

Don't know the climax circumstances have been leading up to. It's artistic, in a way. First, the kitten. Then Biddy broke a little Wedgewood pitcher that used to be mamma's. Then I ruined my new travelling gown by spilling ink on it.'

'And I suppose you own only one dress. Another excellent reason.'

'Wait. Next, the dinner didn't come, but a country cousin did, and it being ironing day, we sat down to crackers and milk. Fifth, when the doctor came he imparted the cheerful intelligence that papa's rheumatism had settled into a case of genuine rheumatic fever, and that he must be nursed "professionally," as he called it.'

'Crickets! That is tough. But the housekeeper who is coming—'

'Who is not coming, you mean. After dinner a telegram came instead saying that she was ill herself, and must cancel her engagement with us. That leaves me at the head of the house, as before; and even if papa is well enough to leave in two months, it will be too late for me to join the classes. And last, Jack,—Madeline paused to give her words due weight,—and last, Aunt Louisa is here!'

Jack gave a prolonged whistle. 'How on earth did she know your father was ill?' he asked.

'She didn't know it; I suppose she felt it. You remember, perhaps, what an uncanny way she had of finding out things. Anyway, she is here—in papa's room. I came out to take a long breath and decide what we shall have for supper. You know she never likes things other people eat—on principle, I think. Now what do you say?'

Jack pondered. 'I—I believe I'd shake the whole thing, and run away, Madeline,' he said at last.

'How about being a hero and a Douglas, and all that?' Madeline asked slyly.

Jack laughed. 'I was joking, of course,' he replied. 'That advice holds good. But it's pretty hard, Madeline—that's a fact!'

And both these young people fell to thinking. Visions rose before them of the prim, black-eyed, sharp-nosed little woman who ruled the Douglas family with her inflexible hand for several years after Mrs. Douglas died; how she would never allow Madeline to play with Jack in summer because it was too warm, or in winter because it was too cold; of the long stints the child had to sew or knit: of the ugly pinafores and unbecoming frocks she had to wear (for Madeline shared her childish woes with the sympathetic Jack in those days, too), and of the pretty, long curls that were cut off. They remembered how Aunt Louisa used to frown on dolls and pets, and the merry-making of Madeline's mates. They remembered, too, how Madeline had developed more naughtiness in that time than anyone—even Aunt Louisa—had dreamed her capable of. In short, the whole three years of rigorous discipline rose before the two, bringing in its train something of the old-time horror and homesickness: for Jack lived next door, and he came in for his share of severity. At last Mr. Douglas awoke to the true state of things, and with his tact and kindness managed—no one ever knew how—that Aunt Louisa should seek fresh fields for adventures. A housekeeper filled her place until Madeline herself was old enough to assume the head of the household, and affairs went on more smoothly. But during her occasional visits of inspection, even of late years, Aunt Louisa brought with her the same irritating atmosphere of discontent; and so it was that tired Madeline wiped the tears away as at last she looked up at Jack. 'Good-bye,' she said, rising, 'I must go now and send Pete to the telegraph office. And I

suppose whatever I order for supper, Aunt Louisa will sniff at. No, you needn't come up to the house with me.'

Jack had risen also. 'I'll go down and send the telegram,' he said; 'you needn't bother about that. And—I'm awfully sorry, of course, and all that, because I had counted on having you in Boston during the rest of my stay in Cambridge. But, Madeline—' Jack paused and flushed in embarrassment, 'I—I wouldn't be beaten if I were you. Don't mind Aunt Louisa.'

'"Don't mind," Jack?' Madeline repeated.

'Yes, I know it's hard, but if you are diplomatic I think you can manage Aunt Louisa without her suspecting it. See, here, Madeline, why don't you try to win her over? Submit to her freaks for a while, and see how it works, I mean. You've got the grit—I mean the character—to submit, and you know it's ever so much nobler, and all that, than to be continually contending. Let her think she's disciplining you if she wants to. Mind her like a little lamb. If she has a particle of affection for you—and of course she has, somewhere—she'll respect you, see if she doesn't. You can do it if you try, Madeline, and it will be easier for you than continual friction. We all of us have to learn self-control some time, and you may as well begin now.'

Looking into Jack's jolly face, so strange now in its suddenly-assumed seriousness, Madeline realized that her playmate was leaving boyhood behind. Was she, too, rising above the petty vexations of girlhood, and learning restraint and self-control? She hesitated a moment; then she held out her hand impulsively.

'I suppose you mean well, Jack,' she said, 'but—well, I'll think of it.'

Jack abandoned his grown-up attitude with alacrity. 'Good for you!' he cried, shaking the little brown-hand with boyish heartiness. 'You'll win, I know. Begin by giving my love to Aunt Louisa. Good-bye.'

When Madeline entered the house she met Aunt Louisa in the hall. 'Was that that Willoughby boy down in the garden with you?' she asked.

The garden was completely hidden from the house by tall trees, and Madeline was sure her aunt had not stepped outside the door. She opened her eyes in surprise, but only for a second. 'Yes, it was, Aunt Louisa,' she replied. Then she added demurely, 'He sent his love to you.'

'Huh! He always was a saucy boy. What was he doing around here?'

'Nothing. That is, he was giving me good advice, and he is going to send a telegram to Cousin Kitty. I was to stay at her house while in Boston, you know. But I cannot start to-morrow, of course.'

'I should think not. So you were going to carry out that silly plan! Well, Katherine never had any sense managing her own children—much less other people's. A fine artist you'd make, with your careless, heedless ways. Your father will need you this winter.'

Madeline felt a choking in her throat, but she spoke evenly enough. 'Yes, Aunt Louisa,' she said, 'I know he is very ill. When the doctor comes I will have him send for a trained nurse.'

'Trained fiddlesticks!' Aunt Louisa's eyes snapped. 'Much I'll have one of those white-aproned high-steppers around me! What am I here for if not to take care of your father, I'd like to know?'

'But—'

'There's no "but" about it. I've settled that, and you needn't waste words.'

Madeline felt the full force of this remark. She closed her lips lightly a moment before she replied, with heightened color, 'Then I

suppose I shall have to look around for another maid. Biddy cannot do all the work if papa is going to be ill long.'

Aunt Louisa looked sternly at her niece. 'Is shoeleather so expensive here that you cannot do a little trotting yourself?' she asked.

'I would if it were necessary,' Madeline replied, beating against the current from force of habit, 'but I had planned to do some painting, if I must stay at home.'

'I suppose you have heard of people having to change their plans?'

'Certainly, but I think—'

'It makes no difference what you think. What does your judgment amount to—a mere child like you? I call it providential that I came here to-day, instead of going to Mary's.'

An angry retort was on Madeline's lips, but she thought of Jack, and said nothing. Her aunt was watching her closely. Feeling her strong, compelling gaze, Madeline looked up presently, and said slowly, and with gentle dignity, 'Aunt Louisa, I am sure you mean to be kind to papa and me, but—and—'. She paused; then she added impulsively, 'Aunt Louisa, if you will take charge here for the time you stay, just as you used to, and will tell me what to do, I will obey you in every particular. You see,' she went on, even smiling now, 'we are both strong-willed, and only one can rule. That shall be you, and I will be subordinate, I will try to be good,' she finished, simply.

Aunt Louisa gazed long, after her peculiar manner, into the grey eyes that met her own unflinchingly. Then she turned abruptly away.

'Well, the first thing you may do is to go downstairs and scour out a dish clean enough for me to make some rice gruel in. I'll be down later.'

Again Madeline's first impulse was that of indignant protest. But she turned obediently and went downstairs. Aunt Louisa was still watching her. 'Humph!' she ejaculated as she crossed the hall to her brother's room.

So the autumn and part of the winter passed, and Aunt Louisa still governed the little household. Once Madeline had surrendered her highly-prized supremacy, matters settled themselves into a routine that was both hard and dreary; though when she ceased to match her own will against that of her aunt, the friction, as Jack had prophesied, diminished, and affairs ran more smoothly than she would have believed was possible. On the whole, Aunt Louisa was not unkind, if Madeline obeyed her commands unquestioningly. Yet it was not an easy thing for a high-spirited girl to be disappointed in regard to a long-cherished hope, and at the same time submit to be dictated to by a person whom she knew was at times both unjust and whimsical. There were moments when her rebellious nature insisted that the time for self-assertion had come. She often tried to persuade herself that such utter self-effacement was wrong. But she had given her word, and was both too proud and too honorable to retract; so she obeyed commands, inwardly chafing at them, but outwardly unperturbed, like a well-drilled soldier. Mr. Douglas' illness was much more severe than even the physician had prophesied, and for a few anxious weeks Madeline was happiest when working hardest, and quite willing to sink her own personality in that of her energetic aunt, if by doing so she could directly or indirectly benefit her father. And with all Aunt Louisa's stern ways, she was a tender nurse. As convalescence was assured, she allowed Madeline to spend more time in her father's room—not idling or