

"I am not so sure of that," returned Harry. "You know I'm rather afraid of the ladies, and like them best at a distance."

"I wish I had been as wise as you!" said the carrier. "But, there, we take the critters for better or for wuss, and if they's wuss, why we can't help it. We must just grin and bear it, I s'pose. Gee-ho, Jerry! And good-day to you, Mr. Danvers."

With that, honest George turned to face the east wind, and Harry Danvers ran off westward.

II.

The carrier returned without his niece that day, but left her in Bagley with a promise to fetch her on the Saturday of that week.

"It's a good thing for you, and she, that you didn't bring her," was Mrs. Prescott's greeting when she saw her husband enter unaccompanied.

"She's coming Saturday," answered George, very quietly, as he unwound the comforter from his neck. "She hadn't time to get ready to-day."

"Time to get ready, the stuck-up young minx!" exclaimed Mrs. Prescott, wrathfully. "I'll have none of her bags and baggage littering my house. D'ye think I don't know all about the dress and furbelows, and dandified airs o' them bits o' gels, and how they turns up their noses at plain, honest folks as works hard to keep themselves decent and respectable?—ay, respectabler a good sight than them helpless women-folk as can't set a stitch for themselves, and keep a clean hearth for their husbands—though for that it don't much matter: the husbands o' this day don't deserve nothink, leastways, not such as mine; they's the ungratefulest animals I ever see. Old blind Jerry, as takes you to an' fro', is wot's two of you George Prescott, any day."

"Come, Jenny, do tell us something I haven't heard before," said George, rubbing his hands at the fire as complacently as if his wife had just paid him a *bona fide* compliment. He was not one of that miserable fraternity called "the wranglers and the janglers." "You needn't put yourself in this pickle about the gel till you've proved that she is one you can't bear. Just wait till she've been here a week or two, As I said before, she'll pretty soon get off to a situation, or else be married, so be easy, do be easy a bit, Jenny, and now let's have the candles lighted and get to tea; for I can tell you this cold day haven't took away my happeetite by no manner o' means."

Even this pacificatory speech did not silence Mrs. Prescott; she continued "nagging" until they sat down to tea, and then she took her place in the most uncomfortable spot she could select—far from the fire, and near a door, through the keyhole of which the wind whistled eerily; and during the meal she preserved a sulky silence.

On the following Saturday, Flora arrived. George wrapped her up in his cart, and when they reached home, helped her from it as proudly as if she had been a queen. Then he took her little gloved hand, and led her into the kitchen, which she seemed to him to transform to a place of sunshine and beauty. Mrs. Prescott knew she was entering; she could hear the soft patter of her footsteps; but she would not turn round from the fire over which she was bending, adjusting coal and wood. Flora went up to her, put her arm around the bowed neck, and kissed Mrs. Prescott. "Dear aunt," she said at the same time in a sweet, low voice, "I am come; I hope I shan't inconvenience you at all. How are you?"

Mrs. Prescott was taken aback so that she could not speak. She stood up and revealed a flushed face. George, unswathing himself over by the window, watched the scene with amused interest. His wife glanced across at him, and frowned at his expression. He evidently thought it better to leave the aunt and niece alone; for he muttered something about Jerry, and strode out.

Flora saw the flushed face and the frown, and looking up at her aunt, said, with an appealing air, "You are not angry with me, aunt, for coming, are you? I am not going to stay long, you know."

"Angry? No. Bless the child, take your things off and make yourself at home," said Mrs. Prescott, to her own great astonishment. The fact was, as she said to herself, "the gel's manner, and that kiss, had put her beside herself. Nobody hadn't kissed her for years, and it upset her like." Poor loveless and unloving woman! She felt as if she wanted to cry; but she controlled herself, bustled about to get tea, at the same time stealing furtive glances at Flora as she took

off her gloves and jacket. "Is this uncle's peg behind the door, auntie? or may I have it for my own? I should like to keep this jacket and hat always down stairs, if you will allow me: it will be handy to pop on when you want me to run an errand. I am going to do lots of things for you, you know, while I stay; and now I will put the tea, if you will just sit down in this arm-chair, and direct me where to find everything. That chair isn't as comfortable as it might be, aunt, so I will set to work to-morrow and make you a nice soft cushion for it. I have some materials with me that will just do."

"La child, how you talk!" exclaimed Mrs. Prescott, rather embarrassed.

"Too much, do I?" laughed Flora, coming close to her aunt, and laying her cold hands upon Mrs. Prescott's for a moment, with an almost child-like familiarity. "Aren't they cold! Yes; I'm afraid I shall talk too much, and make too much noise, but if I do, you must scold me, aunt, you know I've been so used to noise with my young cousins. It seems funny to hear you call me 'child,'" she added, drawing her figure to its full height of five feet two. "I have always been considered such a woman compared with my cousins Tracy. Guess how old I am, aunt?"

Thus drawn into a pleasant chat in spite of herself, Mrs. Prescott answered, "Eighteen."

"Eighteen and three, if you please, aunt. Yes, I am twenty-one, though you look as if you didn't believe it."

She scarcely looked it, though, in her simply-made black dress, with its little ruffle of white lace at the throat, and her hair carried behind her small ears and neatly braided behind. Very girlish she looked, notwithstanding the thoughtful expression of her large dark eyes, and the somewhat oldish look that she had when her face was in repose. Flora had been an orphan five years, and had tasted the bitterness of eating the bread of dependence; and her experiences had made her, in many respects, older than her years. Albeit, she had naturally a light and happy disposition, which she seemed disposed to indulge now in this quiet country cottage of her uncle's.

"Now do let me put tea," she added.

"Indeed no, child. Sit and warm your cold hands, and watch me, if you like."

"At least, let me cut a plate of bread-and-butter," said Flora, starting up as soon as she saw the loaf placed on the table. "You don't know how expert I am at that, aunt. Just say the word—thin, thick, or medium?"

"Can't you sit still?" asked Mrs. Prescott, trying to look cross, though a smile twitched at the corner of her mouth.

"No, auntie dear. If I don't work I shall not eat," answered Flora decisively, as she sat down to the loaf. "What beautiful bread—real home-baked! Will you please to teach me to make bread? I like to know something of everything, and am not afraid to use my hands. There's no knowing what I may need to practice some day, so I just try to learn everything that comes in my way."

At this moment George appeared in the doorway, and comprehended the situation at a glance.

"You see I have begun to work, uncle," said Flora, looking up playfully.

"I didn't set her to it," protested Mrs. Prescott. "I just wanted her to sit still and warm herself, but there's no sit-still in her, I can see."

"Then she'll suit you, Jenny, for I'm sure there's none in you," replied George, unintentionally rousing his wife's ire thereby.

"It ain't likely there could be much in me, and see what I've got to do," she cried, relapsing into the cold, harsh manner which Flora had somewhat charmed away during the last ten minutes. "You never sets your hand to nothink in the house, as some men even scrub floors, as I've heard tell of. But it wasn't my luck to get a helping sort o' man."

"But you see, wife, I goes out with Jerry," said the carrier, sitting down to bask in the fire-glow, stretching out his leg, twirling his thumb, and looking a'teg ther meditative. "Any day as you sees fit to change work with me and trot off with Jerry and the parcels to Bagley, I'll undertake to clean the house, make the beds, and get the victuals cooked. Can I say fairer than that?"

"That would be fun, aunt!" replied Flora, with a ringing laugh that banished the gathering cloud. "I'll go with you in the cart any day that you would like to put uncle's house-keeping to the proof. I'll be bound that we should find him when we got home just where we left him—perhaps dozing beside the fire, where he is now." In a moment she added—