

I don't exactly see—but I'll do my best, Claude, I'll try.'

'Oh, don't trouble,' said Master Claude, coldly, as with his hands in his pockets and his nose in the air, he marched towards the door. 'I can do without your help. But it's always the way if a fellow thinks to take a girl for a chum—'

'But I will—I will!' cried poor Ella, eagerly, unable to bear such a tone from her idolized brother, Claude. 'I'll go now, Mabel is having her music-lesson in the drawing-room. It's a good opportunity.'

She put down her book and ran up the stairs. Grandmama's keys, left for the first time, as a great honor, in the charge of trustworthy Mabel, were hidden away, as Ella knew, at the back left-hand corner of her sister's top long drawer. She easily secured these, and then slipped into Mrs. Harwood's own room, which adjoined that occupied by the girls.

The parcel of books were lying on an ottoman by the window. Ella soon extracted two or three of the coveted crisp white covers; and then she went over to Mrs. Harwood's bureau and unlocked drawer after drawer in search of the five-pound note. But it was in the upper part, after



SHE UNLOCKED DRAWER AFTER DRAWER.

all, that she discovered it, tucked away in a pigeon-hole, in the same envelope in which it had arrived. Ella took out the note with trembling hands, and put back the letter where she had found it.

The reward for her trouble was to be called a 'little brick,' by Claude, but even this, sweet as it was, did not wholly do away with an uncomfortable conviction that she had been doing wrong, and she felt that she should be very glad when the note was safely back in the bureau again.

Claude shut himself up in his room and worked away at his copying for two or three hours that morning, and at dinner-time managed by sundry pantomimic gestures to convey to Ella the intelligence that it was getting on splendidly.

'Where is the note now?' whispered Ella, anxiously, as soon as she got a chance. 'You haven't left it anywhere about, have you?'

For answer, Claude tapped his breast-pocket significantly. Into its deepest recess the bank-note, folded small, was crammed.

Early in the afternoon a school-fellow called for Claude to go out skating, for the ice, after long waiting, had at last been pronounced thick enough to 'bear.'

The boy was rushing away to get ready, when Hannah, who had been their nurse when they were babies, and still looked after them in a general sort of way, called out, 'Don't go to the park in that shabby suit, Master Claude! Your grandma said you were not to go out of doors in it again.'

'All right, nurse,' answered Claude. 'I'll get into my other in two ticks.'

He tossed off the old blue coat and trousers and donned his grey ones with almost the celerity of a professional transformationist, leaving the former, we regret to say, in a heap on his bedroom floor; then down the stairs he clattered again, the front door banged, and he was gone.

It was not until Claude had been enjoying himself for a good hour upon the ice, that he suddenly recollected the five-pound note in the pocket of the jacket he had so unceremoniously discarded. But, 'That will be safe enough!' he said to himself, 'Nobody will meddle with my things while I am out.'

As soon as the boy reached home, however, he ran upstairs to make sure that all was as he left it. To his alarm the blue serge jacket and trousers were nowhere to be seen.

'I say, nurse, what have you done with my old suit?' he anxiously asked. 'Taken it away to mend?'

'It was not worth it, my dear,' answered Hannah. 'Mistress said it was to go to the rummage sale at the Deepside Schools, and as a man came this afternoon to fetch away anything we had to spare, I let him have it.'

Claude felt as though he were suddenly plunged into a hot bath. Then he turned quite sick with fear.

'You shouldn't have sent my clothes away like that, nurse, without telling me,' he said, 'There was—there might have been something in the pockets.'

'I made sure of that, Master Claude, for I felt in every one. There was nothing but your knife, and some bits of colored chalk, and an old padlock. I put 'em all on the dressing-table in your room.'

'When is the sale to be?' asked Claude, with his brain all in a whirl of desperate plans for getting the jacket into his own hands again.

'To-morrow afternoon at three,' replied Hannah.

And Deepside was four miles away.

### CHAPTER III.—AN EVIL COUNSELLOR.

Before Claude Harwood went to sleep that night he had made up his mind to get over to Deepside by hook or by crook next morning, and regain possession of that old blue jacket, or, at least, of the precious contents of the breast pocket, which Hannah had somehow overlooked.

But, alas for his plans, the first post brought the information that grandma expected to reach Rushington by the 10.50 train, and wished Claude to meet her at the station, and carry her bag.

'Well, anyhow,' he thought, 'I can go to the schools directly after dinner—nobody will think it queer of me to want to have a peep at the rummage sale—and perhaps I shall be able to drop upon the jacket before it is sold to anybody.'

But the hope was rather faint, and Claude's apprehensions grew more vivid as the hour for meeting his grandmother drew nigh. Full of anxiety, which he did not communicate even to Ella, the boy seemed so dull and quiet and unlike himself during his walk home with Mrs. Harwood after her four days' absence, that she taxed him with being unwell, and decided he had 'one of his colds coming on.'

In vain Claude protested; ineffectually he begged to be allowed to go and see the fun at the Deepside Schools. The wind was in the north-east, grandma said, and a snow-storm threatening; she did not want to have him laid up at Christmas.

It need not be said that Mrs. Harwood was not in the house many minutes before Mabel told her the news about Uncle Fred's wonderful present.

'And such a nice, kind letter he sent with

it,' she said. 'I'll fetch it and show it to you. I put it in your bureau to be safe.'

Ella glanced anxiously at Claude as their sister ran out of the room, but he was sharpening a pencil, and did not look up. His face was very white.

It seemed a long time before Mabel came back, and when she did her cheeks were as red as Claude's were pale, and her eyes wide with dismay. 'It's gone!' she gasped, 'Grandma, it isn't there. Only the envelope and the letter. My five-pound note is gone!' 'Nonsense!' said grandma, sharply. 'Let me go and look. It cannot have disappeared unless hands have taken it. And I have known and trusted the servants for years.'

She at once rose and left the room, Mabel close at her heels. The other two followed, but at a distance.

'What will you do?' asked Ella of Claude, in a terror-stricken whisper. 'It is too late to put it back in the drawer now.'

'I can't think what we are to do! I—I didn't like to tell you before, Nellie, but that stupid Hannah has sent it to the rummage sale!'

'Mabel's bank-note!'

'Hush! somebody will hear you! Yes; in the pocket of my old serge coat. We shall never see it again!'

'Oh, Claude, let's tell them!' begged Ella. 'Let's own up at once, before it gets any worse.'

'No, no! I've seen grandma in a passion once, and I wouldn't again, for anything.'

'But perhaps someone else may get blamed.'

'No, they won't; you heard grandma say just now that she had trusted them for years. No, let's keep mum, and it will blow over.'

'There's Susan,' Ella reminded her brother, still far from easy in her mind as to the course he recommended. 'She hasn't been with us very long, and—'

'Hold your tongue, do! You'll get us in no end of a row. They're coming back.'

Susan was the school-room maid, a poor, uneducated girl, whom Mrs. Harwood had taken into her employ only a few weeks previously, as a sort of charitable experiment. She was the eldest of a family of orphans, who had been managing for themselves since the almost simultaneous death of their parents about eighteen months before. She was timid and shy, some folks thought not over-bright in her mind; but what wits the poor thing possessed had been nearly frightened out of her by her experiences in her first place, where abuse from morning till night from her mistress, and not infrequent flinging of boots, shoes, and other portable trifles at her head by her master had been her daily portion for nearly a year.

Rescued from this misery by Mrs. Har-



'HER DAILY PORTION.'

wood, Susan naturally felt her new life under the kind, if somewhat severe, rule of the lady of 'The Laurels,' to be a sort of heaven on earth, and did her best to please everybody about her.

'The first thing to be done,' said Mrs.