

judice. She was tall and well-grown, but awkward and shy to these town-bred girls, and her ways, her speech, her dress, all alike came in for their scathing comments. Her hair turned back from her forehead, and guiltless of fringe, was coiled at the back in a fashion which might have been stylish in the year one, as Louise wittily remarked, but was certainly not up to date now. Her dress, a black and white check which seemed to emphasize the breadth of the sturdy figure, was only fit to have 'come out of the ark,' according to their fastidious taste. Her strong brown hands, tanned by summer suns, looked big and clumsy by their slenderer white ones, and she would never be able to do anything but the heaviest work. Her country-made boots were a sore distress to their feelings; she had neither bracelet nor brooch, nor ring, and her very watch was an old-fashioned silver turnip; while although her name was Elizabeth, which was passable, in an outburst of mistaken confidence she told them the first day that, at home, she was always called Betty or Betsy!

This was the last straw. Among the Roses, the Lilys, the Maudes, the Eleanors, the Dorotheys that adorned that busy work-room, what place was there for a plain unvarnished Betty! They did not know that the daughters of many a famous house had long ago proudly borne a similar title, and they gave her up as hopeless. She was entirely behind the age; her dress was dowdy, she had never read a real novel, she was frightened to cross the quietest street, and her talk was all of pigs and cows, and wild flowers, and those everlasting brothers of hers. So after a few days' veiled yet none the less scornful wondering, they coldly and politely decided to leave her severely alone.

It is thoughtless people who cause most pain. Deliberate, intentional cruelty is a much rarer thing. It is your heedless, unobservant person, who never sees with any eyes but his own, who tramples on the feelings of others with a sublime unconsciousness that they have any to be wounded. There was not one of these girls who would not have been appalled and shocked had any one plainly shown them their unkindness. Their dislike was altogether passive, they didn't do anything, they would have said, they simply shut Elizabeth out in the cold by their indifference, while the girl herself would willingly have borne with rougher ways, if these had betokened the least spark of kindly interest. Although she was seventeen and a beautiful needlewoman, she had much to learn, and unfortunately for her, Miss Beckenham was forced at this time to be frequently absent from home, leaving the capable Eleanor to queen it happily over all the others. She did her duty by Elizabeth, revised and instructed with much dignity and immense satisfaction to herself, but her pupil would have gladly exchanged her civil and formal explanations for the merry railery she bestowed upon Letty's uncertain tucks, and Ada's straggling stitches. She grew more and more nervous, and withdrew further and further into her shell until her nickname of 'the Hermit,' became not inappropriate. But for Miss Beckenham's absence things could hardly have got to such a pass. The other sister, who superintended the house, was rarely in the work-room, and as Elizabeth was too loyal to complain, she naturally supposed that all was well. However, she made Sunday the one bright spot in the week to the girl, and sent her lack with renewed energy and resolution not to be so shy but to endeavor to make friends, only to find herself driven back afresh by the invisible barrier across her path.

One dull November afternoon a week after

Miss Beckenham's return, everything seemed to go criss-cross in the work-room. For once Eleanor lost her temper, and her critical remarks caused poor Elizabeth to sit with burning cheeks and trembling fingers, while her blue eyes were dim with tears. Rose Daly looking up, suddenly felt all at once a pang of compunction, and said at last.

'Oh, well, Eleanor, everybody's got to begin.'

'I know that as well as you, but a baby could do this, even Ada.'

'I'm not a baby,' snapped that damsel, who had pricked her fingers and felt rebellious, until her superior's calm stare reduced her to order.

Everyone's nerves seemed on edge, and the sound of the tea-bell was a welcome interruption. The work-room was speedily deserted for the large barely furnished meal-room, dark and gloomy by day, but made cheery and bright by the roaring fire crackling in the huge old-fashioned grate. The girls always had this time to themselves, and while the tea was 'masking,' they congregated round the hearth chattering volubly after the manner of their kind. They made a merry group with the firelight streaming on their eager faces, and outside the circle at the far end of the room Elizabeth stood gazing listlessly at the thick yellow fog and the phantomlike figures passing to and fro in the street. Great tears gathered slowly once more in her wistful eyes, and blurred afresh

knee, and tell her all her troubles! How lonely and strange it all was—how she couldn't get on with the girls and no one seemed to want her. But it could not be, and in the midst of all her longings she was yet unselfish enough to be glad. Glad that those at home, whose burdens were heavy enough should not have hers to bear as well. She had come here to learn, to fit herself to gain her own living, and by-and-bye—glorious thought—she would be able to send help home, where times were bad, and there were so many to be thought of and cared for. She set her teeth hard and choked back the sob that was rising to her lips when she was startled by a terrible, hoarse cry, and at the same moment the dim room was illuminated by a column of flame that rushed towards her from the midst of the crowd of girls, who now fell backwards, huddled one upon the other.

In an instant Elizabeth saw what had happened. Foolish little Letty, walking along the flat edge of the fender after a reckless habit of hers, in a moment of excitement had flung the back of her dress, which was of a loose fluffy material, right against the blazing coals, and in an instant the whole thing was aflame. The maddened and terrified child ran screaming across the room, she knew not whither, and the rapid motion, fanned by the open door as one of the panic-stricken girls tore downstairs, drove the fire fiercely upward until she seemed completely



SHE SCARCELY FELT THE FIRE.

the shadowy people flitting past and vanishing into the mysterious gloom. She was so very, very lonely, and as she stood there rose before her a vision of home. She could picture it all. The quaint farmhouse parlor where the bronze lamp was not lighted yet, but where the busy mother was knitting ceaselessly by the fire. The table was set, and Rebecca, the rough good-hearted servant was cutting those tall stacks of bread and butter, which would speedily be demolished by hungry schoolboys. On the opposite side of the hearth the grey-haired farmer was resting for a few moments after the day's work, and at his feet, dividing the rug with the old sheep-dog, sat Dolly, the curly-haired baby sister, her especial charge, impartially embracing a somewhat dilapidated namesake and a wriggling tortoise-shell kitten.

Oh, how the girl's heart ached for them all! If she could go back just for five minutes, and lay her tired head against her mother's

enveloped in it. There was not an instant to lose, and the others neither knew how nor were in a condition to render help. Elizabeth turned, seized the thick heavy cloth from a side-table loaded with books, scattering the contents left and right, and calling to her companions to close the door, she held it up well in front of her as the awful figure flung itself into her out-stretched arms. There was no time for a more cautious approach, and fortunately for both, Letty was too small and slight even in her frenzy of fear to be a match for the vigorous country girl who threw her as swiftly and as gently, as she could to the ground, smothering her in the massive folds.

'Quick, quick, bring me something else; a blanket—anything!' she commanded breathlessly; and so absorbed was she that she never knew who brought the great woollen curtain which was thrust into her hands, and enabled her to finish her task. She scarcely