

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

A FRIEND INDEED.

By Hilda Richmond.

"Why don't you put a stop to this foolishness, Amy?" demanded Agnes Morton, finding her friend weeping in the kitchen over an open letter. "I know exactly what is the matter. Dick and Dorothy want to bring a pack of boys and girls home for the vacation week, and you will have to wear your self out taking care of them. It's a shame."

"Mother wants the children to have a good time," said Amy, wiping her eyes. "I am very foolish to be crying over a little thing like this, but I am tired and —"

"And just about worn out," put in her friend. "Your mother doesn't realize what it means to you, dear, to have a lot of people to cook for, but for the sake of peace and quiet for her you should refuse to entertain. Don't you remember how poorly she was after the Christmas holidays?"

"Certainly!" but she insists that the twins shall have all the company they want in spite of her feelings. It is very hard to try to restrain Dick and Dot with mother urging them on, Agnes."

"What can I do to help you in case you don't take my advice?" asked Agnes suddenly. "How long is it till vacation?"

"Three weeks; but Dot wants me to invite them at once if we decide to take them. I am ashamed to say I dislike Rose Frost and her brother because they are so uppish. What the twins admire about them I can't tell. Thank you very much for your offer, Agnes. Do you know, dear, sometimes I could not pull through my swamp of trouble if you were not always at hand to help me out. The idea of any girl who doesn't have to do a thing at home coming over here to work for her slow neighbor. Aunt Mary says if I had faculty I never would complain about this little bit of housework."

"Well, I'd like to see your Aunt Mary take care of a semi-invalid mother, and keep house, and entertain company and still have time to be sweet and sensible and accomplished," said loyal Agnes. Amy turned red, but the words of praise from the dear friend who was the only person who understood her trials and knew something of the load she carried in making the slender-income suffice and keeping the home hearth warm and bright, warmed her tired heart and gave her renewed courage.

"I haven't told you the worst," said Amy. "Dot insists that we must have some new chairs for the parlor and the hall repapered. The chairs are a disgrace to the community since Cousin Flora's children scratched them all up, but we can't afford anything just now. Of course the dear children cannot understand how difficult it is to keep within our means, nor how high provisions are just now, but I simply cannot afford anything in the way of new furniture."

"The dear children are past seventeen and only two years younger than yourself, so they ought to know something about household affairs by this time. You have spoiled them so badly, Amy, that they will never recover. Why don't you go to bed the evening before they come to visit and forget to get up till they are gone? It would do them a lot of good to discover some of the things you have carefully kept from them all this time."

"What would become of mother?" gasped Amy. "I'll manage somehow. Agnes, especially since you are with me, but no new furniture in this house this winter."

At their father's death years before the Landon twins had been taken by their rich aunt and given everything in the way of advantages, but at her death she had neglected to provide for them, so they came home with their expensive tastes and ideas to their mother and sister, who had lived with more or less of a struggle on the income left them. Mrs. Landon was neither sick nor well, but a delicate, fragile person needing much care and attention, which was given her by her devoted daughter, who was housekeeper, companion, nurse and business manager all in one. While Amy was small, they had had a faithful servant, but now that Dot and Dick had to go to college Amy did the work herself with occasional days of help from the washerwoman who lived near.

Mrs. Landon was always afraid the twins might feel the difference between their present home and the one they had lost, so she urged her daughter to make everything as pleasant as possible during the vacations. Under a smiling exterior she hid her quivering nerves and pain-racked body during the days and nights of fun and frolic, but when the twins were back in college Amy had the care of her mother increased three-fold because of the noise and excitement. Pretty Agnes came in often during the days of affliction to help Amy, and she was a tower of strength to the perplexed young housekeeper many times.

"Let me varnish the chairs and woodwork in the front hall for you, Amy," said Agnes, when the two girls critically examined the scarred steps and chairs bearing the marks of the iron toys owned by the little guests, who had nearly set Mrs. Landon frantic. "It's a very easy task, and I'd love to do it. You just give me a dollar to buy the varnish and everything will be spick and span by the time the twins arrive with their guests. No, it isn't too much trouble. What are friends for, I'd be glad to know, if not to help out occasionally. You think I can't do it, but I'll show you."

And when the chairs, the edges of the floors, the stairway, the front hall and every bit of varnished woodwork in parlor, sitting room and hall had been liberally coated with the shining varnish, Amy wept tears of joy to see the transformation. "The man said leave the windows open and the shutters closed a few days before going in. Doesn't everything look splendid?"

"You certainly are 'a friend in need and a friend indeed,'" quoted happy Amy, giving her friend a rapturous squeeze. "Just as soon as the twins and the company are out of the house I'll varnish everything else that needs varnishing."

Early the next morning Agnes ran in to say she was going with her mother to visit the latter's aunt and would not be at home for three weeks. "Remember, Amy," were her parting words, "not to work too hard. Let them take things just as you have them at home with your mother, and don't go to a lot of bother. How is my work getting along? That's right! Stay out of the rooms till the very last minute and the varnish will be all the finer and harder. Good-bye!" and she departed, leaving her friend to go about her work with a gay little tune on her lips. Somehow the very sight of bright vivacious Agnes did Amy good and helped her over the hard places.

"What in the world is the matter?" said Dick, ringing the door bell violently, when he could not get in the evening he and Dot brought their stylish friends home with them for the two weeks, spring or late winter vacation. "It's very odd there are no lights in the

front of the house, and everything looks deserted."

"I'm very sorry, Dick," said Amy, rushing around the house in the chill wind, "but you will all have to come in the back way. We have been varnishing in the front hall and it isn't dry yet."

Dick smothered an exclamation as he followed the anxious Amy into the big warm kitchen; and there another surprise met their eyes. The kitchen table was spread with a clean cloth, and on it reposed six plates and other dishes that indicated supper was to be served in close proximity to the range. "Have you had the dining room varnished too?" he asked.

"Yes, and the sitting room and parlor," explained Amy while the guests were seated on the old-fashioned chairs. "You will have to take the trunks up the back stairway, Dick. Dot, if you and your friends want to go upstairs before supper, you had better go now, as it will be ready in ten minutes."

"I think we had better leave the trunks down here and go on to Florence's to-morrow," said Rose Frost. "It will be very inconvenient for you to entertain us under these circumstances, and we have promised to go there before vacation is over, anyway."

Her brother gave her a grateful look, and neither of the twins urged them very much to change their decision. With a little coal-oil lamp Dot led the way up the ladder-like back stairs to the comfortable rooms above, and presently the whole family sat down to the delicious supper served from the kettles and frying pans plainly visibly on the range.

"We can't use these steel knives and forks, Amy," Dorothy had whispered in disgust when she took a close survey of the table. "I'm going in to get silver ones. Dick you come along and hold the lamp."

So Dick, who was equally disgusted with the heavy dishes and coarse cloth, essayed to help his sister in her effort to maintain the family standard for company. Dot took a flying leap over the varnished border to the tuckered up rug about the dining table legs, and from that vantage point reached out to pull at the side-board drawer where the modest supply of silver was kept.

"Ugh! Sticky!" she ejaculated, trying to rub the varnish from her sticky fingers. "I don't believe I can do a thing with the drawer."

"I know you can't," Amy had answered, "I've been trying it off and on since yesterday morning. Come on out to supper or it will get cold."

In spite of the disgust of the twins and their guests and the worry endured by Mrs. Landon and Amy, the good fried chicken, the hot biscuits and honey, the mound of home-made ice cream and all the other dainty and substantial food provided by Amy disappeared like dew in the sunshine. The kitchen was bright, cheery and comfortable, but the young people could not fit themselves in properly, and the result was a very quiet evening and an early departure for bed up the narrow stairs.

"Who painted or varnished the stairs?" said Dorothy the instant the guests departed next morning. "If it had been anybody but Rose I wouldn't have cared so much, but she is always talking about their elegant home. We'll sue the man who did the work for damages. Everything looks lovely and shining, but there is no telling when it will dry."

"Does Rose Frost ever ask you to visit her?" said Amy, ignoring her sister's question. "She has been here time and again, and we have done our best,