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**CHAPTER XIV.**

**Madam Conway's Disasters.**

At first Madam Conway objected saying she preferred sitting on the bank to intruding herself upon strangers; but as it was now noon-day, and the warm September sun poured fiercely down upon her, she finally concluded to follow Maggie's advice, and gathering up her box and parasol, started for the house, which, with its tansy patch on the right, and its single poplar tree in front, presented rather an uninviting appearance.

"Some vulgar creatures live there, I know. Just hear that old tin horn," she exclaimed, as a blast loud and shrill, blown by practiced lips, told to the men in a distant field that dinner was ready.

A nearer approach disclosed to view a slanting-roofed farmhouse, such as is often found in New England, with high, narrow windows, small panes of glass, and the most indispensable paper curtains of blue indispensible shading the windows of what was probably "the best room." In the apartment opposite, however, they were rolled up, so as to show the old-fashioned drapery of dimity, bordered with a netted fringe. Half a dozen broken pitchers and pot-held geraniums, verbenas and other plants, while the well-kept beds of hollyhocks, sunflowers and poppies indicated a taste for flowers in someone. Everything about the house was faultlessly neat. The door-sill was scrubbed to a chalky white, while the uncovered floor wore the same polished hue.

All this Madam Conway saw at a glance, but it did not prevent her from holding high her aristocratic skirts, lest they should be contaminated, and when, in answer to her knock, an odd looking, peculiarly dressed woman appeared, she uttered an exclamation of disgust, and turning to Maggie, said: "You talk—I can't!"

But the woman did not stand in ceremony. For the last ten minutes she had been watching the strangers as they toiled over the sandy road, and when sure they were coming there, had retreated into her bedroom, donning a flaming red calico, which, guiltless of hoops, clung to her tenaciously, showing her form to good advantage, and rousing at once the risibilities of Maggie. A black lace cap, ornamented with ribbons of the same fanciful color as the dress, adorned her head, and with a dozen or more pins in her mouth, she now appeared holding her sleeve and smoothing down the black collar upon her neck.

In a few words Maggie explained to her their misfortune, and asked permission to tarry there until the carriage was repaired.

"Cutting, cutting," answered the woman, courtesying almost to the floor. "Walk right in, if you can get in. 'It's my cheese day, or I should have been cleared away sooner. Here, Betsy Jane! you have pinkled long enough; come and hist the winders in 't'other

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ALL DRUGGISTS

room, and wing 'em off, so the ladies can set in there out of this dirty place;" then, turning to Madam Conway, who was industriously freeing her French kids from the sand they had accumulated during her walk, she continued: "Have some of my shoes to rest your feet a spell," and, diving into a recess or closet, she brought forth a pair of slippers large enough to hold both of Madam Conway's feet at once.

With a haughty frown the lady declined the offer, while Maggie looked on in delight, pleased with an adventure which promised so much fun. After a moment Betsy Jane appeared, attired in a dress similar to that of her mother, for whose lanky appearance she made ample amends in the wonderful expansion of her robes, which, minus gather or fold at the bottom, set out like a miniature tent, upsetting at once the band box which Madam Conway had placed upon a chair, and which, with its contents, rolled promiscuously over the floor!

"Betsy Jane! How can you wear them abominable things!" exclaimed the distressed woman, stooping to pick up the purple satin which had tumbled out.

A look from the more fashionable daughter, as with a swinging sweep she passed out into the parlor, silenced the mother on the subject of hoops, and thinking her guests must necessarily be thirsty after their walk, she brought them a pitcher of water, asking if they'd "chuse it clear, or with a little ginger and molasses," at the same time calling to Betsy Jane to know if them windows was "wung off!"

The answer was in the affirmative, whereupon the ladies were invited to enter, which they did the more willingly, as through the open door they had caught glimpses of what proved to be a very handsome Brussels carpet, which in that room seemed a little out of place, as did the sofa and handsome hair-cloth rocking-chair in this last Madam Conway seated herself, while Maggie reclined upon a lounge, wondering at the difference in the various articles of furniture, some of which were quite expensive, while others were of the most common kind.

"Wh can they be? She looks like some one I have seen," said Maggie as Betsy Jane left the room. "I mean to ask their names." But this her grandmother would not suffer. "It was too much like familiarity," she said, "and she did not believe in putting one's self on a level with such people."

Another loud blast from the horn was blown, for the bustling woman of the house was evidently getting uneasy, and ere long three or four men appeared, washing themselves from the spout of the pump, and wiping upon a coarse towel which hung upon a roller near the back door.

"I shan't eat at the same table with those creatures," said Madam Conway, feeling intuitively that she would be invited to dinner.

"Why, grandma! yes you will, if she asks you," answered Maggie. "Only think how kind they are to us, perfect strangers!"

What else she might have said was prevented by the entrance of Betsy Jane, who informed them that "dinner was ready;" and, with a mental groan, as she thought how she was to be martyred, Madam Conway followed her to the dining-room, where a plain, substantial farmer's meal was spread. Standing at the head of the table, with her good-humored face all in a glow, was the hostess, who, pointing

Madam to a chair, said: "Now, set right by, and make yourselves to hum. Mebbe I orto have set the table over, and I guess I should if I had anything fit to eat. Be you fond of boiled victuals?" and taking it for granted they were, she loaded both Madam Conway's and Maggie's plate with every variety of vegetables used in the preparation of the dish known everywhere as "boiled victuals."

By this time the men had ranged themselves in respectful silence upon the opposite side of the table, each stealing an admiring though modest glance at Maggie; for the masculine heart, whether it beat beneath a homespun frock or coat of finest cloth is alike susceptible to glowing, youthful beauty like that of Maggie Miller. The head of the house was absent—"had gone to town with a load of wood," so his spouse informed the ladies, at the same time pouring out a cup of tea, which she said she had tried to make strong enough to bear up an egg. "Betsy Jane," she continued, casting a deprecating glance first at the blue sugar bowl and then at her daughter, "what possessed you to put on this brown sugar, when I told you to get crush. Have some of the apple sass? It's new—made this morning. Dew have some," she continued, as Madam Conway shook her head. "Mebbe it's better than it looks. Seem's of you wasn't goin' to eat 'nothin'." Betsy Jane, now you're up after the crush, fetch them china sassers for the cov-cumbers. Like enough she'll eat some of them."

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But, affecting a headache, Madam Conway declined everything, save the green tea and a Boston cracker, which at the first mention of headache, the distressed woman had brought her.

Suddenly remembering Mike, who having fixed the carriage, was fast asleep on a wheelbarrow under the woodshed, she exclaimed: "For the land of massy, if I hain't forgot that your gentlemen! Go, William, and call him this minute. Are you sick at your stomach?" she asked, turning to Madam Conway, who, at the thought of eating with her drunken coachman, had uttered an exclamation of disgust. "Go, Betsy Jane, and fetch the camphire, quick!"

But Madam Conway did not need the camphor, and so she said, adding that Mike was better where he was, Mike thought so, too, and refused to

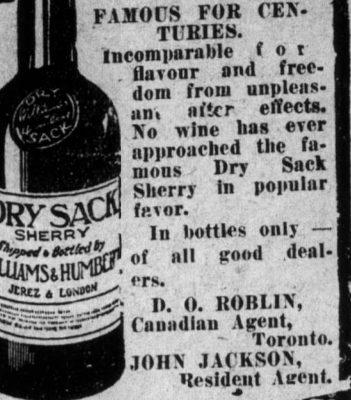
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come, whereupon the woman insisted that he must. "There was room enough," she said, "and no kind of sense in Betsy Jane's taking up the hull side of the table with them rats. She could set nearer the young lady."

"Certainly," answered Maggie, anxious to see how the rats would manage to squeeze in between herself and the table leg, as they would have to do if they came an inch nearer.

This feat could not be done, and in attempting it Betsy Jane upset Maggie's tea upon her handsome traveling dress, eliciting from her mother the exclamation, "Betsy Jane Douglas, you allus was the blunderin'est girl!" This little accident diverted the woman's mind from Mike, while Madam Conway, starting at the name of Douglas, thought to herself "Douglas! Douglas! I did not suppose 'twas so common a name. But, then, it don't hurt George any, having these creatures bear his name."

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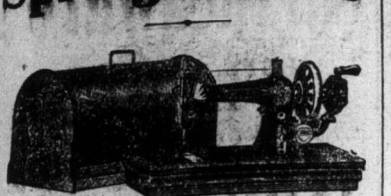
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