

## The Story Page

### Real Heroism.

BY CLARA SHERMAN.

Helen Langdon sat on the edge of the bluff overlooking the pond cooling her hot cheeks in the gentle breeze and idly watching the birds in a neighboring tree, as they worked together over the twigs for their new nest. She had had a delightful morning spin on her wheel, and in half an hour of time she had exchanged the brick walls of the city for the opening blossoms and deeping green of the hillside.

The joy of the morning and the thrill of the spring-time was in her veins. As her pulses gradually quieted down to their regular beat, the loveliness of the day and the surroundings took hold of her with new power. One cannot be aware of the beauty around him in the world without longing, even if half-unconsciously, for harmony between it and the world within; and Helen felt the ancient discontent with petty aims and unworthy pleasures rising in her heart.

"Why is it," she thought to herself, "that the old heroism seems to have died out of the world? We are all alike in these days. At one time we care for little, foolish, every-day things just as if there were nothing better in the world; and the next day we have forgotten all about them. We race after our pleasures until they seem like work, and then we work for things that give us no pleasure."

Then Helen fell a-dreaming of the earlier days, when knights rode forth redressing wrongs, when gentle women embroidered banners and trophies for their heroes, and when life held possibilities for heroism free from all taint of selfish gain. But such thoughts are rather serious for a young girl, and Helen's vague dissatisfaction with things commonplace vanished in her search for houstonias and violets.

An hour later Helen was back in the city, bending herself with a will to the conquest of a difficult sonata; and her morning thoughts did not recur to her mind. At luncheon time she and her mother sat alone in the sunny dining-room that overlooked the river.

"I suppose my gray gown will be finished all right for the reception to-morrow," she said to her mother, after describing her morning ride; "and I mustn't forget to order my violets."

"Oh, that reminds me, Miss Hurter is ill or something and she couldn't come to-day, so I had to send the gown to her and she is doing it there. If you go in to explain to her about the ribbons, some time about six o'clock, she said, it will be ready for you."

"Oh, what a bother!" said Helen, rather impatiently. "I don't see how I can take the time, and I've no idea where she lives."

"James knows. You can dress for the Leland's dinner before you go—for you needn't try it on, you know,—and James can take you right there without coming home."

"That means I must stay at Miss Hurter's for three-quarters of an hour. I'd better take a book along. It's lucky the rehearsal for this afternoon was postponed, or I shouldn't have time to dress."

That was how it happened that a few minutes after six o'clock the door of Miss Hurter's little bedroom opened, and the shining vision of a pretty girl in evening dress appeared at the entrance.

"Come in, Miss Langdon, please," called a girl's voice as Helen hesitated. "Did they tell you below to walk right in without knocking?"

"Yes," answered Helen. "I am sorry you are ill."

"Oh, I'm not ill," returned the other. "I did something pretty bad to my ankle last night, trying to get out of the way of an electric car, when I was taking home some work. It's in splints, but it's not so bad as being ill." While Mary Hurter was saying this, she looked with delighted eyes at Helen, who for her part was looking back as if she had never really seen the little seamstress before.

Mary was sitting on the couch that evidently served her for a bed, with a pillow at her back and her foot stretched out stiffly on a rest before her. At her elbow stood her work table, laden with sewing materials; and Helen's pretty gray dress was spread over the end of the couch.

"See, Miss Langdon," went on the cherry voice, "I've just finished it; and now, if you'll tell me where to put the ribbons,—your mother said you had your own idea about it,—I'll tack them right on." Then, hardly pausing: "Oh, I am so glad you came in such a pretty dress. How lucky I am to have a chance to see you!"

Helen was taken by surprise. Was this eager-faced, bright-eyed girl, hardly older than herself, the quiet, unobtrusive, commonplace little creature who often sat quietly in the sewing-room, seemingly absorbed in following the directions of the dressmaker and thinking of nothing further? Yet the girl was tired now, too. Anybody could see that, from the dark circles under her eyes and the way she tried to straighten herself a little on the couch.

"Do excuse me for admiring you so," she went on impulsively. "You see I've been alone all day long, except when Mrs. Maloney brought me something to eat this noon; and it does seem so good to see something pretty." She gave another rapturous glance at the pink silk train and the great bunch of roses.

Helen laughed. "Then I'm glad I came," she said cordially; and she drew a chair closer to the couch. "And you must keep me for nearly an hour, too, since I'm not due at the Leland's before seven."

It doesn't take long for two girls to be come acquainted, when once a friendly interest paves the way; and Helen's tact soon won shy Mary Hurter to talk about herself. She was less than a year older than Helen; and yet for eighteen months she had been supporting herself by her needle, living quiet by herself in her small room, but guarded somewhat by good Mrs. Maloney who lived on the floor above.

"Do I get lonesome? Why, yes, sometimes," she said in answer to Helen's questioning. "But I think it's too cowardly to be anything but jolly when one has health and strength. And I have good times, too. I have the most heavenly Sunday afternoons, when I go out in the country somewhere to read and walk and do just what I like."

Little by little the whole story came out. It was not an unsmooth one in its main features. Mary's mother had died several years before, leaving Mary and her brother two years older. The father was an inventor, who had made considerable money at one time, but who seemed to lose energy when his wife died, and sank into a state of chronic ill-health. Kenneth, the boy, a bright, even brilliant fellow, graduated from the scientific school and was enabled, partly by a school fellowship and partly by a small legacy received from his godfather, to go to Germany to continue his favorite study of chemistry. Within three months after he started, the father was taken suddenly ill, and died within a week. Kenneth cabled to know if he should return; but Mary bravely replied, "No," and set about the investigation of her affairs.

They knew that ready money had been scarce for some time; but it was a great shock to find that the house was heavily mortgaged, and that, when the debts were paid, the direst poverty seemed close at hand. She knew Kenneth was provided for, at least for the present; and she made up her mind not to interfere with his devotion to his work.

"Why, I never thought of calling him back. I am glad he is getting his start; and when he comes, next October probably, we will work together. He knows I am living in the house with Mrs. Maloney, only he thinks she is staying with me instead of this way. I couldn't teach, for I never went to college; but I always had to sew more or less."

"Why," exclaimed Helen, ardently, "I think you are perfectly wonderful! I didn't suppose anybody could be so patient and brave."

"Hm!" said Mary, with a laugh. "That's much better than living on one's friends, the way they wished me to do at first. There's nothing brave about it; but I'll tell you it has made me meet people who are real heroes and heroines. All I have done has been to sew the best I can and try to live like a lady, even if I am poor, and to write jolly letters to Kenneth. But I know brave ones enough. There's Mrs. Morgan on the floor below, for instance. Her husband fell from a scaffolding, and he has hurt his back; and there are four children. She works all the time and keeps things going, and is always trying to help other people, too."

"Then there is Ned Randall in the room back of me. He was crazy to be a doctor, and he was almost ready to enter a medical school when his father ran away with some funds belonging to the bank and disgraced all of them. It killed his mother, and he told me one night he thought it would kill him at first. Finally, he made up his mind that for his dead mother's sake, if for nothing else, he would be all she wished him to be. So he just took hold of his life again. He asked for a place in the very bank his father had left. Think of the heroism that took! And they gave it to him. That was four years ago; and he is paying off all the money his father took, except what was sent back in the first place. Nobody knows it; but the truth is that he has never used one single cent of his pay—and he gets a good salary now—for his own expenses. He earns enough to live on by doing evening work; and in the winter he teaches in the evening school, and in his vacation he works for a man in Hillston. He works in a restaurant every Saturday evening; and any day, when he doesn't have enough to eat, they will trust him for it there. Now that's the kind of a fellow I call a hero." And Mary's tired eyes glistened.

Helen sat quietly without speaking, remembering her thoughts of the morning and realizing that heroism is to be found in the daily lives of common people quite as much as in tales of old romance and lofty chivalry.

"I was thinking only this morning," said Helen rather

diffidently, "that there weren't any heroes left; but I guess the only thing is to open one's eyes and find plenty of them."

"Yes, that's so," said Mary, heartily. "But don't look to me for one."

Just then came a rap on the door, and good Mrs. Maloney entered with a bowl of milk and some slices of bread and a saucer of raspberry preserves for Mary's supper. And on the little waiter lay a letter with a German postmark. "Why, it's past seven o'clock already," said Helen, with a little jump, as Mrs. Maloney paused astonished at the pink silk gown in the little room. "And that poor James is still waiting. I must run; but we'll see each other again, right soon, and thank you ever so much," she added in a lower tone. "Oh, and I'm going to leave the roses."

Then Mrs. Maloney and Mary Hurter ate their supper together, and the roses and the letter made the room beautiful.—Christian Register.

### Joe's Fire Company.

BY ALICE H. ALLEN.

Joe was washing dishes. It seemed to Joe that she was always washing dishes. If she had only been a boy, and could have done boy's work! Poor Joe tossed her little dark head, set her teeth hard, and went on with the dishes.

Outside she could hear the children talking as they built stick houses. Joe called her little Sister Nan, and Nan's little friend Bob, "the children." For they were only six, while she was ten, and "going on eleven."

Bob was the next door neighbor's boy. He had big blue eyes, stiff white hair, and a round grave face. He drawled his words and dragged his feet. Such a slow, solemn little boy was Bob.

Bob and Nan always played together. But they were never quite happy unless Don was there too. Don was the large brown dog. When mamma saw Nan coming slowly across the lawn or down the walk, she always knew that Bob was only a few steps behind, and that old Don would be close behind Bob. She knew, too, when she saw this solemn trio, that some mischief was on foot.

Joe listened to Bob's slow drawl while she scalded and dried the plates.

"Your sticks don't lie straight, Nan Turner," he was saying.

"Don't care if they don't," piped Nan's clear little voice. "My parlor's all furnished, anyway. See Bob."

Joe could not resist looking out of the window to see too. She was only ten, you remember. There they were under the trees. Nan's hat was hanging by one string. Tired of building, she was already furnishing her parlor. A row of small stones for "chairs" stood on a bright bit of calico which was the "carpet."

Bob was slowly laying his sticks. He looked at Nan's house, and said, with slow scorn in his voice, "Folks—don't—furnish—their—houses—before—they're—built."

"Don't care," said Nan. "I'm tired of playing stick-houses, anyway. 'Tisn't any fun. Come on, let's be the Pilgrim Fathers, Bob, and clear the land."

"What'll Don be? He can't be a Pilgrim Father," said Bob, looking at Don thoughtfully.

"Oh! he can be a tiger, and we'll shoot him," Nan said, "and we must burn away the woods, you know Bob. That's the way to do—papa says so, and papa, he knows everything."

Away went the Pilgrim Fathers to clear the land. And close behind went the friendly tiger, which was to be shot. Joe watched them out of sight, and then went back to her dishes. The next minute she heard Nan's voice screaming, "O Bob, Bob! quick, quick, quick! The ash-house is all afire! Oh, oh, oh!"

As Nan's "ohs" increased in strength, Bob's voice joined in, and Don barked wildly.

"The ash-house on fire!" thought Joe, "and it's close to the barn." She flung down her dishcloth, caught up a pail of water, and ran.

Papa was chief of the fire department in the village. He had often told his children what to do in case of fire. How Joe flew across the yard, calling to Nan and Bob to get more water, and come quick. Before she reached the ash-house she could see the smoke, and when, out of breath, she pulled open the door, black clouds rushed out and choked her. She could see the red flames darting in and out of the darkness within. The stone part would not burn. Joe remembered that, and dashed the water with all her little strength against the wooden roof of the building.

By this time Nan was there with more water. Joe had just raised the pail high for a good throw, when the gruff voice of the old gardener from somewhere near, called "What be you young 'uns up to now?"

Joe sent the water first, then wiped her hot face, and called back, "O, Davis, bring some water, quick! The ash-house is all afire!"