

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

A PINK STORY.

Everything looked dark gray to Claire. It was a gray day, in the first place, with a cloudy sky and frozen ground; the leaves all gone except a few on the oaks, and they were brown. And then Claire was sick with a cough and sore throat, and a miserable hot feeling coming on in the afternoon, when the whole world seemed tiresome and uncomfortable.

Worse than all, Margaret was in the hospital. That there was something very serious about this, Claire was certain, for more than once she had seen her mother crying, and even papa had had tears in his eyes. For several hours, the doing without mamma for herself each day, while she journeyed to and from that unknown hospital, had been harder to bear than any one knew. Yes, this was certainly a gray time for the usually jovial little Claire.

As she lay there in her mother's bed, while kind Mrs. Graham sat beside her, knitting, a queer, penitent feeling was in her heart. Something had happened three days before—the day that Miss Carter stayed with her. After what had seemed hours and hours, she heard, at last, her mother's step and voice "O Miss Carter!" she was saying, in the next room, "You ought to see the dear girl. She is so patient, and she looks so sweet with the flush in her cheeks just matching the pink ribbon running through the lace in her gown!"

And then—that sudden, unexpected sob that burst out before she could hide her head under the bedclothes; the surprise and trouble in mamma's face as she ran in and gathered her smallest girl into her arms, while Claire wailed; "You love Margaret best! She has pink ribbons in her nightgown, and I have only an old blue hair ribbon! And—O dear!—I'm sick, and I want you, mamma, so dreadfully!"

Miss Carter had heard it all, but she was lovely. She brought the thermometer, and the fever medicine; and they took off the blue hair ribbon, and put on an old pink one that she had forgotten, while mamma fed her an orange, and Miss Carter told her a story. And she had felt so ashamed to think that for the first time in her life she had been jealous.

Not once, since then, had Claire complained, or objected when her mother left her. But to-day there was no sunshine; it was a weary kind of afternoon. Mrs. Graham had read to her until she was tired. There seemed to be nothing further worth hearing except—well—there was the postman's ring, which she knew by the two quick pulls. A minute after, Ellen appeared, peeping in at the door.

"Three letters for Miss Claire Aldrich," she announced, with a broad smile. Claire sat up in bed and took them eagerly. Letters did not come to her so very often. These had an unusual lumpy look.

One of the envelopes was addressed, "Miss Claire Pink Aldrich." Claire opened her eyes wider at this, and a smile crept around the corners of her mouth. Mrs. Graham started a little opening, and Claire poked it wider with her fingers, when—out fell two rolls of beautiful, soft, pink ribbon. One was an inch wide, the other three, and there were six yards of each! The second envelope disclosed more ribbon, the same shade, but wider still, six yards. Claire looked inquiringly at Mrs. Graham's face, but saw only surprise and admiration.

The third letter! This time the little fingers did all the work. Three un-

ning handkerchiefs, each with a pink border!

"But there isn't any writing," complained Claire. "Where did everything come from?"

"I can't imagine, dear," said Mrs. Graham, sincerely. "It's very mysterious. There's the bell again. I'll go to the head of the stairs."

A minute later she reappeared, carrying a good-sized package.

"Miss Claire Aldrich. With care," she read, slowly. "Shall I untie it, dear?"

"No; I will," said Claire, with brightening eyes. "I love to untie bundles. Oh!" as she unwound quantities of tissue paper. "Oh, look! A cup—and a saucer—and a plate, all pink rosebuds, and gold on the edges. See, what an elegant shape! Who can it be, Mrs. Graham? Are they all for me?"

Another ring downstairs was followed closely by the entrance of Miss Carter. "How's the little girl to-day?" Then, as she saw the china and ribbon spread out on the bed, a queer look flitted across her face.

"Why, how funny!" she exclaimed, as Claire began pouring out the story. "Somebody got ahead of me. I thought a sick girl ought to have a pretty cup to drink from, so—I brought you a pink one. But mine is all pink," unwrapping and placing it on a broad, white space on the bedspread, "and the other is pink and white, so you can have a change."

Claire drew a long breath.

"Well, I never did!" she said, decidedly. "Thank you so much, Miss Carter, and—well, Ellen, what it it now?"

"I do know what it is," said Ellen, vaguely, "but it's a package a messenger boy brought for Miss Claire Aldrich. There's a note inside, he says. So I just brought it right up."

"Dear me!" murmured Mrs. Graham anxiously, noting the bright eyes and flushed cheeks of her little charge. "I wish her mother'd come. The child's had about all she can stand."

"Oh, I can stand it," observed Claire, sagely, as she untied the last knot. "A whole roll of paper napkins, all bordered with the sweetest little roses. And here's a letter. Now I'll know who sent them."

She opened the envelope, and pored earnestly over a typewritten note, then read aloud as follows:

"My Dear Friend—If I were you, and were to have an afternoon tea, I think I should call it pink afternoon tea—I mean afternoon pink tea. I should want a pink sash, on which would be hung a pink-bordered handkerchief. Then I should want in my hair a pink bow. I should want to serve pink orangeade in a pink cup; ice cream in a pink saucer, and cake in a pink plate. Then I should want pink napkins. Don't you think I am a?"—Claire coughed—"C-o-n-n-o-i-s-e-e-r—what's that, Miss Carter?"

The lady laughed a little. "Connoisseur? It means one who knows all about a thing," she said. "Go on, dear."

"A—conny-sewer—on afternoon teas?"

"Very truly yours.

"Peter Smith."

"Peter Smith!" mused Claire. "I don't seem to remember him. Do you know him, Mrs. Graham? Do you, Miss Carter?"

Miss Carter looked a little confused. There rose before her the picture of a certain business office, wherein was wont to sit a genial, great-hearted man, a friend of hers. She remembered a certain visit she had with him a day or two before.

"I don't think I know any one of that name," she answered, quietly.

"Now, dear, you are tired. You must not sit up or talk a bit more. We'll go out and let you rest till your mother comes. You can show her your presents after the gas is lighted."

They went out together, and Claire lay there alone in the gathering twilight, thinking over all her surprises, and wondering and guessing about Peter Smith. Summing up the evidence, she decided that he must be rich, and good, and generous; that he must understand little girls and be fond of them. "And that's just the kind of man I like," she concluded. "I do hope I'll see him sometime."

The front door opened and closed in the hall below. Claire turned involuntarily, her eyes fell upon the window opposite. What had happened to the gray day? Through the branches of the oaks, behind the few rustling, brown leaves, she could see the sky, all rosy and glorious with the most beautiful pink color she had ever imagined. She lay and drank it in delightedly. The door opened, and her mother came softly in. For an instant Claire thought of the pink ribbons, the china, the afternoon tea; but the spell of the sunset was upon her.

"Mamma, look!" she exclaimed.

"Look at the sky!"

Her mother turned to the window and gazed with her hands clasped. Her eyes were full of joy and tears. She walked over to the bed, bent down, and laid her cheek against Claire's.

"God gave it to us," she said, "after so many dreary days. But they're gone now, for, O darling, listen! Margaret, our Margaret is out of danger. She is going to get well!"

"What a lovely day this has been, after all!" sighed Claire, as she was dropping to sleep. "I know one thing anyway. After this, as long as I live, pink shall be my favorite color!"—Congregationalist.

WAITING FOR THE MOOD.

"Do you wait until you are just in the right mood for your work and find yourself full of your subjects?" inquired a curious lady of the author whose writings she had often read and admired. "Do you just write from inspiration?"

"No, it's from desperation chiefly," was the answer—a truthful answer, though given with smiling lips and twinkling eyes.

There is little of the world's work of any sort done by those who wait for "moods." Special moods and illuminations do come, indeed, but they are seldom vouchsafed to those who stand waiting for them; they come instead to the busy worker already pushing forward at his best pace the light and ability he has. It is wonderful, too, how many good things are born of desperation, of the urgent necessity that must find a way, that dare not fail. The inventions, the enterprises, the great movements that have blessed mankind have come not from waiting moods, but from some pressing need that would not wait. Desperation has had more to do with the march of human events than has any brilliant illumination of genius—at least it has been desperation on the earthward side, however it may have been spelled in heaven. "Must" is not a bad word for humanity. "It is not the worst thing in the world for a man to find himself hemmed in," says some one. With the Red Sea before, the enemy in the rear, and impassable rocks on either hand, the outlook becomes the uplook, and that is the only way to link desperation with inspiration.—Forward.