



## Little Miss Prim.

**G**RAY, angry-looking clouds obscured the bluesky, a cold east wind blew tiny particles of snow into the faces of those persons who were so unfortunate as to be exposed to the cutting blast. A warm fire and comfortable easy chair were things to be appreciated, and so thought the Laurence family as they stood or sat around the great blazing logs of hickory in the open fireplace of the luxurious sitting-room at Pleasant Park, the old homestead of the Laurences.

Harry, the eldest boy, a tall, bright-eyed lad of fourteen, went to the window that looked out upon the highway. It was nearly schooltime, and troops of boys and girls were passing swiftly along in the direction of the huge brick edifice, the pride of Fairmount.

"Lizzie, Johnny, come here," cried Harry, and his handsome countenance beamed with merriment as he gazed upon the scene without. A lady not much taller than Lizzie, the twelve-year-old sister of the merry youth at the window, was walking or rather trying to, for the slight figure swayed from one side of the road to the other, beaten and blown by the high winds; and the umbrella she carried was turned inside out, while her long gray hair was floating like a banner in the wintry breeze. The girl and boy ran to the pretty alcove, with its snowy lace curtains looped back, showing the stand of plants bright with bloom, and by joining in the laughter caused Mr. and Mrs. Laurence to look up from their reading to inquire the cause of so much mirth.

"Oh, mother, you ought to see the capers little Miss Prim is cutting; old Boreas makes her move lively," said Master Harry, and even his parents could hardly suppress a smile as they saw the ludicrous figure the poor dressmaker made in her vain endeavors to keep her feet and avoid the rude embrace of the north-east gale. "Jiminy, but she is a scarecrow," said little Johnny. "Wonder what she goes out such stormy days for?"

"Why, my son, Miss Prim is poor and is obliged to earn her living. She has no kind papa to give her nice warm clothes, or provide her with food, as you have. It is not right to laugh at the little woman, for she has a hard life of it, and is so patient and kind in every trial," and Mrs. Laurence patted the soft curls of her six-year-old boy, mentally thanking God she and her dear ones were free from the curse of poverty.

"It is nearly nine o'clock," cried Lizzie, glancing at the huge old-fashioned timepiece that ticked away so musically in the corner of the room. "I will take Johnny with me, mother, and then one umbrella will shelter us; Harry is large enough to take care of himself." So saying Lizzie arrayed herself in her warm cloak, hood and furs, looking like the pictures of Little Red Ridinghood, with brown eyes shining and cheeks rosy with health. Just as the three children descended the steps to the garden, the huge iron gate clanged to, and Miss Prim met them on the broad gravelled walk.

"Mamma at home, Blossom?" said the little lady in a cheerful tone to Lizzie, and at the same time laughing, as she saw the half-concealed smile on the faces of the children. "You rogues! you might just as well shout and laugh at the funny figure I cut. I shall not feel at all hurt. I know I am a perfect scarecrow, but no matter, my beauty will not suffer." And with a nod and a "Good by, dearies," not waiting for an answer to her question, Miss Prim vanished within the open doorway, and the children hastened to school.

Miss Charity Prim—or Miss Chatty, as she was called—was the village dressmaker. She was a maiden lady, thirty-five or

forty years of age, small and delicate in appearance, but always in good health. Her face was always smiling, her soft, blue eyes mild and pure as those of a child; her abundant hair, long and silken, crowned her head as with a coronet of silver.

"I thought I would come and finish that dress of yours, Mrs. Laurence," said Miss Chatty, as she entered the firelighted room, the warmth and glow making such a contrast to the gloom without. "I am a little late, but I had a hard time of it, fighting the wind all the way from the cottage. My umbrella is a wreck, and I look as though I had been in a gale, and was flying the flag of distress," laughing merrily and showing firm, white teeth that had never known the torture of a dentist's art; "however, 'all's well that ends well,'" and, with a sigh of content, Miss Chatty followed the stately but kind-hearted mistress of Pleasant Park to the sewing-room, where, in a low rocker, with a huge pile of work before her, the little dressmaker was soon busy as a bee.

"Miss Chatty," said a servant, entering with a tray on which

dows of Pleasant Park. The Laurence family were wealthy and high born, Mr. Laurence being from one of the oldest and proudest families in Boston, and his wife, the handsome Kate Carleton before marriage, was of English birth, with noble blood in her veins, yet they acknowledged the goodness and worth of their humble seamstress; and although she did not join them at the table, having her meals sent into the sewing-room, she was invited into the sitting-room when the family met together for the pleasant chat before bedtime, and in her modest brown dress, with snowy collar and cuffs, her sweet, pale face, soft voice and charming smile, Miss Chatty did not look out of place even in the parlor of the high born Laurence family.

"Miss Chatty, I wish you would tell me a story. I do so like to hear them."

This from Master Johnny, who was basking on the snow-white rug of bearskin, the glow from the fire lighting up his curls until they looked like a mass of gold, and his round, dimpled face as rosy as the sunny side of a peach.

"Oh, do, dear Miss Prim, tell us something nice," exclaimed Lizzie, shutting up the entertaining fairy book, and coming forward to the easy chair wherein sat the tiny lady, her small hands busy with some tatting she wished to finish for Mrs. Laurence.

"I never told a story in all my life, my dears. Then I am afraid, even if I could tell you anything that would interest you, I should disturb your father and mother in their reading."

"Not at all," they both cried, with all the courtesy they could have shown a lady of wealth, and putting away the paper and book, they begged her, if she felt so disposed, to entertain the children.

"I will go to the smoking-room for an hour or so," said Mr. Laurence, and putting on his silk-embroidered jacket and cap, left the room. "I will finish this piece of ruffling," Mrs. Laurence smilingly answered, as she turned the gas higher, and soon her white jewelled fingers were plying the shining needle, while Miss Prim, with a thoughtful countenance, commenced the story of her life.

"A true story, Blossom, and I hope it will interest you, but it is the first time I have ever spoken of my past, so you will forgive me,"—turning to the lady of the mansion—"if I shed a few tears over past joys and sorrows."

"Indeed, Miss Chatty, I certainly would overlook anything in one as amiable as you are, but do not bring up memories that will cause you grief. I will tell the children a fairy tale, and you can go on with your work."

"Oh, no, indeed, not for the world would I disappoint the dear little lambs, and it will do me good to relate to

kindhearted ones the story of my rather dull life.

"My father kept the lighthouse. I had no brothers nor sisters, and when at fourteen I lost my dear mother, you can imagine how lonely I was. It was she who taught me to sew and to cut my own clothes and dresses, she who taught me all I know. Mother was a governess before marriage and was finely educated, so I became interested in books and study. I loved the ocean, loved it in all its moods. When the sky was stormy and angry waves were crested with creamy foam I would sit on the rocks and admire, or when the blue waters were serene and smooth I would take my little boat and sail on its mirror-like bosom for hours. Then I loved to wander on the beach and gather sea weed and tiny shells. After mother died I was house-keeper, and helped father in the care of the lamp, and when he was sick many and many a night have I sat alone tending the great glowing light that shone like a blood-red ruby far out on the glistening waters. I grieved over mother's death, but father was so kind, so tender, he took her place in many respects. So we lived until I was seventeen.

"One night in January—shall I ever forget that fearful night?—father had the light burning brightly. We were in the cheerful kitchen with a great fire in the stove, plenty of hot water, blankets, whiskey and other things in readiness for anything that might happen. I was darning stockings, father was doz-



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were muffins, steak and a steaming cup of coffee, "here is something warm for you."

"Well, I declare, all this trouble on my account. It is too bad, but I do believe I am hungry," and putting her work aside, the little woman soon made sad havoc with the dainties before her. She was proud in her way, was this poor, hard-working, woman. She would not own that on this cold and dreary morning she had dressed in her chilly room, and eaten sparingly of bread and oatmeal, with a cup of milk to satisfy her thirst, but never a complaint, never a cross look from the noble woman who had no luxuries and few comforts, but who ever looked on the bright side of life.

Before night the storm became so furious, the snow so deep that the dressmaker was urged to remain till the next day, and to tell the truth she was nothing loath, for her humble room in the cottage of the widow Green was not a very attractive one, although clean and neat, yet a rag carpet, paper shades, a cot bed and a small stove, with scanty food for a dainty appetite, was all the dressmaker could earn for herself in the small village of Fairmount.

Evening, with her sable curtain, enfolded the snowy earth. The wind sighed and moaned around the warmly draped win-