

and sisters lived. Dora, who at sixteen had left school, was at home now, and was helping the eldest sister, Lucy, who had kept her father's house since the mother's death, a few years previously.

The two little ones, as their elders called Alice and Emily, the slim growing girls who completed the family group, went to a day school close at home, and added to Lucy's many cares the task of looking after their home-lessons and behaviour, and providing a succession of new or re-modelled garments to supply those that were always becoming too small or too shabby to be any longer presentable.

It was not an easy duty that had been given to Lucy Evans, that of stepping into her dead mother's place, and caring for the sorrowing father and the young grief-stricken sisters, bewildered by the calamity that had come upon them. If Mrs. Evans had had a long illness, if there had been any preparation, any warning of the trouble that was coming, it would have seemed perhaps lighter to bear, but she was taken away almost suddenly: before they had begun really to anticipate their loss, the family found themselves bereaved indeed.

She had been a cheerful active woman, taking everything upon herself, smoothing the way for her daughters, perhaps a little more than was good for them; chiefly anxious that Lucy, in her bright young womanhood, should go out and enjoy herself as much as possible, and that Hilda and Dorothy should be kept long at school and have a good many advantages. As for the two youngest, they were "mother's darlings," they could not believe, for a time, in the dreadful truth that they should see that dear mother no more.

Her death had changed all things. Lucy, some years older than the next sister, was old enough to take charge of the housekeeping, and an arduous charge she found it. Mr. Evans was a clerk in the Wedgbury bank, and though he had some private means of his own, which made the family position better than it would otherwise have been, there was but a narrow income to supply the wants of such a household. It was impossible to keep more than one servant, and when the faithful and experienced Betty, who had been with Mrs. Evans since the first baby was born, turned traitor to her employer's interests, and married an old sweetheart who had courted her persistently for fifteen years, Lucy called aloud for some help in her difficulties.

"We shall never get anyone like Betty," she said to her father, in despair. "I shall have to spend my time getting a new girl into our ways, and it will be impossible for things to go on properly unless one of the others come home to help."

"I daresay you are right, Lucy," Mr. Evans said, rather wearily; in his secret heart he was always regretting the lost wife who had made everything work smoothly and noiselessly, without the appeal for help that Lucy seemed to make so often. "I daresay you are right, but you know you cannot have Hilda. Miss Graves has offered to keep Hilda on as a teacher, and she will be in a way to get her own living then; with so many of you to be provided for that must be considered. It is time Dorothy was leaving school; she may come home at Christmas to help you, and that is all that can be done. You must just manage as well as you can."

With this concession Lucy was fain to be content; she would much rather have had Hilda, and vainly wished that Miss Graves had exercised more discernment and more thought of the home needs, before she had made that unfortunate offer of a teacher's place for her favourite pupil.

"In a year or two Dorothy would have done just as well for Miss Graves," reflected

Lucy bitterly, "but she will never do as well for me as Hilda would have done."

The decision was a blow to Dora too; she had been keenly interested in her school studies, and had fondly hoped for some kind of work in which she might have used the mental powers of which she was perhaps a little too conscious. To go home and help in the housekeeping seemed a very flat ending to her school-day dreams, and she felt quite sure that it would be impossible for her ever to care, as Lucy did, about keeping the parlours and bedrooms in order, or making sure that the daily dinner was to everybody's liking.

"We can't be made only for such a wretched routine as that," she said to herself, in her young rebellion against the life before her. The poor child had yet to learn how a lofty spirit may animate even the humblest acts; how the simple household service may become the expression of the purest and most exalted charity.

But though she shrank so much from the prospect, Dora, when she did return to her father's house, found that her sad lot admitted of a good many alleviations. Lucy was not a very exacting elder sister; she did what she could to make things easy for Dora, and the latter often found time for the hours of quiet study which were her chief pleasure. She was not altogether ungrateful for Lucy's kindness either, and made really honest endeavours to accustom herself to the household works and ways that were naturally distasteful to her.

"All girls should know how to keep house, Dora," said Lucy sensibly. "I will do my best to give you time for your studies, if you will try to help me, and take a little real interest in things."

By degrees Dora did come to be very useful, and as the two sisters worked well into each other's hands, the time came when the experienced Betty was no longer regretted. The one servant Mr. Evans could afford to keep did pretty well under her two young mistresses, and the head of the family could not help being surprised sometimes that there was still so much comfort and order in the house.

Only in one point poor Lucy failed, but that unfortunately was a very important one; she herself admitted that she had "no head for figures," and try as she would, she constantly outran the quarterly allowance which her father made her for the housekeeping, and to pay for the dress of herself and her sisters.

"Your mother had the same money, and she always made it enough, and even saved out of it," Mr. Evans said, with a good deal of irritation, perhaps not making sufficient allowance for the fact that economy is a difficult virtue for young people to practise. "You must make the amount do somehow, Lucy, for, if I give you any more, it will be impossible for me to pay the younger girls' school bills, and meet other necessary expenses. There are ways and means of saving, if you have only the will to save."

Lucy thought all this very hard, and she poured out her complaints to Dora in no measured terms.

"Why don't you have a proper book and keep accounts, Loo, the same as mother used to do?" suggested Dora. "You don't know how your money goes half the time."

Lucy did not think much good would come of adopting this plan. What she wanted was some other source of supply.

"I could do well enough if the money was only sufficient for our necessary expenses," she said in an injured tone, "but it isn't, and I don't know what to do."

"You must cut your coat according to your cloth, my dear," said Dora, "and I do wish you would be advised by me, and keep an account."

After a little more persuasion Lucy consented that Dora should keep a daily record of expenses, and, as every one who has tried it may imagine, this proved a real help. But even Dora was often surprised to find how many things were wanted, and how very difficult it was to get everything out of a certain fixed sum, and to make all straight at the quarter's end.

She cast about in her own mind for some way of augmenting the family finances, and both she and Lucy were sometimes tempted to envy Hilda, with her entire freedom from the domestic cares that harassed her sisters, and her certain, if small, salary of five-and-twenty pounds yearly. "Out of which she has only to dress herself and pay for postage-stamps and things," Lucy said with her injured air, quite forgetting that it would have been very easy for Hilda too to get into debt, instead of being able, as she often was, to make her sisters little presents when she came home for the holidays.

It was just a month before one of Hilda's visits home that Dorothy had seen in the *Teacher's Magazine* the announcement of the Essay Competition. Ten pounds seemed such a splendid sum to her young anxious mind, that she could not help being eager to make some effort to obtain it. There had always been present with her a vague longing to work with her pen, and this unlooked for opportunity seemed to give it strength and shape.

Lucy thought little of the plan, and indeed forgot all about it after the first mention of the subject; and Mr. Evans, as Dorothy had told Hilda, hardly seemed to notice the request his daughter made for permission to enter for the competition.

It was such a common thing for Dora to be scribbling at odd times in the little back bedroom she had to herself, that no one observed how much care she gave to the composition of her paper, and it was all finished and sent away without any family criticism. But Dorothy herself was surprised when she began to think seriously upon the subject, at the multitude and variety of the thoughts that came to her.

"I never knew there was so much to be said about self-sacrifice before," she thought. "It is a beautiful theme, but I must try and condense a little. I must choose only a part of the many things that come into my head to say."

After resolutely altering and pruning, and after copying her paper three times over, she was fairly well satisfied, and putting it up in a neat wrapper she dropped it into the post-office with a light heart, and went home to wait, with as much patience as she could muster, for the result of her venture.

"I must try not to be sanguine," she said again and again to herself, "but there is no harm in thinking what one might do with the ten pounds if it really came. Half of it I would give to Lucy; I have quite made up my mind to that. If she could once get a little beforehand she might never be in such a dreadful fix about her money again as she is now towards the end of the quarter. But the rest—I might surely do as I like with the rest. I would buy some books, expensive books that I have often longed for; and I would put something by to pay for taking in two or three magazines regularly; then how nice it would be, what a help to me, to subscribe to a good literary circle or correspondence class, or something of that kind. There would be money enough for all, and oh! how happy these things would make me."

Then she smiled at her own reverie and thought herself like Alnaschar in the story, and as far away from the fulfilment of her wishes as that unhappy china-merchant.

(To be concluded.)