

✿ ✿ The Story Page ✿ ✿

A Song of Toil.

I take the little kiss she gives when I go forth at morn,
I take the little farewell wish upon the breezes borne;
I take her little arms' caress and in the morning light
Go out into the world of toil, the battle for the right.

Ring, anvils, with your clangor!
Burn, forges, fierce and far!
The night shall bring the world of home,
Where love and goodness are!

I lean to little lips she lifts to my rough lips of love,
I read the mother-hope that shines in eyes that gleam above;

I hear the roaring city call, and unto it I go
Light-hearted for the stress, because a child heart loves me so.

Swing, hammers, with your clatter!
Whirl, wheels, and shaft and beam!
The light of love shall guide me home
From out this shroud of steam!

I take the little rose she holds and pin it on my breast,
I take the tender memory of her word that cheered and blest;

I face the urgent purpose of the labor that is mine,
Filled with her trust and patience, her youth and faith divine.

Plunge, cities, with your thunder
Of traffic-shout and roar!
I take the task and do the deed,
While she waits at the door!

I take the task, I face the toil, I deem it sweet to be
Bound to the labor that is love for love's fine liberty;
From morning unto eventide, remembering her I go
Under the bending wheel that glides forever to and fro.

Sing, mills, your clattering chorus,
Down where the millions sweat!
I bare my arms and give my strength
And joy in what I get!

I give and take, and give again, and unto dark am bent
Beneath the burden of the task for which sweet life is spent;

But, ah! the wage so dear to have, the little lips that wait,
The hearts that ring, the arms that cling, when I unlatch the gate!

Clang with your mighty revel!
Roar, cities, with your strife!
And God be praised for strength to toil
For wage of love and life!

—Folger McKinsey in Baltimore News.

Keeping Grandmother Markham Company.

BY MABEL GIFFORD.

Grandma Markham was lonely; that was the beginning of it. She wrote a letter to mamma, and mamma began to read it aloud.

"Dear children and grandchildren," that is the way she begins. "I am as well as usual." She never was ill in her life, really ill, so she could not see to her house. She told me so herself when she was here last winter. "John is as well as usual"—he's her hired man—"Eliza is as well as usual"—she's her hired woman. "Dr. Thompson is laid up with a sprained ankle"—he is grandma's doctor. "Minister Parish worked too hard during his vacation, and now is able to do only his necessary duties. So I have no calls from either. I miss them much. I am very lonely. I"—

Mamma stopped reading aloud, and, after reading a moment to herself, looked at us. Then she thought a little.

What could grandma have written? Perhaps she had sent for mamma to make her a visit, and she was thinking whether it would do to leave us to keep house. I should think so, indeed; four of us!

"Grandma wants me to send one of my girls to keep her company this winter."

"Oh-h-h!"

You see it was this way: Grandma lived in a big house in the country. It was a delightful place in summer, but the dreariest place in winter.

"She is an old lady, and she is lonely; she needs some one to cheer her up," said mamma, looking at each of us to see who would offer to go.

"I couldn't leave my studies," said Marian. "Mamma wouldn't allow me to, would you, mamma?"

"I should not permit the studies to stand in the way, if you were willing to go," said mamma.

"Send Carry," said Marian, "she can go as well as not; and she would do better than I at the cheering-up business."

"Oh, I couldn't go, possibly," said Carry, quickly. "I have a class in the Sunday School, and my name is down for half a dozen different things in the Young People's Society. And besides all that, mamma could not spare me, could you, mamma?"

"Yes I could manage somehow to do without you, for grandma's sake," said mamma with a smile.

"Oh, mamma, send Blanche," begged Carry; "she has no school and no church affairs to keep her at home, and she never touches the housework, so you would not miss her."

"Indeed!" said Blanche, giving her head a little toss, "what will you and the others do for gowns and hats,

Miss Carry, if I desert you? And then I am in the midst of my painting lessons. It would be a waste of money and time and labor to stop now and get out of practice and forget all I have learned. You could not get along without your darning and patcher, your dressmaker and milliner, could you, mamma?"

"I think I would for three or four months," said mamma gently.

Then mamma looked at me, and I knew she wished me to go.

"I will go and keep grandma company, if you think I will do," I said; and I was frightened at the very thought of it as soon as I began to speak.

Marian and Carry and Blanche looked at each other queerly, and then at me. They did not want me to go, yet they could not make up their minds to go in my stead.

It was settled next day that I should go. I did not wait to get there to be homesick; I was homesick before I started. But I did not mean any one should know it.

If grandma had been a jolly kind of a grandma it would not have been so bad; but she was so stately and dignified! Her skirts stood out and took up a good deal of room, and rustled when she walked. She never said things for fun, she never smiled when other folks did.

Grandma met me at the platform. I was trying so hard not to cry, but I looked at her and gave her a smile. Trying to smile made it worse, somehow, and I wished I hadn't. But when she smiled back at me, such a kind smile, I couldn't hold out any longer, and I put my hands over my face and cried.

You see I was not expecting that smile, I never saw her smile like that before. How I did feel to be crying before grandma, the very first thing too! Thinking of this made me cry all the harder.

"Why, my dear!" said grandma—"why, my dear! did you not wish to come?"

"Oh, yes," I said; it's pretty hard work talking when you are crying. "I wanted to come, I am glad I have come. Please don't think I am crying because I have come."

I thought she looked displeased, and that she was wishing one of the older girls had come. I made up my mind I would not behave like a baby any more. I would try to act as old as my sisters and be just as good company as I possibly could.

We did not go into the dining-room to eat supper, Grandma had a little table set right beside the fire, and it was so cosy. But, after supper, grandma sat and looked into the fire, just as if she had forgotten I was there. I heard the hall clock going tick-tack so solemn, and black shadows danced up and down the walls.

Grandma had had the lights carried out, because she wished to sit in the firelight a while.

"How do you get along with your music lessons?" asked grandma, just as I was wondering if she had gone to sleep, and thinking how terrible it would be to have an evening like this every day.

"This is my third year," I told her, "and I love it grandma, I just love my music."

"There is no piano here," said she.

"No," I said, "because you were so kind as to let mamma take it for us to practice on."

We talked music all the evening. I did not know grandma could be so interesting.

When I had been with grandma a week she asked me if I thought I could stay with her all winter. I told her I thought I could, and asked her if she thought I would do. "You are a dear little companion," she said.

I have tried to be grown up like my sisters, and had not cried, except after I had gone to bed.

"But," said grandma, "I do not like to see you so quiet. Young folks should be gay and happy."

"I thought"—I began, and then stopped.

"Oh!" said grandma, smiling a very bright smile, "you thought I wanted a little old woman for a companion." Then she laughed, and I began to think she might be a jolly grandma, after all.

The next week she began to invite the young people in the village to visit me, and sent her carriage for them; and just after Christmas she asked me how I would like to have a New Year's party. Now, wasn't that good of her? I was afraid it would be too noisy for her.

"Be as merry as you can," she said; "it will do me good."

I shall remember that New Year's Day as long as I live. It was sleighing, and the brightest and sunniest winter day. We began it with a sleigh ride. Twelve boys and girls were invited. Some of us went in grandma's sleigh, and the rest in a big pung filled with straw. Coming home we changed about.

In the evening, just before it was time to go home, grandma said: "I am going to give Millicent something to begin the new year with, and I think you would like to see it."

She unlocked the music-room door and pushed it open. The room was lighted with colored candles, and decorat-

ed with grandma's ferns and begonias; and there, right before my eyes, was a splendid upright piano.

I gave a little scream, and ran right to it and began to play. I was just starved for my music.

How I played! It seemed as if I never wanted to stop. But all at once I remembered the party, and whirled around on the music stool. They were looking so surprised and delighted. They began to cheer and clap their hands.

As I caught a glimpse of grandma standing behind them I wondered she had not allowed me in the music-room before. Then I remembered she had told me there was no piano there. I was too bewildered to do any more thinking, and we had some singing before the party went home.

Just as they were going out of the room I remembered grandma was going to give me something. I felt very much ashamed at having been so taken up with the music as to forget it. I ran up to her and asked her as quick as I could.

How they all laughed. "Is it this good time?" I asked, puzzled.

"It is this good piano," said grandma.

"Why, you blessed Grandma Markham!" I said, and hugged her round the neck and cried.

I never knew a lovelier minute after that, and that winter, instead of being the dreariest of my life, was one of the brightest.

But I have not told the whole story yet. Grandma sent me to the city to the Conservatory of Music twice a week, to take lessons. I was the happiest girl in the land.

When I went home in the spring, to stay until we all went to grandma's for the summer each of my sisters said to me: "I wish I had gone."—Ex.

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Grandma's Foot-Stove.

The children had been rummaging in the garret, and they brought down such a funny looking thing—a tin box set in a wooden frame, with little carved pillars.

"What's it for?" asked Jack.

"And what's its name?" asked Patty.

"That is a foot-stove," said grandma, looking over her glasses. "We used to fill it with hot coals and carry it to church to keep our feet warm. You see, there was no fire in the church, and it was very cold in winter. The frost on the windows was often so thick that they looked like ground glass."

"I remember the first time that our folks let me carry a foot-stove myself. Mother was sick, and father stayed home to take care of her, so I went to church alone. How grown-up I felt, as I marched up the aisle, holding the foot-stove in my mittened hand, and sat down by myself in one corner of the family pew!"

"The backs of the pews were all so high that I could not see any one except the minister, away over my head, in the pulpit. He was a very wise man, and used long words that I couldn't understand at all; and I soon grew tired of watching his breath make little clouds of vapor in the cold air while he was speaking."

"Then I thought how nice it would be to curl up on the seat and take a little nap. Nobody was in sight but the minister, and he had taken off his glasses and laid them in the hymn-book, and I knew without them he never could see me when he was out on his morning walk, and passed me on my way to school. So I tucked my big muff of gray squirrel's fur under my head and put the foot-stove to my feet, and felt so comfortable that I fell asleep in one wink."

"When I awoke I was surprised to see the pulpit empty and the sunset sparkling through the frosty wet windows. I was astonished to find that I must have slept a long while, the people had all gone away without noticing me, and I was locked up alone in the church!"

"O, Grandma, weren't you afraid?" said little Patty.

"Yes, for I knew it would be quite dark before evening service, when the church would be unlocked again."

It was stinging cold, too, and I put my little numb fingers on the foot-stove and tried to get the tingle out of them.

"Pretty soon I heard some one unlock the door. I thought it was the sexton and stood up on the seat to see, peeping over the back of the pew. Oh, Patty and Jack, how I felt when I saw it was the dignified old minister himself! He had left his glasses in the hymn-book, and came back to get them. How I wished that I had never taken that naughty nap!"

"However, I told him just how rude I had been, and how I went to sleep in the middle of his sermon. I cried pretty hard as I told the disgraceful story, for I thought he would scold me, and all in dreadfully long words, too, but he never said a thing except 'The poor little pussy!' and then he picked me up in his arms, foot-stove and all, and carried me safe home."

"But what an ashamed little girl he set down on our doorstep!"—Youth's Companion.