

"Janie, my little playmate, too! What a happy meeting! Clara came down, dressed for a call, and declared she would come, but I told her no! I knew the amount of gallantry I should feel obliged to use, and I preferred that my first visit should be like the old ones."

"You are right. We are better pleased to have it so, are we not, Janet?"

His call lengthened itself into two hours, and during the time he told pretty stories, and chatted like the boy of by-gone days, but not once did Margaret's or Lettie's name pass his lips.

When he went away, he met them coming, with disappointed faces, from the parlor, where they had been waiting for him; but he only lifted his hat and passed out. Then grandma and Janie received a sound scolding, such as only those two knew how to give, and then the shadow of discontent again fell on Janet's spirit.

Ah! that long cheerless winter! What a story Janet could tell you of disappointments, of happy parties of which she had no share, of moonlight rides, of joy and merriment! She had only that one comforter, kind, patient, grandma; for now that Mr. Bosworth had arrived the way was harder than before.

He came and escorted Lettie to parties and sometimes chatted with grandma, but nothing more. She saw nothing more. She did not, as usual, catch the good-natured smiles he gave her from the sleigh as he rode away—and Lettie never told her how often he asked for her.

Along with grandma, Janet wished for better things, and wondered why she was so harshly dealt with.

At last even the society of her good aged comforter was denied her, and in her bed the old lady gradually faded away. Day and night Janet sat beside her with the knowledge that she was beyond earthly help—waiting upon her, yielding to her childish whims, and shutting out everything youthful and beautiful from her sight.

"Playing household angel," Margaret said.

"Working for her grandma's fortune of old shoes and worsted stockings," Lettie cruelly added.

"Doing her duty by the faithful woman who has taken the three motherless children into her heart, and filled the lost one's place, so far as God permitted," her own heart said, and steadily she worked on.

The first of May brought invitations to the last ball at the Bosworth House, and while the two elder sisters laid out the finery, Janet folded her tiny missive and hid it away next to her heart, as a sacred bit of paper, bearing Austin's firm, broad chirography upon it.

That night grandma was very ill, and when Margaret and Lettie fluttered in with their gay dresses, Janet Leeds met them and almost forcibly put them out of the room.

"I beg you, girls, to have a little respect for poor grandma—she is very ill to night."

"Nonsense! Don't be a fool, Janet—any body would think she was dying?"

"I believe she is."

Their reply came in a violent slam of the door, and Janet was left alone with her patient.

The hours dragged wearily, and overcome by her long, sleepless watches, Janet fell fast asleep.

Two hours later she awoke with a start, and in an instant she saw that dread change in her grandma's face.