

# MARY LEE

## or The Yankee in Ireland

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### CHAPTER XVII.

WEEKS VISITS MRS. MOTHERLY—A CONFESSION ON SLAVERY.—WEEKS SEEMS RATHER DISAGREEABLY SURPRISED TO MEET AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE IN UNCLE JERRY'S NEGRO.

MR. WEEKS, on parting with his lady cousins, (which he did rather abruptly, as we have seen in the last chapter,) returned to Crohan House, and lighting another cigar, mounted the sober animal he generally selected for a morning's ride, and set out for Father Brennan's. When he arrived at the reverend gentleman's residence, he felt somewhat disappointed to learn from the servant that his master had gone some five or six miles on a sick call, and could not possibly return till late in the evening. Resolving, however, to have an interview with the good priest as soon as possible, he drew a card from the richly-carved case he always had about him, and having written a request to that effect on the back of it with his pencil, handed it to the servant, and then turned his horse's head in the direction of Greenmount Cottage.

Mrs. Motherly was sitting on the steps of the hall door, knitting her stocking, and looking quite happy as she plied her needles. The good woman was dressed, as usual, in her large, well-filled cap and white apron, with her bunch of keys hanging by her side, as much perhaps for show as convenience. On the grass at her feet a gray cat lay stretched in the sun, with half a dozen kittens playing about her on the green.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Motherly; how do you?" said Weeks. "Mr. Guirkie at home?"

"Your servant, sir," replied the matron, rising and running her needles into the stocking, after she had waited to count the stitches. "Mr. Guirkie's not in, sir."

"No, sir; he left here about an hour ago for Rathmullen."

"Rathmullen—let me see—that's the place he visits so often?"

"Yes, sir."

"Goes there every week—don't he?"

"Every Thursday, sir."

"On business, I presume."

"No, sir."

"Got relatives there, perhaps?"

"No, sir; he has no relatives living, I believe. People's pleased to say, though, he's often seen sittin on a tombstone there in the ould graveyard."

"Well, must be some friend, I guess."

"Why, if the gentleman was a native of this part of the country, it might," responded Mrs. Motherly, "at he's not; he was born in Cork."

"Does he never speak to you of these visits, Mrs. Motherly?"

"Niver, sir."

"You don't say so! It's odd—ain't it?"

"O, it's just of a piece with the rest of his doings," replied the good woman, opening, as usual, her budget of grievances. "He niver thinks of telling me any thing, of course; why should he? I'm nothing but a sarvint, ye know. I'm only here to do the work, slavin and slugdin from mornin till night, strivin to please him and humer him, till his heart's a most broke; and all the thanks I get is mighty easy told, Mr. Weeks."

"Don't doubt it. He's a very odd kinder man in his ways—that's a fact."

"You may well say it, sir. He's the provokinest man ever drew breath. But won't you light and come in, sir?"

"Well, guess I shall, come to think of it. Say, can't I write a note here, and leave it for Mr. Guirkie?"

"Sartinly, sir; come in; there's paper there, and pens plenty in the parlor. As for the cratur on the sofa, he'll not disturb you in the taste."

"Hilloo! who the thunder is this?" exclaimed Weeks, as he entered the parlor, and beheld the African stretched at his full length on the sofa, apparently fast asleep. "A nigger—ain't he?"

"Yes, sir; that's our new boarder," primly replied Mrs. Motherly.

"But how in creation did he come here?"

"Mr. Guirkie, sir, carried the gentleman home with him from the wreck."

"Ah, that's it. I have heard of a wreck lately somewhere here in the neighborhood."

"He's a very respectable boarder for a lone woman—ain't he, Mr. Weeks?"

"Well, don't know exactly; that's all a matter of taste. Some folks like niggers very much. There's our New England ladies, for instance; they're terrible kind to niggers. I'd venture to say, if this here chap happened to be ashore any where along the eastern seaboard, they'd gather round and clothe and feast him like a prince, before he got well out of water."

"You're jokin, Mr. Weeks."

"No, ma'am, I ain't jokin a mite."

"And ye tell me they're so fond of them as all that?"

"Fond? yes—guess they are fond—they're the most almighty fond creatures in that way in all creation."

"Bedad, then, Mr. Weeks, I don't envy their taste."

"Well, it ain't just that, neither, for the fact is, they despise niggers, as much as any people in the world. But it's a sorter philanthropy, you know, that's made up of a half sentimental, half benevolent kinder squeamishness, with a slight dash of the religious in it, by way of seasoning."

"Yes, sir, of course."

"You understan't me?"

"O, perfectly, sir. They must be mighty charitable intirely, God bless them."

"Very charitable indeed. That is, I mean to the slave portion of the race. Sometimes their philanthropy impels them even to pawn their jewels to buy a slave from bondage—it's a fact."

"See that now! Isn't it wonderf'ul

to think of it? And still I often heard Mr. Guirkie say the cratur out there in America wasn't so badly off after all."

"Well, no—guess they're pretty well off for clothes and food, and all that sorter thing. But they ain't got their liberty, you know; and no American born ought to see a human in slavery and not try to liberate him."

"True for you, Mr. Weeks; you speak like a Christian, so you do. Dear know it's a poor sight to see God's cratur bought and sold, and as they say they are over there, just for all the world like a cow or a horse—it's unnatural."

"It's shocking!"

"And still," said Mrs. Motherly, "they tell us the poor Irish there isn't treated much better than slaves."

"The Irish! My dear woman, don't believe a word of it. I have a letter in my pocket here, from a niece of mine, that's livin in a place called Boston, and she tells me it's terrible to think of what they suffer. There it is," continued the good woman, opening it, and pointing to a particular passage, which ran as follows:

"We're thrated here like slaves, and have more to suffer from the Yankees, specially in regard to our religion, than ever we had at home from the bloody parsectin English. It's a wonder they're not ashamed to peruss so much tiderness for the slaves, and trate the poor Irish so manely as that," said Mrs. Motherly.

"My dear woman, you don't understand the case. It's only the lower orders of our people do so."

"And why don't the upper orders make them behave better?"

"Can't do it. It's a free country."

"O, had luck to such freedom as that. I wudn't give ye a brass button for it. There's my niece, as decent a reared little girl as ever crossed the water—I'll say that much for her, though she is my niece—and her mistress, who's nothin after all but a shopkeeper's wife—may be not as decent a father and mother's child either—and the best word she has in her chest for the cratur is the 'laddy girl,' and the 'Papist,' and the 'ignorant boobie,' and 'O, the old priest—he'll forgive you your sins for a nippence.' What kind of talk is that, Mr. Weeks?"

"continued the good woman, rolling up her arms in her apron, and looking at him."

"Well, that ain't right, I allow."

"Right—bedad, if the girls would do as I would, they'd slap them in the face. And that's what I told Bridget in my last letter. Humph! pretty thing, indeed! because they pay their girls six or seven shillings a week, they must have a right to insult and abuse them into the bargain."

"Very few think so, Mrs. Motherly, very few indeed. I know many, very many families in New England, who respect their help very much, and are as kind to them as if they were relatives of the family."

"To be sure you do, sir, and so Bridget says too, in her letter here; but they're respectable people. I mane yer apsettin, half and between the ladies, that think they ought to take airs on themselves as soon as they can—that's the kind I mane."

"Just so; that's all right enough—but still, Mrs. Motherly, some of your girls are pretty spunky."

"I don't doubt it, sir, in the taste, and may be there's plenty of them do deserve to be turned out of doors too for their impudence. But can't all that be done without castin up their religion and their priest to them? Ah, that's no objection, and write a note for Mr. Guirkie, which you'll please hand him as soon as he returns."

"Sartinly, Mr. Weeks, with the greatest pleasure in life; I hope Sambo here won't disturb you, sir."

"Not in the least. He's asleep—ain't he?"

"So it seems; and still it's queer to see him asleep at this hour. He was sittin up a minute or two before ye came. I'll see. Sambo! Sambo! wake up. There's not a stir in him, sir."

"Don't mind him, Mrs. Motherly," said Weeks, dipping the pen in the ink.

"Don't mind him."

"Well, I never saw him asleep but he snored so strong enough to draw the side to the hoze together. And see now, he hardly seems to breathe. Sambo," she repeated, shaking him by the arm—"Sambo, wake up; here's the gentleman you were asking about the other day."

"Yes, sir; he started just as if he'd been shot, when he saw you pass the window last week."

"Last week? why, I don't remember to have seen or heard any thing of him. I didn't know you'd got a nigger here till this minute."

"Well, he saw you, sir, any way, and looked as frightened as if you came to drag him to the gallows."

"Indeed! Wake him up, and lets see what he's like."

"Sambo! hilloo Sambo!" cried Mrs. Motherly, again shaking him roughly by the arm; "look up, man, and speak to us—he won't though, not a budge he'll do. Bedad, Mr. Weeks, may be he's dyin."

"Not he—the fellow's coming possum over us, that's all; but hold on a bit; I'll make him speak—but a fource-pence;" and striking the African a smart rap on the shin with his knuckles, the sleeper started up in an instant to a sitting posture, and bellowed as if he had been stabbed with a bayonet.

"Shut up," said Weeks; "you ain't murdered—are you?"

"O, Massa Charles, Massa Charles," cried the African, rubbing the wounded part with his hand, "you know him place strike poor nigger."

"You see that," observed Mrs. Motherly; "he seems to know you, sir."

"Massa Charles—why, who the thunder are you—eh?"

"O, golly, there, Massa Charles not

know Sambo!"

"What Sambo?"

"Why, Jubal Sambo—goah! that very sprizin; many time massa licked Sambo on old plantation."

"Where?" demanded Weeks, his words growing few and faint as the negro's voice and features grew more and more familiar to him.

"Where! yah, yah! I no remember Moose Creek, old Virginy; Massa Charles look him my back, him know Sambo better; ebery one knows him own marks."

"Moose Creek!—good heavens! there!" exclaimed Weeks; "well, by crackie, if that ain't the most unexpected—"

"Yah, yah!" chuckled the African, now that his shin no longer troubled him. "Massa no spect see Sambo so far from home. Sambo no fraid massa now. Sambo free nigger—yah, yah!"

"Mrs. Motherly," said Weeks, turning to the housekeeper, who stood looking on apparently much interested in the conversation, "may I beg you to quit the room for a moment? I should like to say a few words to this poor fellow—seems to me I have seen him before."

"Indeed you have, sir, I'll warrant that," said Mrs. Motherly, looking sharply at Weeks now as pale as a sheet of paper. "But sure if you have any thing in private to say to him, I'll not prevent you. Strange how people meets sometimes so far from home, and when they laste expect it, too. Ha, ha! isn't it queer, Mr. Weeks?"

"Very much so indeed—but you'll excuse me, Mrs. Motherly."

"Sartinly, sir, was only just going to tell you how Mr. Guirkie, travelin in America, once met with an old rival of his in the same way, but that thought was dead twenty years before. It was the oddest thing in the world. Him and Mr. Guirkie, it seems, in their young days, were both courtin the same young lady; but, lo and behold you, she went off at last with the other gentleman; and then Mr. Guirkie made a vow never to marry, seein he had no heart to give away, for he loved the girl beyond all reason; and indeed to this very day he carries her pictur about him wherever he goes. Well, he went across the seas to travel, thinkin to forget her among the strangers; and what would ye have of it, but after leaving the West Indies, and landin in the States of America, the first face he knew was that of his ould rival. There he was standing on the quay right before him as he stepped ashore from the vessel."

"Very strange, indeed," assented Weeks—exceedingly so. But won't you allow me, Mrs. Motherly—"

"Sartinly, Mr. Weeks—sartinly, sir."

"Gosh, dat berry queer, muttered Sambo."

"What?"

"Why, Massa Guirkie meetin him old rival on de wharf."

"Hev so, Sambo?"

"Well, old Massa Talbot just say same thing. Modar told me all about it long time ago. Massa walk on de wharf, and dere comes him old rival right out of de ship afore him berry eyes, de man he tink was dead and buried. De sight almost knock him blind."

"Any thing else I can do for you, Mr. Weeks?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Motherly, nothing at present."

"Well, then, I'll leave you together, to settle your own affairs; but I would advise you, Mr. Weeks, before I go, to caution this foolish fellow not to call you Massa Charles any more, for the people of this wicked world are always watchin and peepin into other people's business, ye know, and ten chances to one but they'd say you weren't the man you pretended to be, at all, at all."

"So saying, Mrs. Motherly made her usual courtesy at the door, and closed it behind her.

#### TO BE CONTINUED.

#### RILEY PEBBLES' REVENGE.

MISS Roxelana Pebbles looked out of the window viciously. It was a May evening, Riley was already overdue.

She was a tall, bony woman, angular in every attitude and of an expression that had been soured by adversity. Standing before the window waiting for her brother to arrive home to dinner, her thin lips curled with disdain as she struck to the suburban row of contractors' cottages opposite. Not once, but a thousand times a day she was wont to contrast the humility of her present position in a hired house in a side street with the splendor of the estate from which they had been ousted several days before.

Born in poverty and subsequently raised to an affluent position through her brother's successful business efforts, she could not easily accustom herself to return to penury and to all the petty makeshifts which she once thought she had left forever behind in her life. Roxana loved her brother after her fashion. She admired his business regularity and at times adored his person. But she had not forgiven, and could not forget, the fatal slip he made when he signed a friend's note and thus plunged himself into irrevocable bankruptcy. Nor could she understand the tranquility and peacefulness of mind with which her brother had accepted the kick of Fortune. For Roxana was litigious by temperament and polemical by training, and never ceased to fire even when the enemy had disappeared.

The sickly little row of trees upon the side street was with difficulty sending forth branches of green which for many years would not be able to obstruct the view toward the electric cars. Roxana thought of the stately shade trees that hung over the ancestral home which they had left like cathedrals of green. It is true this had not been her ancestral home, but she always associated with their old place ancestors who ought to have built it and willed it through generations to the present Pebbles family.

As Roxana looked out of the window through the skinny little trees, but recently planted by the city contractor, her face hardened. Indeed, it became

almost metallic, for she saw swinging off the rear platform of the car the portly form and contented figure of her brother.

Riley Pebbles was an anomaly. He looked like a human bulldog, whereas in fact he was gentler than a new-born lamb. Over six feet high, weighing considerably more than two hundred pounds with a heavy neck that is supposed to go with gladiatorial instincts and with the smooth chin and English side whiskers that generally betoken an unapproachable nature, Riley at a distance seemed a dreadful blizzard. But you had only to look into his soft, appealing gray eyes, had only to see the deprecating nod of his big head, had only to watch for the modest gesture of the hand to note that this huge man was only a huge boy.

He carried an umbrella in his hand as he strolled along, and with awkward good fellowship moved it around like a medieval lance as he caught sight of his sister's face framed by the distant window. He was hungry and full of compassion for the loneliness of the one woman who had clung to him, whether disagreeably or not, through his good fortune and through bad.

Indeed, Riley looked up at his little six-room house with an expression of pride. He had a nature that could no more whippers malice than Broadway could harbor a man-of-war. He had known his rise and he had received his fall. He was once rich, now he was poor, and he was probably as happy now as he had ever been in his life. Indeed he was satisfied with his lot, even at the expense of being the head of the firm in which he now served as a cheerful subordinate. He had enough to eat, suitable clothes to wear, a home to shelter him and had saved a few thousands in cash. He was unaware that he had ever lost position or friends. When the crash came the only sorrow he felt was that his sister's social ambition could not now be gratified.

He sprang up the wooden steps like a houndland dog and cried out: "Well, Rock! How are you to-night?" He stooped to kiss his sister and speak an encouraging word, for he recognized the expression upon her face that boded him very little comfort for that evening. A fond regret for the comfortable club from which he had but recently resigned flashed like sheet lightning upon his equitable mind and was gone. At least he could not be part of the tempest by going out into the garden and weeding the rose bushes. The neighbors were so near that they afforded him protection from the stress of Roxana's tongue.

"Riley," said his sister, severely, walking up and down the little parlor while he was taking off his hat and coat and putting his umbrella in the rack. "Riley, I am clean disgusted with you; you have not the spirit of a mouse, I said mouse, and I now say oyster, Riley, you have not the spirit of an oyster."

"Why, my dear, what is the matter? What have I done?" Riley Pebbles opened his large mouth in amazement and looked down upon his sister as if he were the crusher, not the crushed. "It is outrageous!" Roxana boiled, "perfectly outrageous! Here we sweeter and suffer and live in this respectable street, while that woman—that woman I say—has bought a house on the proceeds of the fraud right upon the avenue. The postman told me so this morning, and I called upon the broker and he confirmed the report."

Roxana went to the window and drummed upon the pane hopelessly. Riley sat down upon one of the easy chairs in the room and waited for the storm to break upon the broker, and he confirmed the reference, not to blow contrary to the direction of the wind. If Roxana's brother had not conquered her by his passiveness and by a gentle and unantagonistic tenderness, such as no husband might have assumed, it would have been perfectly impossible for the two to live together. As it was, the woman's outbreaks generally ended in her flinging herself in her great brother's arms and sobbing her bitterness away upon his massive shoulder.

Like a small boy caught in a lie, Riley Pebbles shifted his eyes from his sister. His gaze wandered out of the window to his neighbor opposite, who was watering a ten by twelve lawn with a dyspeptic hose. His glance turned and rested upon the hat rack in the hall and finally gazed through the open door into the dining-room longingly.

He knew that Roxana was stabbing him with impatient glances, and he also knew that this avalanche of feeling could not be stayed by mere everyday caresses. In a stupid pay he blurted out:

"Is dinner ready?"

"Dinner!" blazed Roxana Pebbles. "How can you eat? How can you think of eating when this outrage is being heaped upon you? I should think your pride would cry out for revenge."

"Well," said Riley, wearily, "what do you want me to do?"

"Do?" cried Roxana, stamping up and down the room. "I want you to do unto her even as he did unto you."

Riley folded his hands resignedly and settled himself comfortably in his easy chair.

People spoke of the two as Rock and Riley. Nobody could doubt that the sister was the Rock of the family. But Riley, even by his devoted enemies, if he had any, could not have been characterized as Rye, whether in the form of disposition or of drink.

He had one fundamental stability, and that was his loyalty to his friends. How it happened that a man whose heart dominated nine-tenths of his existence could have remained single up to the age of forty-five is one of the mysteries no one has ever explained.

Roxana was the only one who did not wonder at this. Indeed, she took it as a matter of course. Did he not have her? And wasn't that possession enough to satisfy his most fastidious tastes? Indeed, he gave her some reason for thinking so. He had not the heart to give her one pang or one disappointment, and for that reason he

had resolutely put the highest happiness from his life, even from his very thoughts.

It is true that Roxana had often trodden upon his tenderness and chivalry in a way that might have disgusted many a brother. But bitter moments and temporary discomfort passed like a breath of summer wind over Riley's placid soul.

All he cared for was peace and a little cubby hole of a home into which he could withdraw himself—a shelter from all the world after his day's work was done.

He looked up at his raging sister in a bewilderment way, and as he was wont to do, he took off his glasses and wiped them clear of film.

"Well, Roxana," he said again, "tell me what you want me to do, and for heaven's sake let us have some dinner."

"Do?" she said, standing before him with cheeks ablaze. "I want you to buy out that mortgage and throw out that woman out of her home whenever she falls to pay her notes. We could then move in ourselves. It is such a better place than this, and it belongs to you by rights."

When the woman had delivered herself of this terrible sentence she steamed out of the room like a fussy tug, leaving her brother in a state of collapse.

"God bless my soul!" said Riley to himself when he was alone. "This is terrible! I would not have that woman's disposition for a hundred dollars a minute. She's a regular vixen, she is, and I never suspected it before."

That night Riley Pebbles did not sleep. He tossed in his bed with the new thought of revenge that rested like an iceberg upon his soul. It chilled him. It disorganized him. Revenge! What did he know of revenge? He did not know the first rudiments of hating. He could not harbor malice against a spider. How much less against a woman, and that woman the wife of his dear old friend! Loyalty to his sister on the one side, loyalty to his dead friend on the other tore him in twain.

Day after day he went to and fro in a dazed condition. Day after day his sister asked him: "Well, Riley, have you bought that mortgage? And day after day he shook his head in a deprecating way. He longed to take his sister to his arms and kiss away the dense crust that seemed to chill her whole nature. But Roxana would not be thawed either by gestures or words or endearments. Revenge she must have. Revenge her brother must have, whether he would or would not, and she determined to make his peaceful life miserable until he had done that duty to himself.

It happened about two or three weeks after this that Riley met the real estate agent to whom his sister referred, and, impelled by some demon that he did not know his nature harbored, Riley asked:

"Well, Morse, I understand that Mrs. Winfield has bought a house of you and that you hold a mortgage on it. Have you disposed of it?"

"Yes," said Morse. "I have got that mortgage and I wish I could get rid of it."

"How much is it?" said Riley, breathing hard and feeling that he was a traitor in every fibre of his being.

"Only three thousand dollars at 5 per cent."

"Well," said Riley, "I will take it. You may make out the papers to me and I will pay you next Monday, only on one condition—that Mrs. Winfield shall know nothing of this at all. I want her to continue to pay interest to you."

The agent made a note of the transaction, and nothing more was said.

That evening when Riley Pebbles returned home he did not wave his stick at his sister in the window. He walked in like a shamefaced spaniel.

"Have you bought that mortgage yet?" asked his sister, viciously.

"Yes," said Riley, turning upon her with an abruptness which she had never known him to use before. "I have bought that cursed mortgage, and I forbid you ever to mention the subject to me again."

For the first time in her life Roxana was abashed before her brother. A malicious gleam of satisfaction glittered in her small gray eyes. This she tried to hide by casting them down whenever Riley looked up.

Time passed on. While it brought a truce between the two, it did not restore them to their old relationship. But Riley felt guilty—guilty toward himself and guilty toward the dear friend who, after all, had been the only one who understood the simple and clear heart of the man he had unwittingly ruined. As time went on Mr. Pebbles tried to conjure before his memory the image of the woman whose future he had undertaken, at his sister's instigation, to betray.

He remembered a little bunch of a thing, with fluffly black hair, dancing merry eyes, who seemed to regard the whole world as a joke and her husband as a plaything. Indeed, as he endeavored to part the veil of Time she seemed to him not much larger than the two little babies who crawled over her like kittens. Whatever the vision left in his mind, it was always one of love, of contentment and of supreme joyousness of life.

He doubted if he would recognize her on the street, for after Mr. Winfield's death she had disappeared somewhat where down South among relatives, and had only returned that spring to be the unconscious occasion of a separation between himself and his sister.

Holding this mortgage seemed, however, to Riley to give him a sort of guardianship over the widow. Almost as if Roxana might surprise his very thoughts, his mind sneaked toward the little lady with the furtive contentment that occasioned the good man the utmost wonder. He had not once yet walked past Mrs. Winfield's house. This was entirely due to the bashfulness which he had never been able to outgrow.

It was about the middle of October when the agent stepped into his office and told him that Mrs. Winfield was

behind in her October note, and what should the agent do. Mr. Pebbles' heart gave a great flutter.

"Under no circumstances," he said, "will I authorize you to proceed against her. Let her have her time."

A few days after this Mr. Pebbles received a note from the agent, inclosing the following letter:

"My dear Sir—Owing to an unexpected loss it will be impossible to pay what is due to you on my October note. I understand enough of business to know that such delay to an unscrupulous person might mean foreclosure of the mortgage and the sending of myself and little children out into the world. I can give you no promise as to payment and can only beg that you will treat me with as much consideration as possible till I find relief. Very truly yours,"

"FLORENCE WINFIELD."

For the first time since Roxana had turned his nature topsy turvy with her Corsican eye for revenge did Riley Pebbles begin to understand the reason of the load under which he had been led to stoop.

He did not doubt but that the cold-hearted real estate agent would have speedily evicted the poor lady for non-payment of any petty notes that might be due. But now the game laid upon his own hands. He not only was the guardian of his dead friend's widow, but he had become, by reason of her dependence upon his kindness, the lord of her future.

What would Roxana have said if she had known that amnesty not revenge, had taken possession of his heart, and that he was moved by pardon rather than by retaliation? Indeed, at that moment he gloried in the loss of everything for his old chum's sake, but more than this, he glowed with the thought that he could, unknown to her, heap further blessings upon the widow's head.

Riley chuckled to himself. He was beginning to feel happy for the first time since Roxana had put thoughts of malevolence into his nature. As they vanished he was no longer ashamed, because he had again become himself.

It was an October afternoon, warm and retreating, when Riley Pebbles slowly walked toward the house upon which he held the mortgage. He felt excessively embarrassed, for he was going to make a formal call. Mrs. Winfield did not expect him, and he was almost hoping that she would be out. At any rate, he could leave his card, it might seem to an observer upon the street, twirling his cane and with his aggressive looking head in the air, as if he disdained the lower creatures. Indeed, as I have said before, Riley Pebbles was a contradiction, and never did he seem more so than on this beautiful afternoon, when, with a sternness of demeanor and with a fluttering heart, he approached the widow's house. With nose high in the air he was wondering what on earth he should say, when he felt his feet crunch against something hard and his steps arrested by a shrill treble of disapproval.

"Oh, you naughty man."

"You have spoiled our pretty house."

Mr. Pebbles stopped aghast. From his immense height he looked down. He saw a little boy of about four dancing around him in a furious way and with clenched fists. Beside the boy a little girl of three was endeavoring, with black hands, to restore a mud house which had been ruthlessly crushed.

"God bless my soul!" cried Riley. "What have I done?"

"Oh you naughty man!" said the little girl shaking her finger at him.

Mr. Pebbles' great heart leaped toward these children whom he had so unwittingly abused. He had no experience in dealing with boys and girls, but his kindly bosom prompted him to do the right thing. He had forgotten by time all about the widow, all about the mortgage, and he was only intent upon restoring the children to their previous artless state of beatitude.

"Now, my little man," said Riley, "if you won't hit me so hard I will fix you up in no time." He took in the situation at a glance. "Can't you get a little more mud?" he said.

"You can get some from the gutter over there." The boy spoke with a lordly air of command as to a younger brother.

"Ah! I see I can," said Mr. Pebbles, cheerfully. He took off his brand new gloves and scooped up a heaping double handful of the most delicious plastic mud and brought it over with proper humility.

"Now, little kid," he said to the youngest.

"I ain't a kid; I am a girl; my name is Flossie."

"She ain't anything but a kid," said the boy, "ain't she?" appealing to his elder, whom he had very quickly admitted into the tribe of playmates.

"If you say I am a kid," said the little girl, not at all appeased, "I will throw a hunk of this at you." She picked up a handful of mud.

Riley saw his immaculate collar and his expansive bosom prompted him to smooth clean-shaven face ruined beyond recognition, but that did not worry him in the least. For the first time in his life he was playing with children on terms of absolute equality.

"Don't do that," said her brother. "I will tell mamma; it isn't polite." Riley gave his champion a grateful glance, and the two moved closer together.

"Now I tell you what you can do," continued the boy; "put your hand down and I will plaster the mud on top of it." Mr. Pebbles obediently put his huge paw upon the sidewalk, while the boy raised a mountain of mud on it and patted this down with great care.

"There," said the lad when he had fashioned it into the right degree of roundness; "there! Take it out slowly and you will have the bluest of eyes you ever saw."

Flossie stood by with her mouth open. Her nature was sunk in the abyss of feminine admiration.

"Let us make a hole in this end of it," she said, "then we will have a cave, and the Indians can run away when the soldiers chase after them."

How long the three children played