

CHOICE LITERATURE.

RUMMAGING.

"Kitty! Kitty!" cried her aunt, "what are you doing in the garret? Come down, child; do. There's not one thing there you would care about, and I do hate to have people rummaging among my things," she added, in a lower tone, quite unheard by her niece, who ran gayly down.

"Oh! Aunt, such treasures! Are you going to sit down now? I'll bring my work." And she ran into her room to brush off the dust from her black dress.

"Aunt Catty," she began, after they were seated in the neat, bare parlour, which Kitty contemplated with an inward shudder, I wish you would tell me about great Aunt Katharine."

"What shall I tell you about her?"

"Oh! everything. Why she was so queer and unkind to you and papa; and what became of the beautiful old place and furniture; and why you, poor thing, were cut off with a shilling?"

"In the first place," said Miss Randall, rather grimly, "she never was unkind to your father. She never meant to leave her money to him. She gave him a good education, and he was a man, and what more could he want? she thought, and I think too. But the place; why, do tell, Kitty Randall, if you didn't know it went to the Masons. Jane Mason was her other niece, and had a large family of children; and I suppose it was all right. But as for me, who had always lived with her from a baby—well, I suppose we were too much alike. If she nagged, I answered back—spoke my mind, instead of holding my tongue. However, I'll try to be just to poor Aunt Katharine. I don't believe in my heart that she would have let these trifles influence her will, though in the long years they do turn love very like hate. But it was more than that. I suppose I may as well tell you, Kitty, I was engaged to the wrong man."

"Aunt! you engaged! Why did nobody ever tell me about it?"

"Who was there to tell you, Kitty? Your poor father was ill so long, he wouldn't remember the past—my past, at any rate."

"But do tell me all now, dear Aunt Catty."

"There's not much to interest you, child. I was thrifty, and as plain as a hedge fence, and lovers had never troubled me much; so, when this man—never mind his name—began to make up to me, and seemed to care so much, and admire and respect, you know, why, he made a fool of me—a perfect fool."

"Aunt Katharine hated him. She did everything to induce me to break it off. I couldn't think why. He was a very personable man, my dear, and made both his other wives happy; and I was just set on him, I am ashamed to say."

"Finally, she told me all. It was an uncle of this very man, the same name even, who had ruined her life, and made her the queer, crabbed woman she was. She was only sixteen when he persuaded her into a secret marriage, to be concealed until she was of age or grandpa could be brought round; but before that time came her fine young gentleman had settled his fate by committing forgery and being sentenced for twenty years."

"Aunt Katharine never owned the marriage, though she might have got a divorce easily enough, and she gave him a large sum to promise in writing never to claim her; and she burned the certificate. And as for letting me marry the nephew of this man, and having him drop in upon us at any time, why, she wouldn't and she couldn't, and she ended by declaring that it was my fortune James Lavater (there, the name is out!) wanted, and not me, and that not one cent of her money should ever go to forgers and fortune-hunters."

"Matters didn't mend. Neither gave up. We couldn't, we were born so. It was just as impossible to either as to sit crooked or to make our hair curl; and we were just alike. I felt sorry for Aunt, I must say; but I saw no reason why her bad luck should keep me from happiness. Well, Kitty, it wasn't many weeks after that Aunt died. Died in a moment, of heart disease. Nobody knew she had it, unless maybe herself, for she had looked strange and shaken for some days, and I guess she felt it coming on. At the funeral I saw a stranger—an old man—standing close by the grave. You'd have thought he was chief mourner, and James Lavater—my James—went up to him, looking very red; and they walked off together, talking very low."

"That was Aunt's husband. I found it out afterward, and that he had been hovering about the neighbourhood for a week or two. And the next thing that came out was that the Masons were to have the old place and furniture; but the sixty thousand dollars which were to have gone to me were nowhere. Aunt had drawn that whole sum out of Government securities a little while before her death, and it was all gone."

"Of course I knew the good-for-nothing husband had seen her and either frightened or coerced her into giving it to him. He left the country right afterward."

"How perfectly outrageous!" cried Kitty. Did she leave you nothing?"

"My dear, she left me a trunk and some old clothes in it. One dress in particular she stated that she hoped I would wear when I married. She needn't have troubled herself to write that bitter sneer in the new will she made only two days before her death. Of course you know I never married. Aunt Katharine judged James Lavater right. Perhaps there is something in a name. After home and fortune went, the lover soon followed. Never mind the details."

"I went away just then as a hospital nurse, Kitty; and it did me good. You know I had a little property from my mother, and I came back to her old neighbourhood, when the war was over, and hired this house. I have twelve hundred a year to live on, and peace and independence, if nothing else. I don't say I have not been lonely and sad,

Kitty; but if you can content yourself here and put up with my fidgetty ways there'll be some brightness, after all, in your old Aunt's life."

Kitty felt the appeal, and responded with a caress; but answered, in a hesitating voice:

"You know, darling Aunt, you are all I have to cling to now, and this seems my right place; but—but—I must speak frankly."

"Freely and fully, my dear. I like plain speaking."

"In the first place, Aunt, the money question. I must pay my share."

Aunt looked thoughtful, then nodded.

"I see, dear. You would be most welcome to what I have; but I know what it is to be born independent. You shall do as you like."

"Oh! you dear, sensible thing," cried Kitty, giving her a hug. "Now, that is comfortable. Let us have it all over at once. You say you have twelve hundred a year. I will put in another twelve hundred, and we can live nicely on that, in a very small way. Can't we?"

"Kitty, Kitty, that's twice too much."

"Not one cent, Aunt. I couldn't possibly live on less. We will have two maids, and make a pretty garden, with lots of roses and vines."

"Earwigs and slugs," remarked Aunt, grimly. "And the maids will quarrel. Well, go on. You haven't got through, I can see."

"Just one thing more," blundered Kitty. "This house (don't feel bad, dear) is so hopelessly ugly."

"Ugly! Well, I declare! Kitty Randall, do you mean to drive me crazy with modern art? Are you going to tack up Japanese fans and idiotic paper parasols all over the walls? Must I have a row of kitchen pie plates on the mantle shelf and stick a sunflower in the middle of the dinner table? Are you an æsthetic young lady, Kitty?"

Kitty laughed heartily.

"Don't be afraid, Aunt. I only want my earwigs and slugs, and the maids shan't quarrel, but I want some low chairs and a pretty little table and lamp, and a place to put my piano and my various pictures and pretty things. And I want to send away this dreadful stove and have an open wood-fire. I saw some beauties of andirons and a brass fender in the attic, Aunt."

"Wood-fires make a lot of dirt, Kitty."

"The new girl can sweep it up. Let us put this carpet in your room, and stain the floor and put down rugs. It's so much cleaner. I see you are going to say 'Yes,' you dear. There is just one thing more. I saw a trunk in the attic—the trunk, I guess; and a most beautiful old silk dress—the dress, Aunt?"

"Yes, Kitty, the dress. What now? Am I to wear it to church, with a peacock feather in my hat?"

"Not quite. I was only thinking what a lovely sofa-cover it would make."

"Kitty! a pink and white brocade!"

"Not exactly. Have it dyed."

"I never thought of that," said Miss Randall, opening her eyes very wide. "It's not a bad idea. A good, sensible brown."

"Or a soft olive or lavender," suggested Kitty. "You must choose a pretty paper first, you know, and then cover to harmonize. Oh! you dear, good Aunt! I do believe you are going to let me have my way, and turn this house into a distractingly lovely little home."

"Distracting, indeed!" sighed Aunt Catty. "But—yes, Kitty. You are young, and have the tastes of your times. I'll not thwart you. If you sit by the fire, I shan't miss my dear little stove, perhaps. If you are happy, maybe I'll get to like the new-fangled ways."

"Do let me kiss you, dear Aunt Catty. I am so glad. I wish I could set to work this moment."

"Well, dear, you can. There is that brocade. Rip it up."

"Just the thing!" cried Kitty, delighted; but her Aunt stopped her.

"Only, child, don't rummage. I do hate to have my things tossed and tumbled about. There's nothing in the garret but old broken things, no good at all. Promise me to leave them all alone."

"All right, Aunt," Kitty ran gayly up-stairs. She meant to be very good; but she could not help just looking at this old screen, delightfully capable of restoration, or that old clock, banished for its irregular life, but which, when set in order, would look so well in the hall. The hall! Kitty's countenance fell. How could anything really be done to such a poky, common little house? Kitty sighed, as she lifted the heavy brocade, and wished these decorations might be applied to a somewhat worthier home—something picturesque and artistic.

However, she had gained much, and it was with a bright face she stood before her Aunt, laden with the old-fashioned finery.

"See, Aunt, it is a perfect beauty. I brought down this lovely scarf, too. It would make such a table-cover. Did you know it was there?"

"I never took one thing out of the trunk," said Miss Randall, gravely. "It was a bitter gift to me, and I scarcely know why I did not leave it behind at the Masons'. What a weight it is! I have always supposed it was her wedding dress. I think it will be a real relief to me to send the stuff to the dye-pot. The mere thought of its pink-and-white flounciness has always turned me a little sick! Just look how it is lined throughout, and what a shape!" Aunt Catty seized the scissors and began to rip vigorously.

"I wonder," she ejaculated, "whether Aunt Katharine really thought I would make a guy of myself by wearing that thing to be married in?"

"Oh! no, Aunt, you would have had to rip and alter it, of course, but with white satin, you know, and plenty of tulle, it might have been made lovely."

"With my yellow cheeks!" said Aunt Catty, with a snort. She ripped on.

"KITTY!"

Kitty, who had been daintily detaching the old lace border from neck and sleeves, looked up, startled, to see Aunt Catty sitting perfectly limp and pallid, staring at the silk,

from which protruded various stiff, greenish corners. What was it? Kitty's mind was quick. She jumped up, she tore recklessly at the silk; the linings fell apart. Miss Randall sat paralysed.

They fell around her. Greenbacks without number! Fifty dollars, one hundred dollars—by twenties and forties they came; and Kitty, growing methodical, gathered them all up, and put them into Aunt's lap.

"I do believe the whole sixty thousand are here!" she cried.

They were. Sleeves, waist, all were pulled apart, and the carefully padded bills extracted. Just over the heart was stitched in a little note:

"Dear Niece,

"Think kindly of me, if you can. If your James Lavater is a better man than mine, you will find the real worth of this my wedding dress. If he is what I think him, you are well quit of him, and may thank me. In any case, you are sure to find the money soon, for it wouldn't be you not to rip up and dye my old silk and make it of some use. Niece, may you be a happier woman—whether maid, wife, or widow—than your unfortunate

"AUNT KATHARINE."

Poor Aunt Catty; she could hardly recover the shock and surprise; but when she did it had a wonderfully softening effect upon her. A dozen bitter little angularities and queer-nesses which had grown out of her time of indignity and disappointment dropped away at once and for ever. She looked younger and sweeter than she had ever done, her niece thought, when she emerged, at last, from a long cry behind her handkerchief, cheered by the knowledge that Aunt Katharine had not insulted and forsaken her, as all those years she had thought; but had in reality saved her from what might have been an unhappy marriage, and applied the test to a heart which shrank back in good time, thank Heaven! And now, instead of a soured, forgotten old maid, lonely and drear, as she had considered herself, she walked to the truth that she was a rich, healthy, independent woman, with a lovely niece to pet and spoil and delight in; a niece who was wildly dancing around the room, waving a greenback over her head, and crying, with merry triumph:

"Aunt Catty, never say again that you hate rummaging." —Janet W. Muirson, in N. Y. Independent.

CHURCH HOME-SICKNESS.

After Polly and I had got fairly settled in our new home, we found to our disappointment that there was no church of our own particular denomination within its precincts. Churches there were in abundance—high and low, broad and narrow—but none professing the faith in which we had been baptized. Not that we are of that unpleasantly inflexible class who can see Christ only in creed, and that their own—Heaven forbid! But we were utter strangers in the city which had unexpectedly become our abiding place, and felt that there would be a suggestion of homeliness—so to speak—in attending a church of our own denomination.

"Well," said Polly, bravely, when I made known the unpleasant discovery, "I am truly sorry, but it can't be helped, and, after all, it is but a little differing in a few non-essential forms—it is the same Lord. Perhaps," she added, a little wistfully, "we may make a few friends in whatever church we may attend."

Not, be it understood, that Polly or I had or have any desire to use the church simply as a medium for acquaintance-making. Indeed, we are quiet, reticent people, living very much within ourselves. Our lives have been so filled with the enforced practice of that often unsatisfactory gymnastic exercise known as trying to make both ends meet, that we seem to have but little time for casual acquaintanceship. It was only that we were literally strangers in a strange land. And the most unsocial people sometimes feel a craving for some one beside the butcher with whom to exchange a greeting.

We heard two or three so called popular preachers, but to our uneducated, commonplace ideas, one was too eloquent, another soared out of reach, while a third grovelled too low.

"Persons like you and me," said Polly, thoughtfully, "need a teacher more than a preacher; one who shall set us hopeful lessons from God's text-book—lessons which, if thoroughly learned, shall make us better scholars in life's school."

Well, we found such a one in the Rev. Mr. Faithful. It does not matter to what particular people he broke the bread of life.

Mr. Faithful was a practical, plain-spoken man, of keen intellect and great culture, with a rare knowledge of human nature, and a wonderful fund of original thought. He soon called on us, and we found him one of those rare men who imbued with a spirit of sanctified common sense, know how and when to speak the word in season, without seeming to be impelled thereto by a solemn sense of ministerial duty—a man to whom I felt I could instinctively turn for spiritual guidance in all things.

Thus it was that we became regular attendants at the Second Denominational Church, of which he was pastor. Polly's ill health forbade her from attending all the services, but I think I was as punctual as Mr. Faithful himself. We occupied the same portion of the same pew, communed at the same altar, and gave of our substance to the same cause.

We have not—perhaps through some fault on ourselves—made as yet any acquaintances among the people of the Second Denominational Church, though it is now very nearly a year that we have been in attendance. We know many of its members by sight, and being ignorant of their names, have invested a few of them with ideal names. Not ideal either. Tracing a resemblance of feature or form to certain church friends whom we knew in other days, we speak of such certain ones as of our friends themselves.

"Was Mrs. Smith at church this forenoon?" Polly once asks—the lady thus indicated having the exaggerated Roman nose and majestic profile of a former neighbour.

"Yes," I answer, "she sat with Mary Fensenden and old Mr. Jones. Charley Gregory was there too," perhaps I add.