

## \* \* The Story Page \* \*

### How Miss Prissy Broke the "V."

BY MARY E. BRUSH.

Miss Prissy smoothed it out on her sharp little knee. There was something admiring—almost reverential—in her voice. It was such a long time since she had a five dollar bill that she could call her own, so no wonder that she spent several minutes looking at it.

"It was almost a new one," she soliloquized, still smoothing out the creases, "but smells kind o' old, what with travelin' around in men folk's pockets 'mongst the terbacker. There's General Grant's pictur on the front, plain's life, an' I s'pose that's the Goddess o' Liberty on the green side—they allers draw her that way, with low forehead an' a fender over it, nose slantin' straight an' her hair done up in a loose French twist. I dare say them's French words circelin' her, too—'E Pluribus—something'. I'm sure I don't know what it means, but I do know that them big V's in the corners means five. Yes, I've got a five-dollar bill! It seems 'most too good to be true!" and Miss Prissy rocked ecstatically back and forth in her chair.

Possibly no money was ever harder earned. For one whole week Miss Prissy had washed windows in two big houses upon D— Avenue. She earned her living by housework, but as she was neither young nor strong, she wasn't much at scrubbing, but her long wiry arms and nimble fingers couldn't be beaten when it came to making windows glisten. And, as we know, clear, clean windows are to a house what beautiful eyes are to the human face.

"Now," Miss Prissy continued, "that 'ere 'V' ha'n't goin' to be broke; I'm goin' to put it in the savin's bank jest as it is. Guess that clerk'll stare—it's so different from the quarters and fifty cent pieces I've been puttin' in. An' my! sech a lift towards gettin' the Old Ladies' Home!" As we have intimated, the spinster was getting along in years, was poor and alone, and knew only too well that some provision must be made for the time when she should become helpless. Her only relative was a brother much younger than herself. He had been a wild, wayward youth, whose brief career had been suddenly closed within prison doors. So Miss Prissy's humble efforts were being directed toward acquiring the sum requisite for admission to a comfortable retreat for the aged. Meanwhile she was honestly and cheerfully earning her own living.

"Now," Miss Prissy went on, "there sin't no use o' my spendin' it. The rent for the quarter is paid, I got half a sack o' flour, some cornmeal, tea caddy's nigh 'bout full, an' there's them eggs dear Miss Brown sent me from the country. I can get on for a week 'thout buyin' a thing 'cept milk an' a pat o' butter, an' I got small change enough for that, an' when it gives out maybe along'll come another job at winders. My! don't I feel rich! Seems good!"

And to tell the truth, there were many men in that city with bank accounts running up into the thousands who didn't feel half as much like a "bloated capitalist" as did this little old maid, in her faded calico, patched shoes, rocking contentedly away in her humble home.

Possibly some of us would hardly venture to call it a home, for it was only one room in the third story of a tenement house. However, it was not uninviting. The two windows might have served as a continual advertisement of Miss Prissy's skill, and the white-fringed curtains draping them were clean and fresh. The tiny stove with its two griddles shone like a black diamond. The carpet was free from lint and the little bed in the corner wore a neat counterpane. A scarlet geranium on the window sill and a big yellow cat purring contentedly among the cushions of another rocking-chair were bits of life making the room still more cheerful. It would not be straining the point to say that Miss Prissy's room was the one bright, clean spot in that huge building, for, when you opened the door and went out into the hallway, there was such a mingling of bad smells and loud, quarrelsome voices, so much uproar and confusion surging up and sweeping down from the rooms all about, that you couldn't help wondering how so steady and tidy a body as Miss Prissy could bear to stay in such a place. But she was very poor, you know, and the rent was cheap, so that there was nothing left for her to do but to practice the everyday heroism of making the best of it.

She was still patting the precious "V," when a murmur louder than usual crept through the crack under her door and she caught the always pathetic sound of a child crying.

"There's them Bailey young ones!" Miss Prissy exclaimed, spring up and at the same time stowing away the five-dollar bill in her limp and shabby purse. "If any of them O'Rourke or McGillie children are pesterin' 'em, I'll know the reason why!" and with more ability than one could expect from so old a person, the little spinster sped down the rickety stairs.

The Bailey children were two forlorn orphans who

lived in the room beneath hers, and in whom she had taken a special interest because they were so different from the rough, ill-bred youngsters thronging the building. Little Tom Bailey was the brightest-faced, busiest little newsboy in the city, and as for Daisy, his sister, she was the most winsome fairy one ever saw.

Judging from the fire in Miss Prissy's eye, it was lucky for the O'Rourkes and the McGillies that neither of the clans were the offenders. Instead, a coarse-looking, but well-dressed man was saying harshly, as he retreated through the outer door: "Well, I'll give you till this noon, and then if the money isn't ready, out you go! I don't run an orphan asylum!"

"It's the rent he means!" sobbed Daisy, hiding her face in Miss Prissy's blue-checked apron.

"Yes, it's the rent," repeated Tom, in low tones and with a face too grave looking for his dozen years. And," he added, drawing Miss Prissy into his room, away from the gaping inmates of the house, "you see, when our mama died, we couldn't bear to have her buried like a pauper, so we took the money she left and spent it for her burial. We have got on first rate though, till the first month, when I've had a run of bad luck. But we've been just as saving as we could be!"

"Ahem! I should think so, you poor dears!" Miss Prissy exclaimed, with a glance at the bare cupboards. "You haven't been a mite to blame. An' it's just wonderful how well you have got along! And as for this rent business, now you don't worry one speck! Suthin'll turn up to help ye!"

But it was a very sober face that the old maid bore back to her little room. She sat down in her rocking-chair, and, taking out the five-dollar bill, began to smooth out the wrinkles in the brow of the Goddess of Liberty. She found it much harder work to smooth out the wrinkles in her own just then!

"What a selfish thing I be!" she at last exclaimed. "Here are them children to be turned out into the street unless they have three dollars, an' me so stingy an' notional that I don't want to break that 'V! What if I be crazy ter put it into the bank! S'pose the Lord hadn't gin it to me 'tall! No, I'll jest pinch old 'human natur' fur once an' pay them children's rent, 'n' while I'm 'bout it, an' 'slong's the bill's broke, I might as well help 'em a little besides. Reckon they're 'bout starved! I'll run down to the grocery an' have some things sent up!"

An hour later little Daisy's eyes shone like twin stars, when a big basket was left at her door—a basketful of bread, potatoes, a soup bone with juicy red meat on it, a cabbage, some rice, a bunch of herbs, together with a bag of apples and another of ginger cookies.

"An' I'll show you how to make the soup, child, as well as to invite myself down to dinner with you," said Miss Prissy, bustling about.

So that when noon came a jollier trio nevé sat down to a table, and the merriment was not one wit damped even when the agents' thundering knock was heard at the door. And with all the majesty possible in a little old woman barely five feet tall, attired in a faded calico gown, and with her front teeth gone, Miss Prissy handed him the rent, and in a stiff silence received his mumbled thanks.

Hardly were they seated at the table before another knock was heard. This time it was a tall, stalwart stranger, heavily bearded and wearing a thick fur overcoat.

"Are there children by the name of Bailey living here?" he began, when there came a low cry from Tom and the exclamation: "Oh, it's papa! It looks just like his pictur! And he isn't dead! He's come back! Mamma used to say that somehow she could never give him up! Oh, it's papa!" And as the stranger held out his arms, with happy, tear-dimmed eyes, there was a confused mingling of children, brown beard and buffalo coat!

But what ailed Miss Prissy? She looked and looked—took off her glasses, rubbed them vigorously, put them on and looked again. Then she took a step forward, saying: "Yes, it is! John Bascom—brother John!"—in faltering tones—"Be I dreamin', or is it?"—The stranger's keen eyes flashed a scrutinizing glance at her, and it slowly turned into one of joy and surprise as he uttered the words:

"Sister Prissy!" and the buffalo-coated arms held one more!

"An' I thought you were dead or in—in"—the little spinster sobbed excitedly.

"Or in prison," the stranger added gravely. "Thank God, I got out of that! I'd never gone there if I minded you, Prissy, but I was a head-strong fellow! But I repented and tried to do better, so I was pardoned out before my time. But I made up my mind that my folks shouldn't hear from me till they could hear something good. So I left off part of the old name John Baily Bascom and became simply John Baily, and I set to work steady like, and, after a year or so, married a dear, good

girl. Our children were born and we were happy, and more than once I thought I'd write home, but we were poor yet, and I thought I'd wait until I got more money. But times grew worse. Then I set off West, leaving Martha and the children behind until I could provide a home for them. I was fast getting that when I was struck down by a fever, and was out of my head a long time after I got over it, wandering about until my comrades lost trace of me, and I suppose thought me dead. They must have written that home, for when I came to my right mind again and wrote home, I found that Martha, deceived by the false report, had moved away, nobody knew where. I came East, but could find no trace, till a day or so ago. And now I find she is gone forever! Poor Martha! how she must have suffered!" chokingly.

"Not' a nicer woman than she never lived!" said Miss Prissy, patting her brother's big, brown hand in sympathy. "So quiet and ladylike! I alers felt drawn to her from the first. 'N' to think she was my own sister-in-law! But, dear John, you've got two of the best, smartest children that ever lived to comfort ye!"

"Yes, I know! I'm very thankful I've found them!" patting Daisy's golden curls. "I believe I should have been heartbroken had I come here and found them gone."

"Well, they was nigh to it!" Miss Prissy exclaimed, thinking of the agent's threat. And she murmured to herself: "Land sakes! to think what might 'a' happened if I had been so pigged stingy as not to have broke that 'ere V."—Presbyterian.

### The Pussy Willows.

"Then I will meet you at Harlan's, at three o'clock tomorrow," she said to her friend.

It was some ten minutes before three, when Gertrude entered the large, beautiful store, and finding the appointed meeting place, took a seat to wait for Maria.

There was a cashier's desk near by, and on it a large bunch of pussy-willows. What a hint they brought of the sweetness and freshness and beauty of the advancing spring! While Gertrude was looking at them, fancying herself enjoying "the lovely things in the heart of the woods," a pleasant-faced girl passed the desk.

"Kate," said the cashier, "could you get me some ink without going downstairs for it?" adding, as the one addressed paused, "if you have to go downstairs for it, do not mind."

"But you need the ink?" said the other, and the voice was as pleasant as the face. "Why should I not go downstairs, if it will help you? Do not the pussy-willows help in spring's beauties? I'll be a pussy-willow," and with a laugh she was gone.

Then Gertrude understood the message of the pussy-willows as she had not before. That little bud, the prompt, cheerful response to the need of another, was it not the blooming forth of an abiding springtime in the heart? It was only a trifle, a trip downstairs for a bottle of ink, but it meant the "sweetness and light" of love, ready to express itself in any way that might be needed—just as spring will not content herself with her pussy-willows, but send them forth as the harbingers of the violets, daisies and the May-flowers innumerable! Ah, yes; kind deeds, true courtesies, are never the artificial flowers, tied on a dead stick, but the free blossoming of the love-life within; and the pussy-willows of "little kindnesses, that must leave undone, or despiee," are followed in the Master's good time, by the fair lilies and roses of larger opportunities and widening service.—Eliza E. Hewitt, in *The Young People's Weekly*.

### Jocko's Washing.

Jocko sat on the kitchen window-sill in a brown study. He was watching Betsey do her washing. After a while she took the basket and went out to the clothes-line. She never thought Jocko was trying to learn to wash; but what do you think that monkey did?

Part of the clothes, already washed and boiled, were left in the rinsing-tub. There was a large wash, and Betsey could not carry all at once. Jocko took these, one by one, and plumped them into the dirty-suds. Then he looked round for the soap. He could not find it. Betsey had left it in the tub.

But no matter. There was plenty of black coal in the scuttle on the hearth; and, for aught he knew, that would answer just as well. So he took up a piece, rubbed it on the clothes, and scrubbed them on the washboard.

Some clean towels and dish-clothes lay on the dresser; and in they went too. Jocko was working with a will, washing everything he could lay his paw on, when he saw from the window Betsey coming back.

Of course, he was helping her very much; but people are not always grateful when they have reason to be, and he was doubtful in her case. There might be a