

## The Yellow Yardsticks.

(By Emma Huntington Nason, in 'Well-spring.')

'Tom Hutchinson! you're a boy, and you don't know anything about it!'

Madge Ingraham sprang up impatiently from the piazza steps, where she and her pretty sister, Mabel, had been sitting at their mother's feet, while their Cousin Tom, a lad of sixteen, swayed to and fro in the hammock.

The young people had been relating with sympathetic interest the story of little Harry Hanscom, who, some days before, had fallen from the tall horse-chestnut tree in the yard of the old Plainfield Academy.

'You know, at first, mother,' said Madge, 'no one considered Harry seriously injured; but now a spinal trouble has developed, and the doctor says Harry must go to some city hospital for treatment. He thinks he can secure a free bed if Harry's mother can manage to pay the other expenses. But they are awfully poor—even poorer than we are,' added the young girl with a touch of bitterness in her tone. 'Oh, I do wish we could once know the luxury of giving away a dollar without counting every penny and wondering what we can do without in order to save that munificent sum!'

An expression of pain flitted across the mother's face.

'The greatest deprivation, my dear,' she said, 'which I myself have suffered in our straitened circumstances since your father's death has been in not having the means of helping others; and I feel this even more for you than for myself.'

'Forgive me, mother,' exclaimed Madge.

'I'm only selfish when I mean to be charitable. But what can we do for Harry Hanscom? The school ought to contribute fifty-dollars, Professor Hart says; and we could easily raise this amount, he told us, if each one of us would earn a dollar by working Saturdays. Boys can,' added Madge, in tones of despair; 'but girls—there's nothing girls can do.'

'You mean there's nothing they like to do,' said Tom; 'nothing that's nice and easy.'

'Now, Tom,' cried Mabel, 'you know better! Just give me a chance to earn a dollar for poor little Harry Hanscom, and you'll see.'

'All right,' said Tom, promptly. 'I'll give you a job—nice, clean work, highly respectable, and good pay.'

'Oh, will you—will you?' cried Madge eagerly. 'What is it? Do tell us! But, of course, you're only joking.'

'No, honor bright! It is something I was going to do myself to earn the money for Harry; but, as you say, I suppose the chances are small for girls; and if you really mean it—if you and Mabel are willing to work—I'll give you this opening, and try to find something else for myself.'

'A thousand thanks!' replied Madge.

'A hundred thousand!' echoed Mabel, as eagerly. 'Disclose this rare opportunity, and see how rapturously we will embrace it! I'm sure you will let us, mother?' and she lifted her bright eyes to Mrs. Ingraham's face.

'I think we will hear Tom's proposition first,' was the gentle reply.

'Very well, then,' said Tom, rising and striking a dramatic attitude. 'I will proceed to unfold. You see, auntie, that father has just invested in a new advertising scheme. Having tried circulars and posters, he is now going to sell groceries by the yard.'

'What do you mean?' asked Mabel.

'Just this, madam. Father has purchased a lot of yellow yardsticks—gorgeous

in color—with "G. B. Hutchinson, Groceries and Provisions," painted in black letters along the whole length, under the marks for inches. On the other side are tables of weights and measures; how many quarts in a bushel; how many pounds in a ton of hay, and all that sort of thing, you know; and father is going to have these yardsticks distributed through the country; left like handbills at every house; whereupon the grateful inhabitants will sacredly preserve them, study them in their leisure hours, and then all flock to Hutchinson's to buy their groceries, don't you see?'

'Of course!' said Madge; 'and you were going to drive around the country, and distribute these yardsticks.'

'Exactly so. But now I lay this golden opportunity at your feet.'

'Oh, Tom, you don't mean that Mabel and I could be paid for doing it!'

'Father said I might have the horse and the light express waggon to-morrow, and he would give me two dollars for the day's work for this especial purpose.'

'May we go, then, mother?' asked Mabel, eagerly. 'This is surely something that we could do.'

'But the horse, my dear? Neither you nor Mabel can drive; and I do not know whether such an expedition would be quite the proper thing for you.'

'Ay! There's the rub!' soliloquized Tom.

'Yes,' said Madge, dejectedly, 'that's just what I told you in the beginning. There's nothing girls can do to earn money—nothing that is quite the proper thing.'

'Would you really like to do this work, my daughter?'

'I'm sure I should.'

'Three cheers for the yellow yardsticks, then!' shouted Tom, already half-way across the lawn which separated the homes of the cousins. 'I'll bring you one in a minute!'

'Here auntie,' he continued as he speedily returned; 'you see how eminently respectable this yardstick is—perfectly straight and correct in every particular. And I'll go with the girls and drive the horse for a very small consideration; but they will be obliged to do all the business, and leave a yardstick at every house from here to Bryant's Corner, and then home by Hunter's Mills. The houses are pretty close together, and it will take all day. We must start at seven o'clock sharp, and carry a lunch for dinner.'

'May we go? Say that we may, mother?' pleaded both girls.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Ingraham, 'if you wish to do this for charity's sake, I will not refuse.'

So the next morning, Madge and Mabel, looking very business-like indeed, and prepared for action, were ready at the door at seven o'clock. Tom was equally prompt, and drove around the corner with a grand flourish, in the red express wagon, with its gaily-lettered umbrella spread above the seat.

'Oh, horrors' exclaimed Mabel. 'I re-think he might have taken the box-buggy! There would have been room enough for the yardsticks, and we shouldn't have made ourselves quite so conspicuous.'

'But if we are going to advertise,' replied Madge, 'we wish to be conspicuous. That's part of the business.'

She mounted unflinchingly to her seat, followed by Mabel and Tom, and off they started.

'Father said we needn't begin to distribute the yardsticks until we were well out of town,' remarked Tom; 'and then we must leave one at every house. Now,

Madge, you and Mabel must take turns regularly, with no changing or skipping.'

To these conditions both girls merrily agreed. It was a bright, cool morning, and as Tom drove briskly out of town, and up the rising country road, the faces of the youthful party glowed with healthful animation. Mabel took one of the yardsticks from the package at her feet, and eagerly scanned the house where she was to make the first call. At the sound of wheels, half a dozen children ran out into the doorway.

'Here, little boy, would you like a yardstick?' asked Mabel, graciously.

'A what?' cried the boy.

'A yardstick—a very nice, useful one. Take it right in to your mother.'

'Oh, give me one, give me one!' clamored the rest of the children as soon as they comprehended the situation.

'Do you all live in the same house?' asked Mabel.

'We all live here but me; I don't!' cried one bright-eyed little fellow. 'I live over to Bluehill. I'm visitin'!'

'Well, then, here's one for you,' said Mabel; and the child's face beamed with delight.

'Isn't it jolly!' exclaimed Mabel, as they whirled away. 'I feel just like a fairy godmother with a golden wand.'

'You'll feel differently, my dear, before the day is over,' predicted Tom.

As they approached the next house, a tall, angular woman stood in the doorway wiping a large, round tin milk-pan, while she scolded a freckled-faced boy who hung dejectedly over the gate.

Madge dismounted.

'Here, little boy, wouldn't you like a yardstick?' she said, repeating Mabel's formula in her most winning tones.

'Hey?' said the boy, with a half-frightened look on his face.

'A yardstick, and a very useful one, too! It tells how many feet in a yard and—'

'No, we don't!' screamed the woman at this moment. 'We don't want none o' your pedler's stuff, and you needn't put your feet in our yard at all!'

Tom laughed, and Madge's cheeks turned scarlet; but she did not quail.

'I beg your pardon,' she said with dignity. 'We are not pedlers at all. We are distributing yardsticks gratuitously. I should be pleased to present you with one.'

The woman looked a little embarrassed, and finally said, 'Oh! giving 'em away, be you? Well, you can leave one!'

With ill-concealed eagerness she seized the proffered gift. Madge waited a moment, and the woman, finally constrained to make some response, muttered ungraciously:

'Guess it'll not come amiss.'

'I hoped she would be obliged to say, "Thank you," but she didn't,' explained Madge, as she mounted to her seat and the merry trio drove on.

Thus the morning sped, with varied adventures, and at noon, the party halted in a pleasant grove, by a picturesque little lake and ate their picnic dinner. As the hot afternoon came on, however, the miles of dusty country road grew wearisome, and the enthusiasm of the girls began to wane; but they faithfully performed their duty, and were congratulating themselves upon the comparative ease with which they had accomplished their day's labor, when a sudden turn in the road brought to the view a pretentious new-fashioned villa of that composite style of architecture which Tom characterized as 'Queen Anne front and Mary Ann back.' In front of the house, on the smoothly-cut lawn, a party of young people were playing tennis.