



IN THE OLD APPLE-TREE.

## BREAKFAST FOR TWO.

(By Joanna H. Mathews.)

## CHAPTER I.—STOLEN FRUIT.

At a right angle, or what Jim calls "catty cornered" from our house, and facing another side of the square on which we live, is a large house with a broad stoop, having an arched and grated opening in the mass of stone-work built in below the steps on the side nearest to us; while the other side, that which affords access from the courtyard to the basement door, is guarded by a heavy iron gate, closed and locked at night.

The family living there are, employers and servants, one of the latest households in the neighborhood; and, long after doors, windows and blinds of other houses are thrown open to the morning air and light, this remains securely shut. Hence it came that when the milkman passed on his early rounds, he—probably by some private and friendly arrangement with the lazy cook—was wont to pass the day's supply of milk through the grating aforesaid, and pour it into a pail placed there for the purpose.

"Here, Amy, come quick!" called Milly, as she stood one bright morning before our window, peering through the closed blinds at the beauty of the square in its early morning freshness, and lazily drawing the comb through her long, soft hair, while I was enjoying that half delicious, half aggravating ten minutes which precedes the inevitable time when one knows one must rise.

"What is it?" I murmured, sleepily.

"Such fun!" said Milly, with her low, soft laugh, which, low as it was, always sounded so full of true enjoyment. "Such fun! and yet I don't know if I ought to laugh or call it funny," she added.

But, notwithstanding her own protest, a smile still played about her eyes and lips; and, drowsiness and indolence fairly conquered by the desire to see what could so

amuse "St. Milly," in spite of the reproofs of her sensitive conscience, I sprang from the bed and rushed bare-footed and dishevelled to the window.

"The young wretches!" was my comment upon the scene which met my eyes as they followed the direction of Milly's.

"Poor children!" said Milly, while a shade of tender, pitying gravity chased the laughing light from her eyes, to be in its turn banished by her sense of the ludicrous. And the fun of the situation also overpowering my disgust, we both indulged in a hearty laugh.

At the Fanning's grating stood two young ragamuffins, dirty beyond description, hands and faces begrimed, clothes in tatters, bare-footed, one hatless, the other with the merest apology for that covering, and hair—but that passes description. Each had a French roll in his hand, and was passing it through the grating, and by turns dipping it into the pail of milk, which stood just within their reach, drawing it back dripping with the liquid, and thus making what was doubtless to them a most luscious breakfast, the enjoyment of which must have been somewhat interfered with by the constant watchfulness it was necessary to maintain lest they should be caught. While one dipped the other kept his eye upon the street, on the look-out, evidently, for a guardian of the public peace, or any other person who might take it upon himself to interfere with their repast; nevertheless, it was plainly to be seen that they did enjoy the stolen opportunity. The mingled fun, fear and satisfaction of their aspect was unmistakable, and we watched them with increasing amusement.

"Just imagine the disgust of the Fannings if they knew of this!" I ejaculated.

"Think of having one's breakfast out of that pail of milk! Ought we not to send them word, Milly?"

"How hungry the poor boys must be!"

said my tender-hearted sister, either ignoring or not hearing my question.

"I dare say they've stolen the rolls, too; the little wretches!" was my rejoinder (but then I never did have such quick sympathies as Milly, nor did I have such a "wry" with children and my inferiors). "It would serve them right if a policeman did come and catch them!"

But the repast was finished in such peace as the dread of discovery allowed. No policeman appeared; no one came from the house; and as for the two or three passers-by who came from the direction whence they would be likely to see the boys, they perceived nothing amiss, the young culprits being at such times engaged in standing upon their heads, or pursuing some other apparently innocent diversion, returning to their breakfast as soon as the coast was clear.

When the rolls—and with them the means of procuring more milk—had vanished, the boys, seemingly with consciences devoid of all offence, danced hilariously down the street.

An hour or so later Milly and I descended to our own family breakfast table, where order and comfort reigned supreme, under the supervision of old Thomas.

A new French baker had of late been tickling our palates with his delicious rolls; and as we were a numerous family, the day's supply of a dozen was apt to vanish at the morning meal.

No one observed anything unusual until Thomas, with his ordinary flourish, handed the plate of rolls to father, while at the same time he addressed himself to mother.

"I am sorry to say, ma'am, the rolls is short this morning. The baker had put the dozen into his basket, and left it standing out by the area next door while he went in there; and when he came out there was four gone—stolen—and he had no more to leave us."

Milly and I exchanged looks, mine saying, "There! what did I tell you?"

"Milly and Amy know something about the rolls," said Douglas, interpreting our glances.

"They have been breakfasting before," laughed Norman. "Breakfast for two isn't fair in such a large family as this, if one takes the lion's share."

Here I caught the eye of brother Edward, whose room had the same frontage as Milly's and mine, and I saw by its knowing sparkle that he too had witnessed the occurrence of the early morning.

"Brother Ned's in that secret, too," said quick-sighted Douglas. "What is it? What have you three been about?"

"There's no secret," said Milly. And the story was soon told, and no doubt remained in the minds of any of the family whence had come the diminution of our daily rations.

Father and Edward were in the habit of reading aloud little items from the morning papers as they scanned them while lingering over the last cup of coffee; and among others the former gave us one relating to the immense crowds which were now daily assembling to join in the services held by Moody and Sankey.

"I am going to hear them this afternoon," said Milly. "Who will come with me?"

"I will," I answered. "I have wanted to hear them for ever so long."

"And I will," said Bessie Sandford, who, with her mother, was making us a visit.

In addition to these two volunteers a small voice piped up:

"Couldn't I go, sister Milly? I will sit quiet and be very, very good. And please take Allie, too."

"But I am afraid that you and Alice would get tired, dearie," answered Milly to the plea of the five-year-old pet and darling of the household. "You would have to sit still for a long time."

"But we want to hear the music so!" said Daisy. "And we know some of the

songs. If they sing 'Hold the Fort' we can sing, too, and help lots!"

This argument prevailed, and Milly promised to take the little ones if mother were willing.

But mother demurred, not only to letting the children go, but also to giving her sanction to the elder ones. Dear mother was strong on *les convenances*, and she did not feel that it was altogether "the thing" to have her daughters go to any public place without the protection of some chaperone. And as she and Mrs. Sandford had an engagement for the afternoon neither could go with us; and, of course, the gentlemen of the family were out of the question, the claims of business keeping them down town. But they put in a word for us, saying there was not the slightest impropriety in our going alone; and at length mother was persuaded to consent, although it was a consent under protest.

The children were enchanted. I must confess that I believe Milly was the only one among us elder ones who would have been signally disappointed if mother had absolutely vetoed the expedition. Bessie had only said she would go because Milly and I were going; and I, for my part, while intending to go some time, would have preferred another day, and thought of half a dozen things which would have been more agreeable, after the matter was decided in favor of the meeting.

However, I would not draw back now, or throw any damper upon the enthusiasm of Milly and the children; and at the appointed hour we all set forth.

We were very early. There were not more than a hundred or so of people in the building; and, having an unlimited choice of seats, we secured good places where we thought we could see and hear, Milly being at the end of the line; and being thus comfortably settled, we congratulated ourselves and one another upon our success.

But this state of content was not of long continuance, for, presently, to our dismay, four rough, ragged, dirty boys, regular street Arabs, came clattering down the narrow aisle, and into that very row of seats, with no little bustle, and a "We're as good as you!" sort of air, which boded small peace and comfort for their neighbors during the approaching exercises. We gazed at them in disgust and apprehension, and fell to wishing ourselves anywhere else; while little Allie, who sat next to Milly, made as though she would really bolt out of the seat, and pet Daisy nestled down to me with wide open eyes, which questioned the right of these ragamuffins to approach so near.

Next to Milly sat the dirtiest and most ragged of the crew, a boy about twelve, his tattered jacket only half buttoned together, and showing glimpses of his brown and shirtless little breast. His pantaloons were no better; his feet were bare; his hands grimy beyond description; hair matted, and thrusting itself out in every direction through the holes and rents in the old straw hat which was scarcely worthy of the name. He irresistibly recalled the young thieves of the morning who had breakfasted at the expense of the Fannings and ourselves, although it did not occur to me that he had any connection with them other than a community of dirt and wretchedness. It might also have been wondered at that such a looking object should have obtained admittance, save that all who came were made welcome.

His companions were but a shade better in appearance, and from the moment of their entrance it seemed that there would not be much to choose between them in point of behavior. They were evidently all primed for as much mischief and annoyance as could be ventured upon without danger of immediate expulsion.

The boy next to Milly turned and scanned her, his bold, saucy eyes running over her pretty figure, from the flounce of her black silk dress to the daintily gloved hands lying in her lap, thence to the tasteful little bonnet with its wreath of field-flowers; but she did not shrink from his gaze, nor did she draw the folds of her skirts from their rather too close contact with his soiled rags, as more than one of us would have done.

Allie's aristocratic little soul was sorely vexed, and she pulled at Milly's dress, trying to draw her attention to arguments and persuasions whose tone I could guess, although I could not hear what she said.

(To be Continued.)