

LITTLE MISS PRIM.

Grey, angry-looking clouds obscured the blue sky, a cold east wind blew tiny particles of snow into the faces of those persons who were so unfortunate as to be exposed to the cutting blast. A warm fire and comfortable easy chair were things to be appreciated, and so thought the Laurence family, as they stood or sat around the blazing logs of the story in the open fireplace of the luxurious sitting-room at Pleasant Park, the old home-stead of the Laurences.

Harry, the eldest boy, a tall, bright-eyed lad of fourteen, went to the window that looked out upon the highway. It was nearly school-time, and troops of boys and girls were passing swiftly along in the direction of the huge brick edifice, the pride of Fairmount.

"Lizzie, Johnny, come here," cried Harry, and his handsome countenance beamed with merriment as he gazed upon the scene without.

"Much taller than Lizzie, the twelve-year-old sister of the merry youth at the window, was walking, or rather trying to, for the slight figure swayed from one side of the road to the other, beaten and blown by the high winds; and the umbrella she carried was turned inside out, while her long grey hair was floating like a banner in the misty breeze. The girl and boy ran to the pretty alcove, with its snowy lace curtains looped back, showing the stand of plants, bright with bloom, and joining in the laughter, caused Mr. and Mrs. Laurence to look up from their reading, to enquire the cause of so much mirth.

"Oh, mother, you ought to see the capote little Miss Prim is cutting; old Boreas makes her move lively," said Master Harry, and even Lizzie, who could hardly suppress a smile as she saw the ludicrous figure the poor dressmaker made in her vain endeavors to keep her feet and avoid the rude embrace of the northeast gale. "Jimmy, but she was a screech," said little Johnny, "wonder what she goes out such a stormy day for."

"Why, my son, Miss Prim is poor, and is obliged to earn her own living. She has no kind papa to give her nice warm clothes, or provide her with food, as you have. It is not right to laugh at the poor, for she has a hard life of it, and is so patient and kind in every trial," and Mrs. Laurence patted the soft curls of the six-year-old boy, mentally thanking God that she and her dear ones were free from the curse of poverty.

"It is nearly nine o'clock," cried Lizzie, glancing at the huge old-fashioned time-piece that ticked away so musically in the corner of the room. "I will take Johnny with me, mother, and then, one umbrella will shelter us." Harry is large enough to take care of himself. So saying, Lizzie arrayed herself in her warm cloak, hood and furs, looking like a picture of little Red Riding Hood, with brown eyes shining and cheeks rosy with health. Just as the three children descended the steps to the garden, the huge iron gate clanged, and Miss Prim met them on the broad gravelled walk.

"Mamma at home, Blossom?" said the little lady in a cheerful tone to Lizzie, and at the same time laughing, as she saw the half-concealed smile on the faces of the children. "You are all looking mighty just as well as usual and laugh at the funny figure I cut. I shall not feel at all hurt. I know I am a perfect screech-crow, but no matter, my beauty will not suffer." And with a nod and a "Good-by, dearies," not waiting for an answer to her question, Miss Prim vanished within the open doorway, and the children hastened to school.

Miss Chatty Prim—or Miss Chatty, as she was called—was the village dressmaker. She was a maiden lady thirty-five or forty years of age, small and thin, with a face as round as a turnip, her soft, blue eyes mild and pure as those of a child; her abundant hair, long and silken, crowned her head with a coronet of silver.

"I thought I would come and finish that dress of yours, Mrs. Laurence, and Miss Chatty, as she entered the fire-lighted room the warmth and glow making such a contrast to the gloom with which she came, but I had a bad taste of it, fighting the wind all the way from the cottage. My umbrella is so wet, and I took it through I had been in a gale, and was flying the flag of distress," laughing merrily and showing firm, white teeth that had never known the torture of a dentist's art; however, all's well that ends well, and with a sigh of content, Miss Chatty followed the stately but kind-hearted mistress of Pleasant Park to the sewing-room, where, in a low rocker, with a huge pile of work before her, the little dressmaker was soon busy as a bee.

"Mrs. Chatty," said a servant, entering with a tray on which were muffins, steak and a steaming cup of coffee, "there is something warm for you."

"Well, I declare, all this trouble on my account. It is too bad, but I believe I am hungry, and putting her muffin aside, the little woman soon made a hearty meal with the delicacies before her. She was proud in her way, was this poor, hard-working sewing woman. She would not own that on the cold and dreary morning she had pressed in her chilly room, and eaten sparingly of bread and oatmeal, with some cups of milk to satisfy her thirst, but never a complaint, never a cross look from the noble woman who had no luxuries and few comforts, but who ever looked on the bright side of life.

Before night the storm became a furious and the snow so deep, the dressmaker was obliged to remain until the next day, and to let the tooth she was mending last for her humble room in the cottage of the village. When she was not an attractive one, although clean and neat, yet a poor, poor shadow of a woman, and a small stove, with heavy food for a delicate stomach, was all the dressmaker could offer for herself in the small village of Fairmount.

Exhausted with her aches, she folded the heavy shawl. The wind sighed and moved and the wavy draped windows of Pleasant Park. The Laurence family were wealthy and high-bred from one of the oldest and proudest families in Boston, and his wife, the handsome Kate Carleton before marriage, was of English birth, with noble blood in her veins, yet they acknow-

ledge the goodness and worth of their humble seamstress; and although she did not join them at the table, having her meals sent into the sewing-room, she was invited into the sitting-room when the family met together for the pleasant chat before bedtime, and her hot, moist brow, with snowy collar and cuffs, her sweet, pale face, soft voice and charming smile, Miss Chatty did not look out of place even in the parlor of the high-bred Laurence family.

"Miss Chatty, I wish you would tell me a story. I do so like to hear them," said young Johnny, who was basking on the snow-white rug of bear-skin, the glow from the fire lighting up his curls until they looked like a mass of gold, and his round, dimpled face as rosy as the sunny side of a peach.

"Oh, do, dear Miss Prim, tell us something nice," exclaimed Lizzie, shutting up the entertaining fairy book, and coming forward to the easy chair, wherein sat the tiny lady, her small hands busy with some tatting she wished to finish for Mrs. Laurence.

"I never told a story in all my life, my dears. Then, I am afraid even if I could tell you anything that would interest you, I should disturb your father and mother in their reading."

"Not at all," they both cried, with all the courtesy they could have shown a lady of wealth, and putting away the paper and book, they begged her, if she felt so disposed, to entertain the children.

"I will go to the smoking-room for an hour or so," said Mr. Laurence, and putting on his silk-embroidered jacket and cap left the room. "I will finish this piece of ruffling," Mrs. Laurence smilingly answered as she turned the gas high, and soon her white jewelled fingers were playing the shining needles, while Miss Prim with a thoughtful countenance commenced the story of her life.

"A true story, Blossom, and I hope it will interest you, but it is the first time I have ever spoken of my past, so you will forgive me,—turning to the lady of the mansion—" "I shed few tears over past joys and sorrows."

"Indeed, Miss Chatty, I certainly would overlook anything in one as amiable as you are, but do not bring up memories that will cause you grief. I will tell the children a fairy tale, and you can go on with your work."

"Oh, no, indeed, not for the world would I disappoint the dear little lambs, and it will do me good to relate to kind-hearted ones the story of my rather dull life."

"My father kept the lighthouse. I had brothers and sisters, and when at fourteen I lost my dear mother, you can imagine how lonely I was. It was she who taught me to sew and to cut my own clothes and dresses, she who taught me all I know. Mother was a governess before marriage and was really earning money to take care of herself. So saying, Lizzie arrayed herself in her warm cloak, hood and furs, looking like a picture of little Red Riding Hood, with brown eyes shining and cheeks rosy with health. Just as the three children descended the steps to the garden, the huge iron gate clanged, and Miss Prim met them on the broad gravelled walk.

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led the girl of the little dressmaker, and Mrs. Laurence patted her softly on the shoulder, saying in low tones, "Earth has no sorrows that Heaven cannot heal."

"You are right, and I am very foolish to weep and mourn, when God has been so good to me in all these years," and trying to smile, Miss Chatty continued her story.

"In six months after William sailed father died. He was never well after the fearful night of the storm. I gave up the lighthouse, and with the few hundred dollars my parents had saved, and my small stock of fortune, I came to Fairmount, having known Widow Green when she lived on the island with her husband. I left word with the fishermen where I had gone, so that my letters from Willie could be sent, but alas! no messenger came, and probably my lover sleeps beneath the waves."

"June, with her sunny skies and wealth of buds and blossoms, had come. The Laurence family had gone to Long Beach for their summer sojourn. Miss Prim was with them for Mrs. Laurence, going into a great deal of society, had to have enough sewing done. One day Harry, who had a pretty boat named the Starlight, wanted Johnny and Lizzie to go with him sailing. Mrs. Laurence gave her consent, but said Miss Prim must accompany them. They had a merry time, and, crossing to a small island, ate their lunch on the rocks and hunted for shells. Returning, a sudden squall came, and if little Miss Prim had not been well versed in the art of sailing, all would have come to the bottom. After that event the dressmaker was doubly dear to all, and Mrs. Laurence would not hear of her leaving her. So she stayed and was treated as one of the family.

September, with her gorgeous sunsets, her ripened fruits and soft moonlight breezes, came. It was Miss Chatty's birthday. Dressed in white, with pale pink blossoms in her silver hair and on her bosom, the little dressmaker looked as pretty and smiling as a girl. She had received rich gifts from the Laurences and many other friends, for everyone loved the gentle woman. Sitting in the twilight, alone in the great garden at Pleasant Park, for the family had called, and the little woman, thinking over the past, was glad to be in the solace of the shadowy path, with nothing to disturb her reveries but the sighing of wind or the twitter of a sleepy bird, suddenly a step approached, then a man appeared, standing before her, repeated her name, and saying very softly:

"Chatty, little darling Chatty! Do you know me?"

"For a moment the startled woman thought a visitor from the other world confronted her, but when she felt the clasp of the warm hand, and heard the almost forgotten tones, she knew her former lover was before her, nearly faint with joy. He told her of his voyage to Africa, of the ship being taken by pirates, how he was sold to a chief of a tribe in the interior of Africa, of the long years of bondage, of his saving the life of the principal wife of his master, and how his lover was before her, nearly faint with joy. He told her of his voyage to Africa, of the ship being taken by pirates, how he was sold to a chief of a tribe in the interior of Africa, of the long years of bondage, of his saving the life of the principal wife of his master, and how his lover was before her, nearly faint with joy. 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