

A Wayside Experience.

"So this is to be the scene of my summer's work," thought Lorna Dale, glancing about her with a look of mingled amusement and dismay. A dusty school-room, two rows of ancient desks, uncurtained windows, through whose torn shades the hot June sun was pouring relentlessly. These were what met her gaze. She turned to the much more pleasing sight visible from the window near her—the green, flower-strewn prairie dotted at intervals with houses. Along the dusty trail toiled two little figures, laden with dinner pails, slates and primers. She watched them until they entered the porch, where they left their hats and lunches, before they walked into the room, and solemnly took their respective places, casting shy glances from time to time at the "new teacher." Lorna felt a desire to laugh at the demure little mortals, but judged it wise to restrain her mirth. Before long, six other pupils arrived on the scene and the work of the day began. Such a day! As Lorna thought it over in her room that night, she laughed one moment and sighed the next. How strange it all seemed to the city girl—the unusual work, the unfamiliar surroundings. She glanced around the room; it was small, bare and cheerless, and as she surveyed it the feeling of depression with which she had battled all afternoon, settled down in full gloom. But her natural buoyancy soon reasserted itself and she sprang to her feet, exclaiming: "I'll see if I can't brighten up this den of mine a wee bit!" When the treasures of her trunk were brought forth and arranged about the room, it took on a much cosier air. She lingered longest over her books, fondly handling the daintily-bound volumes as she had placed them in their glass case. "They'll be my best friends this summer," she thought, "there is one advantage in coming away out here to teach—I'll have lots of time for reading. I mean to spend almost every evening in this room with my books."

"Oh, I don't see how you can bear it!" exclaimed Lorna, in pitying tones. "I should want to die right away, were I in your place. I know I should."

It was just a week later, and Lorna was sitting by a bed on which lay a young girl, frail and wasted, whose face, with its lines of pain and its large wistful eyes, mutely told its tale of suffering. Lorna had just learned that the invalid had lain there since her eighth year—ten long years—she could hardly realize it. "How dreadful it must be! and yet—" she hesitated. "You don't seem to mind very much."

"No," rejoined the other, gently. "I am quite used to it and I am nearly always contented. Occasionally a dark hour comes, and then I have to think hard of every pleasant thing I know. A year ago they took me to the hospital and tried to cure me and for a time the doctors had great hopes of a successful operation. How life widened for me! I cannot tell you of all the strange new hopes and thoughts that came to me, nor how bitterly hard it was to give them all up when at last we found it was all in vain. Oh, the disappointment of that day! After a peep into the possible it was hard to come back to the real. However," she added, brightly, "that is all over and I am contented again."

"How do you manage to pass the time?" asked Lorna. "Do you read?"

"Sometimes, but my hands are not strong enough to hold a book for any length of time. When mother's time is free, she always spends it in reading to me, but she is generally busy."

"Do you care much for books?" "Oh, very much," was the quick reply. "If only I could read all the time, I should be quite happy."

A sudden impulse came to Lorna. Should she offer to come and read to Miss Merle in the evenings? Instantly self rose up in opposition. Lorna felt that she would much rather have her time to herself, for she could read much faster if alone and would be free to follow her own tastes. Besides, the prospect of walking a mile every evening was not particularly attractive. While she listened absently to Miss Merle, a

sharp struggle went on in her mind. But finally her better nature conquered. "She is just my age and has never had any of the pleasures that have filled my life. Surely I should share a little of my sunshine with her."

Without waiting to change her mind, Lorna made the proposal and the look of delight that lighted the dark eyes of the invalid was enough. A consultation regarding the choice of books followed, and Lorna found, to her surprise, that Miss Merle knew and admired most of her favorite authors.

They chose Mrs. Browning's poems for their first study, and the next evening Lorna appeared with the volume. What a pleasant evening the two girls spent! and many more followed. Every evening, rain or shine, found Lorna at her self-appointed task, and before long she enjoyed the readings quite as much as did the invalid. What pleasant discussions the two girls had over "Aurora Leigh" and Whittier's Indian Legends, and Lowell's New England tales. Then, often, in the long summer twilight, the book would be closed and the two girls talked as only girls can. Lorna told incidents of college life, of lectures, sleigh-rides, conversats, skating parties and the many other pleasures of college days, and Edna enjoyed it as a child does a fairy tale, for it was all new and wonderful to her. Every day the friendship deepened, and each found the companionship of the other a source of great pleasure.

So the days and weeks and months sped by, and at length there remained a week before Lorna must return to College. Both friends dreaded the parting, Lorna almost as much as Edna, though to her it meant going home.

"I wish you would stay with me to-night, Lorna," said Edna, as her companion rose to go. "I have a kind of presentiment tonight, and I want you to stay. It is not often that I yield to fancies"—and she half smiled—"so I know you'll indulge me in this."

"Why, of course," Lorna replied, readily. "Of course, I'll stay with you. I'll be quite comfortable on the couch in the next room."

"She resumed her reading, but in a short time Edna said: 'I am so tired; I think I'll try to go right to sleep. Somehow,' she added, wistfully, 'I am always tired now.'"

"It is this dull summer weather, dear; when it is over you'll be yourself again. Now, you must go right to sleep and you'll feel better after a good night's rest. Good night, my love."

Long after midnight Lorna was awakened by a wild, weird cry, and as she sprang up, a light flashed into the room and Edna's mother stood beside her. At sight of her white, drawn face and grief-darkened eyes, a nameless, chilling fear fell on Lorna. "Oh, what is it?" she cried. "Edna? Is anything wrong with Edna?"

"Come," the mother said, and with swift steps they went to Edna's bed.

"Why, she is sleeping so peacefully," said Lorna; "what is wrong?" As she spoke, she placed her hand gently on Edna's brow, but instantly withdrew it with a cry, "Why, how cold she is!"

"Aye, she is dead," said the mother brokenly. "A few moments ago I awoke, and some impulse, I could not tell what, urged me to come in here. I found her just as she is now. She must have died while she slept," she added, softly, "she looks as though she were only asleep."

She did, indeed. Lorna stood by the bed in a maze. Could it really be true, or was it only a frightful dream from which she would waken presently to find her friend unchanged? In all her happy, sheltered girlhood, death had never before crossed her path, and here his touch was so light and gentle that she could see no trace of it in the peaceful face before her. It was the moans of the grief-stricken mother that brought Lorna to the realization of the truth. She who had hitherto seemed to Lorna so reserved and self-contained was now sobbing in a very abandonment of grief as she hung over the still, dead form, mourning for her only child. Edna clasped the bowed form in her arms, and by her own grief gave the only comfort possible—the priceless one of sympathy. Together they watched by the dead

during the long hours of that awful night. How the scene burnt itself on Lorna's memory—the homely, familiar details of the room, the waxen figure in its strange stillness, the anguished face of the mother, and the dim lamp-light over all.

During the next week, through the details of the funeral, and for a few days after, Lorna remained with the lonely mother. When she at length returned to the city, it was with a feeling

that she had been to the very edge of the spirit land and life could never be quite the same to her again. Her college mates wondered at the indefinable change in Lorna—she was so much more gentle and thoughtful. She told them very briefly of her summer's work, but she could not tell the inner details—they were too sacred. Only to her mother did she reveal the whole story of the life and death of the friend whose character had so influenced her own.

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