

Family Circle.

A BIT FROM REAL LIFE.

A NEW YEAR'S STORY.

"Who wills to do and does his will,
Though barriers high as day
Obstruct his path, he leaps them all
And speeds him on his way."

The March wind was skurrying up the main street of the village, and a bevy of school girls skurried along with it, toward their homes.

"I don't see what made that teacher so cross all the afternoon," said Lillian Day, the tallest of the party. "Did you hear him snap me up, Helen, just because I happened to laugh the least little mite in the world?"

"Why, where upon earth are you? I'm talking to you, Helen Stearns!" and she turned on her heel, and walked backwards.

"Oh, there you are, lagging behind as usual. What in the world has got into you lately? You grow poky and pokier every day you live."

The girl addressed was slight in figure. She walked wearily, and one hand pressed her side, while the other carried a heavy satchel of books, which, with the wind, seemed greatly to impede her progress. Little rings of blonde hair were blowing all about her forehead and fair delicate face. She gave Lillian no reply, but the compressed lips would have shown one less thoughtless how the words hurt her.

"Come, hurry up," said Lillian.

"I can't hurry, I'm so tired." "Tired! Pooh, you're always tired!" But here was the gate, and Helen left the party and turned to enter her home.

"Good-by!" called the remaining girls in a chorus. "And don't go off mad!" said Lillian Day. "Never mind her talk, it isn't worth a fig," said a pleasant voice, and the eyes of its owner looked sympathy toward the retreating figure of Helen, who turned and waved her hand as she closed the front door.

"You are too bad to talk that way to Helen Stearns, Lillian," said the pleasant voice, as Helen disappeared.

"Yes, that's so!" chimed the rest. "And she's such a nice girl, and she's just killing herself studying so hard," added the first voice.

"Well, I can't take out all my words and look at them. If she'll kill herself just to keep at the head of the class, why, she's a bigger fool than I am, that's all," and Lillian hurried along ahead of the rest.

"Well, she's the smartest girl in school, anyway," said the first voice. "But what does that amount to, if she kills herself to do it?" flashed Lillian angrily over her shoulder.

A few months later, had you entered the kitchen of Mr. Levi Stearns, you might have seen his granddaughter Kate at the table, kneading bread.

The old brown farm house has been the home of Mr. Stearns' orphan grandchildren, Helen and Kate, ever since their early childhood. Kate was the younger, a pretty girl, with bright face and plump figure; such a picture of health as in these days does one's heart good to look at. Her sleeves rolled above the elbow displayed a pair of fair arms working energetically.

Grandma Stearns, whose dumpy figure was very like that of an apple dumpling, sat at the window darning stockings; her lame foot resting upon a fat cushion, which Kate's thoughtful hand had made for this special use. Something like a tear glistened upon the cheek of grandma Stearns.

The cat on the window-sill at her elbow looked at her, and a shade of melancholy seemed to be in her yellow motherly eyes. An air of subdued sadness sat upon everything in that old kitchen, save Kate and the teakettle and teapot upon the stove: these sang, and the teapot even trotted itself merrily, as if keeping time to Kate's gay air.

"Hush-sh-sh! you seem to make a deal o' noise, Kate," said grandma. "Aint you afraid you will disturb Helen? Poor child! she seems terribly nervous to-day, more so'n common."

Kate ceased singing, and kneaded her bread more quietly, but a smile played about her mouth, as if something pleasant were in her thoughts.

"I'm glad, dear, if you can feel like singing. I'll 'low I'm dretful down 't the heel about Helen, this afternoon; and yer grand'ther, he's blue as a whetstone," continued the old lady mournfully. "Somehow it seems as if things was all goin' wrong. Dunno but the Lord's got agin us some way; if He has, 'tain't no use tryin' to prosper."

"O no, grandma, I guess not," said Kate cheerfully, giving her bread another slap upon the board. "If we only do our part all right, I don't believe He objects to our prosperity."

"But what is our part's more'n I know," sighed the poor old lady.

A heavy step sounded in the back entry, and her husband entered. He was a stout, kind-faced old man, and as was his wont when trouble or anxiety weighed upon him, he was singing, in a low husky tone, a weird old minor tune. He drew his big arm-chair to his wife's side, and sat down heavily.

"Wal, what did the doctor say 'bout Helen to-day?" he asked in a dejected tone.

Grandma sighed as she drew her yarn through slowly. "He says the spine of her back's affected along with her lungs, and that she's liable to be a sufferin' invalid all her life, if she don't go into a decline," and grandma wiped her eyes hastily with the woolen stocking she was darning.

Her husband said nothing; grandma's words had fallen very heavily on him, for Helen was very dear to his old heart. He did not "believe in pickin' favorites in a family o' children," he always said, "but Helen did look a master sight like Tom, poor boy." And as if to divert his mind, for he could not bear the wild fear at his heart, he arose and took a newspaper from the line, and slowly unfolded it.

"Who's been markin' this ere paper all over, mother?" he asked, carefully spreading it open upon his lap.

"Lor, who d'ye spose, father? Ye didn't think I'd taken to makin' posies n' butterflies n' angel's heads, at my time o' life, did ye?" and the good old lady looked over her spectacles.

"Kate," said he, "don't it kinder seem s'if ye hadn't orter mark up my very last Zion's Herald this way?"

Kate flushed. "Yes, grandpa, I know I oughtn't, but I had such a lovely face in my mind, and I couldn't find any paper just then, and I didn't want to lose it, you know, and I never minded till after I'd used that nice clean margin that it was the very last one. I didn't think, truly, grandpa."

"Come here, child!" said the old man.

Kate ran to him, her floury hands put out straight behind her.

"Kiss your old grand'ther," said he, taking her pink cheeks in his brawny hands.

"There, make all the pictures ye want to, child. Massey knows ye've had to work hard enough, since Helen's been sick, and yer grandma lame. I'll buy ye some good nice paper if I can ever think on't."

"Oh, what a good old grandpapa you are!" cried Kate, and she patted his cheek with the back of one floury hand, kissed both the old faces, and returned to her work. She soon had the table set for tea, and was running to the garden for berries.

With the closing of the door behind her, one at the opposite side of the room sprang ajar, unobserved by the old couple.

"Have you seen Squire Foster?" asked the old lady.

"Yes, and he says he's goin' ter foreclose on that mortgage right off, so the farm's got to go, I s'pose."

"Deary me! Deary me!" groaned grandma, "what ever 'll become of us all the mussy knows. Couldn't ye tell him what bad luck we've had—doctor's bills 'n everything? Mebbe he'd have a little compassion, and wait a spell. He knows you're honest."

"I did, mother, but it don't make no difference. He's a hard-fisted old customer. I've laid out a good deal on Helen's education—a good deal for me—not? I begreth it—I don't; but it does seem hard for things to turn out so," and he took off his hat and hung it upon his knee.

Through the half-open door these words directly fell on the ears of the sick girl, who lay upon her lounge in the next room. Her face, so pale when last we saw her, now wore a hectic flush, and the dilating pupils gave her eyes a look of blackness. She clutched the pillows convulsively with her thin white hands, and buried her face in it to stifle a cry of anguish.

A long time she lay thus, with her face in the pillow, heavy sobs shaking her whole frame, when the door noiselessly swung wide open, and Kate, her face bright with hope and health, came lightly into the room, bearing a tea-tray, upon which were temptingly arranged a plate of toast, a dish of luscious blackberries, and a glass of rich, creamy milk.

Having placed her light burden upon the stand beside the lounge, she stooped, gently lifted the frail form of her sister, and softly kissing the fevered brow, she asked, caressingly, "What's the matter, chicken?"

"Oh! I want to get well; and grandpa's got to lose his farm; and everything, everything!" and she moaned aloud.

"Well, you shall get well, and grandpa won't lose his farm, nor anything—nor anything!" and Kate sang the last words gaily.

"Oh! but Kate," sobbed Helen, "you don't know, you don't begin to know the castles I've built, the good I was going to do in so many, many ways. And now, here they all come tumbling down, crushing my heart out. Oh such nights as I have! The doctor says I can't get well—did you know it?"

"Doctors don't know everything," said Kate, looking quite fierce. "Look at Mrs. Deacon Jones! Doctor King said a year ago she couldn't live a month, and she's pretty well now. You can get well!"

Helen lifted her face and looked at her sister.

"Come, now, eat your supper like a good girl," said Kate, and drawing up the big arm-chair, she shook the cushions, and helped Helen into its broad arms, and while the invalid listlessly tasted here and there, Kate drew from her pocket a paper.

"Just hear me read, and shorten up that face of yours," she said cheerfully, and announced her title—"The Physical Education of Girls."

As she proceeded with growing animation, Helen seemed to catch a little of her spirit, her face lit up with interest, and then with something akin to hope.

The sterling sense of the ideas advanced, together with the smoothly elegant language in which they were set forth, attracted her.

Kate had reached the closing paragraph: "Since the physical life must be the foundation of all higher developments, that from which the mental and spiritual qualities must take their stamina, so the development of a healthful, vigorous body should be the first element of culture with our girls."

"True, true," said Helen sadly, giving a sharp cough, as Kate closed. "That's how I've failed. Study hasn't killed me—but not knowing how to study. I've just plodded over my books, and never

at all thought of my health. Do you suppose, Kate?"—she paused a moment, and then spoke the words desperately—"that it's too late?"

"Too late! No!" said Kate vehemently. "Why, I've been happy as a bird all the afternoon, just hurrying my work like mad, to get a chance to read this to you, just because I believe it's not too late."

"No! you are going now to study to live, and I'm going to help you do it. I'm going to see you well!" and she rolled the curtain high up, and threw open a window.

The crimson and gold sunset cloud sent its glory through the casement and flooded the room. Helen clasped her hands in rapturous delight, and whispered,

"Oh, Kate! if I only could go back to school again, and graduate. Just think! only a few months more, and I could have been ready to teach. Oh, if I could have somehow saved the farm for poor old grandpa!" and the light died out of her eyes again.

"We'll see, we'll see yet," said Kate, nodding her head sagely.

Helen smiled wearily, and Kate rattled volubly on until the poor invalid actually laughed at some of her funny sayings. "There! you are ten per cent. better than I found you!" Kate ended, and picking up her tea-tray, she walked off.

Left alone, Helen turned her face toward the sunset which threw its halo about her, and filled her hair with its golden light. With radiant face she gazed into the evening sky. "Yes, I must live! I must be well, and thank God, I believe I can be!" she said aloud, slowly and earnestly.

The next morning the sun shone, the birds sang, and the honeysuckle and the jasmine sprays sent graceful, dancing shadows over the grass and front steps in grandpa Stearns' yard. Yes, and over Helen herself, who reclined well wrapped, among a pile of cushions and pillows upon an old wooden settle placed close beside the steps.

"Was there ever so beautiful a morning, grand-ma?" she asked as the good old lady's anxious face appeared at the window to ask for the twentieth time. "Ain't ye the least mite cold?"

Kate looked out. "Have you taken your long breaths?" she asked.

Helen smiled wanly. "It hurts so and makes me so blind and dizzy!" she said, putting one hand to her chest.

"But you must do it a little easy—so—" and Kate illustrated. "Then stop, before it hurts more, and do it often—ever so often," and she brought a book and read some directions on "Chest expansion."

"So you must make it a regular business to attend to this, and do it systematically, as you would any other work—your lessons at school, for instance. You did not expect to accomplish the study of Algebra at one bound; and she stood on the top step restituting like a stump orator."

Helen laughed, and promised to do as bidden, and the speaker returned to her kitchen work.

After a whole day in the open air Helen had a night of sweet, natural sleep, her first for many weeks, and the next morning found her a new being in courage, and perceptibly improved in body.

"I shall get well, Kate," she said emphatically, as her sister was helping her to dress, "but the farm—how can we save that?"

"I've a project in my head," replied Kate.

"What?"

"Shan't tell you," and Kate, looking mysterious, waltzed off around the room, one shoe in hand, which she slipped upon Helen's foot as she stopped with a low bow at the bedside, and quietly proceeded to lace it.

That afternoon as Helen lay half asleep among her cushions, beneath the shade of the cherry tree in the front yard, the gate flew open, and Kate, breathless with excitement, rushed in. "I've done it! I've done it!" she cried, taking off her hat and fanning her flushed face with it.

"Done what?—what is it?" asked Helen, thoroughly aroused.

"I've saved the farm!"

"Saved the farm!—You!—How?—What do you mean?" asked Helen in amazement.

"Well, I've been up to Uncle Joe, and laid the whole case before him. I've told him you are going to get well, and that one of us can earn this money certain sure. And what do you think?—what do you think, Helen Stearns!" and she waved her arm around in the air.

Helen held her breath—"What—tell me quick!" she cried.

"Well, if you'll believe me, that dear blessed old saint has loaned me the money to pay off that mortgage!" and the rotating hand halted and unclosed close to Helen's chin, displaying a roll of bills, crisp and green.

"Oh, Kate!" and Helen's arms caught her about the neck, and the sick girl was sobbing for joy.

Then Kate rushed into the house to grandpa, and then off to the barn to find grandpa, who at the pace of a younger man soon came through the long entry, followed by the excited girl. He opened the door and stared at his wife.

"Wall, wall, mother! d'ever ye see the beat o' them girls of ours?" said he.

The old lady wiped one eye, then her spectacles, then the other eye, before speaking.

"I declare, I don't believe I can set another stitch to-day, I'm so frustrated," she said tremulously.

The remaining days of summer went by, and autumn, with its ripening fruits and golden grains, slid gently along. Helen gained rapidly. She had what she called her "gymnasium"—a trapeze and dumb-bells, and she exercised according to directions from a book on "Physical Culture," found in