

"Oh, thank you," said I; and tremblingly, with fear lest the dreaded Alice should get hold of it, I put my letter into her hands, and soon afterward left the house.

The fog was already so much thicker that I lost myself among the garden-paths, and walked into a flower-bed; and when I heard voices on my left, I made my way recklessly in their direction across grass, flower-beds, and everything. I was just going to speak, when a few words in the man's voice stopped me.

"I have had enough of you Norfolk girls; you are too stand-off for me."

It was Tom Parkes.

It seemed to me, with my suspicions concerning Tom already strong, that in the talk which followed he managed with very little difficulty to find out a good deal about the ways of the household. Presently I heard the sound of a kiss; and he promised to come and see her again on Wednesday; and then they went away; while I, seized by a sudden inspiration, found my way not to the park, but back to the house, which was less difficult.

I asked for Miss Maud Reade again; and this time she rushed out of the drawing-room and met me in the hall as soon as I was announced, and whispered—

"They are all in there. Come into the library."

"May I have my letter back, just to put in something I have forgotten?" said I.

"Oh, yes; here it is!"—and she drew it from her pocket. "Write it here. I will give you a pen. Why, how white you look! Has anything happened?"

"Oh, no, no, nothing, thank you!"

I wrote on a half-sheet of paper, which I carefully folded inside my letter, these words—

"A man who was at Denham Court, and about whom I have strong suspicions is hanging about the Hall now. He is coming here again on Wednesday night."

I put my letter into a fresh envelope, and put the torn one into my pocket that it might not be seen about; then I begged, Miss Reade earnestly to send the letter off at once, as there was something in it of the utmost importance; and she whispered again, "Remember Mr. Reynolds in the winter!" and, having this time got Williamson to show me as far as the beginning of the drive across the park, I made my way in safety back to the Alder.

Haldee left my room next day for the first time, and spent the afternoon by the dining-room fire. Soon after dinner Mr. Rayner came in with his riding-boots on, and asked with a smile if I had not a letter to send to the post. He was going to ride to Beaconsburgh, and, if I gave it to him, it would go a post earlier than if I put it into the bag for the postman to fetch.

"No, I have no letter, thank you, Mr. Rayner," said I, with a blush.

"Not a line for—Nipe, to tell—some one you are coming!" said he archly.

"No," answered I, shaking my head.

"You posted that one yesterday yourself, didn't you, Miss Christie?" whispered little Haldee, putting her arms round my neck.

Mr. Rayner heard the whisper.

"Yesterday?" asked he quickly.

"I—I gave a—a note to Miss Reade to put with hers," said I.

A curious change passed over Mr. Rayner. The smile remained on his face, which had, however, in one second turned ashy white. He said, "All right, my dear," in his usual voice, except that I fancied there was a sort of hard ring in it, and left the room.

That evening, at tea-time, Mr. Rayner announced that he had found a letter waiting for him at the Beaconsburgh post-office which obliged him to go to Monaco a day sooner.

So Haldee and I must be prepared to start on Thursday morning.

CHAPTER XXVI.

On Tuesday afternoon, while I was helping Haldee to dress her doll in the dining-room, there was a ring at the front-door bell, and shortly afterward Jane came in, looking rather frightened, saying a gentleman was in the hall asking for Sarah.

I got up, and, following her into the hall, found a respectably-dressed man, who very civilly apologized for disturbing me.

"Could I speak to you in private for a few minutes, miss?"

"Oh, yes, certainly! Will you come in here?"—and I opened the door of the schoolroom.

He followed me in and shut it carefully.

"I am the brother of Sarah Gooch, miss, who is a servant here."

I nodded assent.

"I've been abroad and worked myself into a good position, and now I want my sister to leave service."

"How could I break the fact of her illness to the poor man?"

"Oh, please be prepared for bad news! I'm so sorry!" said I gently. "She is ill—very ill."

"She was quite well last Friday afternoon."

"Yes—an accident happened to her on Friday night. She fell down a flight of stairs and injured herself severely. If you will only wait until Mr. Rayner comes, he will speak to you. Sarah is a very old servant in the family, and much respected, and she has every possible care I assure you."

But he still seemed more curious than anxious about her, I thought.

"Do you know, miss—if it's not troubling you too much, and you won't take it as liberty—she's got a sweetheart?"

I hesitated. The man's cold curiosity seemed so unlike the warm interest of a brother that I began to wonder whether I was right in giving him the information he wanted. My doubts were so vague and his questions so very harmless, however, that, when he said—

"I beg your pardon, miss—of course it is not for a lady like you to interest yourself in the likes of us—"

I broke out—

"Oh, pray don't think that! Sarah has an admirer, I know—"

He was very much interested at last, and was waiting impatiently for my next words, when Mr. Rayner quietly entered the room. He looked inquiringly at the man, whom I was going to introduce as Sarah's brother, when the latter anticipated me by saying quietly—

"From Scotland Yard, sir."

"Scotland Yard!" echoed Mr. Rayner, inquiringly. But the name did not seem new to him, as it did to me.

"Yes, sir; I've been sent after a woman named Sarah Gooch, from information received that she was in your service. Mr. Gervas Rayner, I believe, sir?"

"Yes, that is my name. But what on earth do you want with my servant, Sarah Gooch?"

"Suspected of complicity in the Denham Court robbery, sir—some of the property traced to her."

"But what proof have you?" asked Mr. Rayner earnestly.

"Last Friday afternoon, between half-past four and twenty minutes to five, your servant, Sarah Gooch, was seen to give the contents of a black bag to a man in Beaconsburgh. The man took the next train to London, traveling second-class. But south of Colchester he was seized with a fit; he was taken out at the next station, the bag he had with him examined for his address, jewels found in it, and the police at Scotland Yard communicated with. The man escaped; but, on inquiries being made, witnesses were found to prove conclusively that the biscuit-tin which contained the jewels had been handed to him in a street in Beaconsburgh, on Friday afternoon, between half-past four and twenty minutes to five, by a woman who was identified as Sarah Gooch. The main point now is, having traced the jewels to the woman Sarah Gooch, to find out how they came into her possession. I must ask you to let me see the woman and question her. Taken by surprise, she may confess everything."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

THE CHILDREN'S CORNER.



Within the cosy nursery,
Two little kitties play,
As good as gold, though full
of fun,
The live-long summer day;
In fact, they were too good
to live,
The mother cat would say.

And day by day, as sweet they grew
As any one could wish,
Until within the nursery
Was placed a bowl of fish;
And they, it seemed the kitties thought,
Would make a dainty dish.

But, wishful ever to maintain
Their character so dear,
They watched the little glittering fins
With longing, yet with fear;
Then all at once devised a plan
To keep their conscience clear.

"Dear brother Tom," said sister Floss,
"I wish we could be told
How is it that these pretty fish
Are all aglow with gold?
Now, shall we find out for ourselves!
We will not make too bold."

"We will not hurt the pretty things,
Nor give one tiny pat
To frighten them—you know we are
Too well brought up for that;
We only wish to peep and see!"
"Quite right," purred mother cat.

Alas! alas! for good resolves:
One little moment more,
And then a crash, an awful smash
Upon the nursery floor,
And kitties sweet beat swift retreat
From out the open door.

A moral I would have you note,
'Tis very quickly told—
To turn from all forbidden sweets,
To be not over-bold,
And learn that all things (even fish)
That glitter are not gold.

—Marian Isabel Hurrell.



Slyboots.

Slyboots was his name, and Slyboots was his nature, but there is this to be said in excuse for his underhand tricks, that he had a wife and family at home who expected a great deal of him, and looked very black indeed when he returned empty-pawed.

"I wish papa would bring us something really nice for once," said the youngest cub, one morning at daybreak; "it's very disappointing when he comes home with nothing to eat."

"There's some truth in what the little chap says," said the son and heir. "I'm sure if I had a fine young family it would be my greatest pride and pleasure to work for them. My father should exert himself a little and provide us with more comforts."

"You shouldn't speak so of your pa," said Mrs. Slyboots; "but I must say I do feel a terrible sinking at this moment. Do poke your nose out of the burrow and see if he is coming."

The three little noses of the three cubs were already stretched out as far as possible.

"Here he comes!" cried one, "and hurrah! he's got something in his mouth!" But, when the father arrived, the prey which dropped from between his teeth proved to be nothing but a very thin weasel. "Here, give it to me," cried the eldest son, "it's no use making two bites at a cherry." He seized the weasel by the neck, but cubby the youngest was too quick for him and possessed himself of the tail. Cub No. 2 contrived to get a leg, and there ensued a savage, snarling breakfast.

"Settle it among yourselves," said the father fox wearily, "you're a set of ungrateful little cubs, and never think of all the trouble I have seeking for prey. I only got that weasel by telling him the ghosts of three rabbits were making straight for his hole. Out he rushed in frantic haste, trembling all over, and I nabbed him at once."

"It's no use mincing matters, father," said the son and heir, licking his lips, "a weasel or so is all very well in its way, but we want some really good solid meals for a change."

"Well," said old Slyboots meekly, "the moon will be up to-night and I will do my best for you. There's no chance of getting into the hen-house, it's locked up so tight, but I've heard that that conceited old cock Chanticleer and one or two hens have taken to roosting in the wood-shed. If their perch is too high I can surely get one of them down by flattery."

It was quite true that, the hen-house being crowded, Chanticleer and his old wife Partlet, also a pretty young pullet called Rosytoes, were sleeping each night in the wood-shed.

"Now, mind what I say, you ungrateful kind," remarked Chanticleer, as the three cubs told themselves that night on their perch, "there's a sly old fox in the neighborhood. He's very likely to push his way in and make up his mind to pay the least attention to what he says."

"Can't I give him a bit of my mind?" asked Dame Partlet. "I should think not, indeed," answered her lord. "You hens are so easily humbugged. If anything has to be said I shall say it."

Sure enough that night the cunning old fox stole in. But the long tail-feathers of the cock were just three inches out of reach. Force would not do, he must try stratagem.

"Good evening, ladies," he began, "pray don't trouble yourselves to turn round."

"I told you so," whispered Chanticleer. "Now mind what I've said, sit tight and hold your tongues."

"I ought to apologize for intruding at this time of night," went on Slyboots, "but I am so much engaged with my family during the day that I can hardly find time to pay visits. Mrs. Slyboots hopes to have the pleasure of calling soon."

"Mrs. S. need not trouble herself," put in Chanticleer, without turning round.

"You are very considerate," said the old fox. "It is true she is very busy with domestic duties. An exemplary mother like you, Mrs. Partlet, will understand."

"He seems a very civil sort of gentleman, really," whispered Partlet. "It is true I did sit an enormous time on that last hatch of eggs without a word of complaint."

"Stuff!" returned Chanticleer. "What fools hens are! My ladies are both asleep, Mr. Slyboots, or ought to be. Pray don't exert yourself to make conversation for them. Good night."

Poor Slyboots felt that he must retire, but as he left the shed he exclaimed admiringly, "What an exquisitely beautiful young creature!" After which he disappeared rapidly.

Now, the remark could only apply to Rosytoes, so her susceptible little heart went pit-a-pat in an instant. "I wonder will he come again," she said softly.

"I should think not, indeed!" said Chanticleer "Impertinent rascal! I've settled him."

Rosytoes sighed gently, and closed her eyes to dream of a handsome red-coated gentleman. Chanticleer's last waking words were, "What fools hens are, to be sure!"

Poor Slyboots received a very cold reception at home, but cheered the family considerably by promising them a fine fat pullet for to-morrow. "I have already made a great impression on her by a well-turned compliment," he explained.

That night Rosytoes could not sleep, her ears were strained to catch the faintest sound. She hoped for another visit from the red-coated gentleman. At last he came. His step and voice were gentle. He was "so delighted to find her quite alone," for the old folks were very sound asleep. He explained that she had quite won his heart, but he dared not venture near the farmyard by day, as he had enemies about who told false and cruel stories about him.

"But to change to a pleasanter subject," went on the sly old fox, "the moon shines gloriously tonight. What do you say to a little stroll with me? How I long for an exchange of ideas with a sweet congenial spirit."

"Why can't we talk in here?" asked Rosytoes.

"Impossible," answered Slyboots, "that bigoted old guardian of yours might wake any moment and so prevent a free interchange of souls."

"You shouldn't speak so of Chanticleer," said Rosytoes. "No work could go on at all but for him—the laborers would never do a thing. He wakes them all up. There is reason to believe that the sun itself rises so early in order to hear him crow—he hinted as much to me himself."

Slyboots with difficulty stifled his laughter and then again begged Rosytoes to descend for a moonlight stroll. But how the whole farm would talk if a pullet went out walking at night, and how angry Chanticleer would be.

"No, Mr. Slyboots," she said at last, politely but firmly, "I cannot leave the wood-shed alone with a stranger."

But at last he extorted a promise from Rosytoes that if he would come again to-morrow she would think it over, and—"perhaps"—

With this the old fox had to be contented, and home he went with his tail between his legs; for Slyboots in the bosom of his family was a very different person from Slyboots abroad.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Cemented Friendship.

Friendship is a good deal like china; it is very beautiful and durable as long as it is quite whole; break it, and all the cement in the world will never quite repair the damage. You may stick the pieces together so that at a distance it looks nearly as well as ever, but it will not hold hot water. It is always ready to deceive you if you trust it, and it is, on the whole, a worthless thing, fit only to be put empty on the shelf and forgotten there. The finer and more delicate it is the more utter the ruin. A mere acquaintance, which needs only a little ill-humor to help it up, may be coarsely puttied like that old yellow basin in the closet, but tenderness and trust and sweet exchange of confidence can no more be yours when a quarrel words and thoughts have broken them than delicate porcelain teacups which were splintered to pieces can be restored to their original excellence.