

and see 'daddy'! But she did not cry. The fierce blue eyes that stared fixedly ahead were quite dry.

Across the aisle was a child, sitting alone. Two seats ahead, on the other side, sat a little old person in rusty black. Beyond, a robust, bald man doing sums already in a note-book; behind, a family of five. And behind Mary Abby the "daddy" girl. Nobody looked interesting. Mary Abby hated them all impartially.

There was the diary in the shabby hand-bag, of course; she could take that out at any minute and begin to write. But write what? That the cars had started? The jerky handwriting would announce that plainly enough. That she had three days to travel? Was going to Great-Aunt Caroline? dreaded it, hated it, was miserable?

Or should she write down what had happened when she came away, how the step-baby had cried when she held him so tight; how the stepmother had not cried at all, had smiled to show how glad she was? She might write that down in the diary in her hand-bag.

"I'll begin," Mary Abby said, shutting her little white teeth hard to shut in her pain. It would be doing something, anyway. She took out the little blank book. If she sat here thinking black thoughts any longer, she might suddenly scream right "out loud," and they would put her off the cars! She would not know what to do then; she couldn't go back to the step-life without daddy, or forward to Great-Aunt Caroline, walking on the track.

"March 3. On the cars," wrote up hill and down the little stub of a pencil. "Yes, I'm here. I've started; Aunt Caroline's in for me! The baby cried, but it was because I squeezed him"—Mary Abby spelled it "squeezed," but it may have been a jerk of the pencil stub. "She never cried a tear; I guess not! I suppose she was tickled to pieces. I suppose she was good-riddance inside."

"There's a girl who calls her father 'daddy' on this train, and I hate her. That was my name! I'm glad she's going off to leave him." Mary Abby turned suddenly and looked at the "daddy" girl covertly. "No, I'm not, either—not glad. I pity her; she's crying like anything. There's a little boy all soul alone, and a fat man, and a lean woman, and a mother with three children and a baby. And, my, a homely girl!"

Mary Abby laughed when she wrote that, up hill and down. The homely girl was directly in front of her, at the end of the car, and looking straight at her. When she laughed, the homely girl laughed. She knew that if she were to nod in a friendly way, the homely girl would nod back.

"She's a sight!" wrote the stub of a pencil. "Shabby, just like me. Her hat's my kind o' hat, and her coat and everything. I bet she's going to her great-aunt's to live, and her stepmother was glad, too! Well, goodness knows I'm sorry for the homely girl. I wonder if she's going clear to the end o' the world too." In her heart Mary Abby was sure of it. She would have one travelling companion all the way.

The conductor came round for tickets, and the interruption sent Mary Abby's thoughts wool-gathering. She forgot the diary for a while, and sat staring blankly out of the window at the flying landscape set in its early-March frame of dreariness. Everywhere was melting snow and everywhere sombre brown tones cropping through the dingy white. It was not a cheerful scene.

The lone little boy across the aisle was whistling cheerily under his breath. The gay little tune crept over to Mary Abby, and tried to comfort her. Back in the car the family baby cried drearily under its breath, and the sound tried to hold its own with the lone little boy's tune; but cheeriness prevailed. The fat man kept on doing sums. The little old lean woman settled further into her seat in a tired way, and seemed to be making the best of it; at least, her rounded old back seemed to be to Mary Abby. Probably the "daddy" girl behind was still crying.

Mary Abby took up the diary. "We're all here still," she wrote twist-edly, "every soul of us. Maybe we're all going to the end o' the world together! It will be a nice, cheerful company; anyway, the lone little boy's cheerful. He's whistling. I know what would happen

if I whistled; the homely girl would, too. She's bound to do everything I do. I pity that girl on account of her step-mother and her dear daddy that is dead. But I don't admire her; she's a sight! "I pity the family baby too. My, the way he cries, a poor little groany cry; not much like the step-baby's splendid little yells. I wish—I wish I could hear those."

"I'm not going to cry. I said I wouldn't, and I won't. The homely girl wants to, I know. She's aching to crumple right down in her seat, and have a good one—but she won't. I know the homely girl."

"There, she's straightening up like everything; now she's looking over toward the lone little boy—she's going over!"

"She's been and got back, and you ought to see her face! It looks queer, and I don't wonder, for I know what the lone little boy told her. My seat is just across the aisle. He told her he was going to see his mother now because it was his mother's turn to have him. It's just got through being his father's turn. He lives with 'em by turns; he told the homely girl he wished they could all live together always, because it would be comfortable—that was just the word he said; I heard it. But his father never lives where his mother does. I don't wonder the homely girl's face looks like that! That's the way my face feels as if it looked. Oh, the poor lone little boy! There are worse things in the world than 'steps.'"

Mary Abby's eyes sought far-off spaces—a daddy that had been loving and tender with a little stepmother and a step-baby and a great homely girl. He had never been anything else but loving and tender. The little stepmother had been tender, too, with him, and perhaps—Mary Abby's eyes grew gentler—perhaps she would sometimes have been tender with the homely girl if—she had been given a good chance. Were homely girls always bitter and hard toward their "steps"? Was the homely girl down there at the end of the car, facing this way? She looked so. She looked exactly as if she had never given her stepmother a chance, either.

"She never has," commended Mary Abby, and pitied the homely girl's stepmother. There were so many ways one might give chances—by being a little, even a very little, tender one's self, for instance. And in her heart Mary Abby knew the homely girl had never been even a very little tender herself. She wished she had been. She and the homely girl down there at the other end of the car were getting very well acquainted.

The "daddy" girl, behind, hunched down in a lonely little heap, and sobbed herself to sleep. The lone little boy whistled; the family baby wailed himself to sleep. Night settled over the car, and the swaying lamps overhead lighted its uninteresting interior erratically. After a while only Mary Abby and the homely girl seemed to be left awake, and they sat gazing stonily at each other. They seemed both to be remembering a little step-baby they wanted to kiss in his sleep, and to be trying to hide the want from each other.

In a draught from an opening door a sheet of paper blew across from the robust bald man to Mary Abby, and she mechanically picked it up. Some of the bald man's sums—why, no! She started a little in surprise; for in big, bold writing on the sheet she read, "Take care of yourself for my sake, darling." It was a letter to somebody the bald man loved! Everybody loved somebody.

"But me," sighed Mary Abby drearily, "and the homely girl," she added with a whimsical mouth. "Just us two."

Down at the end of the car she saw the homely girl get up, and knew she was going across the aisle to carry back 'the piece of a love-letter. She knew she stopped on the way back to life the lone little boy's swinging legs to the seat, and stretch them out more comfortably. She knew the homely girl tucked her own shabby jacket in a little roll under the "daddy" girl's head, nodded in a friendly way to the family mother, who roused and shifted the baby to her other arm. All these things that the homely girl did comforted Mary Abby, and the bitterness began to ooze out of her heart a little. She nodded good-night to the homely

girl, and went to sleep herself. In a dream the little stepmother came and pleaded for a chance to be tender. "Please, Mary Abby," she said, "take the gates down and let me in!"

"If you'll bring the baby," Mary Abby stipulated in the dream.

"I will, I will! He's right here in my arms. We'll love him together, Mary Abby." It was a beautiful dream.

The next day some of the people went away, and new ones took their places. But the family and the lone little boy and Mary Abby—and, of course, the homely girl—stayed on together.

It was the ending of the second day before any of them got off the train, and then it was the lone little boy first. Mary Abby helped him get his things together.

"There she is! There's my mother a-waiting!" he cried in subdued excitement, and Mary Abby had a glimpse of a quiet, sad face, lone, like the lone little boy's.

"She looks as if her husband could live with her," wrote the stub of pencil unevenly; "I wish he would! I wish there weren't sad things like that in the world—oh, sadder than 'steps,' my, yes! Perhaps, if they had their chances, 'steps' wouldn't be sad at all. I wish they'd had chances; I wish I'd given my step one!"

More and more Mary Abby wished that. The wish and the regret seemed to increase with the miles that were piling up between her and the little stepmother she had deserted. For wasn't it deserting? Hadn't daddy left them both to her to take care of—the frail little mother and the step-baby? "Because you are strong, little girl. Take good care of them for me," he had said, and gone away into the great silence happier because of it. And just at that time, in the bitterness of her sorrow, she had meant to do it. O, yes, she was strong, and she would do it.

But now she had deserted. She was deserting more and more every minute. She had gone back into the old bitterness and jealousy and hugging of her pain. When one day they grew, she decided, too great for her to bear, she had packed her trunk and come away. Great-Aunt Caroline's door had always been open to her. She would work out there just the same, and send most of the money back to the "steps," the big one and the little. In that way why wouldn't she be taking care of them for daddy? Why not? why not?

But she was not satisfied that it would be. Not in the way daddy had meant. He had meant in a tenderer, nearer way than that; he had not meant take care of them across hundreds of miles. Mary Abby caught up the stub of pencil, and began to write fiercely, crookedly, rapidly, to drown her thoughts.

"The family baby is crying again. I wish he wouldn't. I wish he would stop reminding me of the step-baby, too! I had him over here in my seat a little while ago, amusing him so his mother could rest; and he went to sleep in my arms, and felt just like the step-baby—warm and heavy up against me. His mother doesn't remind me of the step one; she isn't near as pretty, and she's fat. The step one is a little thin thing like a shadow—oh, I wish she wasn't a little thin thing! I wish she was strong like I am; then daddy would have—" Mary Abby got to her feet stumblingly, and crossed to the family mother and the wailing baby.

"Let me take him again," she said, holding out her hands. "He'll be good with me, you see."

"Yes, I guess he will," sighed the mother gratefully. "He thinks you're Angeline; don't you, baby? He's dreadful fond of Angeline; she's his half-sister. We're going out where she is; my land, I'll be thankful when we get there! Angeline's married now; she was set on our coming out. She's rented the tenement over hers for us, and says she's going to take care of the baby the whole living time! There ain't many half-sisters like what Angeline is."

"Half's" were a good deal like "steps," O, a good deal. Angeline was a good deal like her, Mary Abby; only Angeline liked it. No, there couldn't be many "half's" like Angeline.

Mary Abby jogged the family baby on her knee, and tried not to think of Angeline, or daddies, or little thin things

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