

"Dot," said the child. "You hasn't kissed me yet, has you?"

Miss Roxbury bent and kissed the child. The rockaway creaked louder than before. The touch of the child's mouth thrilled through the iron nerves of the woman with a sensation inexpressibly delightful.

Miss Roxbury had imagined her life to be a happy one. She now discovered that she had mistaken selfish isolation for happiness. She was beginning to be happy for the first time in fifty years. Dot was too tired to be very talkative, but she leaned against Miss Roxbury with a look of quiet wonder and content in her eyes.

"Is I going to stay here?" she asked, as the rockaway stopped at the Roxbury gate, and she surveyed the old stone house with the woodbine clambering over its gray walls.

"Yes, child."  
Dot's face grew luminous. A bath, a bountiful supper of bread and butter, a walk in the garden kept her joyful until twilight, but with bedtime came the longing for her mother.

"I wants my mamma—my own mamma," she said.

Then Miss Roxbury gave vent to the instinct that can never be utterly destroyed in a woman. Taking the child in her lap she caressed the white face and sunny curls in a restful, soothing way, and talked so cheerfully that the shadows fell from the violet eyes, and Dot, nestling close, said,—  
"I love you."

Miss Roxbury had not only begun to be happy; she had begun to live. With the coming of this sweet child Heaven was changing the dull prose of her existence into celestial rhythm. Her cold, loveless nature in the presence of this tiny girl was already becoming Christ-like in its tender ministry.

Dot offered her evening prayer and was put in Miss Roxbury's own stately bed.

"Good-night, dear," said Miss Roxbury, with a kiss.

"Good-night," said Dot, burying her face in the great bunch of lovely white roses she had brought to bed with her; "I feel zif I'd died and gone to Heaven."

Miss Roxbury passed a wakeful night but not a restless one. Her mind was filled with plans, and then it was such a pleasure to lie and listen to the soft breathing at her side, and occasionally to touch the little hand on the counterpane, still holding the treasured, roses.

The next day Dot ran nearly wild with delight. She revelled among the daisies in the deep, soft grass, and it was pitiful to see how small an object could charm her hungry mind. God's commonest gifts were unknown to her in their bounty and purity. Sunshine, sweet air, flowers and bird songs were enough to make her happy, and when she found the brook that danced across the meadow her delight was unbounded.

After a day or two Miss Roxbury took the morning train down to Bradleyville to do some shopping. She was gone until night, and all the way home she thought of the glad voice that would welcome her, and her face grew so radiant with the new joy in her soul that when she alighted, laden with parcels, at the Lynford station, old Deacon Bennett failed to recognize her until she had passed him.

"Wall, I declare," he said, "Reliance looked as if she'd diskivered a gold mine."

Miss Roxbury reached home and soon had the "gold mine" in her arms.

After tea the parcels had to be opened. There were paper patterns, rolls of muslin, embroidery and blue flannel, a pair of child's slippers, dainty hose, bright ribbons and a large doll.

"Oh, oh, oh!" was all that Dot could say, but her tone expressed more than the most extensive volume on philanthropy that ever was written.

The village dressmaker was installed in the house for a week. The Rocky Mountain patchwork was consigned to the seclusion of the spare room closet, and Miss Roxbury developed a taste in Mother Hubbard dresses and ruffled aprons that was truly marvellous.

In the meantime she wrote a letter to Dot's mother, to which Dot added a picture of the cat, which, although not absolutely true to nature, resembling in fact the plan for a house, was a great satisfaction to the young artist. There came no reply to this letter.

Dot's cheeks were getting plump and rosy and her step buoyant.

"If it wasn't for my mamma," she said, "I would not want to go back forever'n ever."

When Mr. Knox, the gentleman in charge of the party, called to see that Dot would be ready to return at the appointed time, Miss Roxbury exclaimed, almost fiercely,—

"I can't let her go. I need her. Why may I not keep her?"

"I do not believe her mother would part with her," said Mr. Knox.

Miss Roxbury was silent for a few moments, and looked out on the lawn where Dot was swinging in a hammock with the doll and cat.

"It will be a dull house without the child," she said, "but I will bring her to the station."

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When the morning of Dot's departure came, Miss Roxbury arrayed herself in her second best black silk, put a few articles in a satchel, filled a small basket with fresh eggs, new biscuits, a pat of butter and a bottle of currant wine, and said to Hannah,—

"I may be gone two or three days. Have the east chamber thoroughly aired and dusted before I get back, tell Hiram to take a peck of peas down to Mrs. Alder, don't forget to see if those canned strawberries have