

Mealtime Sunshine.

(Miss Lucy A. Yendes, in 'New York Observer'.)

'Pansy, have you got my stockings?' came in a querulous tone in Elizabeth's voice, and saying almost as plainly as in so many words, 'I know that you have, so don't deny it.'

'No, indeed, I haven't. I have plenty of stockings of my own!' retorted Pansy, indignantly.

'Then where are mine?' inquired Elizabeth.

'I did n't eat 'em; and I'm not wearing 'em,' snapped the irate Pansy. 'You'd better take care o' your things, an' then you won't lose 'em all the time.'

'I do take care of 'em, and I don't lose 'em when you leave 'em alone,' replied Elizabeth hotly.

Nor did her heat diminish when she found the stockings hanging to her own skirt, which Pansy had thrown on the floor when she wanted to sit down in the one chair which that room afforded, while she put on her own stockings. In this spirit, heated and irritated, they entered the dining room, with its brightly glowing fire, for it was early autumn, and the grate had been lighted.

'Good morning, girlyes,' and 'good morning, papa,' preceded the usual kiss; and they sat down to the breakfast table, partly mollified, finally forgetting their half quarrel. But Mr. Phelps did not forget, and several times during the day he just thought of how he might bring harmony between his two motherless daughters, girls of twelve and fourteen years, who should not only have been companionable to each other, but a great comfort to him, instead of which scarcely a meal passed in which they did not have 'high words' even though they did not actually come to blows. Finally he wrote to his sister-in-law, a young lady who was teaching in a girls' school in New York, stating the case frankly, and saying that while he did not so much mind on his own account—although he felt that he was being deprived of what might have been his chief comfort—but because he saw that his daughters were really developing an antipathy for each other, and growing into a really selfish disregard of other people's feelings and their natural rights, one of which is to live in peace and harmony, to have an atmosphere of happiness even when deprived of luxuries or even of comforts which neither of his daughters were. 'And now,' he added, 'I wish that you would come and live with us for a year or two. Study the girls, and see if you cannot bring them together. I will double the salary that you are getting, and ask nothing except that you will "mother" my motherless girls.'

When Clara Bannister received that letter she did not hesitate as to what she would do, but at once responded: 'Meet me at the five o'clock train, Saturday,' which Mr. Phelps did, and so had a quiet talk before getting home with her, to the six o'clock dinner.

Both the girls were somewhat reserved before the aunt, who was almost a stranger to them; and this did not wear off the next day; but Monday morning before breakfast, Aunt Clara heard something similar to what had taken place on the preceding Monday, of which I have

written, and while she was yet in her own room, which she had asked might be put next to theirs, that she might 'study' them unawares.

'I'll presume that Elizabeth is orderly, and Pansy careless,' she thought, fastening her tie. 'I wonder why they room together in this big house.' She went down to the dining room before the girls were ready, and noted their faces as they came in, one sullen, the other defiant.

The meal was almost silent, Mr. Phelps dreading an outbreak, Aunt Clara studying ways and means of prevention, and the girls rather hating to show themselves in so unfavorable a light before their young aunt. But they separated for the day, Mr. Phelps going to business and the girls to school.

After a few days more of quiet study, Aunt Clara found, as she surmised, that while Elizabeth was extremely orderly and neat to fastidiousness, Pansy was not only disorderly, untidy in habits and person, but that Elizabeth roomed with her to please Pansy, who was timid.

One afternoon Aunt Clara invited Pansy into her own room, and after a time she said, 'Pansy, if we only had a cot, which I could put right in that alcove, I'd love to have you room with me.'

'Oh, my! Wouldn't that be lovely. And there is one in the deep closet off the hall. I'll move right in.' And she did, to Elizabeth's great pleasure; for although only two years older than Pansy, she had felt, in a measure, responsible for her and had really sacrificed her own feelings a great deal in rooming with her young sister.

Of course Pansy was rather more careful about encroaching on Aunt Clara's rights than she had been with Elizabeth; but when she used Aunt Clara's comb, and left hairs in it, Aunt Clara called her back from the dining room, and quietly said: 'Pansy, I don't so much mind your using the comb, until you can get one of your own; but please don't leave hairs in it.'

'Why, I have a comb, Aunt Clara!' in surprise.

'Be kind enough, then, to use it, so as to leave mine for my convenience,' pleasantly, but firmly. This was hard, but nothing to not being allowed to throw all her things down wherever and whenever it happened, regardless of Aunt Clara or her things; but they were so chummy and Aunt Clara was so constantly planning good times for the girls, and was so bright and so ready to help them with their lessons, to go with them wherever they were allowed to go at all, and had such an immense stock of stories, of quotations, of information, of fun, and was altogether so 'perfectly lovely,' that Pansy submitted, and by little and little grew into habits of order and neatness.

And the meals became pleasant, each one having some 'Sunshine' memory to be carried away by each member of the family, for Aunt Clara believed thoroughly in the principle that digestion depends as much upon the 'tone' of the meal as upon its materials. She also took great pains to help the girls see that very much depended upon their individual efforts, for if they maintained a cheery disposition and shed a happy influence at the table, it was infectious; while, on the contrary, if they had 'differences' and brought all of them to the table, they not only did

themselves a great injury, but they helped spoil the possibilities of the entire day for the entire household.

'And now, girls,' she said, in conclusion, one day, when the conversation had come around to this point, by natural gradation, 'I do want to see each of you thinking of this, and of your own possibilities for good, by just merely shedding "Sunshine," no matter how you feel. What if you are out of sorts? You have no right to help put the entire world out of joint with you. What if you do have troubles? You are not lonesome in that. Everybody carries a load of some sort, and it only remains for each of us to carry our own with as little ado as possible, but also to see how much we can do to lighten the troubles of others, and one of the very best ways, one of the easiest, to make your father perfectly happy, is to send him away from home in the morning with "Sunshine" in his heart that you have shown at the breakfast table, so that no matter what comes up in his business to distress or worry him, he will have his little daughters for comfort, and then when he comes at night, you can smooth away all his cares at dinner in the same way. Learn to keep your troubles away from the table, and allow nothing but pleasant conversation to predominate. You will have to bury self, in a measure, to do this; but that is the very spirit of "Sunshine," to think less of self and more of others. The world will never be better than its homes; and every happy home helps make a happy world.'

Elizabeth and Pansy were no worse and no better than millions of other little girls (I say nothing about boys, this time), who are too likely to let their little personal feelings come up, untrained and unrestrained, at the table, perhaps spoiling the meal for the very ones who need it most, besides spoiling their own characters, in sheer thoughtlessness, which soon develops into absolute selfishness.

We have no right to be selfish, nor even to be thoughtless, and one of the very best places to train out either quality, is at the table, by making it a place where no unkind word is heard, no scowl, frown, or pout is seen; and here is where the children of the household can do more than anyone else to radiate 'Sunshine,' for they are without the worldly cares, the financial anxieties, the other burdens of the older people.

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