

# The Story of a Child.

BY MARGARET DELAND.

ALL the children had received Effie with admiration, and even a little fright. Ellen and her dearest friend, Lydia Wright, talked about her in lowered voices. They felt vaguely that there was something naughty in thinking too much of the strange little girl, whose hair hung over her eyes and waved loosely about her shoulders, who possessed two rings, and who never wore aprons. One morning, soon after Effie's arrival in Old Chester, Ellen whispered to Lydia behind her spelling-book, at school, that if she would come down to the fence of the east pasture that afternoon she would be there,—and tell you something about *her*," she ended mysteriously.

Lydia opened her round eyes very wide and shook her brown curls. "May be my mother won't allow me to go down to the east pasture, Ellen."

"But if you just happened to be walking there," Ellen tempted, "an' I happened to be walking on my side of the fence? It isn't like visiting; I guess we needn't ask leave."

"Well," said Lydia doubtfully.

"If you *should* be there, and you should bring your sewing, I'd do it for you," Ellen enticed; "only, of course, may be I won't be there."

"Well," said Lydia again, but with more firmness.

"Mother didn't say I mustn't," she assured herself, when, in the afternoon, silencing her conscience with castuistry learned from her friend, she ran across a sunny meadow, through an orchard, waist-deep in blossoming grass, and reached the east pasture. Two poplars, one on either side of the fence, dropped flickering shadows through the sunshine, and their smooth trunks offered comfortable supports to any one who climbed up and sat on the fence, as Ellen was doing now.

"Why!" said she, affecting vast astonishment. "Where are you going? Won't you stop a minute and talk?"

"Why, Ellen," faltered the other, "you said—"

"I *happened* to be walking along here," Ellen interrupted, frowning,—it was so stupid in Lydia to forget to make believe. "I saw you coming, and I waited a little while. It isn't visiting."

"Oh no," Lydia assented weakly. "I—I brought the handkerchief to hem, Ellen." You said you would," she ended, with a confused air.

"Oh, I don't mind doing a little for you," Ellen returned, in an obliging manner: she ignored the arrangement, but she did not ignore the work.

Lydia reached the handkerchief up to her, and then climbed on the fence and settled herself comfortably against her poplar. Ellen whipped a thimble out of her pocket and began to sew very fast. "She's coming to our school until it closes, and when it does she is to have a governess."

"Oh!" cried Lydia. There was no need to say who was coming. To the two children Effie Temple was the only person of importance in Old Chester.

"She doesn't want to," proceeded Ellen. "I heard grandmother tell Mrs. Drayton so. Grandmother said it showed how she was brought up, that anybody knew or cared what she wanted. Grandmother said she was *spoiled*."

"Oh, my!"

"But she's coming, any way. And, Lydia, do you know, she talks French!" Lydia was speechless. "They're coming to tea to our house to-morrow night, and she's coming. And grandmother said I might have my tea-set on the bench on the side porch,—just Effie and me. I wish grandmother would invite you."

"Won't she?" Lydia asked anxiously.

"No," Ellen assured her, sighing. "I guess I'll go home now and fix my tea-set for to-morrow night. I wonder if she'll like to play hollyhock ladies, or hear stories? Do you suppose she'll like stories? I'll tell her lots. I'll tell her what happened to me when I was a little girl and was sick."

Lydia knew this story well, but she could not resist asking for it again and listening, with delightful shudders, while Ellen cheerfully, her hands clasped around her knees, staring up into the branches above her, related, circumstantially, and with that pride in illness which children feel, how she had taken lots of medicine, and got worse, and worse, and worse, and *worse*; and then at last they thought she was dead, and she was put into a coffin and buried,—here she paused to quake with terror, not at her bold untruth, but at the picture she had conjured up; and how she had "escaped,"—and thus, and thus. Neither child believed this marvelous tale, but it was true to both. Midway in her fiction Ellen stopped to say: "Oh, Lydia, do you know any French at all?"

It was not often that Lydia occupied the proud position of instructor to Ellen, so it was a happy moment when she said: "Yes, I do; I know 'How do you do, this morning?' My brother told me."

"Oh, tell me," Ellen begged; and Lydia generously said something which sounded like "Coma-voo port ah voo, set mattan?" Her pleasure at giving Ellen information almost made her forget the vague and gnawing consciousness that she had done wrong in coming out without permission.

## II.

That tea party was an event in Ellen's life. To begin with, she had a quarrel with Betsey Thomas, who was dressing her.

"I don't want to wear a white apron; it's too babyish. I won't! So there!"

"You will," Betsey assured her briefly, holding out the hated garment.

Ellen stamped and opened her lips for some outcry, but there was a sound in the hall outside the door, and she only drew a sobbing breath and waited; she knew that slow rustle of her grandmother's dress. As for Betsey, she hailed it with delight.

"If you please, ma'am," she said, as Mrs. Dale entered, "Ellen won't put on her apron."

"Grandmother, I don't see why I should wear an apron. I'm going on twelve, and Effie doesn't have to, and"—

"That is enough, Ellen."

Mrs. Dale's hair, soft and white as spun silk, was caught back by little tortoise-shell combs, and fell in three short, thick curls on either side of her face; she wore a turban made of snowy muslin, and the bosom of her black satin gown was filled with the same soft whiteness, crossed in smooth folds and fastened with a small pin in a silver setting. Her deli-