

"Oh!" said he, covered with confusion, and turning pink, "I came to see Nettie! Ah! That is—Isn't it nearly dinner-time?"

Of course that brilliant suggestion made Louis start up with an apology, and take abrupt leave. I wanted to pinch Charley, but I couldn't do more than give him a provoked frown, for papa came in at that moment. I wonder why Charley gave me such an odd, mournful look over his spectacles, as we went out to dinner? It's absurd for "Mr. Pickwick" to look sentiment; but positively, there was something in that glance which I can't make out; it has haunted me ever since. Nonsense! What's Charley Leigh to me? Louis loves me; I care for nothing else!

April 20.—I take up my diary with eyes so dim that I can hardly see the page. And yet I feel as if writing would be a relief to me. There! Down splashed a tear, and made that great blot! Nettie, be a woman, and try to bear it.

Between this entry and the last, a long gap of pain. What a merry-hearted girl it was who sat here in the blue wrapper that night. I look in the glass, now, and see my black dress and heavy eyes, and pity this pale, sad creature. I ought to be ashamed to do it. How dreadful to have grown morbid enough to pity oneself.

Let me try to write out a few things calmly. That next day, the 24th of February, the crash came. I have not a business head, or a clever way of telling business details; but something went wrong in Wall street, and stocks and gold fell, suddenly; ever so many men were ruined; but the worst and blackest ruin of all was my dear papa. Poor papa! He sits down in his little room (a den I call it, after our house in Madison Avenue) and looks grayer and older every day. And no mamma to help him to bear it.

Oh, mother! laid away under the sod, where the spring violets are beginning to push their sweet faces up toward the sunshine, do you know how we want your tender heart and helping hand? Mamma, come back! God help us!

That was the hardest of all, you know. We set ourselves to look poverty and adversity in the face with comparative cheerfulness; but when mamma sickened and died, (she was ill only three days) then it seemed as if there was nothing but blackness and desolation. I can't talk about it calmly, even yet.

Papa behaved splendidly. How proud I was of him. He gave up everything to his creditors, and if we children had not had our little fortune from grandpa Turner, I think we must have gone to the poor-house. We left our beautiful house, and came into this queer, dark, little house, away over in East Thirty-Fifth street, and papa has taken a book-keeper's place in the bank where Charley Leigh is cashier. And that puts me in mind. I don't know what we should have done without Charley to assist poor papa, and counsel him. All through that dreadful time, when papa was to take this place in the bank "till something better turned up." I am thankful to say that Charley has forgotten all about his ridiculous fancy for me and last New-Year-day's performances, and has gone back to being fatherly and useful—more Pickwickian than ever.

April 30.—I had to run away, and leave my diary just there, for Bobby was crying for mamma, and nobody can quiet the poor little fellow but "sissy"; and, after that, Emma had her French lesson, and Harry his Latin verbs; so I got no opportunity to write more. Charley came in to play whist; but as papa seemed interested in talking with Mr. Sampson, Harry appealed to him.

"Eh? What?" said Charley, with the Pickwickian glance over his spectacles. "Don't disturb your father. Give me that book; Nettie looks tired." And that was the last verb I had to hear for that night.

It's very queer. I don't understand it; but Louis hasn't been here for ever so long. Only once since mamma went. But he wrote me a beautiful letter; yes, a really beautiful letter, though, somehow, it seems cold to me as I read it over now, for the twentieth time. It's all about being "resigned," and how happy dear mamma is; but he doesn't once say that he loves me—the poor, little girl, who is hungry for one fond word. What was it that Charley said, when he saw me that day—the day God took mamma: "My poor, little Nettie! A storm-wind has beaten your bonnie head to the ground."

Charley's voice was choked and broken, and his horrid, gold-rimmed spectacles were wet and dim; but it was nice of him—very, I didn't know that "Mr. Pickwick" had so much poetry in him.

May 28.—And my birthday. I got up feeling sad enough, but I did not have much time to think of last year's fête, for Bobby got away from his nurse, and frightened the family by tumbling down the entire flight of back-stairs, which, by-the-way, are so long and dark, that I only wonder how he has escaped doing so before. He was more terrified than hurt; but he has a big lump on his forehead, and a black-and-blue mark on his knee; so I have taken him to sleep with me to-night, and shall write a page here before I go to bed.

I did have a present to-day; such a lovely one, that I know it could come but from one person—my dear, handsome Louis! It was like his delicacy to send his gift anonymously, for fear papa would not let me accept it. The parcel came just after breakfast, and inside it, I found

just the loveliest pair of bracelets—onyx, with a buckle of gold, and studded each buckle, six large, beautiful pearls. I haven't shown them to any one except Charley and Adele. Adele's manner was so odd; she asked me if I had written a note to thank Louis, told her I meant to wait until I saw him; and she said he had gone to Chicago for a month.

Why, he did not come to bid me good-bye; but, of course, this was his lover-like way of letting me know that I was never forgotten. What could Adele mean by asking me if I was sure Louis sent them?

I showed Charley the Bracelets, and he smiled in that beamy way of his, which always reminds me of a full moon, and asked who sent them. Of course it was a very natural remark, but I got quite hot over it.

"There is but one person whom I could think of accepting them from," said I, loftily. He stared.

"And who may that be?" said he slowly. "Louis Delaplaine," said I, rather triumphantly, and I am afraid that my face betrayed the whole. But Charley walked off to see papa. I do think he might take a little more interest in what concerns me.

(N. B.—I put the bracelets on, and now, just as I'm ready to put out the gas, one won't unclasp! Well, it's rather pleasant to think, that though Louis is far away, I am, after a fashion, his chained captive. Nettie, you goose! go to bed.)

June 8.—I have not been able to keep my diary with any regularity. What with the children's lessons and housekeeping, and mending, my yards are pretty full. And we have had an invasion. I am principled against domestic invasions, particularly when they come in the form of a female cousin. Papa could not help it, for aunt Maria wrote to ask him if cousin Sophia could come here for her summer shopping, giving by way of an equivalent, an invitation to "Nettie and the children" to spend the month of July with them at Nahant. Now, I know that papa has been dreading the long, hot season for Bobby and Emma, and he would have welcomed Medusa herself, if she had promised a change of air for his babes; therefore, he was unaffectionately polite and kind to Sophia Nesbit, and evidently expects me to be equally so. I sometimes take the most unreasonable prejudices. Dear mamma once warned me of that fault. I don't like Sophia, and for the same excellent reason that the nursery rhyme gives for not liking Dr. Fell.

She is pretty and stylish, and not old, although she may be five years my senior; but, somehow, I think she's sly. And the way she purrs around Charley Leigh is plainly disgusting!

To begin with, she asked me a multitude of questions about him, and, especially, whether he was rich. I told her I believed he was, and she said I was lying. She has three sisters to take care of. Her countenance fell, and I indulged in pumped papa on the same subject, and he, poor, innocent man, set Charley's means down at a far larger figure than I had ever imagined. Sophia cooed gently, and I was vexed, and would not send for hot coffee for her second cup, although I knew that what remained in the urn was stone-cold.

And that night, as luck had it, Mr. Sampson couldn't come to play whist, and Sophia said, modestly, that she would play, to make up a game. I hate whist! I never could learn it, and what's more, I never will; so Charley's journey to the nursery for me was of no avail, and Sophia sat down in my stead. And it turned out that she played capitally. Charley eulogized her performance until I was sick of the subject, and if you'll believe it, when I went to bed at half past twelve, there those people sat, playing still. Charley banging the table, and crying, "By Jupiter!" every ten minutes, over her good play.

Since that night, Charley has behaved in the most perfectly ridiculous manner, as far as Sophia is concerned. He appeals to her opinion in everything, and is Pickwick intensified—acts like a great shiny idiot! And she defers to him, and quotes him, and purrs about him to papa. Bah! I'm out of all patience. The idea of my being so foolish as to give a whole page of my diary to Charley Leigh.

Louis Delaplaine has not come home yet, and Adele has not been here for three days. What can be the matter.

June 19.—Have had a weary day. Bobby is ailing, and I did not finish the mending; and Mary, the cook, gave warning; and Charley sent a splendid basket of flowers to Sophia. There! I was just going to say something mean, but I won't, on second thoughts.

June 30.—How I have ever lived through to-day is a mystery. The world seems to have turned topsy-turvy, and I'm not at all sure that I shan't wake up, and find it's all a dream. To begin properly: this morning cousin Sophia got ready for her daily shopping excursion, right after breakfast and Charley came in with some fruit for Emma; so, of course, Sophia invited him to go with her as far as Stewart's. I have hardly spoken to Charley for a week. It's partly his own fault; he hasn't noticed me, and I was quite crusty and short with him, when he sidled up to me and said, rather anxiously, that he thought I looked pale.

They had not been gone five minutes when a note came for me. It was from Adele. And I ran into papa's little den down stairs to read it.

Well, what do you suppose it was? My very dear and intimate friend, in a short and very

carefully-worded manner, announced her engagement to Louis Delaplaine!

I sat very still for some moments; the room ought to have whirled before my eyes, and it might have been proper to have fainted dead away in my chair—but neither orthodox catastrophe occurred. To my utter amazement, I did not care very much; (hard-headed girl!) and a thousand little things came back to me then, which I wondered why I had been so unsuspecting as not to notice.

But to think of Adele's treachery; Adele, who had been my dearest friend ever since we rolled hoops together, and stole plumb-cake from her mother's pantry—that did hurt me, and I hid my face in the sofa-pillow, and cried tempestuously.

"Nettie, Nettie, oh, don't!" said a distressed voice, presently; and, looking up, I discovered Charley standing first on one foot, and then on the other, in his embarrassment, very much like a distracted stork.

"Don't what?" said I, angrily. "Go away! What brought you back, I should like to know?" "I came for an insurance-policy which your father left on the table," said he meekly. "I beg your pardon; I'll go immediately. Miss Nesbitt said she would wait at Arnold's."

I instantly resolved that Sophia should spend the day there.

"Charley," said I, as he laid his hand on the door-knob, "would you mind leaving a note at Adele's for me as you go down?"

To my great surprise, he turned pink, as pink as possible, and stammered out, "Adele's? Then you do know. No, you don't. How could you?"

"Know what?" said I. "Pray, what are you talking about?"

"Don't ask me," said he, assuming the Pickwickian attitude, and brandishing one hand up and down. "But Nettie, you'll believe, won't you? that I would have saved you the pain if I could—if I could, my child. And he's an infernal scoundrel, by Jupiter!" wound up Charley, banging the table furiously.

"If you'll be good enough to explain, and not add to the holes you've already knocked in that unhappy table, I'll be obliged to you," said I, pushing a chair toward him.

"You won't be angry, Nettie," said he, still persisting in being an agitated "Mr. Pickwick." "From some rumors that came to my ears, I felt convinced that that fellow, Delaplaine, was playing fast and loose with you, and I called—I called on him last night; and he told me he was engaged to your very particular friend, Adele Watson; and, by Jupiter, I believe I shook him. You'll forgive, won't you, Nettie?"

He looked at me in such a ridiculous, pleading way, that I plunged my face into the sofa-pillow, and hid myself there despairingly. "Nettie, don't! I am not that; and he's a scoundrel!"

"Wait!" I said, deserting the sofa-pillow, as a remembrance of my bracelets occurred to me, one of which I had never been able to take off my arm since I put it on. "Will you take these back to Mr. Delaplaine for me?"

"No, I won't!" said Charley, bluntly. "And pray, why not?" said I, the foolish tears rushing up into my eyes. Everybody was deserting me; even "Mr. Pickwick" was only like the rest of the world, after all. "I'll never ask another favor of you, Charley Leigh. You teach me how a beggar should be answered."

"Then I have a favor to ask of you," said Charley, in a gentle, firm way, which affected me in the oddest way. "Keep the bracelets, Nettie, for I sent them. Did you think your birthday was going past without a gift from me, child? Do you suppose that I did not know how hard the birthday was in this poor old house, or how heavily you struggled to keep your father from knowing the home-sickness which drove you into a dark corner all that evening? You thought Louis sent the bracelets. Well," said I, to myself, "she would rather wear his gift than mine, if it makes her any happier, or lifts a straw's weight from her burden, let it pass." But don't ask me to take back my gift, Nettie. I like to think that something of mine belongs to you; that you care enough for old Charley to never mind! I'm a fool, darling. I'll go away; and sometime, when you feel that you can say it honestly, just tell me, "Mr. Pickwick I'll wear the bracelets." Will you, Nettie?"

There he stood, his face crimson, his dear old spectacles moist, and his lips quivering with suppressed feeling. A great big lump gathered up in my throat; I made a dash at the spectacles. "Take them off, Charley!" said I, between crying and laughing; "they don't help you, you dear, blind bat, to see what is going on under your very nose."

"Nettie!" gasped he, as I threw these detestable glasses on the sofa.

"I think it's a genuine case of the blind leading the blind," said I, despairingly. "I'll never return the bracelets! I'll keep them because you—you are the dearest and best. Oh, Charley! don't you see—"

Whether he saw or not. I had two strong arms around me the next moment, and I'm not going to tell you what he said. No, indeed! my dear, absurd, noble-hearted Charley! God bless him!

Sept. 30.—(Entry in a different handwriting.) Nettie has given me her diary to read, and I must add, that she is as much of a child as ever and a worse tease, if that were possible, although

40-morrow is our wedding day. My little girl loves me, at last; and I am happy in the knowledge that she is fully contented and satisfied with the devotion of "HIS MODERN PICKWICK."

HEBE'S JUMBLES.

Scribner's Monthly.

"TWELVE, thirteen, fourteen—just enough. Oh, I am glad!" said Hebe Gladney gathering up that fortunate number of pennies and giving them a miserly rattle. "A pound of white sugar will be just fourteen cents, and I can work out the eggs and flour."

Having made this satisfactory financial review, she addressed herself to the broken bit of looking-glass on the wall, and finished braiding her hair. Auburn a braids look well, passed, circlet fashion around a small head, brought close to the forehead and tied with a knot of blue ribbon. Hebe acknowledged it, and gave an innocent little sigh of satisfaction. She was very tired. Her cheeks had an uncomfortable flush, as different from their morning freshness as a pink morning glory just opening, dewy, well-poised, responding to the light currents of air, is unlike its same pink drooping self at noon. She had weeded the garden and scrubbed the pantry-shelves from top to bottom, besides her ordinary round of kitchen work.

"Aunt Lizzie knew I wanted to make something for the donation party, and she locked up the sugar and let the fire go out on purpose!" and Hebe gathered up the pennies, twitched her sun-bonnet from the wall, crept softly through the kitchen and garden, climbed the fence, and took the shortest cut to the village store.

Miss Lizzie Stebbins had not locked up the sugar accidentally; there, was method in her madness always. As she turned the key that morning she said to herself, with grim satisfaction, "There! whether it's crullers, or waffles, or goose-berry tarts that mix has got on her mind to make, I reckon they'll stay on her mind. Minister Bliss and his donation party ain't going to gorge on my butter; when he's eat some of his own words to me, sauce and all, it will be time to think of coddling him like the other girls in the church," and Miss Stebbins tossed her head with a virtuous air that plainly admitted no compromise with the Delilahs of the parish; and, flouncing through the kitchen, she scowled at her little grand-niece Hebe, who was up to her pretty elbows in flour over the kneading-board.

The painful inference here asserts itself, that Miss Stebbins was in a highly inflamed state of mind toward her spiritual shepherd. And yet time was when the new minister counted no disciple more ardent and devoted than Miss Stebbins. She paved his way to dyspepsia with pies of deadly pastry, and then deluged him with bonnet tea. She worked book-marks for him on ribbons of imaginary hues, which taken collectively formed a complete concordance of the word *Lige*. She was herself a perennial donation party, until rumor had it that she was ready to de-vote herself and all her charms to the minister on the slightest provocation. It never came, however. On the contrary, Mr. Bliss cut himself off from further pastry tributes by making Miss Stebbins a pastoral call, and mildly reproving her for slandering Miss Marsh, the district-school teacher.

"Love thinketh no evil," said Mr. Bliss on that memorable call, as if suggesting a text for a book-mark, which she had overlooked.

"If some folks is minded to walk in blindness and tongue-tied all their life, they're welcome to—I believe in seeing truth, and speaking truth," replied Miss Stebbins.

"My friend," said Mr. Bliss, with tender solemnity, "look into the hearts of men with eyes as clear and piercing as our Lord's; but beware of failing to see the good He saw, and beware of passing judgments less loving and charitable than His."

Four Sundays had passed and Hebe was the only worshiper in Miss Stebbins's pew. She sat there with her soul in her eyes and her eyes on the minister, her round cheek flushing and paling as she joined in the hymns; and once, when she lifted her head after the last prayer, the minister himself remarked the tremulous lips and wet lashes, and wondered what they meant.

"I tell you, wife, I shouldn't be s'prised if the spirit was working in that young Heby," remarked Deacon Biddle, going home from church.

"Father, it's my belief it's an evil spirit, and that spirit is Liza Stebbins," replied his wife, emphatically.

Of course rumor was not dumb on the subject of Miss Stebbins's sudden withdrawal from sanctuary privileges; it made shrewd guesses at the truth and it looked toward the donation party as a test occasion: "if she holds out against that, we may as well give her up," was the village conclusion. This was a wretched time for Hebe. She loved the meeting-house and minister with all her innocent heart, and she could not bear to feel that a shadow had fallen on their pew, excommunicating them, as it were, from the sunlight of God's favor.

And then to give up the party—all its fun and merry-making, the loaded table, the smell of coffee over the whole house, the dazzling brilliancy of lamps everywhere, the good old games of blind-man's buff and fox-and-geese,—and then to put such an open slight on the minister! Oh, it was heart-breaking; and Hebe decided on her knees,—she had a way of solving such little problems of life in the middle of her prayers,—that she would, and with full hands too. Then she wound up with the petition,—hardly to be found in her prayer-book,—that Aunt Lizzie's heart might be moved to let her make some jumbles.

The next day, however, doubting whether Providence intended to interfere in the matter of the jumbles, Hebe came to the desperate resolve, as we have seen, for investing her entire worldly fortune in sugar. She came softly up the garden-walk, swinging her bonnet by the strings, and carrying fourteen cents worth of sweetness under her apron. Her forces were quickly brought together and arranged on the buttery shelf—flour, sugar milk, and great eggs with transparent shells. From that moment the jumbles were forgone conclusions. Looking at the preparations and the hands beating up the eggs so deftly, I should have said: There is the most delicious batch of jumbles you ever tasted! and if you had asked, Where?—I would have replied, chaotically but contentedly: Oh, in the sugar and things, but mostly I guess, in Hebe's fingers.

Through the open window came little puffs of air, faint and sweet like a baby's breath, and looted with the rings of hair about her face, until she brushed them back with her floury hands, giving herself quite unconsciously the look of a modern belle.

The cakes came out of the oven round and golden, spotted here and there with sugary eyes where sugar bubbles had burst. "There!" said Hebe, with a sigh of immense relief as she stacked up the cakes by the window and spread a white napkin over them; "it's all come true—what Mr. Bliss says about God's using our fingers to answer our prayers with. I shouldn't wonder if He put Aunt Stebbins asleep on purpose."

Aunt Stebbins at that moment was sniffing the fragrance of fresh-baked cake through a crack in the kitchen door, and gaining all the balf knowledge which that rather limited avenue of light afforded to one eye; and these were the words that fell slowly and vengefully from the thin lips—"I'll be even with her—the busy!"

Hebe ran up to her little back room, a very poor place—until she entered it. She put back the curtain from the west window, and sat down on a stool, in the level sunshine. The sun was drooping towards the horizon through fathoms of misty blue and golden haze, and the tranquil air was sweet with old-fashioned pinks and flowering currant. Hebe was sensitive to beauty always, wide-awake to the charms of common things; not that a flower or a sunset was of any commercial value to her, for she was absolutely incapable of tinging sentiment with the rose of a sunset or embalming it in the scent of a violet. But her instincts were fine and true, and they led her to appropriate, for their own sake, sweets of sound, scent, and color wherever she found them. Ordinarily, that is; at present, worn with the fatigue of the day, her head drooped on her crossed arms; and, she slept, the old apple-tree just outside the window drooped a few of its—of blossoms on the Auburn hair.

And as she slept, Miss Liza Stebbins down below was getting "even with her."

"Here comes Hebe Gladney, girls; and with a donation too, as you're alive!" whispered Crinthy Crane.

"Well now, Heby, it's good to see your bonny face!" said Mother Biddle, bustling forward, and giving her a comprehensive kiss that made you think of a sunflower smacking a peach-blossom. "And ain't Miss Stebbins come?" questioned Mrs. Biddle.

"No, ma'am," said Hebe, hesitating and sorrowful.

"There, girls; didn't I tell you Liza Stebbins was mortal mad at the minister?" said Miss Crane, not too softly for Hebe's ears.

"There's beauties, Mr. Bliss!" exclaimed Mrs. Biddle, cheerily, catching the minister's coat as he was passing, and lifting the napkin from Hebe's basket; "you can always count on something good from Miss Stebbins oven."

Oh, how Hebe blessed the dear soul, in her heart, for that speech!

"Your aunt made 'em dear?"

"N-no—I made them," said Hebe, devoutly wishing that the tip of Miss Stebbins's little finger had touched the dough, so that she might divide her honors with her.

"La! Mr. Bliss, off with you now, not a jumble till supper-time," cried the good woman holding the basket above her head;—"you must save your appetite for the substantives," she added, unconscious of the arid grammatical prospect to which she doomed a hungry man.

"Ah, if you knew what small rations my house-keeper has kept me on for the last week, starving me on anticipations of to-night," pleaded Mr. Bliss pathetically, but Mother Biddle trotted off to the supper-room, laughing and shaking a fat finger at him.

Oh, the jollity and good-fellowship attending an old-fashioned donation party—that compromise between meanness and generosity, that parody on justice, that raven-like method of feeding starving Elijahs! All day the goodly stores pour in; now a load of smooth-skinned hickory that made Squire Treac's eyes water in the loading; now a white-ben whose glossy feathers some little maid kissed before sending it to the minister; now a barrel of flour, and a bag of coffee, and packages of groceries, until the parsonage appears to be in a state of siege. Then the delightful bustle, the boiler of coffee, steaming up fragrance, the mothers in Israel, hanging over the supper table and wedging in one more plate of goodies, where an eye but that of faith, there was not room for a fairy's teacup.

"Friends, we won't ask what we all need—God's blessing," Mr. Bliss stood, with lifted hand, at the head of the table.

The hum of voices was hushed, the laugh and the joke died on the lips, and all heads, young and old, were reverently bowed while he prayed