

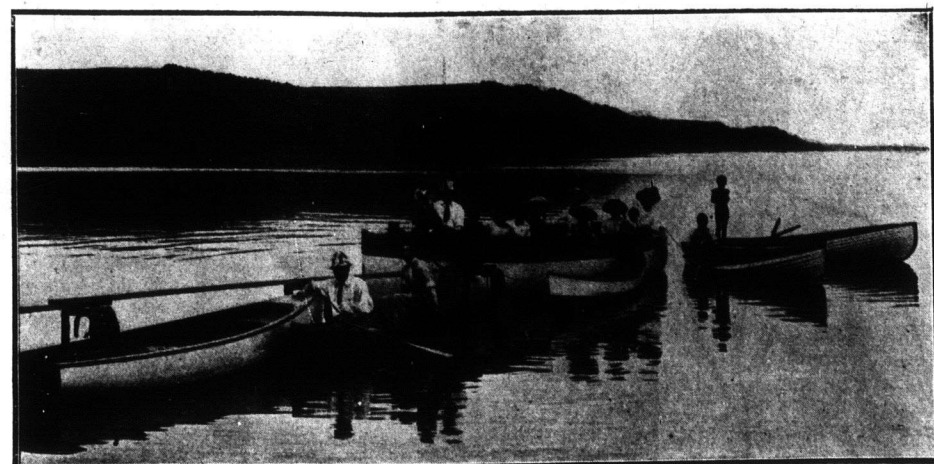
Christmas time, foolish child! But love is always on guard, with its poor blind eyes.

By-and-by, when the trees were a wilderness of netted boughs against the heavens, when the winds had swept the earth clean of rubbish the first snow heralded itself one night by a bank of clouds, and at morning the bare boughs were draped in filmy laces, and all the world was a lonesome, dazzling waste.

"At least," thought Priscilla, "Christmas will be here soon."

She did not trust herself now to say that Jasper would be as certain to come. She had begun to doubt, now that the winter winds blew in her face, and the frost flowers shut out her sea-view; for how many storms must rave along the coast, and how many ships go down, and how many hearts break before Christmas-day! Perhaps she thought of these things while she made ready for that happy day; perhaps she saw now how cruelly she had used herself as well as Jasper, in disowning with her lips the emotion of her heart, in rashly counting on to-morrow's friendship. What if he should go down to his death, and never know how she had watched and waited and sorrowed for him! Where would be her comfort then? To find that he must wait till the sea gives up its dead to hear her answer, to know her heart. But all the same, she went about her drugery with these fears haunting, waylaying her, made the house cheery for Uncle Eben, the fire bright, the food savory; mended his clothes, looked after his asthma, and made herself the prettiest bonnet she could devise, just for Jasper's sake.

But somehow, when Christmas was really knocking at the door, and the earth was sheeted in hoar-frost, and the fires snapped and blazed with a will, and all manner of kind wishes were current; when Priscilla's six-hour pudding, a culinary masterpiece, was ready for its bag, the pies were waiting on the pantry shelves, the crab-apple jelly quaking in its jars; when the great turkey was dressed and in the pan, and there was a



A Summer Day at Balmy Beach, Ninette, Man.

loaf of plum-cake in the chest, along with the sponge gingerbread and raised dough-nuts that Jasper liked: when there were apples red as cherries in the bin down-stairs, and nuts that Priscilla and the children had gone into the Pettingale woods to pick before the snow came; when all these delightful preparations had been completed, and Priscilla, in her new poplin with scarlet ribbons, went up to the house-top, with the spy-glass and Uncle Eben, all those dolorous fears with which her winter had been clouded blew away; and she expected nothing but to see the Heron bounding homeward, without a hindrance, the instant she should put the glass to her eyes. But she had never had a real lover at sea before, and her eyes hadn't the knack of Uncle Eben's in such matters, into whose hands she reluctantly resigned herself.

"Do you see anything coming, Uncle Eben?" she asked, like Bluebeard's wife, her fingers tingling with the cold, her cheeks burning with excitement, and the high wind pulling out her crimps at a disastrous rate.

"Hey? Yes, I see the sea out there beyond the bar all frothy like yeast, Cilly."

"Any sail, Uncle Eben?" she persisted. "Yes, child, yes: two of 'em."

"Do you suppose it's the Heron?" altogether overlooking the plural number.

"Wait a bit, Cilly; don't hurry: time enough; if either of 'em's the Heron Jasper'll be up before dinner-time anyway; it's only a matter of three miles, and with this wind she'd be up in a trice."

Priscilla's teeth were chattering in her head, as much with nervousness as with cold.

"You'll catch cold up here, Uncle Eben," she said. "I'll just run down and look into the oven: I'll be back in a jiffy."

"Put something on your head while you're down there," he advised. "I'm as warm as wool with my tarpaulin and comforter."

She was gone precisely a jiffy; during which mythical portion of time she had fed the fire, looked into the oven, and lifted the cover of the steamer; for it would never do to have the dinner overdone and Jasper at the door, so to speak. Then she wrapped a shawl about her shoulders, and was up to the house-top in season to hear Uncle Eben exclaim:

"It's the Heron! it's the Heron! or I'm a cat."

"How do you know?" queried his niece, merely as a matter of form, being fully persuaded that if Uncle Eben said it was the Heron, the Heron it must be.

"Know?" he returned. "Don't I know every sail in her? Didn't I set every stitch in that canvas?"

"I hope the stitches aren't so big you can see them this far!" spoke his saucy niece.

And just then one of the children called Cilly to come down and mend her frock, which she had torn on a nail; and down Priscilla skipped, humming a favorite tune, as gay as any lark. At any other time, it might be, she would have scolded the little Nanine, but now she was too happy to condescend to such trifles, and her only thought was that Jasper would be home by dinner-time, and the children must all look tidy and fine; and while she wove her thread back and forth in the rent she laid some little plan for seeing Jasper alone that first, sweet instant, without the curious faces of Nanine and the others, or the kind eyes of Uncle Eben, to see her blush beneath her lover's smile. And then she set the table; she put on the best bird's-eye damask, which her mother had brought in her wedding-dower, which had been carefully hoarded and lavendered, and jealously guarded against moth and rust. Then followed the old-fashioned stone-china that Uncle Eben had bought at the auction ofquire Gibbs twenty-five years gone, when he had thought to begin housekeeping himself. She had placed a seat for Jasper at her right hand, and stood off at the end of the room and surveyed the effect of the whole with pleasure, and pronounced it perfect; and so saying she toiled up the stairs again to the roof, and found Uncle Eben looking over an old log-book, stowed away in the attic, where he had spent the last three-quarters of an hour, having assured himself that the Heron wasn't far outside, and would be up before the dinner-bell rang.

"It's the Heron and no mistake," said

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