

She parted from Sarah Griffin at the door of the club and drove to St. John's Wood in a hansom. The repose of the house had not been disturbed in her absence. Aunt Jane, Aunt Ruth, Molossus and Scipio were all in their accustomed places.

'And here is another letter for you, my dear,' said Aunt Jane. 'I hope your earlier letter brought good news of all?'

Claudia blushed a healthy, honest, old-fashioned flush. She had forgotten that letter. Its opening page or so had alone been glanced at.

Aunt Jane looked astonished at the confession, but with her placid good-nature added, 'Of course, my dear, it was the little excitement of this evening.'

'So natural to young heads,' added Aunt Ruth with a shake of her curls.

But Claudia was ashamed of herself, and ran upstairs for the first letter.

A hasty glance showed her that, whilst it began in ordinary gossip, the long postscript dealt with a more serious subject. Mr. Haberton was ill; he had driven home late at night from a distance, and had taken a chill. Mrs. Haberton hoped it would pass off; Claudia was not to feel alarmed; Pinsett had again proved herself invaluable, and between them they could nurse the patient comfortably.

Claudia hastened to the second letter. Her fears were justified. Her father was worse; pneumonia had set in; the doctor was anxious; they were trying to secure a trained nurse; perhaps Claudia would like to return as soon as she got the letter. 'When did this come?' enquired Claudia eagerly.

'A very few moments after you left,' said Aunt Jane. 'Of course, if you had been here, you might just have caught the eight o'clock train—very late for you to go by, but with your father so ill—' And Aunt Jane wiped a tear away.

Claudia also wept.

'Can nothing be done to-night?' she presently cried. 'Must I wait till to-morrow? He may be—' But she did not like to finish the sentence.

Aunt Ruth had risen to the occasion; she was already adjusting her spectacles with trembling hands in order to explore the A.B.C. time-table. A very brief examination of the book showed that Claudia could not get home that night. They could only wait until morning.

Claudia spent a sleepless night. She had come to London to find a mission in life. The first great sorrow had fallen upon her home during her absence, and by inexcusable preoccupation she had perhaps made it impossible to reach home before her father's death. She knew that pneumonia often claimed its victims swiftly; she might reach home too late. Her father had been good to her in his own rather stern way. He was not a small, weak, or peevish character. To have helped him in sickness would have been a pleasant duty even to Claudia, who had contrived to overlook her mother's frail health. And others were serving him—that weak mother; Pinsett, too, and perhaps a hired nurse. It was unbearable.

'My dear,' said Aunt Jane, as Claudia wept aloud, 'we are in our Heavenly Father's hands; let us ask him to keep your dear father at least until you see him.'

So those two old maids with difficulty adjusted their stiff knees to kneeling, and, as Aunt Jane lifted her quavering voice in a few sentences of simple prayer, she laid a trembling hand protectingly on Claudia.

Would that night never go? Its hours to Claudia seemed weeks. The shock of an impending loss would of itself have been hard enough to bear; but to remember that by

her own indifference to home she had perhaps missed seeing her father again alive—that was worse than all.

And then, as she thought of the sick room, she remembered her mother. How had she contrived for years not to see that in the daily care of that patient woman there lay the first call for a dutiful daughter? It was noble to work; and there was a work for everyone to do. But why had she foolishly gone abroad to look for occupation and a place in life, when an obvious duty and a post she alone could best fill lay at home? If God would only give her time to amend!

It was a limp, tear-stained and humble Claudia who reached home by the first train the next morning. Her father was alive—that was granted to her. Her mother had borne up bravely, but the struggle was obvious. A nurse was in possession of the sick chamber and Claudia could only look on where often she fain would have been the chief worker. But the room for amendment was provided. Mr. Haberton recovered very slowly, and was warned always to use the utmost care. Mrs. Haberton, when the worst of her husband's illness was over, showed signs of collapse herself. Claudia gave herself up to a new ministry. Her mother no longer called for Pinsett; Mr. Haberton found an admirable successor to his trained nurse. Claudia had found her place, and in gratitude to God resolved to give the fullest obedience to the ancient precept: 'If any have children . . . let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents.'

### Little Song Sparrow.

True to his instinct, Little Song Sparrow came back to his northern home before the snow banks were gone. He had been telling us for several days that spring had come, when the north wind began to blow, and the snow came down in a manner that would have done credit to January. Little Song Sparrow found a berth for the night in the depths of a spruce tree, where he curled up like a ball and slept snug and warm. During the night the snow changed to sleet, and then to rain, which froze and crystallized everything. When he came out of his evergreen bedroom early the next morning, the clouds were all gone, and he found a windy, glittering world, with scarcely a place for the sole of his foot. At last he found a perch on the tip-top of the farmer's great woodpile, and began to sing.

Little Song Sparrow never dragged in his music; and there were no doleful sounds. From the tuneful beginning, quickly through the merry middle to the final note, it was a song of happiness and trust. The farmer heard it as he went to the barn with his milk pails, and said to himself, 'A pretty nice morning, after all, and not so cold as I thought it was.'

Song Sparrow finished his first concert just as the sun rose, and having given thanks, he went to look for some breakfast; but not a bare twig could he find where he could get one juicy little bud. Ice covered everything, so he went back to the highest stick of the woodpile for another song service. The wind carried the song to a man going to his work. He was walking with downcast head and heavy heart, as he thought of his sick child at home, and his slender purse and empty coal bin. Then he heard the sparrow's song, so brave and joyous on that wintry morning. He raised his head and quickened his steps as he remembered, 'Ye are of more value than many sparrows.' 'Your Heavenly

Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.'

The sparrow finished his second song service and took another look for breakfast, but the wind was still too cold for the ice to melt, and he had no better success than before. With a few cheerful little chirps and nods and flourishes, he returned again to the woodpile and fairly outdid himself in rapturous song.

The minister had retired the night before with a heavy heart. The church finances and the choir dilemma were bad enough, but besides these, an old church quarrel had broken out again. He had passed a weary night and awoke with a headache. He was just thinking of the gloomy situation and listening to the wind that seemed so dismal, when that same wind brought to him the sparrow's song of trust and thanksgiving.

He listened and listened until the song got into his soul, and he repeated aloud, 'In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.'

He had been wondering how he could get the victory of his worries and discouragements; now he could say, 'Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Over against financial straitness, he put, 'My God shall supply all your need,' and against the other troubles he put the sure promise of God: 'He bringeth them out of their distresses, he maketh the storm a calm.' 'All things are possible to him that believeth.' The minister's wife knew of her husband's depression and dreaded that day. She was trying to think of something cheerful to say to him at the breakfast table, when he burst into the room singing, 'There's sunshine in my soul to-day,' and his face was so bright that she knew it came from the heart.

In the meantime, the sun was beginning to melt the ice from the trees and the little sparrow, having finished his 'Te Deum,' went to his breakfast and found it just to his liking.

I was going to say that the minister preached a sermon with the song sparrow for a text, but he did a great deal more than that, he LIVED that sermon.

### The Little Foxes.

(Ellen A. Lutz, in Michigan 'Advocate.')

'Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.'

Take us the little foxes, that spoil our pleasant vines;

They ravage all the vineyard o'er, where'er a tendril twines;

Sly, selfish little foxes the bloom of love destroy,

And surely beasts of discontent gnaw down the fruits of joy.

The little foxes which we fear, of doubt and pride and greed,

Nip all the buds of timely grace which serve another's need;

And bitter weeds spring up apace, while faith and meekness pine,

In the wake of the little foxes which spoil our pleasant vines.

In vain we water, prune and train, with all our toil and care,

Our grapes of Eschol blast in bloom, our vines no fruitage bear;

Then take the little foxes; from the subtle foe set free,

Dear Lord, our pleasant vines shall thrive, and bear much fruit for Thee.