

The Inglenook

A Left-Over Thanksgiving.

BY SOPHIE SWETT.

"I suppose some of the 'left-overs' are more forlorn than we," said Mildred Ten Broeck reflectively. "Some of them are not going home because they are poor. Fancy being too poor to pay for a little journey! I wonder how such people feel. That queer, mathematical girl from North Joppa lives only 25 miles away. I wish she could go home!"

"What do you care?" laughed Dorothy Rylance; and Ruth Palmer, who was perched upon the window-seat beside her, echoed the question with an accent of wonder.

"O, I don't know," returned Mildred reflectively, rtying her hair ribbon.

"She's in my class, and she's so forlorn. She's rather condescending, too, in a recitation; she's a real genius in a mathematical way. I can do addition if you give me time. That girl Dobbins girl is her room-mate, and snubs her, I fancy; she's just vulgar enough to do it. Some way, Miss Rachael Hickling of North Joppa gets upon my nerves!"

The girl spoke with strong feeling, and the tiny line between her finely pencilled brows grew into a deep pucker.

"What do you care about her? She isn't in our set," said Ruth conclusively.

"She isn't in any set. That's just the trouble, she's lonesome," returned Mildred.

"It's her own fault, then," said Sally Peyton in a soft Southern drawl. "If she can't find a friend among three hundred girls—"

"I don't fancy that social savor faire is developed in North Joppa," returned Mildred, airing her freshman French with a little grimace. "And if it's needed anywhere in the world it's in a girl's college. Besides, she's a little queerer than any of the other girls."

"In a different walk of life Mildred would have been an anarchist," remarked Polly Peabody, proceeding to toast a marshmallow upon a hat-pin.

"I'll admit that I can't have a good time Thanksgiving eve, knowing that there's a girl alone and lonesome on the other side of the wall!" Mildred flung out the words with sudden energy; and an odd, embarrassed silence fell upon the gay group of girls. The ticking of the little clock whose vitals were hidden in the heart of a china rose became suddenly audible.

"Now you've made me burn a marshmallow!" cried Polly Peabody in an injured tone.

"That girl is happy enough. You may be sure she's digging. I knew she was a dig when I saw that great, high forehead of hers."

No one answered. One or two of the girls looked half-guiltily about the room shared by Mildred Ten Broeck and Sallie Patton, which their mutual belongings had made luxurious and, they fondly hoped, "artistic." All the girls knew how bare and bleak was the unadorned room on the other side of the wall. The Dobbins girl scorned the room-mate who had been allotted to her, stayed in the room as little as possible, and made no effort to adorn it. She said frankly that she cared a good deal more for clothes than she did for fixing up rooms, anyway.

"There! Now your box must have come!" exclaimed Polly Peabody, rescuing another marshmallow from the lamp-flame as the sound of rapidly moving wheels was heard without.

The girls' faces brightened, and they listened eagerly. They were all freshmen, and none were over eighteen. It was not long before a porter came up the stairs with a large wooden box, which

he deposited just inside the door and pried open at Mildred's request.

Mildred, an orphan without a home, had an uncle in New York who had promised to send her a box from Delmonico's. The little party of girls invited to share the feast was composed of "left-overs" (as they called themselves) of the Thanksgiving vacation. No one had a home or a mother, except Marion Fiske, and those precious possessions of hers were both in India. They had all resolved to blink the tears off their eyelashes and be merry, and they wished that Mildred, the hostess, had not brought in those disturbing reflections about the girl from North Joppa.

Mildred drew from the box a long muffler of red worsted and a pair of coarse blue yarn mittens. She held them up, and gazed at them in bewilderment, while a chorus of laughter came from the girls who were looking on. These articles had been tucked into the corners of the box, wrapped in a great many folds of paper. In a pasteboard box was a small and skinny fowl, garnished with sausages in a long string. Mildred seized the fowl by the legs and held it aloft, the long sausage chain dangling. Polly Peabody was dancing about, adorned with the muffler and the mittens. The door of the next room opened suddenly, and the girl from North Joppa appeared in the lighted corridor.

"I—I expected a box—" she faltered, and then she suddenly took in, at a glance, the scene beside the open door.

Mildred turned the box over hastily, so that the address written plainly upon it was visible.

"It was awfully careless of me," she stammered. "Jarvis brought it up, and I took it for granted that it was mine, and told him to open it."

When the box was turned over, two dinner-pails, a small one and a large one had rolled out, also a quantity of very large doughnuts.

Polly Peabody, whose hands were still incased in the coarse mittens, thrust each of her thumbs into the hole in a doughnut and danced off.

"Oh, I do love a doughnut," she sang in a voice half-choked with glee.

Mildred saw a faint flush on Rachael Hickling's sallow cheek, and something like a flash of her serious gray eyes. She almost thought that she had been mistaken, when the girl said quietly, the next moment: "If you like doughnuts, why not come and share my spread? I am afraid I shall be all alone. Mother was coming; she has been nursing Cousin Solon's wife, only thirteen miles from here. Cousin Solon promised to bring her over, and come after her in the morning. He's hauling wood over this way, anyway, but I'm afraid the sleighing isn't going to last; we can't expect it will this time of year. I should be real pleased to have you come if you'd like to, whether mother comes or not."

Mildred and one or two of the other girls were shamefacedly restoring the scattered articles to the empty box. Mildred raised her flushed face suddenly to Rachael Hickling's.

"I am sure we should like to accept your invitation especially if your mother should come," she said heartily. "We haven't a mother among us!" she added wistfully, "and it's Thanksgiving eve. Perhaps you would like to have the spread in here. We were thinking of having one ourselves and are all ready. My box hasn't come, but we have lots of candy to add to your feast."

The girl cast a backward glance at her little bare room.

"I think it would be pleasant here, if you don't

mind," she said easily. "I should like especially to have it pleasant for mother."

"Hain't she got checks?" whispered Polly Peabody to Sally Peyton behind a screen, with the exaggerated slang of deep emotion.

The color was high on Rachael's face as she set about helping the girls to arrange the eatables, but there was no other sign that she was more than usually ill at ease.

Occasionally she looked eager'y out at the window, and at length she uttered an exclamation of pleasure, and ran out of the room and down stairs. The girls, looking out, saw a horse-sled loaded with wood; and beside the driver was the small, muffled figure of a woman.

Jarvis came up with a second box, a larger one, with many express labels. Mildred, with only a moment's hesitation, told the man to put it into the closet, and then she calmly turned the key upon it.

"It might hurt her feelings, the things are so different from hers," she explained quietly, facing the dismayed group of girls.

It was Polly Peabody, the greediest and the most thoughtless one, who recovered herself first, and danced up to Mildred and threw her arms around her neck.

"I believe you are the right kind of a girl, Mildred Ten Broeck!" she said.

It was a little, worn woman with stooping shoulders and a wrinkled face that Rachael Hickling ushered into the bright, luxurious room. The girls seated her in the most comfortable armchair, and wheeled her up to the feast when it was ready. They explained that they could not help making much of her, because a mother had been the one thing lacking to their Thanksgiving festival.

"I told 'em I'd rather come to see Rachael than to go home to Thanksgiving," said Rachael's mother with tears of delight slipping down her cheeks that were seamy before their time. "But I didn't hardly expect Rachael's friends to make so much of me. Up our way some calculated that Rachael would be looked down on here 'mongst a lot of rich girls, but I didn't believe but what she would be appreciated anywhere. I—I was kind of afraid the rooster would eat tough; but Lizzy, she cooked it real well, and Mary Olive made the plum puddin'. You won't never eat a better plum puddin', if I do say it!"

The pudding was in the large tin pail, the sauce in the small one; Rachael had set both by the fire to heat. Nothing in the Delmonico box could have been more delicious than that plum pudding, and Mrs. Hickling and her daughter both showed their gratification at the girls' appreciation of it. There was a great quantity of molasses corn balls. Little Lysander wouldn't let the box go without some he had made, Mrs. Hickling explained; and the girls' supply of French candy was neglected for the corn balls.

Mrs. Hickling eagerly offered the recipe for the pudding to the girls; and Sally Peyton, who was domestic after a pleasant, Southern fashion, carefully wrote it down.

"Rachael hain't had time to learn to be a real good cook," said Mrs. Hickling regretfully. "She has kept the Doughnut Ridge School summers, and worked in the straw factory winters ever since she was fifteen. When Uncle Pliny left her a wood-lot, we talked it over with the minister, and he thought she'd better sell it and go to college. He helped her to fit for it. She wanted so to help the boys along, maybe to college." Rachael's mother turned toward her daughter, and looked wistfully at the serious, eager face, the small, sinewy, toil-hardened hands. "It's been hard for Rachael since her father died. He got killed by a falling tree. Rachael's had to be the man of the family, bein' the oldest and the smartest. She hain't never had any good times till she come here. Mary Olive has stuck to it that her letters didn't say anything about havin' 'em now, but I told her that it was just like Rachael to be so took up with her studies that she didn't say much about anything else. I know you hain't never let her feel a little strange, and I take it real kind of you."

The girls looked into one another's faces scarlet