

The Inglenook.

Tom's Choice.

BY CLARA SHERMAN.

"I choose the doll," said Milly, putting one eager forefinger on the pane and nodding to the blond haired, pink cheeked beauty who sat just inside the window, apparently conscious of her charms and willing to become the property of a little mistress who would be so respectfully appreciative as Milly.

"I choose the ship," responded Tom, but in a tone that implied life had no more illusions for him and that it made little difference what he chose, under the circumstances.

"Do you suppose you'll get the ship ever, Tom,—say, when you're most grown up?"

"Shan't want it then. What makes you choose a doll? They're no good. If we had the ship, we could sail it on the Frog Pond. You'd better choose a ship."

"No, I want to choose the doll."

"H'm! Pretty selfish, I see! If we both chose the ship, maybe I'd get it some day."

Milly's lips quivered. "Then you may have the ship first," she said bravely. "I don't choose the doll any more. I choose the ship." The beauty on the other side of the window gazed at her reproachfully. "Yes, I do," she repeated, gazing back, her eyes full of renouncing adoration. "I choose the ship."

"Oh, you little goose," said Tom, with a short laugh. "I was only fooling. Choosing will not bring them, and we must choose our legs to get us home to supper—the first thing." So he caught his little sister's hand, and they sped through a side street to the tenement house in which their mother hired three rooms.

Mrs. Townsend had not always been so poor as now; but, when her husband died after having been several months out of work, she had no one to help her in the care for the children. She did her best for them, working hard, teaching Tom evenings and keeping him at school, in spite of the fact that Mr. Baker, the husband of a lady for whom she did considerable sewing, had promised to find him a good place whenever he was old enough to go to work in earnest. The days were often hard; but she kept her cheery smile, even when her heart was heavy. Tom was able to help a little already; and he did errands regularly for the market man on the corner, who often sent over a good piece of meat or a peck of potatoes "for friendship," besides the payment agreed on.

Tom and Milly had not had any "country week," as had many of their school acquaintances, partly because they were always dressed so neatly that people did not understand how poor Mrs. Townsend really was, and partly because she had never encouraged them to seek the privilege.

"There are plenty of children worse off than you are," she used to say. "They are the ones to go."

But she managed that they should have a day in the park, at least once a week, through the summer, or an electric ride out to the suburbs, as far as a five-cent fare would carry them. One great treat had been promised,

which had to be put off till the last of the season,—a trip down the harbor, for which the money was carefully saved for weeks ahead.

That was a famous Saturday. The air was delightfully crisp, but still with a feeling of summer in it, the water was blue and sparkling in the sunshine, and the sky—why, as Milly said, there wasn't any end to it all, it was "blue all the way through."

Such a merry hurry and scurry as they had to catch the earliest boat possible! They walked from their home to the wharf, carrying a basket of luncheon. Tom made funny jokes all the way; and Milly skipped from one side of the sidewalk to the other, taking twice as many steps as she needed, in spite of her mother's advice to save her skipping for the beach.

On the boat Milly became intensely interested in a little girl of about her own age, who had a great doll in her arms, fully as big as the one in the shop window, and with the same bewitching smile, the same two teeth just showing between the parted lips, the same pink cheeks and dark eyebrows; only this doll had dark hair braided in two braids down its back instead of a golden fluff of short curls.

"Oh, my! oh, my!" said Milly, breathlessly. "Look, Tom, it's that doll I chose. I never saw such braids. Oh, please, please look and see her lovely dress." Then Milly's faithful heart smote her for her inconstancy. She had loved the doll in the shop window too long to deny her allegiance now. "No, I don't quite choose that doll," she said loyally. But the dark eyed princess smiled invitingly; and Milly murmured to herself, "S'pose I might as well choose both dolls while I'm a-choosing."

The children had a beautiful time on the sands. They took off shoes and stockings to paddle, dug deep holes to be filled with water, made channels for the advancing tide and marked out wonderful hop scotch courts. Milly's dreams of playing with the little girl they had seen on the boat, and perhaps taking the marvellous doll in her own arms, were not realized; and the only disagreeable incident of the day was connected with the two. Milly had been watching them frankly; and, when the doll was left once apparently forgotten on the sands, while its fortunate owner strolled further down the beach, Milly ran up, bent lovingly over it, and took a good long look into its enchanting eyes.

"Here, you mustn't steal that doll!" said a maid, rather rudely, as she came back for it and snatched it up before Milly had a chance to touch it. Milly was dreadfully hurt. Her eyes filled with tears, but she was too astonished to speak before the maid was gone. She was glad that Tom seemed not to have noticed anything.

Coming home on the boat, they were again near the two that had been so much in Milly's thoughts through the day. The little girl sat near the railing, the doll still in her arms. She kept leaning over the side; and her mother had to speak to her more than once, bidding her be careful not to lose her balance.

A fine yacht with sails outspread came swiftly toward them. Tom's eyes grew

eager, and he pulled Milly by the sleeve. "See, Milly," he cried, "there's just the ship I chose. Look, isn't she a beauty?"

But, as he was about to press through to the stern of the steamer in order to watch the white wonder as long as possible, there was a sudden scream, a glimmer of something falling, a splash in the water.

"A child overboard! Child overboard!" went up a horrified cry. Tom turned his eyes from the ship, then first fairly in view, and, without a word or look to the others, kicked off his low shoes, and over he went, cleaving the air like an arrow.

"O mother," Milly screamed, "that's Tom!"

"Oh, the poor boy!" exclaimed the people near, as they realized what had happened. "He thinks it's a child that has fallen overboard, and it's nothing but a doll."

Tom was not a remarkable swimmer; but the clothes of the doll kept it afloat until he managed to seize it, and then, holding it in his teeth, he sustained himself in the water without exhausting himself by much swimming. The waves from the steamer tossed him violently; but help was at hand; and in a few minutes he was lying panting on the floor of the lower deck.

People crowd-dround, but made room for Milly and his mother, as they asserted their claim. Tom caught his breath as he saw them bending over him. A queer smile broke over his face, and he gasped out,—

"Say, Milly, I did choose the doll instead of the ship after all, didn't I, though?"

Milly could not help laughing in spite of her anxiety; and even his mother smiled, as she said, "Milly said she knew you knew it was the doll all the time."

Tom was soon dried off and rigged out in some clothes belonging to a clerk employed on the steamer, but the lovely doll did not escape so easily, though, as Milly said philosophically, "It didn't make quite so much difference about her after all." Salt water dripped from her brown braids, her cheeks were washed white by the mischievous waves, her fine clothes were dragged, and the general dejection of her appearance led her mistress to say petulantly:—

"I don't want that old thing any more. Give it to the boy's sister. She's been staring at it all day. I wouldn't be seen with such a looking thing."

"Hush, Lillian," said her mother, more decidedly than she had yet spoken. "Little boy, you are very brave. Did you think it was Lillian who had fallen over?"

A gleam of laughter danced in Tom's eyes. "Oh, no, ma'am!" he answered hastily. "You needn't praise me, for probably I shouldn't have thought of jumping after her."

Milly was afraid the pretty lady would be vexed, but she was not. Perhaps she knew what funny things boys are, anyway. She merely asked, turning to Tom's mother, "What did he mean about choosing a doll and a ship?"

Mrs. Townsend explained in a few words; and the story seemed to interest especially the little girl, who had grown quite willing to make friends with Milly before they left the boat. The lady took the address of the small tenement home, and they all said good-bye finally as if they were old friends. Milly bore off the draggled-looking doll in triumph, loving it for the dangers it had passed hardly less than in the hours of its beauty.

The next day, when her mother went to carry some sewing up to Mrs. Baker, Milly