

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## The Mayflower's Message.

(Frances A. Doughty, in 'Christian Herald.')

### I.

Miss Nute's scholars had a May holiday, and they spent it most happily in the woods, hunting the lovely pink and white blossoms of the arbutus, called in their New England home the mayflower.

One class of her girls, ten in number, belonged to the 'King's Daughters.' They had for the time a genuine enthusiasm for helping other people, and now even wanted to give away the exquisite pleasure they found in a large bed of mayflowers.

The result of the generous impulse was that before night they had tied up twenty-five or thirty small bunches, attached cards to each, with a favorite maxim or quotation, and expressed the floral offering to the President of their Society to dispose of as she might think best in New York. Miss Nute told them the flower was considered very choice there, as it is not found growing in the country near that city.

### II.

The streets of New York are very lonely to a person in trouble. Poor little Hetty Harvey walked along wearily on the beautiful May day, the sky blue above her, and the dawning springtime fresh with promise in the air, but her spirit felt as worn and shabby as the walking-suit she had lived in all winter, and she was painfully conscious of not matching the day at all. Only a forlorn remnant of pride prevented her from crying in the street.

'Everybody and everything is against me,' she said to herself bitterly, turning her head away as she passed a big store on Fourteenth street. She did not wish any of the shop-girls there to see and recognize her. Some articles were missing from her counter, and she had left there the previous week with circumstances strongly against her, dismissed ostensibly because the force was being cut down. There was no open accusation, but a cold stiffness in the manner of the head-clerk put her pride in arms, so she would not ask for a letter of recommendation to assist her in getting another place. Probably he would have given her one if she had asked him. He would have seen that she felt strong in her own innocence.

She went at once to call on the lady she had sewed for when she first came from Vermont. A strange family was occupying the house, and she was told at the door that the people who used to live there had gone to Europe.

'To Europe!' she echoed, from a great deep of disappointment that you who read this in happy homes cannot fathom. 'They might as well be at the bottom of the Dead Sea—sometimes I wish I was there myself!'

Hetty had no home, and she had just money enough left for one night more, another supper and breakfast at the reduced rates of a certain 'Working Girls' Home.' She had never been brought low enough to ask charity; and had not the means to pay her way back to Vermont to stay with her only relatives—some very distant ones—until she could find work there. She had left them to try her fortune in the great city of New York, where she had heard many more avenues were open than in the rural districts, and the Yankee spirit of independence and progress in this blue-eyed dimpled maiden could not bear an out-and-out defeat. She looked soft, but she had a certain strength of purpose. She remembered

that a family she used to know in Vermont was living in Jersey City. She had seen none of them for years, but surely they would feel enough interest in a fellow-townswoman to help her to find a situation. Perhaps they would ask her to stay with them for a day or two until something 'turned up,' and every day would make a difference in the present state of her finances.

Acting upon this she took the Elevated road and was soon at the ferry. After crossing it she went into the first drug store she came to in Jersey City, to consult a directory. Her heart gave a great bound of joy when she found the name she was looking for—'Turbill, Hannah, widow,' etc. The street and number were not far from the ferry; she was soon at the house, and, pleased with her luck thus far, rang the bell eagerly.

A gaudily dressed girl came to the door. Hetty knew her at a glance, but was eyed in return without a gleam of recognition. The two had not met since they were children.

'What do you want?' said the young woman—Miss Printhy Turbill—rather curtly, as if impatient at the interruption.

'Don't you remember me, Printhy? We used to be schoolmates—'

'Land sakes!—as if there wasn't a hull lot of girls who went to school with me, and how in creation am I to keep track of 'em all?'

'Hetty Harvey.'

'Why to be sure! I do remember there was a Harvey girl. Her mother used to make real good cookies; she had 'em for lunch'—smiling, and thawing considerably—'Come in, Miss Harvey.'

Just at this moment a bell rang at the other end of the hall. Hetty could see the dining-room open and a table spread there, so this bell must be the summons to dinner, an awkward time for her to arrive.

Printhy looked toward the parlor as Hetty stepped over the door-sill, and giggled meaningly.

'I know you'll excuse me; a gentleman is in there—me and him's a keepin' steady company and I've got to speak to him this very minute. You just wait till I call mother.'

'Mother!' she screamed: 'Come out here, somebody wants you,' and then Miss Printhy took her flight.

Hetty swallowed a feeling of reluctance with one resolute gulp, as a stout, middle-aged woman came waddling out of the dining-room, fastening her dress hurriedly at the waist, as if in the act of making a second toilet. It was evident that after officiating as cook, she was about to act the part of hostess at the dinner-table to that gentleman, 'Keeping steady company' with her daughter in the parlor.

'Hello! if this ain't Peter Harvey's girl—I see the likeness.'

'Yes—he was my father.'

'What be you doin' in New York?'

'Working for my living, Mrs. Turbill. You may have heard that I was left an orphan—' then realizing that not a minute was to be lost—'Oh, do tell me if you know of any work I can get to do?' she added, in an eager breath.

As yet she had not been invited to sit down. This civility was merely forgotten. Mrs. Turbill was not a bad-hearted woman, she was only flustered, having something else on her mind.

'No, I haven't heard of no place at all, lately. I hope you ain't given dissatisfaction to your last employers?' (not too hurried to throw in a little cheap advice). 'A girl with her way to make in the world hadn't ought to be too particular. Well, we're just up to our eyes in work, a gettin' Printhy ready to be

married. It came sort o' sudden like. That's her gentleman in the sittin'-room now, and it's the first time he's come from down East to visit us, and we've got to have him here to dinner. I tell you, Miss Harvey, just you call some other time. I'd ask you to stay over night, but you see he's got the spare room, and Printhy—her room is chuck full of patterns, and dresses, and what with the sewin' machine and her sheets and pillow-cases we're a makin', there's hardly room to turn round. You ain't busy now, you say. Come again while you have holiday, later in the spring, and we'll talk about the folks down to Vermont, and old times. We calculate to git all through this all-firin' rush after while, and take a little breathin' spell before the weddin'. Goodby, Miss Harvey.'

If Mrs. Turbill did not literally close the door in her guest's face, she came very near doing it.

'Good afternoon, Mrs. Turbill.'

Hetty set her mouth firmly as she turned her back on that inhospitable door, resolving never to darken it with her shadow again. They should never even hear what became of her if she could prevent it. When she stepped on to the ferry-boat again she lowered her veil, looking under it, away from her fellow-passengers, at the water in the dock. The sun lit it up cheerily, but she thought only of the thick blackness underneath the bright surface, and a voice from way down there seemed to call her:

'If all else fails, rest is here, this is always open to you.'

It was a long way from the Cortlandt street ferry to the Working Girls' Home, but Hetty could not afford to ride there. As she walked along one temptation after another came to her. How should she escape the cruel uncertainty of the present, the despair of the near future, when she would find herself without money, without friends in this desolate wilderness of New York. Were there no ways out of this dreadful dilemma?

Yes,—death, and begging,—and some other ways, too, but sinful ways, Hetty had never walked in and scarcely understood.

What if she were to abandon herself recklessly to the current of the hour? It was growing strong, relentless, irresistible.

### III.

The dining-room in the Working Girls' Home was in the basement; when supper was ready, Hetty followed the others into it dejectedly.

As they entered the door a delicious perfume filled the air, strong and penetrating, like nothing but the woods in the earliest springtime. Hetty Harvey knew this perfume well, though it had not greeted her for two years.

She took a seat mechanically. A bunch of mayflowers was lying on the plate before her—whose was it? Then looking down the table she saw a similar one on each plate, fresh and delicate, as if gathered this May day.

This bunch then was intended for her. Childhood's early memories, evoked by that woody odor, came rushing back on the swift wings of sense. How often she had gathered the mayflower with her mother and father in their Sunday afternoon walks, or her own solitary rambles. It was her mother's favorite wild flower, and but a few weeks ago she had written to ask an old neighbor to place a bouquet of it, when it came into bloom, on the lonely graves of her parents in the country cemetery.

All the sacredness of home influences in other and happier days rushed over her in an overwhelming tide. For a few moments she