

DEB.

The solemn Androscoggin bell was ringing the mill-girls in by broad sunlight, one noon, when there came a knock at the door, and behind it the young lady of whom I heard. Deb was startled by the knock, and frightened by the young lady. It was not often that visitors came to Brick Alley, and it was still less often that Brick Alley had a visitor who knocked.

This was a young lady for whom Deb's mother did fine washing, Deb's mother wiped her hands and placed a chair, and the young lady sat down. She was a straight young lady, with strong feet, and long brown feathers in her hat, and soft brown gloves upon her hands. She had come, she said, with that Cluny set, which she found she should need for a party this very night; indeed, she was in no such haste for it that she hunted Deb's mother up—which was a matter of some difficulty—as she never had the least idea where she lived before, and how crooked the stairs were!

But the lace was very yellow, as she saw, and would she be sure to have it done by nine o'clock to night? and—

And there, turning her head suddenly, the straight young lady saw poor crooked Deb in her high chair, with the wonder in her eyes.

"I wonder if I frightened her," thought Deb. But she only wondered but did not speak.

"Is this your—"

"Yes," said Deb's mother, "the eldest. Fifteen. I'll try my best, ma'am; but I don't know as I ought to promise." She spoke in a business-like tone, and turned the Cluny lace—a daintily collar and a pair of soft cuffs—about in her hands in a business-like way. A breath of some kind of scented wood struck in a little gust against Deb's face. She wondered how people could weave sweet smells into a piece of lace, and if the young lady knew; or if she knew how much pleasanter it was than the onions Mrs. McMahoney cooked for dinner every day in the week but Sunday, upon the first floor. But it gave her quite enough to do to wonder, without speaking.

"Fifteen!" repeated the young lady, standing up very straight, and looking very sorry. "How long has she been—like—that?"

"Born so," said Deb's mother. "She's jest set in that chair ever since she's been big enough to set at all. Would you try gum on these, Miss?"

"But you never told me you had a crippled child!"

"The young lady said this quickly. 'You have washed for me three years, and you never told me you had a crippled child!'"

"You never asked me Miss," said Deb's mother.

"The young lady made no reply. She came and sat down on the edge of Deb's bed, close beside Deb's chair. She seemed to have forgotten all about her Cluny lace. She took Deb's hand between her two soft, brown gloves, and her long, brown feathers dropped and touched Deb's cheek. Deb hardly breathed, the feathers and the gloves, and the sweet smell of scented wood, and the young lady's sorry eyes—such very sorry eyes!—were so close to the high-chair.

"Fifteen years!" repeated the young lady, very low. "In that chair—that nobody ever—poor little girl!" "But you could ride!" she said suddenly.

"I don't know, ma'am," said Deb. "I never saw anybody ride but the grocer and the baker. I ain't like the grocer and the baker."

"You could be lifted, I mean," said the young lady eagerly. "There is somebody who lifts you?"

"Mother sets me, generally," said Deb. "Once when she was very bad with a lame ankle, Jim McMahoney set me. He's first floor—Jim McMahoney."

"I shall be back here," said the young lady, still speaking very quietly, but speaking to Deb's mother now—"in just an hour. I shall come in an easy sleigh with warm robes. If you will have your daughter ready to take a ride with me, I shall be very much obliged to you."

The young lady finished her sentence as if she did not know what to say, and so said the truest thing she could think of, which we are all in danger of doing at times.

"Well, I am sure!" said Deb's mother. "Dabitra, tell the lady—"

But Dabitra could not tell the lady, for she was already out of the door, and down stairs, and away into the street. And, indeed, Deb could not have told the lady—has never told the lady—can never tell the lady.

If all of the blue summer skies, and the gold of summer sunlight, and the shine of summer stars fell down into your hands at once, for you to paint scrap-books with, should you know what to say?

Into the poor little scrap-book of Deb's life the colors of heaven dropped and blinded her on that bewildering, beautiful, blessed ride.

In just an hour the sleigh was there, with the easiest cushions and warmest robes, and bells—the merriest bells!—and the straight young lady. And Jim McMahoney was there, and he carried her down stairs to "set" her. And her mother was there, and wrapped her all

about in an old red shawl, for Deb had no "things" like other little girls. The young lady had brought the prettiest little white hood that Deb had ever seen, and Deb's face looked like a bruised day-lily bud between the shining wool, but Deb could not see that; and Mrs. McMahoney was there paring onions at the door, to wish her good luck; and all the little McMahoneyes were there, and all the children who did not wonder, and the grocer turned in at the ally corner, and the baker stopped as he turned out, and everybody stood and smiled to see her start. The white horse pawed the snow and held up his head—Deb had never seen such a handsome horse—and the young lady had gathered the reins into her brown gloves, and the sleigh bells cried for joy—how they cried!—and away they went, and Deb was out of the alley in a minute, and the people in the alley hurried, and hurried, and hurried to see her go.

That bewildering, beautiful, blessed ride! How warm the little white hood was! How the cushions sank beneath her, and the fur robes opened like feathers to the touch of her poor thin hands! How the bells sang to her, and the snowdrift blinked at her, and the circles, and the slated roofs and sky, and the people's faces smiled at her.

"What's the matter?" asked the young lady; for Deb drew the great wolf's robe over her face and head, and sat so, for a minute still hidden. The young lady thought she was frightened.

"But I only want to cry a little!" said Deb's little smothered voice. "I must cry a little first!"

When she had cried a little, she held up her head, and the shine of her pretty white hood grew faint beside the shine of her eyes and cheeks. That bewildering beautiful, blessed ride!

Streets, and a crowd, and church-spires were in it—yes, and a wedding and a funeral, too; all things that Deb had seen in her high chair in the daytime, with her eyes shut, she saw in the sleigh on that ride with her eyes open wide.

She sat very still. The young lady did not talk to her, and she did not talk to the young lady. The horse held up his head. He seemed to Deb to be flying. She thought that he must be like the awful, beautiful white horse in Revelation. She felt as if he could take her to heaven just as well as not, if the young lady's brown gloves should only pull the reins that way.

They rode and rode. In and out of the merry streets, through and through the singing-bells, about and about the great church-spires—all over, and over, and over the laughing town. They rode to the river, and the young lady stopped the white horse, so that Deb could look across, and up and down.

"There is so much of it," said Deb, softly, thinking of the crack of it that she had seen between two houses for fifteen years. For the crack seemed to her very much like fifteen years in a high-chair; and a long, broad-shouldered, silvered river seemed to her very much like this world about which she had wondered.

They rode to the mills, and Deb trembled to look up at their frowning walls, and to meet their hundred eyes; but some of the girls who wore pink bows, and who knew her, came nodding to look down out of them, and she left off trembling to laugh; then, in a minute, she trembled again, for all at once, without any warning, great Androscoggin pealed the time just over her head, and swallowed her up in sound. She turned pale with delighted terror, and then flushed with terrified delight.

Did it pray, or cry or laugh? Deb did not know. It seemed to her that if the white horse would carry her into the great heart of that bell, she need never sit in a high-chair at a window again, but ride and ride with the young lady. It seemed to her like forever and forever.

They turned away from the Androscoggin without speaking, and rode and rode. Daylight dimmed, and dusk dropped, and see! all the town blazed with lights. They rode to see the lights. Deb could not speak—there were so many lights.

And still she could not speak when they rode into Brick Alley, and Jim McMahoney and her mother, and the children who did not wonder, came out to meet her and take her back to her high-chair.

She was too happy to speak. She need never wonder any more. She could remember. But the young lady did not want her to speak. She touched her white horse, and was gone in a minute; and when Androscoggin rang them both to sleep that night—for the young lady forgot to ask for her Cluny, and was too tired to go to the party—I am sure I cannot tell which was the happier, she or Deb.—Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.

I once asked a company of little girls, who, after meeting the Saviour, they would like best to see in heaven. One said a holy angel; another, a little brother, who had died a few months before; and a third said, "The children that Jesus took in his arms and blessed when he was upon earth."

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