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CHAPTER V.
 He pushed open a baize door, went down a narrow passage—just here Decima heard the parlor-maid explaining to the cook how she had dropped the plate. "It slipped out o'my 'and, as if it was a piece of 'ot butter; it did, I do assure you, cook"—and knocked at a thick oak door, through which, though it was tightly closed, came sundry and various odors, all of them wondrously strange and extraordinarily powerful.

A voice, which seemed to come from a distance, said, impatiently: "Come in!" And Decima and Bobby entered. It was a large, much-lined room, with shelves on which stood, in a gorgeous glitter, books, retorts, instruments, plaster casts, models of every description. A small furnace was blazing away in one corner; a forge and lathe were conspicuous in the center of the room. There was also a carpenter's bench and a modelling-table, an electro-plating battery, and, in short, a collection of tools, models, instruments, and general lumber, which would have fitted out a country museum or a workshop of Bedlam.

Working at the bench stood a man in his shirt-sleeves, his hair, long and gray, falling over his huge forehead. He was dressed in a shabby old suit of a fashion of ten years back, wore no collar, and stood in a pair of thick carpet slippers at least two sizes too large for him.

Decima stared at him, pale and a little tremulous. She scarcely remembered him.

"Here's Decima's, father," said Bobby.

Mr. Deane looked up, pushed the hair from his forehead, and blinked at the beautiful vision.

"Decima!" he said. "Decima? Where is she? Has this lady brought her?"

"This lady—" began Bobby; but Decima, with a little cry and a gush of tears to her eyes which made her way rather uncertain, ran to the strange object and put her arms round his neck.

"Father, I am Decima! Don't you know me?"

"God bless my soul! Is it, really?"



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he said, with a dreamy amazement. "How—how you've grown!" He looked at her abstractedly for a moment, then he sighed. "You're like your mother," he said. "It might be her."

Decima leaned against the bench and held his hand.

"I am glad I am like my mother," she said. "I am glad to come home, father."

"Oh, take care, take care!" he said, with sudden anxiety. "You're leaning against my model—the model! I'm afraid it will break—er—er—thank you!" He took the model from behind her and drew a breath of relief. "Not broken, thank God!" he murmured. "And so you're Decima?"

"But his eyes were fixed on the model as he carried it to a place of safety, and not on her.

And this was Decima's home-coming. And these two, the half-crazy man and the boy, were all she had to protect her from the "dragons by the way."

CHAPTER VI.
 Decima watched her father, bending over his model, with something very near tears in her eyes. It was quite evident that he had forgotten her presence.

Bobby touched her on the arm. "Come away," he said. "It's almost time to dress for dinner, and you must be dying for a wash."

"Is—is he always like that?" asked Decima, as she followed Bobby along the passage.

"Nearly always; always when he is in his workshop. He'll wake up after dinner—when most men want to go to sleep—and talk—oh! talk like a machine. But there, you'll see. He can't help it, you know, and there's no need for you to feel hurt. He'll get quite fond of you—when he's got time to think of such an insignificant and unimportant a thing as a daughter. Here, I'll show you your room. Where's the portmanteau? I'd better carry it up, or Sarah Jane will fall down-stairs with it and break her neck, or worse still, some limb; if I thought it would be certain to be the former, I'd let her carry it up by all means."

As he shouldered the portmanteau, Decima cried out warningly: "Take care, Bobby! Keep that small box right side up, because there's a guinea-pig and some white mice in it. I've only brought this portmanteau with me, the imperials are coming on by the luggage-train."

"The what?" said Bobby. "The what, did you say, your royal highness?" Decima laughed.

"You silly boy, you didn't think that small thing held all my clothes? Oh, what a pretty room!" she broke off, as Bobby kicked open the door of a dainty little bed-chamber.

"Glad you like it," he said in an affectedly off-hand way. "I had it fresh papered and painted directly the governor talked of sending for you. Like the paper? And I bought the furniture. You will perceive that it is pure white to watch your original innocence—in other words, greenness."

"Oh, it is beautiful! It's a duck of a room! Bobby, I must kiss you!" He threw himself into fighting attitude.

"Beware, bold maid! I am young and unprotected, but I will defend myself to the last gasp. Keep off! Now I'll give you three quarters of an hour, while I execute my nightly task of luring the governor out of his den, and persuading him to change for what he calls his dress-clothes."

He unfastened her portmanteau for her, liberated the guinea-pig and white mice from their travelling-box, and set their cages on a table. "Where I can see them while I dress, please," said Decima, then left her.

As Decima changed her traveling costume for her soft, dove-colored evening-trook, she found it hard to realize that she was not asleep and dreaming. The change in her life was so sharp and sudden, and she wondered if she should really be of any use to her father and brother.

Presently she heard a gong, and she went down-stairs to the drawing-room, a pretty room enough, but with old-fashioned furniture and shabby curtains and carpet. Bobby was standing by the window in a well-fitting evening-suit, and looking rather handsomer even than before.

"Poor girl!" he remarked, as his eyes wandered over her with the keen and calmly critical eye of a brother. "Always keep time at meals. Punctuality in the sole, not to say the turbot, of business. No, we do not wait for the governor, for the simple reason that he never comes down until he hears us go in. He considers time spent between dinner in the drawing-

room time wasted. As you are a nice girl, and rather prettily dressed than otherwise, you may take my arm, this occasion being your first visit." He offered his arm with mock condescension, and so, laughing softly, Decima went in.

She had made up her mind to a bad dinner and indifferent waiting, but she was not prepared for the actual badness and shortcomings of that meal.

Bobby led her to the head of the table, and seated himself on her left. "The tureen before you," he said in an under-tone, "contains what cook, with a mistaken optimism, calls soup. I call it warm size; but may difference of opinion never alter friendship. Take care when Sarah Jane raises the soup-plate, that she does not empty it in your lap. I should be jealous if she did, because I generally get it in mine. Here is the governor; you are requested not to smile."

Philial respect, notwithstanding, Decima really found it hard to obey Bobby's injunction, for Mr. Deane, in a dress-coat of a fashion of twenty years ago, with a corkcrack trousers shining at the knees, with a shirt-front minus a stud, and a necktie under one ear, was a spectacle at which the most dutiful of daughters might pardonably have laughed.

"Ah—afraid I am late!" he said; his severe-voiced formula. "Soup! Did you say soup? Yes, please, Decima, you will be glad to hear that the model was uninjured. It is the model of my last invention, for which I have just taken a patent. A portable electric force. Its principle is—"

"Have some sherry, sir," cut in Bobby adroitly.

"Eh? Sherry? Did you say sherry? Yes, yes; certainly. And so you left Lady Pauline well, Decima? Wonderful woman! Charming, but singularly deficient in intelligence. I remember the last time we met; I endeavored to explain to her my invention for opening bridges by candle power—quite a simple thing. It was done in this way—"

"Fish, sir?" cut in Sarah Jane.

"Fish? Did you say fish? What is it?"

"Cod, sir," said Sarah Jane.

"Is it indeed?" remarked Bobby, staring with simulated surprise at the overbilled mass. "How strange! I thought it was white worsted antimacassar. None for me, thank you, Decima. I am too young to die."

"I—I'm afraid it is done a little too much," said Decima, timidly.

"Surely not! Not a little," said Bobby, with admirable gravity; "but don't be alarmed, my dear Decima. You will find that cook will strike the balance by sending up the joint raw. Ah, I thought so!" he said, when the leg of mutton ran red at the first touch of the knife. "Cook has joined the new Temperance in Feeding Society. She takes care that we are not tempted to overeat ourselves. Yes, as a man can not live by bread alone, I will trouble you for a piece not actually blue. Decima, my dear, I should advise you to wait for the pudding. Sometimes—mind, I do not make an actual promise, so do not buoy yourself up with hope too much—but sometimes cook makes a decent pudding. Let us hope she has done so tonight."

The pudding happened to be rice, and eatable, so that Decima, who, only eat to live, was perfectly satisfied so far as she herself was concerned.

But that meal was a significant one. She could understand why she was sent for; and the contrast between the daintily cooked, well-served meals at Aunt Pauline's filled her with pity for the two men seated beside her. She felt guilty of selfishness all the ten years she had been "lapped in luxury and cradled in ease."

"You have now seen a specimen of our culinary skill, Decima," said Bobby, when Sarah Jane had left the room. "I will not ask you what you think of it, because, being only a mere girl, to whom the privilege of expressing yourself in swear words is very properly denied, you could not do yourself justice."

(To be continued.)

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