

There was a cover for the little table in her mother's room, that she worked at every day for an hour, she practised a piece of music which she knew her mother loved, so that when she returned, Marjorie might be able to play it for her without one mistake. She studied her French verbs as patiently and earnestly as if she really liked them, instead of privately thinking that they were so hard that no one could ever possibly learn them, and that it would be far nicer to speak French without any regard to them.

She did all the little tasks that she was accustomed to do when her mother was at home, and, lonely as she was, she found a certain amount of happiness in preparing for her mother's return.

The weeks crept slowly away, and each letter brought glad news of improving health under the sunny skies of Italy. Then came the day of the journey toward home, and Marjorie counted the days, and counted, too, the hours of the days, that must pass before she should be clasped in her mother's arms.

The travellers were coming upon a slow steamer, that the trip might be as long as possible for the sake of the beneficial effects of the sea air, so it was quite impossible to know exactly when they would be home. The time of the incoming steamer varied usually some two or three days. From the hour the steamer sailed, Marjorie spent her time in preparation for her mother's return. Each day, with her own hands, she carefully dusted her mother's room, put fresh flowers in the vases, and made everything look as pretty as possible. She kept herself ready, too, and through all the long days she never once faltered, nor forgot to be ready if any hour should bring them.

She tried to be patient, but scarcely an hour passed, as it grew time for the steamer to become due, that she did not ask, wistfully: "Do you think they will be here pretty soon, now, aunt Alice?"

It was almost Marjorie's bed-time one evening when she asked: "Do you think mother could possibly come to-night, aunt Alice?"

"I do not think there is any chance of the steamer coming in before to-

morrow noon," was the answer. "You know uncle was to telegraph us as soon as she was sighted, and we have not heard from him, so of course there cannot be any news."

"May I sit up a little longer so as to be ready if she does come?" pleaded the little girl, and aunt Alice consented.

Marjorie loved to read her bed-time verses from her mother's Testament, and after a while she went up to the room that was all ready whenever the travellers might return, and, climbing upon a chair where she could have the light fall upon her book, she found her chapter and began to read.

Suddenly her quick ears caught the sound of footsteps and, rushing down stairs, she opened the front door, and running out, went straight into the dear mother arms open to receive her, just as a little bird darts straight to its nest.

Need I tell you what a happy household that was, and how late the hour grew before they could go to sleep? Marjorie slept in her mother's arms, when at last she could go to sleep at all: a mother with cheeks that were tanned with the sea air, and ruddy with renewed health and strength.

Such happy days were the ones which followed, when Marjorie showed her mother how she had improved the time of her absence, and received the loving commendations which she had earned.

Some weeks later, Marjorie and her mother were having one of their Sunday talks, which they both enjoyed so much; Marjorie nestled on her mother's arms.

"I cannot quite understand about Advent, mother dear," Marjorie had said, and her mother answered:

"You know what a parable is, darling?"

"Oh, yes," Marjorie responded. "It is something easy to understand that explains something that is hard to understand, a sort of story."

Mother smiled at her little girl's definition.

"Yes, I see you understand," she answered. "Well, darling, I think my absence from you and my return is a parable of Advent that will help to make the Advent lesson very plain to