

his sleepy eyes coming wide open again. 'Poor baby 'gators! I so sorry for them.'

'But their mother takes care of them, and will not let the father find them, if she can help it,' said Mother Reess, hugging her own little boy.

'Will she go to look at her eggs to-morrow day?' asked Clay.

'I think she will,' said his mother.

'Then I'll take them all back,' murmured the sleepy little fellow.

'Poor mother 'gator—feel—bad—but Clay was off into dreamland, where mother alligator and her eggs were all forgotten.

The box of eggs was put in a closet, and neither Clay nor his mother thought of them again. A week later, Clay went to the closet for some toys, and heard a strange, rustling noise. He looked up, and saw a box on a shelf with the cover dancing up and down in a frantic manner.

'Oh, mother!' cried Clay, dancing up and down himself in excitement, 'come here—quick! Here is a box—all alive!'

His mother came running in, and there were a dozen tiny black snouts peeping out under the box cover. Before she could even scream, out popped a swarm of baby alligators and dropped down to the floor, where they scampered off in every direction. All the eggs had hatched, for the closet was behind a stove and the box in a warm place.

Such a time as there was! Clay jumped up and down, screaming with glee, but his mother was screaming with fright, and she climbed on top of a table to get out of the way of the alligators, who went running about, as if in a hurry to investigate this new, strange world in which they found themselves. Black Cinda came running in to see what was the matter, and she got up on a chair and screamed, too. If Clay's father had not come in, they might have been perched there, screaming, yet.

Then for a hunt! The baby alligators hid under the furniture and burrowed under the carpets, popping out of every hole and corner. It was nearly a week before the last one was caught. Father Reess shook three out of his boot one morning, and Mother Reess nearly had a fit when she pulled on her stocking and found one in the toe. As for Cinda, she spent the most of her time perched on chairs or tables and screaming, thinking everything she saw was an alligator.

But Clay was not afraid of them. He thought they were the cunningest of playfellows, and begged hard to keep them all. But when his mother told him that the mother 'gator would want her babies, he consented to have them taken to the beach. His father let him keep six, and made a pen for them in the back yard, with a small tank of water in it. Here Clay played with them, and they became very tame and seemed to know their little master. He was often seen with the whole lot swarming all over him, but his mother could not bear to touch the creatures, though Clay assured her that their way of running up his arm and poking their black snouts into his face was their way of loving him. He kept his pets for a year, then sharp, white teeth began to come in their big mouths, and his father thought they might become dangerous playfellows, so one night they all disappeared and Clay never saw them again. If he had been on the beach next day, he might have seen six young alligators scampering about as if they did not know what to make of their strange surroundings. I wonder if their mother knew them.

## What Lysbet Found

(Hope Daring, in the 'Michigan Advocate'.)

'How now, miss! Supper time and past and you dreaming by the window. It's always that way when I am gone. It's plain, Lysbet, that you can never be trusted.'

Lysbet Van Pelt sprang up. 'Supper is ready and waiting, aunt.'

A scowl lingered on Madam Van Pelt's face. 'Let it be brought in. Could you not have found something with which to busy your hands while you waited?'

Lysbet made no reply. She was a girl of fifteen, short, plump, and fair, with blue eyes and sunny hair. She was dressed in a black bodice, a crimson quilted petticoat, clocked stockings, and low-cut buckled shoes.

That was the usual dress of young Dutch girls of that period. For this was the year 1720, and the Van Pelt mansion stood on the bank of the Hudson, but a little way out from what was then the staid town of New York.

Lysbet called the maid to bring in the hearty supper of venison steak, broiled shad, hot johnny cake, 'oly koecks,' fritters, coffee, and various kinds of preserved fruits. There was only Madam Van Pelt and her niece. Before sitting down the lady covered her handsome brown brocade visiting dress with a huge white linen apron.

It was a quaint room where the meal was served. There was a large tiled fireplace, but on that June evening it was occupied by an immense East India porcelain jar filled with feathery asparagus. An oak sideboard, black with silver and heaped with massive family silver and the china brought by seafaring Van Pelts of long ago from the East, occupied one side of the room.

The husband of madam and the father of Lysbet had been brothers. From their father they had inherited an extensive shipping business. The younger brother, Lysbet's father, had died suddenly, and his wife had lived only a few weeks after his death.

Lysbet—four years old then—was taken to her uncle's home. A year later madam's husband died. It was rumored that the younger of the brothers had lost his entire fortune by speculation, and that the little orphan was dependent upon the bounty of her aunt.

At first this mattered little to the child. The loss of mother love meant far more to her. She grew up in the home of her ancestors, sharing the advantages of her cousins. As she grew old enough to understand her aunt's sharp tongue made her aware of the fact that she was a pauper. Now the cousins were married, and madam and Lysbet were alone in the old home.

After the meal was over Madam Van Pelt took her knitting.

'Go up to my room, Lysbet, and bring me my glasses before you commence your spinning.'

Lysbet obeyed, taking a candle from the mantle to light her way. Madam Van Pelt's room was on the second floor. Lysbet entered it, and, as she reached over the table for the glasses, her arm hit a carved sandalwood box, and it fell to the floor.

The girl bent over the box, an exclamation of sorrow coming from her lips when

she saw that the slender little brass hinges were broken. She picked it up, and a quantity of papers dropped to the floor. A name carved on the inside of the lid caught her eye. Holding it to the light, she read, 'Gretchen Van Vechten.'

'Why, that was my mother's name,' she thought. 'How strange my aunt never told me this box was hers!'

Ever since she could remember the box had occupied a place on the table at the head of her aunt's bed and had always been locked. Upon picking up the papers, she found there were several official-looking documents and also a few letters. On the outside of one of the letters was written, 'To my little daughter Lysbet.'

The girl's breath came hard and fast. What did it mean?

With trembling fingers she spread open the sheet. 'Mijn witte mamme' (my white lamb), the letter began. Lysbet had read only these words when her aunt's voice floated up to her.

'Stupid! Have you gone to sleep? They are on the table.'

One second Lysbet stood motionless. Then, with quick, decisive movements, she returned the sandalwood box to the table, carefully fitting on the cover. As this came down over the sides of the box, it would remain in place as long as it was not disturbed. Gathering up the papers, she crossed the hall to her own room, lifted the pillow from the bed, and placed under it the precious packet.

'Whatever kept you so long?' madam asked when Lysbet joined her.

'I went to my own room and got a clean handkerchief,' the girl replied, unfolding that article as she spoke. She sat down at her little spinning-wheel and began to draw out the long gossamer-like threads of flax.

Outside the uncurtained window near her she could see the grassy meadow that separated the Van Pelt mansion from the next house. A new moon hung low in the west, shedding a dim light upon the scene. The soft air stole in and touched her cheek.

'My white lamb, my white lamb,' over and over the words sounded in her ears. It was hers at last—that message from the dead. Why had it been hidden from her for twelve years?

It was not until the clock in the hall struck ten that Madam Van Pelt rolled up the coarse blue stocking upon which she was at work.

'You might as well go to bed, Lysbet,' she said sharply. 'You are looking out of the window instead of spinning. Ah, it is well for you there is such a thing as charity.'

The girl's cheek flushed crimson, but she took her candle without a word. She was half way up stairs when her aunt called out:

'No loitering about your room. Go straight to bed, or I will never get you up in the morning.'

Lysbet walked on, tears welling up in her eyes. Suddenly she threw back her head, and the spirit of her brave ancestors looked from her eyes.

'I can wait. I believe the papers are mine, and I will not give them up. It is hard to wait longer for my mother's message, but I will be brave.'

For hours she lay awake. Again and again her hand crept under the pillow and touched the precious packet. Ah, that letter! Her mother's own words to her!