

Miscellaneous.

A TRUANT EPISODE.—(Continued.)

"It seems to me I did—once," said the old man, absently. "But it takes timbers and boards and nails, and a saw."

"Oh dear me!" laughed the amiable old lady. "Just hear him talk! Why, I can make the nicest house you ever saw out of stones and brick. That is the way we girls always do in the school-yard. Just lay them in rows for walls, don't you know?"

Her aged companion busied himself industriously, bringing her bits of rock, which she formed into intersecting chains upon the ground, with here and there a break between. When they paused to rest she proudly designated the boundaries of the parlor, sitting-room, and kitchen, which she had constructed.

"Now, you can go in the parlor and sit down, and I shall stay in the sitting-room and knit," and she brought forth her work from the capacious reticule. "But there! How many times will I have to tell you not to walk over the walls, but come through the doors. There! You've gone out over the walls, and now you are coming through a window. Oh dear, oh dear!"

"Stuff and nonsense! What's the difference?" retorted the old man, irascibly. "That's right, now. Go to bawling, will you, just like a silly girl!"

"I'm not crying, and I'm no sillier than you"; and the old lady bridled. "I'd thank you to behave yourself, or I'll go straight home and tell my—" She broke off suddenly, and looked vaguely about at earth and sky in startled questioning.

"There, there, don't get huffy. We'll play war," he added, a bright thought striking him. "This is the battle of Bunker Hill. You are the Tories, and here I come with my canon. Boom! Boom!"

His gentle face shuddered. "I never could play that. War is too dreadful," she said. "Poor little Jimmie Hale. Such a pleasant-tempered, gay young lad he was, but they brought him back from the Mexican War with a bullet hole in his breast. Deary me how mixed up I am. That wasn't Jimmie Hale. That was a brown-bearded, gallant man, and—Jimmie—why, Jimmie is a boy, and gave me the book the teacher gave him on last prize-day." She smiled mistily.

"Well," said her companion, impatient of these reminiscences, "if war don't suit you, how would you like to have a game of mumblepeg?"

"What?" Her curiosity was aroused, and her voice expressed warm interest.

"Mumblepeg." He drew from his pocket an old jack-knife, very loose in the joints, and opened one of the blades.

"First you place it across the palm of your hand and toss it up over—so?" The knife turned a somersault in the air, and the blade was deeply buried in the ground. He pulled it out with an air of triumph. "Then you place it on the back of the hand and toss it up again." The knife revolved anew in the air, but fell flat upon its side.

"Whenever one misses it's the other's turn. But I'm just showing you now, you know. The one who beats gets all the marbles. Next time comes this," and holding the blade between his finger and thumb, he essayed to give it a dexterous flip in the air, but failing to make it describe the proper curve, the sharp blade descended upon his hand, cutting a deep gash in the palm. He made light of the injury, and endeavored to staunch the blood with his red handkerchief. But his companion, greatly distressed, hurried him down to the shallow brooklet, and after bathing the wound in the little stream, wound her own handkerchief tenderly about the hand.

Standing there, she turned, and looking off to the southeast, espied white shafts gleaming amid a setting of green.

"I declare! There's a graveyard. Let us go and see it. I love graveyards; don't you?" cried the old lady, excitedly.

"Pooh! Don't care much about them. Girls always have such queer notions," returned the old man; but he accompanied her as she set eagerly off in the direction of the cemetery. Over the rough and stony ground they labored, plodding through clayey embankments and across narrow ditches. Reaching level ground at last, and roaming along streets and by-ways, they came at length to the old mission church, quaint and ancient, with its rude Moorish architecture and thick adobe walls. They paused and gazed for a moment at the aged structure, before entering the decrepit gate which led to the burying ground of the old mission.

A policeman, who had been standing in the shadow of the church and closely following their movements, drew from his pocket a copy of the afternoon paper, and re-read the following notices:

AGED PEOPLE LOST.

A gentleman, residing at 1,887 Howard street, has reported to the police that his father, aged 82, and childish, left home early this forenoon on an errand to the market near by, and has not since returned. Information leading to the discovery of his whereabouts will be thankfully received.

An aged lady is also reported lost from her residence, 1,793 Folsam street. She was attired in a plain black bombazine, and carried in her hand an embroidered reticule, tied with black ribbon.

"Guess I'll go across the street and telephone down to the central station," soliloquized the officer.

Meanwhile the singular pair pursued their way along the tangled paths which intersected the old cemetery. A strange hush reigned throughout the place. Here and there a startled bird flew from its nest.

"We might play hide and seek among the stones," suggested the old man, artlessly.

The old lady looked at him severely. "You must be a very wicked boy to think of such a thing. Let us walk about and spell the names and verses on the stones, and smell the flowers," she added gently.

"I don't like to do that," said her companion, peevishly. "The names are too hard and long, 'F-r-a-n-c-i-s-c-a M-a-r-i-a-D-e-R-i-m-e-g-n-a.' What a queer name. And when did she die?—1835. What year is this?"

"'36, isn't it?" came the doubtful response.

"Pshaw! That was last year or the year before. Let me see! I was born in—"

"Oh, don't talk dates. I never could keep the absurd things in my head," said the old lady, smiling. "Just look at this cunning little grave, all covered with myrtle and pansies. It must have been a baby—a sweet little baby. But here are some naughty weeds that are trying to choke out the flowers."

She carefully uprooted the noxious intruders and bent forward to decipher the lettering upon the stone. Then she started wildly, and looked around her. A low wail burst from her lips. In that moment the burden of the forgotten years descended upon her.

Dropping upon her knees, she flung her arm protectingly over the tiny mound, and laid her withered face among the blossoms.

"My darling! Mother's precious!" she cried. "Gone so long from these empty arms. When will I see you again, my dearest?" And she mourned and sobbed in a tearless anguish.

The voice of the old man, absently repeating some familiar words, fell upon her ear:

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.