

THE FIRST TIME.

SAXE HOLM, IN ST. NICHOLAS.

(Continued.)

When I went into the sitting-room I walked slowly toward her, and she took me in her lap and kissed me. If she had said one word to show that she suspected me of having lied I should have burst into tears and told her all about it; but she was too wise to do that. She knew very well that the surest way to make me hate a lie was to let me live along with it fastened to me for a while. So she began to talk about something else, just as if nothing had happened, and in a few minutes we went to dinner.

I hardly could eat a mouthful. It seemed to me, whenever my father looked at me, that his eyes were sterner than ever. A dreadful voice seemed dinning in my ears:

"In a few minutes more dessert will be brought in, and then he will ask for the report."

As soon as the servant began to remove the meat and vegetables, I said:

"I don't want any dessert. May I be excused?"

"Not want any dessert!" exclaimed my mother. "Why, Peggy, you must be ill. We are going to have India pudding and cream."

Now, there was nothing in the world I liked so well as India pudding, and my father and mother both knew it. It makes me laugh now to think how my dear mother must have pitied me in her heart when she heard me reply.

"But I am not hungry. I don't want any."

Then my mother said: "Very well; you may go."

And didn't I run fast toward the door! And didn't I hope, for two seconds, that my father was going to forget to ask after the report! Alas! no such escape for me!

"Peggy, Peggy," he called, "what is all this hurry about? Bring me your report, dear. I want to see that."

Before I had time to reply, my good, kind mother replied for me:

"Oh, Peggy has lost her report," she said. "The wind blew it into the brook. So we shall not know how good a girl she has been this week."

This was the worst thing yet; to have to stand there and hear my mother tell my lie over again for me.

"What!" said my father, vehemently. "This high wind blow anything into the brook?"

"Yes," said my mother, in what I now understand must have been a very meaning tone: "that is the way it happened. Run away, Peggy, dear, and play."

Play! I was thankful to escape out of the room; but I

out every little thing I could see in the brook which looked in the least like a bit of paper. It was very cold and wet, and dismal, and before long I got to crying so that I could hardly see anything. It did seem to me too bad that now I really wanted to get the report back and carry it home to my mother. I could not find it. Suddenly I made a misstep on the bank where it was covered with snow, and plunged in, both feet, into the water nearly up to my knees. Except for my big stick I hardly could have got out. I was horribly frightened and dripping wet, but there seemed a sort of relief in having a new kind of misery; it put the lie out of my thoughts for a few minutes. I went into the

darling," she said; "let it go. The little fishes can read it if they want to, and make some like it for their schools."

But I was too unhappy to laugh. I only cried the harder. Then they undressed me, put on my flannel night-gown, rolled me all up in blankets, and laid me on the lounge by the fire; and my mother sat down close by me, and began to read aloud a nice fairy story. Pretty soon, in spite of all my unhappiness, I fell asleep, and when I waked up it was about dark. My mother was still sitting by my side. I watched her for some minutes before she knew I was awake. She was sitting with her eyes on the fire, and looked as if she were thinking very hard.

"Oh dear," I thought, "I know what she's thinking about. I don't believe she believes me; but why don't she say so? I should think she'd whip me for telling a lie."

As soon as she saw I had waked, she said:

"Well, my little diver, are you rested?"

Then she told me about the way the divers go down in the sea after pearls, and at the end of the story, she said:

"I guess it wasn't much of a pearl you went diving after, Peggy, was it?"

"No, mamma," said I. "I don't believe it was, as near as I can remember. I think it was a pretty bad report."

She waited in

silence for some minutes after this. I think she hoped I would confess the truth to her then. But I was too cowardly. I lay still, with my face turned to the back of the lounge, trying to take a little comfort to my self, because I had owned up that the report was not a good one. That was the last time she spoke to me about the report, except the next Monday morning, when I was setting off for school, she said:

"Oh, wait a minute, Peggy. I'll write a note to Miss Caroline, and tell her how you lost your report."

I had not thought of this new occasion for another lie. I stood still by her side while

house crying out loud, and, looking like a little half-drowned animal. The muddy water dripped from me as I walked and I left the wet prints of my feet at each step.

"Mercy on me, child! where have you been?" cried my mother. "Don't come a step farther. Stand still right there, till Mary can get off your things."

"I was looking for my report in the brook," sobbed I, "and I fell in; and I can't find it."

Ah, how loving and sympathetic my mother was then. She understood all about it; she knew just how wretched I was.

"Never mind about the report,

I felt no more like playing than I did like drowning myself. I never had felt so miserable in my whole life.

I put on my India rubbers and rolled up my pantalets (in those days all little girls wore long white pantalets down to their ankles). Then I went out, climbed over the stone wall into the orchard, and began looking in the brook after my report. Of course, if I had been older I should have known better. But I was a poor, ignorant, naughty little child, only eight years old, and I hoped I should find the little roll of paper floating along on the water, just as I left it. I found a big, strong stick, and I fished

out every little thing I could see in the brook which looked in the least like a bit of paper. It was very cold and wet, and dismal, and before long I got to crying so that I could hardly see anything. It did seem to me too bad that now I really wanted to get the report back and carry it home to my mother. I could not find it. Suddenly I made a misstep on the bank where it was covered with snow, and plunged in, both feet, into the water nearly up to my knees. Except for my big stick I hardly could have got out. I was horribly frightened and dripping wet, but there seemed a sort of relief in having a new kind of misery; it put the lie out of my thoughts for a few minutes. I went into the

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THE ANCESTRAL HALL OF A CHINESE MANSION.