

I am sure'; and a pained expression came over Mrs. Walden's face.

Irene saw it and was remorseful at once.

'Mamma, dear!' she exclaimed, throwing both sticky hands about her mother's neck, 'what a horrid creature I am! I've got the blessedest mother in this world, and I don't deserve half I have. After that sickness of yours that so nearly took you away, I'm an ungrateful girl to say one word'; and a hot tear dropped on Mrs. Walden's neck amid the shower of impulsive kisses she received.

Dr. Walden, on his way to the stable, had heard the outburst, and thereupon a suggestion came to him.

After dinner, when all the Tuesday preparations of Thanksgiving week were disposed of, and Irene her own smiling, happy self once more, for her discontent was never more than momentary, he called to her to take a ride with him.

'I have several calls to make, one upon Lila Colby, and perhaps you can cheer her up a bit.'

'Why, what's the matter there now?' questioned Irene in surprise.

'Didn't you hear me say she stepped on a bit of broken glass and cut her foot quite badly? It will be some time before she can step on it again.'

'Why, no; poor thing, after all the trouble she has had, too!' said Irene sympathetically.

She donned her hat at once and seated herself beside her father. It was a real treat to go with him, for she did not often have the opportunity amid study and home duties, which took so much of her time. They chatted together like schoolgirls as they rode along, and the distance to Lila's home seemed very short. Irene looked admiringly at the erect form, with its kind, genial face crowned with white hair, as he passed up the walk before her and, walking in, tapped on the sitting-room door.

'I've brought you a visitor,' he said cheerily to the young girl who had called, 'Come in!'

She smiled delightedly and welcomed Irene with a kiss, saying, 'How good of you to come! I have to be alone so much, for Ida goes out sewing nearly every day now, and I see almost no one, except as the neighbors come in; they are so kind!' she added gratefully, smoothing her black dress with hands that looked unused to hard work.

Dr. Walden attended to his patient, gave instructions as to bandages, etc., and then saying he would call for Irene later, bade them be good girls and 'not talk,' shaking his finger playfully at them and laughing heartily at the absurd idea of leaving two young girls together for an hour and telling them not to talk.

'About you, I suppose you mean, doctor? I'll promise not to say anything very bad,' rejoined Lila, as the door closed after him.

While the others were busily talking, Irene had an opportunity to recall the events of a few short weeks—less than two months in all—in that pleasant little home.

Mr. Colby, returning one day from business in a neighboring town, was thrown from his carriage and so badly injured that, without recovering consciousness, he died within a week. It was a crushing blow to the family, but Mrs. Colby, courageous little woman that she was, brave-

ly took up the burden, and the two daughters clung still closer to their mother.

Then so suddenly came the stroke that took her from them that the poor bewildered girls could but faintly realize all it meant when their home was again desolated and they stood alone to battle with the world. They knew so little of what life means, for heretofore it had been care free and they had been merry schoolgirls. Ida had graduated in the summer and Lila was on her last year in the high school. All they knew of work was what they had learned to do at home, the fond parents little dreaming their girls would need while so young to earn their own living. But so it proved; for when the lawyer, into whose hands fell the settling of the estate, examined the affairs, he found that there was none too much to pay the heavy expenses of the past months, and the house must be sold.

Some of this Lila confided to Irene as the conversation turned from lively to more serious subjects.

'The worst of it is there must be an auction, and everything except what few things we need to furnish a room, must be sold. Isn't that dreadful!' exclaimed Lila, burying her face in her hands and sobbing bitterly. 'It's just terrible to have this thing and that held up for folks to bid on, and hear the remarks made and fun poked at what has always been so dear to you,' she added. 'I've been to auctions just for fun and done the same thing; but that seems ages ago, if it was only last spring!' and the sobs came thick and fast.

Irene threw her arms about her friend and comforted her as best she could. But what could she say to this sad, lonely girl, she whose life was so happy and bright? She could only mingle sympathizing tears with those of her friend, and assure her that her heart ached for her.

'There! I feel better now,' said Lila bravely, smiling through the tears she wiped away. 'It's so hard to be brave all the time, and I do miss my mother so!' and her lips quivered; 'but I try to keep up before Ida, for she has the hardest part. I have to sit still and think, and that's hard, too,' she added. And then with an effort that Irene could see she began to inquire about the schoolgirls and send messages to them, and to talk about the new town hall and the new books in the library, and by the time Dr. Walden returned they were quite merry again.

He came in hurriedly, an anxious expression on his face, saying, 'Be as quick as possible, my dear. I have just heard of an accident on the railway. The down train left the track at Falls Centre, and I must go at once; they will need all the medical help they can get.' So without more words, except a warm good-by kiss and whispered message from Irene, they hurried away.

'I will leave you at the corner and drive as fast as I can; you can explain to mother,' said Dr. Walden. 'I can't tell when I shall return; some time before midnight, I hope'; and giving his precious daughter a loving kiss, he helped her down and drove off at a rapid trot.

Irene was greatly agitated over the news, added to the conversation she had with Lila, and her thoughts were very busy as she hastened towards home.

'Hurrah!' called Joe, her twelve-year-old brother, waving a letter from the top of

the gatepost, where he was watching for her. 'Will's coming! We've had a letter, and he's on his way now; the train'll be here in half an hour!' he called jubilantly. 'Where's father?' he questioned in sudden wonder.

Irene stopped short in her rapid walk and grew as white as a sheet.

'O Joe!' she gasped, 'does he say he's coming to-day? Are you sure? I thought it was to-morrow'; and she seized the waving letter frantically.

'Well, what ails you, I'd like to know?' burst out Joe. 'Aren't you glad? I'd think you'd be when Will's been gone since September.'

Irene read the letter with eager, straining eyes, and then ran gasping into the house, Joe following in vague alarm.

'O mother!' she sobbed, 'there's an accident on the down train, and father's gone because he thought there would be need of help, and Will's coming on that train!' and she sank white and trembling upon the lounge.

Mrs. Walden grew pale with sudden fright and staggered, and would have fallen had not Irene sprung to catch her.

'Oh, what have I done?' she cried remorsefully. 'How could I blurt it out so? Quick, Joe, get some water.'

Mrs. Walden quickly revived, but was scarcely less frightened and tremulous than her daughter. She questioned rapidly to learn the facts, but Irene could tell but little. A man had met her father and told him, and he had gone at once, bringing her only part way to save time.

There was nothing to be done but to wait as patiently as possible. Joe was despatched to the postoffice, where there was a telephone; but although a crowd had gathered, little could be learned, except that it was a serious accident and many injured. Two hours of torturing suspense and then a messenger appeared down the road, bearing a yellow envelope. They watched, hoping and fearing. Yes; it was for them! Three terrified faces met him at the door, and breathlessly Mrs. Walden opened the telegram and read:

Lost my train. Meet me at seven o'clock at Wheeler.

Willis Walden.

The sudden relief was almost too much, and they laughed and cried in one breath, and hugged each other in ecstasy, for Wheeler was on another road, and Will was far away from the scene of the accident and on his way to comfort and assure them with his own cheery presence.

It was after six now and the other horse must be harnessed at once, so Joe and Irene repaired to the barn in gay spirits, while Mrs. Walden gathered her scattered senses and began to prepare supper. Irene declared she was the one to go for Will, while Joe claimed his right as well, and so it was decided that both should go as a relief to their feelings after the terrible strain they had all been under.

How splendid Will did look as he stepped upon the platform, a tall, handsome sophomore, with a 'real moustache,' as Joe said, and how they did hug him and squeeze his hands when they were safely out of sight of curious eyes! Irene disgraced herself by breaking down utterly and crying, which was so astonishing to Will that he stared at her in amazement.

'O Will,' she sobbed, 'we have had such a time!'