



To speak wisely may not always be easy, but not to speak ill, requires only silence.

## The Home Coming of Melinda

Nellie Gilmae.

(Concluded from last week.)

THE girl's quick glance took in the furnishing instantly, and her eyes danced appreciatively. She drew off her gloves, and unpinned her hat and laid them on the bed. Then after they had rested and chatted a few moments, Melinda said: "I want to see all the rooms, Mumsey. You've done wonders with this one."

Mrs. Branham demurred, but Melinda insisted, and together they made the tour.

"The parlor is a dear little nest, and I've a lot of curios with which to fix it up when my trunks come. But— but who stays in here, pray?" They had reached the threshold of Mrs. Branham's room.

"This is my little berth, dear. You have no idea how comfortable and warm it is in winter."

"Comfortable—warm indeed. Why isn't a perfect crypt, mother. You shan't sleep in this box another night. You must take my room, you and Johnny. This will suit me beautifully. I want it for a den."

"But if it is so bad for me, why should it be so lovely for you, Melinda?" Mrs. Branham questioned indignantly.

"In the first place, it is just what I am looking for as a receptacle for the thousand and one college mementoes I have—a trunkful. In the second, I shall be very little indoors out here, and I couldn't think of letting that fairy of a room you've furnished for me go to waste."

"But there's scarcely any furniture in here, and—"

"Oh, I'm as resourceful as the morning, Mamma dear. Give me a few drygoods boxes, a few yards of dotted swiss, a hammer and some tacks, and I can furnish a whole house in a day!"

"I hope you'll not find it too dull here, Mellic."

"Dull! Listen, Mumsey: just a secret. I've a queer notion that I can paint a little, and if I'm right—if I've an ounce of talent in me anywhere, you may be sure I've reached the very limit to coin."

Just there a familiar step sounded on the verandah, and Mrs. Branham said quickly: "It's Lydia Martin, dear. She's been the best friend in the world to us since our—had luck."

But her reminder was lost on Melinda, for she had already gained the front porch and was straining her old friend to her warm young heart. "Oh!" she cried, "Will wonders never cease? Here you are looking just like you used to. I was so, so afraid that things would be changed—everybody different—"

"I'm delighted to see you home, Melinda. We've planned a big reception for you at the Beales's to-night."



"Glorious!"

"I hope you'll not be disappointed, child. It'll be mighty different from those stylish affairs you had in the city, but—"

"And if it is, I shall be all the more pleased, Miss Lydia. I want something fresh—something wholesome. Many a time in the midst of the gaieties up there, I've longed for



Children's Shelter at London, Ont.

From which 33 poor, neglected children were placed in homes during the past year. See article in this issue regarding work at this Shelter.

one of our good, old-time frolics." And she clapped her hands merrily.

"I was thinking," continued Miss Lydia, "that it would be such a good chance for you to show off one of your new Paris gowns you wrote about."

Melinda was silent a moment, a puzzled look on her pretty face. Then: "What are the other girls going to wear, Miss Lydia?" she asked.

"Well, I believe Jennie Edwards is going to wear her last Christmas pink silk; I heard Lucia Wilson's mother say she was making a new white lawn for Lucia, and I know the Beale girls will have real sweet tussles, blue and yellow. Oh, you'll outshine them all—no doubt of that."

"I'm going to wear my commencement dress, Miss Lydia. It's over a year old, but it is so simply made in the style doesn't specially matter. It is Empire, with a little lace and chiffon, that's all."

Miss Lydia smothered the ejaculation on her lips—and held out her hand. "You're just the same big-hearted girl you always were, Melinda, and I—I'm proud of you, child."

The trunks were arriving, and Melinda hurried off to attend to her unpacking. There was a whole trayful of wonderful toys collected from many foreign countries to delight Johnnie's heart, an exquisite shawl for Mrs.

Branham, a genuine meerschaum for Mr. Branham, and a fan with mother-of-pearl sticks for Miss Lydia.

In the midst of her unpacking, Melinda turned to her mother and said: "Now, Mumsey, I want you to be quite frank with me. Is Papa—penniless? Lucy Carleton is to be married in the spring. She offered to pay me exactly what I gave for my dresses, and that will bring in two thousand dollars."

"Your money? He'd never in the world touch it, dear."

"Our money, Mamma. He gave it freely, and I give it back just as willingly. Believe me it will give me more happiness than using it any other way in the world."

"He does need a bit of extra money to get the farm in good running order, buy a few modern appliances, and hire a few more men—"

Melinda got up off her knees and threw her arms about her mother's neck. "The hand of Providence is in everything, mother. God be praised."

Two months passed. Under Melinda's youthful enthusiasm and optimistic viewpoint, wonderful changes had come to the little Brookside cottage. There was a flourishing flower garden that ran around three sides of the house, and inside the rooms had undergone magic metamorphoses—at small expenditure of dollars, and a large output of industry and ingenuity.

One morning Mrs. Branham went to her daughter's room with a resolute

roots of the girl's gold hair. But she did not answer.

"There is something."

"Someone, Mother."

"You cared for him, child?"

"Yes, very, very much."

"And our misfortune somehow came between you?"

"He never knew the reason. I felt it would not be sufficient to put a stop to everything at once—as had to be done. He would have persisted. There was never any engagement. He did ask me to marry him, and I promised him by an oath when reached Montreal. There, I learned the truth. When he came I told him that I did not care—that it was all a mistake. I could not have explained—not for the universe. It would have seemed like throwing myself at his head. Besides, I wanted to take up the burden with you and Papa—to give your life with you. Had I married Richard Barfield that would have been impossible. His father is one of the richest men in the state."

Mrs. Branham looked thoughtfully into her daughter's cow-eyed face. At last she spoke. "And after two months are you still willing that things should remain as they are? If he should come for you would you go—"

"I could not."

"It seems a bit quixotic to me, dear. I'm afraid—"

"Understand, Mother. I couldn't have endured the comments—the coupling of the names of the families after Papa's defeat. It would have been intolerable."

"Yes, Mumsey?"

"A young man came down from Montreal this morning and was talking to your father about the advisability of settling Brookside."

"Well?" Melinda's heart gave a great lurch; her cheeks flamed into scarlet banners.

"He was startling like the photograph in your portfolio."

"And—"

"Dearie, I wish you'd run down to the parlor and bring me up that Sevres vase. I want to mend a little nick in it."

Melinda went pale and red by turns. She rose automatically and started toward the door. She went on in the direction of the parlor as one in a trance, and entered it still streaming.

"Melinda!"

"Dick!"

She was half way across the floor before she saw him.

"So I have found you at last. And the reason, too. Sweetheart, why couldn't you have told me the truth?"

"Have you—been looking for me?"

"I've been looking for her, her eyes hid under drooping lashes."

"For weeks—interminable weeks. Ever since I learned of your father's trouble."

"But it was unfair—cruel. You had no right—"

"I had every right—that of a man who loves a woman honestly and with his whole heart."

"But the difference in our circumstances—that you should have remembered that. Oh Dick!"

Her look, the ring in her voice, caused wild joy to spring up in Richard Barfield's heart. But he choked it down. "Have you dropped me out of your heart as completely as you did out of your life—that day, Miss Branham. His face was grave, pale."

Melinda's suddenly became serious, and in her confusion she caught at the back of a chair for support.

He took a step toward her, the warm breath rushing eagerly between really lips. "Listen, Mellic," he said earnestly. "I'm without a cent in the world myself to-day. My father has cut me off because of my refusal to ask the girl of his choice to marry me. For the next time I feel I feel emancipated—free! I am young