

## A Brilliant Idea.

### CHAPTER I.—HEAD TO HEAD.

'Now, this is what I call just proper, you and I having supper together, "head to head," as the French say. This is how we shall be when we're ever so old, Mabel—when I'm a nice middle-aged medical gentleman, and my old maiden sister keeps house for me. You're cut out for an old maid, everybody says that. And they always say it of the nicest girls, so you needn't mind.'

Mabel smiled. Whatever Claude had said she wouldn't have minded it much. He was so handsome and merry and kind that everybody, from grandma—who had brought up the three orphans from mere babies, and could be alarmingly stern when she chose—to the gardener's odd man, seemed inclined to indulge and spoil him.

Clang-a-lang! went the door-bell.

'Post!' cried Claude, jumping up from the table and making a headlong dive at the door, 'Christmas cards.'

'Oh, no, not yet!' laughed Mabel, 'Why, this is only the fifteenth. Ella home from Robinsons', more likely.'

Almost as soon as she had finished speaking, Claude was back again waving an envelope triumphantly above his head.

'The rule of the game is,' he observed,

She was opening the letter as she spoke, and roiced inside was a crisp, rustling sheet of paper, with the magic word 'FIVE,' printed very bold and black in one corner.

'A five-pound note, as I'm alive,' gasped Claude. 'Who's it for?'

'It is to buy things for the orphans' Christmas tree! Oh, how good—how lovely of him!' cried Mabel, with sparkling eyes. 'He says he knows how interested I am in it, and how hard I've been working, and he wants to do a little bit of Santa Claus business on his own account. Oh, I am so glad!'

'He is a proper good sort, I must say,' remarked Claude. 'Grandma will be pleased! Shall you write and tell her, or wait till she comes home?'

'Oh, I don't know. She'll be back on Thursday; perhaps I'll wait. I think we ought to buy some nice things with this, Claude—I mean things that will do for the elder girls. It is quite a fortune, isn't it?'

'What shall you do with it in the meantime? You had better give it to me to take care of for you,' suggested Claude, with an elder brotherly air.

'I shall lock it up in grandma's bureau drawer till she comes back,' said Mabel. 'She left her keys with me, and it will be quite safe there.'

Cling-a-ling! went the bell again.

bound volumes exposed to view, the gold and colors of their covers quite visible through the white, semi-transparent 'pin-flores' in which they were wrapped.

'There are six volumes of "The Children's Friend," to start with,' said Claude. 'The youngsters are sure to like them; and I can see some of "Pansy's" too.'

'How nice to have them all in that whitey paper!' observed tidy Mabel. 'But what queer stuff it is! It's crisp and crackly, like the paper my bank-note is made of.'

'So it is,' said Claude. 'It's almost exactly the same. What a pity we can't make some five-pound notes for ourselves! Mabel,' he added, impressively, after a minute's silence, 'I've got an idea—a brilliant idea, that'll be no end of fun! Just lend me your bank-note for an hour or two and I'll astonish you.'

### CHAPTER II.—A 'LITTLE BRICK.'

'She's a disagreeable pig, that's what she is!'

'Oh, Claude,' expostulated Ella, 'I'm sure Mabel is never disagreeable.'

'She is now—precious! It's that old bank-note coming has made her so horrid uppish. Anybody'd think I wanted to steal her old five pounds.'

'Why, what's the matter, then?'

'It's just this. I've got a most splendid—a perfectly scrumptious idea for Christmas cards—the best joke of the season. You know that funny sort of stiff tissue-paper that comes round new books? Well, it's almost exactly like bank-note paper. And I want to make two or three imitation five and ten pound notes with it, in India ink; different words, of course, all about Christmas wishes and that sort, but to look just like the real thing at first sight, and be a jolly take in, you know. And Mabel won't let me look at hers for just five minutes or so, to get the size, and see how the wording goes.'

'I suppose she's afraid of something happening to it,' said Ella. 'But that would be a lovely idea, and you write such beautiful copper-plate that I am sure you could do it splendidly. And it couldn't hurt her note.'

'Of course not! I say, Nelligen'—after a pause.

'Yes?'

Ella tossed back her fair hair, and looked readily up from the book she was reading, for her special pet name and the confidential tone in which it was uttered, suggested that 'fun' of some sort was coming. 'You could help me, you know, if you liked.'

'Could I?'

'Why, yes. In the first place you could get me a sheet or two of that paper I was talking about. Mabel won't let me have even that—some nonsense about giving the books to grandma just as they came, as if taking off their outside wrapper could hurt! But she'd let you look at them, I daresay; and then you could slip off one or two of the papers. And you could get hold of the note for me at the same time just as well as not.'

'I'm afraid I couldn't do that,' Ella said, hesitatingly. 'You say Mabel has locked it up in grandma's bureau.'

'Well, I daresay you know where she keeps the key?'

'She would be awfully cross if she found out,' said Ella—'grandma, I mean. I don't think I could dare—and—I don't think it would be quite right besides.'

'Oh, there, you're just like the rest of the girls!' cried Claude, in accents of disgust. 'Always afraid of something!'

'I'm not afraid,' protested Ella. 'Only,



'IT'S FROM UNCLE FRED.'

'that the one who guesses right has the prize. Consequently, the first Christmas card of the season is awarded to Mr. Claude Harwood, of "The Laurels," Rushington.'

'Oh, Claude, is it for you really?' asked Mabel, as her brother slipped the missive under his plate, and made a show of composedly continuing his supper.

But she was well up to all his tricks, and with a deft movement suddenly tipped up the plate, and pounced upon the letter under it.

'"Miss Harwood"! she read. "Ah, now, if I didn't think so. Why, it's from Uncle Fred! and—oh, I say, Claude, what's this?'

'That's Ella for certain!' said Mabel. 'How surprised she'll be!'

'Wrong again,' said Claude, as a servant entered with a large, square, brown-paper parcel in her arms.

'From Barton's, Miss,' she said.

'Oh, I know,' said Mabel. 'It's the school prizes grandma ordered last week.'

'Let's have a squint at them,' suggested Claude.

'Better not,' said Mabel. 'Grandma mightn't like it.'

'Fiddle!' retorted Claude; and in two minutes the string was untied, the brown paper unfolded, and about two dozen smartly