

stood Mary Smith, and facing her was Sir Arthur. Evidently the girl had hurt herself somehow, for the young man was in the act of bandaging one finger of a rather dirty hand that she held out to him; and, as he tied the last knot, he stooped with an unmistakable expression of love on his face and kissed the finger.

Miss Lester went back to her arm-chair considerably enlightened; but no remembrance of the want of reference came to her.

"She is so pretty and such a thorough lady," thought the romantic old maid; "what more could dear Arthur want? I am sure he has money enough for both, and no relatives to interfere with him." And so she deliberately shut her eyes and let matters take their course.

It was the twentieth of December, the day on which Lord Charlwood was in the habit of hearing his steward read the list of those to whom Christmas presents were to be sent, and the two were sitting together in the Earl's private room.

The Earl looked ill and worried, and listened with an effort to the names. The steward had just read "Miss Lester, Laurel Cottage, Richmond," when the Earl started suddenly and passed his hand across his eyes as though to clear his sight. For a moment a girlish figure seemed to be sitting by his side and a bright young voice to be asking, "Who is Miss Lester, papa?"

"Who's that, Dixon?" Lord Charlwood asked sharply; and, as the steward repeated the name and address, the Earl wrote it down in a note-book that lay on the table at his side. Then, with a sigh, he sank back in his arm-chair, muttering to himself, "It may be a clue."

The steward glanced at his employer compassionately, and went on with his reading. All the dependants and servants in the Charlwood family knew that something was wrong, but they were not certain what it was. Lady Mary, the youngest and prettiest daughter of the house, her father's darling, had left home rather suddenly before the rest of the family. It was said that she had gone to visit some friends, and was afterwards to rejoin her family at their country-seat in Yorkshire. During the previous season a grand match had been arranged for her, to which it was supposed she had given her consent; and the gentleman, a peer with an enormous rent-roll but not a particularly good reputation, was to be their first visitor in Yorkshire, there to be received as a future member of the family. The future husband had arrived a day or two after the family, but the bride-elect had not since been seen.

On the same twentieth of December Miss Lester stayed in bed till dinner-time. She had a little cold, and wanted to be well for Christmas Day; so, as on the first day they met, Sir Arthur, coming in, found Mary Smith sitting alone in the little drawing-room, but this time, instead of arranging flowers, she was trimming a dainty little bonnet to be worn on Christmas Day.

The young man stood for some time with his shoulder resting against the mantelpiece, looking silently down on the curly brown head that was bent over the interesting and absorbing work; then, feeling a little left out in the cold, he said, in a slightly injured tone—

"You might leave that thing alone and talk to me for a bit. I'm going North to-morrow, you know."

"Going North! What for?"

"Well, I suppose you know I have a home up there, and my people will think it very odd if I don't go home for Christmas. My old housekeeper, poor old Mrs. Mackay, will be sending all round to look for me, and, as for the head-keeper Evan, he probably thinks by this time that I ought to be put into a lunatic asylum. It is two months since I last went out shooting."

"Then I think the sooner you go the better," said Mary Smith, sharply; and she turned her back to him as she spoke, bending still lower over the bonnet, to which she was just putting the finishing touches.

Several minutes of perfect silence followed, then the girl rose abruptly and went towards a mirror on the opposite wall. There she stood for some time carefully putting on the bonnet, her eyes, though Sir Arthur did not see them, filling with tears. It was so sudden; she had never doubted for one moment that he meant to spend Christmas Day with them. The tears came faster. She tried to dash them away with her hand, and, furtively taking out her handkerchief, she raised it to her eyes. At that instant the moody young man, still standing with his back against the mantelpiece, looked up. With one stride he was across the little room.

"Molly!"

The girl turned round on him, her eyes still wet, her face a little pale, but looking prettier than ever, framed by the coquettish little black velvet bonnet. Sir Arthur held out both hands.

"Molly darling, I was a brute, I know! Only tell me you want me to stay, and I will!"

With shining eyes, into which had come the old twinkle, flushed cheeks, and lips that quivered a little, though they tried to smile, Mary Smith said, as she put both her hands into his—

"I did so want you to go to church with me in my new bonnet on Christmas Day!"

"Promise me that you will marry me at Easter, and I will go!"

The shining eyes drooped before his ardent gaze, but the quivering lips murmured a faint little "Yes;" and the next moment the curly head, bonnet and all, was on his breast, and he was kissing again and again the pretty face within it.

An hour afterwards, when Miss Lester came down to dinner, she found Mary Smith alone and looking pretty much as usual. She and her lover had settled that Miss Lester had better have her dinner in peace before she was told the great news, and in the afternoon Sir Arthur could meet Mary in the town, when she went to execute various little commissions for the old lady, and come back to tea with her, so that he might help to soften the blow. Both knew well that Miss Lester would feel the loss of her companion greatly. So, when dinner was over and Miss Lester comfortably settled in her arm-chair by the fire, Miss Smith started off at a rapid pace to make her purchases; and, this done, she walked quickly up the hill to the Terrace, where an impatient young man had been waiting for her for at least ten minutes.

As the lovers walked on together, Sir Arthur noticed that Mary Smith was a little absent-minded and scarcely seemed to hear all he said. At last he asked tenderly—

"What is it, Molly? You don't look quite happy. Tell me, dear!"

She smiled, but rather gravely, and clasped her hands over his arm as she looked up into his face.

"Yes, I do want to tell you something. But first—Arthur, you know nothing about me—my name, I mean, or who I am, where I come from, or why I am here—and yet you have asked me to be your wife. I know you trust me or you would not have done that, but I want you to say it once—just once—in so many words."

"Molly, I trust you entirely, whatever your real name may be."

"Thank you—thank you!" she said, giving his arm a tender little squeeze. "Now I shall be quite happy, and on Christmas Day I will tell you all about myself, if you like; but to-day—now—I want to tell you about some one who died—it is too sad for Christmas-time. She was my sister, my eldest sister, and I loved her dearly. She was so pretty and bright and clever, always singing and laughing, so kind to us little ones! When I was only fifteen, she was engaged to a man; she did not care much for him, but it was a good match—mamma persuaded her, talked her into it. Two days before she was married she heard from some one—I don't know whom—that he, the man she was going to marry, was constantly getting tipsy, and once, when he did not know what he was doing, had killed his own favorite dog. Lucy—that was my sister's name—was terribly frightened. They all thought I knew nothing about the affair, but I did; I heard Lucy crying all night. The next day she went to papa and begged and prayed him to save her; but he said he could not—it was too late. He did not believe all she had heard, and he petted and comforted her till she grew bet-

ter. So she was married. Once afterwards she came to see us, and, oh, she was so thin and pale! she never said anything against her husband, but we heard afterwards that it was all true; and he got worse and worse, till at last—"

Here Molly's voice failed for a moment, and Sir Arthur felt her shudder. He drew her to a seat, and, putting his arm round her, as they sat, let her lean against him. After a moment or two, she went on again in low quivering tones.

"There was a little baby born. Once I saw Lucy with it, and she looked quite different. But one day it cried, and he—her husband—was angry. Lucy was standing at the top of the stairs with it in her arms. He came out of his dressing-room—I suppose he had been drinking there, for he did not know what he was doing. He cried out that he would 'stop the brat's squalling!' and rushed at Lucy and struck her. Arthur, she fell from the top to the bottom of the stairs, and, when they picked her up, she and the little baby were both dead!"

Letting her head drop against her lover's breast, Molly burst into tears. Sir Arthur's eyes were dim too, but he kissed her and soothed her until by degrees the sobs ceased and she sat quietly, with her face still pressed against his breast, and both hands clasped on his arm. At last she whispered softly—

"Do you understand now why I left my home? There was some one, and I was afraid; mamma is so—"

She did not finish her sentence, but it was enough; he understood.

"My Molly," he murmured fondly, "it is you who are trusting me, I think. How do you know I shall not turn out a brute, too?"

She raised her head and looked into his eyes.

"No, Arthur, never! You are so good to your old governess!"

"My old governess," he said, smiling, "will be wanting her tea, I think; and it is getting dark. Come, Molly darling!"

It was tea-time when they reached Laurel Cottage. At the gate stood a cab, from which a gentleman had just alighted, and Martha was letting him into the house. With a sudden intuition, Miss Smith pulled her hand from her lover's arm, ran up the narrow pathway, and opened the door as Martha was leaving the drawing-room after showing in the visitor.

"Oh, Miss, here's a gentleman come to see the Missus, and he's a lord, and she only just walked in!" cried the old servant, in a tone of awe and excitement.

"Never mind, Martha; I will go in," said the girl, feeling instinctively that there was no need to ask the gentleman's name; and, closely followed by Sir Arthur, she opened the drawing-room door and went boldly in.

On the rug, with the bright firelight shining on both their faces, stood Lord Charlwood and Miss Lester. He was holding both her hands, while she was looking up into his face with a puzzled expression, as though she was trying to reconcile the grave, anxious face and the crown of almost white locks with her recollection of the proud young father she had last seen in the prime of life and without a gray hair.

As the door opened, the Earl turned, dropped the hands he held, and gasped at his daughter's name. She flew to him, and, throwing her arms round his neck, sobbed out—

"Papa, forgive me!"

He kissed her many times, then held her away from him to look into her face.

"Molly, how could you run away like that? What possessed you to make us all so unhappy? My child, if you only knew what I have suffered all this time!"

She went back for a moment, then, dashing away her tears, she raised her face, and, looking her father straight in the eyes, said bravely—

"I am very sorry for that, papa. I did not want to make you unhappy, but there was nothing else to be done. Mamma had quite made up her mind that I was to marry that fat Lord Balcombe; and," she added, in a lower voice, "you wanted it, too!"

The Earl did not speak; he knew it was true.

"I hated him, papa; he is a bad man—I know he is!"

"But, Molly, if you had only told me so—"

"Papa, Lucy came to you—I remember, though I was so young then—and—"

Her voice broke and she turned away; but the Earl took her in his arms, kissed and soothed her till her tears ceased. Then, still holding her hand, he turned to Miss Lester, who, with pale, scared face, was watching the scene from the depths of the arm-chair into which she had dropped.

"So this naughty girl took refuge with you, my dear old friend?"

"I don't understand. Who is she?" gasped Miss Lester.

Molly left her father, and, kneeling down by the arm-chair, took both the old lady's hands in hers.

"It is all right, Miss Lester. He is my father, and he told me about you once; so, when I did not know where to go, I saw your advertisement and came. That's all!"

This explanation was enough to reassure the old lady some what, and, by the time Molly had kissed and soothed her a little, she was quite ready to enjoy the unexpected romance of the whole affair.

Meanwhile Lord Charlwood had glanced several times at Sir Arthur Kennard, who was not very much surprised, and had stood quietly enough waiting until his turn should come.

Molly turned to her father again at last, and, catching one of his slightly curious looks at Sir Arthur, sprang up and went to her lover.

"Papa, this is Sir Arthur Kennard, and he wants to marry me—that is, he did when he thought I was Mary Smith; perhaps now he will change his mind."

She looked into his face with a defiant sparkle in her eyes as she spoke. Sir Arthur caught her in his arms and kissed her several times, and then led her across the room to her father.

"I don't feel quite clear as to who you are, sir; but it is quite true, I love your daughter, and I want to marry her."

"Oh, Arthur," cried the old governess, "he is Lord Charlwood, my first boy!"

"I know you very well by name, Sir Arthur," said the Earl, "and have often heard you well spoken of. After such an escapade, I think my naughty girl here is only too lucky to have won such a husband."

The Earl stayed to tea and supper at Laurel Cottage, sending a telegram to town and going with Sir Arthur to his hotel at night.

On Christmas Eve, Miss Lester, Molly, and the two gentlemen travelled down to Charlwood Castle, where, in consequence of a rather strongly worded letter from Lord Charlwood, they were well received by its mistress. Besides, various little facts lately come to light about Lord Balcombe had made her ladyship only too willing to accept her daughter's chosen husband, and to greet with kindness the old governess who had been the undoubted though ignorant cause of the match by taking Mary Smith as MISS LESTER'S COMPANION.

M. C.

"Here and Hereafter."

What wonder when the training of the schools Has done such work as schools and lessons can; When through the discipline of tasks and rules The boy compacts, expands into the man.— If the field the Father bids him come, Where manhood's earnest standards are unfurled, Is not the school an exile from the home? Is not the school the threshold of a world? This earth is but for learning and for training, Earth's highest work but such as children do; The workmen here their precious skill are gaining, The true life-work is *growing*, out of view.

This life doth but our life begin, Is but outside the porch of the above; And death the going home—the entering in, The stepping forth on the wide world of God.

THE CHILDREN'S CORNER.

The "prize story competition" is now over, and no more fairy tales need be sent in. Results will be published next issue.

COUSIN DOROTHY.

A "Proverb-Hunt" will now begin this column. A prize is offered for correct solutions of the first three pictures. Only children of subscribers may compete, and competitors must be under sixteen years of age. Answers should be sent in for each group, e.g., 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, etc. A prize is offered for each group of three pictures, and a better one at the end of the year for the largest number of correct answers. Letters marked "Proverb-Hunt" will not be opened until ten days after the third picture of each group is issued. The first letter opened, containing correct answers, will be prize winner; all others will receive honorable mention. Address your letters to Cousin Dorothy, as above, and mark them "Proverb-Hunt"—outside the envelope.



HIDDEN PROVERB—NO. 6.

Watching the Tongue.

Keep a watch on your words, my children,
For words are wonderful things;
They are sweet like the bees' fresh honey—
Like bees, they have terrible stings;
They can bless like the warm, glad sunshine,
And brighten the lonely life;
They can cut in the strife of anger—
Yes, cut like a two-edged knife.
Let them pass through your lips unchallenged
If their errand be true and kind—
If they come to support the weary,
To comfort and help the blind;
Should a bitter, revengeful spirit
Prompt the words, let them be unsaid:
They may flash through the mind like lightning,
Or fall on the heart like lead.

Keep them back, if they're cold and cruel,
Under bars and lock and seal;
The wounds they make, my children,
Are always slow to heal.
May Christ guard your lips, and ever,
From the time of your early youth,
May the words that you daily utter
Be the words of beautiful truth!

Two Pictures.

BY HATTIE LUMMIS.

It was Carl who had suggested the game, and so, of course, he was the photographer. He had thrown an old silk scarf of mamma's over his head, and peering from under its folds, he issued his directions.

"Don't crowd, Bess. Ned, stand up straighter; and Connie, you must hold that doll so I can see her face, if you want her to get a good picture."

Ned stood upright with as dignified an air as possible. Connie clasped Rosalind in her arms, while little Bess nestled close to her, looking as if she were not quite sure whether this was a play or a serious matter. There was a moment of perfect quiet, and then the young artist said in a tone of relief: "There, that will do. I guess it's going to be a nice picture."

Somebody stood in the doorway and laughed. "I think myself it's a nice picture," mamma said, addressing Uncle Jack. "Don't you?"

"Very nice, indeed. I think I shall have to bring my camera over some day and photograph the group," said Uncle Jack.

"Then I want to be taken too," cried Carl, emerging from under his extinguisher. "I can wear my soldier cap."

"An' I want my dolly tooked," lisped Bessie; and immediately there arose such a hubbub that Uncle Jack clapped his hands over his ears and threatened to run away, if they were not quieter.

The next morning it stormed; not a brisk snow-storm, but a drizzling half-rain which made things seem very dismal indeed. Not even Ned could go out of doors, though mamma was obliged to go down town on an errand which could not be postponed. She came to the nursery door before she left the house and kissed each of the four gloomy faces raised to hers. "Now, do be good children," she said; but there was an anxious expression upon her face as she spoke.

And indeed she had reason to be anxious, for she was hardly out of sight before everything was going wrong. Baby Bess began to cry lustily over some grievance, real or otherwise. The boys fell to disputing roughly, and even Connie, who was usually a peace-maker, added her mite to the growing discord. In the midst of it all, a sharp click sounded at the door, and the children, looking up, saw Uncle Jack. In a moment they had rushed upon him.

"Oh, Uncle Jack, have you come to take our pictures?"

"I have taken it already," Uncle Jack answered briefly.

"But—but—why, we weren't ready at all," stammered Connie.

"So I suspected," said Uncle Jack. "And yet, on the whole, I think it was better to take the picture when I did."