

An Untransferable Gift.

(Carroll Watson Rankin, in the 'Youth's Companion.')

Mrs. Dilman was the most unselfish person in the village. Unselfishness is of course a beautiful trait, but since even a virtue may be carried to excess, there were times when Mrs. Dilman's family wished her less generous.

Did she have a blossoming plant, off it went to some sick neighbor. Did she buy herself material for a new gown one day, the next would find her cutting it up for her daughters, or giving it away bodily to her less prosperous sister-in-law, although Mrs. Dilman herself was not any too well provided with this world's goods. Did affectionate relatives heap embroidered linen upon her at Christmas time, hardly a doyleie did she possess by midsummer.

'Of course,' complained seventeen-year-old Elizabeth, 'there isn't a scrap of satisfaction in giving mother a birthday present; but I must be thinking about it if I'm to make her anything this year. Aside from the needle-book I made her when I was six, she hasn't kept anything I ever gave her for longer than a fortnight. The worst of it is that one can't possibly feel offended, for she explains it so sweetly afterward that one feels like presenting her immediately with something else to give away. But I wish, just for once, I could think of something to give her that she couldn't possibly bestow upon anyone else.'

'So do I,' said Mr. Dilman. 'I supposed I had accomplished it when I gave her that ice-cream freezer last summer, but it seems I was mistaken.'

'Yes,' laughed Elizabeth. 'She discovered inside of a month that one was needed at the Children's Home in Sawbridge, and away went ours.'

The Dilmans lived in a rented house, and their landlord was not an ideal one when it came to making repairs. So long as his houses presented a fairly respectable exterior they were good enough, in Mr. Black's opinion, for anybody. If the tenants desired new plumbing, fresh paint or new wall-paper, they were at liberty to supply them—at their own expense. Once, however, he departed from this rule, and in rather a singular manner.

The paper in Mrs. Dilman's room had been dark and ugly to start with, and time had not improved it. Mr. Black had declined to replace it, and Mrs. Dilman was the last woman to spend money for her own comfort or convenience as long as there was anyone else in the world to be made happy or comfortable, so the ugly paper remained.

'It's a shame,' said Elizabeth, one morning, as she was helping her mother with the mending, 'that you have to have such an ugly room when you are so lovely to everyone else. I wish Mr. Black had to gaze upon those abominable purple triangles for a couple of hours every morning. They look like the coat of arms of Nicaragua. How can you see them without counting them?'

'I can't!' sighed Mrs. Dilman. 'There are just three hundred and sixty-six of them on the ceiling.'

'One for every day in the year, and leap-year at that,' returned Elizabeth, sympathetically. 'Don't get me a new jacket this spring, mother. The old one is quite good enough for rainy days. I'm sure you

could get this room papered for the price of a new jacket.'

'So I might,' replied Mrs. Dilman, 'but I've given your old one away.'

At that moment Elizabeth missed her thimble. She was feeling in her apron-pocket for it when her fingers came in contact with a small silver coin. With the touch came inspiration. The girl gathered up her sewing and went to her own room, where she began a diligent search for hidden treasure.

Under the handkerchiefs in her handkerchief-box she found a quarter. The match-safe yielded two sulphurous pennies. A collar-button box was found to contain a five-cent piece, while the vigorous shaking of an old tin bank brought to light a tenderly cherished Canadian penny. Next, Elizabeth got down on hands and knees, crawled under the bed, and finally emerged, dusty, triumphant and the richer by a dime. She dropped all the coins into a little Japanese tea-caddy, which she carefully concealed behind the books on the hanging shelf, and then, with an expression of deep satisfaction, she returned to her mending.

About two months later, and just a week before her birthday, Mrs. Dilman learned that her sister-in-law, living in a neighboring town, was ill and in need of careful nursing. Of course she went immediately to the rescue, leaving Elizabeth in charge of the house and the house-cleaning.

'How providential,' thought Elizabeth, 'since Aunt Mary had to be ill at all, that she selected this particular time!'

Before the train was fairly out of the station, Elizabeth, with the accumulated savings of two months in her purse, was inspecting the paperhanger's stock with a critical eye.

'It must be blue,' soliloquized Elizabeth, 'because mother likes blue. Besides, the paper must match the pincushion Kittie is making. Of course before the week is out the dear woman will happen upon somebody with a craving that only a blue ruffled pincushion will satisfy, but we might as well have things match to start with.'

After deliberation, she decided upon a creamy paper adorned with a blue nasturtium pattern for the walls, and a plain ceiling paper. 'The paper is pretty if it is cheap,' she said, 'and no one can possibly discover anything about it to count. Can you hang it for me the first thing tomorrow morning?'

'Bless you, no, Miss Elizabeth!' said the paper-hanger. 'Every man I have is engaged three weeks ahead. Seems as if every house in town needs papering this spring.'

'But I must have it done at once. Mother may come home at any moment, and I want to have it ready for her. Couldn't you possibly manage it?'

'Not this week,' said the man, regretfully. 'This is our busiest time. If it's a small room, maybe you could do it yourself.'

'Why,' cried Elizabeth, 'I never thought of that! I used to paper my doll-houses easily enough. I'll try it if father can't suggest some better plan.'

Mr. Dilman, however, was called out of town by business that day, and Elizabeth was forced to depend upon her own resources. Early the next morning the amateur paper-hanger stripped the room of all its contents, except the floor matting,

over which she spread a thick blanket of old newspapers. Next she went to the kitchen, where, with more zeal than discretion, she made a huge pail of flour paste. It was thick at the bottom, thin at the top and lumpy in the middle, but Elizabeth was thoroughly satisfied with it. She brought in the step-ladder and was ready for work.

'I'll do the ceiling first,' decided she. 'Of course, the floor and the ceiling are the same size, so it will be easy to measure the paper. You hold one end of it, Kittie,' said Elizabeth to her sister, who had offered to help. 'There! I think that is about the right length. Now turn it over, and I'll spread the paste with this old whisk-broom. It's rather stiff, I'm afraid, but it's the best I can do. Did you ever see anything easier? Think of the money I'm saving! I wonder people don't always do their own papering. Here, I'll cut the strip in two, and then we can handle it better.'

Elizabeth poked the paper up into the corner of the ceiling, and began to smooth it out with her hands. 'It's dreadfully wet,' said she. 'I think I've been too generous with the paste.'

'I know you have,' responded Kittie. 'It's soaking through.'

'Dear me!' said Elizabeth, giving a final poke. 'It's too far away from the wall at this end. What shall I do?'

'Put in a wedge-shaped patch,' suggested Kittie. 'It's an all-over pattern, so it won't matter if it's a little on the bias.'

'I shan't use so much paste this time,' said Elizabeth, cutting off a second strip. 'There, that goes better—no, it doesn't, either. It doesn't seem to stick at all. Look out! It's coming down at that end!'

'Take it away quick!' cried Kittie, as the long breadth of sticky paper wrapped itself about her head and shoulders. 'Ugh! It's the wettest stuff I ever felt. There's paste all over me!'

At noon three strips of the ceiling paper were in place. That is, they were so firmly attached to the ceiling that even unselfish Mrs. Dilman would have found it impossible to give them away; but the girls were not wholly satisfied.

'It seems so uneven,' said Elizabeth, returning after a hasty luncheon to survey her work. 'Perhaps it may look better when it dries. I think I'll work at the side wall for a change. I'm tired of reaching up.'

The first side-wall strip went into place without a wrinkle.

'There!' cried Elizabeth, waving the shears in her enthusiasm. 'Didn't I do that beautifully?'

'Yes,' admitted Kittie, 'but it's upside down.'

'Dear me! I might have known it was too good to be true!' lamented Elizabeth. 'Perhaps it won't show so much when the furniture is in.'

Kittie forgot to trim the edges of the second breadth; it never occurred to either of the girls to match the pattern. By four o'clock a good share of the paste Elizabeth had made in the morning was distributed impartially over the two tired girls and the floor. The newspaper blanket had been frequently displaced, and there was not a little paste on the matting. Elizabeth, pale and dejected, was regarding the nasturtiums with an expression of deep disgust, and Kittie was