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THE WHOLESOME BAKING POWDER

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OR

Loyalty Recompensed.

CHAPTER VI.

"I—I will try and improve it," said Decima. "The worst of it is that I—I don't know anything about cooking, and I could not tell you one how to do things. I will get a cookery-book."

"Do—do!" said Bobby, with cheerful resignation. "It would be better to expire of one meal from your hands than to die lingeringly, as we are doing, at cook's."

"Was there anything wrong with the dinner?" asked Mr. Deane, gazing at Bobby.

"No, father," said Bobby, brightly; "certainly not. It was a charming meal—for a pack of hounds! But we will not pursue the painful subject. At this period, my dear Decima, we smoke. Father consumes tobacco out of a black meerschaum, which I now produce—he laid the pipe and tobacco-jar beside Mr. Deane—and I inhale the mild and fragrant hay which the local tobaccoist calls 'genuine Turkish.' You may retire to the drawing-room if you like; but if you can stand the smoke, we should infinitely prefer you to remain. Try it, at any rate. If you feel approaching symptoms of suffocation, you can call out, and I will carry you into the fresh air."

"I'd rather stay, and I'm sure I shall not mind."

"Perhaps you smoke yourself?" said Bobby, blandly.

"Decima stared and laughed, as at an excellent joke.

"Fardon, I forgot that you had been brought up by a lady who combines the simplicity of the Quaker with the philosophy of a Platonist.

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WASH day is the least welcome day of the week in most homes, though sweeping day is not much better. Both days are most trying on the back.

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I want you to tell me all about your past life, Decima."

"But this was evidently not the opportunity; for, having lighted his pipe, Mr. Deane rose and began to pace the room, his eyebrows working, his lips moving as if he were communing with himself.

Bobby touched Decima's foot with his own.

"Guv'nor's off," he said. And presently Mr. Deane began.

"My dear Decima, I don't think I have told you of my last great discovery. It is the biggest thing I have done—by far the biggest. You are aware that the principal obstacles in the way of progress of electricity is the difficulty of packing its force in a portable form. My invention removes that obstacle. By a simple contrivance which I will explain to you—"

He stopped in front of her, his eyes gazing over her head into vacancy, his hand ruffling his long, straggling hair, his face rapt with the crank's enthusiasm and absorption, and poured out a mass of words and technical terms.

"But," he broke off at last, "come with me to the laboratory, and I will show you."

Decima, with a woman's pity, mingled with her bewilderment, rose and took his arm.

"Yes, father; try and make me understand," she said. "I am interested—I want to quite understand."

"You shall—now shall! My dear Decima, it is quite evident you have inherited the brain-force, the mental receptiveness of your father; your mother's face, perhaps; but my—my—mind the step!" he broke off, as he himself stumbled over it.

He led them into the workshop and waved his long hand toward the extraordinary collection of models, machinery, and instruments, and began a kind of rhapsody, scarcely one word of which Decima understood.

Every now and then, in his pacing up and down, he would face her and gaze at her absently, and Decima would nod and smile gently and encouragingly, and then glance pityingly at Bobby, who was seated on the bench smoking his cigarette with philosophical calm.

"In this room, my dear Decima," said Mr. Deane, "you may see the potentialities of vast riches. There are inventions, ideas here which will produce—when they are perfected and put on the market—hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of money. For myself, I have no desire to be rich, but I think of my children. Robert will need money; it will be well for you to be rich. It is for his children that a father toils, and it is sufficient reward for him to know that he has given them wealth and the means of enjoyment. Yes, this room is a veritable Golconda. This last model, for instance—"

He took up the extraordinary looking thing, and attempted to set it going; but there was something wrong with it, and in a moment he grew absorbed in the endeavor to put it straight, and entirely forgot the presence of his children.

Bobby slid off the bench and took Decima's arm.

"Come on," he said. "He's up in dream-land again."

Decima sighed, as she went out slowly, and looking back wistfully at her father.

"Oh, what a lovely night!" she exclaimed, as they passed over the moonbeams which streamed through the passage window on to the well-worn oiled cloth. "Can we not go out, Bobby, just for a little while?"

"We can, certainly, at several little whiffs, for we sha'n't be missed. Wait here, and I will get you something to put on your head."

He brought her a Tam O'Shanter of his own and her cape, and they went out through the old-fashioned little garden and into the road.

Decima looked round her with keen interest and admiration. Stretton Wood is a fine district, and the road from The Woodbines runs

through lines of stately firs, through which the moon was shining brightly. The air was fragrant with terebene, and so thin and light that, together with the beauty of the scene, it produced a strange effect upon her. It was as if she were walking in fairyland, and was herself as unreal as the place.

She slipped her arm through Bobby's and sighed.

"Bobby, I'm glad I've come. You won't think me heartless and—unnatural, if I say that I didn't like coming. You see, it was leaving Aunt Pauline, whom I love and who loves me."

"That's all right," said Bobby. "But now you are here, your filial and sisterly affection has started going like, or, rather, unlike one of father's machines, and you find that duty is its own reward. Good girl!"

Decima laughed.

"Are you never serious, Bobby?" "Yes, when I am up for an examination," he replied, promptly.

"And you're going to be a soldier?" said Decima. "How proud I shall be of you!"

"Just you wait. It all depends upon half a dozen beasts who ask questions."

"Oh, but you are sure to pass; you are so clever. I know you are clever, Bobby."

"Do you, really? Now, I wonder who told you that?"

"And you work hard?" "These silvered locks, whitened before their time, can testify—"

"Oh, what place is this?" broke in Decima.

They had come to a brand-new wall on the right of the road, with starting white pillars and bronze-painted gates of the most conspicuous pattern.

Bobby glanced at it disparagingly. "That is the entrance to The Firs," he said. "It's a new place, built by a new man. His name is Theodore Mershon, and he is something in the city. 'Something in the city' appears to pay. He is supposed to be worth piles of money, and The Firs is a kind of palace—a ginger-bread palace. You will see the house directly. It is a large place, built of white stone—stone brought all the way from Aberdeen—and is as gorgeous inside as—as a London restaurant. There it is."

They stopped, and Decima saw a large house glaring white in the moonlight.

"It is very ugly," she said. "What is Mr. Mershon like?"

"Oh, plain little chap. Rather dark, and like a city man. Sharp eyes that look away from you when he speaks, as if he didn't want you to know that he was thinking of you."

"Do you know him?" Decima asked.

"Well, yes," said Bobby; "I can claim that great honor. I called with the governor's card—I got some printed for him—and we've met once or twice; but Mr. Theodore Mershon was not particularly friendly. You see, The Woodbines is a small house—a mere cottage—and the Deanes are poor, and men of Mershon's class estimate you by the size of your domicile and the length of your purse."

"Do they?" said Decima, innocently. "But what can it matter to them how small your house is, or how poor you are, if you are nice, Bobby?"

"I give it up. Now, we'll just turn down here, and I'll show you a place better worth looking at."

He led her down a narrow lane and suddenly they came upon the entrance to an avenue guarded by a pair of old iron gates stained green by age. A lodge of red brick, covered with ivy, stood just inside the gate, and its red curtains glowed in quaint harmony with the moonlight.

"How pretty!" said Decima.

"Wait a moment," said Bobby. "This

gate is closed, but there is a smaller one a little lower down, and I can take you up the avenue until you see the house itself. Here you are."

He opened a small wooden gate in the old wall, and they made their way over a weed-grown path to the avenue. They walked for some distance between the lines of pines which stood like gaunt sentinels on either hand, and then, at a bend, the house came suddenly in sight.

(to be continued.)

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