

## Her Proportion.

(Agnes E. Wilson, in 'Forward'.)

'It seems such a worthy object,' Claire said, musingly, resting her elbows on the literature-strewn table. 'I hope the call will be met, I'm sure. If I had a million dollars, I would just love to help in such cases.'

They all smiled. 'If I had a million dollars,' was a favorite hypothesis of Claire's. The young people were gathered round the evening lamp, and their sympathies had been aroused by an account of a worthy charity which was in dire need of funds.

Bert, the big brother, laid down his magazine. 'How much would you give them, Claire?' he asked, half in earnest, half in jest. 'If you had a million dollars, how much would that cause be benefited by your generosity?'

'Oh, I don't know,' laughed Claire. 'Why, if I had a million, I'd give them, yes, I'd give them five thousand dollars. I'm sure somebody ought to give them five thousand dollars. Wouldn't it be lovely to be able to do it?'

Her brother smiled a quizzical smile, and rapidly making some figures on a piece of paper he pushed it toward her.

'What on earth?' she enquired, curiously. 'What is this, Bert?'

'Oh, I was just figuring out your proportion, that's all. Considering that you haven't a million, I thought you might like to know how much might be expected of a young lady with an income of ten dollars a month, which, I believe, is the sum for which you agreed to forego the new-womanish idea of earning your own living.'

'But, I don't understand.'

'I was counting your income, in case you had a million, at six percent on your capital. That's a very good interest, by the way, and it would produce an income of sixty thousand dollars. Five thousand dollars is one-twelfth of that sum, as you see. One-twelfth of your present annual income is ten dollars. Do you perceive my application, sister mine?'

They all joined in the laugh against Claire, who accepted the situation gracefully.

'I'm afraid you are going away beyond my resources,' she replied. 'They consist at present of two dollars and thirty-seven cents and a postage stamp. You'll have to revise your calculations, Bert.'

'All right. We'll take your million dollars as a basis of computation. Five thousand dollars is to one million dollars as sixty cents is to one hundred and twenty dollars. You can't get out of it, this time, sis. You owe this good and worthy cause sixty cents. I might point out that the former basis of calculation is the true one; but I'm so anxious to see you contribute the sixty cents, that I waive the claim to the ten dollars.'

'How much good would sixty cents do?' Claire queried.

'Sixty cents' worth,' Bert replied. 'Come, Claire, I've reduced your air-castle generosity to cold cash. Pay up, now.'

'Whatever put such an idea into your head, Bert?' asked the other sister, Helen, throwing aside her paper and leaning forward to join in the conversation.

'Something I was reading here,' replied Bert. 'Just listen: It was so strikingly apropos of Claire's remark, that I couldn't help noticing it. The subject is "Air castles." Just hear what ye editor says: "Living in an air castle is about as profitable as owning a half-interest in a rainbow."'

'I should think it would be lovely to own a half-interest in a rainbow,' interrupted

Cousin Mildred, who had listened in interested silence up to this point.

Bert read on, unheeding the interruption. "Air castles are built of golden moments; the only value of the air castle is the raw material thus made valueless."

'That's true, at least,' commented Helen. 'I call that a long way from the subject in hand,' Claire said, saucily. 'I fail to see how these glittering generalizations suggested to Bert his exceedingly practical application of my well-meaning remark.'

'I don't think you will ever let me get to it,' Bert replied, in pretended vexation. 'You girls never let a fellow get beyond the first two sentences.'

'Skip,' suggested Claire. 'I'm too curious, to let you read all that goes between.'

'The author has a good deal to say about air-castle generosity—I suppose he was thinking of people who wish they had a million to spend—and he winds up with the sentence which inspired me: "Live up to your proportion"; this is the magic formula which changes air castles into fortresses. There are no glittering generalities about that, eh, Claire?'

'Read it all, please, Bert,' requested Helen. 'It sounds as if it might be helpful.'

They settled themselves to listen, but one of them at least was following out her own thoughts rather than those of the breezy editorial which Bert was reading. Mildred Vincent was earnestly wondering what her 'proportion' might be.

It was all very well to talk to Helen and Claire of their proportion. For such young girls their allowance was a liberal one; at least, so it seemed to Mildred, who had accepted the home her uncle had offered her, but was striving to eke out her other expenses from the income of the very little property which her father had left her. Nobody knew of her many little economies, practiced in order that she might not appear to a disadvantage beside her cousins. She had purposely left her uncle and aunt in ignorance of her exact income, and she tried to manage so that they should not suspect how tiny it was. Uncle was generous, but she was not willing to tax his generosity further than necessity demanded.

She thought about it as Bert read on, a little shadow coming over her sunny face as she did so. She had been touched to the heart by the appeal which they had been talking about, and she had wished, like Claire, that she might do something worth while by way of answering it. But even Claire's proportion was away beyond her. Sixty cents would almost empty the meagre little pocketbook, and its contents must last several weeks yet. Sixty cents! Ten cents was beyond her ability to give.

Her cousin finished the reading and laid the paper aside.

'Let me see it a moment, please, Bert,' Mildred begged. 'I want to see just one thing in it; I didn't quite catch it as you read.'

She turned to the sentence which Bert had quoted as his first inspiration, and re-read it carefully. Very shortly she excused herself to her cousins, and went upstairs to be alone with her thoughts.

'Live up to your proportion.' It was not 'Give up to your proportion,' although her cousins had restricted their discussion to that narrower phase of the subject. She sat down in the white moonlight, leaving her lamp unlit, and began to ponder over what the message, which had so strangely appealed to her, really meant. Surely, she thought, reverently, the message must be for her, or her own heart would not have answered it so strongly.

Her air castles! She still loved to build them, even though they meant only golden moments made valueless; and her voice was always the foundation for her dream castles, the sweet little thread of a voice which had promised so much more when she was a child than it did now, and which she knew now would never afford a foundation for anything more substantial than air castles; and yet the building of her fairy fabrics started in the same old way—'If I were a great singer!' Now it was the great throngs of people in some crowded concert hall hanging breathless upon her silvery notes; now it was a weary one strengthened for daily toil by the sweetness of her message; now it was a little child who forgot his tears at the magic of her voice. Only air castles! She knew it very well, and in the bitterness of the thought she had almost ceased to sing, in spite of the fact that her uncle liked her simple ballads, and that hers was the only singing voice in the family circle. God had not given her a great voice, neither had he given her the means for the cultivation of her smaller gift.

'But the wild birds praise him,' she said to herself, humbly. She remembered how her aunt, that very afternoon, had looked her way as she told how the dear old lady whom she was going to visit loved to hear her favorite hymns.

'I might have given her as much pleasure as if I had been a great singer,' she thought, regretfully—she had not offered to accompany her aunt—and it would have gratified auntie, too; and Helen would have liked me to help with some singing the day she had her primary-school babies here. There's one way in which I haven't lived up to my proportion, I'm sure. Perhaps there will be other ways shown to me later if I keep watching for them.'

It was surprising how many opportunities she found to contribute her proportion when she had once opened her eyes to them.

'I'm trying to live up to my proportion,' she explained, one evening, with heightened color, when Bert had commented with cousinly candor upon her changed attitude in regard to the home music. 'That article you read is responsible for it.'

She had spoken lightly, but Bert noticed the earnest look which followed her smile. He was beside her at the piano, and the others had resumed their chat as soon as her song was finished.

'Then you will be willing to help me!' he said eagerly. 'I have not mentioned it to you girls, for fear you wouldn't be in favor of it. But you see, Mildred, I've got acquainted with a lot of boys who are just at the age when they want some outside interests, and I'm afraid they aren't getting the right sort. They aren't much younger than I am, but they haven't the home I have. I've been thinking I'd like to have them here, say one evening a week; mother will be willing, I'm sure, if you girls will help me to entertain them.'

Mildred's eyes were shining. 'Can I really help you, Bert?'

'More than any one else. Helen and Claire play, of course, but boys like a jolly song in which they can all join. If you help, I'll be sure that there is always something entertaining on hand. It isn't anything very ambitious, just a social evening for five or six fellows who need a little steadying, that's all.'

Bert scarcely understood Mildred's enthusiasm.

'But it is so well worth doing,' she cried. 'Why, Bert, if my voice is even ever so little useful, I'll feel as if my air castle was turning into a fortress, after all.'