

CASTLE-BUILDING.

"What are you building darling?"
I asked of my girlish fair,
As she quietly sat on the hearth-rug,
Piling her blocks with care,
While the ruddy glow of the firelight
Danced in her golden hair.

"I am building a castle, mother,"
My little maid replied.
"These are the walls around it,
And here is a gateway wide,
And this is the winding stair
To climb up by the side."

So the busy fitting fingers
Went on with her pretty play,
And the castle walls were rising
In the fading winter day.
When—sudden, luckless motion,
And all in ruins lay!

Ah, merry little builder,
The years with stealthy feet
May bring full many a vision
Of castles rare and sweet,
That end like your baby pastime—
In ruin sad and fleet.

Yes, laugh o'er the toy walls fallen,
For sunshine follows rain,
And we may smile, looking backward
At ruined shrine and fane,
While the heart has shattered temples,
It may not build again.

DULCIE.

By the Author of "My Marriage," "Poor Little Kitty," Etc.

A farm-yard basking in the sunshine of a drowsy June evening—a farm-yard that bespeaks plenty, from the glint of the golden straw and hay ricks peeping over the wall from the stack in the rear to the great fat pigs and the fluffy hens and golden balls of chickens.

The calves in the stall are looking out with brown lazy eyes, and the lowing and the grunting and the clucking and the crowing are all pleasant country sounds in harmony with the summer air and warmth, and the scent of uncut meadows fragrant with clover and yellow with buttercups.

In the centre farm-yard, scattering corn with a lavish hand to the chickens crowding at her feet, stands Dulcie Lovel, the mistress and owner of some hundreds of broad acres around. Tall and lithe she is, with a brown face that has been made still browner by frequent exposure to the fresh air, and that is lit up with eyes of deepest blue.

Clad in a light print dress, with a wide hat tied under her chin with blue ribbons, she makes a fair enough picture, with a basket on her strong young arm, out of which she feeds the chickens. There is never a care on her smooth young face, never a trouble in her long-lashed eyes.

Life is a sweet and easy thing to the mistress of Loveleigh. She has health and strength and high spirits, and everything her hand touches seems to prosper. It is her whim to manage everything herself, to be mistress and steward combined, and her reign has been a successful one.

A flock of white pigeons are disputing with the chickens for the crushed maize; Dulcie empties her basket among them, and pays a visit to the calves, stroking their soft noses with her brown shapely hand.

It is very warm; the western sun shines full into her eyes as she leaves the yard and the pigeons, cooing and circling and fluttering, and proceeds slowly through the cool meadow where the cows, knee-deep in the long grass, looking lazy and contented, are standing to be milked.

For a moment Dulcie watches the creamy milk foaming into the pails, and then proceeds in the warm sunshine toward the house, a many-gabled one-storied mansion, a mass of climbers and creepers, with roses peeping in at every window, and jasmine and clematis twining and struggling up to the very top of the red chimneys.

"You dear old house!" said Dulcie aloud, looking up at the red sun on the windows, and pausing to pick a yellow rose.

An old red setter, panting on the hot gravel, raps his tail on the ground as Dulcie passes, and looks up at her, blinking his old eyes in the sunshine.

"Poor Dash, you are very warm!" she says, stooping to stroke his head.

And Dash seems to understand, for he gets up and walks slowly where the gable of the house casts long shadows across the grass, and there he finishes his nap in peace.

Dulcie passes into the coolness of the hall, and on into the drawing room, a low-ceiled apartment with a shining oak floor and wide-open windows, a room full of quaint furniture very faded and old, and with ancient bowls of rare china full of roses standing on the tables. It is a sweet, cool, fragrant room, and Dulcie appears in harmony with it, as she stands in the doorway in her blue dress, a smile on her fresh, ripe lips, looking the very picture of health and life and beauty.

"Eighteen out of the two sittings of Aylesbury's just out," she says in her clear voice. "Not bad, is it, Grace?"

"Very good, indeed," returns Grace, Dulcie's sister, who spends all her life on a sofa, as she lies back among her pillows, as Dulcie might look if she were dying.

The faces are the same—both have blue eyes and soft brown hair; but, while one is in the flush of health, the other is very pale and wan, with only the peace of patience to glorify the sad eyes and still sadder mouth.

"It is intensely warm," says Dulcie, untying her hat and throwing it upon a chair. "I have been everywhere—all over the home-farm, the garden and the dairy—and it is such a lovely day! You can't think, Grace, how delightful it all is!"

Grace's eyes glance wistfully out of the wide open window to where the sun is slanting over the meadows and creeping down the purple sides of the mountains far beyond. Once she was like Dulcie, strong and lithe and full of vigor. Now she is a confirmed invalid, and can never again know the pleasures of a free, active life. "She will never walk again," was the verdict pronounced five years before, and since then the sad look has never quite left Grace's face—never will leave it till she lies in her coffin and death smooths the lines away.

The two girls live all alone in their sweet home at Loveleigh. Once or twice Grace has mildly suggested the propriety of a duenna; but Dulcie, in her decisive way, has negatived the idea.

"What is the use of saddling ourselves with a crotchety old woman? It is not our fault that we have neither father nor mother, and if Heaven had intended us to have a natural guardian I suppose one would have been left us; as it is, we are perfectly happy, and I think I am very well able to take care of both you and myself."

So the mistress of Loveleigh goes her own road, and in her busy life seems to have no time to think of a possible future, when a possible somebody may come to claim a share in her warm affections. She is one of the very few girls who can live without thinking that the end and aim of woman's life is matrimony, and is perfectly happy and contented in the present.

By-and-by the two girls are at tea together. Grace's chair has been wheeled into the dining-room, and the table is laid beside the open window. Great masses of crimson roses adorn it—for Dulcie takes care that Grace's eyes shall never miss the sight of each flower in its season. And the meal is a tempting one, with the old "Crown Derby" service, which Dulcie uses every day, with a sweet unconsciousness of its value. The yellow butter is home-made, also the brown loaf; and the golden honey comes from the hives against the south wall in Dulcie's garden, and the fresh eggs come from the farm-yard. All these Dulcie enjoys with a good appetite born of her life in the open air, while Grace pretends to eat to please Dulcie, and with loving eyes watches her strong sister. Dulcie has put on a white dress, with lace at the ends of the elbow sleeves and round her firm white throat. A scarlet rose lies against her neck. She looks very sweet and lovely. Grace sighs.

"Are you quite content here, Dulcie?"

"Content?" Dulcie cries, opening her eyes wide. "I am perfectly happy. I am my own mistress, and everything is going well, I think"—with a sweeping glance out of the window at the peaceful scene outside. "To-morrow we are going to cut the ten-acre field."

Grace smiles and looks into the lovely, eager face of her sister.

"Do you never wish for anything more, Dulcie—anything outside the four walls of Loveleigh? Do you never dream of being married?"

"Married?" Dulcie echoes, with laughter-filled eyes. "My dear Grace, that is the last thing I ever dream of. Fancy leaving my dear old home for any man?"

"But you might not have to leave it."

"Then I would have to bring him here—and that would be worse. He would want to be master—and I don't think I could stand that; and"—smiling and blushing—"how would you like a swarm of children breaking everything in the house?"

"I should love your children," Grace said softly.

"What nonsense, dear! I have no time to think of such frivolities. We could adopt a child, if you think it might amuse you; but I certainly cannot promise to go husband-hunting."

"Wait till somebody comes, Dulcie, and then you will change your opinion concerning marriage."

"I see a suitor approaching at this moment," cries Dulcie, laughing—"Mr. Sinclair; and a young man who is with him, a very giant. I wonder who he is? We must give them some tea, I suppose, and offer them something more substantial than honey."

The advent of a stranger flurries Grace, and she looks pale and frightened when Mr. Sinclair enters the room a couple of minutes later.

Dulcie goes forward with alacrity, and shakes hands with the old man who has been friend, lawyer, adviser, ever since Loveleigh came into her hands. And then the stranger is introduced.

"My friend, Mr. Carlton. I took the liberty of bringing him over," Mr. Sinclair says; and after Dulcie has shaken hands, he adds in an aside to her—

"A young fellow in my office," and Dulcie, looking up, suddenly wonders why Mr. Sinclair appears so odd and speaks in such a strange hesitating way.

"You will have tea, won't you?" she says pleasantly, and, ringing the bell, gives her order in a simple, unembarrassed fashion; and presently a cold fowl and tongue make their appearance.

And all the time old Mr. Sinclair keeps watching Dulcie furtively from under his bent brows—and Mr. Carlton is watching her too, for that matter. Not indeed that this is surprising, for she is very sweet and comely to look upon.

Mr. Carlton himself is a very fine specimen of manhood, not at all like an old attorney's clerk, and he has a very pleasant face and steady gray eyes. There is, too, something very infectious in his smile; and presently Dulcie finds herself talking to him as if she had known him all her life. He seems to like to talk about Loveleigh and the farm and matters that interest her, and finally asks him if she will show him the place after tea, to which proposition Dulcie assents.

"It is a dear old place."

They have been all through the meadows in the heavy dew, Dulcie walking with the stranger, her white gown thrown over her arm, for the grass is heavy and wet; and Mr. Sinclair, with his gray head bent, follows them through the fields into the quaint old garden, sweet and fragrant with its wealth of summer blossoms, to the farm-yard, where the live-stock are sleeping, and finally up through the fields to the higher land from which Loveleigh can be seen nestling in the twilight shadows, while the gray light of evening steals over all.

The sheep are nibbling away in the dusk. Mr. Sinclair looks at them absently.

"Have you sold these hoggets, Dulcie?"

"Not yet; they are going to the fair on Monday."

Mr. Carlton turns to Dulcie.

"What are hoggets? Young pigs, I suppose?"

The girl's clear laugh rings out with irrepressible merriment.

"Oh, Mr. Sinclair, do you hear that? I am afraid, Mr. Carlton, it is lost labor showing you the farm."

"No; I am very willing to learn," he answers, laughing. "And 'hog, hogget,' sounded all right."

As, laughing and talking, they pass back through the fields, Dulcie points to a streak of silver shining through the trees.

"That is the river," she remarks; is it not pretty? It runs through our lower meadows."

Mr. Carlton looks from the river to the girl's earnest face.

"How fond you are of Loveleigh!" he says softly; and Dulcie answers, with a little tremor in her voice:

"I love it; Loveleigh is home, friends—everything to me."

"And if you had to leave it?" he asks, in a low tone.

"Leave Loveleigh! I shall never leave it until I am carried away to the old churchyard."

"Don't say that!" he cries, quickly. "I sincerely hope you never will be obliged to leave your old home; but is it not as well to look the possibility in the face?"

Dulcie laughs.

"You are as bad as Grace, my sister; she told me the same thing this evening, and wondered I did not look out for a husband"—with a flash of mischievous scorn in the last word.

"I wish to Heaven you were married, Dulcie," Mr. Sinclair puts in suddenly, with a gravity that seems out of place.

"Why?" Dulcie asks, turning a still smiling face to him in the twilight.

They are all three leaning against a gate leading into a wheat field; the evening breeze rustles, like a sobbing wind from the sea, among the wheat. There is silence for a few moments. Dulcie waits for the answer to her question. Mr. Carlton rests his arm on the top rail of the gate and looks away into the purple shadows of the coming night. Mr. Sinclair moves a few paces away and comes back again, and still Dulcie waits; but the smile on her lips is forced now and has left her eyes.

"Can't you tell her somehow?" The passionate interruption comes from Mr. Carlton, who immediately afterward resumes his old position and looks away as before.

Mr. Sinclair takes Dulcie's hand in his.

"My child, how can I tell you?"—his voice sounds full of tears. "When I see you so happy to-night, so proud of it all, it is hard that I should have to make you wretched."

The smile has quite left her face now; but she does not falter as she speaks.

"There are only Grace and I—there is no one else; so what bad news can you have?"

The old man looks all around at the sleeping world, the quiet beauty of the country scene, and Loveleigh with its lighted windows twinkling; and then he fixes his eyes on the face of the girl watching him so intently.

"Tell me at once," she said calmly, with a strong brave wish to hear the worst without further delay.

The old man sighs as he replies—

"My dear, I can tell you to-night as well as to-morrow; so why not now? The rightful owner of Loveleigh has turned up; it is yours no longer," and, as he speaks, he looks beyond her startled face at the young man leaning so quietly against the gate, apparently taking no notice of the conversation going on.

A flood of crimson dyes Dulcie's face, and then leaves her white as marble.

"Loveleigh not mine! The rightful owner! I do not understand."

Mr. Sinclair plunges into explanations; he has got over the worst part, and talks glibly enough now. He tells her rapidly that her father's elder brother, who was supposed to have died in Australia years before, has in reality only recently done so, leaving a son, who has now come home to claim his property and the old home of the Lovels, Loveleigh.

All this at great length the old lawyer relates, while the blank look in Dulcie's face is piteous

to see. It is difficult for her to realize that home, money, everything is gone at one stroke.

"Poor Grace!" she says at last, with quivering lips. "It will be very hard for her. Does this Mr. Lovel take everything?"

"All, except your mother's fortune—about two thousand pounds," retorts Mr. Sinclair, wondering at her perfect calm.

"That will be something under one hundred pounds a year," Dulcie says, in the tones of one accustomed to manage and calculate for herself. "Ah, well, we can't starve on that; and I suppose we had better go at once."

Mr. Carlton abandons his reclining position against the gate, and looks into Dulcie's proud, grief-stricken face.

"I am sure," he puts in hastily, "your cousin will not wish you to go until you like; perhaps he might not wish to live at Loveleigh at all—you might rent it from him."

She laughs a laugh that has tears in it.

"Rent Loveleigh, and live on a hundred a year! That would hardly do."

And then all at once she seems to realize a little what the life will be which will be hers in the future, the poor, miserable, struggling life, and a little sob breaks from her lips.

"Poor Grace! How shall we tell her?" she says, with the great unselfishness that makes the girl's nature so beautiful. "It will be worse for her than for me; I, at least, can work"—stretching out her strong young hands and looking at them.

"Grace knows," Mr. Sinclair says, gently. "I told her that evening you were out. You remember?"

"Ah, yes—and that accounts for Grace's headache! Come, let us go to her," Dulcie says, turning her troubled eyes with a dreary smile toward the younger man who is watching the little scene so quietly. "It is not very interesting for you, Mr. Carlton, to have to listen to all these family revelations."

"I am sorry for you," he replies quietly; "and, if I might be pardoned for making a suggestion, I should say it would be as well for you to see this cousin, this Mr. Lovel, before you decide on going away."

"I will never see him, never speak to him!" cries Dulcie passionately. "It is not his fault, I suppose; but why has he staid away all these years, letting me get to love every stick and stone, every blade of grass in my dear, dear old home?"

And then, as if half smothered of her emotion she walks swiftly away through the darkening shadows; and the two men follow in silence.

Another day, and the world is all awake again, blithe with song, fresh and bright after the quiet night. Only Dulcie has not slept; never once has she closed her brave, bright eyes all through the long dark hours. She has watched the sun rise this morning and wake the world with his first warm kiss; and now she stands, pale and heavy-eyed, in the warm old fragrant garden where the York and Lancaster roses flourish gaily, and the gaudy old cottage roses and the pale delicate Celeste rose-buds open in the morning sun.

Such a sweet old garden it is, where all manner of old-fashioned flowers grow in wild luxuriance along the borders. To-day she looks at them all, oh, so sadly! They are hers no longer; she has no right to the cherries growing on the wall, to the crimson strawberries blushing amidst their cool green leaves. Yesterday her mind ran on jam-making and the preserving of fruits; to-day she has no right even to the mignonnette she has idly plucked and holds in her hand.

"How shall I tear it?" she cries, with a little catch in her voice.

The bees hum among the flowers, and are as busy as they can be, flying in and out of the hives; and Dulcie watches them through rising tears. They are not going to be turned out of their home.

"We must go soon—the sooner the better," the mistress of Loveleigh says to herself, and tries to speak cheerfully of the life to come.

She has got through one painful business this morning—that of breaking the news to the old servants, who have loved the girl with a passionate affection. She is mistress here no longer, and yet, partly from habit, and partly from a desire to give a good account of her stewardship, Dulcie gives her orders as usual, and the whole business of the day proceeds as if nothing had happened. From the garden to the farm, from the farm to the dairy, Dulcie goes through her duties as usual—but it is with a pale face and a sinking heart. The old servants hate their new master already, and think that possession is nine points of the law, and that he has no right to turn Miss Lovel out.

Mr. Carlton, coming up with a note from Mr. Sinclair, is directed to the dairy, where stands the dejected mistress of Loveleigh in a white dress, amid pans of yellow cream and rolls of golden butter.

"Regarding my lost possessions," Dulcie says, shaking hands with a wistful smile. "It is so hard to realize that I have no right to anything any more."

Mr. Carlton looks at her steadily for a moment, and a tinge of color creeps up to his forehead.

"What do you think of doing, if it is not rude for me to ask?" he says, after a moment's pause.

She raises her eyes frankly to his.

"We are going to Dublin, and I intend to try to get something to do in a shop, or something of that kind. You see, I cannot leave