

Jack said he had it first, but anyway the doctor said I had it badder than Jack. I didn't tell Jack that I was sorry that I got it, but I was. It hurt a lot and I had to take some nasty medicine; and when Mrs. Johnston found out that I spit the medicine out when she wasn't looking, she stayed with me till I said, 'It-is-all-gone-now,' and I had to say it slow, too. So, you see, I had a awful nuisance, too."

There was a twinkle behind Anna's glasses as she arose and left the room, saying to her sisters, "I'll fix tea." While Emmaline, with an unusual twitch in the corners of her mouth, found a skein of wool, and showed Cricket how to hold it while it was being wound into a ball. The child chattered away without restraint about her life in the garrison, which was as unreal to the listeners as the Arabian Nights.

When Anna returned, carrying a large silver tray laden with steaming tea and crisp little cakes, Cricket leaped to her feet, depositing the wool in a tangled mass in Emmaline's lap, and dragging part of the skein about her foot as she ran to the little table, exclaiming delightedly, "Oh, we're going to have a tea-party!" May I pour tea?"

"The girls" looked uneasily from the grimy hands to the polished silver, then at the eager little face, and Adelaide rose. "You may if you will let me wash your face and hands first. Ladies always have nice clean hands and faces when they sit down to tea."

The child followed docilely, and came back with shining face, then sat down and reached for the fat little silver tea-pot, remarking graciously, with a ridiculous assumption of dignity, "I'm the mover now, and you are my little girls, only I don't know your names yet, you see."

They told her, Anna, Emmaline, Malvina, Mary Ann, and Adelaide Corgee; and Cricket nodded sagely.

"Miss Corjeses! I know all about your family! The chaplain read about Jesus to us at Sunday School."

There was a chorus of shocked voices, and, after trying fruitlessly to explain her error, they finally told the bewildered Cricket to say Miss Anna, or Miss Emmaline, and not use the surname.

When tea was cleared away the five cats appeared, and the child stretched on the floor, cuddling them all and talking until Adelaide said she would take her safely home. At the door Cricket turned and gave a stiff military salute, saying gravely, "Good-night. I've had a perfect-ly beautiful time," the tone being an unmistakable imitation of an affected society drawl; then she vanished, only to put her head in again and announce, reassuringly, "I'm coming back again to-morrow."

The next morning there was an intangible atmosphere of expectation in the house. Emmaline was undecided whether little cakes with currants or caraway cookies would be best for tea; and Anna thought they might just as well have the table in the arbor, "the nights were so warm."

Adelaide, who had been out on the weekly marketing trip, exhibited a gayly-colored picture book of biblical stories, saying she thought the child had been raised like a heathen and it was their duty to teach her better. Malvina and Mary Ann held a whispered conversation, which resulted in a journey upstairs, from which they returned with a china doll made into a pin-cushion, its stiffly extended skirts being stuffed with sawdust and sewed to a circular piece of cardboard. It had stood on the mahogany dresser in Malvina's room since she was ten years old, but the faded blue silk skirt still showed the heads of the original pins forming the word "Malvina." The two sisters sat down, and added new pins until the original word was supplemented by additional ones, "to Cricket."

Cricket kept her word; her face was clean in sections, as though she had performed her ablutions on the in-stalment plan, but there was evidence of heroic effort.

The cakes, doll and book were re-

ceived with little screams of joy, then, before anyone knew what was coming, she had flung herself on "the girls," and was kissing them impartially. Miss Adelaide's wig got a little on one side, and Anna's point lace collar was rumpled, but there was a queer little thrill in each staid heart—the ghost of the thrill of motherhood—as though the fingers of the unborn babies had touched the withered breasts.

A quaint little wooden rocker had been resurrected from the garret, and the child, holding the doll in her arms, rocked back and forth, looking at the picture-book and listening to "the girls" explanations.

The afternoon passed quickly for them all, when the child was told it was time to go the animated face became wistful. She made no protest, but rose quietly and laid the book carefully on the table, placing the doll beside it. For a second she gazed into "the girls" faces, then slipped softly to Anna's side, and said, hesitatingly: "I'll be awful good if you'll let me come again."

Anna took off her glasses and wiped them hurriedly, then replacing

and the favored gowns were carried to the sewing-room. Such a ripping and snipping, and discussions as to bias and straight edges, ruffles and flounces, until Adelaide returned with her arms full of bundles.

When Cricket materialized that afternoon she was seized, led to the bath-room and scrubbed from head to foot. The new clothes were slipped on her, and a pair of blue kid shoes with dangling tassels. The tangled mop of hair was transformed into a mass of shining curls that fell to her waist, and were held in place by a blue ribbon that encircled her head and ended in a coquettish bow above the part. Miss Adelaide flushed with pleasure when the other "girls" remembered she always "had such a knack for making pretty bows." Then a dainty white dress, with little ruffles edged with lace, was fastened on, and Cricket was led down in state.

Tea was late that evening, and after the dishes were finished, Cricket, tired by the excitement, curled on the floor with the cats, and in a little while Anna, looking down, saw that the child was asleep. Placing her

in the spare room for to-night, and be sure they are not damp."

An hour elapsed before she returned, but when they questioned her she shook her head, saying, "I'll tell you after we put the child to bed."

It was Anna who raised the sleeping child, and as she looked down at the flushed face, with its tangle of curls against her breast, a tender look stole over her face, and the other "girls" knew she was thinking of the children that might have been hers, and with exquisite tact they sat down quietly and watched her ascend the stairs, holding the child in her arms.

When she came down again the other sisters crept softly to the spare room to see "if everything was all right," after which they picked up their old-fashioned needle work, taught them in days when idle hands were considered a woman's disgrace, and waited for Adelaide to speak.

"Girls, we have been very happy here together, but I have often wondered which of us would be the last one to be left; and in the dread of that one lingering maybe helpless for years, with only memories, I have prayed God to take us all together. The dread of it has never left me for years, until I thought if we would take this little one into our home to be our own, that fear would be ended. When I saw Mrs. Jessup I asked if she had any objection to our legally adopting the child, and she said she would be glad of it, for she had more than she could do to look out for her own."

"So to-morrow, if you 'girls' are satisfied, we will see the family lawyer and have the papers made out."

The sisters looked at each other, laughing guiltily, then each confessed she had intended to do exactly what Adelaide had done.

When Cricket woke the next morning she was told the news, and if any of the "girls" had ever doubted the child's love for them that doubt was laid to rest forever. Then life began anew for them all.

House-cleaning time approached; though why such an epoch should exist when a house is always clean is an unsolved enigma. However, an orthodox Philadelphian of the old regime must clean house in the spring and fall; to omit it would be as heathenish as to omit one's prayers.

In the confusion of carpet-beating, painting and scrubbing from garret to cellar, it was discovered there was no sugar in the house, and Emmaline dispatched Cricket to the corner grocery.

She arrived just in time to see the clerk pick up a box in which were some tiny pink baby mice; and when she begged them for pets he laughed and gave them to her. Hiding them in her pocket she hurried home, and, after leaving the sugar in the kitchen, sneaked into the garden and examined her treasures.

When the warning shadows began to lengthen Cricket began to wonder what she should do with her mice for the night, for she feared "the girls" as much as the cats.

Then a brilliant thought struck her, and putting the mice carefully in her pocket, she hurried upstairs to the bureau where Emmaline's gloves were kept.

Taking a pair of soft kid gloves from the drawer, Cricket pushed the mice gently into the palm, and started each one into a separate finger, so it could have a "room all to its own self." Then replacing the glove she shut the drawer and left the room, happy in the thought that her pets were safe and comfortable.

The next day was market day and Miss Emmaline did not notice anything unusual about her "third best" gloves until her fingers encountered an obstacle. Even then, being busy discussing her market list, she only pushed harder.

"I wonder what on earth is the matter with this glove!" she exclaimed, as she pulled it off to investigate.

There was a howl from the stairway, and Cricket precipitated herself on the glove.

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them, she spoke gently: "Of course, you may come, dear. We want you to."

A little face was upturned and two rosy lips met the wrinkled face above it. Then somehow Emmaline's hands went out and her arms were about the tiny figure. There was a rustle of silk and bombazine skirts as the other sisters claimed their kiss, while the child's face beamed.

She was not old enough to realize that the crumb of her love was a feast to the poor starving hearts that had never before realized that they were hungry.

The day after, Adelaide, bent on a mysterious shopping trip, was followed to the front door by her sisters, each giving parting injunctions. When the door closed there was a chattering procession to the garret, where trunks were overhauled and numerous old-fashioned dresses and ribbons, relics of youthful days, were spread about, accompanied by, "Do you remember the night I wore that to Cousin Ellie's party?" or "That was your birthday dress when you were eighteen, Malvina!" How many old dreams rose ghost-like from those trunks!

At last a selection had been made,

finger warningly on her lips, she brought a soft, warm, knitted shawl and threw it gently over the little figure, remarking, apologetically: "It seems such a shame to disturb her! I've heard it is bad for a child's nerves to be awakened; besides, she might catch cold going out in the night air." Then, seeing no disapprobation in the faces, she grew bolder: "Don't you 'girls' think it would be better to see Mrs. Jessup and ask permission for the child to remain here for to-night?"

Each head gave a little nod of acquiescence, and Adelaide, laying aside her tating, left the room for a wrap.

"I'll go to see Mrs. Jessup," she declared in a stage whisper, as she threw a cape over her shoulders and draped a black lace "throw" over her head, leaving the prim little curls dangling unconfined each side of her face.

"The woman may be all very well, so far as I know, but no one knows anything at all about her grandfather, and, besides, she has only lived ten years on the street, and one has to be so careful, you know! I shall not be gone very long, and I don't think it would do any harm if I don't of you 'girls' should turn down the sheets