

CHAPTER XXIX

THE Flathers' family was indulging in a birthday party. The table, set in the bedroom so that Chick might participate, was decorated at one end by a gorgeous pink cake, bearing a single candle, and at the other by Loreny herself, blue of eye, and chubby of cheek, who crawled triumphantly about among the dishes, bestowing equal attention on the sugar bowl and the molasses jug, only pausing to emit ecstatic screams when a rough, red head appeared above the table rim.

In the bed, propped on pillows and with throat bandaged, Chick executed a lively tune with knife and fork on his plate, while Maria Flathers dedicated herself to the task of preventing Loreny May from putting her blue-slippered foot in the butter.

Without, the sleet pelted the windows, and the red top of Mr. Iseling's wagon waiting at the gate. It whistled and rattled down Bean Alley and converted the telegraph wires into cables of ice. But the Flathers family, luxuriating in the unusual extravagance of an open fire, and cheered by the hilarity of the occasion, was happily oblivious to the