

breakfasts and dinners. Somebody must take care of Aunt Sally; she could no longer look after her one little room, and make her bed. All the houses connected with the Rev. Joseph Frasier's church grew suddenly small. The only one for miles around where there was found to be room for Aunt Sally was the little story and a half old-fashioned manse. Thither Aunt Sally went and was cared for until the angels who minister to those who are heirs of salvation came for her.

Even then, the poor clay that she left behind needed care, and in all these ways, not to mention Uncle Edward's 'ill luck' and consequent inability to pay the borrowed hundred dollars, the sacred 'fund' steadily decreased, until all the grown-up members of the family went about with the unspoken fear that Allie must give up Grantly for another year. Nobody said that it was not very likely that she would get there at all, but every one of them feared that that was what it meant. It had taken three hard years to gather 'the fund'; and Allie was nineteen now, and the boys were growing older every day. The outlook was dark.

Still, they were all brave. After those first tears shed on her father's shoulder, supplemented by a regular storm of them when she reached her own room, Alethea kept her word, and 'did not cry a speck.' It is true that occasionally her spirits seemed to be so high that the father and mother looked at one another with significant and pathetic smiles, and understood that their brave girl was trying to hide her pain under a forced gaiety; but for the most part she was sweet and brave and helpful as before.

After so heavy a disappointment perhaps one would not be expected to notice smaller ones; yet it must be confessed that, when Alethea's plan to take a twenty miles' 'spin' with a party of young people to Glendale came to naught, she did feel a touch of sympathy with old Jacob when he said, 'All these things are against me.'

They had been invited to Glendale for the day, six of them, to have a farewell visit with Helen and Louise Westervelt, whose father was a banker and lived in a lovely home; and the daughters were to enter Grantly the next term.

Yet the morning mail brought so imperative a summons from Uncle Edward and so pitiful a wail from Aunt Annie to come to them at once in an emergency that father and mother both felt there was no alternative but for them to depart for the day.

'But, Allie dear, what will you do?' Mrs. Frasier had said, stopping her hurried preparations in dismay, as the thought of the girl's frustrated plans came to her.

'Stay at home, of course, mother dear, and take as good care of Toodles as I can.' Whereupon she swung Toodles, otherwise Joseph Parkman Frasier, jr., up into the air with such vim that he shouted his joy.

'Poor child!' said Mrs. Frasier. 'I declare it does seem too bad! If there were any other way—'

'Well there isn't, mother dear; Josie and I will have good times, and do what we like every blessed minute, won't we, Josie? Mother, shall I get out your heavy shawl? It may be real cold to-night, you know.'

She watched them drive away, having told her father cheerily that he was to take the twenty miles' 'spin' instead of herself, that was all, then she went back to the lonely house, and began the routine of homely duties that must occupy her morning. Long before this the little boys had been despatched with a note to explain to the girls her non-appearance and they were probably well on their way by this time. Never mind; she would make a holiday of it in spite of late. The first baked sweet apples of the season were in the pantry; the little boys

would be delighted with baked apples and milk for luncheon, and with dinner at night after father and mother reached home. Young Joseph, with the house so quiet, was good for a three hours' nap; and she would be a lady, and sit in her easy chair and read. Not a bit of housework or sewing would she do. How fortunate that she had a new book that had hardly even been glanced at!

She flew about the neat little kitchen, eager to despatch the morning work, and presently found a letter that her father had forgotten to mail. A glance at the clock showed that mail-time was near. She must run over to the office with that letter; it might be important. Young Joseph, entirely willing to have his hat tied under his chubby chin, chuckled with delight over the unexpected walk; but the postmistress said, 'Here's a postal card, Allie, that got missed out of your mail somehow.' And Allie read it on the way home.

'My Dear Frasier:—I'm coming to make that long-promised call, and take a bite with you at your hospitable table; more than that, I'm going to bring company. You have heard me speak of Mr. Waterson, of New York? He and his wife are spending a few days with us, and we are going to drive to Glendale and spend a day or two. It occurred to my wife this morning that a delightful feature of the plan would be to take luncheon with you, and so carry out a plan made long ago. If we were not well acquainted with your good wife and her resources, we should not dare do this without longer notification; but, as the time is short, I think we'll risk it, and call upon you, anyway. We shall be with you about one o'clock to-morrow, if all goes well. We can give you about two hours, and then must push on. Yours fraternally,

HOSMER.'

Alethea gave a dismayed exclamation as she read, dumped Joseph on the grass in their own yard while she ran to look at the kitchen clock, then sat down on the steps to consider. Mr. Hosmer was her father's old friend, a brother minister in the next parish twelve miles away. She knew him very well, and his wife a little, but these people from New York they had never seen; and it was now ten o'clock, and at one they would all be there to take luncheon! Well, of course, there was nothing to be done but to explain to them that her father and mother were away for the day, and say how sorry they would be to lose the visit. Then, of course, the guests would go on their way.

But where would they get luncheon? It was twenty miles to Glendale, and people who had already taken a sixteen miles' ride over a hilly road might be expected to need refreshment. There were no hotels between here and Glendale that could be recommended. It would try her father very much to think that his old friend who had for several years been planning to make them a visit should be so inhospitably treated; but there was no help for it.

Wait! Was there not? Why should not she, Alethea Frasier, get luncheon ready for her father's guests? To be sure, she had never done it alone; but there must always be a first time. Moreover, the Watersons of New York were very stylish people, probably used to all sorts of dainties. Never mind; they grew hungry, she supposed, like other people, and could eat on plain ironstone and with plated forks for once. She would do it. Father would be so distressed not to have Mr. Hosmer cared for comfortably. There was the baby to think about, it was true; but the little boys would be at home at noon, and they would help.

'Yes, sir, Mr. Joseph Parkman Frasier,' she said, perching that young man on her shoulder, 'we'll do it, you and I; and Oh, I "hope" you will rise to the occasion and be as good as gold, for there's everything to be done.'

Never in all the years of her busy life had Alethea Frasier passed a busier morning. It seemed to her that the hands of the old clock fairly flew. Since the guests were limited as to time, it would not do to delay them. As the dignified clock struck the half-hour for half-past twelve, the sound of wheels drew the young housekeeper to the door. Yes, there were her guests! and she reflected with infinite satisfaction that the dear little chops were cooking beautifully, and that her stewed potatoes were set where they could not burn.

How pretty a hostess she made! Her cheeks were a trifle redder than usual, but it was very becoming. That luncheon was surely all that they could have desired, and the gentlemen praised the coffee as much as the ladies did the salad. Young Joseph, who had declined to sleep as long as had been planned, demanded attention in the midst of the meal; but Alethea ran to him with loving words and caresses, and soothed his feelings promptly, so that he came, presently, serene and smiling, to watch them take coffee.

'You don't say that you are entirely alone!' exclaimed Mr. Hosmer, at last. And Alethea explained that the little boys had been there at noon, but had had to run back to school.

'Well, upon my word!' said Mr. Waterson. 'So you are the fairy that has evolved all this good cheer, and taken care of a baby besides! Your father must be proud of you, Miss Frasier.'

'Oh, what about your own school?' began Mr. Hosmer. 'Grantly doesn't open yet, though, for two weeks, does it? Your father told me, the last time I met him, what plans you were making for it.'

Alethea was very tired; it was probably for that reason that there came a sudden quiver of her lips and an almost overwhelming desire to let the tears come. She ordered them sternly back, and controlled her voice as well as she could, while she said briefly: 'That has been given up, Mr. Hosmer; I am not to go. Mr. Waterson, may I give you another cup of coffee?'

'How she did hush me up on the school question!' said Mr. Hosmer, when they were speeding over the road again. 'I never saw anything more simply dignified, and her eyes were full of tears that minute. I tell you, I'm sorry for that girl; she is worth her weight in gold anywhere, and she's a capital scholar; and here she must give up all her hopes of an education, just because her father isn't given salary enough to educate her. Don't you call that a shame?'

'Are you sure it is money that is in the way?' asked Mr. Waterson.

'Of course it is. What else would keep a girl like that from school, feeling it as she evidently did? You saw a specimen of her executive ability this morning? Well, she walks through her studies with just that force; I've heard of her; and I say it's too bad. Oh, I know what's in the way well enough; it's the same thing that cripples most of the ministers about here,—lack of means. If I had the money, I'd send that girl to Grantly next week.'

'Ermina,' said Mr. Waterson turning to his wife, 'why isn't she the girl for whom we are looking?'

'I've been thinking of that,' said Mrs. Waterson. 'I thought of it all the while she was serving that delicious luncheon, and I believe she is the very one.'

Then it was revealed that Mr. and Mrs. Waterson had had a trust fund committed to them years before by their own dear daughter, who had graduated from school and gone home to her father's palace to live forever. The interest of the fund was to be used each year to help some dear girl through school, who without its help could not have gone. And the father and mother, who always took a keen personal interest in these wards of their absent daughter, had been for several weeks quietly on the watch for another. They wanted just the sort of girl that their child would approve, and it came to pass that they believed they had found her.

'Sly little pussie!' said the Rev. Joseph Frasier, as he stroked his daughter's brown head that was leaning against his arm. 'She appeared to give up all idea of school; and then gave up even her bicycle trip and her fine dinner at Glendale, and stayed at home without a murmur while her old father and mother rode away. They told each other that she was as unselfish and brave and faithful as an angel; and all the while she was at work, baking and frying and broiling herself into a three years' course at Grantly with all the extras thrown in!'

'It wasn't the frying and broiling, father,' said Alethea, lifting happy eyes to his face. 'It was mother's salad-dressing; Mrs. Waterson said it was the best she ever tasted.'

'And to think,' said the mother, 'that I actually grumbled that morning about having to go away, and said I could not see why all Allie's plans had to be spoiled! How little we understand!'