but the thrusts had gone home, and one by one they slipped shamefacedly away, while the children, awed and frightened, disappeared as by magic, leaving the stranger dominating, but alone.

“Oh, Ruth! Ruth! Forgive my bitterness, dear! But they’re not going to spy at you with unloving eyes! I’ll take you away, girl, to where your dear body can be returned to dust, quickly and cleanly. Then you and the briar

rose will go with me over the sea, and some day the rose will bloom in a far land above us both!”

He made his way to the business street, and inquired for the doctor’s office.

Greeting him, he said: “You have no crematorium here, I suppose? Then I’m going to take her to Chicago. It can be done there and will be on my way. I’m going back, but before I go there’s something I must do. Can you recommend a good lawyer—a man’s man, and a hustler? Thanks.

“I’m going to buy that house, and I’m going to burn it down—every last board. No, I’m not crazy, but I think I’d go that way if I knew it stood here to be pointed out as the house of Ruth’s tragedy, together with all the embellishments gossip and the years would add, and which would not die so long as the house stood. Then I’m going to deed the land for a children’s playground—with a trust fund to keep it in good condition. We’ll have to hunt up trustees, and that will take time. But I want it done, and done fast.

“I’ll see him first, then I must have an undertaker. Know anything human in that line, and one who will keep his own counsel? Dalton, I’ll never forget your kindness. Never, man! It’s the one bright spot in this part of the globe—that and the words of a little child!”

Before the day closed, Ruth Edwards lay in a narrow, pearl-grey box, resting on her own bed—for Roger would not have it otherwise—her face framed in briar roses. But the last one her hands had plucked lay close to her lover’s heart.

A look of ineffable peace had come to the dead features, as if she knew that at last she was resting in the care of him she loved.

For once in his life, Brownlee knew a keen joy in being a master of money. Cablegrams found the new owners of the property. They were quite willing to sell, but knew nothing of values. When a marvellously generous offer was made for the small house itself, while the matter of the land lay over for correspondence, it was accepted by return cable.

Again money cleared away municipal objections and red-tape. The day came when Ruth Edward’s body was taken to the depot, her last few personal effects packed carefully in a small trunk and checked with his own, and a bundle containing the precious briar rose.

Then Roger Brownlee, with permit in his pocket, viewed his possession for the last time.

With characteristic thoroughness, he had seen the children's loved red and pink rose-bushes moved to a safe part of the garden, and providing against possible emergency, had the fire engine, hose and men in a nearby street. Then, with kindling and coal-oil, he went from room to room, laying his fuel in strategic places, till preparations were complete.

Standing in the midst he said softly, "You'll never wander back here, my Ruth. You're going with me, your body in my keeping, and your beautiful spirit near me and my love for you, which is all that life holds for me now." And with this, he applied a match. From room to room he went, unhurried and unafraid, closing the front door on the last as the glow appeared in the windows at the rear.

The lavish gift of the Edwards Playground for Children became commonly known, and widely commented upon. Genuine sorrow on the part of some, shame on that of others, kept the details of the lonely death amongst the group most nearly concerned, so that Roger Brownlee went upon his way unmolested by thoughtless comment and impertinent stare, and bearing within his heart such a depth of sympathy for the poor and the lonely, and of love for little children, as even his generous nature had not known before. And the fortune he had struggled to amass for one, he was to spend in her name for the many.

Back in the little Eastern city, the heart of a child grieved for him and for the woman he had lost. Dramatic and spectacular, the event had left an ineffaceable impress on the youthful consciousness, and Delphine's step lagged, and her usually happy song was silenced in the days that followed.

Beth Avery watched, but waited for a natural opening of the subject, to find just where the childish problem lay. Delphine broached it of her own accord.

"Mother, why did God let Miss Edwards die, alone and perhaps hungry, when people were all around and had lots to spare?"

"My dearest, is God to be blamed when He gave all of us eyes to see and we did not use them; hearts to love, and we kept that love for just our own?"

"Each one of us is to blame, dear. I, as your mother, should have known the woman who was kind to my daughter. And did my girlie think to offer some service to the one who had shared with her the few beauties she possessed? You see, dear, we cannot blame others till we first see if we ourselves are free from all reproach.

“And what shall this mean to you and me? Shall we not always be eager to do a kind act, say a friendly word, give a sympathetic look to those we contact in our daily life? If we do that, dear, we’ll surely lighten the burden that some lonely heart is carrying, and bring a little more of God’s love into the life of the world.

“May He bless my little one, and help us both to be more worthy of that love.”

The child’s doubt had been dissipated. She saw clearly her mother’s simply-stated argument. She accepted it, and was at rest once more.

When Mrs. Avery told her husband of Delphine’s distress, and the talk that had followed, he said:

“You’re a very wonderful mother, wife of mine. I wish that as a father I could hold even a candle to your clear light. And Beth! I’m more and more impressed with the belief that we must have another home—a house with a garden. I’m going out to-morrow to see what I can find.”

CHAPTER XIV.

Lad's Love.

“An invitation from Auntie Mern for you to visit at her home, Delphine. Would you like to go?”

“Lovely, lovely! Oh, motherie, I'd just 'dore it. I never feel lonesome there, for auntie loves me like you do, mother.”

So the following week saw Delphine in the Waldie household, where she settled down as if a member of the family.

Mern Waldie had many treasures left from her childhood days, and these she produced for the little one's pleasure. One was a quite remarkable small stove in which a fire could be lighted and which had many utensils for doll's cookery. These were being shown a girl friend of Mern's one day when the caller remarked: “I'm afraid you're spoiled, Delphine.” This was considered for a moment, then came the grave reply, “Yes, but it's my friends who spoil me, not my family.” And the discrimination caused a ripple of amusement among her hearers.

A short distance from the Waldie home lived a family of boys, the youngest being a chum of Allan. One day the latter asked, “Mother, may I take Petite over to Dick's this afternoon? She'll like their swing.” “Yes, Allan, I'm sure she would, and she'll like the boys—they're good laddies, all of them.”

That afternoon Delphine met Dick Arthur—a manly boy, sturdy in physique, pink-cheeked, blue-eyed, strong and unusually gentle.

There had been a small sister in the large family, but diphtheria had taken her in a few short hours. As the only girl she had been idolized, so the boys gave naturally very special care and attention to any girl-child who visited their home.

There were days when Delphine's gipsy-like colouring made a vivid impression, and this was one. Her dress was a rich cream ground with a small design in red rather widely placed. Crimson ribbons for her curls and a broad red sash made a very attractive picture.

The new friend viewed her for a few moments, then said in a way that she was to learn was characteristic, “You're like a picture I've seen of a

fairy. I'm going to call you 'Elf.' Do you mind?"

"I think that's very pretty. Do you believe in fairies?"

"Well, I've never seen any, but I've read that some people say they have. I'll look for the picture and show it to you. Would you like to have a swing?"

"I'd love it. I think a garden with trees and flowers and a swing is just a heavenly place to play in."

To Delphine the swing was little short of sheer ecstasy. The boys helped her on to the seat, then Dick warned: "Hold on tight to the ropes, Elf, and we'll send you to the sky. Tell us when you've gone high enough. Come on, Allan, we'll take turns in sending her up."

First one would catch hold of the back of the seat and run, sending it above his head as he let go. As it returned, the other would do the same, till the velocity became too great for this, and in turn they would catch the seat as it swung back toward them. This would often lift them from the ground and they would expend all their energy on coming down to send it still swifter and higher on its next journey. Allan was inclined to do this with a jerk, and Dick warned: "Don't do that, Al! She is not accustomed to swinging and her hands are small to grasp that big rope!"

But boys don't like to be corrected by another, so the warning went unheeded.

"High enough, Elf?"

"Oh no! I love it. I'm a bird going right up into the sky!"

But the next moment she was more like a bird having a dust-bath. It was Allan's turn and with a laudable effort to make the flight seem more bird-like, he exerted all his strength to speed the swing, but alas, the resultant jerk sent the small figure completely off her seat. For a few awful seconds they expected her to fall, but remembering instructions, she clung to the heavy rope, and though her fingers slipped and burned, still they did not let go, but she came down to earth with heels scraping along the ground in a cloud of dust.

Allan seem petrified, but it fairly galvanized his friend. Before the swing could double back and hit the curly head, Dick was there and steadied it in a firm grasp.

"All right Elf. I've got you. Let go. You're safe now." Then, as he helped her to stand—"Oh! You poor wee thing! Your hands are all bleeding!" And

turning in a fury on his friend, his eyes blazed blue fire. “You chump! Didn’t I tell you to be careful of her! If you want to see blood, come and take it out of me! Come on! I’m ready for you!” And off went his coat while he squared away.

“I didn’t do it on purpose and you’re not going to say I did either. Look out!” And throwing his coat to one side, he came at Dick, hammer-and-tongs.

Delphine had stood breathless with amazement, but with the first blow she was there too.

“Why, boys! You silly things, you’re not going to fight over that!” And as they paid no attention: “Stop it! I won’t have it! I won’t have it!” while small feet stamped her emphasis and eyes blazed with excitement and purpose. They broke away at that and stood looking at her in awkward, boyish indecision.

“My hands aren’t hurt,”—then truth compelled her to add, “much. The rope was hard to hold, it was so rough. But I’m not hurt, and if you’ve got a hanky, I can use it for one hand, and my own for the other, and I’ll go again, if you’ll be careful not to jerk, Allan.

“It’s wonderful, Dick, and I love it. It’s like going down Roy’s slide, only it’s going up instead!”

“You’re a brick, Elf. Here’s my tie, haven’t a handkerchief with me. Sorry I struck you, Al, but you should have been careful when I told you.”

“You’re mighty quick with your fists! I wouldn’t hurt Del for—for all the world.”

“Of course you wouldn’t. Now you’re not going to quarrel any more. I’ll have one more swing, then we’ll explore the garden. May we, Dick?”

“Anything you like, Elf. But do you think you can hold on this time? Your hands look sore.”

“Of course I can.”

But it was a very set, small face that swung back and forwards. It did not seem so bird-like to her now, for the tender fingers rebelled at every tightened grasp of the large, coarse rope.

Presently she called out, “I think it would be nice to look at the garden now, Dick.”

So the swing was halted, and she very thankfully released her protesting fingers.

The swing was close to the side gate, for the house stood on a corner, so they took the back garden first.

“Did you ever see peanuts grow, Elf? We have some over here. See? These little plants. They look very ordinary, don’t they? But from the centre of the flower the pistil grows longer and longer ’til it reaches the ground, and then seems to fairly burrow into it and the peanuts form on the end of it. Look, some are growing now!”

And scraping the earth carefully away the young nuts were revealed in the sandy soil.

“They’re not ready to be gathered yet, and even then they must be roasted to taste good. They’re not a bit nice raw, and another odd thing is that they aren’t nuts at all, they’re really legumes.”

“What are legumes, Dick?”

“Peas and beans are legumes. They form in a pod that splits in two and the seed is attached to the pod when they are very young.”

“How much you know, Dick!” And the great brown eyes regarded him admiringly.

“That isn’t anything. I like reading and I like to try things out. Peanuts grow very well here. We always used to think we had to go to the States to buy them. Do you like apples, Elf? We have some dandies down here!”

The back garden gave great pleasure, but when they reached the front, apples and nuts took second place in Delphine’s mind, for here she found pansies—in such profusion and of such variety as to be almost bewildering.

“Oh, oh, oh! Why didn’t you tell me of these beauties! They look like a comforter, or a carpet—only no one would dream of walking on them. They’d rather have them to keep them warm like a quilt! Oh you darlings! You darlings! You’re too lovely for words, and so sweet the perfume is like fairyland!” And dropping on her knees she buried her face in them the better to inhale the delicate odour.

“Pick what you want, Elf. They’re so many you can’t make an impression.”

“No thank you, Dick.” And she lay her cheek softly down on the upturned blossoms, as though she were caressing a person whom she loved.

“No thank you. They go to sleep so quickly when they are picked, I don’t like to see them die!”

The boy regarded her curiously.

“You’d think they were people, the way you talk!”

“They are people. Fairy-people. Flower-people. Oh, I don’t know, but I love them very, very much.”

“Come and see the rest of the garden.” And then ensued a glorious time for the flower-loving child. Verbena, portulaca, phlox (of many colours), sweet-mary, hen and chickens—all of which were known to her, and a feathery green plant she thought very pretty. “That’s ‘lad’s love,’ and they say the more you trample on it, the stronger it grows. Have a piece?” And breaking a stalk he shyly handed her the plummy branch.

Inhaling the fragrance she remarked, “This is just like you, Dick. ‘Lad’s love.’ Isn’t that a pretty name?” And she put it carefully in her sash as Allan called them from the verandah.

“This is a great book you are reading, Dick. Del would like to see it, I’m sure.” So all three bent their heads over the wonderful illustrations.

The owner of the book was a natural raconteur, and he told the other children of the period of knights and ladies, dragons and crusades, jousts and favours, tournaments and rewards, ending with:

“I’ll be your knight, Elf, and you can give me something for a favour, to wear into battle.”

“I haven’t anything but my hanky, and it’s all stained from my hands. Oh, I know! I’ll give you my hair-ribbon for a favour and I’ll keep the flower as your emblem. But I don’t want you to go into battle, Dick. Do you have to do that? And what do you battle?”

“I don’t know. There aren’t any real dragons any more. Though mother says we can fight the dragons inside us, just the same as the knights did the real ones.”

“What are they, Dick?” came in round-eyed wonder.

“Mother says Selfishness is the biggest and strongest, and Laziness and Forgetfulness are nearly as bad.”

“Oh!” Then shyly: “I think you’d make a wonderful knight, Dick. Here’s my hair-ribbon.” And pulling it off, the clustering curls fell in profusion around the earnest little face.

“I’d rather have your handkerchief.”

“What! That bloody thing?”

“Yes. Because it wouldn’t be bloody only you were plucky and held on.”

“I want the ribbon!” from Allan.

“Can a lady have two knights?” questioned Delphine.

“Two knights could fight for her and the one that won would be her real knight.”

“Well, I’m not going to have any fighting! I’m going to have two knights! So take the hanky, Dick. And Allan, here’s the ribbon! Now you’re both my knights and we’ll fight the dragons inside. Let’s look at the pictures in this book!” And opening a story of the Indian Mutiny, they were soon engrossed in the illustrations and the story which Dick so graphically recounted.

Reaching the portrayal of the slaughter of the English, Dick read:

“Massa-cree of the British!” It was an unfamiliar word to both the other children, and Delphine gazed at this knight of hers in breathless hero-worship.

Allan, feeling he was decidedly out of things, suddenly bethought him of the time.

“Gracious! Del! We’ll have to go, or we won’t be allowed to come again. It’s late now. We’ll have to run. ’Bye Dick! Come on, Del!”

“Thank you for the loveliest afternoon, Sir Knight. May we come again?”

“I want you to, Elf! Soon! Good-bye!”

As they ran down the street and before rounding the corner, Delphine looked back to see her knight standing on the fence; on seeing her turn, he thrust his hand high over his head, waving her favour on the breeze.

When she was preparing for bed she found to her dismay that her sprig of “lad’s love” was gone, lost, apparently, on the hurried homeward trip.

Was it prophetic? Did the shadow of future events account for her depression as she went to sleep, thinking:

“I ’spose Carelessness is my dragon. I shouldn’t have lost my ‘lad’s love,’ for I did love it, but father would say I didn’t love it enough!”

CHAPTER XV.

The New Home.

Before the happy time could be repeated, Delphine's parents arrived to take her home.

Mr. Avery's search for a house with a garden had been rewarded. He could not buy the place, as it was part of a church property—in fact the minister's home. However, the incumbent being unmarried, and not desirous of maintaining an establishment, it was possible to lease it, together with the land behind the church, which was really merely an extension of the large house garden. A fair-sized barn provided for stabling the horse, and great old fruit trees shade during the warmest hours of the day, while to the immediate rear of the church was a large open area for ball games. The front lawn had wide borders for flowers and greens for croquet. Altogether, it was a very happy discovery. The house had been repaired and redecorated. The moving had been accomplished and the Averys were quite settled in their new quarters before they went for Delphine, who knew nothing of what awaited her.

Taking the journey home in the evening, it was midnight before they arrived, and Delphine was sound asleep. Her father carried her gently into the house, and her mother carefully undressed her in order not to rouse her to complete wakefulness.

When morning came, she found herself lying on a couch in an alcove to a large bedroom. Bedding and furniture were old friends, but the surroundings were new and strange.

Slipping softly out, she pattered into the larger chamber and over to the bed, where her mother still lay resting after the tiring night trip.

She had heard the child, however, so opened her eyes and asked:

“How do you like our new room, Delphine?”

“It is very pretty, mother, but where are we? This is our furniture I know!”

“Father found a home with a garden for us, dear. Now let us see how fast you can dress, then we can go over it together.”

Mother and daughter were very soon ready for their tour, and Delphine was so excited she danced around like a butterfly.

“This room is ours and this one Empsey’s, and this is our guest-room. Aren’t they attractive?”

“Oh yes, mother! And whose is this to be?”

“Would a small girl like it for her very own self?”

“Oh motherie, how lovely! My own room! And it’s all so new and pretty! But I didn’t sleep here last night, mother!”

“No dear. We thought you might wake and be frightened when you did not recognize your surroundings. And we wanted to surprise you, so that is why you were not told.”

“It’s a glorious surprise, mother,” looking ecstatically around the simple but cosy bed-chamber.

“Now let’s see what’s downstairs, Petite.”

Down they went to the comfortable-looking furniture from their old-time living room. The various pieces that had seemed of ordinary size in the spacious apartment they had left, looked heavy in the smaller quarters, but they were part of “home,” and as such were perfect in the eyes of the child.

The small parlour had entirely new furnishings, and this was all duly admired.

The dining-room was “home” again, and one could look through wide windows and French doors on the side verandah and smooth lawn.

“Now the kitchen and Empsey, dear, and then the garden.”

Delphine flew into the arms of the waiting girl—“Isn’t it lovely, Empsey? Do you like your room? And isn’t mine a darling? And the kitchen’s nice, too. The whole house is! Now let’s go and see the garden.”

“But you and your mother must breakfast, child!”

“I just couldn’t eat when I know there’s a garden waiting for me. Oh I couldn’t, mother. Really, truly. Could you?”

“I don’t think I could this time, Petite. We’ll have to ask Empsey to keep it warm for us a little while and promise we won’t do it again.”

With a smile for the maid she took the hand of the dancing child, and they went out of the kitchen door.

“Oh mother, a swing! A swing!” And there between two great poles sunk deep in the earth and undoubtedly new, was a swing, whose jointed iron-rods and bolted seat guarded against the possible accidents of rotting rope or loose board.

“Father had it put up for you, Petite, and hopes you and your friends will have much pleasure from it.”

“Isn’t he the wonderfulest father!” And even while she said it a flash of longing to have him play with her coursed through the child’s brain.

“Why, mother! We’re to have pears and apples! Look! The trees are just loaded!”

“Yes, dear, and next summer we’ll have a vegetable garden. It’s too late this year.”

“And flowers, too? Lots and lots of pansies? And can we have a rose—a rose like you, mother? And can we put our dear plants into real earth right away?”

“Yes, dear. We’ll try.”

“Oh, won’t they be happy! And we too, mother!”

“We hope so, darling. Father planned it for you, dear.”

That evening, as Petite’s father drove to his new home, he was met at the top of the street by his small daughter.

“Oh father, father! Thank you, and thank you, and thank you a million, million times for the lovely new home!” And small arms hugged tightly as he lifted her into the carriage.

“I am repaid if mother and you are happy, child. And remember, there will be no need for you to go away from home for pleasure. The garden is large enough for your friends to play with you.”

“Home is always best, father, ’specially when there are trees and flowers and a swing!” And feeling that, though greatly daring, she might for once give evidence of her love, she slipped her hand under his free one as it lay upon his knee.

Smiling down at her he caressed it for a few moments, then released it as they turned into the driveway and were at home.

Delphine slept that night with the hand he had fondled under her cheek.

For days the child was so enraptured with the new surroundings that the thought of playmates did not intrude.

The new home was a considerable distance from the old, so that constant chumming with Nessa was quite out of the question. Indeed a visit was to become an event.

This meant that new friends and associations would certainly be formed, but with acquaintances of her parents in the neighbourhood this happened fairly soon.

Eileen Emerson was a very different type from the little Nessa. Older in years and much more matured in character, she was also the antithesis in looks. Large, plump, very fair, with a skin as pink and white as apple blossoms, and eyes like the summer sky, she made a remarkable foil to the vivid gypsy colouring of fairy-like Petite. Position and wealth were factors also, but neither training nor tradition had brought "Noblesse oblige" into her consciousness, and this was a keen disappointment to the younger and more sensitive nature of Delphine Avery.

A cousin, Orson Fitch, made a third in the new alliance. Tall, dark, with flashing great black eyes, he was always ready to lend his strength and superior knowledge of a year's seniority.

One day he suggested:

"Let's have a telephone!" This was such a rarity that the natural query from Delphine was,

"However can you do that, Orson?"

"Easy enough! Watch me!" And the various homes were ransacked for heavy cord and table-bells.

It didn't really matter that each one had to sit by an open window where the cord ended with the bell pendant to it, and when the ring came that voices must be raised considerably in order to be heard at the open window in the next house. It was a telephone to them, and they got as much fun out of it as if it had been real.

Ball games were much enjoyed, for Orson could bat "skies" with great facility for the girls to catch, but they had their first disagreement when it came to more complicated games where additional players were needed.

A family of several children lived across the street and Delphine suggested that they be asked to make up the number.

“What! Those poor children! I should say not! I wouldn’t ’sociate with them!” was Eileen’s scornful reply.

“But they look nice and quiet, and very clean, Eileen!—Wouldn’t you like to come and play ball with us?” Delphine called to the eldest, who was staring wistfully over the fence across the street.

“Yes, we would,” came the shy response.

“I won’t play with her, the i-dot! If you want to play with such poor trash you can. I won’t!”

“What’s an i-dot, Eileen?”

“Don’t know what an i-dot is? Isn’t that funny, Orson! She doesn’t know what an ‘i-dot’ means!”

“Well, what does it mean, Eileen?”

“If you don’t know, then I’m not going to tell you.”

Orson had a vague feeling that something was wrong with the word, but did not say anything for fear that the mistake was his, and his dominating young cousin would never allow it to be forgotten if it were.

“Well, if you’re not an i-dot, I don’t see why they should be. They look quite as nice.” Then innate courtesy made her add, “as we do.”

“You can play with them if you want to; I won’t!”

“But, Eileen, we must now I’ve asked them. Let’s play and see if they *are* nice.”

“No I won’t! I’m going home!” And she flounced away with angry eyes.

The little strangers acquitted themselves very well, enjoyed the game in a somewhat subdued way—for they evidently felt the scorn of the angry Eileen—and in fact gave evidences of better home-training than the spoiled beauty who had derided them.

That night, when Mrs. Avery was tucking Delphine into bed, the child asked:

“What is an ‘i-dot,’ mother?”

“I don’t think I know, dear. Where did you hear the word?”

“Eileen called Florrie Greenwood an ‘i-dot’ to-day. And when I asked her what it meant, she wouldn’t tell me.”

The mother’s lips quivered in her endeavour to repress a smile.

“I suppose she meant ‘idiot,’ dear, and that means a person who is not capable of thinking or reasoning. The Greenwood children may not be wealthy, but they certainly are not idiots. You see, dear, how silly it is to use words one doesn’t understand. And never must one be scornfully superior to others because they do not possess as much of this world’s goods as we do. Some of the greatest men the world has ever known were born into poor homes and humble surroundings. We should always look for the sweet, the fine, and the true in people we meet, and finding it we may be sure that they are worth while.”

CHAPTER XVI.

Slaying a Dragon.

Delphine believed her mother implicitly. She had no cause to do otherwise, for Beth Avery held truthfulness as an essential, and the child felt this and gave her faith accordingly.

So with regard to finding the sweet and the fine and the true in people, she set vigorously to work to discover it in Eileen, but it proved most difficult.

Eileen was lovely to look at but had been thoroughly spoiled. When elders make wealth and social activity the main theme of conversation, and unwisely comment on a child's beauty and the likelihood of its procuring a wealthy marriage, one cannot expect the individual concerned to be natural and lovable, or to have any of the ideals that are so necessary to building a noble structure of the House of Life.

Eileen loved to play pranks and practical jokes, while the mice episode at the Lane's farm had been Delphine's only experience along that line.

One day Eileen, Delphine and another child, Anne Courtney, came home from school together.

Suddenly Eileen turned and said to Anne, "Where is that candy we kept for Delphine? Give it to her now." And rummaging through her pockets Anne produced a conversation lozenge which looked not quite clean and fresh, and handed it to Delphine.

Immediately the child thought, "Here's something nice to tell mother about Eileen," and aloud:

"Thank you so much, girls! It was dear of you to remember me," and though her natural fastidiousness shrank from the worn appearance of the candy she bravely took a bite, at which Eileen broke into shouts of laughter.

"Oh! What a joke! Del ate a candy we picked up on the street!"

With face flaming with indignation and disgust, Delphine spat out the sweet, and mortified beyond words and unable to attempt speech for fear of tears, she turned and flew homewards.

Mrs. Avery was alone in the sitting-room, and Delphine threw herself into the loved arms with, "Mother, oh mother, I've been disgraced! Fearfully

disgraced! And I just hate Eileen Emerson and Anne Courtney! And I hope sometime someone tells them lies and gets them to eat candy from the street.”

“What is the trouble, dear? Tell me. Now, quietly, dear.” And the story came out broken with sobs.

“And, mother! I didn’t want to eat it. It looked so soiled, but I thought if they had kept it for me it was so nice of them, and I wouldn’t be acting right if I refused, and it looks as if I never had candy and would eat anything, clean or not. Oh mother! I just can’t forgive them.”

“My darling! I am very sorry, for I think I know how you feel. It was a very unpleasant, illbred trick to play, but in spite of all that, I am pleased that my daughter tried to do the right thing when she thought a courtesy had been extended to her. Now dear, come and rinse out your mouth and you’ll feel better. Should you be in doubt about anything again, say you would like to keep it for later, thank them and put it in your pocket. Then you can show it to me when you get home and we can decide what to do. See dear?”

“Oh, why didn’t I think of that before!”

“Never mind, sweetheart. We all have to learn things, and you will have the thought ready for another time. And in the meantime remember mother says you did the courteous thing, and I know that father would say so too, dear. Now we won’t think of it any more. Get your book and come and read by me.”

“You do comfort me so, mother, and if you and father are satisfied I won’t feel so badly.”

But Beth Avery noticed that reading seemed difficult and not very engrossing; that the flushed face did not cool but grew more brilliant in colour, and the eyes glassy and heavy-lidded.

When the housekeeper returned, Mrs. Avery, not wishing to appear to give undue attention to conditions, took her aside and said:

“Keep your eyes on the child, Empsey. I am going to Dr. Dalton; I’m not just satisfied that she’s quite well.”

When she reached the doctor’s office and related the child’s story and told of her feverish appearance, he smiled at her.

“This doesn’t seem like you, Mrs. Avery. I never knew you to be panicky in even the worst crisis.”

“I am fully aware that nothing could have resulted from the candy so soon, Doctor, but I am not satisfied about her feverishness.”

“I think you’ll find that the upset and the crying are the real factors. Give her a cooling drink, like fruit salts, this evening and again to-morrow morning, and she’ll be all right. She’s so sensitive that she takes to heart things that a phlegmatic child would barely notice. Now don’t worry.”

When James Avery heard of the candy joke and its effect on Delphine, he was aroused to swift anger, and then to genuine admiration.

“That Emerson child should have a sound thrashing, and her father should know it too!”

“No James, you must not speak of it to Mr. Emerson. Delphine must learn to meet life as it comes. It’s a most distasteful occurrence, but if we are to teach her to find the good in people we can’t keep her from mingling with those in whom it isn’t just apparent.”

“I suppose you’re right, Beth. But wasn’t she a little thoroughbred! She is so extremely dainty that I can fully appreciate her reluctance, and too the revulsion of feeling when she found she had been so distressingly tricked. She’ll uphold the traditions all right. Too bad she isn’t a boy!

“Oh! Beth dear, don’t look like that. I didn’t mean to hurt you, wife of mine. Please forgive me!”

“There’s nothing to forgive, James, for we must remember it was a girl-child who was sent, so there must be a reason for that. This life isn’t a chaos, nor is it built on the hit-and-miss principle. There certainly is a plan. And surely when our minds admit that, we must realize that this which may be our disappointment is the best and wisest to le bon Dieu, who is our Guide and Director!

“And James, if you feel that she did act in a way that meets with your approval, will you not tell her so? It will help to re-establish her self-respect. And that, in her childish eyes, has received a very severe blow.”

“You do understand children Beth! You should be able to mother them all!”

“Dear, if I can help even one child to get the most out of its opportunities, and develop to the best of its possibilities, I shall feel that my life has been not lived in vain. And you won’t forget to tell her?”

“No Beth, I’ll keep it in mind.”

The next day Delphine was heavy-eyed and languid. The cooling drinks did not fulfil their mission, for although she went to school, by the afternoon the fever again manifested itself, and so strongly that when she asked if she might go to bed, she was quietly allowed to do so.

When the father reached home that evening, he had dinner and then went direct to Delphine's room, where ensued one of the rare moments of contact between the hearts of the man and the child.

“How is my Pet to-night?”

The great eyes opened wonderingly, their very expression giving him a twinge of regret that surprise should have legitimate ground for existence.

“Very well, thank you, father, only my head is hot and tired.”

“I wonder if a pair of strong arms would help. Like to try?”

“Oh I just know they would!” And wrapped in a comforter, she was soon cuddled into him, with her head upon his shoulder.

To a man reserved by both nature and training, it was a difficult thing to speak of that which was emotional as well as personal. But having promised, he took the plunge.

“I was proud of my daughter in her trial of yesterday. You were bound to accept in a courteous way what appeared to be a courtesy to you.”

A pair of hot arms crept around his neck, hot lips pressed against his cheek, while the shy words came.

“I shan't mind it, father, now I know you're pleased. But I did feel terribly disgraced. It wasn't a bit nice and I don't think Eileen has anything sweet or fine in her at all!”

“An idea has just come to me, child, but we'll have to get mother's approval. I'm thinking, Petite, that you are old enough to have an allowance. If you do I shall expect you to provide something for yourself, possibly your hair-ribbons and also birthday gifts for your playmates. There will always be extra for you at Christmas time. Generally speaking, I want you not to spend it on candy, but I would like you to do this with the first, if mother approves:

“Buy some lozenges and give some to Eileen and the other little girl. You need not say anything, Pet, but to return good for evil is a very good principle in life, and oft-times an action accomplishes more than any words could possibly achieve.”

“Oh father! I would so like to have an allowance and I’ll do what you say for the girls. You’re a real knight, father, helping me to fight the dragons inside, for I felt I hated Eileen and Anne. And now I won’t, for I’m sure they haven’t a father like you to teach them what to do.”

“Bless your heart, child! It’s mother you and I must be thankful for. She’s the most wonderful woman you’ll ever know, Petite!”

“I know, father, and you’re the most wonderful man!” An ecstatic hug accompanied the remark, then the child snuggled cosily to him, eyes happy and contented, while a hot hand patted his cheek.

For perhaps the first time the man appreciated the fact that the intense Latin inheritance of his little daughter’s nature craved demonstrative affection—the touch of loved hands, the happiness of treasured kiss—and he promised himself not to forget this in the future.

Delphine’s feverish attacks continued for a week, gradually diminishing, till she seemed herself again, except that she had lost in weight and colour.

She was happy in her new-found touch with her father, and in the pride of her allowance, which became an established fact.

Her first expenditure was for conversation lozenges, and on leaving school that day she joined Eileen and Anne, who had been chumming since Delphine’s illness.

“Girls, wouldn’t you like some candy?” And she offered the bag.

Both looked startled. Eileen examined hers somewhat ostentatiously, but Anne gave hers only a quick look when Delphine said:

“They’re perfectly fresh and good. I buy mine at Lambert’s. Take more—please do.”

“No, thanks” from Eileen, who continued ungraciously, “I don’t like conversation lozenges.”

But Anne burst into tears and, throwing her arms around Delphine cried, “Oh Del! I’m frightfully sorry I gave you that nasty one. Can you forgive me? I’ll never do such a thing again as long as I live!”

The generous heart of Petite responded instantly, and she replied, though somewhat ambiguously,

“I’m sure you won’t. Of course I do,” and hugged her in return.

Eileen was shamed, though she would not admit it.

“I’ve got to run, girls! Got to go for my music lesson. Good-bye.”

After dinner that evening, Delphine shyly approached her father as he read the paper.

“Father, may I tell you something? You were perfectly right about returning good for evil.” And she told him of the further experience with the lozenges. “And it was the best thing to do, father, for I feel all comfy inside, and I wasn’t a bit that way before. Do you think we slew a dragon to-day, father?”

CHAPTER XVII.

Under the Shadow of Thy Wings.

The school year sped along for Delphine. She found the new teacher and surroundings pleasant, but love such as Miss Paul had called forth was neither given nor received.

Winter brought two or three visits to Nessa and the old playmates, but the distance was too great to allow for frequent intercourse.

Delphine, together with her new friends, built a slide in the long garden and made a pond when the frost permitted. They had snow forts and snowmen, and in all she had a very happy winter, except for an occasional return of the feverish condition suffered in the fall.

Believing them to be bilious attacks, her mother strove, by careful watching, to avoid recurrence, but do what she might it invariably reappeared, until she became aware of a rhythm in the sequence and learned to expect it each third month. But this discovery took time.

Spring brought the joy of planting the garden, and mother and daughter worked over the flower and vegetable beds with keen delight.

Reading had become an absorbing pastime for this only child. Louisa Alcott's books grew to be intimate friends. Then the semi-historical novels were contacted, and the fact that there was a large element of truth in them captured the childish imagination, and became a veritable passion to the expanding intellect.

As spring gave way to warmer skies, Delphine chanced on a Huguenot story, "Under the Shadow of Thy Wings," and the French strain in her intense nature thrilled and vibrated as though she were living the dreadful time herself.

She read and re-read—cried over it by day, and dreamed it by night. The call of blood told, as it was to again in later years, but from an entirely different angle.

About this time the Averys paid their first visit for that summer to the Lane farm, and Delphine revelled in renewing the acquaintance of flowers and trees, animals and human beings. There was one regret, for on asking for Dick, she learned that he had been sold, and the child missed the small

pig which had followed the lilting voice wherever he was allowed around the farm.

The day of the return journey dawned hot and sultry, so they did not leave until the midday heat was past. Mr. Avery was always considerate of his horses, and while he would never tolerate one which needed a whip to make it travel, he constantly checked the spirited animal facing a long drive to a pace which could be maintained without difficulty or hardship.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if we had a thunderstorm before we reach home, Beth. Of course we can always find shelter from the worst of it.”

And his anticipation proved correct, for barely half the distance had been travelled when the clouds they had been watching seemed to descend to earth like a curtain blotting out the landscape completely. Even the distant roadway vanished as the storm moved toward them with a velocity that was amazing.

Chain and forked lightning played from the heart of the advancing cloud, while the sheet variety flashed and faded almost faster than words can tell.

The day grew dark and the air suffocating, while the terrific crashes of thunder seemed to make the very earth vibrate.

The horse became more and more restive, snorting and throwing up its head with every peal, and Mr. Avery’s attention was fully occupied in controlling its fear with soothing speech (though he allowed its speed to increase considerably) and in keeping a sharp look-out for a place of refuge whenever the lightning flashes revealed their progress.

Delphine and her mother, hand in hand and hugged close to one another, said little. They were ardent lovers of the beautiful in tempest as well as sunshine, but both sensed their danger—though not in the same way.

Mrs. Avery knew that their road led right into the heart of the storm, and it was undoubtedly the worst she had ever witnessed. She knew, too, that her husband was anxious, though he voiced no word of alarm.

Delphine grew to listen for the “snick” of the beginning of a peal of thunder then, tense and breathless, to await in the sudden thick silence the crash that made her very flesh shrink, and an icy feeling surge through her quivering body.

Faster than the horse was travelling toward it, the storm was racing to engulf them.

“There’s the schoolhouse. I’ve been watching for it. Go, Polly!” For the first time the animal felt the flick of the whip.

With a snort of fear and indignation, she straightened out into a racing pace.

On came the grey wall. They could watch it fairly eat up the white road, and straight toward it flew the frightened animal, while lightning ripped and tore and thunder crashed and deafened.

Beth saw the child’s lips move, and thinking she was addressing her, bent her head to catch the words “Under the Shadow of Thy Wings, oh Lord, Under the Shadow of Thy Wings!”

The horse was slowed to make the turn into the school driveway toward the shed in the rear. Still not a drop of rain, while the heat had increased almost to the suffocation point.

To pull up within the shed, help out the wife and child, took Avery but a matter of moments. They were hemmed in by wood-piles on both right and left, so that there was only a fair margin of room for mother and daughter at the side of the carriage, while the father went to the horse’s head in order to control it within the narrow space.

He had barely caught the bit in his right hand, while soothing the animal with his left, when without even the warning “snick,” came a roar and explosion as if the very earth were disintegrating, and a ball of fire about the size of the child’s head tore its way between the carriage and horse on one side and the mother and child on the other, to bury itself in the earth almost at their feet.

At the terrifying noise Polly stood straight up on her hind legs, lifting her master completely off the ground, and tense with fear the child pressed her face against her mother’s hand, saying over and over again: “Under the Shadow of Thy Wings, oh Lord, Under the Shadow of Thy Wings!”

With the crash came the rain—torrents of it—and as the reverberation died away, the horse relaxed and came down to earth, trembling and spent. The child raised her awe-struck face and asked,

“Did you see it, mother? Is father hurt?”

“He’s quite safe, dear. Yes, I saw the bolt. Le bon Dieu was certainly sheltering us, dear, under the Shadow of His Wings!”

The storm, its climax over, passed swiftly on its way. Gradually the thunder lessened, but the rain still came in a steady downpour.

Presently it was safe to leave the horse, and James Avery came and put his arms around the waiting pair.

With heart too full for words, he turned and sought the doorway to view the passage of the storm.

What his keen glance saw made his breath quicken. The lightning had left its cleaving mark on splintered telegraph pole and trees whose branches on one side hung shattered and forlorn, as though a huge axe had dealt a roughly-devastating blow.

He sought the exit of the bolt, to find the earth still warm where the blazing ball had buried itself, beyond sight or touch of man.

Turning, he came once more to wife and child, and kissing each again, strained them to him as though he could not let them go.

The rain began to slacken, and before long the sun broke through the clouds, bringing into vivid relief the refreshed grass and foliage—so beautiful in their cool serenity as to make it seem like a wild dream of the night that Death so recently had passed that way.

The Averys resumed their journey without further untoward event, and when the parents were alone, Elizabeth told her husband of the child's prayer.

“Under the Shadow of Thy Wings!” he repeated. “How do we know! How do we know that that cry for protection was not answered! After the experience of to-day, I for one, would be the last to disbelieve!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

Applying the Motto.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and Delphine was spending it with Nessa.

They had gone to the Edwards Playground, and there had met a number of Delphine's former friends and the old enemy of the Ackland slide incident—Walter Nixon.

A game was in progress when someone cried:

“Oh, look at the funny funeral. . .!”

Everyone was interested, and immediately another child announced:

“I know whose it is. It's Mrs. Dippy's. She got drunk and died the other day.”

“Oh poor Mrs. Dippy!” from Delphine.

“What do you know about her, Del?”

“Only that she was a beautiful girl, from a lovely home and a wonderful old family. She married a man she shouldn't and her people wouldn't have anything more to do with her and her husband drank and abused her frightfully. And she's had no child to love her and so she took to drinking too. And now she's dead and there's nobody of her own kind to be sorry she's gone—only that horrid, old drunken husband in that cart. Let's be mourners for her, poor lonely thing.”

“Who? Us children? You're crazy, Del.”

“No, I'm not. I think we might do that much for her! Do come.”

“I should say not! I wouldn't be seen speaking to her!”

“Then you don't know anything about ‘Noblesse oblige.’ Come on, Nessa.”

Very reluctant, but always willing to acknowledge Delphine's leadership when something unusual developed, Nessa slowly left the group and joined her urgent chum.

Roy Ackland was one of the crowd but, until now, had said nothing, then:

“I wouldn’t, Del. There isn’t any use. She’s dead now, and she won’t know.”

“But I’ll know! And if I were in her place I’d think it kind if nice people were sorry for me. Come on, Roy. They’re nearly out of sight. Please hurry!”

“Well if you must go, guess I’ll go too.”

The rest began to jeer:

“You’re ‘dippy’ too.”

“Don’t go, sillies! That’s no fun!”

“Oh come on and play. Who cares about that old beggar. Good riddance to bad rubbish!”

“Roy’s struck on Del! Ooh-hoo! Del’s Roy’s girl!” from Walter Nixon.

The girls had gone on, and the chorus came only as voices too confused to be understood. But Roy got the whole of it.

For a moment he flamed to his hair, half halted, clenched his hands and scowled. Then as Del’s clear voice reached him, he turned and ran to catch up.

“Don’t go, Del! The crowd will make such fun of it!”

She flashed a blazing look upon him. “You don’t need to come if you’re scared of that!”

This was so unlike the gentle, lovable playmate, that Roy could hardly believe his ears.

“Don’t look like that, Del, you know I am not afraid.”

“Then I think you might be willing to do a little thing like this for that poor woman!”

“But she won’t know!” he persisted.

“How do you know she won’t? But even if she doesn’t, haven’t you any ‘Noblesse oblige’ in you?”

By this time they had caught up with the funeral procession. Resting within a hearse that bore none of the wonderful black plumes which were the fashion of the day for people of even the humblest walks of life, was a brown wooden coffin without one flower to relieve the too-evident poverty.

An old cart with a decrepit nag came next, driven by its tattered, tousled, half-drunk, bleary-eyed master—the chief and only mourner—for he could not be persuaded away from his familiar accompaniments. Then a two-seated top-buggy carrying the undertaker and minister.

The day was warm and the horses barely crawled—Dippy’s poor old animal looking as if it could not do anything more. So the three children walked abreast behind the minister’s carriage.

Roy wanted to talk, but this Delphine would not allow.

“Mourners don’t talk at funerals, and you must bow your head.”

“I can’t do that, I’m not mourning. And I want to see what’s going on.”

“Well, you just must! You’ve got to feel sorry that she made such a terrible mistake, and that her people were unkind, and that not any of them are here to-day, and that she hasn’t a child to love and be sorry for her, and that she forgot she had things to live up to and began drinking to try to forget. There’s heaps in that to mourn about. I don’t mean to cry, but to be real sorry inside. You can do that. Now, bow your head!”

The children were beginning to feel the heat in the hot, dusty and unshaded roads, as the pitiful cortege wended its slow way southward, block after block till it reached the bridge which spanned the ravine on that side of the city. Boots were white with dust, faces grimy with perspiration, hands anything but clean after their earlier hours of play; altogether, it was a weary and bedraggled little aggregation that met the astonished gaze of Dr. Dalton as his carriage reached the bridge on his homeward way from the country.

He halted his horse in amazement:

“Why Delphine! Whatever are you doing away out here?”

The face that was never intended for steady gazing at the immediate pathway, lifted itself with real relief.

“Oh doctor! We’re being mourners for poor Mrs. Dippy. She’s dead you know, and she hasn’t any of her own people to mourn for her, so we came. Is the cemetery very much farther? Do you think we’ve gone far enough to show we’re sorry?”

“It’s a pretty long way. Yes, I’m sure you’ve gone far enough to show you’re sorry. Now hop in, and let me take you back to town.”

They had a very happy time with the doctor, for he loved children and they loved him. Besides, they had had enough of mourning and were glad to

turn to lighter thoughts.

When they reached his office, he said: "Now out we get, all of us. I must see if there's anybody waiting for me and you children must go to your tea. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye doctor! And thank you ever so much for the ride" was Delphine's farewell, while Roy remarked confidentially:

"I had to go to look after the girls. Del made up her mind and there was no keeping her back."

"Right you are, lad. You can't go far wrong when you're taking care of someone. Good-bye!"

And they went their several ways, Delphine with Nessa for tea, and Roy to his own supper-table.

When Delphine reached home it was nearly bedtime, and she related the happenings of the afternoon to her mother, who was always interested.

Recalling Mrs. Dippy's visit to their former home and the brief history given the child, Mrs. Avery understood at once Delphine's response to the situation and her desire to apply her own loved traditions, so kissing her, she said:

"It was a very kind intention, Pet, though it was a very long walk, and had you gone all the way you would have had a very exhausting time before you reached home, for you would not have cared to return with Mr. Dippy in his cart. So I think, sweetheart, another time, when you cannot come to mother and secure her assistance, it would be best to say a little prayer in your heart, and think the kind thoughts as you did on your walk to-day and make that do, for thought reaches everywhere, whether we realize it or not, and I am sure in my own mind that the soul of Mrs. Dippy will somehow be happier for the sweet intention of the little strangers who followed her poor body to-day."

When James Avery returned to his home that evening, after being detained downtown by business, Delphine was in bed and asleep, and never was her mother more thankful in her life.

She had never seen her husband so angry in all the years she had known him. His face was white and set and his eyes fairly blazed as he said:

"Do you know where Delphine was to-day?"

Not thinking immediately of the funeral, she replied:

“Yes. She was spending the afternoon with Nessa.”

“She was doing nothing of the kind! She was traipsing with two other children through the city streets, following the funeral of that drunken old beggar, the Dippy woman!

“Our daughter, if you please! Dirty as a little sweep, scuffling up the dust into clouds and making a spectacle of herself, and us into the bargain! Half the town seems to know about it. I heard of it from five different sources this evening. And I was speechless. What would your family say—what would my family think if they knew that the last of the line was playing the part of a gutter-snipe! I’m amazed at you, Beth. Why don’t you know where the child is and what she is doing? If she is going to run wild like this, I’ll send her back to England to school, where she will at least be taught to govern herself according to her birth and upbringing!”

The torrent ceased as the man cooled with the speech that complete ignorance of events had denied him in the earlier hours and with his business associates.

Elizabeth Avery had waited quietly for the end to come, but there was a fire of indignation in the grey eyes and the sweet voice as she spoke.

“Did you ever know of Delphine doing anything that could be classed as the action of a gutter-snipe, James?”

“Until this, no!”

“Then don’t you think that you would be more true to your traditions if you waited to know the facts before you jumped to conclusions?”

“Facts! Didn’t you tell me she had been spending the afternoon with Nessa Wood, and I hear from half-a-dozen different quarters that she was following the body of a drunken old sot, much as if she were trailing a circus? What do you mean by ‘knowing the facts’?”

“Just this. That far from forgetting her birth and traditions, she was remembering them and the obligations they entailed so keenly, that she followed that poor creature’s body this afternoon, taking her two friends with her to act as respectable mourners for the woman who had forgotten all to which she had been born, who had lost courage with her ideals, and who had no child to love and comfort her. She felt that it was the only thing for one person of family and traditions to do for another, no matter how low and poverty-stricken that other might have become. And on considering the fact that Delphine is scarcely farther than on the threshold of life, I am more proud of her to-night than if she had been oblivious or indifferent to the

pitiable situation, or had been thinking of the reputation and pride of her parents. And what is more, I am thankful that she has not seen or heard her father in a state of mind so utterly unjust and foreign to that of a gentleman and a loving and understanding father!”

Surprise seemed the order of the day, for Avery looked at his wife as if she had suddenly become another person.

“Looks as if I had been somewhat hasty! Sorry, Beth. I suppose I should have had more faith in her, or at least given her the benefit of the doubt till I had heard her side.

“To be quite frank, I can see I’ve been ruled by my old desire, and constantly looking for her to act as a boy would, forgetting that she is a girl—idealistic, loving and impulsive. I can see, too, that her Latin intensity makes it necessary for her to live her ideals. A boy might have them, but he’d be far more likely to keep them buried and out of sight.

“I’m wondering too, how her loyalty to this, her own land, is going to fare if it ever comes in conflict with her devotion to the Old World which so absorbs her now!”

“It is a great relief and happiness to know that you are studying and attempting to understand her, James. She needs you and your point of view, but in sympathy, not in criticism.

“Personally, I am not worrying about her probable attitude to this land of her birth. She is naturally intensely loyal, and she’s still in the stage where the stories and glamour of our youth capture her imagination and enthrall her spirit. Which will be the stronger, only the future can disclose. Our problem is to help her develop, that she may do the right thing, the true thing in any test that may come then.”

CHAPTER XIX.

On the Sea.

Delphine awoke one morning feeling weary and heavy-eyed. However, she went to school as usual. Lessons were irksome that day, for everything was an effort. Frequently she would chill so that a convulsive shiver would fairly shake her body for a few minutes.

Mrs. Avery was not at home at the noon hour. They were shorthanded in the office, and her husband had been called to London to a business conference, so Elizabeth, as usual, had stepped into the breach. Had she been there the child certainly would not have been allowed to return to school. However, she did so, but came home afterwards with such brilliancy of colouring and brightness of eyes as to cause the housekeeper to think to herself:

“Isn’t she going to be a beauty! The darling.” But this gave way to other emotions when Delphine went to her and said:

“Empsey dear, my head aches, and I’m so hot. I wish mother were home!”

“Why, darling—what’s the matter with my sweetheart?”

“I don’t know, Empsey. But I do wish mother were home!”

The girl had been assisting in the removal of wraps, for it was still winter, being the latter part of January. This done, she said:

“Shall I bathe your head with some of your mother’s cologne, dear? Perhaps that would cool it.”

“Thank you Empsey, perhaps it would.” But when it was applied, a chill shook her so violently that it had to be abandoned.

Empsey had taken her into her arms. She never grew too large to be cuddled, for somehow she could make herself seem tiny by the way she relaxed and snuggled into one she loved. The girl took the child’s head upon her breast, and smoothed the curls from the hot forehead. As the fever mounted, Empsey’s distress over the little one began to assume the aspect of fear. The heat from the fevered head had penetrated the woman’s clothing, and began to burn into her very body. What would she do? What could she do? She was afraid to leave the child to go for mother or doctor; then as

Delphine grew more limp and heavy-eyed, while an occasional violent chill shook her, the girl began to cry.

Delphine was not aware of it in the beginning, but finally a tear splashed on to her forehead, and lifting her languid glance she saw that the eyes of her beloved Empsey were red with tears.

With apparent effort, she raised one hand and patted the wet cheek.

“Don’t cry, Empsey dear, mother’ll be here soon!” and then she subsided into a half-stupor. When Mrs. Avery arrived she found them so, but by this time Empsey was crying without any effort at concealment, and the child too ill to know.

Recognizing the old fever and also that the attack was much more serious than previous ones, Mrs. Avery quickly discarded street clothes, took the little one into her own arms and sent the maid for the doctor.

Delphine was undressed and in bed by the time Doctor Dalton arrived.

A few quick questions as to the earlier hours, while he examined the colour of the body, the whites of the eyes and took the temperature. Then he asked:

“Has she had this before, or is this the first attack?”

“I think they began, doctor, the day I told you about the soiled candy the children had given her. You thought then that the feverishness had resulted from the crying and the mental distress. But it came on again and again, and it is beginning to be evident that the periods are three-monthly, though this is the worst she has experienced.”

“Where do you get your water?”

“We have a well, Doctor.”

“Spring?”

“I am not sure, for we had a period without any last summer, but it was an exceptionally dry season. The owners said they found the trouble in the pump, and afterwards it seemed all right.”

“I fear the cause of this sickness lies there. It is undoubtedly malaria. I wish you had summoned me at one of the earlier attacks.

“The blame is mine, Mrs. Avery. I should have known that you would never come to me because the child was upset from crying. Now we must do our best.”

They did, with the result that at the end of the week Delphine was free of the fever but weak and languid in the extreme, beside having grown very thin and pale.

The cause of the attack was presumed to be the well, which was proved, on expert examination, to be not a spring, but surface drainage. Every precaution was taken—other water being procured and all boiled before using, while Mr. Avery immediately began a search for another home.

Before this reached fruition two cables, one hard upon the other, brought sad news to this Canadian household.

James Avery's mother had died of heart disease, passing away in her sleep. His sister Laura, who had married and was journeying to her new home in India, found the cable of her mother's death awaiting her. This proved a great shock and came at the moment when she had contracted one of the country's fevers which at times takes swift hold upon the unacclimatized newcomer. The combination proved too much, and the young bride's life flickered out like a blown candle.

The double tragedy meant that son and brother must repair immediately to the old land, so events proceeded rapidly for the Averys.

When the doctor heard, he said decidedly: "This is not an unmitigated sorrow, James. Delphine needs a sea-trip to rid her system of the malarial poison. She appears cured and you would have found it difficult to persuade yourself that there was sufficient need there to demand the sacrifice that ordinarily would have entailed. Now the urgent demand for your presence there, makes the opportunity for your child's future health and strength."

"That's true, John, and it will be a blessing to Beth too, for her mother and one brother are still alive, and the years away from them have been long to her, I know."

But when he broached the subject to his wife, she demurred.

"What of the business! I really should be here if you are away, James. After all your years of effort it would be disastrous to have it fall away now."

"I don't think it will, Beth. At any rate, we shall risk it. You and Delphine both need it and I must go. So we had best sublet the house for the balance of the lease, store our furniture and have someone on the look-out for a permanent home for us on our return. Now dear, can we manage this in a week? I can the business, if you can the house."

“Then we will, James. Make your arrangements. I’ll be ready.”

Mr. Avery knew enough about ocean-travel to be quite well aware of what he wanted in the way of ships, so he called that day upon a friend who had the agency for some of the best steamship lines on the Atlantic.

“Charlie, what can you offer for my wife, child and myself on a boat sailing in about ten days’ time to England? I want a long trip and a steady boat, but of course, good cabin accommodation.”

“Just a minute, Jim. Let’s see. Think I have just the boat you want. How would the Allan liner, ‘Numidian,’ suit? Eight days, and it carries freight—steady as your two feet. Can give you a good cabin with couch for the little girl.”

“That sounds good. The Allan line has a fine name for comfort and reliability. When does she sail?”

“In just nine days, from Portland, Maine. What do you say?”

“Right-o. Book us up.”

The first of February found them travelling through the White Mountains of the State of Maine, joying in their rugged grandeur, and inhaling the keen pine-scented air with the happiness that comes with the holiday long deferred.

On boarding the ship at Portland, they found their fellow-passengers gave promise of being a very pleasant group. They were mostly English, or of British origin, some returning from the Orient by way of the States, others who had been travelling in America.

From Portland, the ship fared to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where a large contingent of Canadians as well as residents of the British Isles, embarked.

Amongst the latter was a young Englishman—the Hon. E. E. U. W. Leeson, heir to title and wealth—who had been travelling throughout the British Empire in order to fit himself more fully for the position of influence and responsibility which would be his in the not far-distant future. About thirty years of age, he was a tall, striking-looking individual, and, from the first, took a great liking to Delphine.

There was that about the man which captured the child’s imagination. They were standing on the deck one morning, her hand in his, while he talked with her father about the vast reaches and the immense potential agricultural wealth of Australia. In a wide-flung gesture, a heavy ring he was wearing flew off his finger, and describing an arc in the air, struck the blue

depths beyond the white foam of the ship's pathway. They watched it for seconds, sinking to its destination on the floor of the great sea.

"Oh, Mr. Leeson! Your beautiful ring!" came breathlessly from Delphine.

"A fool of a thing to do!" he laughed shortly. "However, nothing is lost when you know where it is. Is it? So we'll say it isn't really gone, it's just laid aside."

"Did you love it very much?"

"It was an heirloom, child."

"Oh, then it was a part of you! How terrible to lose it!" And her gaze almost said that, as a result, he wasn't quite complete.

He interpreted it with an amused laugh.

"So you think I'm not all here, now?"

"Well, heirlooms are part of us—part of the 'dignity side.' Aren't they? And they're things we have to live up to, like we do our mottoes."

"So you have a motto, too. What is yours, Delphine?"

"Mother taught me 'Noblesse oblige,' and she said that's true for any family at any time."

"She's quite right, and that's a beautiful ideal. We're too apt to forget it these days. I would like to meet your wife, Mr. Avery. Is she still confined to her room?"

Delphine's father had been an interested listener to the preceding conversation. He found he was learning much about his child, who apparently had the gift of conquering hearts wherever she went.

"Yes, she is, I'm sorry to say. We left our home hurriedly at the call of death. She was tired, and the train trip, always trying to her, made the rough sea weather the last straw, and she has been indisposed ever since we came aboard."

"I'm sorry to hear that. So you're returning to England?"

"Not to remain. Simply to arrange affairs."

"To which part did you say?"

"Not England really, but the Channel Islands. My father belonged to the Devonshire Averys. A break in the family several generations ago led our

branch to settle in Guernsey, where I was born. My mother and sister have just passed away. I am the only surviving child, and Delphine the last of our line.

“The family fortunes suffered much, as so many in England during the past thirty years, so I went to Canada, where I am established in business.”

“That’s somewhat of a change.”

“Yes it is, but I like commercial life, and have become much attached to my foster-home. Besides, it is the native land of my only child. I expect to wind up the estate and return.”

“Then you’re satisfied to establish your permanent home there?”

“There is a great lure in Canadian life, and the necessity to work hard to win and then to maintain one’s way is a constant incentive to keep one’s self mentally and physically alert and fit. Britishers who come out with a sane idea of life, a willingness to adapt themselves to new methods, and a determination to succeed, very rarely desire to leave except to revisit old surroundings and old friends. And this type is welcomed by the native-born as the finest settlers that Canada can desire.”

“This is exceedingly interesting” Leeson replied. “And it appeals to me. There is nothing I’d like better than to carve my way in Australia, New Zealand or Canada. They’re different, vastly so, but each the country of Youth, and they certainly draw one almost irresistibly. However, I inherit land which in itself is a responsibility, but far greater than that is the welfare of our people—ours for so long that they feel that I belong to them, and in truth I do—Well, doctor. How are you to-day?” he broke off as the young ship’s surgeon approached.

“Very fit, thanks. I’ve been watching your small listener, and wondering if she wouldn’t like a game of shuffle-board. Eh, Winsome?”

Delphine responded at once. She loved the new name, and adored the man who was never too grown up to understand the heart of a child. In fact, though she did not know it, he saw in her the possibilities of a very beautiful maturity, not only that of the body, but of the mind and soul as well.

The unusually rough trip had forced many to remain in their state-rooms, and Delphine was the only member of her sex who had appeared regularly on deck from the beginning of the voyage. Naturally, she received a great deal of attention, and the fact that she was not spoiled, and possessed much originality and quaintness in her thought and speech, made her a general favourite.

At the doctor's query, her sense of hospitality promptly manifested itself with:

“May we all play, doctor? You would, wouldn't you, Mr. Leeson? And you, too, father?”

So very shortly they were all engaged, and Delphine felt that she was enjoying one of the happiest playtimes of her life, with the three men she loved in such varied ways.

Very rough weather indeed had been encountered from the first day out, and for one period of twenty-four hours the passengers were not allowed on deck at all. But Delphine knew no shadow of fear, and no touch of sea-sickness.

When freedom of the deck was restored, she would stand by the quarter-hour watching the sweep of the great swells as the ship ploughed her way through, revelling in the keen wind and the salt tang it left on her lips.

Everything of interest was carried to the sympathetic mother. One day, when the wild spume and cloud-like spray had subsided, the ocean had taken on another aspect and Delphine, glowing from her after-breakfast romp on the deck, ran into their state-room much like a miniature ocean-breeze itself.

“The sea is wonderful again to-day, mother, though it's so very different. It looks like some huge live thing moving underneath shiny dark-blue paper! And it seems as if you could walk right out over it and the paper wouldn't break. You'd just have to be careful to climb the little hills, and you needn't be scared of the live thing under it, for you know you'd never go through. I just love it and love it till it hurts, mother! And Dr. Taylor told me such a funny little song to-day. It's like this—

‘O, the sea! The beautiful sea!
O, the up-and-down motion!
It's such an emetic, it's truly pathetic, . . .
O, the beautiful ocean!’ ”

The young voice rang out in the notes of the old song, sweet and true, while the eyes laughed over the foolishness.

“It is funny, but I can't understand it being an emetic—though there are lots of people who can, evidently. And, oh, mother! Mr. Leeson came on deck looking such a scarecrow we were in fits of laughter inside of us. Someone had given him some soap and told him to wash his hair while he was having his bath—that it was a special kind to be used in salt water—and

he did, and he couldn't wash it out. And the more he rubbed on the worse it got, till all his hair stood straight out from his head like little sticks!

“He's a thoroughbred, though, for he treated it as a great joke on himself and wasn't a bit cross, but told everybody how he had been fooled. Then someone said the barber knew how to get it off, so he had it done and looks just like himself again. He's an exceedingly nice man, mother, though not quite so nice as my dear doctor!”

The whole voyage was a series of vivid delights to the small girl. Sea-air and happiness worked wonders, so that by the time they docked at Liverpool she had recaptured the sparkle to her eyes, the brilliant colouring to her cheeks, though the slenderness and fragility of physique remained and would do so for some years, until she completed the transitional period and entered the portals of womanhood.

When good-byes were being exchanged, the Hon. Leeson said to her father:

“You're not coming to London?”

“No, I shall not have time this trip.”

“Then look me up when you come again.” And he proffered his card with club and London address inscribed. “I shall always be interested to know how ‘Little Miss Canada’ is getting along. Good-bye, child, don't forget me.”

“I couldn't, Mr. Leeson. You're England!”

“Thanks, little sweetheart. You couldn't have paid me a greater compliment. May I always be worthy!” as he gravely shook hands with her.

But on parting with the doctor, she was tossed high in the air, then brought back to his arms, while he said:

“Au revoir, my Winsomeness! You'll write to me once a year—for Christmas. Will you? You won't forget?”

A slightly different question, with a somewhat different answer.

“Oh, I couldn't, doctor!” And while arms tightened around his neck, she gave him one of her rare kisses, whispering in his ear, “For, you see, I love you.”

CHAPTER XX.

“Breathes There a Man?”

Not knowing how long they might be required in Guernsey, the Averys lost no time in Liverpool, but took the boat-train for Weymouth and the Channel steamers.

It was disappointing that this part of the journey should occur in the hours of darkness, for all three longed to see the English countryside as they travelled through it.

They reached the Channel port at midnight, and went immediately on board as the boat left on the arrival of the train. And here, Delphine nearly lost the reputation of being a wonderful sailor which she had so proudly established on the ocean, for of all the stretches of disturbed water on the face of the globe, the English Channel is one of the worst. The mountainous waves and wild spume of the Atlantic held no distress for her, but the choppy cross-currents of the Channel, which caused the sturdy steamer to both roll and toss, upset the child to a distressing degree. Fortunately, the long day had tired her completely, and she was soon fast asleep, and this saved her from actual sea-sickness. But it was a wan little face that joined her father on deck the next morning as they entered the harbour of St. Peter Port on the east side of Guernsey Island.

“There’s the Martello Tower, Delphine; and there’s where we always held our regattas. There’s Castle Cornet, and watch how the waves are dashing up the Esplanade.”

“Why, father! It’s exactly like you told me over and over again. Only it’s more beautiful, I think, now I see the colours. And where’s Herm, where the lovely shells come from? Can we see it from here?”

“That little islet over there is Herm, but no one could imagine it had such a famous shell beach, could they? Now look at Guernsey’s rocky shore, Petite. We’ll have some great scrambles down there when the tide is low, and I’ll show you such beauty in any one little pool as can hardly be matched elsewhere in the same latitude in all the world.”

“How you love it, father!”

“It’s home, child, and that says everything. Some day you will go back to your birthplace after an absence—long or short—and know exactly how I

feel to-day.”

“I think I know already, father. I have a funny, stirred-up feeling inside of me, right now.”

He smiled down at her and squeezed the small hand in his as his wife appeared in the companionway, then joined them on the deck.

Mrs. Avery’s eyes eagerly searched the waiting group on the wharf, then, “James, there’s Henri!” And she waved her scarf, while an unwonted colour stole into the delicate face. A long arm raised hat high in air in recognition, and Delphine had her first glimpse of the French uncle of whom she had heard much concerning his childhood, but less of the later years.

He had been but a little lad when Elizabeth was married, and she would meet a man to-day—a man who would be almost a stranger, for the years between had been the formative ones for him.

When they stepped on to the wharf, he greeted his sister in the French fashion—a kiss on either cheek—though he spoke in English.

“Welcome back to Guernsey, my sister.” Then, shaking hands with his brother-in-law, he turned to the child.

“And this is Delphine, the last of two old families!” bestowing on her a somewhat careless caress.

“Don’t say that, Henri. You’ll have a child of your own, one of these days,” came from James Avery.

“I? A cripple, and a pauper to boot? Not likely, mon frère!”

“Oh don’t, Henri. Any girl would be proud to marry you!” And his sister gazed with tender, loving eyes at the undeniably handsome face and the tall form that, beyond the heavy cane, gave no indication of his lameness till he began to walk.

A fall while still a child had been the cause of hip-trouble, from which he had never entirely recovered. It had occurred after the sister’s marriage, so, though aware of it, she was seeing him thus for the first time.

As he led the way to the livery carriage that awaited them while the luggage was being sorted and claimed, Delphine, who had said no word as yet, gave him the fearless scrutiny of childhood. There was no happiness in the cold, white face, and the dark eyes brooded with thwarted desires. She could not know what the trouble was, but she was repelled. She looked at

the hands—very long and slender—ending with a shape of nail she had never seen before, but instinctively disliked.

Vaguely disturbed, the child drew closer to her mother, while the latter asked:

“Madame, ma mère, comment se porte-elle?”

“Elle se porte très bien. But we do not speak la belle français, Jacq. You have been away a long time, and there are many changes.”

His sister’s eyes filled to hear her old family name again. Christened “Jacquine Elizabeth de Beauvais,” her husband had preferred the English, and especially the diminutive “Beth,” so that the former “Jacquine,” or “Jacq,” as this young brother had been wont to call her, carried her back to girlhood, to the father long dead but shrined in tenderest memories, and to the home which was no longer theirs.

Her husband joined them and they left the quay, noting familiar landmarks at every turn, many of which remained so marvellously the same that their departure of years before might have been the previous day.

At last they reached the small house to which the one-time prominent family of de Beauvais had repaired in their days of privation. The door was opened by the one remaining link of the past—old Guillaume—whom nothing of want or failure could drive away from his beloved Madame.

Though decrepit and stiff with rheumatism, the old retainer bowed low to “Mam’selle Jacquine.” In her gentle, thoughtful way, Elizabeth took the wrinkled old hand in hers, saying in the language he loved:

“Guillaume, it makes me very happy to see you again. May the good God bless you for your faithfulness to my mother. And now, to Madame, Guillaume.”

With tears of age and emotion running down his furrowed cheeks, he opened the drawing-room door, announcing “Madame Avery, Madame,” and turned to gaze on the child of the young mistress he adored.

James Avery patted the old man reassuringly on the shoulder, saying: “This is our little daughter, Guillaume. And she looks more the de Beauvais than Avery. Does she not?”

“She does that, sir. She does that,” while Delphine gravely advanced, and holding out her hand, which the old servant raised respectfully to his lips, she said:

“I love you, Guillaume. Mother has told me about you, oh, so many times.”

Having given his wife a few moments alone with her mother, James Avery, with Delphine by the hand, entered the drawing-room as he was announced.

The stately old lady in softly-rustling black silk, with real lace at neck and wrists and a dainty wisp of it embellished with mauve ribbons on her white hair, relinquished her daughter from her breast, and moved forward to greet them.

“James, my son! Welcome back to Guernsey. I wish the trip had not such sad demands. And this is my granddaughter.” And holding out her hands she waited. But not for long. Somewhat shy in the Old-World atmosphere, but reading love and longing in the sweet, high-bred face, Delphine moved swiftly to her as the woman bent to take her into her arms.

There would never be any question as to Delphine’s affection for her dear “grandmère.” It was deep and instantaneous on the part of each, and instinctively the child invested her with the old tradition of “Noblesse oblige,” and here she would never be disappointed.

“You will remain with us, James? We have no spacious establishment, but we do possess a guest-room in our tiny house. You will have to be much at your old home, we quite understand, but dismantling would make it impossible to inhabit, and harder for you to leave it if you do.”

“Thank you, madame ma mère. We shall be most happy to be your guests. Yes, you are right. It will be hard to see the old place in the hands of strangers.”

“And that must be? There is no chance of your living here again?” was the wistful question.

“No. I could not do so—not to live the life I would be expected to here, keep up the place and educate Delphine as well. And to be quite frank, I like Canada, and am growing much attached to New-World ways and business activities, though Guernsey will always be ‘home’ in my heart, ma mère.”

It was foreign to her son-in-law to reveal himself to that extent, but he had done so for her sake, and her look of approval and even relief, repaid him for the effort.

Leaving Elizabeth and Delphine with her people, he repaired early in the afternoon to his old home.

None but those who have gone through the trial know the wrench and the heartache he experienced when he entered the beloved dwelling of his childhood and of his family for centuries; but aware that it would have to be faced, he preferred to meet it alone.

The lawns had been well kept and looked familiar at every turn. The great difference between the old land and the new struck him afresh—the one settled, stable, sure and firmly established, the other restless, unstable, subject to quick and unexpected change—in fact a land in the making, and while the first tugged at his heartstrings, the other lured and beckoned to his imagination and his youth.

With an impatient sigh over the very natural conflict, he rang the bell.

The family solicitor had known that he would come, but not the date of arrival, so the surprise was genuine when the old butler opened the door.

“Oh, Master James, Master James! Is it yourself, then, laddie? Oh, but ’tis a sorry homecoming, Master James, after all these years!”

“I know, Binns, I know. But it’s life, Binns. We all have to go, sooner or later. I’m glad she didn’t suffer.”

“You can be sure of that, sir. She looked so calm and peaceful, with a little smile on her face, and more like the bride your father brought us, so many years ago.”

“Thanks, Binns. Now I’ll just wander through the place. No, you needn’t come. Keep the women away. By-the-bye, how many are here, now?”

“Only cook, sir. We take care of the house, and McCracken and Tibbits are still outside. We had only a housemaid extra before, sir. Your mother has lived very quietly, since Miss Laura left, sir.”

“All right, Binns. I’ll talk to you again. I’ll have to see Mr. Westland first, but I’m afraid we shall have to let strangers have the house, Binns. I don’t see anything else for it. Don’t fret, old friend. It’s just another spur from Life to change and alteration. I could not live here and properly maintain the position our family has always held. I must work, Binns, and I can do it better in the new land than in the old.

“I suppose my room has been changed with the years?”

The old servant’s face was working spasmodically as he tried to control his voice and the fit of shaking the words had induced.

“No, Master James. It is waiting for you, just as you left it, sir.”

“Thank you, Binns, I’ll be down presently.”

As much to relieve the old servant as himself, he broke away to make his tour of the house.

His mother’s suite drew him first, and from these she might have just departed. Nothing was touched. He lingered in the dressing room, fingering the articles on tables and mantle—almost all of which he had known in childhood and young manhood. When he approached the bed-chamber, he hesitated again, then went in and closed the door.

When at last he reappeared, there was a touch of time in his white face and compressed lips. Sorrow had aged him more in minutes than work and struggle had done in years.

He went quietly throughout the house. The furniture in most of the rooms was shrouded with linen covers. He briefly noted the general effects, with an occasional scrutiny of the articles covered.

Of the main rooms, the library alone looked homelike and inviting, but the formal reception rooms, in their cold austerity, made it difficult to repress a shiver.

The apartments which had been his own brought a lump to his throat. He might have gotten out of bed that morning—it was all so exactly the same. And the realization of what this must have meant to his mother struck hard and deep.

He returned to the library and touched the bell. Binns appeared, red-eyed but composed once more.

“Binns, I shall have to see Mr. Westland at once, for I must make my stay in Guernsey as brief as possible. We are guests of Madame de Beauvais. It is better so, Binns. I couldn’t stand it here. Now before I leave I would like to see the other old friends of my childhood. Call them in, please.”

“They’re waiting, sir. They want to see you, sir,” and left the room, with an heroic effort to maintain his accustomed poise.

He returned in a moment to say:

“They’re here, sir.” And as the three filed in, James Avery advanced to meet them.

“Why, Mullins! You look as young as you ever did,” taking her hand in his and patting it gently, the while the woman broke into tears which she struggled to subdue in the clean white apron adorning her ample person.

“And you, Crackey! And Tit-bits, here! How are you both? It’s good to see my old friends once more.”

The men fidgeted and were ill at ease, mumbling, “Thank you, Master James, sir.” But there was evidently more on the minds of all than just their greetings, and Binns came to the rescue.

“Mr. James, sir. We want to tell you, sir—harrmp-p, that we wants you to stay here, sir—harrmp-p, and we wants you not to go back to Canady, sir—harrmp-p. And we know times aren’t good, sir, but we have our little savings put by and we all wants to say, sir, we’d be glad to work for you, sir, and we don’t need any wages, sir, thank you, sir, if you’ll please stay at home, sir.”

This was too much for even their self-contained master. Emotions had been stirred from the moment he had sighted the beloved island, and each succeeding one probed deeper into the profound love of race and family, home surroundings and human ties that this man of lineage possessed in no small degree.

His eyes filled and then frankly overflowed as, unable for a moment to utter a word, he turned toward the window to win back his self-control. Presently he returned to them.

“Bless your loving, generous hearts! Even that brave sacrifice would not make it possible. Certain monies cease with my mother’s death. Income generally has been dwindling, while maintenance and living expenses have risen steadily. I would still have to be earning, dear friends, and I can do that more effectively in Canada than I could possibly accomplish here.

“I would like you to know some of my plans.

“This property, as you know, should go to my child. I judge, if rented, it will care for all needful repairs, with a fair sum over and above all expenses.

“I am convinced as to what my mother would say were she here. You have all given your best years to us. It is time now you had a rest. If you were forced to continue in service, I would have been glad, if such were possible, to see you remain here to watch over the old place because you love it too. But that would have been hard under a new master. So I want to know that you are all spending the evening of your days in peace and comfort. The rentals can attend to that and still put something aside for Miss Delphine. She will be true to the best traditions of our house and will be happy when she attains her majority to know that the faithful old members

of our household have had the care in their age that true service should always receive.

“I had not intended speaking of it now, but your wish to help made it right for you to know.”

By this time poor Mullins was sobbing beyond control, and Binns led her to the door.

The two men stood twisting their caps in their old hands—quite too overcome to trust their voices, and their beloved master, who to them was still the little lad who played pranks on them in years gone by, took first one and then the other by the hand.

“Thank you, Crackey. And you, Tit-bits. I’ll never forget your offer. There’s a glow in my heart in spite of sorrow and loss, and it will go with me the rest of my life.”

And of all he said, the sweetest to them was that he called them by the old childish names they had loved so well.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Decision.

With characteristic energy, James Avery saw his family solicitor that same afternoon. Together they went into matters along general lines, and the lawyer received an outline of the plans of the new owner. Considerable data had to be examined before a decision as to the future could be made, and this was allocated to the following day.

When he prepared to leave the de Beauvais home the next morning Delphine asked in a disappointed voice:

“Aren’t you going to take me to Avery Place to-day, father?”

“No, dear, I’m sorry to say. Business affairs must be gotten under way, then we may give time to pleasure. It won’t be long, Petite.

“Are you ready, Henri?” and the two men left the house together.

Henri de Beauvais had received the education commensurate with his birth and physical limitations, but to do this his mother had used from her capital, and so depleted her income to an appreciable degree.

But none knew better than she his pride and his rebellion against Fate. As a lad he had had great dreams of rehabilitating the family fortunes, but relentlessly these had been dissipated by the growing realization that his accident had made any very active life an impossibility.

To deepen the hurt, he had lost his heart to a girl of wealth as well as position, and his pride sealed his lips to her, while the sternly-repressed longing for wife and children of his own only served to eat deeper and deeper into the once happy nature, tarnishing the beauty of spirit and even leaving its corrosive effect on his physical condition as well.

He was acting as private secretary to a man of important public position in the government of the island, and as they walked to town he spoke frankly of personal affairs.

“There’s no use acquainting either Jacquine or my mother with this, James, but I may tell you. I’m not growing stronger. The time may come when I shall not be able to accomplish even the limited effort I can make now. When that arrives, let us hope the end comes quickly.”

Avery put his hand on the other's arm, but de Beauvais prevented him from speaking.

"Thanks, James. I know what you would say, but don't say it. This is one of my bad days. Nerves pretty rotten sometimes.

"The sale of 'La Villa de la Reine' made possible such investments in Government securities as to ensure an income for my mother, and as long as I do not become too great a financial burden, she will not suffer too much.

"I don't know whether or not you remember that the main branch of our family still exists in France? At one time, while we were still flourishing here, we communicated occasionally, but it was allowed to drop on our side. Of course they do not know of our reverses, nor would we allow them to be told. We stand or fall by ourselves. But here we part for awhile."

"Henri, old chap! It sounds frightfully banal to say that I hope the future will not be for you what you have pictured, but I do, with all my heart. Thanks for telling me, old man. And don't worry about Madame. She will never need while I am alive."

They sealed it with a hand-shake, and then went their separate ways.

It was difficult for Avery to reach his lawyer's office anywhere near the intended hour, for at every turn he met friends and acquaintances of his parents or amongst his own contemporaries.

An engagement for lunch was the result of the first encounter, and dinner invitations to his wife and their host and hostess as well as himself, were numerous. One or two, from very old friends, were accepted at once, on the proviso that Madame de Beauvais was well enough to go.

It was afternoon before the business details were covered, and the solicitor said:

"It would appear that to sell would be your best plan, unless you feel that you would return to spend your old age in the home of your fathers."

"I doubt it, Mr. Westland, I very much doubt it. My only child will more than likely marry in the new land, and that being so, she and her children would be such bonds as I am content neither my wife nor I would wish to disrupt. By that time, the friends of my youth would be either dead or grown so far away in their interests that we would have little in common. There would be the house, of course, but human ties come first."

"Your conclusion is well reasoned, sir, so we shall have to see what we can do for a sale.

“The income from the bonds your mother had will care for the pensions of which you spoke, and when they are no longer needed will accumulate for your daughter, if you so wish.”

“Let the whole matter stand for twenty-four hours, Mr. Westland. I never take any important step without talking it over with Mrs. Avery. She sometimes sees farther than I do. But I shall let you know to-morrow, and when I come, I shall bring my daughter. I would like you to see the last of the Averys.”

As soon as Elizabeth met her husband that evening she sensed distress.

“James, what is it?”

“What is what, Beth?”

“What is troubling you, dear? Were conditions worse than you expected?”

“Yes and no, Beth.” And he outlined the situation as it appealed to him, ending with:

“As a business man, I feel it far better to dispose of it as soon as we can, for I cannot be coming over every few years to give my personal supervision, and it would likely develop into a source of trouble and expense. What do you think?”

“I think I am going to differ, James, although I can see that with the money remaining tied up here we may be forced to do without much of luxury, even of ordinary comforts, but isn't there another than the purely materialistic side?

“Delphine is imbued with a strong love of family. The house should one day be hers. Suppose, in her maturity, she feels the call of the centuries, and desires to live her life in the surroundings and under the roof-tree of those who were responsible for her being; and if the house were in alien hands, what then?

“I felt the same about ‘La Villa de la Reine,’ but the problem there held no other solution. This does. If you and I are willing to sacrifice a little and work somewhat harder and longer, we can keep it for her and the decision of her womanhood.”

“Beth, I sometimes wonder which is greater in you, wife or mother, and indeed I cannot tell, for you are a blessing in both. My business sense steps aside for your intuition and your perfect concept of ethics. We shall keep the house, and when the right time arrives Delphine will decide.”

The old lawyer's eyes glistened when the final decision was made known to him.

“My respectful compliments to your wife, Mr. Avery. She has looked ahead, just as you anticipated. And I think that a certain small person will appreciate that to the full when it is laid before her, perhaps when I am dead and gone.

“And now we shall take steps to lease it at once. It will be easier to let than to sell, I am sure.

“And what do you think of our Island, Miss Delphine?”

“It's wonderful, Mr. Westland—just like mother and father have always said. I haven't seen Avery House, nor La Villa de la Reine yet, but we're going down to the shore now, and that is very beautiful, father says.” And there they betook themselves after leaving the aged lawyer.

As they clambered over the rocks which the receding tide had bared, Delphine examined the seaweed for the first time.

“This is the ‘vraic,’ Petite. It is gathered for fertilizing the ground, and also for fuel by the poor people.”

“It seems too beautiful for that, father. Doesn't it?” as the sun brought out the bronze colouring of the wet weed.

“If that is beautiful, what about this?” And he indicated a tiny pool left by the retreating sea in a rocky crevice below high-water mark.

“Oh, father! I never saw anything so lovely in all my life!” And she sank beside it and leaned over to study and feast her eyes upon it.

“What is this wonderful mauve flower, father? It looks like a chrysanthemum waving in the water instead of the wind. And there's a coral-pink one, too.”

“Those are called sea-anemones, Pet. They're alive, and when any particle of food comes within their reach, they gather it in with those beautiful frond-like feeders. Aren't they marvellous?”

“It makes me breathless, father. There's so much in this little pool! Just look at that fairy-seaweed. It's so fine you can hardly see it, and it's a lovely red! And here's a green—like green lace! And there's a heavier brown, but it's lovely too. And there's a limpet, and a cockle. I don't see an ormer, though.”

“Let us look a little further.”

“I hardly want to leave this, father. Don’t you wish we could pick it up and carry it home! I never dreamed that any shore could have such water-flower gardens.” But the next proved as enchanting as the first, and here she saw a pale grey anemone, and one that was spotted mauve and white.

“Father, I don’t think I can ever leave the rocks. I just can’t find words to tell their beauty!”

“The ocean would have something to say about our staying. You remember I told you about the tides, and it was a little difficult for you to understand, for we don’t see the daily rise and fall on Lake Erie. But when the tide turns here it will come in fairly rapidly, and if we are not watching would send us scampering pretty lively for safety, unless we do not mind wet feet and splashed clothing.”

They spent two glorious hours finding beauty wherever they looked, till the child was fairly entranced with it, and when she reached home late that afternoon she said:

“Mother, dear! I’ve seen the ocean-home of the fairies to-day, and I don’t know enough of fairy-language to tell its loveliness. You couldn’t help believing in fairies after seeing the rock pools, could you, mother?” And the somewhat wistful query brought the assurance—

“There are many things that, though we can’t see, still we believe in, Petite, and often when I am enjoying a particularly beautiful flower, I like to think of it as the home of one of the wee folk, so we’ll just consider the Guernsey rock pools as the scene of their water-revels, and love them all the more for the fancy, shan’t we?”

CHAPTER XXII.

Avery Place.

The following day James Avery took his wife and child to the home of his people.

As they entered the driveway, the beautiful camellias coming into full bloom were a most attractive picture, but Delphine was greatly disappointed to find they carried no perfume to enhance their beauty. The studied arrangement of shrubs and flower-beds was interesting, but did not enchant her as did less formal gardening containing the unexpected in blooms and their disposition.

The house itself was built of large, smoothly-dressed blocks of native grey granite, and on either side of the great oak door bay windows extended from ground to tiled roof three stories above, the whole effect substantial and solid, permanent rather than picturesque.

“I like it, father. It looks ‘sure.’ Doesn’t it?”

“What do you mean, Petite?”

“I don’t know whether I can explain, only I think I’d never wonder ‘What should I do?’ if I lived here. I’d always know.”

James Avery smiled, for his daughter had very accurately caught the atmosphere of the Avery home and home-life.

When Binns opened the massive door and they entered the great hall, Delphine caught her breath.

The broad stairway came from the floor above with a flaring sweep into the hall below, and a wonderful window of stained glass, extending the greater portion of the two stories, admitted the soft-toned light that prevailed. A fireplace to one side, and several great pictures completed the dominating features, while fur rugs here and there softened the severity of the polished oak floor.

But her father was speaking, and almost in a dream she heard:

“Mrs. Avery and I have brought Delphine to see the old place, Binns. Delphine, this is our dear old Binns, who was with your grandparents before I was born.”

The child, still under the spell of vivid imagination combined with memory of her father's stories of his childhood, replied:

"I wish I had been born and had lived here when I was very young, Binns." Then turning towards him, continued: "And I know now why father so often spoke of you when he told me of Avery Place. He loved you, and you just belonged here, didn't you?"

"Thank you, Miss Delphine. I do feel that I belong to the family and to you too, Miss Delphine, although you were born in Canady."

"That's very nice of you, Binns, for one time I feel all French, but this minute I believe I'm all English. Why do I feel like that, father?"

"It's very natural, child. You've heard the history of the de Beauvais and of the Averys from the time you were able to understand, and now, seeing the old surroundings for the first time, they are bound to appeal. But never mind about it now. Come and enjoy the house, dear." And with Binns in admiring attendance, they pursued their way.

The furniture had been uncovered, and the whole place put in the condition that would be maintained were the family in residence.

The formal reception rooms, with their glittering glass chandeliers containing what seemed to the child unnumbered candles; the beautiful grey satin-damask walls; the few pictures; the somewhat meagre furniture with quaint "spindly" legs and worn coverings; the bare floors with occasional rugs, brought to the child's mind pictures of ladies with powdered hair and crinolines, patches and languid fans, men in doublet and hose, with long lace falling over their white hands.

Fortunately, the Victorian craze for crowded rooms, fancy antimacassars, pictures in deluge, and general closeness of heavy curtains had not obtruded itself upon this old-world household—one real blessing that straitened circumstances had bestowed.

The dining-room, with its high panelling and carved woodwork, great oak table, high-backed chairs and wonderfully-wrought buffet, won Delphine's intense admiration, while as for the library, she felt as if she could spend many long hours there, curled up in a great arm-chair with a book in one hand and a Canadian apple in the other.

The sitting-rooms upstairs had a far more modern aspect, but did not stir the imagination as had those of the older period. She was much interested in the sleeping-rooms with their four-posters and high, rounded feather beds,

but her father's and the nursery were replete with happenings of his childhood and as such seemed like old friends to his daughter.

They lingered long over the family portraits—dandies in peruke, satin and lace, ladies with high-built coiffures and shimmering gowns, corpulent gentlemen in hunting togs, women in crinolines and curls. Each had some special story in the family history, and Delphine drank it all in eagerly, feeling that in this way she was contacting those who had established the traditions which seemed to be a very real part of herself.

As they returned to the main hall before going to see kitchen offices and gardens with their respective caretakers, Delphine remarked:

“I'd love to dress up in a silk gown with wide, wide skirt, and come sailing down the stairway with a big feather fan in my hand. Wouldn't it be a wonderful place to live and play in, mother? Why haven't we houses like this in Canada?”

“There are some very beautiful residences, dear, but they are comparatively new, for Canada is a new land, and these Old Country places have been growing and developing for hundreds of years. Then in Canada we have to work for what we enjoy, and it will take a long time to earn enough to procure a home anything like this, Petite.”

“Then why can't we stay here, mother?”

“It costs a great deal, dear, and we cannot afford it just now. Father must be in business, and he has spent many years in building one up in Canada, so we must continue there for a few years longer and then we'll see what we shall do. Come, dear, father's waiting.”

Mullins was captivated at once, and “Crackey” and “Tit-bits,” quite prepared to believe that no child could ever be in the same category with that of “Mr. James,” found the original more lovable than they had imagined, and worshipped accordingly.

They conducted them through the coach-house and stables—from which carriages and horses had long since departed—and then into the walled garden where trees and grape-vines were trained for quality of fruit, not quantity.

“The gardens are lovely, father, and every inch seems to be petted and cared for, but I think our rough orchards are more fascinating. It's so satisfying to take a book and climb a tree to read. You can imagine things so much better up amongst the branches.

“But look at the flowers! Mother, those are primroses, aren’t they? And violets! What wonderful blooms! And aren’t they sweet! And what are those lovely velvety brown and gold ones, mother?”

“Those are wallflowers, Petite, and the most fragrant of all.”

Before long her hands were filled with the spring blossoms, and every few minutes she would bury her face in them, delighting old “Tit-bits’” heart by the way she communed with them.

“Do you bloom so well because you’re in a garden where you’re loved every minute of the time, violets? I’ve never seen such beauties in Canada. And our wild ones have only a woody odour. It’s sweet as sweet, but not like yours, you dears!

“And my Christmas mat for mother was just like you, primrose, only it’s a giant in size. And no flower I know smells like you. You’re just like spring sunshine—all clear and cool and bright.

“But you’re like summer sunshine, wallflowers. I can see hummingbirds and big fat roly-poly bees visiting you. Wouldn’t you like to come to Canada with us?”

“I’ll give you some seed, Miss Delphine, perhaps it would grow there,” came from the delighted old gardener.

“I’m afraid it’s too cold, Tibbits, but we can try. And you may be sure it won’t fail for want of loving.”

“I’m sure of that, Mrs. Avery, ma’am.”

As they re-entered the house, Binns approached his master.

“Mr. James, sir, where would you like tea served sir?”

“In the library, Binns.”

And as they partook of this most English refreshment, with the old servant hovering round, James Avery watched with concealed amusement and satisfaction the way Delphine adapted herself to the position of daughter of a great house—though serenely unconscious of the process.

When they re-entered the hall preparatory to their departure, she found it difficult to tear herself away.

“Father dear, I love your rooms and the nursery because of the stories you’ve told me, but oh, the hall is the most wonderful of all. I can see our people as if they had stepped out of their pictures coming down the great

stairway, and children going up and down, and Christmas time and the mistletoe hanging from the chandeliers, and the great log fire in the fireplace, and people—lots of people moving around all the time. It stirs me all up inside, and it's hard to leave it, father dear. Isn't it?"

"Very hard, Petite. But apparently there's a place for us to fill in our Canadian life, or it would not have become impossible for us to remain here. So we must try to fill that place, child, feeling that we shall be guided in the future as we have been in the past. When the time comes, we shall know what we should do. Say good-bye for the present, dear. We must go now."

And as they left the home of his fathers, James Avery became aware of the fact that in spite of her French ancestry there would be times when his daughter would realize her English kinship with all the intensity of which her sensitive soul was capable, and that would be to no small degree.

CHAPTER XXIII.

La Villa de la Reine.

Days of sunshine and a few of storm in the delightful spring climate of the Channel Islands brought each its peculiar pleasure to the little daughter of Canada.

When weather permitted, a drive to various points of interest was enjoyed, and in this way Delphine became familiar with the quaint parish of St. Sampson's, the Bays of Cobo and Fermaine, the Cromlech, or Druid's Altars, at l'Ancress, and many other interesting places. It was impossible to make the sea-trip to Herm, but they were able to procure some of the beautiful shells, and this ameliorated the disappointment to a certain extent.

Every week saw renewed health manifesting itself in Delphine's old-time vivid colouring, the brilliancy of the dark eyes, and the joy of her dancing step. There was no return of the malarial conditions though her parents endured a period of anxiety fearing that such was not to be the case. The wonderful Guernsey milk had seemed most delectable, but proved far too rich for the unaccustomed digestion, resulting in a very heavy bilious attack.

It was a great relief to find the indisposition was not more serious, and indeed it assisted in solving another problem which had arisen, and that was a visit to the old de Beauvais home.

More than one invitation had had to be refused because of previous engagements, and when the last came, Madame de Beauvais said to her daughter:

"Jacquine, I cannot go, chérie. I have been steeling myself to the prospective visit, but I haven't the strength to face the rush of memories."

"I have been fearing the strain for you, ma mère. I would find it difficult, so how much more would you. We have said good-bye in our hearts. It would be best not to re-open the old wounds. And Delphine's illness provides our opportunity to send our regrets and so avoid the experience in a graceful way—for we shall be returning to Canada very shortly, especially if the Nevilles take Avery Place, as we expect.

"I would like Delphine to have at least a glimpse of La Villa, and that can be accomplished during one of our drives. Reposez-vous, ma mère, your

beautiful courage will not be challenged beyond endurance.”

And Elizabeth’s mind was eased also by this decision. She had noted her mother’s fragility, and dreaded for her the heartache of witnessing the home of her happy married life occupied by comparative strangers and alien furnishings.

Mrs. Avery took Delphine alone one morning for a drive past La Villa de la Reine.

The old-time manorial house was built of the native granite in the shape of two sides of a square, a large tower filling in the angle formed by the two wings.

At the end of the avenue an arched gateway opened on to the main road, revealing, directly in line, the front door of the old mansion. This was deeply set under a circular headway of grey granite, over which was carved the armorial device of the family.

There had once been a considerable estate, for Guernsey, where properties are high in value if limited in acreage, but failing fortunes had seen it dwindling, little by little, until the house and garden surrounded by a few fields were all that remained of its ancient glory.

But there was a captivating suggestion of romance about the whole place to the imaginative child. Its age was quite evident in the irregular size and somewhat rough treatment of the granite blocks, and when her mother drew her attention to the loopholes for defensive arrow-shooting still to be seen in the walls of the old tower, her eyes grew black with the exciting possibilities which immediately took shape.

“Oh, mother! It must be wonderfully interesting—even more than Avery Place, for this is so much older. And are those the deep window-seats where you used to curl up with a book and read? And those the ruins of the old turret which was used as a look-out when the house was young, and where you children used to play you were living the old days over again? It must have been just fascinating!

“That’s a very satisfying word, mother. It sounds so mysterious and breathless. What is it in French?”

“‘Fascinant,’ ‘enchantant’ or ‘charmant.’ There is a slight difference in meaning, just as there is in the English ‘fascinating,’ ‘enchanting,’ ‘charming,’ though I think that you would be inclined to apply all three. Am I right, Petite?”

“Yes indeed, mother. And aren’t they beautiful! I love French—it sounds so pretty. And I love English—it says so much. And I don’t know which I love the best, mother dear.”

“Love both, Petite, for both are wonderful, and stand for great things in the development of the whole world.

“And now you have seen ‘La Villa,’ will you mind very much if we don’t go inside? You can picture it from my description, and can fit in the rooms now, can’t you? And it might be disappointing if we found that the new owners had made changes, as they very likely have, and their own furniture would make a great difference, too, dear.”

“I shan’t mind, mother, for I know it would be terribly hard for you and poor grandmère, and now I can see it all if I close my eyes.

“And I’d like to picture the gardens as you described them to me—half wild, and with dear old plants greeting you just where you didn’t expect them, and every one having a perfume. That seems to me the dearest part of all—the little bride of hundreds of years ago deciding that her garden must ‘say things,’ and that only flowers with perfume said anything worth listening to. Wasn’t she a dear, mother!”

“To us, yes, Pet, for we too love the flowers that talk to us that way. And if the soul of the garden has been destroyed by modernizing, it would be a real grief to us. So it may be a blessing that we are not to go in, dear.”

Mrs. Avery had had the carriage halted close to the high part of the garden wall, where they were screened from observation but could look from an angle over the lower portion, and secure a fair view of the house and outbuildings.

“Now, dear, we must say good-bye. And we must never forget, you and I, that within us we have the blood of the little bride who made the garden, of the fearless, courageous pioneers who built and defended their home, and that we are the product of Guernsey sunshine and clear, pure air which should breed a deep love of beauty and of beautiful thoughts. And these are just a few of the blessings we must always remember.”

With a long last look they drove away, and the child said little on the homeward trip, for picture after picture flashed through the active brain, interwoven with the thoughts which the mother’s last words had aroused.

When they reached the house and joined Madame de Beauvais in the sitting-room, Delphine ran to kiss her, then standing close, lay her head on

the silk-covered shoulder and with one arm around the fragile body, she patted the white face which suddenly conveyed so much to the young mind.

The child did not speak, nor did she need to. The woman understood the wordless message, and when later they were alone together, she said to her daughter:

“Delphine is a most interesting blending of the English and the French characteristics, Jacquine, but which predominates?”

“It’s difficult to say, ma mère. Only this I know—she responds vividly to environment and emotion and in that she is surely French.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

Ideals Win.

The Averys' departure from the Island had been set for the last day of April. Avery Place had been leased, and all matters of business brought to the stage where they could be left in the hands of the solicitor.

The Neville family, who were taking over the estate, had two children—the elder, Wilhelmine, and the younger, Anthony, or Tony, as he was called. And Delphine was invited to spend an afternoon as their guest at Avery Place. This occurred two days before the Averys were to commence their homeward trip to Canada.

On the afternoon in question, the Neville carriage, with the governess and two children, called for Delphine to take her for a drive before going to Avery Place for games and tea.

Wilhelmine was a very pretty girl, markedly English in type, with large blue eyes shaded by long lashes, a rose-leaf complexion and brown hair which glinted with gold in the sunlight. She was gentle and sweet in her manner, and altogether appealed very greatly to Delphine.

Tony was so unlike as to make one think he must belong to another family. Dark-eyed as well as dark-haired, with a pugnacious little nose, a self-willed mouth, and imperious voice and manner, he seemed to challenge something in Delphine—just what she did not know.

Before greetings were fairly over, he began with:

“You're from Canada, aren't you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you see the Indians very often?”

“Yes, if I happen to be downtown. There are always some on the streets on Saturdays.”

“What do they do?”

“They sell wild berries in summer and baskets other times.”

“Is that all they do?”

“I don't know of anything else—except that sometimes they get drunk.”

“Do they scalp people very often?”

“No. They don’t do that nowadays. They live at the Indian Reservation, and they’re very quiet when they’re not drunk.”

“Have you seen many scalp-belts?”

“I’ve never seen any. They aren’t allowed to do anything like that now.”

“Huh! A girl wouldn’t know a scalp if it were dangling in front of her!”

“Tony, don’t be rude! Of course Delphine would know!” came from Wilhelmine.

“Tony, Delphine is your guest,” gently remonstrated Miss Porter, the governess.

They stopped at one of the lovely bays and had a race on the firm sand, then back to the carriage, returning to Avery Place for nursery-tea.

They were eating some hot scones, which were a treat in honour of their guest, when Tony inquired:

“Do you have hot scones for tea every day in Canada, Delphine?”

“No. We don’t have tea. We have dinner at half-past six.”

“Dinner? Do you go in to dinner every single day?”

“Of course. We all do that in Canada.”

“I don’t believe it. You’re spoofing!”

“What’s ‘spoofing’?”

“Joking—saying something that isn’t so, just to tease” said Wilhelmine.

“Then I’m not, for it’s truly true!”

“What do you do if there are guests?” asked Tony triumphantly, for this time he was sure he had caught her.

“We have all our meals with our parents, whether there are guests or not.”

“Oh gee!”

“Tony, that word is forbidden.”

“I’ll bet Delphine says it. The Burnham children do and they’ve been to America. You say it, don’t you, Delphine?”

“No, I don’t, Tony. Mother doesn’t like it.”

“Well, aren’t your people funny! Have you sit at the table with them all the time, and won’t allow you to say ‘gee’!”

“They’re not a bit funny! Mother says it’s a young country and different because it’s young, and that if we live there we must do as other people do.” And Delphine’s dark eyes flashed. No one could pass slighting remarks about her people and have them go unchallenged.

“Tony, you’re being frightfully rude, and I’m thoroughly ashamed. Please forgive him, Delphine. He acts like a little bounder sometimes” said his distressed sister.

This evidently touched Master Tony on a sore spot, for he flamed into sudden passion. “I’m not a bounder. And if I am, you’re a bounder’s sister!” And jumping from his chair, he ran behind hers, giving the long curls a vicious tweak as he passed.

“Tony! Leave Wilhelmine’s hair alone and take your place at the table at once!”

It was very evident that the post of governess would not be filled easily or pleasantly where Tony Neville was concerned. The only son and a domineering nature as well, he had been completely spoiled by a doting mother, who had been greatly disappointed that the first child born to her and her very autocratic husband had been a girl. So when Anthony junior arrived, no wish of his that she could grant, or conveniently not see, was opposed, with the result that his bad qualities were developing at the expense of those which should have been fostered.

When they began their games, they played some English ones, and Delphine taught them others enjoyed by the children of Canada.

At last, in a game of “Blind Man’s Buff,” Tony accused Wilhelmine of peeping, and when this was denied, began to quarrel most violently, finally rushing from the room in a fit of passion.

Before this had occurred, the governess had left them, saying that she would return in a few minutes, but before she arrived Tony had rushed back into the nursery, brandishing in his two hands a sword which he had taken from its scabbard where it hung in the hallway, and with teeth set and showing wickedly between his drawn-back lips, rushed at his sister, with the evident intention of striking her with all his might.

For a moment both girls were paralysed, then Delphine leapt at him and fought against the upraised arms.

“You shan’t do that! You shan’t do that! She’s your sister, and she’s a girl! You’re worse than a little bounder—you should be put in jail! You’re wicked! Take it away! Take it away, I say!”

Terror, combined with her blaze of anger, made her invincible, and she forced him back and out of reach of Wilhelmine.

As his temper somewhat waned, he dropped the sword-point to the floor, glowering at his sister the while, and threatening what he would do to her, but Delphine cut him short.

“You won’t do any such thing. Take that sword back where you found it!”

“I won’t!”

“You shall—at once!”

“I won’t, and you can’t make me!”

“I can and I will! Take it back!”

“I won’t, I won’t, I won’t! So there!” he blustered.

By this time, Delphine’s face was blazing, and her eyes like points of light.

“Tony, if you don’t take that back at once, I shall go to my father and tell him you’re not fit to be trusted in our house, and I’ll tell him why, and he’ll tell your father he can’t have Avery Place because he has a wicked son who tried to kill his sister! Now take it back—at once!”

He could not doubt her word, and he knew that he could never go that far with his father, so, muttering to himself, he sullenly left the room, dragging the sword after him, just as the governess entered by another door.

“What is the matter, children?” for Wilhelmine, now the tension was relaxed, had dropped upon the couch in tears, burying her face in one of the cushions.

Raising her, Miss Porter repeated the question, “What is the trouble, Wilhelmine?” and between her sobs the little girl replied:

“Tony was going to kill me, and Delphine stopped him!”

Bit by bit the story came out, for the embarrassing questions were not put to Delphine. The governess’ eyes took on a determined aspect, and her lips tightened as Tony swaggered into the room, hands in pockets, and whistling in an effort to appear unconcerned.

“Tony, you will go to your room and to bed, at once. Otherwise this very serious matter must be reported to your father. You will say good-bye to Delphine now.”

“Oh, dash it all! I don’t want to do that! Don’t be a bally fool, Will! You know I wouldn’t hurt you. But you do make me rage sometimes! I’m sorry, Delphine. I’m sorry, Miss Porter. I won’t do it again. Now that’s all right, isn’t it?” And he turned to Delphine to ask the question.

There was something very engaging about Tony Neville when he wanted it so, and he wanted it now. Delphine Avery was not to carry away the remembrance of his disgrace if he could help it.

She was regarding him with such a mixture of amazement, curiosity and antagonism as to be a new experience. Appealed to directly, she replied with a question.

“Don’t you know anything about ‘Noblesse oblige?’ ”

A quiver passed over Miss Porter’s stern lips, but the child did not see it—she was too intent in her regard of the unruly boy.

“What do you mean by ‘Noblesse oblige?’ ” he asked, as he kicked at the leg of the couch.

“People who are born into a noble family should live noble lives, and that doesn’t mean losing your temper, and trying to hurt someone.”

“I don’t care. *I’m* not French, anyway!”

“It isn’t French. It’s only *said* in French. It’s true for any family at any time. And you ought to feel that way if you’re going to live in Avery Place. Our people always have—most of them, anyway.”

“Huh! I’ll be one that doesn’t, then. I couldn’t be bothered. Come on, let’s play!”

Knowing her charge, Miss Porter realized that the truth had struck home, and privately wished that the Canadian child could associate for a much longer period with the untrained son and heir. However, she had declared herself, and so was bound to follow it up.

“You will say good-bye to Delphine, Tony, and then take your choice.”

Ordinarily there would have been another battle of wills, but somehow Tony did not desire to exhibit further before their guest, so he held out his hand.

“Good-bye, Delphine. Hope you come to Guernsey again soon. And write and tell me if you ever see an Indian scalp a white man. Good-bye.” And carrying matters with utmost nonchalance, he marched out of the room, hands thrust into pockets, and whistling as he departed.

Miss Porter entertained the two girls with some illustrated periodicals, telling about places she had visited, and getting them calmed and quiet before Delphine was to be taken home.

When at last they entered the carriage for the return drive to Madame de Beauvais’, each was her normal self again, and on saying good-bye were genuinely sorry to part.

When Mrs. Avery went to tuck Delphine into bed and say good-night, her daughter asked:

“Mother, why do people who are unworthy have happiness and blessings that others who are truly trying to be worthy can’t have?”

“You are asking a very profound question, Petite. What caused you to think of it, dear?”

“Tony Neville, mother.” And the story of the afternoon’s experience came out.

“And why should Tony Neville be able to live in Avery Place when he doesn’t love our traditions, and why can’t we, when we do try to live up to them? It isn’t fair, mother. Is it?”

“You have opened a very big question, Petite, and all I can say is to tell you how it seems to me.

“I believe Life to be like a grade in a great school for the development of our character. I think there are further steps ahead, though where and when I do not know. But all the time we are building. Every act, every thought are building processes. I believe that each one of us has our own part to play in the advancement of our race. We do that first in ourselves, and then in our contact with others.

“I am sure that for some reason we do not know yet we were needed in Canada—perhaps for our own progress, possibly to assist others. But at any rate, what we possess in houses and lands does not mean anything compared with what we are in our hearts and in our minds.

“Some people appear not to know this, and they will have to learn. Tony will have to learn, dear, and perhaps it was necessary for him to be in Avery Place in order to get that lesson.

“The things you and I must master may lie along different lines, and so we have been sent to a new land, to new conditions, and to new people for our development. And though we shall always love the home of our people, still our greatest responsibility is our own life, and how that life influences others with whom we come in contact.

“So you see, dear, it *is* fair if our greatest opportunity lies in work and effort, that that opportunity shall be ours, though it lead us through struggle and self-denial, and even sorrow and great loss.

“But we shouldn’t think of what may happen, Petite. We must live each day as it comes, do the best we can in it, and then we shall be prepared to meet the future, whatever it may contain.

“Now, good-night, dear. Say a little prayer for Tony. Every good thought is a help to someone, Pet, and it would seem he needs that help.”

Alone with her husband, she told him of Delphine’s perplexity, and how she had tried to meet it.

“I felt as if I were suddenly turned into an animated catechism, James. And indeed, for a moment I hardly knew whether it were wise to attempt to put it into words or not. What do you think?”

“That you are a real mother, Beth, for you are concerned with every aspect of Delphine’s development. I believe that you were right—no matter how hard it was—to try to make it clear to the child as it appears to you. When her mind conceived the question, then it was ready for the answer, and that answer undoubtedly should be the truth, at least as far as we see it.

“She really grows more interesting every day—our ewe lamb—doesn’t she, wife-of-mine? But why shouldn’t she, with such a mother?”

CHAPTER XXV.

Au Revoir and Good-Bye.

The departure of the Averys from the beautiful little island was made with reluctance, and to the parents of Delphine it marked a definite milestone in the life of each.

Elizabeth found the farewell to mother and brother poignant in the extreme. It was not "au revoir," but "good-bye" that she bade to the stately old lady, for the delicate face rose white and fragile above the silvery grey silk dress with the touches of lavender and old lace that seemed an essential part of herself, and the daughter's loving eyes knew that life's span was narrowing rapidly for the mother she adored.

To her brother she gave both love and sympathy, but the separation of the years had led them along such different paths that common ground was small in compass and of indifferent value.

Her own meeting of life's problems, disappointments and sufferings, had been so brave (though this she would have scouted) that she found it difficult to realize that this only brother was allowing life to dominate him, instead of wresting strength and growth from the experience.

Of his failing strength she did not know, otherwise her quick pity would have overlooked all. As it was, she had no idea that she was seeing him also for the last time.

James Avery, too, felt the clinging of invisible hands in this relinquishing again of former ties and old contacts. But the fruit of his years of struggle awaited him in Canada, and the vigour of his young manhood gave zest to the thought of renewed effort toward ultimate attainment.

Then for him there was the comforting assurance that the home of his birth was still in his possession, to which he might, and undoubtedly would, return at some future time.

For Delphine, there mingled with the youthful acceptance of events a passionate love and yearning for the home of her father, which led her repeatedly to voice her desire that they might remain longer in the beautiful Channel island. And to her cherished "Grandmère" she clung as if, with the occasional prescience of childhood, she knew that when she would return,

the gracious figure would live in memory only, and that touch and sight would not know her again.

It was a crisp, cool day toward the end of May when they steamed out of the harbour. Waving a last farewell to the little group remaining on the wharf, the three drew closer together, as though silently to share one another's sorrow at the parting.

The Channel was rough, as usual, and quickly demonstrated the fact to the travellers.

"Beth, don't go down to the cabin. Let me tuck you and Delphine into this cosy corner with your rugs around you. You will feel far more fit if you do."

"Thank you, James. This is never a happy part of the trip. Is it?" And she smiled bravely up to the solicitous face bending over her. He understood, and said softly, "Poor little Jacqueline!" For he knew that for the moment she was neither wife nor mother, but daughter only.

"I'd like to cuddle in beside you on this seat, mother. It isn't a bit the same as my wonderful ocean. I think I'd like to sit down!" And the little one looked as she very evidently felt.

Sheltered from the wind, and wrapped snugly in their rugs, they both began to feel better, and when the father had left them while he smoked a cigar as he paced the deck, Delphine slipped her hand into her mother's and said shyly:

"When you're lonely for Guernsey and grandmère, mother dear, may I call you 'Mother Jacqueline!?' I think it's the sweetest name I ever heard, and I'm sure you want to hear it sometimes, too. You know, I love 'Beth,' mother. It's so cuddly, and 'Elizabeth' is so proud and strong, but 'Jacquine' is all of these things with something from the little bride's garden of flowers that say things, too. May I, mother?" And as her mother's hand gently patted her own because her voice could not be trusted to reply in quite her usual tone, Delphine accepted the unspoken answer and continued,

"You know, mother, when I'm grown up and have a child of my own, I'm going to call her Jacqueline, then she'll have to grow like her name. They always do, you know. You're just exactly 'Jacquine,' and Uncle Henry looks 'Henry,' but nobody would dream of calling him 'Harry,' for that means laughter and fun and easy-to-meet, but 'Henry' is grave and cold and stand-offish."

"Aloof, Petite?"

“That’s the exact word, mother, And isn’t he just like the nicotiana flower? When it’s open, it’s so wonderfully sweet, then it just closes up, and while it really is there, it doesn’t seem to be at all!”

Her mother laughed involuntarily, for the description of her brother by means of the flower was perfect.

“You haven’t told me what grandmère is, Delphine.”

“I haven’t found her yet, mother. I’ve thought of her sometimes as that pansy of ours that’s pale mauve shading out to grey. The perfume fits, and the sweet look in her eyes, but it isn’t just right. I think she’s a flower I haven’t seen yet, for even that dear pansy seems a little too ordinary for grandmère.”

“I understand, Petite, but I think you’ll find her, some day.”

“I’m sure I shall, mother dear.” And contented that her mother had laughed, she continued, “May I go and look for father, now?”

“Yes, if he’s on deck, dear. Don’t go below. You may not feel so well if you do, for it’s hot and close down there.”

They reached the English port late in the afternoon, and Delphine noticed, as she had in Guernsey, the great difference between the cities of the old land and the new.

“It looks as if it had just been house-cleaned, and no children to muss it up again! And the houses never will get old and shabby, or the streets untidy. Even the beach looks as if the lawn-roller had been used on it! Somehow I like it, father, but I think I’d like the countryside and lanes better!”

But Delphine was not to see the much-anticipated country on this trip, for in order to reach the Allan liner leaving Liverpool that week, the boat-train again had to be taken. Otherwise, a seven-day delay would have been the penalty, and this too great a sacrifice in time and money to be entertained.

They enjoyed a little of the Old-World quaintness and charm before the twilight hid the details of the landscape, and caused them to turn to other interests to occupy time and attention.

Delphine found the railway coaches with first, second and third-class compartments odd in the extreme, and frankly did not like them nearly as well as the more airy and open Pullmans of Canadian lines, though the privacy of the first-class had its own pleasures and attractions. But one aspect of English trains was most noticeable and appreciated, and that was

their speed and the smooth quiet of their locomotion. It was fascinating to watch the lights of a city fly by as the train swept into it with the swift clean motion of a bird coming to rest, and with a like absence of jar in stopping. This was so greatly in variance with Canadian transportation that it seemed to outweigh every other consideration, for by closing one's eyes tight one could really fancy they, too, were a bird taking a flight into the vast heaven and looking down upon a world that would surely resemble the maps in one's "geography"—or was it "grammar"?—such perplexing words when one was so sleepy! So very sleepy that when morning came there remained only a confused memory of lights and the bustle of a station, father's arms and a cab, and after that no more till the moment of waking.

The steamer was the "Mongolian," a sister-ship to the "Numidian" of their journey over, and this, too, was a source of disappointment.

Delphine was sure it wouldn't be nearly so nice—that the captain wouldn't be so indulgent to small girl passengers—that the passengers could not have another Mr. Leeson amongst them, and that the nicest doctor they could get wouldn't be anywhere near her own Doctor Taylor—and he needn't call her "Winsome," anyhow! She just wouldn't have that! Until at last her mother remarked:

"Petite, dear. Don't you know we usually find what we look for, simply because we have eyes and ears only for that for which we are searching? So if you are sure you won't be happy on this voyage, why, of course you will not; and if our daughter does not accommodate herself to a situation that cannot be helped, I fancy that next time she had better remain at home and not come at all. Now come and lie down dear. A little sleep will help a very great deal, after last night's late hours, to make you see very differently when you wake up."

And the forecast was true, for the rest brought back vivacity of spirit as well as the roses to the little face, so the ship with its passengers did look interesting, but of course it couldn't quite compare with the ecstatic happiness of the first experience or the persons who had helped to make the ocean journey such a keen delight to the young daughter of Canada.

Ten days found them in Ontario once more, and with the proposed change of residence for the Averys, Delphine went immediately to visit Mern Waldie and the Lanes, who had recently moved to London, until her parents had settled in the new abode.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Love Is Treasuring.

“Oh, Auntie Mern! Auntie Mern!” And a small girl flew down the station platform and into the arms opened to receive her. “You don’t look a bit different! Isn’t that nice!” And with a great sigh of relief, she gazed contentedly up into the sweet face, while Mern Waldie inquired:

“Did you expect to find me changed, Petite?”

“Well, you see, it’s such a very long time since I saw you, auntie, and everything looks so different from Guernsey, that I thought perhaps you would too!”

It had been impossible for either Mr. or Mrs. Avery to accompany Delphine to London, so she had been placed in the care of the train-conductor who was well known to her father, and was met at the depot by Mern. After attending to the baggage, the two boarded the street-car for the Waldie home.

Delphine’s tongue had scarcely an idle moment, there was so much to tell the beloved aunt. Leaving the street-car, they had several blocks to walk to the house, and on the way caught sight of a group of boys playing ball in an empty lot.

Amongst them were Allan Waldie and Dick Arthur, and Mern was amused to see how elaborately unconscious both were of Delphine’s proximity; how intent upon the game; and how each was endeavouring to make some spectacular play which would impress the small visitor whom each secretly adored.

“I love to play ball, auntie, and I can hit with a boy’s bat, too, if it isn’t too large and heavy. But boys are so funny! They’ll play by themselves with girls, but when they all get together, they don’t want girls around at all! I think sometimes they’re just scared for us to know they do like to play with us.”

Mern smiled, for, being observant, she considered Delphine to be very near the truth—for a good many cases at least.

Delphine was loved to heart’s content by Mr. and Mrs. Waldie, and all the pets were visited and made much of, while every nook in the garden was

inspected for old and new flower-friends. The yearly planting of annuals had taken place, and those that had been started indoors were already looking quite at home in their changed abodes.

The lilies-of-the-valley were a great joy to Delphine.

“They’re all baby-faces, Mr. Waldie. Don’t you feel as if you could cuddle their faces in your hand, only they’re too little. They look like angel-babies who haven’t begun to think of coming to earth yet.” Then she began to tell him of the little bride’s garden at La Villa de la Rome, which she had only glimpsed but still felt that she knew so well.

“And we brought so many seeds from Guernsey, and mother and I are going to love them into flowers. And you should have seen dear old Tit-bits and Crackey, who gave them to me. Tit-bits looks just like a big brown potato, and Crackey like a Savoy cabbage—he’s so wrinkly. Oh, Mr. Waldie! *there’s* grandmère!”

Mr. Waldie had been keeping his most precious new possession till the last, and finally had brought the child to a warm corner under the large grapevine where hung an orchid, mist-grey and sunset-mauve, with one deep splash of wine near its heart, and a fragrance that stole into one’s senses like a measure of exquisite harmony.

Hands clasped against her breast, face upturned, and seeming scarcely to breathe, she stood gazing at the wonderful beauty of the exotic bloom.

“I knew I’d find her some day! It’s just like her, Mr. Waldie. Isn’t she lovely?”

An old and wealthy friend had bestowed the treasure on the flower-loving man, and lifting Delphine in his arms so that she could be near the plant, Mr. Waldie told her of the orchid’s habitat in tropical jungles; how men risked their lives continually in search for new and rare specimens, the lure of the search being greater than the danger involved. She listened absorbedly, then remarked:

“I’m sure there’s only one like grandmère, Mr. Waldie. And anyone would go anywhere to find her! I wish mother could see it!”

“Are all your friends flowers, Petite?”

“My friends are; if they’re not nice, kind vegetables.”

“Am I a vegetable, Petite?”

“Oh, no, Mr. Waldie! You’re the loveliest, big Scotch thistle I ever saw!”

This brought a hearty laugh from the genial Scotsman.

“Am I as prickly as all that, Petite?”

“No. You’re not the prickly stalk at all, though it’s beautiful to look at, and strong and dignified, too, but you’re mostly the lovely purple flower, soft as velvet, and so sweet the bees and hummingbirds like it too. I just love the Scotch thistle, Mr. Waldie!” And while a small hand slipped into his, brown eyes beamed deep affection into the kindly face above.

“And is Mrs. Waldie a Scotch thistle too, Petite?”

“Oh, no, Mr. Waldie!” with a shocked look that almost said “How could you suggest such a thing!” “She’s a dear daisy—the one she calls ‘wee, crimson-tippet flower.’ It’s tiny, but such a happy little thing, and blooms, and blooms and blooms all summer and as long as it can in the fall, and if it were taken in the house I’m sure it would bloom all winter, too. And that’s just like Mrs. Waldie. She blooms for everybody all the time, doesn’t she?”

“Aye, lassie. An’ whit’s Mern?” He always lapsed into a strong Scotch accent when deeply stirred, as he was by the reference to the shy little woman who had been his sweetheart, wife and helpmate through the long years of their married life.

“Auntie always makes me think of apple blossoms and spring, and a tiny brook, like the one in the Lanes’ orchard, and birds singing, and sunshine, and rain, and loveliness anyway, all the time.”

“Aye, she’s like thet, tu, lassie. She’s a bonnie gur-r-rul. An’ what might yersel’ be, Pet?”

“I’m afraid I’m not anything yet, but I want to be a deep, deep red rose, all velvety and winey-red, and a perfume you can’t forget! Do you think if I want it all the time, and just terribly hard, that perhaps I could grow like one, Mr. Waldie?”

“Yes, ah believe ye can, an’ while ye’re just a bit bud the noo, ah believe ah can see a wee glisk o’ red a-peepin’ oot.” And with all seriousness he held her off and apparently studied the piquant face that was so dear to his understanding heart.

At this moment, Allan came vaulting over the low gateway, causing his father to look up and remark,

“Here’s Allan, the scamp! What’s he like?”

“Oh, Mr. Waldie! Isn’t he just like a mud-pie!” For hands and face and clothes gave evidence of the hours of play on a field muddy from recent rains, and made worse by energetic feet.

Allan’s face reddened furiously, even his hands showed his mortification, for they seemed huge and red and clumsy in a moment.

Sensing immediately the boy’s chagrin at her simile, and the laughter that followed, Delphine ran to him, her contrition apparent in tone and words.

“I’m so sorry I said that, Allan! But you do look funny!” Eyes twinkled and lips curled up with restrained merriment.

“I slid for second, once. Guess I mopped up the lot. But I made it!” And he threw up his head triumphantly.

“Good for you! That’s grand! I saw you and Dick when auntie and I passed, but neither of you would look at us! Don’t knights salute their ladies when they see them?”

“Yes, of course they do! But you know, sometimes they’re not supposed to see.”

“O-o-o-h!” And with the dawning meaning the word came slowly to completion.

An interested observer, the father remarked, “You’d best go and make yourself fit to be seen, laddie.” And as Allan disappeared, he added:

“Boys do that, Petite, but when they do, we’re not expected to notice it. They’re queer little tykes, but they get over their bashfulness after awhile.” And he chuckled reminiscently.

“They are different from girls. Aren’t they? Girls would have looked—lots of times! I don’t know a great deal about boys, for you see, I only know other girls’ brothers. But I like them, Mr. Waldie. I like the way they fight and make up and are better friends than ever. We don’t. We just get mad and stay mad, and it’s not a bit happy! I think girls have more dragons to slay than boys, don’t you?”

“Perhaps so, lassie. But we all have plenty, and the difference in to-day is that the fine and noble woman doesn’t sit down and let the man do all the fighting. She wants to help, and she does! This sounds strange from an old man, Petite, but I only have to look at my own wife and your sweet mother to see that, little one.”

“I like that, Mr. Waldie. I like doing things, too!—There’s Mrs. Waldie calling us. May I say good-bye to ‘grandmère’ first?”

The man’s blue eyes were very tender as he lifted the small girl while she put her lips to the lovely blossom with a kiss like a breath of summer air.

It was several days before the children had the opportunity to visit Dick, the swing and the delightful garden. When they arrived, it was to find their host very much brushed as to hair, clean as to face and hands, and smart as to new necktie—which was of a shade of red much beloved by the miniature woman.

He was deeply engrossed in a book, so deeply that Delphine thought of Mr. Waldie’s words, “They do that, Petite,” and then felt oddly relieved that she knew, for somehow she did not want an old book to cause Dick to forget that she was coming! Dick was her very first knight, you see.

“Hello, Elf! How do you like Canada now? I’m reading about Guernsey. Mother was telling someone the other day that you folk had been there, and they had a history of the Island, so I borrowed it. And it’s great! I’m reading it now. Want to see it?”

“Oh, please! I love it. It’s the most beautiful place on earth! Of course I haven’t seen them all, but I just know Guernsey is one of the loveliest anyway! You should see the pools in the rocks when the tide is out! You’d believe in fairies then, Dick. You just couldn’t help it!” And fully launched, Delphine began a vivid description of the fairy-like beauty on the rocky shore.

“Here’s a map of Guernsey, Elf.”

“Then this is where I saw the ‘fairies’ water-gardens.” And then followed a description of the quaint old town of St. Peter Port, the bays, the country roads, ending with Avery Place and La Ville de la Reine.

“After hearing you and reading the history, I feel as though I had been there, Elf! I shall go, some day, and talk with people who have been there, and then I’m going to travel—all over the earth.”

“I wish I were a boy! I’d do that, too. And I’d go hunting for gold, and diamonds and orchids. Wouldn’t that be fascinating?—Oh, Dick, are your pansies just as lovely this year? May I see them?”

“I should say so! But they’re not a patch on last summer’s. So many were winter-killed.”

Allan remained on the side verandah, interested in the old history, while Delphine and Dick went to the front garden.

When they reached the bed, Delphine stood still in dismay. The pansy plot was a wreck. Only a straggling few of the old plants remained, and while countless new ones were growing from last year's seed, still they were too young for flowers, and indeed it would be the end of the season before they would bloom in any profusion.

"How dreadful! How dreadful! All those dear faces gone! Whatever happened, Dick?"

Dick looked embarrassed and ashamed, but said in his manly way:

"It's my fault, Elf. Mother told me to cover them with leaves and manure, and I meant to, but just put it off, and a hard frost got them. I put it on then, but it was too late. Don't cry, Elf. I'm awfully sorry!"

Delphine's eyes had filled with tears, though she struggled valiantly to keep them from falling.

"Do they mean so much to you, Elf?" he asked curiously.

"They looked like little children in school with their faces all turned to their teacher. And now they're all gone!"

Disturbed and unhappy, Dick sought to placate.

"The lad's love is in great shape, Elf." He didn't say that somehow that had seemed a rather nice plant since the previous summer. "Have a piece?"

"Thanks, Dick. I lost the branch you gave me last year. And that's a dragon I've got to slay. I mean, I thought I was taking care of it, but I wasn't taking enough."

"Guess you're not alone, Elf. I've got an old thing to kill, too. Meaning to do a thing and then not doing it right away. But I will kill it. I've got your handkerchief, and I'm still your knight, you know! Let's have a swing!"

"Having a swing" really meant giving one to Delphine, but at least the subject of conversation changed, and, calling Allan, they raced to the old swing.

The three had a joyous time, and after Delphine had swung till she was satisfied, the boys took turns at standing on the seat, seeing how far up they could force the swing to go by their own strength aided by various clever manœuvres. The audience for each performance was all that could be

desired of admiration and solicitude from one, and critical appreciation, not untouched with envy, from the other.

But all good times come to a close, and at the end of a memorable afternoon, Allan and Delphine bade good-bye to their young host, returned to the Waldie home, and before long were each re-living the day's events in their own particular dreamland.

On waking the next morning, Delphine's first thought was of her lad's love. Whatever had become of it! It certainly was not in her room, so dressing as rapidly as she could, she ran to the garden to search along the paths. Not finding it there, she was thinking of the sidewalk when Mr. Waldie, whose work at intervals called for night-duty, opened the gate on his return home for breakfast and his daily sleep.

"Why, Petite! You're up early the morn, lassie. Were you coming to meet me?"

"I had intended to, Mr. Waldie, but I was looking for a flower that was given to me yesterday. I lost it on my way home."

"A flower? Since last evening? It won't have much life left in it now, Pet. It'll be like this piece of lad's love I found down the block. Someone had amused themselves picking it, and then left it to die." Saying which, he tenderly took from his coat pocket Dick's gift to Delphine.

The man and the child were very much at one in their love of all growing things, and Delphine's face crimsoned with mortification as she acknowledged:

"It's the flower I lost, Mr. Waldie, and I'm frightfully ashamed of myself. I didn't mean to be so careless, truly I didn't!"

"Sometimes it isn't that we're careless, lassie, so much as that we don't prize our gifts enough. 'Love' is 'treasuring,' my pet. All the little flower had to give was its life, and it wasn't fair to take that and then let it fall unheeded in the dust. Was it? Suppose we plant it, and put a piece of shingle to shield it from the heat of the sun, and water it carefully every day, and see if we cannot give it life again. Won't that be better than forgetting it and letting it die?"

"Oh, much better, Mr. Waldie. And I'll try so very hard to make it grow."

And the earnest care she gave it was rewarded, for before she left on her visit to the Lanes, the lad's love had lost its tired look, and appeared to have taken a new lease of life in the protecting confines of the Waldie garden.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Kisses or Pollywogs.

In order that the elder son might begin the collegiate course which would ultimately lead him to his heart's desire—the Church—the Lanes had leased their farm and taken a house on the outskirts of London. This was near enough for their purpose, and gave them a garden of ample proportions and splendid possibilities.

It also provided Fred with the opportunity to follow his mechanical bent, and a better chance to develop his undoubted business genius than could be afforded on an out-of-the-way farm.

On the day following the advent of Delphine, Mr. and Mrs. Lane had to go to the city on matter connected with the farm lease. This left Delphine at home in the care of a young French girl who was living with the Lanes as companion-help.

Riette Tourgeon was a very lovable girl, and her speech with its quaint French accent and inflections, was a great joy to Delphine, but Fred teased her and everyone else, unmercifully, when his parents were not there to keep a watchful check on his exuberant spirits.

That he was too nearly a man for such antics did not appear to carry much weight. In age, there was only two years between him and his brother, but they were almost the antithesis in every other respect.

Will was large of frame, studious and a thinker, with a touch of mysticism and spirituality which lightened his somewhat phlegmatic temperament, while Fred was small, wiry, alert, quicksilver in action, both mental and physical.

On this afternoon Fred, arriving home about four o'clock, found Delphine curled up in a rustic chair under a tree, with the cat in her lap and her attention completely engrossed in a book which she had discovered in the Lanes' library.

Fred wasn't any too clean after his day away from home, and he knew it. He also knew how fastidious the small girl visitor was, and the opportunity was too tempting to be disregarded.

“Hallo, Del! What’s the book? And why pet the kitten when I’m around? Give me a kiss—won’t you? You haven’t kissed me for ages, you know, and I’ll bet you’ve been loving that beastly cat!”

“Yes, I have. She’s nice! And I won’t kiss you. I told you so long ago!”

“What! That old stuff? Oh, yes you will! I’m nicer now, even if I am a bit dirty at present. I’m going to have that kiss, Del.”

Book and cat were tumbled to the ground. “You’re not!” And off she flew like the wind, around the house, with the nimble boy at her heels.

But Delphine could run, and she managed for awhile to keep ahead. However, time told, and she began to feel winded.

Not far from the kitchen door was a huge rain-barrel, and intuition telling her that her pursuer was doubling back to meet her, she dodged into the corner made by the barrel and house, hoping that he would think that she had gone indoors, and she would then have time to get her breath and steal to some safe hiding-place.

Her plan nearly succeeded, but not quite, for the red hair-ribbon she so delighted in gave her away just as Fred was about to tiptoe into the kitchen door.

With a whoop, he pounced on her, lifting her up in his wiry arms the while she struggled and fought, silently, but with all her strength.

“Got you now, Del. Come on and give me a kiss. Never mind the dirt. You can’t get away, you know!”

“I won’t! Let me go!”

“Not till you give me that kiss! Come on, Del! It won’t take a minute.”

“I won’t! Let me go! I hate you!”

“Ugh! You’re a little tiger-cat! Come on, Del! I’ll dip you in the rain-water barrel if you don’t!”

“Oh, don’t! It’s all full of pollywogs!”

“Kiss me, then!”

“No, I won’t!”

“Then here goes!—Kiss me?”

“No!—Oh, don’t, Fred! I hate pollywogs!”

“Kiss me?”

“No! O-o-o!” ending with a scream which choked into gurgles as Fred, turning her head-downwards, slowly lowered her nearer and nearer and then into the water.

He really thought she’d give in before it touched her face, which was hidden by her mass of curls and outstretched, frantic arms, so that until the gurgle came, he hardly realized he had gone so far.

But someone else did. Coming in the front gate, Will Lane heard the agonized scream, and tearing past the side of the house, he called out:

“Fred, what are you doing? I’m coming, Delphine!” But before he got there, Fred, the nimble, had set Delphine on her feet and was scrambling up over the summer-kitchen to a safe place on the roof of the main part of the house.

The noise and confusion brought Riette from her sewing to see what was happening, and as she appeared in the doorway, she found Will hugging the small, forlorn figure, whose streaming hair and dripping arms were rapidly saturating the remainder of her clothing, the while he questioned:

“Petite! What is the matter? How did you get wet? What was Fred doing?”

“Oh, Will! I’ve swallowed some pollywogs! Will they turn into frogs inside of me?”

“Pollywogs? Frogs? What are you talking about, Petite?”

Shaking, but tearless, she recounted the incidents leading up to the ducking, and ended with “and frogs are pollywogs when they’re little and I must have swallowed millions of them! Won’t they come hopping out of my mouth when I talk?”

The wet arms clung around his neck, and the tragic face, framed in its dripping hair, pleaded for the answer she was terrified to hear.

“No, Petite, they won’t. Don’t tremble so, dear. You know I wouldn’t say so if it were not true. See!” And lifting her up to the edge of the huge tank, he said:

“Now, watch how they whisk down towards the bottom as soon as they see even the shadow of my hand, and they go faster when I plunge my hand in. So even if you did drink some water, they would be a long way down before your head got that far in. I’m sure you didn’t swallow any. Now, Pet, don’t think any more about it, and Riette will take you in and dry your hair. I’ll be busy for awhile.”

The French girl had been hovering around, eyes full of concern, and soft voice crooning over the child. “La pauvre petite!” And only tardily did the realization of what had taken place come to her. Then the dark eyes flashed as she ejaculated, “Ah, mon Dieu! M’sieur Fred! Il est du diable! Nevaire mind, leetle Delphine. Come with Riette, and some nize clothes ve vill change.”

Will watched the two girls into the house, his face growing more set and stern with every passing moment. Under the controlled exterior, his anger against his brother raged fiercely.

Thrusting clenched hands into his coat-pockets—a habit he had when fighting for self-control—he strode to the rear of the house and called “Fred, I want you!”

“Oh, do you? Well, I’m repairing the roof, old top. Can’t come just now.”

And following the mocking voice with his eyes, Will caught sight of Fred straddling the ridge-pole of the main portion of the house, and pretending to examine intently the condition of the shingles in his immediate vicinity.

The tone was the last straw. Will’s temper blazed.

“Come down, you bully! A man who would force caresses from a girl hasn’t a vestige of right to be called a man! Come down and take your medicine!”

“And who deputed you to administer it, my angel brother? Aren’t you kicking up an awful fuss over a kid?”

“You’ve broken two laws of common decency! Instead of being a protector, you’ve been a frightener of children, and in place of a host, you act the bully from the gutter. And now you’re a coward to boot. You cad!”

“Don’t call me that, you big preacher! You take that back!” And stung at last in a vulnerable spot, Fred swung passionately around to clear the edge of the gable and find a foothold on the window below. But anger and action are sometimes ill friends, and before either could see how it came about, Fred fell and bumped, rolled and thudded his way to the ground, which he struck with a sickening impact.

White as death, Will raced to the huddled figure lying partly on the slat walk and partly on the grass.

“Freddie boy, are you hurt? Speak to me, old chap! I say, Fred! Look up, old man!—Oh, God! I’ve killed him!” And gathering the limp body into his arms, he carried it into the house.

Riette was in the midst of drying Delphine’s hair, preparatory to changing the damp dress and petticoat, when they heard the noise on the roof.

Running to the bay window on the side from which the noise came, they saw Will pick up the thin form which all at once seemed so pathetically frail and immature. They rushed to open the door just as the burdened figure loomed through the glass panel.

“Mother’s room, Riette. Quick! He’s hurt!” He did not voice the greater fear clutching like an icy hand at his heart. Then as he laid him gently down, Fred’s eyes opened as he groaned with pain, and subsided again into unconsciousness.

“He’s not dead, thank God! Riette, bring some cold water and a sponge.” And while this was being procured, Will loosened tie and collar, opened the shirt-front, and fanned the white features.

Gently as a mother he bathed the still face, and presently the eyes opened again, though heavy and clouded with pain.

“Where’s the hurt, old chap?” And as Will uttered the words, the parents entered the house.

The few quick questions were answered by the elder son, and Will took upon his own shoulders the blame for the fall.

“I was savage and I taunted him. It made him hot, and he was too angry to take care. It was my fault, the accident. I’ll never forgive myself if he’s injured seriously.”

Fred’s eyelids fluttered, then opened, and a look of such affection shone out toward the elder brother as perhaps had never been witnessed there before, and he said slowly, but with evident pain,

“You—generous—old—duffer! I deserve—everything—all you said—all I got!” And he closed his eyes. “Tell Del—I’m sorry. Won’t do it again.”

The small girl was standing at the side of the group where his eyes could not follow, but she heard, and like a flash was at his head.

“I’ll kiss you, Fred!” and suited the action to words. “I’m sorry I was so mean! Are you hurt very much?” And with arm encircling his head on the

pillow, she patted his cheek with the other hand as if he had been the baby her mother-heart delighted in.

“Not much. Look out! I’m going to sit up.”

But he didn’t, for with the effort to move, he wilted in a dead faint.

The collar-bone had been broken, and for some weeks Fred carried a daily reminder of his fault in his useless, strapped-up arm.

Only once was the cause referred to in a direct way, and then it was the father who did so. Fred was fussing over the inactivity, and Mr. Lane said quietly:

“I am not regretting the lost time, the inconvenience or the pain, son. You planted distress, it was but fair that you should reap distress. I am hoping that in the future you will choose your seed more carefully, and not for your own sake. For remember, that with every troublesome weed that we allow to spread, others suffer as well as we, and we have no right to breed that which may become a menace to our neighbours and associates. Think on this, son. I want my boys to be planters of grain, not idlers amongst the tares.”

“Will’s a planter, pater.” While he thoughtfully stubbed his toe into a grass-root.

“We each make our own choice, son, and no one can do it for us.”

“You’re right, father. And he was right, too. I’ve been no end of a cad.”

“Then change your methods, son. Half the harvest lies in first recognizing the conditions.”

“I’ll try, dad!” And the young hand gave an affectionate half-shake, half-strong grasp to the older arm as he passed on his way.

Delphine became better friends with her old-time torment than she had ever been before, but he never presumed on the new relations.

When the time for her departure arrived, she went freely to him and lifted her face for a caress.

“Am I better than pollywogs, now, Del?”

She flushed a little, but replied bravely “When you’re nice, you’re very nice, Fred.”

“And when I’m bad, I’m horrid, eh, Petite?” But he kissed her gently and with a little touch of respect, amidst the laughter which followed the

bantering reply.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

New Contacts.

Several houses were submitted to the Averys for their inspection and consideration on their return from England. The choice was not easy to make, especially after their recent contact with old associations and former conditions. Then, too, there were many things to be reckoned with, and not the least was the water supply.

Of course there was the city water system, but one of the properties boasted a spring which had a history as old as the city itself, and had never been known to run dry even in the worst periods of drought of which the district had any record.

Another house—"The Turrets," situated in the heart of the town, was a great temptation.

"I want that for you, Beth. It seems the most fitting that has come anywhere near our means, and I would so like to see you in a home more suitable to you and the hospitality you could dispense so regally."

Beth Avery blushed like a girl at the compliment.

"Thank you, James. I appreciate that exceedingly, but there are two others to be thought of in this decision and I could not allow your love to forget all for me. 'The Turrets' is beautiful, restful and satisfying in that respect, but it would take two maids to care for it, and the grounds would demand a gardener in constant attendance. This we could not afford, while we retain Avery Place. That decision was good I am sure, so we shall not allow ourselves any regret concerning it.

"The house on Waverly Street is plain, substantial, large enough for us and yet small enough for Empsey and me to take care of. The back garden will afford ample opportunity in the attention to trees and vines which we may plant, for the out-of-door exercise you need and desire. There is plenty of play-space for Delphine and her companions. The water is excellent, the neighbourhood is good, and the school that Delphine will attend is one of the best in the city. I feel that that should be our choice."

"Right you are, Beth, only I would give my wife the best if I could."

“You are, in that which is best for all.” And slipping her hand into his in one of her rarely demonstrative moods, they passed out of the attractive residence with but an appreciative backward glance at its beauty, content in having arrived at the best decision possible for all concerned.

The house on Waverly Street was of white brick, two and a half stories high, and though containing but nine rooms, was a typical residence of the average prosperous business or professional man in that busy railway centre.

A quite spacious drawing-room opening with a wide archway into the but slightly smaller sitting-room, gave a very pleasing setting for the daily life. The dining-room had at one end a tiny apartment which was later used as a sewing-room. These two looked out on the large back garden which, under the Avery’s care, was to become a veritable paradise of fruit and flowers.

There were verandahs at front, side and rear, and whether open as in summer, or closed in with great glass windows as in winter, provided comfort as well as pleasure the year round.

Of the four bedrooms, they had allotted the one on the third floor, and covering the entire house, to Delphine, and when she saw it her delight was beyond question.

“Oh, mother! father! This is just gorgeous! My really-bedroom is this end, and the other my playroom and study! And a desk and bookshelves all my own! And letter-paper, too. Won’t I have lots to write grandmère, and Mr. Waldie, and Auntie Mern and Dick and Will Lane, and my dear, dear doctor, and oh, just everybody! Won’t it be fun!

“And I can have Nessa and Eileen up here to play! It’s going to be just wonderful!”

“As wonderful as Avery Place, Delphine?”

“Oh, father! No house could be as nice as Avery Place—except La Villa de la Reine.” And she looked shyly at her mother. “But they’re old and traditiony, and this is new and waiting for us to make it say things. I think we can do it quite nicely, here!”

And they began their plans to “say things” in the garden as soon as possible.

“We’re very late, but shall we try sweet-peas, Petite?”

“Oh yes, mother. Let’s! Perhaps with extra loving we can coax them to bloom. And what about roses and pansies, and forget-me-nots, and musk

and portulaca, and petunias, and nicotiana, and geraniums? Then there's Tit-bits' wallflowers and primroses too, mother!"

Mrs. Avery laughed. "Where shall I begin, Petite? That's a whole garden, almost. Well, let me see. We shall go to the florist's for rose-bushes and some pansies and forget-me-not roots. And we'll plant the others right away.

"The wallflowers and primroses won't bloom this summer, but we can try to have them grow into strong healthy plants, then in the fall cover the roots with plenty of straw to keep them warm, and take a few into the house for the winter to see which do the better next year."

"Mother, may we have a pink moss-rose? That's you, you know. And I would like a deep, deep red rose. I want to grow like one, mother, and Mr. Waldie thinks I can if I try hard, and I could try better if I had one to look at all the time.

"And couldn't we plant morning-glories all up the side of the barn. Barns aren't pretty and glories are so lovely."

This too was approved of, and the flower-garden progressed rapidly while orders were placed for trees, berries and grape-vines to be planted in their special season.

Delphine and her father spent many hours together in the absorbing problems presented in both house and garden to make it distinctively their own, and to express themselves as far as the general limitation permitted.

"You're a great little helper, Delphine, almost as good as a boy," her father commented as one evening she was painstakingly shellacking the knots in some V-jointing her father had used to make a linen closet across one end of the large bathroom.

She flushed up to her hair at the unexpected praise, then queried:

"Won't I ever be as good as a boy, father?"

"You may be as good in many ways, Pet, but there are things a boy can do that a girl can't, you know."

"Then I'll just have to be better than a boy! But Mr. Waldie says that women are beginning to do things that people used to think they couldn't do at all, and he says they're real helpmates when they do. I'm going to be that kind of a woman, father, and I'm going to do things women haven't at all, just as soon as I can."

“What things, Petite?”

“I want to be a doctor and bring babies to their mothers. That’s a great responsibility. You and mother want a boy, and every time Dr. Dalton brings one he chooses one that doesn’t live. I’d bring the ones that would live to people that want them, and the sick ones to those who don’t. I never thought there’d be anyone who didn’t want a baby, but I heard a lady on the boat tell Dr. Taylor that children were a great responsibility and babies a nuisance. She shouldn’t ever have one at all. I was afraid Dr. Taylor would take her one, so I asked him not to. Babies need arms that love them, and so do children.”

“You darling! They certainly do!” And much to Delphine’s surprise her father swept her off her feet with a hug and a kiss that left her breathless but supremely happy.

There was no swing at the new house, but when she was asked if she would like one, the unexpected reply was “No, thank you, father. I’m getting too old for that! Oh yes, I like a swing once in a while, but not to play on it as I used to. I would like a croquet set for the front lawn. May I have that instead?”

So the long-wished-for pleasure was provided, and contributed its share in making the summer speed by on wings of happiness. Nessa and Eileen spent many joyous afternoons with her, and the return visits were delights almost as keen to Delphine.

Mern Waldie and Mrs. Lane were guests at the new home during the holidays, which altogether seemed to pass in a remarkably swift way to the other summers Delphine could remember. Then came the end of August and school once more.

“They’ll ask you how to spell ‘Mississippi.’ Do you know?” queried one of the older neighbouring girls when talking about school-opening.

Round-eyed, Delphine silently shook her head. What an awful word! She hadn’t even heard it before!

“That’s one of the big rivers in the United States. You’d better get your geography out and study it. They’ll ask you heaps of questions before they decide which room you’re to be put in. And the principal is awfully cross! He shakes his finger and his bristly white head at you, and he growls!”

Delphine felt panicky inside, but she wasn’t going to allow it to be seen.

“Perhaps my teacher will be nice.”

“They’re none of them nice. They’re all cross!”

Delphine took heart at once. “Oh no, they aren’t! They never are! I’ve been to two schools already, and there’s always some dear teachers amongst them! If you think they’re all cross I guess you’ve been a very troublesome child! Mother says everybody is nice if you only find out their best side. So I just know I’m going to like my teacher!”

The “troublesome child” went off in a huff, telling some other children that “Del Avery’s stuck up,” which, in the vernacular of the moment, was the very acme of scorn.

The fateful day arrived, and despite the fact that a letter from her former school had been sent to the new one, with complete statement of standing, general ability and deportment, Delphine’s heart was thumping as she took her seat in the grade similar to the one she had been attending before her trip to England.

Names of those successful in the June examinations were read out, and the lucky individuals were marched to their new classroom to be enrolled and given the list of books needed for the ensuing year.

Delphine felt very lonely and forlorn in the midst of the array of empty seats, but before the incoming students appeared she was called to the teacher’s desk, and then taken to the principal’s room.

With visions of bristled head and shaking forefinger, and almost hearing the growls she had been told to expect, her heart seemed to pop up into her throat, and her hands grew cold as ice.

A knock on the door was followed by the sound of a heavy, irregular step, while a voice said, “John, take down the names of the class in the order in which they are sitting. You’ll find a paper on my desk.”

The door opened, and the owner of the voice appeared. “Yes, Miss Merilees?”

“This is Delphine Avery, Mr. Cameron, from Mr. Harding’s school.”

“Yes, I remember. Well, little maid. So you’re coming to study with us awhile?” (He’s just another dear grandfather! He isn’t a bit growly!) “Then we’ll have to make you right at home. Thank you, Miss Merilees. Just a moment, child.”

Re-opening his classroom door, he stood on the threshold while the talking subsided under his steady gaze.

“Young people! There’s one thing I always expect of my class. When I am called away from the room, I expect them to conduct themselves as if I were present. Remember, ‘snake’ is only one way of spelling ‘sneak.’ Don’t qualify for either.”

Delphine gasped, but in a flash she realized that he spoke kindly, but with every intention of being obeyed.

Wheeling with surprising swiftness, he closed the door, and said:

“Come with me, Delphine.” And, beginning to walk, she saw that he was lame, and that this was the reason for the uneven step she had heard crossing the floor.

Full of sympathy and pity, and reposing complete confidence in the kindly face and keen blue eyes, she only wished that she could slip her hand in his to show how nice she thought he was, but one of his pressed heavily on his cane, while the other was used to steady the withered leg at each step.

Delphine’s new teacher was a young woman, very modish in dress and capable in teaching, but utterly impersonal in her regard of her class. The child longed for Beth Paul’s personal interest though she did not recognize it as such—and endeavoured in her shy way to achieve it, but with no success. In discussing it with her mother one day she said;

“You know, mother, we’re not flowers, we’re not even weeds to Miss Haviland. We’re just like a lot of little toadstools. We come and go and all look alike, and aren’t much use for anything. We aren’t even mushrooms, for if we were, we’d be good for something! And she’s so ’dorably pretty! I wish I could get to her ‘nice side!’”

“But she’s an interesting teacher, isn’t she, Petite? So that must be her ‘nice side’ to you, dear.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

La Grippe.

As acquaintance with the new teacher and school friends progressed, Indian summer faded into autumn, and winter rushed to claim control of land and sea.

With its advent, there appeared in Europe and in Great Britain, a violent outbreak of what the French named "La grippe"—a severe form of "cold" which often developed into rapid pneumonia, sometimes even sending the sufferers completely out of their minds.

Death stalked abroad, touching its victims with icy fingers within a few hours after seizure, and sometimes plucking from life every member of a family, leaving in its wake a trail of horror, fear and desolation hardly paralleled since the "black plague."

Cablegrams and letters were constantly bringing the news of Old Country relatives and friends having succumbed, and amongst others came the word that Madame de Beauvais had fallen into the long sleep. Elizabeth Avery was an orphan, and Delphine was sure that the dearest and loveliest grandmother in the whole world had ceased to be with the passing of her cherished "grandmère."

For a while it was hoped that North America would escape the disease, but cases appeared in New York and Boston, in Halifax and Montreal, and the epidemic had begun its devastating work in North America.

Early one week a letter came to James Avery calling him to a business conference which would have far-reaching effects and was of the utmost importance.

His wife, following the shock of her mother's death, was not in her normal health, and he persuaded her to leave Delphine in the loving care of Empsey and go with him to London.

The conference was to take place on a Thursday, and he would return Friday for the always busy Saturday, leaving Elizabeth for the week-end with her friends.

One important phase of the discussion was a policy of "tightening-up" during the ensuing period in which was prophesied a demoralization of

general business activity through the advent of “the grip” and its consequences, which it was contended was already evident on the Atlantic seaboard.

Avery, with his optimistic mind and healthy body, laughed in derision at the idea that business in Canada would be seriously affected by the scourge, contending that only the fag-end was touching the Dominion, and that would quickly die out amongst a people whose food, housing conditions, and great land area, were so vastly different from those of the older countries.

“Don’t be too sure, young man. You’ve got a cold yourself!”

“I? Nonsense. It was a bit chilly in the train this morning—that’s all. I’m fit as a fiddle!” And, unconsciously, he straightened his fine physique as though to defy the menace to come near him.

However, the majority were against him, and the general policy was adopted after prolonged discussion, pro and con.

A heavy snowstorm throughout the day had put the street-car system out of commission, and vehicles for hire were unobtainable. This meant tramping to the depot through snow-drifts up to his knees, then a long cold journey, for the storm had developed into a blizzard and defied all efforts to warm the coaches.

Like street conditions met him in Farborough, and he arrived at his home with a severe chill.

A scalding drink and heavy dose of quinine ensured him, he thought, fitness for the next day, but by morning he was burning with fever and when he attempted to rise was so giddy he could not stand.

Calling the housekeeper, he directed, “Send Delphine for Dr. Dalton. I’m not feeling very well, but I must be out to-morrow.”

So, instead of going to school, Delphine was sent on the long errand to the doctor’s office.

Arriving there, she found the waiting-room full of people, and no doctor. For a period which seemed endless in its inactivity, she waited. Then at last, Dr. Dalton arrived.

Surprised to see the child, he spoke to her first. “What’s the trouble, Delphine?”

“Father’s ill, Doctor, and wants you to come and see him. He says he must be out to-morrow.”

“All right, Petite. Tell him I’m pretty busy, but I’ll get round as soon as I can,” dismissing her with a comforting pat on the shoulder.

She trudged home, block after block through the heavy snow, to find Empsey disposing of a mustard footbath which, as a good procedure in some cases, she had undertaken to administer in the meantime.

“Delphine, get your house-slippers on and go up and sit with your father while I get some mustard plasters ready. Don’t talk, but be there to do things for him if he asks you.”

This was lovely—an opportunity to play doctor and nurse to her beloved parent!

But when she got there, it did not appear a joy at all, for even she could see that he was very ill. The face blazed with fever, the eyes were glassy and hot-looking, and the breathing was rapid and maintained only with great difficulty.

Empsey, whose nature was ever generous, gave evidence of this in the size of her mustard plasters. Down to the waist and up to the throat they covered the entire lung area. Undoubtedly the counter-irritant relieved the frightful congestion. The laboured breathing was slightly eased and became somewhat less rapid, while the sharp hard cough grew less tearing in quality after the applied warmth.

With a great majority of the cases of “the grip” prevalent during this terrible year, there was a secondary condition which sometimes assumed primary importance, and in these cases it almost universally meant death.

The doctor had not yet arrived, and Empsey, at her wits’ end and knowing that Mrs. Avery should be at home, on her own accord despatched Delphine to the telegraph office, which was in the doctor’s vicinity, and instructed the child to call at the latter’s again to urge immediate attendance on her father.

Fear lent the child wings that covered the long distance as though it were the first time that day.

The written telegram given in and paid for, she sought Dr. Dalton. He was not in, but a message hung where all might see, said that he would return at three o’clock.

Delphine decided that she just would have to wait to see him for herself, so she settled to the task. And it seemed interminable! Pale, but otherwise

composed, she sat on the hard chair, gripping its sides with the determination not to stir until the doctor arrived.

After what seemed an eternity, during which others came, and stayed or departed, according to their temperament and needs, the doctor's cutter halted on Talbot Street, and throwing the robe over the tired horses, he came into the office.

He spied her at once. "Why, Delphine! Didn't you go home? What's the matter?"

"Father's terribly ill, doctor, and you said you'd come, and you didn't!"

"Child, I'm working night and day. There's hardly a well household in the city or country. What has been done for your father can you tell me?"

She detailed all she knew.

"How long have you been waiting?"

"Oh, a long, long time! I thought you'd never come!"

"Well, run along now, Pet. I'll have to see these people, then I'll go to father at once."

Reassured, she once more retraced her steps on the trip that, covered four times, would tire an adult in the best of weather, let alone with snow-covered sidewalks.

Wearied, but resting in the doctor's promise, she entered the house.

Why, somebody was with her father; she could hear them talking. Perhaps it was mother! But no. Empsey said mother could not arrive till evening.

She hurried into the kitchen to find the housekeeper. But no Empsey there!

Without waiting for more, and never thinking why she was so impelled, she made her way to the sick-room without removing anything of her outdoor clothing.

Again she broke precedent by opening the door softly and looking within.

She was terrified by what she beheld. Empsey in tears, and with her long rope of auburn hair tumbling down her back, was exerting all her splendid strength to prevent Mr. Avery from getting out of bed.

“I tell you I will! Give me the laudanum bottle! Give it me or I’ll get it myself! I will get up. I can’t breathe in here! I’m not going to die like a rat in a hole. Going out to get some air!—Who’s that? Beth, come here! Take this woman away—I’m going out! Who’s that child? What’s she doing here? Send her off! I want my son! Where’s my son? Beth! Why don’t you come? Tell me we have a son!—No, don’t say that! I won’t believe it! I’ll find him! Yes, I *will* get up! Get out of my way!” And he almost overpowered the vigorous woman.

With tears streaming down her face, and manifestly frightened, the girl was using all her powers of persuasion to quiet the man, who was completely demented by fever and delirium.

“Petite,” she panted, “run for Dr. Dalton. Tell him your father is out of his head and I can’t control him much longer. Run, child, run!”

Delphine turned and fled with winged feet, but not to the street. Unhesitatingly she flew across the garden to the barn.

Undoing the great door with trembling fingers, she flung it open, then in to the box stall.

The iron-grey stallion which had become the Averys’ property on their return from England had been christened “Satan,” and lived up to his name. He was vicious, tricky, and so free with his heels that even his fearless master approached him with caution.

As Delphine went forward, the thought uppermost for the moment in her mind was “I must be as good as a boy! Oh, God! Help me to do all a boy would do! Take my scare away, dear God, and make Satan good for once!”

Straight to the box stall she went, though her face was deadly white and heart thumped as if it would burst through her small body.

Satan was not loose in his room. That was one comfort. He had been so free with his heels that he had had to be tied, to keep him from battering down the barriers to freedom.

Delphine unlatched the door and set it wide, then swallowing hard to displace the lump in her dry throat, she murmured “Under the Shadow of Thy Wings, Oh Lord!—Make Satan good! Make Satan good!”

The horse snorted, and rolled wicked eyes, while he fairly danced around the spacious quarters, but he did not kick!

Though sick with fear, her brain functioned rapidly and clearly. She knew that the halter must be untied first, and that she must then be high

enough to get on his back.

Quick eyes noted where the stall had been mended with new planks from the floor upwards for almost her own height. The ends were slightly irregular, and saying her little prayer over and over, she climbed its side by means of these toe-holds, to where she could grasp the uppermost inside board, and edge her way along the topmost of the repair planks.

Whether it were the repetition of his name that restrained the animal, or his wonder at his visitor and her unprecedented performance, or that other for which she prayed, who can tell; but the horse that had the reputation of crushing the ribs of a disliked master, and breaking the leg of an unwanted rider by crowding against the stall, allowed the small girl to make her way unhindered to the manger and untie the strap.

Still voicing her prayer, and with great presence of mind keeping the strap within her grasp, she gently drew the great creature nearer the manger and herself.

Facing the crucial moment her fear faded, and the beast, interested though watchful, responded. As he came alongside, she reached out, patted his neck, and before he knew her intention, was on his bare back with arms clutching mane and halter.

With part of her purpose accomplished, her long-time terror of an unharnessed horse swept over her in a panic which evidently communicated itself to the spirited animal for, wheeling, he shot from the stall and made for the open door.

Tipsy had followed Delphine from the house, and scared by the noise she fled for safety, but the movement caused the startled brute to shy and brush into some harness hanging on a projecting bar. Delphine's face caught the full impact, and a piece of metal ripped a jagged tear across her cheek.

Almost blind with terror, she was quite insensible to hurt and struggled valiantly to steady herself with her little prayer, "As good as a boy! Please, dear God, as good as a boy!"

CHAPTER XXX.

Her Father Won.

How she did it, or even whether she did it, she never knew, but after what seemed long years of pounding terror, Satan stopped of his own accord in front of his master's office. This was but a few yards from Dr. Dalton's, and sliding off the great back, Delphine staggered rather than walked the short distance, brushing her hair from her eyes and the blood over her face as she did so, her red bonnet hanging by its ribbons around her neck.

The doctor was giving parting injunctions to a caller, relative to the care of the sick at home, when this disquieting sight met his gaze.

"My God, child! What's happened?"

"Father's out of his head, doctor! Oh, please come and get him back! Empsey says she can't hold him much longer!"

He had donned his fur coat while she spoke, then waiting for nothing more, pulled his cap over his ears, picked the child up in his arms, and strode to the waiting cutter.

"How did you get back so soon?"

"Satan brought me—Oh! he's gone!"

"Don't worry. He'll go home. What happened to your face?"

She put up an exploratory hand. "I don't know, doctor—Oh, yes. Something frightened Satan, and he shied against some harness. But, doctor, how do people get out of their heads? And can you get them back again?"

Her terror-stricken face killed the man's quick desire to smile.

"Almost always, dear. It is the fever that affects the brain and makes them have queer fancies, that's all. And father's a strong man, so we'll get rid of the fever all right." He would not even allow his mind to dwell upon the recognized fact that the scourge seemed to create its worst havoc amongst the exceptionally strong and healthy.

"He doesn't know me, doctor. He sent me away and called mother to bring his son!" Her voice broke in a heart-wrenching sob.

The man's arm went round her to comfort and sustain, and as they turned the corner they saw Satan trotting along in front of them.

To divert her mind from her grief, he said:

“There’s Satan, isn’t it? But how did he bring you? He has no harness on. You didn’t have an accident, did you?”

“No. I climbed on his back.”

“Rode down? Bare-backed? *You*, Petite? I thought you were scared of horses!”

“I am, doctor—just terribly!” And with the dawning realization of what she had been through, her body shook and trembled, and her teeth chattered with nervous chill, but she managed to get out the words, “But I—prayed—to God—to make—Satan—good—for once—and me—as good—as—a boy!”

Attuned, the man sensed the supremeness of the effort, and as he halted the horse at the Avery house and lifted her out of the sleigh, he hugged her close. “You little thoroughbred! You’ve got more courage than any boy I know, and I certainly know a goodly few!”

He found his patient sunk in the stupor which so often was the precursor of the end, but there was still a fighting chance, and he took it. With every faculty alert to its utmost extent, he fought for the life, not of his friend, but the idolized father of a woman-in-miniature that challenged the best he had to give.

While the evening was still young, Mrs. Avery arrived, and together they worked and waited, and when the sickly winter dawn broke on their haggard faces, it revealed hope they had not dared to admit during the earlier hours of the night.

And tucked into her little bed, a small girl slept the sleep of utter exhaustion, but not before she had sent her thanks God-ward for “making Satan good,” and voiced the further petition, “Help Dr. Dalton to make father well.”

Weeks later, when the epidemic had passed its peak, taken its toll of lives, and was on the wane while the convalescents retrieved their strength slowly but surely, there came a time when the two men and the woman talking together, reviewed the whole history of James Avery’s illness. For the first time, Delphine’s participation was fully understood by all, as the mother related Empsey’s story, adding the details she had at various times abstracted from the child herself, and the doctor completed the picture from his personal knowledge.

The brusque man forgot his curtness as he pictured the little one's courage. "And if she hadn't got there when she did, I would have been gone. They told me McMillan was dying. He was, too—poor chap. But I didn't dream you had it, Jim, so I would have gone there first, and likely got tied up in a futile fight and you would have lost your chance."

At that moment, a light tap sounded on the door, and as the mother called "Come" a bright face peeped around its edge, and said:

"May I bring father's drink, mother? Oh, doctor, how nice to see you! Got any more babies to-day?" she asked as she approached the bedside, where her father motioned her to place the tray on the table, and then drew her close beside him as he rested back amongst the pillows.

Rising to depart, Dalton purposely misunderstood. "Boy-babies? Indeed I haven't! And don't want any when you're around. You're as good as a boy, any day!"

As Mrs. Avery accompanied the doctor to the door, the father's arm tightened around Delphine, and raising her flower-face that made him think of a beautiful red rosebud in its flush of colour at the unexpected praise, he bent and kissed her, saying in a voice that thrilled in never-to-be-forgotten cadence to her innermost being:

"Better than a boy, my daughter, better than any boy!"

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

When nested quoting was encountered, nested double quotes were changed to single quotes.

[The end of *Delphine of the 'Eighties* by Irene Helen Hawkins Moody]