

BOYS AND GIRLS

Uncle Nathan's Money.

(Minna Stanwood, in 'Wellspring.')

'It will cost just thirty-five dollars to keep Nora all summer, to say nothing of her board!' announced Maud, looking up from her figuring, and tapping the table in a business-like way with her pencil.

'It will cost something to eat all summer, and a trifle to pay for gas and ice and soap and various other insignificant things which two normal ladies find indispensable in this enlightened day and age,' went on the girl, gayly.

'You speak as if you were somebody else, objected her mother. 'Anyone would think that it was the finest thing in the world to be poor. I don't believe you care.'

At that the girl's gayety vanished. It was not very deep-seated. 'Now, see, mother dear,' she began, earnestly, 'caring will not make one hundred and nine dollars and twenty-three cents any more, and not caring will assuredly make it less. I thought we might plan, dear, and do the wisest way.'

'And there's your Uncle Nathan with all that money,' wailed Mrs. Peters.

The woe-begone face of the little invalid, and her mournful utterance of her chronic complaint, made Maud laugh genuinely. 'O mother, if we had a dollar for every time you've said that these last three years, we could keep Nora and have a new dress a piece.'

Mrs. Peters looked grieved. 'I tell you I never can understand how an uncle with such a lot of money can be so hard-hearted.'

'I know, dear,' said Maud, consolingly, 'but we can't help it. We're just as nice as we can be, but if Uncle Nathan don't think so, we can't make him. So let's give it up. We've sent out sighs enough after Uncle Nathan's money to send several ships across the ocean, and we've shed tears enough over that and various other things to make the said ocean. And now, seeing we've equipped a maritime commerce, suppose we say, "Let Uncle Nathan keep his old money, every cent of it, and let him keep his old influence, every bit of it, and let us paddle our own canoe."'

Mrs. Peters sighed impatiently. 'You're young and strong, and independence looks very fine to you, no doubt; but if your Uncle Nathan keeps his influence, as you say, how are you to get a school here in Duffield?'

Maud looked at her mother. How hard it must be for her to have to sit there day after day, knowing that not by a hand's turn could she help their fortunes! The daughter's heart smote her. She had tried to be patient, but had she been patient enough? Did her quick-spoken words seem harsh sometimes? She wondered. Did she realize, did anyone realize, how much heroism it took to sit like that with no prospect of ever being better? Oh, no, surely not. And she, herself, she must try to be stronger and cheerier, and shield her mother as her father had always done.

Then, very gently, she began to unfold her plan. 'I've been thinking, mother dear, and it's this way. In the first place, the application is in, and I must stand or fall on my merits. I cannot try to influence Uncle Nathan in my favor; Uncle

Nathan isn't the kind that influences. In the second place, seeing our money's gone, and seeing we can't mortgage our house without going against father's advice, and seeing I can't get a school anywhere until September, and seeing Uncle Nathan has a deep, deep pocket with a button on it, we must live as economically as we can on what we have left. To this end, I'm afraid Nora must go next Friday, when her week's up.'

Mrs. Peters groaned. 'But the work, Maud, and the washing. Think of the washing.'

Maud held up her plump white hands and looked at them approvingly. 'I have thought of it, mother,' she declared, bravely. 'These hands can claim intimate acquaintance with dumb-bells and Indian clubs and golf sticks and tennis rackets, and this summer I propose to introduce them to washtubs and scrubbing brushes. I'm going to work on the Squeers method. H-o-u-s-e, house, w-o-r-k, work, housework, then go and do it. It's an excellent system, if Mr. Dickens did make it unpopular. And I shall presently be discovering more muscles than they ever taught us in physiology.'

The muscles were truly discovered, but the interest Maud took in them was not strictly scientific. For instance, when she washed the kitchen floor, she did not rush upstairs to her anatomy to find out just how many muscles were causing disturbance, and what their names were. Consequently she did not make her housework as educational as she might have, but she made it fairly economical. That was the main point. The next point was that she wanted to hear from her application. It had been duly made out and sent to the committee, of which Uncle Nathan was chairman. Uncle Nathan might keep his money in his own bachelor pockets if he wished to, but if he would only look favorably upon that application—even as favorably as he might look upon others!

It was strange, reflected Maud, with what disfavor Uncle Nathan looked upon his brother's family. Perhaps it was on account of the family being women. Maud had heard that Uncle Nathan was accredited with a deep-rooted antipathy to women. But then, she thought, he might be fair enough to allow that neither she nor her mother were responsible for their sex.

Joking aside, the fact remained that Uncle Nathan had not been friendly to his brother's womankind. No, for when Maud told him that she was going to be a teacher, he threw back his head and laughed in a most offensive manner. He said nothing. It was entirely unnecessary, as Maud observed to her mother. That laugh spoke volumes. It told all that wealthy, energetic Mr. Nathan Peters thought of Mrs. William Peters and her daughter, Miss Maud Peters. It told that he did not believe that Miss Maud would have perseverance enough for that severe four years' normal course. And if Uncle Nathan had not laughed that way, who knows? For when Maud got a bit weary, she would hear that laugh. And when she wondered if the little hoard in the savings bank was going to hold out, and questioned if she ought not to take something easier to prepare for, she would hear that

laugh. But now she had her normal-school certificate, and she had cast a bomb into the enemy's camp by sending her application to the chairman of the Duffield school board.

'And you didn't hear?' questioned Mrs. Peters, wistfully, when Maud took up her breakfast tray that Monday morning.

'No,' laughed Maud; 'that hard-hearted postman brought no tidings from the battlefield. But perhaps waiting is good discipline. At any rate, you know I have a useful outlet for impatience to-day, namely, the washboard. I'll pretend that every piece is an acceptance that I'm helping on to some would-be schoolma'am. I'm not the only girl on the anxious seat, by any means, mother dear. And the clothes will look clean. Remember how streaked they looked the first washing I did?'

Sick-room cheerfulness doesn't always wash well, especially on dog days, and Maud's was rather losing color in the steam of the kitchen, when the big knock came at the back door.

'Come in, Charlie,' she called, rubbing away. 'You'll find the order on the table. Business is rushing to-day, you see. And, Charlie, if you would just as soon not knock quite so loud, next time, please. You kind of startle nervous wash-ladies—'

'That's all right,' interrupted a big voice, 'but if you could stop long enough to look round, you'd find that my name doesn't happen to be Charlie.'

Then Maud made haste to take her arms from the tub, and swung round.

'Uncle Nathan!' she gasped.

The tall man with the bushy eyebrows coolly looked the girl over.

'Well,' he remarked, at last, 'when did you take to this sort of thing?'

'When school closed,' returned Maud, matching his ungenial tone. 'When an uncle hasn't called for months, and then pops in at the back door early Monday morning, and proceeds to take a niece to task for doing her duty, he doesn't deserve much consideration,' reasoned Maud to herself, while her uncle was studying her soaking gingham apron.

'Why?' he demanded, at length.

'Had to,' answered the girl, briefly.

'Why?' again questioned the none-too-agreeable voice.

'No money, no work,' returned Maud, concisely, as she pushed the suds down one arm with a finger and thumb.

'I've got some money,' observed Uncle Nathan, with a shrewd look.

Maud knew she was red when Uncle Nathan came in, and now she knew that she was red on red. But she would not let her uncle think it was guilty red, and she looked him straight in the eye as she said, indignantly, 'I've never coveted one cent of your money. All I ever hoped was that, as chairman of the school board, you would consider my application for a position as candidly as you would any other girl's. And if I stood as high and was as well entitled to the position, that you would incline to me because I am your brother's daughter.'

Uncle Nathan smiled under his drooping mustache, and dragged his long legs over to the chair beside the table.

'Like washing?' he asked, precisely as if he had dropped in for a morning call, and