

now', pleaded Sylvia. 'There are the children, poor little things, they look as if they never had any pleasure. Grandmother, let me go out with Stephens and buy some toys and bonbons, and to-morrow I will go into one of the poor streets to give them away. Grandmother, dear, do give me some money and let me go.' Grandmother very rarely said 'no' to any request of Sylvia's, so in a few minutes she was well wrapped up, and accompanied by the old servant who loved her almost like her own child, Sylvia went out in high spirits.

In little more than an hour she came dancing up the stairs with bright eyes and rosy cheeks, followed by Stephens, laden with parcels.

'Here I am,' she announced, throwing the door wide open, 'oh, you dear old grandmother,' giving Lady Eleanor a frantic hug, 'it has been so lovely. I feel like Christmas now, and I have found a horrid, dull, miserable place, where I am sure they never have anything nice, so they shall have a surprise to-morrow. I have some lovely toys and picture books, and heaps of bon-bons. Come in, Stephens, I want to show grandmother the things.' With eager fingers she tore off the wrappers to display her purchases, while Stephens gathered up the paper and string.

'Are they not beautiful, grandmother? Do you think children can help liking them? Oh, Stephens, thank you, what a dear old body you are. Do you know, grandmother, Stephens has actually been defending the weather, she says it does her good to see rain and slushy mud after being away so long.'

Lady Eleanor admired the purchases as much as even Sylvia desired, and it was not until after dinner that she remembered she had not told all her story.

'I quite forgot my adventure,' she said, as she drew her chair closer to the fire, and put her feet comfortably on the fender. 'I was coming out of the sweet shop when I saw the dearest little girl—not a poor child, she did look rather poor, but she was a lady's child. I longed to give her a present, so I slipped my prettiest box of chocolate into her hand. I wish you had seen how astonished she looked. But the queer thing was that I cannot have seen her before, yet her face was so familiar, a sweet pretty little face with golden hair clustering round it, and large happy-looking brown eyes, and I have just remembered that she was exactly like that miniature that you always have on your bed-room mantel-piece.'

Lady Eleanor smiled. 'Little Eleanor Graham,' she said, 'she was a dear little girl, but it is not an uncommon kind of face. Many English children have it.'

'She was your god-child.'

'Yes, her father was the vicar of our parish. Eleanor was born at a time when I had had a great sorrow, she was named after me, and I saw a great deal of her until she was about twelve, then I went abroad with your father and grandfather, and never saw her again.'

'But did not she write to you, grandmother?'

'Yes, two or three times, but she was only a child, busy with her studies, I was busy also with my little children, and constantly moving about, so the correspondence gradually ceased. I have often thought if I came to England, I should like to find Eleanor.'

'Let us try,' cried eager Sylvia, 'she would be quite like an aunt for me. I have always been so sorry my little aunts all died.'

Lady Eleanor smiled and shook her head, but Sylvia spent the next half hour in devising means for learning the present address of Eleanor, only child of the Reverend

Thomas Graham, who was once vicar of Ashmeade in Norfolk.

### III.

Christmas Day was fine, and Sylvia rose in a flutter of impatience. As, however, her basket was a considerable size, it was decided that she had better not go out with her gifts until dusk; so the early part of the day passed with no more exciting events than the exchange of presents between Lady Eleanor, Sylvia and Stephens, and the arrival of letters from old friends left in France. About half-past four it was decidedly dusk, and Stephens, having assured Lady Eleanor that the neighborhood selected by Sylvia, though undoubtedly very poor, was quite safe for her young lady to visit, she set out, a very bonnie Santa Claus, with a most attractive basket.

'It ought to have been a bag,' she said, looking at it with satisfaction, 'but I suppose the contents matter most. Now, Stephens, I am going to help to carry it, it is far too heavy for you alone.'

The children in a poor part of the town remembered that Christmas afternoon for many a day, and it came to be a legend of the neighborhood how a lovely young lady with blue eyes and yellow hair and an old woman carrying a basket between them came to door after door leaving the most wonderful presents that ever were seen. The children in the lane also had a story to tell of a little sweet-faced rosy girl who came to them with a bag on her arm from which she gave them white packets of toffee saying she wanted to give them something because it was Christmas and that was all she had. The toffee was nice and some ate it with no thought beyond the moment's pleasure, but to some the sweetmeat was but little compared to the smile and the loving words that were given with it.

'To think,' said a lame girl looking at the dainty parcel in her hand, 'To think that she should care to give us anything—That's the best of all.'

Just as the clock was striking six Sylvia, with her basket empty, was hastening home when she nearly ran into some one going in the opposite direction, and at the same moment a child's voice exclaimed,

'Why, I believe it is my Santa Claus.'

'And it is my little girl,' responded Sylvia stooping to kiss the pretty face while Sarah, who was proud to be trusted with Miss Eleanor, came forward to satisfy herself that it was a real lady who spoke to her.

The little group stood by a lamp so that they could see each other's faces distinctly.

'I did so want to see you again,' said Eleanor looking up with big serious eyes, 'because you know I didn't thank you for that lovely box of chocolate. I am almost sure it was you, but you went away so quickly. Are you really Santa Claus? I always thought he was an old man.'

'So did I,' laughed Sylvia, 'perhaps I am one of his relations. That looks like his bag on your arm.'

'Does it really?' asked Eleanor gravely, 'because I want it to be. I have been a little Santa Claus this afternoon. Those poor children in the lane, you know they hadn't any Christmas, so mother let us make some toffee for them. It is like she used to make when she was a little girl, so we call it Ashmeade toffee because—'

'Ashmeade!' almost screamed Sylvia, 'My dear child, you must come with me at once. You may come too,' as faithful Sarah tightened her hold of Eleanor's hand, 'Stephens, please get a cab. We must make haste back to grandmother.'

Hardly knowing what was going to happen to her, Eleanor let herself be lifted into the cab, and in a few minutes more Sylvia was hurrying her up a wide staircase and into a large warm room.

'Grandmother, grandmother,' she cried, 'I have found my dear little girl. Do look at her.'

Lady Eleanor had been dozing in her chair, and little Eleanor was stupefied by this sudden introduction, so for a minute they stared at each other in bewilderment. The child was the first to recover herself; here was the beautiful old lady of Judith's tales with the silvery hair, bright eyes and pretty color. She drew her hand from Sylvia's clasp, ran across the room and stood by the large easy chair.

'Are you mother's fairy-godmother?' she asked, looking up into the sweet old face. I think you must be, and I am so glad.'

Lady Eleanor drew the child more closely to her side.

'Eleanor,' she cried in a low voice, 'little Eleanor Graham.'

'Now I know you are the fairy-godmother,' cried Nelly, 'for you would not know I am Eleanor unless you were. But you made one little small mistake. I am Eleanor Ashley; it is Roland whose name is Graham. Mother will be so pleased. Do let us go to mother at once, she will think I am lost.'

Mrs. Manners was beginning to get alarmed at Eleanor's long absence, when Roland, who was kneeling on a chair with his face pressed close to the window looking into the darkness, called out that a carriage was stopping at the door.

'And, oh, I say, Nelly is getting out of it—and an old lady—and a young lady—oh, and Sarah.'

Judith went to open the door. Eleanor rosy and excited sprang into her mother's arms, crying out,

'Oh, mother, mother, the fairy-godmother!'

A beautiful, stately, white-haired lady came after her, and taking Mrs. Manners's hand, asked,

'Is it really my Eleanor?'

Sarah went into the kitchen, and Judith stood shyly looking on until some one lit the gas in the little sitting room and they all went in. Judith had so often imagined this scene, that she fancied she knew exactly what to say and do, and it was very mortifying, now that Lady Eleanor was really sitting by the fire talking over old times with her mother, to feel so awkward that Roland and Nelly had Sylvia's entertainment entirely left to them.

Altogether that was a wonderful evening, and it would make a very long story to tell of all that happened then and afterwards. As Judith had said, Lady Eleanor would have liked to adopt the whole family, for she quite felt that Mrs. Manners was like a child of her own.

'God has taken all my daughters,' she said, 'come and be a daughter to me, Eleanor, I really need you.'

Mrs. Manners, however, thought it was better to be in a home of her own, but when Lady Eleanor had bought a pretty place in the country she consented to come to a small house very near, and to do all in her power to fill the place of a daughter to her old friend. About the same time a sum of money which Mr. Manners had lent to an unfortunate friend was unexpectedly repaid; it had seemed a trifle in the days of their wealth, but now it was enough to enable them to live in comfort so that as Eleanor said, they might now begin 'to live happily ever after, like the end of a fairy tale.'

'And it was Nelly's plan that helped to find