

tively; "they might be inconvenient at times, anyway."

They laughed and went into the sitting-room, while the two boys settled down for a game of dominoes. Only one member of the group thought again of the bantering words, and this was little Mary, who sat sorrowfully down upon the bottom stair and looked with troubled eyes at the glorious statue.

For many months Mary had been building a radiant castle, and now it was crumbling before her. Her beautiful Teacher Ruth was slighted, thrust aside for an armless, headless creature, with clinging draperies far removed from simple gowns of Quaker gray. Yes, had not Uncle Ned firmly declared his allegiance to this plaster figure? And suppose it should come to life? Mary shuddered at the thought, and rolled herself up in a mournful little bundle to cry about it.

Vacation ended, Uncle Ned departed as Teacher Ruth returned, and Mary did not know that Miss Ainsley found a volume of poems and a three-cornered note on her dressing-table.

The child went about, cherishing her little trouble and moping so hopelessly that her mother grew anxious, and the neighbors recommended a "spring tonic."

Uncle Ned was very busy during these past few months at college, and his visits grew more rare. This fact Mary noted sadly, and it was a new grief to her that Teacher Ruth so persistently admired the beautiful Victory. Mary could only look upon it with aversion. Uncle Ned did not talk to Teacher Ruth nearly as much now, nor look at her nearly so often.

Ah, poor little Mary, not enough of the woman yet to rightly read these signs of the times! She did not know that it was safer for Uncle Ned to keep his glances and his words for quiet moments in the shady garden or sheltered window-seat, safer for Teacher Ruth to gaze demurely at her plate, or to be occupied with books or sewing. She could not read the mystery in the lovely gray eyes either, nor did she guess why the young woman so often drew the child into her arms in a moment of joyous ecstasy.

It was very sweet to Mary, but she did not understand.

The spring wore away, and June came with its roses and lilies; school and college were nearly over, and one morning Mrs. Marston announced that her brother was coming to spend with them the last Sunday before his graduation.

Mary heard the news, and a bold resolution suddenly possessed her. A crisis was at hand. Uncle Ned was coming. Before he could come again Teacher Ruth would leave them for the long summer time. Something must be done, and like an inspiration came the thought to Mary that the winged Victory must be disposed of. If only this antique beauty were removed from his vision, surely Uncle Ned would see Teacher Ruth again—Teacher Ruth who was possessed of soft, warm arms, and a beautiful, beautiful head.

But how was the abduction to be accomplished? She would have to take the boys into her confidence. The Victory must not be injured because mamma cared so much for her; and then it would never do to treat a Greek goddess—Mary supposed she must be a goddess—with disrespect. Besides, the little girl was still haunted with the vague possibility that the statue might become alive and suddenly loom up before them in all the majesty of divinity. She must be propitiated in some manner. It never occurred to Mary that a goddess might look slightly upon Uncle Ned.

After dinner she summoned her brothers to a favorite retreat in a corner of the orchard, and after pledging them to secrecy with all the oaths dear to childhood, Mary solemnly told her story and revealed her plans.

"What! You mean to say he is gone on Teacher Ruth and the statue, too?" gasped Harold. "Why, I never thought of it."

"Hush!" whispered Mary. "Oh, don't speak so loud, Harold. But don't you see how it is? We must keep him from liking the Victory—it would be so lovely to have Teacher Ruth for our auntie!"

"Why, how could Teacher Ruth ever be our auntie?" asked Jack, to whom these revelations were a huge mystery.

"Well, she will be, I know it," replied Mary, "if only we can make Uncle Ned stop waiting for the statue to come alive. Will you help me, boys?"

"Course we will," said Harold, always ready and eager for a new adventure. "But what can we do with it, Mary?"

"I've thought it all out," replied his sister, the color deepening in her cheeks with earnestness. "We'll carry her to your cave. A cave is a good place for a goddess to live in—only you must promise not to forget and take Uncle Ned there."

"All right, come along!" responded Harold, eager for action, and Jack arose to follow him, Awe writ large upon his face.

"What will mamma say?" he murmured, anxiously.

"Oh, dear," said Mary, wringing her hands, "that's the worst part of it. Poor mamma will feel so bad; but she would be glad if she only knew; and, of course, we'll put the Victory back again after Uncle Ned is gone. We'll just have to take her. There's no other way."

Forthwith the little band of conspirators stole into the house through the side doorway. Their mother was away for the afternoon. Teacher Ruth had not yet returned from school, and the servants were both in the kitchen. Therefore, no one saw the beautiful Victory lifted from her pedestal and borne through the shady garden to a seldom visited corner, where the two boys had constructed what they chose to call a cave. Here the Grecian maiden was carefully set down, and the three breathless little thieves gazed upon her in silence.

"Do you suppose she's mad with us?" Harold asked at length, half laughing.

"I don't know, but I think we'd better offer a sacrifice," replied Mary, soberly. "Don't you remember what Teacher Ruth told us about people sacrificing to the gods to keep them from being angry?"

"Well, what shall we sacrifice?" asked Harold, cheerfully. "I'll build a fire in front of the cave. Here, Jack, you run and pick up some sticks. We ought to have a calf or a dove to kill."

"Oh, Harold, how can you?" cried Mary. "She wouldn't like that. See, I brought a sponge-cake!"

"A sponge-cake!" cried Harold, contemptuously. "Well, I suppose it will have to do as we haven't anything else."

"How can she eat it?" queried Jack. "She hasn't any mouth."

"Goddesses don't eat," explained Mary, with a touch of superiority. "They just smell the food while it's burning."

"Well, she hasn't any nose, either," rejoined Jack.

Mary was silent for a moment.

"I hadn't thought of that," she said dubiously.

Harold paused in his sacrificial preparations.

"Look here, Mary," he began, casting covetous eyes on the sponge-cake meanwhile, "I don't believe there's any need of giving her a burnt offering. As long as she can't enjoy it, s'pose we eat the cake ourselves? Besides, I don't believe ma would like to have us build a fire out here."

"All right," said Mary, who had her own misgivings on this point.

"We can lay some flowers at her feet instead," and the matter being thus amicably settled, the self-ordained priests of the Victory sat down to partake of the sacrificial cake.

Thus it happened that when Uncle

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