

FAMILY DEPARTMENT.

ISOLATION.

We walk alone through all life's various ways,
Through light and darkness, sorrow, joy, and change;
And greeting each to each, through passing days,
Still we are strange.

We hold our dear ones with a firm, strong grasp;
We hear their voices, look into their eyes;
And yet, betwixt us in that clinging clasp
A distance lies.

We cannot know their hearts, how'er we may
Mingle thought, aspiration, hope, and prayer;
We cannot reach them, and in vain essay
To enter there.

Still, in each heart of hearts a hidden deep
Lies, never fathomed by its dearest, best;
With closest care our purest thoughts we keep,
And tenderest.

But, blessed thought! we shall not always so
In darkness and in sadness walk alone;
There comes a glorious day when we shall know
As we are known.

—Elinor Gray.

A LUCKY MISTAKE.

CHAPTER III—"PEEPING BACK."

(Continued.)

Leo and Lily were awake and out of bed betimes the next morning; but Roy had passed a sleepless, disturbed night; the cold and wet that had no harmful effect on the little ones had been too much for his already weakened strength. His cough was incessant, and his flushed face and heavy eyes told Rebecca that mischief had been done.

"You must stay in bed, Master Roy, for your breakfast, and get rid of that cough."

"But we must go to Whichcote by the first train."

"There'll be no travelling by rail for you to-day. The snow has been coming down all night, and it's not done yet. Dawes—that's the gardener—says the line is blocked farther on."

"But we can't trouble Mr. Johnson."

"You just leave that to the master and me. You don't think we'd let those poor children go out in this weather? It'd be just murder."

"Are they ill—have they caught cold?"

"Not they; they are as merry as two crickets downstairs, and Master Leo is that helpful! Why, he's doing the toast this very minute."

Leo and Lily were in their element. As Leo finished his first slice of toast, he turned his crimson face to Lily, and, with a grin of delight, said—

"Now, Lily, look sharp, and put on the butter while it's hot."

"But, Master Leo, Rebecca did not say nothing about you buttering it," put in Sarah, with dismay at what Rebecca would say when she came back.

Lily was seated on the fender, regardless of scorched face. "Of course, we must do it properly, Sarah; it's for Mr. Johnson. Don't be stingy," and she continued her work regardless of Sarah.

"Well, you must bear the blame."

"Blame! why she ought to thank us."

"We'll manage all right; you needn't trouble about us."

"Yes, Sarah, if you don't hurry up with your work, it will be you who'll catch it. See how hard we are working!"

Rebecca entered at that moment, and at sight of the burnt faces exclaimed in dismay; then her eyes fell on the butter that was fast melting from the hot place in which Lily had put it; such a dirty, nasty looking mess it was, too; for she had been using the same knife to cut the butter and to scrape off the burnt parts of the toast.

"Oh, Miss Lily, what a mess!"

"It's all Leo's fault; he will burn it so."

"He was doing it very nicely when I left."

"I'll fetch it himself, then. I believe," and she rose and marched for,

"I am sure you are the favorite at home, Lily, or at any rate they pretend so, because you are the girl. You might let me be Rebecca's."

There was some truth in this statement Lily had to allow, and when Rebecca added—

"I think you are a very nice young lady," she condescended to return.

To tell the truth, Lily's great weakness was the love of being first favorite with everybody. She was not blind to her fault, for her mother had often pointed it out to her, and conscience at that moment gave her a good strong prick, just to remind her of what mother had told her.

"Are you peeping back?" whispered Leo mischievously.

"No, I'm not"—decidedly; "I like the new leaf."

After this passage of arms, they finished their work in peace; then with a proud air of satisfaction, carried the toast into the breakfast-room.

Here they found Mr. Johnson; he was standing at the window, a grave, anxious look on his face. He had just paid a visit to Roy, and thought the boy looking really ill. No wonder he looked grave. It was a great responsibility to have the charge of three strange children, and one of them weak and ill. Even if the weather had been fine, Roy was not in a fit state to travel. The matter was settled for him, however, as all traffic on the line was stopped by the snow, so the children were obliged to remain where they were.

If Roy had been well, there would have been nothing but pleasure in the prospect, for in his secret heart Mr. Johnson had rejoiced when he heard that his little visitors were weather-bound.

Lily greeted him with a kiss, and said, "Leo and I have made you something so nice. You must say it's good, won't you—and before Rebecca, please?"

He at once promised this; and Lily said, "You may have one peep, and then we'll put it down to the fire to keep warm until after prayers."

Mr. Johnson pushed up his spectacles and rubbed his chin thoughtfully. His usual habit was to have a book to read while he breakfasted, and that book was not a book of prayer, as a rule. He was a shy, reserved man, and it was a difficult thing for him to make any alteration in his ways.

"We could not learn our verses this morning, because our Bibles are in the trunks at the station," said Lily.

"Yes, and lots of other things, too. It was such fun dressing this morning."

At last Mr. Johnson said, "We don't read out prayers: Rebecca is always busy at this hour."

"We always do at home. Can't we have it without Rebecca—only Sarah?"

Without another word he turned and brought from a shelf near a Bible and Prayer Book.

"Then Sarah may be busy too," he said.

"May we choose the chapter?" The two little heads were bent together over the book, and after a little discussion they decided on the one they wanted, the tenth of St. John.

"I do like that about the good Shepherd so," explained Lily, as she drew up a chair beside him. "Mother says, we children are His lambs; so it's meant for us just as much as for grown up people."

When he had ended reading the chapter he read out some prayers from the Church Service, and as the children's bright young voices joined in the Lord's Prayer, a strange dimness came over his eyes, and he had to rub his spectacles well before he was able to see as distinctly as usual.

The children heard with great glee, that they would have to remain on in their present quarters until the weather improved. They

were perfectly happy, and in no hurry to go; in fact, they thought they would prefer remaining here instead of going on at all to the other Mr. Johnson's. He was a stranger to them now; this Mr. Johnson was their own friend.

To their host's relief they were not in the least alarmed about Roy's cold. If it had been any other member of the family it would have been different, for none of them were ever ill, except Roy; he was the delicate one of the family.

"The doctor said Roy only wanted rest and change," Lily informed Mr. Johnson and Rebecca; that Leo repeated the words as glibly as a parrot, and with as little understanding of what they meant. Lily remembered her promise "to take care of Roy; so she went and sat in his room, and tried her best to amuse him.

Roy did not want to be amused; he only wanted to be left quiet, his head ached, and so he turned his back on his little sister, and, shutting his eyes, said, "I want to go asleep."

Poor little Lily found it very dull all alone, with no one to speak to and nothing to do. She could not go down and play with Leo, for Rebecca had trusted her to remain with Roy until she came back.

Mr. Johnson had gone out to see about having their boxes brought from the station, and also to send for the doctor to come and see Roy; but this latter fact the children were not told.

Lily's patience was nearly worn out by the time Rebecca made her appearance.

"Master Leo is playing in the yard. Wrap up warm, and you may join him. Hurry, dear," she added.

No need to tell her that. She was off in a moment, delighted to join her brother.

Rebecca felt quite proud of the way she had got her out before the doctor's arrival, and actually took herself to task for having had such a dislike for children's company.

"Lily, I am going to ask for some string," announced Leo, in a pause of their game.

Together they went to the house. Peeping in, they saw Rebecca busy at the table. Before her was a saucepan full of something savory and boiling, to judge from the appetizing smell and clouds of smoke. She bent so earnestly over it that she did not observe the children.

"She'll touch it with her nose," whispered Lily.

Leo giggled. And they crept up behind her softly. She was intent on her work, and did not hear them. Lily put up her hand to the back of her head, but drew it back; then up it went again.

"Don't be a coward," whispered Leo; and he gave her arm a nudge. Down went Rebecca's head, and in went her long nose into the boiling soap.

With a scream of pain and anger she dropped the spoon and turned round. "Oh dear, oh dear! my nose is scalded."

The little culprits tried hard to smother their laughter, and as they were behind her she did not at first see them; but Sarah, who had come forward to her assistance, did, and the sight of the three upset her gravity. She burst out laughing.

"You wicked, unfeeling wretch!" exclaimed Rebecca, indignantly. But before she could say more, Lily had darted to the flour-bin, and, seizing a handful of flour, dabbed it full on to Rebecca's nose. In her hurry she flung it into eyes and mouth as well, half choking the unfortunate Rebecca.

"It's the best thing for a burn I know," exclaimed Lily; then as the victim of their mischief sank into a chair and began to softly rub her poor burnt nose, they both went off into peals of laughter.

(To be Continued.)