

holding up the two supplied her by nature, now much reddened by her morning's occupation, and thinking of all the harms which might possibly befall her precious green ones. 'Of all things! Whoever sent you on such an errand as that? That's some of Mrs. Wilson's work, I'll be bound.'

'No'm,' said Esther, timidly, but hastily, for she could not let Mrs. Wilson rest under the unjust imputation, 'It was my own idea. We are all going round to different houses to ask for plants and things, because we want the platform to look pretty, we're all going to sit there — all the Sunday-school scholars.'

'Well, I couldn't think of letting you take my palms. The idea! A pack of children! I think the world of them,' ejaculated Mrs. Peck rather incoherently. Her next move was not a courteous one. She rose, stiff and angular, from her chair, with a suggestive look toward the two little figures on the sofa. They hastily slid off the haircloth cushions.

'I—I guess we'd better go,' said Esther, weakly, and out from the dark parlor into the sunshine, went two little, red-faced girls, holding each other's hands.

The days flew swiftly by. 'Anniversary Sunday' came, and if there were no graceful palms to beautify the platform, there were flowers and green branches, and canaries whose yellow throats quivered and swelled as they joined in the choruses of the little white-robed girls and round-cheeked boys.

It was a week later.

'Got some news for you, Esther,' said Ned, as the little girl came into the house with her hands full of daisies. 'Mrs. Peck needn't have been so scary about lending you her palms. She's lost 'em now, every one of 'em. She forgot, and left 'em out over night on the porch, and in the morning they were gone. Somebody stole 'em. Tom Chatfield says they're probably half-way to Boston by now. His mother said she felt awful. I told him it was good enough for her. She needn't have been so stingy about lending 'em. I don't feel sorry for her a bit,' and Ned walked off whistling.

'Mamma,' said Esther, 'did you hear? Did you know Mrs. Peck's palms had been stolen?'

'Yes, dear. I am sorry, I am afraid it won't improve her disposition any,' and then this rather indiscreet remark mamma hastened to amend. 'Poor woman, she has had a great deal of trouble! We ought to feel very sorry for her.'

There was silence for a minute till the little voice began again. 'Mamma, you s'pose she feels real unhappy about losing them?'

'I presume she feels very sorry, indeed.'

'Mamma,' may I go out again, and get some more daisies? I—I believe I will take some to Mrs. Peck.'

It was a hot afternoon. Even the broad-brimmed sun-hat only half shielded Esther's face as she made her way toward the open field where the daisies grew. They were beautiful, long-stemmed flowers, with the whitest of borders and goldenest of centres. Esther gathered a great sheaf of them and since no daisy bunch seemed to her quite complete without a sprinkling of red clovers a handful of these were added; she chose the fullest and roundest heads, though she had to gently suggest a change of location to several yellow bumble bees. The air was full of sweet odors and sweet sounds, and though she was only a very little girl in a very big meadow, she could not feel alone. The grasshoppers gave sociable little hops, bending the tall plummy grasses as they alighted, and the crickets kept up a fitful chirping. Esther had never studied natural

history, so she thought the music came from their little black throats, and loved it all the more for that.

At last the bunch of daisies was as large as she could manage. A little wave of shyness came over her as she thought of the visit to be made. She would leave the flowers with Maria. Mrs. Peck would not care to see her, and she did not want to see Mrs. Peck. That settled, she walked more courageously.

As it happened Mrs. Peck herself opened the door. She looked down in some surprise at the small visitor. The sheaf of daisies was so large and Esther's arms were so little that some of the daisy heads came up to her chin, and an impertinent clover or two tickled her ear.

'Well,' said Mrs. Peck, a slow smile breaking over her face. 'Good morning.'

'Good morning, Mrs. Peck, I—I've brought you some daisies, some I just picked.'

'Brought them to me! Well I never! Come in, child, come in!'

There was no help for it, Esther followed Mrs. Peck into the cool darkened parlor, and made her way shyly toward the same stright-backed sofa where she and Lillian had sat two weeks before.

'I never!' said Mrs. Peck again, looking down at the great bunch of meadow-flowers. 'And you brought them to me!'

It was a shy little figure that sat on the haircloth sofa and two little feet dangled at least six inches above the floor. She cast an apologetic look from the dusty shoes to Mrs. Peck's face. 'I didn't know they looked so—it's a real dusty day.'

Mrs. Peck's eyes grew gentle and more gentle as she looked into the pink childish face, and then down at the round neck, a tinted brown above the collar, and below where the sun's rays had not had a chance to burn, a tender white.

'What made you bring them to me?' she said, looking down at the bunch of yellow-eyed daisies and red clovers. 'Did anyone tell you to?'

'Oh, no, I just thought of it myself. I felt so sorry for you because you lost your palms. I knew the daisies couldn't make up for them, you know, but you might like them some.'

'I do like them,' said Mrs. Peck, decidedly, 'I like them very much.'

Suddenly, (was it called up by the fragrance of the clovers and the gold of the daisies, or by some swift passing look on the young face opposite her?) another child with sweet brown eyes, and tossing chestnut curls, seemed to steal to Mrs. Peck's side—a little girl who had brought her just such flowers—so long ago that if she had stayed with her all the years since then, she would no longer be a little girl, but who had slipped away before she could outgrow her white ruffled pinafores, or the sunshine could find time for fading from her hair. Out of doors the cicadas kept up a rasping chorus, accompanied now and then by a note of a robin on the lawn. There was such a long pause inside the dim parlor, that Esther slid noiselessly down from the haircloth sofa. 'I guess I'll have to go, Mrs. Peck.'

The childish voice drove away the little dream-face with the brown eyes, and Mrs. Peck took a long look at the serious blue ones. 'Don't go,' she said, 'Sit down again, and tell me what you did at your church on Sunday. How was it fixed up?'

'Oh,' said Esther, 'it was real pretty. We had some lilies, calla lilies, and roses, and Miss Bentley fixed some green branches around the pulpit.'

'Did you have any palms?' questioned Mrs. Peck.

'No, ma'am, but the branches looked lovely, and almost as pretty.'

'I wish,' said Mrs. Peck, slowly, 'I wish I'd let you have my palms. I guess nothing would have happened to 'em.'

'No, ma'am, I guess there wouldn't; but I know how you felt about them. You felt just as I do when any of the other girls want to play with my best wax doll, my big wax one. I'm always so afraid they'll rub the paint off her face, or flatten her nose, you know, without meaning to. I guess you felt so about your palms.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Peck, smiling slightly, 'I was afraid my palms would have got their noses flattened too. But—but you let them take your doll, anyway, I'll warrant, don't you?'

'Yes'm—truthfully, but slowly.'

'Humph!' said Mrs. Peck, 'that's the difference, you see! Well—' after a pause.

'What did you do down at the church? Did you speak a piece?'

'No, I sang one. I sang, "I think when I read that sweet story."'

'Can you sing it now?'

Esther twisted her apron in her embarrassment. It had not been so very hard there in the church among the lilies and roses, with a crowd of faces looking at her, but to try it here—on the haircloth sofa, with Mrs. Peck watching her. How could she do it?

'Oh, I don't know,' she said, weakly.

'I wish you would,' said Mrs. Peck, 'I'd like to hear it.'

So, swinging one little dusty shoe, to relieve her embarrassment, Esther began:

'I think when I read that sweet story of old,

It was pitched too high, and her voice died away on the last note.

'I'll have to begin over again,' she said, 'I was singing too high.'

It sounds real nice,' said Mrs. Peck, and thus encouraged, Esther made another attempt, the little voice growing quite brave by the time it reached the last verse:

'In that beautiful place he has gone to prepare,

For all who are washed and forgiven,

And many dear children are gathering there,

For of such is the kingdom of heaven.'

The childish treble called up the little brown-eyed vision again. Mrs. Peck could see it more clearly with her eyes closed, and so she sat with her head resting on the back of her big, cushioned chair and her eyes shut tight till the song was finished. She opened them quickly then. 'That's a nice song,' she said.

'Yes'm, I think it's pretty.'

'S'posing you stay and take tea with me to-night.' Mrs. Peck suggested, suddenly. 'I'm all alone, and I guess we could manage to have quite a nice time together. Will you?'

'Thank you,' said Esther, 'I'd like to,' and she meant it, for she was beginning to like Mrs. Peck. 'I'll have to go home first and ask mamma, and—and black my shoes, and I guess she wouldn't like to have me come in an apron either.'

'You needn't fix up at all. You come just as you are—you look all right. After we've had tea I'll get out a box I have up in the attic full of dolls and little doll's things, you know. I put 'em away a long time ago, and I guess you'd like to see 'em.'

'Are they some you used to play with?' questioned Esther, interestedly.

'No; they belonged to a little girl years ago.'

'Oh! Is she grown up now?'

'No,' said Mrs. Peck, quietly, 'she didn't grow up.'

'Oh!' said Esther again, and she was quiet