

St. Cecilia of the Court

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CHAPTER X.—(Continued.)

If the Saint was glad to see Puddin', then Puddin' was quite as glad to see her; in the luxuriousness of his new surroundings—for beside his accustomed squalor, the light and cleanliness and daintiness were luxurious indeed—he had longed for the loving fondness of Cecilia's voice. He saw her when she entered the door, and almost with his glad cry of 'Celie!' her arms were around him, and she was kissing his pale little face.

He was not the same Puddin' that had been carried out of the Court a week ago. This Puddin' was paler and thinner, but his hair was smoothly brushed, his face had no tear streaks, and Cecilia noticed that even his finger nails were clean. She wondered how they had ever managed to get them so clean—with all her care and vigorous use of a splinter of wood, Puddin's nails had always been a tribulation to her.

She sat down next the bed and stroked his hair lovingly. Dr. Hanauer saw how her whole face shone with almost maternal love as he looked at the child, and saw, too, her eyes fill suddenly with tears. She had felt, beneath the coverlet, a heavy strap. She did not understand, and looked up appealingly at him.

So he carelessly sat down on the edge of Puddin's bed, and while he drew funny pictures on a paper for Puddin' to laugh at, he explained in low tones to Cecilia that it was only by keeping Puddin's little form immovable that they could even hope to cure the spine that had been so injured; that those ugly straps and braces were going to help him on to health.

'Puddin', Puddin' darling,' she bent over him and cuddled his head in her arms, 'do they hurt?'

'Naw! Not now—anyway, not much!' Puddin' was intent upon seeing the doctor develop from a pumpkin a very funny little Brownie. 'It's bully here.'

'Ye ain't never hungry, are you, Puddin'?' The Saint's voice sounded as if she were not half convinced.

'Hungry!' Puddin' laughed aloud. 'Ye couldn't eat all yer can get, nohow!'

'Ain't yer lonesome, Puddin'? Don't you miss me nor ma?' Her voice almost quivered with dread lest he had not missed her at all.

Puddin' heard the tremor in the voice, and with the intuition of childhood guessed its cause. 'I miss you awful, Celie! I was cryin' for you, sure I was, the first night! I'm glad ma ain't here!'

'Oh, don't, Puddin', don't!' Cecilia bent over him to hush him. 'She's dead now.'

'Is she?' Puddin' answered quite complacently. 'I'm glad. She won't be hittin' me any more.'

'Puddin'!' The tears were rolling down the Saint's cheeks, which had flushed red. 'She looked grand when she was laid out! She looked good, Puddin'! You "know" she was good most times!'

'She wasn't good when she was drunk, anyway!' Puddin' had had time to think over many things during the days he had lain strapped to the bed, and he had made up his mind fully upon a few things—and this was one. 'She was most times drunk. Don't you remember, Celie? You said lots of times that she was awful when she was drunk! You said it was awful to get drunk, didn't you, Celie?'

'And she is quite right! It's worse than

awful! It's beastly!' It was a strange voice that spoke, and Celie sprang to her feet quickly. Back of her stood a man who might be thirty, because his hair was so brown and his voice so young—but he might be fifty, because his eyes looked dim and his face had many wrinkles. He wore a long dressing-gown, and his hands were dug down into the pockets. Cecilia gave him one quick glance, and remembering that he might have heard Puddin's remarks about her mother, disapproved of him at once. She turned to Dr. Hanauer, and pointing at the newcomer, said curtly, 'Who's that?'

'That is Mr. Daniels—William Ever Daniels, of Brooklyn. Mr. Daniels, this is Miss Cecilia Sweeney, of New York.' The doctor's eyes twinkled and Cecilia didn't know if he were joking or not. Puddin', with his eyes fastened on Mr. Daniels, said shortly, 'I know him! I like him.'

'I "don't!"' The Saint's answer was decided.

Dr. Hanauer laid his hand upon her shoulder, and with a certain tone that made her look up at him, said, 'Puddin' says he knows him, and "likes" him! You "don't" know him, so why do you say you do not like him? That isn't fair, is it?'

'It isn't fair,' she admitted it huskily, 'but he heard what Puddin' said!'

'And if he did?' The doctor spoke in very low tones. 'Perhaps he will sympathize with you, and understand better than any one else. See, he brought Puddin' these toys, and this book.'

On the table by the bedside lay a book with such a gay cover that the Saint's eyes had spied it long before. 'Is it "yours," Puddin'?' she asked eagerly.

Puddin' nodded.

'Did "he" give it to you?'

'Yep.' Puddin's voice sounded quite gay. 'An' he read me awful funny stories out of it. One day when my back hurt awful, he read me a big long one about a feller what got shot in the heel!'

The Saint brushed her hair back with her quick familiar movement, and then stepped nearer Mr. Daniels, who was eyeing her quizzically. 'I'm sorry I said I didn't like you. If you was good to Puddin', I'll like you, even if you "did" hear.' Then she laid her hand appealingly on his arm. 'Don't you believe all he said! Don't you believe she was awful bad because she got drunk. She was good lots of times, and Jim says it was a bad angel made her drink. Puddin's so little he don't understand. Jim says maybe she tried hard to keep back, and couldn't, and God'll think of her a-tryin'!'

'...y, my dear child!' Mr. Daniels gave a quick startled glance at the doctor, and then clenched his hands tightly. 'My dear little girl! There's many another fighting the same battle and failing. Don't "you" worry about it—you're too young!'

And as if it hurt him to talk, he turned away, leaving the Saint to puzzle over what he meant.

XI.

MR. DANIELS MAKES A PROMISE TO THE SAINT.

The next few weeks seemed like an unreal dream to Cecilia. To pass one's days in a warm room, not to feel hungry, to boil Jim's tea for him when he came in at

night, and to listen to him talk for an hour after—if this were not joy supreme, what could be? And to go to the hospital and see Puddin' three times a week, and ride each time, 'that' was joy inexpressible! It was hard to say whether Puddin' or the Saint enjoyed these visits the more, or Mr. Daniels, for often Cecilia met him there—unless, as he explained, his head ached so he couldn't tell Puddin's voice from an Arctic blast—then he stayed in his room, and the nurse crept silently in and out. At other times, he sat by the children's bedsides, and told them marvellous stories, or drew wonderful pictures of impossible animals, and just as impossible men. Every one seemed to like him, from the pretty nurses to the very littlest girl in the big children's ward, the little girl whose back was in a great hard case, even worse than Puddin's. He sang for the children sometimes, the funniest kind of songs that Cecilia had ever heard. Once when the littlest girl was crying because her back hurt, he sat down on the edge of her cot, and sang a song that made even Puddin' laugh, and that always made the Saint laugh, too.

'There was a little Nigger boy
Living on the Nile,
And he did have a stomach ache,
All, all the while!

'The doctor put a plaster on,
What else could he do?
It cured the little Nigger boy
While he counted two.

'The Nigger boy he laughed so loud,
He woke a crocodile,
Who chased the boy and doctor, too,
Ten miles up the Nile!'

And whether it was the song or not, the Saint did not know, but the littlest girl's sobs grew fewer and fewer, and then, before 'she' could 'count two,' she had fallen asleep. Then Mr. Daniels came back to talk to Puddin' and Cecilia. He looked at Puddin' very severely.

'Were you laughing at my singing, sir?' Cecilia thought he was cross, but Puddin' knew better. 'Yep—I liked it.'

'Did "you"?' He looked laughingly down at Cecilia, who, knowing nothing at all of society's ways, said candidly, 'No. But it was funny.'

Mr. Daniels sat down slowly, and looked at her as if he were half-amused, and half-puzzled. 'Thank you.'

'What for?' Cecilia wondered what he meant.

'What for? For being honest.' And he looked as if he meant it.

'Do you say thanks for being honest?' The Saint was rather puzzled now. 'I'd be ashamed if it wasn't.'

'Yes, I think you would—I think you would!' He noted the eyes that looked straight into his, the thin, firm mouth. 'Don't ever grow out of that! It "is" a shame to lie! Well, why don't you like that song?'

'I don't know just'—and indeed she could not express her feeling—'I like the other kind of songs—big, big ones!'

'Big ones?' Mr. Daniels was smiling at the characterization, and trying to make it fit some song he knew.

'I mean—I mean—I mean the kind they sing in church.' There, she knew now the kind she liked.

'I see.' He surveyed her slowly. 'But—children don't usually like that kind.'

Celie kin sing', remarked Puddin' irrelevantly. 'She kin sing fine!'

'Good.' Mr. Daniels dug his hands down into the pockets of his dressing gown, and made the Saint a low bow. 'Go ahead.'

(To be continued.)

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