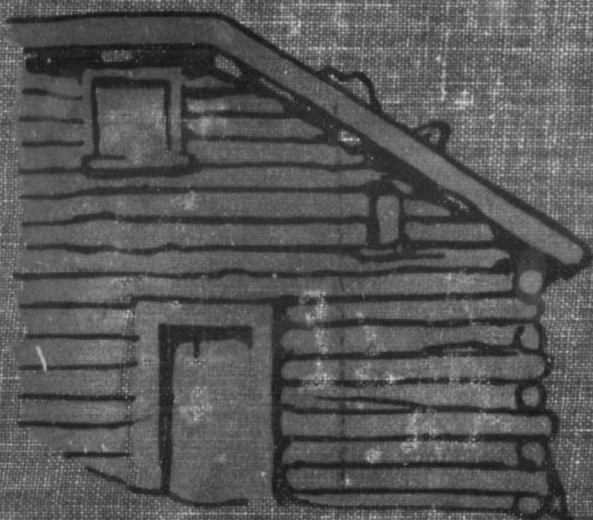


SISTERS OF SILVER CREEK



*Bessie
Marchant*

RITA EAST

Sisters of Silver Creek

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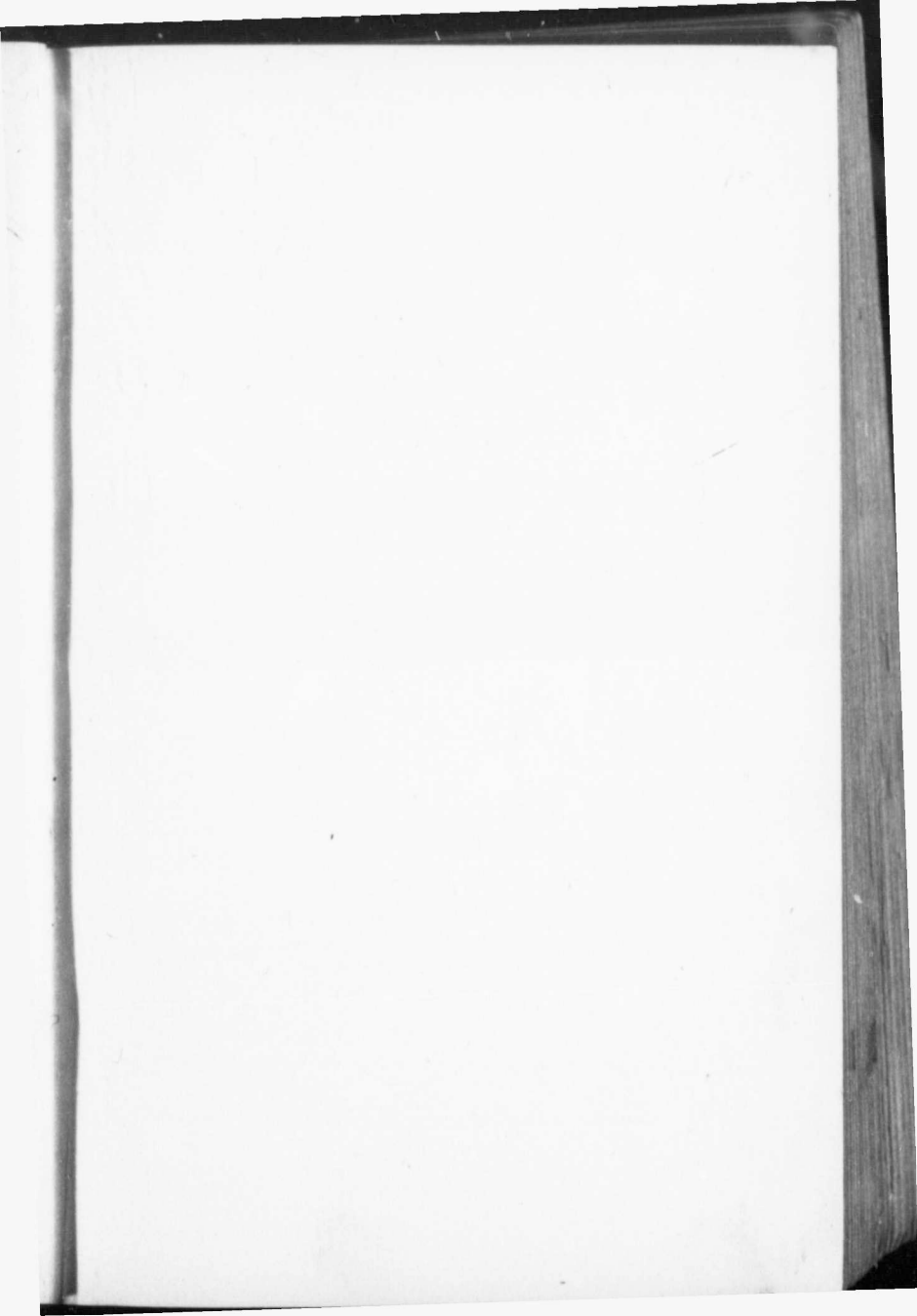
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CATCHING BETSEY

Sisters of Silver Creek

A Story of Western Canada

BY

BESSIE MARCHANT

Author of "Three Girls on a Ranch" "Harriet Goes a-Roaming" &c.

Illustrated by Robert Hope

BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED

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CHAPTER I

Uncle Ben's Letter

THE sun was shining as brightly as if there were no such thing in the world as sorrow or anxiety, when Sue crept out before breakfast to see if Tim had fed the pigs and given the chickens their morning meal.

This had been her habit for the last ten days. She had no fear that Tim would neglect his work, but ever since her mother's seizure it had seemed proper that some one should look after outside things a little.

The pigs were still shouldering each other from the troughs, in order to get the biggest mouthfuls for themselves; while the chickens, which had been fed first, were languidly preening their feathers in the sunny corner beyond the barn.

Sue stood watching them for a long minute, wondering that everything could look so natural and happy, just as if the finger of change had not as yet touched the old familiar life, which had seemed a trifle tame and humdrum while it lasted, but became invested with a peculiar sweetness and joy, now that it was slipping from her.

Then a lump came up in her throat, and a black mist of tears obscured her vision, for the old irresponsible past had gone for ever, and it was the stern realities of life which had to be faced now.

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"Sue, Sue, I want you ; come quickly, dear !"

It was Kitty calling, and her voice had a glad eager ring, which fairly shocked Sue, for it did not seem decent, in her way of thinking, to shout in cheerful tones on the very next day after one's mother had been carried to the grave.

So, instead of calling in reply, she hurried round the corner of the barn to the house, while a faint curiosity began to stir within her as to the object for which she was so urgently wanted.

Tim's mother, who had slept in the house since the sickness and death of Mrs. Walsh, had got breakfast ready for the girls before going off to her own cottage across the road, so there were no pressing duties demanding the attention of either Kitty or Sue that morning, and, in consequence, neither of them had troubled to get up very early.

Sue entered the house by the back door, and going through the kitchen, went into the little back sitting-room where breakfast was laid.

Kitty stood by the table reading a letter. She was tall, slender, and graceful, with masses of dark curly hair, a winsome face, and a bright smile. People always spoke of her as the prettiest of the Walsh sisters, but Sue privately considered Pattie better-looking.

Sue was plain. Every one said so, and she herself was very sensitive on the score of her looks. But her disposition was so kind, and she was so ready to help other people, that she was by far the most popular of the three sisters.

Kitty turned as she entered the room, saying eagerly, "Oh, Sue, there is such a wonderful letter from Uncle Ben !"

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"From Uncle Ben in America?" asked Sue, in a bewildered fashion.

"Of course. We have only one Uncle Ben that I know of," rejoined the elder sister, with a touch of asperity. "He has written from Assiniboia, saying how sorry he is for us."

"But he could not have known about mother?" interrupted Sue, in surprised query, while she tried to think in what part of the two Americas Assiniboia might be. Then her geographical knowledge being unequal to the strain put upon it, she gave up the attempt and awaited explanations.

"The letter is to mother, but of course I had to open it. She must have written to him soon after she had to give that bill of sale to Hubbard, and he asks us all to go out to Canada and live with him. Ah, here comes Pattie; now I can read the letter to the pair of you."

Pattie, a fragile girl of about fifteen, weary and listless in appearance, came into the room, and was promptly hustled into the nearest easy-chair by Sue, who wanted to hear what the letter contained.

"Don't be so rough, Sue. I have got a headache, and feel so shaky this morning," said Pattie, in petulant tones. Her eyes were swollen and red with crying, and she looked utterly miserable.

"Never mind, darling, you will feel ever so much better when you have heard the news and had some breakfast," Kitty said caressingly, as she crossed the room and dropped a light kiss on Pattie's pale face.

The dead mother had always been so tender with her delicate youngest-born, that Pattie had been thoroughly and systematically spoiled from her earliest infancy, and now that her mother had been so suddenly taken from

Sisters of Silver Creek

her, she was of all the sisters most crushed by the blow.

"I don't want any breakfast, and I expect the letter will only make my head worse," the poor child murmured, in a plaintive tone, leaning back in her chair with closed eyes, while two big tears rolled slowly down her cheeks from under her long dark lashes.

But Kitty did not see the tears, for her gaze was bent again on the letter, while Sue was looking at Kitty, who now began to read—

"Silver Creek, Qu'Appelle, Assiniboia, Canada.

"MY DEAR SISTER,

"I was glad to get your letter, which followed me here from Winnipeg. I bought this place, and settled down about three years ago. I meant to have written and told you, but the time has gone so fast, and I have never seemed in the mood for writing.

"I am very sorry for your troubles; the poor boy's death was very sad. Still, you have your girls left, and they, I have no doubt, will be of great comfort to you.

"Your financial position is certainly serious. What-ever induced you to go in for speculation? A woman always burns her fingers over that sort of thing; and in my opinion you had no right to risk the money left by your husband to maintain you and your children in decent comfort. But it is of no use to cry over spilt milk, and I am going to suggest a way out of your difficulties, which I hope you will be willing to take. Bring your three girls, and come out to me; I can give you all a good home, and as I have saved a decent pile, neither you nor the girls need ever know what want is, for of course all I possess will be theirs when I am gone.

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"From your letter I gather that the bill of sale will wind you up about the end of June. When your things have been sold, come straight to me. I suppose there will be enough from the wreckage to pay your fares out here. If not, send me a cable stating how much you require, and I will at once cable back the needed amount.

"In your case I should take the children into confidence; it is always good for them to know the difficulties of their parents; it makes the young ones self-reliant, and sympathetic too.

"But letter-writing is always a toil to me, so I will stop. I shall hope to see you and my three nieces very soon. My love to you all. Ever yours,

"BENJAMIN HOLT."

"What a nice, kind man he seems! Oh, Kitty, shall you write to say we will go to Canada?" cried Pattie, a pink flush of excitement spreading over her pale cheeks.

"I will write to-day. Then, as Mr. Hubbard says he must sell the furniture next week, we had better start directly after the sale," Kitty replied, with vigour and determination in her tone.

Sue caught her breath in a gasp. In that household it had always been the mother who decided everything, and it seemed so strange to find Kitty settling their destinies in this fashion.

"Don't you think it would be better to write to Uncle Ben about mother's death, and ask him what he would like us to do?" she ventured, thinking that perhaps her uncle would not care to have them now that their mother was gone, and feeling how terrible it would be to go so far, and find no welcome at the end of the journey.

"We cannot afford to wait," replied Kitty, more

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decidedly than before. "Directly the furniture is sold we must go into lodgings, and expenses of that kind will speedily reduce our little store of money. This offer of Uncle Ben's to take us all in seems absolutely providential, and I vote that we accept it at once."

"So do I," said Pattie, sitting erect and displaying unusual energy. "I only wish it were possible for us to start to-day, for life here seems just too bad to be borne, now that mother has gone;" and her energy collapsed suddenly in a fit of dismal weeping.

The other two comforted her as best they could, although their own hearts were heavy enough, poor things, while the prospect before them, apart from their uncle's letter, might well have daunted stouter hearts than theirs.

The need to be cheerful for Pattie's sake helped them a little, while the sudden boiling over of the kettle recalled the neglected business of breakfast to their minds, and the meal made them all disposed to take more hopeful views of life.

"What a queer hand Uncle Ben writes," remarked Sue, as they lingered over the breakfast-table discussing the present and planning the future.

"It is queer; I had a difficulty in making it all out at first. But what an old dear he is to say that he will leave all his money to us. We shall be quite heiresses, and able to do all sorts of pleasant things," Kitty said, with a toss of her head, and a sparkle in her eye.

"I think he is a darling too, because we shall all have a home together again; and I have been so afraid that you and Sue would have to take situations, while I had to live with Tim's mother, or go to the workhouse," Pattie replied, with a sigh of intense satisfaction.

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"I will tell you, now that the necessity is over, just what I had meant to do," said Kitty, catching her breath in a little sob, then breaking into a laugh to hide it. "I meant to have gone on my knees to that old Hubbard, on my knees, mind you, to ask him to let that bill of sale stand over for a year, while we took boarders, and paid interest on the loan."

"He would not have consented to that," Sue replied quickly, her shrewd common sense seeing the impractical side of such a scheme.

"Probably not. At any rate, my pride will be saved considerable mortification, thanks to Uncle Ben," Kitty answered gaily. Then, becoming suddenly grave and business-like, she went on, "You will have to do the work to-day, Sue, what must be done at least, for there are so many things for me to see to. First of all I must write to Uncle Ben. I shall tell him all about mother's seizure and death, how we three are left next door to destitute, and that we are coming out to him as fast as steam can bring us. Then I shall have to write to a shipping company to know what vessels are sailing, and how much it will cost us to go to Assiniboia. By the way, Pattie darling, do step into the dining-room and bring our school atlas here; I have not even a hazy notion as to where in Canada Assiniboia may be, or whether it is a province, a country, or a town. Oh dear, what a shocking thing it is to be ignorant!"

"Why don't you write your letters in the dining-room? It would be quieter than here," said Sue, as she began to clear the table as quickly as possible, in order that Kitty might commence operations without delay.

"Because if I write letters there they always sound so stiff and formal, and I do want to make a good

impression on Uncle Ben," Kitty replied, with a rather wavering laugh.

"I wonder what he is like—to look at, I mean," Sue said wistfully, as she piled cups and plates in an orderly fashion on a tray for removal.

"Rough, I expect. I believe that most of those self-made colonials are very unpolished," answered Kitty, with that little air of superiority which she often unconsciously displayed, just because she was two years older than Sue, and so of course two years wiser on all subjects.

"He must be very kind though, for his letter is really nice," Sue went on, with a yearning note in her voice, as if anxious to make herself believe what she said.

"Undoubtedly, or he would not have written as he did," Kitty said, stooping to pull her shabby old writing-desk from under the side-table, where it usually stood, serving as a footstool for any one who preferred to sit sewing by the little side window. Then she went on, in a half-hesitating fashion, "I think he was right too in what he said about parents taking their children into their confidence. Just think what we have had to bear since that morning when poor mother dropped in that apoplectic seizure."

"I know," Sue answered, with a shiver; "but she kept the troubles to herself so that we might have nicer times. It was all meant in kindness."

"Yes, yes; but if only we had known about things, matters need never have got so bad as this," Kitty said, fighting down her emotion with a resolute hand, though her face had grown haggard with care. "It was because we wanted this and that, that she ran so heavily into

Uncle Ben's Letter

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debt, and then tried to smooth things over by getting that loan from Hubbard."

"We had always had things we wanted, you see," began Sue, with a sort of apology in her tone, as she thought of the new piano standing in the drawing-room, for which they had all three begged so hard last Christmas.

"That is the worst of it. If mother had said that she was poor, and could not afford it, that she had already more debts than she could pay, we should have done without the piano, and without a good many other things also. But, as Uncle Ben says, it is of no use to cry over spilt milk, so we must just get over the troubles as best we can, and be humbly thankful that he is willing to smooth our way in the future. Now I really must begin my letters, or they will never get done," said Kitty, briskly.

But at that minute Pattie came back with the atlas under her arm, saying that Mr. Hubbard was knocking at the front door.

"I will go to him," said Sue, with a brave face, but a shrinking heart; for she was genuinely afraid of this man, who had them in his power.

CHAPTER II

The Wrench

MR. WALSH had died when his three daughters were quite small children. Indeed Pattie had no remembrance of him, while Sue's recollections were of the vaguest, and it was only Kitty who could recall his face, and talk of how he used to swing her right up into the boughs of the old apple tree in the orchard.

Their mother was so capable and managing that the children seemed never really to miss the father who had died before they had learned to need him ; and life, up to within a fortnight ago, had been very easy and pleasant for them, with only the shadow of Phil's death to sadden the sunny days.

Sue and Phil were twins, and in childhood had been inseparables, as twins usually are. Then Phil had been sent away to school, where he made the acquaintance of a sea-captain's son, and from that time his career in life was settled ; he would be a sailor or nothing at all.

Mrs. Walsh was simply horrified at the idea. Living all her life inland, her knowledge of ocean life was limited to an occasional visit to the seashore, and she entirely failed to understand the fascination the grey heaving waters could have for her only son, for whom she had planned such a very different future.

Her husband had been a brilliant scholar, and she expected Phil to follow in his father's footsteps ; but the boy had only a very ordinary share of brains, although he was persevering, and had plenty of common sense.

However, go to sea he would, and finding that there was no turning him, his mother decided through the advice of her friends to give him such a taste of the disagreeables of seafaring life, that his first voyage should be his last. So at fifteen he was shipped aboard the *Cleopatra* for a voyage to Australia. This, so far from having the desired effect, only strengthened his determination to follow the sea as a profession, his letters home being brimful of delight at the novel experiences through which he was passing.

The *Cleopatra* was away for a year. Then, on the morning of Sue and Phil's sixteenth birthday, Mrs. Walsh had a letter from the captain, telling her that Phil had been washed overboard one night and drowned.

The blow was a very terrible one to the mother, and, although she seemed to recover from it quickly and to conduct her affairs with her old brisk energy, her power of bringing her business affairs to a successful issue seemed to slacken. She made mistakes, some of them very serious ones, getting every month more hopelessly involved in money troubles. Her daughters were never allowed to share her anxieties, they did not even know that she had any, and when she appeared to be silent and absorbed, they were in the habit of saying to each other, that their mother was secretly fretting about poor Phil's tragic end.

But matters were hastening to a crisis. One morning, a month after Sue's seventeenth birthday, Mrs. Walsh came down as usual to her breakfast, but when she had

Sisters of Silver Creek

opened her letters, she dropped senseless on the floor in an apoplectic seizure.

In the fright and flurry of the sudden illness no one thought of the letters as a possible cause of the catastrophe. It was only when the doctor came to inquire into the reasons which might have led to the seizure, that Kitty thought of the letters and went to find and examine them.

At first she could not understand the trend of the two business communications which had arrived that morning. It was only when Sue had been called and consulted, that some glimmering of the state of things came to the astonished girls. One letter was from a stockbroker with whom their mother often had dealings, and announced the utter collapse of some scheme, in which it appeared Mrs. Walsh had been somewhat deeply involved. The other letter, signed Richard Hubbard, stated that it was not possible for him to renew the loan, and if the money to repay it was not forthcoming at the end of June, Mrs. Walsh must face the unpleasant experience of having her home sold up under a bill of sale.

It was well for the girls that the shock of their mother's sudden illness had so numbed their faculties, that they could not realize the full significance of their position, or they might have broken down under the strain. The doctor, to whom Kitty showed the letters, understood, and was exceedingly pitiful; but he forbore making the grim truth plain to them just then, because their mother's state demanded all their thought and care as she lay in her living death.

Six days she lingered, but never regained consciousness, then slipped out of life so quietly, that those who watched her did not at first know she was dead. It was then that the doctor was forced to make their position

The Wrench

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clear to Kitty and Sue, who had, as it were, to become women all in a moment. They hid the full gravity of affairs from Pattie at the first, because she was so crushed by the shock of her mother's sudden death.

Acting on the advice of the doctor, the two girls made arrangements for a severely simple funeral, and it was when Pattie hotly protested at the meanness of their mourning garments that they had to tell her of the ruin just ahead.

There had been no time to make any definite plans, but Kitty and Sue had decided that they would take situations as domestic servants, because they could earn the most money in that way, and most of their wages would be needed to keep Pattie from the necessity to work.

Then Uncle Ben's letter arrived so opportunely on the day after the funeral, and they found their destiny shaped in a most unexpected fashion.

Sue shivered as she went along the passage to the front door. Mr. Hubbard, who was a grocer and a money-lender in Woodbury, was a big fat man, with a loud voice and a patronizing air. He had always been very willing to let Mrs. Walsh have money at a high rate of interest, and to renew the loan as often as she required, until her solvency became doubtful, when he deemed it necessary to make sure of his money.

"Good morning, miss. Can I see your sister?" he asked, bustling into the quiet house with as much noisy vigour as if the place already belonged to him. Indeed, practically it was his, as, in addition to the bill of sale, he had a mortgage on the premises of more than half the market value.

Sue showed him into the drawing-room, then went to call Kitty, feeling thankful that her elder sister had the

Sisters of Silver Creek

courage to stand up to this odious man, and answer him back in the fearless fashion which was so characteristic of Kitty.

"You wished to see me, I believe?"

The eldest Miss Walsh carried herself with the air of a queen, while the severe plainness of her black frock added to her dignity, calling forth a grudging respect from the creditor, and bringing him hurriedly to his feet as she entered the room.

"A little matter of business that had to be settled, though, of course, I am sorry to intrude at such a time," he said, waving his podgy hands with an apologetic air.

"I am really glad you did come so soon," Kitty replied, motioning him to a seat with a rather disdainful flourish. "My sisters and I are very anxious that everything should be settled with the least possible delay, as we are leaving England very shortly."

"Indeed?" Mr. Hubbard gave a perceptible start of astonishment, then eagerly awaited further information. He had made it his business to be very well acquainted with the affairs of his late client, and he did not think there would be much money left for her young daughters, after all the liabilities were met.

But Kitty, having said so much, was not disposed to volunteer any further information, and quietly waited for the money-lender to state his errand.

Mr. Hubbard was greatly impressed. There was something in Miss Walsh's attitude which suggested that she did not greatly care how soon her home was wrested from her, and that could only mean that she and her sisters had some other home to go to. Now, Mr. Hubbard made it a rule never to trouble or inconvenience

The Wrench

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clients who could pay, reserving all his hardness for the unfortunate ones who could not.

So he hesitated a minute before announcing the very unpleasant business which had brought him to Stoney-croft on the very day after Mrs. Walsh's funeral.

Kitty could hardly repress a shudder as she looked at him, and thought how different that interview would have been but for Uncle Ben's letter ; and in her heart she blessed and loved the stranger kinsman whose offer of a home had arrived so opportunely. Looking at the perplexed face of the money-lender, she realized how useless would have been any appeal to his pity or his kindness.

The thought of how she had meant to plead with him blanched her cheeks, and the sight of her sudden paleness enabled Mr. Hubbard to make up his mind that this was not a case wherein it was expedient to study the feelings of the client.

So he cleared his throat with a preliminary cough, and then began to speak in a husky voice, but with his most pompous air.

"It is usual in cases of this kind, miss, to put a man in possession directly the sale has been announced, and as I'm bound to clear the business off next week, I think I'd better send a fellow in at once, just to prevent accidents, you know."

"Very well, Mr. Hubbard, that must be as you please. What man will you send ?" Kitty's voice did not falter, as she asked the question, although the man-in-possession was a horror which neither she nor Sue had anticipated.

Again Mr. Hubbard hesitated, baffled by the serene indifference of Kitty's manner. There were two men

Sisters of Silver Creek

whom at different times he employed in this sort of work ; one was Jim Busby of Finlea, a hulking quarrelsome giant, six feet in height and broad to match, who was usually sent to places where there was any likelihood of fraud. But this girl in the plain black frock, who looked so superbly indifferent to the blows of adverse fortune, would not be likely to lay violent hands on the glass and china, or abstract inventoried articles under cover of the friendly dark, so, with a sudden inspiration of generosity which made him feel like a fully fledged philanthropist, he made up his mind to send in the other man, Alfred Holmes, who was meekness personified.

"Oh, I'll send in Alfred Holmes ; he is a quiet chap, and won't be so much of a nuisance in a household of ladies."

Kitty's mouth twitched in a sudden smile, and she would have burst into fervent thanksgiving for so much consideration, had not her quick wits helped her to the conclusion that the safest *rôle* to play with Mr. Hubbard was that of indifference.

"Very well. Does he board himself, or shall we have to feed him ?" she asked, rising to her feet as if to intimate that she could be bothered with no more business at this sitting.

"It is usual for the parties to board the bailiffs, Miss ; but you won't find it a very serious matter to keep Holmes in food, for he isn't used to high living in a general sort of way ;" and he chuckled with merriment at his own elephantine wit, Alfred Holmes being so miserably poor as to be oftener than not on the verge of destitution.

Kitty did not laugh, however, but bowed the money-lender out with such grave dignity that he caught

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himself bowing in return in a manner so servile that he became downright angry because he felt so mean in the presence of this girl, with her air of grand superiority.

When he was safely outside, and the door locked behind him, Kitty flung up her arms with a deep breath of relief, then turned towards the sitting-room in search of her sisters.

"Gone, has he?" asked Sue, popping in from the kitchen, where she had been washing the breakfast things.

"Yes, I am thankful to say he has. Oh dear, how I do loathe that man;" and Kitty gave herself a violent shake, like a dog that has been in the water.

"Never mind, he won't trouble us again until the sale, I suppose," said Pattie, lifting her eyes from the map of Canada, which she had been studying intently since Kitty had been engaged with the obnoxious visitor.

Kitty shot a glance of inquiry at Sue, grimacing a little, as if to imply that there was something unpleasant to tell, and she wished to know if Pattie should hear it at once.

"Yes; it is of no use keeping it back," Sue answered, speaking almost unconsciously, because she was so anxious to know what further blow threatened.

"Mr. Hubbard is going to send a man to stay in the house until after the sale," announced Kitty, with a little gasp, thankful to be able to tell the unpleasant news so quickly.

"What man?" asked Sue, her eyes dilating with dismay at the announcement.

"Alfred Holmes," answered Kitty, as she looked round the room and wondered what they would do with the man in possession, and where he could be most easily stowed away for the time he must remain.

Sisters of Silver Creek

Sue drew a long breath of relief. "I don't mind that poor little man, he is so quiet and harmless-looking. Besides, it will be some sort of a comfort to have another person sleeping in the house. Tim's mother has been very kind in staying with us so long, but we could not have asked her to keep doing it, unless we had been prepared to pay her for her trouble."

"Of course, if you look at it in that way it is really a benefit, and seeing that it is Holmes who is coming, I dare say he will be willing to make himself useful," Kitty said, with a short laugh, as she settled herself again to her task of letter-writing.

"Sue, there is Assiniboia," called Pattie, drawing her sister's attention to the map she had been studying so intently.

"Where?" Sue came round the table with a towel and a saucer still in her hand, anxious to determine the location of the new home awaiting them in the west.

"There, right in the middle; you can't call that the far west, Sue, for it is this side of the Rockies," replied Pattie, rather proud of the fact that her knowledge of geography was superior to that of Sue.

"Call it the middle-west, then; it does not sound so far away," said Sue, as she bent over the map trying to realize what it would be like to go half round the world in search of a home.

"We shall be quite in touch with civilization too," went on Pattie. "For, see, the railway runs right through the district; and there is the Qu'Appelle River marked quite plainly, so I expect Uncle Ben's place will be quite near to the rail."

"If there are horses to ride, I should not mind about the railway being very close. Four or five miles away

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would not matter at all ; but oh, I do trust that uncle has a decent house," said Kitty, lifting her head from her letter-writing.

"It is very good of him to want us to come," Sue remarked soberly.

"Indeed, yes," replied Kitty, fervently. "And oh, the comfort of not having to be poor! I am sure that none of us were cut out for wrestling with poverty ; we all so detest narrow means."

"I expect most people do," Sue rejoined, with a shake of her head. "But the worst of our trouble has been because it was so unexpected, and we could have helped mother so much better if we had known."

"I wish the wrench of going away was all over, then I should not mind at all," put in Pattie, with a plaintive note in her voice.

"It will not be so bad as you think," Sue answered hastily. "We shall all be glad to get away from a place that reminds us at every turn of what we have lost."

But it was bad enough. There were days of strange upheaval, and such hard work as none of the three had ever in their sheltered lives experienced before. Strangely, too, it was not Pattie the weakly one who felt it most, although she took her share in everything which had to be done and borne. Kitty and Sue were quite worn out, and broken down by the strain of the unaccustomed anxiety and hard work, and at the last it was Pattie who did things, collecting, packing, and sorting, until their small possessions were all in readiness for shipment.

Then there were farewells to take of the grey old village, that clustered in such unpicturesque confusion on the bleak side of the hill. They had lived in Stoneycroft

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for the whole of their lives, and the grey old village had a beauty of its own to them which the eyes of an outsider might not discover.

Kitty had been resolute in her determination not to apply to Uncle Ben for money for the journey. A little had been saved from the wreckage of their home, and they had each a few pounds of pocket-money in the savings bank, and when their passage was paid to Winnipeg, which was as far as they could book, they had just fifteen pounds left between the three of them.

Even this meagre sum might have suffered inroads, but for the kindness of the neighbours, who pitied the forlorn young things flung so early on their own resources.

It was over at last, and then one lovely June afternoon, when the dog-roses were draping the hedgerows with a lacework of pink and white, the three girls were driven in the vicar's wagonette to Woodbury station, *en route* for London, where they were to take the night train for Liverpool.

"Cheer up, Pattie!" said Kitty, as the train drew slowly out of Woodbury station. "We have done with the old troubles now, dear;" and there was no intuition to warn her that the new life would have even more of strain in it than the weeks through which they had recently come.

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CHAPTER III

Indiscriminate Charity

IT being summer weather with the river open, the girls went by way of the St. Lawrence to Montreal, and keenly enjoyed the trip. All three of them were the better for the rest of the sea voyage, and the change of scene that had diverted their thoughts from the sadness of their circumstances. Of course it was rather trying for the first two or three days out from Liverpool, but afterwards the water part of their journey was pure pleasure, all of them feeling real regret when they changed the liner for the cars.

Kitty had expected to find a telegram of welcome waiting for them in Montreal from Uncle Ben, and was considerably disappointed that none had arrived. In her heart she had thought perhaps her mother's brother might have come so far to meet them, and so was a little chilled and daunted to find that he had not even troubled to wire them a word of greeting.

Sue and Pattie tried to comfort her with the assurance that farmers were so busy at this season that even such a simple process as sending a telegram might easily have been forgotten by Uncle Ben ; and with such poor consolation Kitty was fain to be content.

Finding themselves with a few hours to spare in

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Montreal, they spent the time in watching the busy crowds thronging the railway depôt ; for with such scanty resources at their command they did not dare to spend money in touring about the city.

Kitty was holding a lively discussion with Pattie on the relative values of dollars and shillings, when Sue, who had been sitting very quiet, and, truth to tell, feeling rather melancholy, heard a half-strangled sob, and turned quickly to see who it was that was in trouble.

Huddled into a bunch on a seat not far from where she and her sisters were sitting was a crippled lad of about fourteen, whom she recognized as having been among the third-class passengers on board the vessel by which they had come from Liverpool. There had always been a brother with him then, a tall silent young man, who was nearly always reading ; but now the boy was alone, and Sue crossed over to him, to learn the nature of his trouble and help him if she could.

"What is the matter ?" she asked gently, laying her hand on his arm to attract his attention, because his face was hidden.

The boy lifted a strained white countenance, and gave her a searching look, as if to determine whether she were to be trusted ; then, because her eyes were so kindly, he said slowly—

"I'm wanting Sandy to come."

"Sandy ? Is that your brother ?" she asked.

"Yes ; what made you think so ?" and the boy's gaze searched her face in keen, half-suspicious inquiry.

"I used to see you with some one whom I supposed was your brother on board the ship that brought us from Liverpool. Where has he gone, and why has he left you alone in this bustling place ?"

Indiscriminate Charity

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"There was nowhere else that I could stay without paying," the boy said wearily ; then he went on with a touch of defiance in his tone, "Sandy has gone out to see if he could pick up a job to earn a quarter, because we are so short of money for food."

"A quarter?" queried Sue, in a puzzled fashion.

"Yes, quarter of a dollar ; they don't have shillings here, you know," the boy explained, as if in pity for her ignorance.

"But how would he earn money here, while just passing through?" asked Sue, who was keenly interested.

"Oh, he would do anything ; hold a horse outside a shop, carry a parcel, or a trunk," the boy answered, with confidence in his tone. Then he went on with a sad little quaver, that brought quick tears of sympathy to his listener's eyes, "It was my fault, for I lost the money that Sandy had saved to buy food with, while we were on the cars. But it was stolen from me when I was asleep."

"What will you do, if your brother cannot earn the money?" Sue asked gently.

"Go without, I expect, at least Sandy will ; but he mostly finds something for me to eat, however pinched we may be," replied the boy.

Sue's hand crept timidly towards her pocket, while a hasty glance over her shoulder showed Kitty and Pattie to be still engrossed by their talk.

"What is your name?" she asked softly, thinking what nice eyes the boy had, and what a broad white brow.

"Donald Gordon ; but I'm always called Don. What is yours?" he demanded, in quick retaliation.

"Susan Walsh ; but I'm always called Sue," she replied, whereat they both laughed ; then she spoke

again, urgently this time, as she pressed something into the boy's unwilling hand. "Please take it, just as a little gift to buy food with, if your brother is not able to earn the money."

"Sandy would not let me; we are not beggars, and why, it is two dollars!" exclaimed the boy, with a flash of resentful pride, as he tried to thrust the money back upon her.

"Oh, please, please keep it!" she pleaded, the tears in her eyes ready to brim over now because of the boy's obstinacy. "I had a brother of my own once, my twin brother whom I loved very dearly, but he was lost at sea, and for his sake you must not refuse me."

A queer softened expression crept into the boy's face; it was as if he had begun to pity Sue in his heart, and the feeling lifted him above his pride.

"As a loan, then?" he said, with an evident desire to temporize, and Sue gave a sigh of relief as his thin fingers closed over the money.

"A loan if you prefer it," she replied, with a happy smile, thinking how difficult he would find it to repay; but he was shrewder than she thought.

"Your address, if you please?" he asked, taking out a little pocket-book.

"Oh, don't worry about that," she begged.

"I must. Sandy wouldn't let me take charity; but a loan is different," he said, in a resolute tone.

"We are going to live with our uncle, at Silver Creek, Qu'Appelle, Assiniboia," she said, in a protesting tone, then exclaimed, as his pencil moved swiftly across the page, "How nicely you write!"

"It is readable, isn't it?" The little flush on his pale cheeks showed genuine pleasure at her praise.

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"Very readable," she replied, and was about to ask him some further question, when she heard her name called in quick impatient tones by Kitty, and so had to hurry away.

"We can get away by the next train that draws in," explained Kitty, who was busy collecting their smaller bags and cloaks, looking after Pattie, and generally preparing for a move.

"That will be very much better than waiting here any longer," Sue answered; then flushed hotly as she saw in the distance Don's brother Sandy, making his way through the crowd, laden with the luggage of a stout lady who walked close behind him.

"Why were you talking to that shabby-looking boy, Sue?" asked Pattie, who had been more observant than Kitty.

"I was trying to cheer him a little, he was so lonely while his brother was away," Sue answered, nervously, hoping that no more would be said of the matter.

"How did you know him or his brother? Who are they?" asked Kitty, with a quick turn of her head to scrutinize Sue, who forthwith had to tell what she knew of the two brothers, suppressing only her gift to Don, who had so proudly insisted that it was only a loan, a something that would be repaid.

"There are so many poor people in the world, and we can't help them all," said Kitty, with a gloomy shake of her head. "I hope you did not give the boy any money, Sue?"

"I had to, a little," admitted Sue, feeling like a culprit, but quite assured in her own mind that, under the circumstances, she would do just the same over again.

Kitty's face set in harder lines. She was a good-

Sisters of Silver Creek

natured girl on the whole, and could sympathize with the troubles of other people, when the sympathy did not cost too much, but there was considerable disapproval in her tone as she said—

"We must learn to be just before we are generous, Sue, and I need hardly remind you that our money is barely enough to carry the three of us through to Qu'Appelle. Besides, you must not forget that although a little hardship will not hurt you and me, it is different in Pattie's case. What did you give the boy, a dollar?"

"I gave him two; but he would only have it as a loan, and will repay it as soon as he is able," returned Sue, taken off her guard by the abrupt question, and thinking that on the whole it was wiser to make a clean breast of the matter.

"A loan? That is indeed a likely story!" And Kitty laughed scoffingly at the bare idea. "My dear Sue, how little you know about the world and its ways! But do be warned by me against indiscriminate charity; it is equally bad for the giver and the receiver, and, as I told you, in our case it is really quite out of the question, for we cannot afford it."

Sue shrugged her shoulders, but ventured on no other reply. There was hot rebellion in her heart, however, against the poverty which made it wrong to help some one yet poorer still. She was quite prepared to deny herself even to the point of semi-starvation, in order that Kitty and Pattie should not suffer through her action in giving two dollars to Don Gordon, but there was a sting in the thought that even when this was done they would still feel defrauded by her generous impulse.

She had never yearned to be rich just for her own personal gratification, but a strong desire to have money

of her own woke to life in her heart now, because then she would be accountable to no one for the kindly acts and generous gifts she might choose to bestow on people less fortunate than herself.

Entering the cars, they established Pattie in the most comfortable place they could find. They were afterwards standing on the rear platform taking a last look at the great busy depôt before the cars began to move, when Sue's quick ears caught the sound of a boy's voice talking in shrill eager tones—

"There she is on the platform at the end of that middle car, not the tall nice-looking girl, but the little plain one beside her!"

It was Don Gordon's voice, and he was doubtless telling his brother of the money she had given him. With an instinct of caution Sue turned and entered the car, crouching down in the corner beside Pattie, fearing lest the proud-spirited Sandy might follow her instantly to return the money she had given to Don.

Just then the cars began to move, and her fears were put to flight, and in the same moment a miserable discontent surged into her sensitive heart, because the boy had spoken of her to his brother as "the little plain one." The words so heedlessly spoken were destined to rankle for many a long day, for Sue could not be reconciled to her insignificant stature and plain face. With all her heart she loved beautiful things, and admired beautiful people, and it had not yet dawned upon her that the most penetrating and lasting kind of beauty in the world has nothing to do with face or form, but emanates from the soul within, making its power felt in silence like the fragrance of violets.

CHAPTER IV

On the Threshold

THE railway depôt at Qu'Appelle in those days was little better than a rough shed by the shining ribbons of steel which linked together the East and the West.

It was a glorious July evening when the three girls stepped out of the cars, telling each other, with smiles and sighs of relief, that at last the long journey over sea and land was at an end, and that now they were on the threshold of their new home.

Quite a crowd of all sorts of people moved up and down beside the westward-bound train. Some of these had come to meet friends, some were merely loungers, who had come there out of curiosity and to pass the time, others of the throng being, like the three sisters, passengers leaving the long train of cars.

Kitty gave the luggage checks to the official in attendance, and then stood waiting, with a fast-beating heart and a heightened colour, for some sign of Uncle Ben, for surely he would be at the depôt to meet them, especially as she had wired again from Winnipeg, stating the day and the hour of their arrival.

"There he is, that must be Uncle Ben!" cried Pattie, as a benevolent-looking man, rather rough and shaggy, but clad in garments of fairly good cut and quality,

passed slowly in and out among the crowd, as if looking for some one who had not come.

"I believe you are right," said Kitty, catching her breath sharply; then, going forward with a quick step, she accosted the shaggy gentleman with quite a new note of nervousness in her voice. "If you please, are you Mr. Benjamin Holt?"

"Why, no, young lady, and what is more, I never heard of him," returned the shaggy one, with a genial smile; then he asked in a tone of kindly interest, "Where does he hail from, and did you expect him to meet you here?"

"I supposed he would be here; he is my uncle, and I sent a telegram from Winnipeg to say that we expected to reach Qu'Appelle this evening," Kitty answered, impelled to confidence by the stranger's friendly manner.

"Ah, you had better step into the office and see if the clerk sent the wire on. It is a little way they have in these parts of letting such things lie until they are called for."

"Thank you, I will inquire at once. Which is the office if you please?" And Kitty looked about her with a decidedly flustered air, for this suggestion of a telegram being delayed opened up a whole vista of unpleasant possibilities.

Sue and Pattie, who stood watching, saw her move off with a jerky nervous movement, whilst the shaggy man sauntered slowly in the rear, as if friendliness or curiosity impelled him to be on hand for further help or information if required.

The two had not heard the stranger's reply to Kitty, but it was easy to guess from her manner that he was

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not their kinsman, so they stood waiting a trifle impatiently for their sister's return, wondering where she had gone, and why.

In a few minutes she came running towards them, with a scared look on her face.

"Oh, Sue and Pattie, was there ever such a situation? Whatever shall we do?" she cried, apparently forgetting that in her flurry and consternation she had not even told them what was wrong.

"What is the matter? Did we get out at the wrong station?" demanded Sue, anxiously, turning to look after the long train of cars which were already in motion again, slipping slowly away into the radiant west.

"My two telegrams, the one I sent from Montreal and the one yesterday from Winnipeg, are both lying here in the clerk's office. And Silver Creek, where Uncle Ben lives, is twenty miles away, right up in the Pheasant Hills, near to the Indian Reservation."

"Oh, what shall we do?" cried Pattie, looking to the full as flurried and dismayed as Kitty.

"I think we shall have to go to a hotel to-night, then in the morning we shall be able to find out a way of getting to Uncle Ben's," Sue said, in a soothing tone; adding, with a note of forced cheerfulness, "At least the delayed telegrams account for there being no one to meet us here. How was it they were not sent on?"

"They never do send telegrams such long distances, the clerk told me, for the people to whom they are addressed would refuse to pay the cost of the journey. If only I had written a letter instead of wiring, what a lot of trouble would have been saved!" cried Kitty, who was fit to wring her hands in despair.

"It might have been just the same, for perhaps the

post-office also leaves things until they are called for," Sue answered, in a resigned fashion.

"Whom shall we get to tell us where to find a place to stay in for the night?" asked Pattie, wearily.

"Perhaps the shaggy man would know of some quiet cheap place. Go and ask him, Kitty, before he disappears," urged Sue. The crowd was rapidly thinning, and it would not do to be left to camp in solitude by the side of the railway track for the night.

A minute Kitty hesitated, wishing that there were some women among the crowd to whom she could apply; but such women as had left the cars when they did had already gone off, and only a group of men remained to whom she could apply for help and advice.

"Pattie is getting so worried and tired," Sue said softly.

Kitty waited no longer then, but walking up to the shaggy man, who still lingered quietly watching the three sisters from afar, she asked him if there were a hotel near the depôt where they could stay all night.

"There is one, certainly, but it isn't, so to speak, a nice place for ladies to stay in, being little better than a whisky saloon," the shaggy one answered.

"Oh, we could not stay in a place like that!" cried Kitty, in dismayed tones. "But surely there must be somewhere else, a baker's shop, a store, or some place where there is a bedroom to spare?"

"People make their own bread round here, so baker's shops ain't wanted, and the store is the saloon, don't you see; but if you like to come along with me, I'll see if my daughter will make room for the three of you just for the night. She is a terrible smart girl, is my Imogen, and I expect she will just be dreadful pleased to have company like you."

Sisters of Silver Creek

At the mention of a daughter, Kitty's smiles flashed broadly out, and she thanked the stranger warmly for his kindness, then asked if his house were near at hand, also where the luggage could be stowed for the night, or until there was a chance of its being conveyed to Silver Creek.

"My waggon is here, so I reckon the trunks had better go along too. It ain't far, not much over three miles, but the road is a bit rough, I must confess," the stranger answered, then strolled up to the heap of trunks by which Sue and Pattie were standing, as if to take a mental inventory of their size and weight.

"Evening, young ladies." His hand executed a flourish in the direction of his hat as he spoke, though it did not touch it, and then he began counting the articles in the heap of baggage. "Five trunks, one an out-size article, a portmanty, heavy as lead by the looks on him, three bags, a hold-all nearly as big as a house, and three ladies. I reckon my hosses will think I've taken a quarry-contract, and have had to start hauling rock this side of harvest. Hi, Jim!" The last two words were uttered in a stentorian shout, accompanied by a wild wave of the arms, as if to attract some one's attention.

A young man came running round the corner of one of the depôt sheds, in answer to the shout, and after a word of explanation from the shaggy man, set about hoisting a big trunk on his shoulder. Then, picking up the hold-all with his unoccupied hand, he set off back by the way he had come, making no more of his burden than if the big trunk had been merely a lady's hat-box.

"Now then, young ladies, if you will step this way, my waggon is waiting back of the depôt." And shouldering another of the trunks, their host led the way round

the corner past the clerk's office ; and the girls saw quite a medley of waggons, buggies, and saddle horses waiting, the animals being all hitched to a convenient length of fencing.

There was a great deal of kicking, stamping, and plunging, among the tethered horses, and Pattie, who was very much inclined to be afraid of everything on four legs, shrank behind her sisters for protection.

The shaggy man's waggon, into which Jim was piling the trunks, had two skittish horses harnessed to it, that neighed, squealed, and reared in a fashion which showed them ripe for running away, if only they got the chance.

"Don't you be afraid, missy. Them animals won't want to run very far if they do take to bolting ; they haven't sampled the weight of them trunks yet, you know," the shaggy man said kindly, noticing the way in which Pattie was shrinking behind her sisters.

So many barrels, boxes, and cases had to be stowed away in the waggon, in addition to the girls' trunks, that presently Pattie's fears took another standpoint, and instead of being afraid the horses would run away, she grew concerned lest they should not be able to move the heavy load.

"Now then, Miss Walsh, if you will sit on the front seat with me, the other two young ladies can settle themselves on that box of herrings just behind ; and Jim must hang on by his eyebrows, wherever he can find an opening," said the shaggy man, when the other part of the load had been settled to his satisfaction.

"I'll manage to find a roosting place, Mr. Jones, don't you fret," retorted Jim, with a cheerful familiarity which rather shocked Kitty, who had supposed him to be what she would have termed quite a low-class individual. His

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appearance certainly justified this theory, for he was clad only in a red flannel shirt, corduroy nether garments, and a battered straw hat. A jag in one of the trunks had torn a three-cornered slit in one shoulder of the shirt, exposing bare bruised flesh below ; but the limitations of his garments seemed so much a matter of course to the young man that Kitty could only suppose it was his normal condition.

Sue and Pattie were safely stowed away on the box of herrings behind the driver's seat. Kitty had also mounted to the place of honour which was hers by right, when scrambling up beside her, with the lines in his hand, Mr. Jones shouted to Jim to let go.

There was immediately a wild plunging of the two skittish horses, Sue and Pattie embraced each other involuntarily on the herring-box, whilst Kitty had to clutch at the shaggy man's arm to keep herself from being pitched off the waggon seat.

But Mr. Jones took it all as a matter of course, yelled a few expostulations at his frisky steeds, then guided them skilfully away from the crowding pitfalls of the depôt out to the open road, where the creatures tore along like mad things, from sheer joy of motion.

Pattie's face was drawn and pinched with anxious waiting for the expected disaster which, however, did not come, while she privately wondered what these horses could be made of to career ahead in such a fashion, as if the burden of the waggon weighed no more than a handful of straws. Then a sound behind attracted her attention, and she turned to find Jim, perspiring but serene, seated on the topmost trunk, and looking as if he had found no more difficulty in mounting than she herself had experienced.

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Meanwhile Kitty, having recovered her balance, and found herself able to sit without clutching for support at the arm of Mr. Jones, was beginning to sound him as to the best method of conveying her sisters and herself to Silver Creek. Privately she was hoping that he would volunteer to drive them the twenty miles to her uncle's place; but then she as yet knew nothing by actual experience of haymaking in that part of the world, and did not understand how the work had to be rushed through.

"I don't know anything of the country out Silver Creek way; but then we only came here in the fall, and I've been too busy getting my place fixed up a bit to have much time for rushing round the neighbourhood," explained Mr. Jones.

"Is there any carrier or person of that sort, whom we could engage to drive us over to-morrow morning?" asked Kitty, who was very anxious to get the question of transit settled without delay.

"Not that I know of," replied Mr. Jones, reflectively. "The fact is, Miss Walsh, everybody round these parts is working double tides just now, what with hay and harvest coming so close together, and a summer only half long enough for all there is to do in it. Jim, have you been out Silver Creek way?"

"I've been to Sampson Kench's place, that is on Silver Creek," replied the red-shirted youth, who seemed to be enjoying life immensely as he sat at ease on the trunk.

"Good road?" queried the shaggy man.

"Fairish. I've seen better," retorted Jim, in a strictly non-committal tone.

"Think our old Betsey would manage to get these ladies and their trunks up to Silver Creek?"

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"She might do—in time," responded Jim, in a reflective fashion, as if the matter required deep consideration.

"I'll tell you what it is, Miss Walsh," began the shaggy man, in a dictatorial tone; he had discovered that the girls were named Walsh from the address painted on the trunks, and rather prided himself on having found them out so easily. "I've got an old mare that isn't doing anything particular just now, and there's the little waggon isn't doing anything either; you can have them and welcome, to drive your sisters and the baggage up to Silver Creek to-morrow. If you start early you'll be bound to get there by night—at least, I should hope so."

"It is most kind of you, I am sure!" murmured Kitty, who was fearfully disconcerted by this embarrassing offer. "But could we find a driver somewhere? I am not sure that I could manage a horse, especially on a strange road."

"Stick liquorice is all Betsey wants in the way of managing," put in Jim from the background.

"You won't find it easy to pick up a driver round here," said Mr. Jones, with a swing of his arm that indicated the whole horizon. "Can't any of you young ladies drive, now?" this last, in a coaxing tone, as if anxious to persuade them for their own good.

"I have driven a donkey a little, ever so long ago," admitted Sue, when the shaggy man turned round to her and Pattie.

"Can you ride a bit too, my dear?" asked Mr. Jones, in a fatherly sort of manner. He evidently regarded Sue and Pattie as quite children, deeming Kitty the only grown-up member of the party.

"Only on a donkey," admitted Sue, with a laugh, in which, to her dismay, she was instantly joined by Jim,

whose hearty guffaw rang out with a startling noise on the quiet evening air, causing the horses to lay back their ears and scurry on the faster.

"Horses and donkeys are pretty much alike, only one is bigger than the other," remarked Mr. Jones in the tone of one who knows. "I'll tell you what it is, little missy. You shall have Betsey and the waggon, tomorrow, to drive to your uncle's location. Then you keep the old mare for a couple of days just to rest her a bit, for she isn't what you would call a colt; then you get your uncle to lend you a quiet horse and a saddle, tie the animal behind the waggon and drive Betsey home; then you can stay a night to rest a bit, and ride off back as gaily as if you were going cow-punching in Texas."

What Sue would have answered to this astounding proposition was not clear, for at that moment the horses turned with a sharp swerve in at an open gate, and stopped with quite painful abruptness before a low wooden structure, bare and ugly like a barn, with glass windows in it.

"Here we are!" announced the shaggy man, in a cheerful tone. "And here comes Imogen to see what sort of a load I've brought to-night."

CHAPTER V

Imogen Jones

THE three Walsh sisters wore garments of the plainest, black serge coats and skirts, with black cotton blouses, because the weather was so hot, their sailor hats having only a ribbon band to serve as adornment. They were thus thrown into sharp contrast by the attire of the big good-natured-looking girl, who at this moment flung wide the house-door, and came bounding out to meet them.

"Gracious me, Pa, what is up now?" she demanded, in high clear tones, as the shaggy man seized Kitty, swinging her down from the waggon, as easily as if she had been a sheaf of corn.

"I've brought some company along from the depôt to stay the night, my dear; you were saying yesterday that you'd like to have summer boarders, if you could only be sure of getting the right sort. These are young ladies just out from Europe, and can put you up to the latest kink in the fashions. That is Miss Walsh, and these are her two little sisters," said the shaggy man, holding out his arms in kindly invitation to tired Pattie to drop into them, while Sue followed last of all.

"Come to stay, have you? I never quite know how to take Pa, he is so full of his nonsense," remarked

Miss Jones, holding out her hand in friendly greeting to Kitty, while she shook her head with a deprecatory air.

She was tall and stout, with a mass of light frizzy hair, which she wore puffed and curled over her forehead, stuck through with numerous combs and ornamental pins. Her frock was blue muslin, flounced from waist to hem, while tags of ribbon, frills of lace, with brooches many and various, showed Miss Jones to have spent considerable time and trouble in the adornment of her person.

"Your father kindly said he thought you would be so good as to give us shelter for the night, because, through a mistake, our uncle did not meet us, and the hotel was not a fit place for girls travelling alone," explained Kitty, rather nervously, for the fluttering ribbons and laces were awe-inspiring in her own dusty, travel-stained condition; she had expected to find a rough, rather untidy daughter to match the father, so Miss Jones was a distinct surprise.

"Dan Lemon's place isn't fit for a decent man to stay at, much less a woman," remarked Imogen, with an air of finality, while her eyes travelled in close scrutiny over the face and figure of Kitty; then she said cheerfully, "I'm very glad to see you, and if there isn't enough supper, why, we will just eat what there is and be thankful."

"You've no call to worry about the supper," put in the shaggy man, who, having lifted the girls out, now proceeded to lend Jim a helping hand with the trunks. "We found that box of herrings at the dépôt, and brought it along in the waggon. You can cook a dozen or so; they will be a bit of a relish."

"Well now, did you ever!" exclaimed Miss Jones, holding up her hands in horror at the suggestion. "Fancy having smelly things like herrings for supper, when there's company!"

"Oh, please don't mind us," murmured poor Kitty, who was feeling rather overwhelmed.

"I will mind you, though, for we don't get young ladies straight from Europe out here every day, I can tell you," answered the big damsel, greeting Sue and Pattie with quite affectionate warmth, and hustling them all into the house with hospitable haste.

The bare ugliness of the outside had its match in the ugliness of the interior. It was a place to eat and sleep in merely, not a home to be loved and cared for; and Kitty could have shivered in actual loathing and disgust at this her first peep into a western house, but for two things, one of which was an open piano, surmounted by piles of well-used music, and the other the supper-table, spread with a lavishness which made her stare in surprise, for there was food enough upon it to satisfy the hunger of twenty people.

"Come out on a visit to friends, have you?" asked Miss Jones, conducting them to her own room, so that they might wash away some of the dust of travel before supper.

"We have come to stay. Our mother is dead, and Uncle Ben has offered us a home," Kitty answered, with lips which would quiver, in spite of her efforts at self-control.

"Oh, how awful you will find it to live in a place like the Qu'Appelle district after Europe!" exclaimed Miss Jones, in genuine pity.

"We have always been used to the country; we have

never lived in a town," broke in Sue, who saw that Kitty was perilously near to break down.

"But there is always good society, wherever you go in Europe, so I have understood ; and here there is none, or next to none," Miss Jones said, shaking her head with a dubious air.

"Then we must do without society, that is all ; at least we shall not be worse off than other people," Sue answered, with resolute cheerfulness.

"You will feel it more though, because you have been used to such a different sort of life. I can feel for you, for I was educated in Chicago, and have lived most of my life near a town, until Pa took it in his head last fall to cross the frontier and buy a location here. He wouldn't have done it if Ma had been alive, I guess, but men do want a sight of managing, as I find to my cost ;" and the fair Imogen heaved a sigh so windy and deep that it set all the tags and laces fluttering afresh.

"You have brothers, perhaps ?" suggested Kitty, who had recovered from her momentary tendency to hysterics.

"Oh no, there's only Pa and me of our family. It is Jim I find so hard to manage," said the large maiden, with a becoming blush, and a gurgle of laughter which threatened to choke her.

"Jim ?" Kitty's face was full of astonished query while she gazed in an uncomprehending fashion at her hostess.

"Yes, he's my beau. Came here with us last fall as Pa's hired man, and fell so deep in love with me that I simply had to smile on him, or the consequences might have been serious to his health. Have you got a beau ?"

The abruptness of the question, coming as it did just when Kitty was trying to imagine what sort of affinity

there could be between the young man in the torn red shirt and this beflounced maiden, proved too much for her gravity, and she burst into ringing laughter, in which she was promptly joined by Sue and Pattie.

The fair Imogen laughed as heartily as any of them, and seemed delighted to have provoked their merriment.

"But it is all very fine to laugh like that at such a natural question, for I'm sure you are pretty enough to have a beau of your own," she said, with another shake of her head, when she had sobered down a little; then added, as if fearing lest Sue and Pattie should feel slighted, "And your sisters, too, ought to make good matches when they are old enough, for this district just swarms with young men."

The girls being all tired, strained, and hysterical, this remark only served to evoke a fresh burst of laughter.

"I am so sorry we are all behaving in such a fashion, but we are so tired that it has to be laughter or tears," Kitty said penitently, when she had a little recovered. She did not like to add that they were very hungry too, not having had much food that day.

"Oh, I like people to laugh, it sounds so cheerful; but come out to the other room and have supper. You will be about starving, I expect;" and the kindly hostess bustled about, intent on making her unexpected guests as comfortable as she could.

To the great relief of Sue and Pattie, however, she would allow no herrings to be cooked that night. They had endured so many fish odours on the ride from the depôt, that they were thankful to be spared any more just then.

"It is just dreadful the way that I am harried about in my own home," said Mr. Jones, as he sat down at the

supper-table ; but his face was beaming broadly with satisfaction at his daughter's masterful ways, so that he seemed scarcely an object of pity.

The cheerful homely talk, and the kindly hospitality of these strangers amongst whom they had so unexpectedly been flung, was inexpressibly sweet to the three tired girls, and even Pattie came out of her shell of reserve to talk and laugh with the rest.

Very early next morning they were astir, for the start for Silver Creek was to be made directly after breakfast, and they were all desirous to do something to help their hostess with the Shakespearian name, since she would accept no money payment from them in return for her kindness.

"It is a real pleasure to have you, and that is a fact," said the maiden, whose heart was as large and as kindly as it was possible for a human heart to be. "I never had a sister, you see, and I never had a girl friend either. But there, I never wanted any one else while I'd got Ma. Such good company she was, and that lively, it was as good as a theatre to see her carrying on. She'd say to Pa, 'Washington Jones, I'd rather die than be doleful, and when I can't be cheerful any longer, I'll ask God Almighty to take me quick before I make other folks miserable.' She died so suddenly too, that it really seemed as if she had prayed her prayer, and had it answered quick."

"Are you like your mother?" asked Sue, whose heart had gone out in quick sympathy to this stranger, who had also lost her mother.

"Not a bit," replied Imogen, as she whisked away a tear before it had time to fall, and smiled broadly even though her eyes were full. "Ma was a dear little dot of

a creature, with dark hair and eyes. I'm like neither side of the family. Pa teases me sometimes and says I'm a changeling, but Ma always said she'd know me among a thousand, because of the mole on my chin."

Sue became very nervous after breakfast, when Jim went off to harness the old mare Betsey to the little waggon. Her knowledge of driving was of the most rudimentary description, and the thought of having to take charge of a strange horse, on a journey of twenty miles, was almost too dreadful to be borne.

Kitty was of opinion that a driver ought to be found from somewhere, even if it took all their remaining money to pay him.

But there was a prudent streak in Sue's character, and the disappointment of not finding Uncle Ben at the depôt yesterday had made her keenly alive to the uncertainty of things in general, so she was rather glad than otherwise that no one could be found available as a driver, since that would admit of their hoarding their little store of ready money.

Jim had given them the most concise directions as to the road to be travelled, and these Kitty had written down, so that there might be no mistake about the matter. Pattie looked forward to the journey in something of the spirit which French ladies of the old aristocracy regarded the march to the guillotine; but as she said nothing about it, no one even remotely guessed how very bad she was feeling.

There was a rumble of wheels outside, and Sue stepped outside the door to get the first view of Betsey as that worthy animal came at a smart trot round the corner of the barn.

"How fast she goes. I thought you said Betsey was

a slow creature," Sue said, in a tone of gasping protest to Jim, as Betsey stopped with a jerk before the door, and the young man jumped out of the waggon, wherein the trunks were already piled.

"That is only because she knows I'm behind her ; horses always understand they have got to move when I hold the lines ; but you will find her slow enough before you're done with her, don't you fret !" replied Jim, cheerfully. Then he went on in a business-like tone, "I have put you a bundle of willow-sticks in the waggon to whack her with, and here are some bits of string for you, in case anything breaks ; we could only let you have the old harness, because we need the strongest we can get to hold in them colts that we took to the depôt last night ;" and he waved his hand in an apologetic fashion towards the collection of broken straps, string-mended, which fastened Betsey to the waggon, or the waggon to Betsey.

"Then you don't think she will run away ?" ventured Sue, whose heart was beating furiously at the thought of what might be before her.

Jim threw back his head with a great burst of laughter. "I'd run a mile any day for the chance of seeing her up to a prank of that kind. Don't you fret, missy ; whatever faults Betsey may have, running away is not one of them."

CHAPTER VI

Of a Different Sort

"OH, Kitty, what shall we do?" cried Sue, in a despairing tone, as after a couple of miles of gradually slowing pace, Betsey stopped altogether, and commenced to crop the grass by the roadside.

"I should take a stick to her," replied Kitty, wearily. Betsey's eccentric conduct did not strike dismay into her heart as it did into Sue's; it merely bored her.

"Oh, Sue, be careful; she might not like it!" cried Pattie, who expected to see the quiet old mare display some of the pranks of a capering colt.

"Well, I don't like being stuck in such a fashion; besides, we shall never get to Silver Creek at this rate, so I think I shall take Kitty's advice," said Sue, who was hot and flushed with her unaccustomed efforts.

Stooping for a stick, she selected a flexible one, and cutting Betsey smartly across the old harness, shouted "gee-up" in a very aggressive tone.

But beyond a shake as if to get rid of a fly, Betsey took no notice at all, only went on calmly munching.

"This is really too bad!" cried Sue, in exasperation, and gripping the lines tightly in her left hand, proceeded to use the stick pretty freely with the right.

Pattie cried out in dismay at her cruelty; but Kitty

only laughed. Then presently it appeared to dawn on Betsey's obtuse intelligence that it would be better to move on, whereupon she started forward at a lumbering trot which lasted for perhaps half a mile, when she dropped into a walk again, stopping to browse as before.

It was Pattie who laughed this time, for Sue was in desperate earnest now, and so warm with her exertions that she was glad to slip off her coat, in order to be less encumbered for her work.

She was rapidly losing her fear of the lazy old horse, and the hard labour she was having made her understand Jim's statement, that he would gladly run a mile for the chance of seeing Betsey take to bolting.

To Sue at least the hours of that hot summer day did not lag, and after the first tremulous hour or two, she thoroughly enjoyed herself.

Kitty and Pattie, who had no such active exercise to divert their minds, grew very weary as the day wore on. Even the country through which they were passing failed to charm them, because it was so much alike, that having watched it for one mile, they had seen it for the whole journey. Some was rolling prairie, dotted here and there with clumps of trees like an English park on a gigantic scale, then would come some strips of cultivated land, with a lone house and a barn or two set down in the middle ; but it was all so wild and solitary, so absolutely lonely, that Kitty could have cried out in dismay at the prospect of having to spend her life in such a place.

Pattie, on the contrary, was delighted with the solitude, but so anxious to get to the end of the journey, that she had no patience with Betsey's lagging movements, and

wished that Sue would find some means of making the animal move on a little faster.

They waited for an hour in the middle of the day by the side of a little stream, to let Betsey have a drink and a rest, while they themselves enjoyed some of the bountiful luncheon packed up for them by Imogen Jones.

"The remainder will do for supper," remarked Kitty, as she replaced the fragments in the basket. "If Uncle Ben has had no notice of our arrival, his larder may not be able to stand all the demands we three shall want to make on it."

"I wonder what he will say when we get there!" said Sue, wishing vainly that she could get more pace out of Betsey, in order to arrive in a fairly impressive style.

"I wonder what he is like. Oh, I do hope his face will resemble dear mother's; then it will be a pleasure to look at him," Pattie said, catching her breath in a sob.

Kitty got up suddenly, and walked down to the edge of the little brook, under pretence of wanting to wash her hands. Vague doubts of their reception had been flitting through her brain all the morning, and she was wondering whatever they would do if Uncle Ben did not welcome them. She knew they had no means of getting back to England, and no prospect of a living, if they could have gone back. There was nothing to be done save go forward, only the pity of it was that her heart was so heavy, and so full of fears.

Betsey behaved better when they started on again. Perhaps she had eaten so much grass in the morning that the afternoon found her with no appetite for browsing, or it might have been that Sue had mastered the art of whipping where there was no harness.

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They had seen only one person since starting in the morning from Mr. Jones's house, and that was a taciturn man who was very deaf, and could only understand when they bawled a question right into his ear.

"There is a house!" exclaimed Kitty, about half-past four o'clock, as they slowly topped a long gentle rise, and saw spread out below them a pleasant valley, with clumps of trees, and a stream showing here and there.

"It must be Silver Creek!" cried Sue, joyfully. "And perhaps that house yonder is Sampson Kench's store."

"I hope it may be, for oh, I do want to get to Uncle Ben's so badly," Pattie said, in a wistful tone.

"I can see more than one house; perhaps it is a sort of village," Kitty went on. She had the keenest sight of the three, and so detailed information as fast as she could make out the different objects as they approached.

"I see some pigs, and a little dog, no, it is a duck, a whole lot of them, and some poultry too, I mean hens and chickens, for of course ducks are poultry. Oh, I see a man now, he has come out of the house and is staring at us; here comes another—no, it is a woman. Well, I don't wonder at their staring, for we are certainly a queer-looking lot. And, Sue, you are such a sight; your hair is all coming down!"

"I can't help it, I have had to work so hard at making this creature move, that I believe I have shaken nearly all the pins out. There is one comfort, I shall be able to find my way back to Mr. Jones's with Betsey, by following a track of hairpins, unless indeed the natives pick them up meanwhile," replied Sue, who was in a happy mood; then, applying her willow stick to Betsey's

sides in quite a scientific fashion, she made that worthy animal career along at a gay and festive pace, which brought them in a very short time to the house, in front of which the man and woman still stood watching their approach.

The house had a bare, uncared-for look, while a pile of goods in one small dusty window, and various packages littered about outside, showed that it was a store.

"Sampson Kench's place, I suppose; and if that is the man himself standing there, I confess I don't like the look of him," muttered Kitty, in a low tone, as they drew near.

"Never mind, he isn't Uncle Ben, you know," whispered Pattie, with intent to console, and then Betsey stopped with a jerk, while the man came forward to speak to them, the woman still lingering in the background.

"If you please, is this Silver Creek, and are you Mr. Sampson Kench?" asked Kitty, in her most winning tone, and with her sweetest smile.

"Right you are, miss," replied the man, in a surly voice, like a dog that wants to bite.

"Can you tell us where our uncle, Mr. Benjamin Holt, lives, and how long it will take us to reach his house?" asked Kitty, feeling chilled and repelled by his unfriendly manner.

"I can tell you where he *did* live," said the man, with sombre emphasis.

"What do you mean?" cried Kitty, with an aghast air, while Sue and Pattie shivered, as if struck by a blast straight from the North Pole.

"I mean that he is dead; we buried him yesterday," said the man, with a slow brutal brevity.

"Dead? Is Uncle Ben dead?" wailed Pattie, in a

tone of such bitter grief, that Sue sobbed from sheer sympathy with her sister's sorrow, although personally she felt nothing saving a numb horror at the grim tidings which had met them.

"Yes, miss, it is true," reiterated the man, sombrely, as before, although with less of ferocity in his tone.

"What shall we do?" exclaimed Kitty, in dismay.
"Sue, what shall we do?"

Being appealed to in this direct fashion, Sue had to shake off the numb horror which held her in its grip, and make the most sensible reply of which on the spur of the moment she was capable.

"I suppose we must just go on to the house as if he were still alive, for we have nowhere else to go," she answered, with a feeling of keen desolation in her heart; for although she had never seen this stranger uncle, he was a tangible link with their past, and whilst he was still alive, they could never have felt quite so much alone as they did now.

"Yes, of course we must go on," said Kitty, in a brisker tone, thankful for that word of practical wisdom from her sister, just when her own ideas had momentarily deserted her. "Is there any one in the house, do you know, Mr. Kench?"

"There's our old woman, Mrs. Morgan; we've had to spare her to stay up at Ben Holt's place ever since the death. John Elstow said that he would see us paid for sparing her, if you wouldn't," said the woman, who had remained silent hitherto, watching them with an unfriendly aspect.

"We will attend to that, of course, and I think we had better get on at once," returned Kitty, in a chilly tone. Then, receiving the necessary instructions, they

Sisters of Silver Creek

started on again, Betsey going forward now at a decorous trot, as if she understood that there was trouble in the air, and so was on her best behaviour.

Pattie was crying quietly. She had clung all the way from England to the belief that Uncle Ben would be very much like her mother, and now to hear that he was dead was almost too much to be borne.

"Kitty, what a frightful calamity this is!" whispered Sue, in an awed tone.

"It looks so now, certainly; but it may turn out better than we think," Kitty answered, in an odd choked voice, while a spot of bright red began to glow in her cheeks, which had turned so pale on first hearing of her uncle's death; but though Sue looked at her with puzzled inquiry, she said no more.

The road now was merely a waggon track through unfenced grazing land, keeping mostly to the side of the creek, and under the shade of the willow trees that lined the water's edge. On the other side of the valley beyond the stream the ground rose more steeply, the broken line of high hills being thickly covered with trees.

Sue noted all this in a strange apathetic fashion as she guided Betsey's feet into the smoothest path between the waggon ruts. She even found herself speculating as to whether the Indian Reservation reached so far, and whether the tree-clothed heights were the commencement of the Pheasant Hills, of which Jim had told them last night at supper. It did not seem right that she should be able to take notice of things in this fashion, and she called herself hard-hearted, because she was not drowned in tears like Pattie, or thinking hard about the future, as Kitty was plainly doing. But in many things Sue was a puzzle even to herself, and could by

no means account for moods and feelings which seemed cold-hearted and callous.

Presently her thoughts veered round to the people at the store, and then she spoke out with quick decision—

"Kitty, what an unpleasant man that Sampson Kench appears to be! And his wife is evidently no better."

"I did not like them," replied Kitty, coming out of her abstraction with a start. "They are a very different sort of people from the Joneses."

"Indeed, yes. How very kind they were to us, taking us in such a friendly fashion, as if we had been invited guests, and not mere helpless waifs dropped out of the train; then trusting us with a horse and waggon, so that we could make our journey without expense," Sue said, with a little burst of grateful warmth.

"It was very considerate, certainly," Kitty answered, with less warmth in her tone than Sue had displayed, but that was perhaps owing to her being so absorbed by her own particular train of thought, which found expression half a mile farther on in an abrupt question which she appeared to voice almost unconsciously.

"Do you expect Uncle Ben made a will?"

"I had not even thought of it," Sue said, in surprise.

"Some one has to think of such things," Kitty replied, with a touch of severity in her tone. Then she went on, "Of course if there is no will we shall inherit all right enough, as we are his only surviving relatives; my fear is lest he might have made a will years ago, and neglected to destroy it, after telling mother that he meant to leave his money to us."

"Time will show," Sue said briefly, while her eyes were fixed on a speck of brown now coming into view from behind a grove of tall poplar trees. Then she

Sisters of Silver Creek

said, in an eager voice, pointing her willow stick towards the brown gable which had arrested her attention, "Kitty, is that a house?"

"Yes, or a barn; it looks hardly big enough to be a house. Oh, Sue, that must be Uncle Ben's place, for you know Sampson Kench said it was the first habitation we came to on this side of the creek," Kitty said, bending forward to get a better sight of the little brown house now coming into view round the corner of the poplar grove.

Even Pattie ceased crying, and began to look interested, exclaiming a minute later—

"What a little place; it is nothing but a log hut!"

"Perhaps it is only a labourer's cottage, and uncle's house is farther on out of sight," suggested Kitty, who had been cherishing the idea that her uncle was better placed than the ordinary settler, and would be certain to have a nice house, with well-laid-out grounds.

"Sampson Kench said the first house we came to," Sue reminded them, in a low tone; then was secretly ashamed because her own heart grew so heavy at the sight of the rough little log hut, to which Uncle Ben had asked Mrs. Walsh to bring her three daughters.

"There is a shed at the back, and a barn; perhaps it isn't as poor as it looks," Pattie commented, giving her eyes a final dab with a very wet handkerchief, then putting it in her pocket, because she had just then no more tears to shed.

"We need not stay here, if all the money comes to us, that is one comfort!" Kitty said, in a low tone, expressive of some disgust; and then Betsey reached a very home-made style of gate in the fence, enclosing a cultivated field, before which she stopped of her own

accord, although the waggon track went meandering on into the distance, perhaps leading to some other lonely habitation which lay even farther away from civilization than the little brown house which had been the home of Uncle Ben.

Kitty clambered down to open the gate, then said that she should walk the remainder of the way.

"Let me come with you, please ; I am so tired of sitting," pleaded Pattie, alighting with more haste than dignity when the gate was passed, then walking forward with Kitty through a field of potatoes, among which the weeds were growing rank and strong.

But Betsey crawled along at a slow walk behind them, and Sue, sitting alone on the waggon seat, thought how differently it had all turned out from what they had expected.

It was a warm welcome they had looked to receive at the end of their journey, but death had arrived before them ; and now if they meant to have a home again they would have to make it for themselves.

CHAPTER VII

The Little Brown House

KITTY and Pattie, who reached the house before the waggon, thought at first that the place was tenantless, for although a rather grimy curtain flapped idly from an open window, the door was shut, and when they knocked no one came.

"Try if it will open," urged Pattie, who was fairly shaking with eagerness.

Kitty gently tried the door, and finding it yield to her persuasion, pushed it open and entered.

A strong odour of soapsuds met her on the threshold, and the dampness of the floor suggested very recent cleansing.

There was a cooking-stove on one side of the room, a shut-up cupboard in the corner, a table in the middle of the floor, also freshly cleaned, a few cheap chairs, and a long bench like a settle under the window, upon which a little old woman lay asleep.

"Is that Mrs. Morgan?" softly whispered Pattie; but Kitty only shook her head in a doubtful fashion, and tip-toed a step or two nearer to the settle, to see what manner of woman this was who lay wrapped in such sound slumber.

She saw a gentle, sensitive face, the expression of

which was refined and sweet, though lines of care and sorrow were deeply graven on it, but the wrinkled hands folded so restfully on the coarse apron were roughened and reddened by hard and constant toil.

Kitty hesitated to break in upon a repose that seemed to bring such peace with it. But she could hear Betsey's feet coming along the track to the door, so the woman must be roused.

Just then a happy smile came on to the quiet face, the sleeper stirred, awoke, and lay gazing up into Kitty's countenance with an air of profound mystification.

"If you please, are you Mrs. Morgan?" the girl asked, wondering if the old woman were imbecile, because of that strange blankness in her gaze.

"And me lying here thinking it was an angel, as if angels ever wore black frocks and hats!" exclaimed the old woman, as if talking to herself; then, rousing herself with an effort, she asked in wavering tones, "Who are you, my dear, and what do you want?"

"Is this the house where Mr. Benjamin Holt lived, if you please?" Kitty asked, with difficulty repressing a shiver as her gaze took in the bare ugliness of her surroundings.

"Yes, poor man; but he was carried to his grave yesterday. Did you know it?" the old woman asked, sitting erect on the settle and rubbing the sleepiness out of her eyes.

"Mr. Kench told us," Kitty replied, in a choked voice; then, recovering herself with an effort, she went on, "We are Mr. Holt's nieces, and we were coming here to live with him."

"I know," said the old woman, nodding her head in a vigorous fashion. "John Elstow told me you would

be coming, so I cleaned the house right out ; but it made me so tired that I shut the door to keep the pigs and hens from coming in, then lay down for a little rest. But I have not been idle long."

"I am sure you needed a rest after so much hard work," Kitty replied, with gentle kindness in her tone. "But can you tell me what we are to do with the horse? Is there any one about to unharness it?"

"I can do that," Mrs. Morgan said, getting off the settle with a feebleness of movement which awoke Kitty's pity.

"I am afraid you are not fit to do it; but perhaps you could show us how to manage. My sisters and I do not know how to unharness a horse, or we would not trouble you," she said, in her most winning manner, which brought an unwonted dew of tears to the sunken eyes of the woman.

"I can do it, only I am always a little shaky after I've been to sleep. What a nice girl you are, and so pretty! I'm glad you have come, though it is a poor place, and I'm afraid you will have hard work to make it pay." Mrs. Morgan shook her head dolefully as she walked out towards the waiting waggon.

Kitty looked at the old woman in surprise, then a chill dismay began to creep into her heart. Had Uncle Ben been poor instead of rich, and was the little brown house all that he could afford as a residence? These questions would have to be answered sooner or later, but the main thing just now was to get Betsey out of harness, and there being no other helper handy, she went out to give what assistance she could.

Mrs. Morgan and Sue had already released Betsey from the waggon, and the old woman was tugging at the

harness with a strength and vigour of which she certainly had not appeared capable a few moments previously.

Another home-made gate in the fence at the back of the house gave entrance to a big meadow, in which an old horse and two cows were feeding. Through this gate Mrs. Morgan led Betsey, and pulling off the animal's head harness, left the tired horse to fend for itself.

"Will the poor thing want some drink?" asked Sue, who had been feeling very sorry for Betsey during the last few miles of the journey.

"A bit of the creek runs through the other end of the paddock. The creature will find that out in no time; horses can always smell water when they want it badly. Tired, did you say it was? Look there!" And the old woman went into a cackle of amused laughter as Betsey, freed from the bondage of harness, indulged first in a roll, then scrambling on to four legs again, set off round the paddock at top speed squealing with delight, while the other old horse and the two cows joined in the race with great zest and enjoyment.

Sue laughed in spite of herself, for the whole thing was irresistibly comic. Her arm ached with the violent exertion of making the willow stick play to some purpose on Betsey's rough sides, and latterly her heart had been aching because the poor beast looked so weary and moved with such dragging slowness; yet now that the harness was off and resting-time had come, the horse chose to take its ease by galloping like a racer.

"Who milks the cows?" Sue asked, as they turned back towards the little brown house, where Kitty and Pattie were standing in a rather dazed fashion doing nothing, because apparently they did not know what to do.

"I do; but it isn't time yet for more than another hour. You have to be careful to do it at the same time regularly every day, or it is bad for the milk, you see," Mrs. Morgan explained. Then she pointed out three pigs and a brood of chickens, saying that they had grown ever so much since she had been there looking after them.

"How long have you been here?" asked Sue, with considerable wonder in her mind.

"Only five days. A real holiday it has been, though I haven't stood still. But it has been so quiet and peaceful, just like the gate of heaven. I wished ever so many times that I could have changed places with the man who had just got inside, but as I couldn't, the next best thing was to be watching by his cast-off body, and fancying I could catch the echoes of what he was hearing in the Celestial City."

"Do you mean that you have been staying here alone since my uncle's death?" queried Sue, in an awestruck voice, as she looked at the feeble, bowed figure of Mrs. Morgan.

"Why, yes, my dear; but there was nothing dreadful in that. I was glad to come, and it has been a beautiful rest for me."

"Were you here when he died?" asked Kitty, who had overheard the last remark as Mrs. Morgan and Sue came back towards the house.

"No one was here. John Elstow came along one morning and finding no one about entered the house to see the poor man sitting by the table, with his head dropped forward on the Bible, but quite dead."

"How shocking!" murmured Kitty.

"Who is John Elstow?" asked Sue.

"He is the nearest neighbour you've got, and lives

only a mile away up the creek. It was he that found the paper saying that you young ladies were to have what there was left. The paper was in the Bible, under the poor man's head. But Mr. Elstow will bring the paper for you when he comes, and he said I was to make you as comfortable as I could."

"It is very kind of him to take so much trouble on our account," Kitty said, in a strained tone; and then she turned silently into the house, followed by her sisters, leaving the trunks where they were in the waggon for the present.

There were only two rooms in the little brown house, with a kind of pantry, which was half a cellar, dug out at one end of the building, and then half buried under a great heap of soil, over which grass and weeds were already drawing a carpet of filmy green.

"There is only one bedroom. What should we have done for a sleeping-place if Uncle Ben had been still alive?" cried Pattie, in amazement, as she viewed the scanty accommodation of her new home.

"Oh, he would have slept on the settle, or in the barn most likely, until another room had been built out somewhere. I've slept in much worse places myself, and this is a beautiful little house, with a stove that draws in a lovely fashion," the old woman said, with an admiring look round, adding, with a pathetic ring in her tired voice, "I wish that I lived here always."

"I like it too," Pattie said quickly; "it is a dear, cosy little place, and I do hope we shall be able to stay here. I am so tired of scurrying about the world in search of a home. Are you, Sue?"

"Yes, dear, I am, and we will just make the best of it, feeling thankful that it is no worse," Sue said, drawing

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poor pale-faced Pattie into her arms with a warm sisterly hug, while she secretly resolved to stand by the delicate younger sister in the choice of a home, whatever Kitty might say to the contrary.

There was a conflict of feelings in Kitty's heart as she turned away to consult with Mrs. Morgan about the possibilities of supper. She had heard what passed between Pattie and Sue, and rightly guessed how staunchly the latter would be sure to side with the weakly younger sister, if it came to a question of making a home in some other place.

"I cannot stay here always, oh, I cannot!" she muttered to herself, going to the door, and sending her gaze out over the solitude which reached to the wide horizon.

It was pleasant enough now, bathed in the warm light of the July afternoon, but how would it be when the skies were dark and lowering, when tempests howled through the leafless boughs of the poplar trees, or the whole face of the land was shrouded in snow. The appalling loneliness then would be too awful to be borne, and Kitty decided that not even her love for her sisters could demand such a wholesale sacrifice of herself and her inclinations.

Mrs. Morgan managed to get them a good and sufficient supper, a loaf of good bread which some kindly neighbour had brought for the funeral feast on the previous day, butter made from the milk of the cows pastured in the paddock, and eggs laid by the fowls which ran in and out of the open door, just as if the whole place belonged to them.

"We shall have to get those trunks indoors to-night, for it may rain," Kitty said, in a dissatisfied tone, when supper was over, and they were looking round making

arrangements for the night, and settling how best to bestow themselves in their narrow quarters.

"I think we can slide them down the back board of the waggon if we take care," Sue replied ; " we shall have to learn to do all sorts of things for ourselves, so there is nothing like beginning early."

"It is very horrible, Sue. I simply can't endure the thought of it," moaned Kitty, then whisked away an unaccustomed tear. Weeping was a weakness in which she very rarely indulged, but now the circumstances seemed to demand it.

Sue looked as uncomfortable as she felt. "We shall have to bear it for a few weeks, that is evident," she said soothingly ; then went on, with a little hesitation in her tone, "We may even have to stay here altogether if it suits Pattie, for I believe that Uncle Ben was a poor man, and what he said in his letter about the pile he had made was all imagination or failing intellect."

The two girls were alone, standing by the farther window of the bedroom, and at Sue's words Kitty's cheeks blanched to a ghastly whiteness. Pattie was helping Mrs. Morgan to wash and put away the supper dishes, so there was no one but Sue to listen when the elder sister broke into vehement speech.

"Don't suggest such a thing to-night, Sue ; I can't bear it ! Think of how we hurried away from England because of the poverty which threatened us. Do you think I should have bustled things through as I did if I had believed Uncle Ben to be poor ? There it is in black and white in his letter that he has money in abundance for all of us ; he said, too, that if mother had not enough for the passage, she was to cable for what she wanted, and he would send it for her at once."

"He may have had a few pounds saved, and thought it riches ; but look at this poor little house and its appointments ; remember the kind of life he lived, cooking his own food, washing his own clothes, and slaving to till his little holding. People who are rich do not as a rule work like that," Sue replied, hating to dash Kitty's hopes in this fashion, yet honestly believing that it would be the shorter suffering to get the matter settled on a common-sense basis at once, before the elder sister had time to build any more castles-in-the-air, on the foundation of riches which did not exist.

"He might have been a miser, and people given to hoarding will suffer any hardship rather than be forced to spend money," Kitty broke in eagerly.

But Sue only shook her head, saying, in a low, tender tone—

"I don't think Uncle Ben was a miser, or he would not have written offering a home to all of us, and even volunteering to help us with money for the journey. I believe that he was good and kindly, that to him this little brown house was equal to a fine mansion, and that the few pounds he might have saved by his hard work seemed like great riches. I wish, oh, I wish that he had lived a little longer, for I am sure we should have loved him." And Sue's voice broke in a little sob of lamentation piteous to hear.

"I think it was very wrong of him to have deceived us so, bringing us this long journey of thousands of miles on false pretences," Kitty said, with a thrill of indignation in her tone.

Sue did not reply, for at that moment Pattie came in to say that Mrs. Morgan was going to milk the cows, and she was going with her to learn how to do it, because the

old woman would have to go back to her own proper work in the house of Sampson Kench on the very next day.

"We shall have to get a man to do all that kind of thing while we stay here," Kitty said impatiently. "We never did such work at home."

"I fancy numbers of people have to do in Canada what they would never have dreamed of doing in England," Sue said, with a nervous laugh ; for Kitty's rebellious mood fairly frightened her.

"I can't think how we shall sleep to-night ; that bed is too small for three," the elder sister remarked, with a glance at the wooden bedstead standing in the corner, and which, like the field gates, was plainly of home manufacture.

"That is easily arranged," Sue replied briskly. "You and Pattie can do with the bed, Mrs. Morgan can sleep on the settle in the other room, and I will roll in our big rug and lie on our trunks ; they won't be harder than the floor, and I shall not be afraid of rats or black beetles promenading over my countenance during the night."

"What a good little soul you are, Sue ; you always contrive to make the best of a situation, however bad it may appear to be !" cried Kitty, becoming suddenly very much ashamed of her own petulance.

"It is of no use to be miserable," Sue said quietly, as the two went out of doors to the waggon, in order to unload the trunks.

"No use, certainly ; but, all things considered, very natural," grumbled Kitty, with a temporary relapse into her black mood ; then she went on a little resentfully, "I believe you would be quite content to settle down in this solitude for always."

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"I would rather live on here in this little brown house, than have no home at all," Sue said, with a brighter colour drifting into her face, as she struggled with the nearest trunk. "So if it comes to settling the question by voting, I fancy you will find yourself in a minority of one."

CHAPTER VIII

The Situation disclosed

"WAIT a minute! That trunk is too heavy for you; let me haul it down," shouted a voice from the road past the barn, and Sue almost let the biggest package of the lot tumble on to Kitty, in her astonishment, for she had seen no one approaching.

A man was coming towards them with long swinging strides, and the same rolling gait as she had noticed in Mr. Jones and Jim, and which was probably acquired through trying to get over rough ground at the fastest possible rate.

"Perhaps it is that John Elstow of whom Mrs. Morgan spoke," whispered Kitty, whose colour had risen to a burning red, at the thought of being caught at such an undignified occupation.

Sue was more of a philosopher, and did not trouble to blush, although she felt considerable relief at having stronger arms than her own to lift the big trunk to the ground, for it was both heavy and unwieldy.

But the man put his shoulder to it, gave a heave, and, walking off with his burden, deposited it in the house, then came back to the girls.

He was a pleasant-looking man of thirty or more, sun-burned, and with the aspect of a real colonial, a man

who loves the land, and expects it to reward him for his persevering toil.

He held out his hand in frank neighbourliness to Kitty, saying in a friendly tone, "I am glad to see you, Miss Walsh. I have just made the acquaintance of one of your sisters, who is helping Mrs. Morgan to milk the cows; and this, I suppose, is your other sister?" And from Kitty he turned to Sue, who decided at the first glance that she liked him very much.

"I suppose you are the Mr. Elstow of whom we have heard Mrs. Morgan speak?" Kitty said, with just a little hint of coldness in her tone, which grated on Sue, though probably the stranger did not notice it, or would have put it down to shyness if he had.

"John Elstow, at your service," he replied. "I am sorry I did not know when you would arrive, or I would have tried to meet you at the railway depôt, for Qu'Appelle siding is not a cheerful spot at which to end a long railway journey. How did you manage to get up here?"

"A farmer, Mr. Washington Jones, took us to his house for the night, then lent us a horse and waggon to drive here," Kitty explained, still standing on her dignity, as if she felt immeasurably superior to this simple kindly neighbour.

"I'm glad you came off so well, though people are mostly kind to each other in these thinly settled places. My wife will come along and see you to-morrow, if the baby is better; but the little chap is teething, and has been a handful for the last week or so."

"Pattie, that is, my younger sister, will be delighted to know that you have a baby. She was saying as we came along to-day that she had not seen a small child

since we left the cars," put in Sue, with great friendliness in her tone. Kitty's superior air jarred on her so much that she was anxious to make what amends she could in her own person.

John Elstow laughed. "There are plenty of babies about, though there is room on the land for more," he said, as he shouldered another trunk and bore it off to the house.

"Mr. Elstow, won't you come in and tell us about Uncle Ben's death? It came as a fearful shock to us," Kitty said, when the last of the trunks had been carried in, and the waggon had been wheeled back into the shadow of the barn.

"I am sure it must have been a shock," he answered kindly, as he followed her into the house, and took his seat on a trunk standing just inside the door. "But although I have known Mr. Holt quite intimately for the last two years, that is, ever since I settled in this district, I never once heard him mention any relatives, and I had got into the way of believing that he had none, until that morning a few days back, when I found him sitting by the table dead. Your letter was lying under the Bible on which his head was resting, and it was so creased and worn that I think he must have read it a great many times."

"What made him die so suddenly and alone?" asked Sue, turning a little pale, as if in fancy she were reconstructing the scene, and seeing the lonely passing of her kinsman.

"The doctor said that he had a weak heart, and that it must have failed suddenly. It must have been quite a painless death, probably he did not even know that he was dying," John Elstow replied, but forbore to

state what further the doctor had said, about the probability of the solitary old man having been worried at the prospect of three nieces arriving to disturb his quiet.

"Mrs. Morgan said something about a paper which you found in the Bible ; what was in it ?" Kitty asked, her heart beating fast, and her colour rising as she looked at him.

"I will bring it down for you to-morrow. It was left in my care after the inquiry, and I locked it up until you should arrive," he answered.

"Cannot you tell us what it was about ?" asked Sue, who, seeing Kitty's ill-suppressed agitation, came to the rescue, as was her wont.

"I can give you the substance of it certainly, if not the actual wording. 'I want my three nieces to have everything I've got to leave, and I beg them on no account to sell this place on Silver Creek, or, if they do, they must all agree about it, and it must not be done until after the youngest one is twenty-one.' The paper had been signed by him, but not witnessed. Indeed, it might only have been written just before the end."

"Had he any other property besides this little house and the land about it ?" asked Kitty, her throat growing dry and parched as she waited for the answer.

"Not that I know of. He always struck me as being rather a poor man, although I've known him do many a kindly deed, in helping needy settlers at a pinch ; and he was very good to the Indians on the Reservation in the great snow of last winter." There was so much sincerity and simple conviction in John Elstow's tone, that Kitty was quite sure he was speaking the truth so far as he knew it.

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"I fancy that my uncle had means of which you might know nothing," she said, and again the condescending note, which had so jarred on Sue, crept into her tone, as her hand slid towards the little bag containing Uncle Ben's letter to her mother, which night and day she carried fastened round her neck. But she did not produce the letter, because she had not yet decided how far to take John Elstow into her confidence.

"That, of course, is quite possible, and I hope will prove to be the case for all your sakes. Farming is a hard life for women in these sparsely settled districts, and although no one need starve if they are careful, the work is heavy and very rough." John Elstow rose to go as he spoke, for the farmers of Qu'Appelle had scanty leisure for paying visits in July, and his duty of neighbourliness had cost him rather dearly these last few days.

Sue followed him out of the door, anxious to prefer a request that she had found no chance to make while Kitty was talking.

"Can you tell me where I can borrow a side-saddle, and whether that horse in the field is safe for a girl to ride?" she said, with such a friendly smile, that her plain little face looked more winsome even than Kitty's.

"I can lend you my wife's saddle for a week or two. Are you fond of riding?" he said, smiling down at her, and thinking what a nice little girl she was. It was Sue's misfortune that people always believed her younger than her actual years.

"Oh, I don't really know how to ride, that is, I used to ride a donkey sometimes when I was a little girl. But Mr. Jones's horse and waggon must be taken back to Goshen, that is the name of his place, you know, and Mr. Jones said if I could borrow a saddle and bring a

horse with me, I could ride back," Sue explained, in a matter-of-fact tone.

John Elstow looked at her in surprise. "You are a plucky girl even to think of such a thing ; but won't you be afraid?"

"Oh yes, I expect I shall be fearfully nervous ; but when one has to do a thing it mostly gets done. I had never been in charge of a horse and waggon until to-day, and I was very much afraid of Betsey ; but we managed very well. Only I should like to be sure that the horse in the field is not frisky."

"Old Diamond is the slowest, most stolid kind of a horse that I ever encountered, and I ought to know, for I've borrowed the creature a good many times, when work has been pressing. You will be quite safe, I should say, if you can stick on. But I will bring the saddle down to-morrow evening, and give you a lesson in riding, then you will feel safer," he said kindly, admiring the quiet courage in Sue, and determined to help her as much as he could.

Sue thanked him warmly, and went back to the house happy in the consciousness of having found such a helpful friend, and with half her dread of the day-after-to-morrow's journey taken away because of that assurance of old Diamond's freedom from friskiness.

Kitty was sitting in a despondent attitude on one of the trunks, bursting into open lamentation when Sue entered.

"Oh, it can't be true that Uncle Ben had no more property than this miserable shanty, and the land which goes with it ! If it is, we are just beggars, and would have been better off as cooks and housemaids in England."

"I don't see how any one with house and land could

be called a beggar, and I am quite sure that we shall be happier in a home of our own, however humble, than if we were just paid dependents," Sue said warmly. "Then you must remember we have Pattie to think of, and though you and I might have managed in situations, she could not have earned her living in that way ; and Pattie is taking to this place already, I can see."

"Just because it is a novel experience. Wait until the winter comes, the long dark nights, the cheerless days, she will feel differently then," retorted Kitty, with great bitterness.

"And you will feel better when we have had a good night's rest ; you are tired out now, and so everything looks dismal," Sue said, with determined cheerfulness. She was tired herself, more weary even than Kitty, for it had been hard work driving Betsey, and her right arm was stiff from her ineffectual but active use of the willow stick.

Kitty responded only by an inarticulate noise like a moan, and still remained perched in a melancholy attitude on the trunk, while Sue darted to and fro, putting things in order for the night.

Pattie and Mrs. Morgan were still out-of-doors, the old woman being busy in showing Pattie the work necessary to be done every night among the live stock Uncle Ben had possessed.

The evening was very hot, and the fire in the stove had been let out immediately after the supper tea had been made. The one window of the sitting-room stood wide open, the outer door being open too, while the bedroom, which by good fortune had two windows, one in the front and one in the gable at the end, was open to the fresh air also.

John Elstow had set the trunks side by side in an orderly row against the wall of the sitting-room, and looking at them, Sue had a sudden inspiration.

"Kitty, I shan't trouble to move these trunks into the other room to-night, but just spread my rug on them and lie down here ; it will save a lot of hard work, for which I shall be thankful, for I am desperately tired, and then, too, we shall be more evenly distributed, two in one room and two in the other."

"Just as you please ; but I fear you will be frightfully uncomfortable," Kitty remarked, with weary indifference.

"Oh, I shall sleep like a top, never fear. I only trust that my troubles in hunting Betsey along will not haunt my dreams," Sue responded laughingly.

Then Pattie came in with the old woman, and the day sank slowly into night across the vast solitary plains.

CHAPTER IX

A Vain Search

KITTY awoke the next morning in more cheerful spirits, and determined that she would devote that day to a thorough overhauling of her uncle's effects, in the hope that she might find some clue to the existence of that hidden hoard in which she tried so earnestly to believe.

The other two girls left her to prosecute her search alone, as they had other and, to them, more important things to do.

Pattie this morning milked the cows, while Mrs. Morgan looked on in the character of instructor, then fed the chickens, and liberated the pigs, in order that they might find their own food, which was no hard task, seeing that they had all day to do it in.

But Sue was out in the field with the horses, going through a small rehearsal of what would have to be done on the next morning before she could start for Goshen. Catching Betsey by the guile of a handful of beans, she slipped a halter over her head, led her home to the barn, and tying her to a convenient post, proceeded to put the harness on, using such powers of observation and common sense as she possessed in order to perform the unaccustomed task correctly.

When it was done to Sue's satisfaction, and Betsey, by

dint of much coaxing, had been induced to stand between the shafts, and be fastened to them, Sue called Mrs. Morgan to admire her handiwork, and tell her if it were properly done.

"You took and harnessed that great beast all alone?" exclaimed the old woman, in delighted surprise. "Well, you are real clever, and no mistake about it. I wonder now if you would drive me along to Sampson Kench's, seeing the horse is harnessed already; it won't take you long, and I do get so tired walking in the sun these hot days."

"I will drive you certainly; but must you go so soon? It would be very nice if you could stay with my sisters until I come back from Goshen," Sue said, wondering how Kitty and Pattie would like being in the house by themselves on the night when she would have to be absent from home.

"I promised Mrs. Kench that I would go back the first day I could be spared. I really ought to have gone last night, seeing that you came before dark, only I was so tired, and you were strange, so I stayed. But there will be dreadful goings on if I don't show up this morning, for Mrs. Kench is a real hard woman."

"That is how she looks, hard," said Sue. "But you must have some breakfast. I should think Kitty will have got the coffee made by this time, and it won't hurt Betsey to wait here half an hour."

Fortunately the coffee was made, and Kitty, who was rested and refreshed by a night's sleep, was disposed to be very gracious and kind to the poor old woman. But when the question of payment for her services was brought up, Mrs. Morgan flatly refused to take any money.

"It was such a rest to come up here, and stay alone with that poor man lying in his coffin, it seemed like having Sunday all the week. I have had no holiday like it for five years now," she said, in her gentle quavering voice, which carried such a suggestion of refinement with it.

"But it would not be right to let you do all you have done for poor Uncle Ben, and for us, without trying to make you some amends," Kitty said gently.

"You will most likely have to pay Mrs. Kench something for sparing me so long ; but don't do anything until you have asked John Elstow ; he will know what is fair, and will see that you are not imposed upon," Mrs. Morgan said, looking round the bare room with a yearning gaze as if it were a shelter which she grieved to leave.

"Mrs. Kench referred to the matter yesterday ; but we will take your advice, and let Mr. Elstow settle that question," Kitty replied, with a shake of her head. "But we want to give you something, if it is ever so little, just for yourself, please," coaxed Kitty, in her most winning manner.

"I would rather not take anything, thank you," the old woman persisted, while her lips trembled and the tears came into her eyes. "But if you would come and speak to me sometimes, when you are along at the store, it would be a real happiness to see your bright faces."

"We will come, certainly, and you must come here to see us. Do you work for Mrs. Kench always—I mean, do you live in the house ?"

"Yes, I'm her hired girl ; that is, I do as much work as I can, but I can't get through what I used to do, and the winters try me terribly."

"It is a very hard life for you," Kitty murmured

compassionately, her heart aching for the feeble old creature, who wore the heavy yoke of servitude.

"I do find it hard sometimes, but when the debt is paid, perhaps I shall be able to get an easier place," Mrs. Morgan answered, with attempted cheerfulness.

"What debt?" asked Pattie, who had been a keenly interested listener.

"My dear, years ago when my husband was alive we got into debt at Sampson Kench's. He was living then at Merton in Dakota, and we were living there too. When my husband died I sold everything I possessed except the clothes I wore, in order to pay them, but it was not enough by five hundred dollars, and so I set about working it out. I came here from Dakota with them, and have stayed with them ever since, nearly five years." A tired sigh fluttered from the old woman's lips, but no murmur. It was her fate that life had proved such a thorny path, and of what avail was it to cry out or make a moan at the inevitable?

Pattie's eyes were full of tears, and even Kitty was conscious of a lump in her throat, as she said—

"But were you obliged to work it out, if it were your husband's debt and he had been unfortunate?"

"My dear, it is not honourable to owe money, and I had nothing left to live for, save to clear my husband's memory," Mrs. Morgan answered with a gentle dignity. Then she burst into passionate pleading. "Oh, let me beg of you children, whatever happens, don't run into debt at the store. Go without things, or sell everything you've got to buy food, but don't owe Sampson Kench money, I pray you, for he is a hard man, and there will be bitter suffering in store for you if once you get into his clutches!"

Kitty shivered and turned pale, while Pattie's ready tears dropped in a silent shower; but Sue stretched out her hand and laid it on Mrs. Morgan's, saying brightly—

"We will take your advice, and be grateful to you for giving it; and now, if you are ready, I will drive you back to the store."

Mrs. Morgan rose instantly, but did not reply in words. The outburst of excitement seemed to have shaken her, and she looked so frail that Kitty and Sue almost lifted her into the waggon between them.

It was a lovely morning, with enough cool breeze to temper the heat of the sun, and Sue, who was becoming used to Betsey, thoroughly enjoyed the little outing, using her eyes to good purpose in a survey of their new property.

"That patch of potatoes looks rather weedy, don't you think?" she said, pointing her willow stick at the impudent battalions of stitchwort, ragged-robin, crow's-foot, and chickweed which flaunted luxuriant growths where only trim rows of potatoes should have been.

"Yes, you will have to weed them soon, or the crop will suffer, and, my dear, there is half your winter food in that field. Don't sell them, but save a few bushels of medium size potatoes for seed, eat the big ones, and feed your pigs and chickens on the rubbish, which should be well boiled and mixed with meal."

"What a lot you know about farming! And we are so terribly ignorant! I think you will have to come and live with us to show us how to manage our land and our live stock," Sue remarked, with a laugh.

"I wish I could; what happiness it would be!" sighed the frail old creature. "You all look so kind, and you

have such sweet merry faces. But I must pay my debt first, and then we shall see."

Sue turned many things over in her mind as she drove back from the store. But she was not so absorbed in meditation as to neglect Betsey, and succeeded in getting more pace out of that leisurely animal than had been possible at any part of yesterday's journey.

By the time the little brown house was reached again Sue's thinking had merged into resolutions of a very definite sort, and she had decided that it was her duty to devote herself to the heavy outdoor work, toiling in the fields like a man, in order that the land might supply them with food. She could not imagine Kitty doing work of this sort, and Pattie was not robust enough. But some one must do it, or haply they might starve in the midst of plenty.

Pattie came running out to help to unharness Betsey as soon as she heard the waggon wheels.

"Kitty is in a dreadful state of mind because she can't find any papers to tell her whether Uncle Ben left any money," she said confidentially, dropping her voice so that there should be no danger of the elder sister overhearing what she said.

"Is she still searching?" asked Sue, in a troubled tone.

"Yes; she has turned out every box and bundle in the house. The place is in a fearful muddle, and Kitty is just raging round. I wouldn't go in if I were you, Sue, for she snaps just dreadfully."

"I am afraid I must, dear, just to let her know that I have come back, and afterwards you and I will go all round the place, and make up our minds what to do next."

"I shall like that," replied Pattie, with a beaming

face, and then she volunteered to lead Betsey out to the paddock alone, while Sue went indoors to report.

At least she went as far as the door, but entrance was not just then possible, every inch of the floor space being covered with odds and ends of Uncle Ben's household treasures. Judging from the miscellaneous character of the things, he must have had a genius for hoarding rubbish, old pickle bottles, empty meat tins, and worn-out shoes bulking largely in the collection.

"Oh, what a muddle!" cried Sue, aghast; for although the house had struck her previously as being very bare, it had also looked most primly tidy.

"I would not mind muddle, if there had only been some results of a satisfactory character," Kitty answered in a petulant tone, as she reached down a pile of old newspapers from a shelf above the stove, nearly smothering herself with dust in the process.

Sue took a sudden resolution, and acted on it before her courage had time to cool.

"Kitty, it is of no use wearing yourself out in looking for what cannot be found. Give it up, dear, and let us turn our attention to making the best of what we have got. If you can do the housework, I believe that, with Pattie's help, I can manage to get a living out of the land."

"Pattie's help indeed!" cried Kitty. "And pray what use will a delicate child like that be in a hard outdoor life? Why, she is so afraid of everything too, and would flee shrieking if a cow looked at her!"

"I don't think you are quite fair to Pattie. She milked one cow last night, and both this morning, and now she has just led Betsey off to the paddock," Sue replied quietly.

"But think of the hardship of such a life to her!" Kitty whisked an angry tear from her dusty cheek as she spoke, and felt very miserable indeed.

"It would not be hardship if she liked to do it," went on Sue, slowly, as if carefully weighing her words as she uttered them. "She might even grow stronger from the free outdoor life."

"There will be time enough for us to decide our future mode of life when I have quite satisfied myself that there is no money," Kitty rejoined tartly, for Sue had been using the very same argument as she herself had always brought forward during her mother's lifetime.

Mrs. Walsh, like many people who live in the country, had had a great dislike to fresh air. Her windows were kept fast shut, with sandbags on the ledges, chimneys not in constant use were stuffed with bags of straw, and Pattie was coddled up in heavy garments, which would scarcely allow of her shuffling along at a moderate walk when she went abroad, while running was entirely out of the question.

Kitty and Sue, being stronger, had early revolted from this tyranny of shut windows and cramping garments, but Pattie had been too weak and languid to be self-assertive, so for her the old order of things had never been changed.

Sue decided that it was of no use to argue with Kitty in her present frame of mind, and just telling her that she was going with Pattie to look round the land, went off and was away for nearly two hours.

It was easy to discover the extent of Uncle Ben's location, it being entirely surrounded with a fence of very lightly twisted willow boughs and stout stakes at

intervals of about a yard. The enclosure was not well farmed, though a big field of wheat looked very flourishing. There were two patches of roots, both badly in need of hoeing, like the field of potatoes near to the house, and all the rest of the land seemed to be covered with low scrub, reaching to the shoulders of the two girls, as they pushed through a belt of it growing near the creek.

"Pattie, these are black currant bushes!" exclaimed Sue, as the old familiar aroma of leaves and branches crept up her nostrils.

"So they are. Look at the currants too, and what fine ones! We never grew better in the dear old garden at Stoneycroft. We had better make some of them into jelly for the winter," Pattie answered.

"We will make some jelly to sell!" cried Sue, seized with a sudden inspiration.

"But who would buy it?" asked Pattie.

"There are sure to be people in the big cities who would take it from us to sell again. Remember how dear jam and marmalade were in Winnipeg. We will begin gathering here the day after I come back from Goshen; some of the fruit is ripe enough already, you see, so we can take that first."

"Would some of those pickle bottles which Kitty was turning out of Uncle Ben's cupboard do to put the jelly in, do you think?" Pattie asked, looking as if she would like to start making jelly there and then.

"Admirably. I noticed they had very wide mouths; but we had better hurry back and rescue them before Kitty flings them away in a fit of despair."

They returned to the house by way of the creek, going through the paddock where the horses were pastured, and pausing to make acquaintance with the

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old horse Diamond, which seemed a friendly animal, for it followed them to the farther gate, then stood whinnying after them as if desirous of more of their companionship.

Kitty was not to be seen when they peeped into the outer room, although the muddle was, if possible, greater than ever. But the sound of muffled sobbing came to them from the farther room, and with alarmed glances at each other the two girls tip-toed between the meat tins and the pickle bottles to the inner room.

Kitty was lying face downwards on the bed, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Oh, my poor dear, what is the matter?" cried Pattie, in great dismay, springing towards her sister's side; but catching her foot in a pile of Uncle Ben's clothing, which had been flung on the floor, she nearly fell headlong instead.

"I can't find a trace of anything which even remotely suggests money, and I am beginning to think that Sue must be right in believing that Uncle Ben had none, unless—unless——"

"Unless what?" demanded Sue, a trifle sharply, for Kitty's hesitancy brought a chill to her, suggesting as it did something very disagreeable indeed.

"Unless John Elstow or Mrs. Morgan stole it," replied Kitty, in a defiant tone.

"Oh, Kitty, don't even think such a thing of that poor old woman, or Mr. Elstow either," burst out Sue, with great indignation, beginning to fear that the vain search for Uncle Ben's money had upset her sister's brain.

"Why should I not think it? Remember their opportunities. John Elstow came into the place and

found the poor man dead, so he had ample chance to lay his hands on anything he chose ; and Mrs. Morgan was here alone for days."

"Hush!" cried Sue, in a warning voice, as the sound of a footstep caught her ear, and stepping carefully over the piles of rubbish, she reached the door to find herself confronted by Sampson Kench.

CHAPTER X

Uncomfortable Suspicions

A TERROR seized Sue lest this sombre-looking man, with his uncivil ways and rough talk, might have heard Kitty's incautious speech. The windows and doors were wide open, so that any one approaching the house slowly would have had ample opportunity for listening to what was going on inside.

"Good morning, miss," said Sampson Kench, with what was meant for a smile, but resembled only a grimace. "I happened to have business up the creek this morning, and so thought I would just call in and see if you wanted anything from the store to-day."

"I think not, thank you. I drove Mrs. Morgan over to your place this morning, and if we had needed anything I should have brought it back with me," Sue answered, with as much dignity as she could muster, though her cheeks had flamed an uncomfortable red.

"Ah, that must have been after I started. My wife will be very glad to have the old woman back, though she is not much use ; but we keep her on out of charity," he said, with an affectation of blandness, which sat but ill upon him.

Sue gave a jerky nod, which might have stood equally

for assent to or dissent from this statement ; then waited for the visitor to go. But he was not ready yet.

"I suppose you are looking into things a bit. The old man was a rare one for hoarding, liked to have his money where he could see it, and know that it was safe. So he has told me many a time," drawled Sampson Kench, not looking at Sue, but fixing his sombre, shifty eyes on the door-frame, as if examining into its need of a fresh coat of paint.

Again Sue flushed uncomfortably, while privately hoping that Kitty would not overhear what the man was saying, and her tone was chilly as she replied—

"Our uncle was so much of a stranger to us that we do not know what his habits were, but at present we have found nothing of more value than empty pickle bottles."

"Ha, ha, ha—very good ! He was a great one for pickles, and always bought the best. He used to say that a tin of corned beef and a bottle of pickles were as good or better than a wife, for when you had bought them they were always ready when wanted, but a wife might have taken to gadding."

Sampson Kench appeared wishful to give the impression of being really a merry fellow at heart, but it was the sort of mirth which made one think of a buffalo dancing a hornpipe.

Again Sue responded only by a jerky little nod ; never before had she felt such repulsion and dislike to any person as she felt for this melancholy-looking man, while all the time she was fearing that he must have overheard Kitty's incautious words.

"Then you are sure there is nothing that you are likely to be wanting at my place ?" he asked, after a

long pause spent by him in gazing at the door-frame, and by Sue in staring at the sky.

"Nothing, thank you," she replied, quite civilly, yet feeling something of a hypocrite all the time.

"There's no need to go short of things if you can't afford to pay cash down. I'm always willing to give credit to respectable people," he said, lingering still.

Sue, with difficulty, repressed a shiver; she was thinking of Mrs. Morgan's passionate outburst, and her entreaties that they would not get into debt with Sampson Kench.

"Thank you. We like to pay ready money best," she replied simply, and then was relieved to see him put his hand to his battered old hat brim, and wish her good day.

When he had gone, Kitty came to the door of the sleeping-room, not crying any longer, but with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, which made her look prettier than ever, despite her rumpled hair and general untidiness of appearance.

"Sue, you see my conjectures were correct ones," she said eagerly.

"What conjectures?" asked Sue, assuming great indifference, although inwardly she was very much perturbed, for Kitty was impulsive, and sometimes indiscreet.

"About Uncle Ben's tendency to hoard. I am quite sure he had money, and that he kept it by him, and we shall find it some day—a tremendous haul of dollars and paper money—unless indeed John Elstow or the old woman found it instead, in which case the secret will be safe to leak out somehow, and Providence will help us to get our own again. Meanwhile, with this

hope in prospect, I am quite content to settle down for a time in this dreary solitude ; and, to show how good I am going to be, I will clear up all this muddle, and get some dinner ready, while you and Pattie do what you please."

Kitty's entire change of front would have been very comforting to Sue but for the miserable suspicions which she persisted in harbouring against John Elstow and Mrs. Morgan.

However, this might right itself in time, and Sue had to be content to take things as they came for the present, so she fell in joyfully with Kitty's suggestion about getting dinner ready, and turned her own attention towards collecting all the pickle bottles she could find, and carrying them off to the barn, where they could be stowed away in safety until they were wanted.

She would not let Pattie help her, being fearful of overtaxing the delicate younger sister, and hurried to and fro between house and barn laden with a big basket of bottles, or returning with the basket empty to fetch another load.

The barn was bigger and better built than the house, and appeared to be used for a variety of purposes. One end had stalls, where the horse and the two cows could be accommodated with winter quarters, whilst the other part had a hollow floor with a trap door, which Sue found led by a solid kind of step-ladder to a cellar, six feet deep, evidently made for the storage of potatoes and other roots, out of reach of winter frost.

It required quite a large amount of courage to induce her to descend into this place, and it was not until she had fetched Pattie to sit on the top step that she felt brave enough to make the attempt.

Once down, however, she found the cellar to be not such a fearsome place, after all, and as two or three bushels of potatoes still remained stored there from last year's stock, she felt herself amply rewarded for her bravery in making the venture.

Kitty had the house tidy, and the nicest dinner ready that was possible in the short time at her disposal, while she was so cheerful that the other two simply basked in the sunshine of her content. She was quite as eager as Sue to keep expenses down, and equally resolved to have no credit dealings with Sampson Kench.

The money they had left, now the end of the journey was reached, amounted to about forty dollars, and this, with twenty dollars left over after their Uncle Ben's funeral expenses had been paid, represented the sum-total of their capital.

John Elstow had told them about the twenty dollars, and had promised to bring the money down with him when he came to give Sue her riding lesson, it having been left in his care until the dead man's nieces should arrive.

But the girls agreed that this twenty dollars was to be regarded as an emergency fund, and not to be touched except in a time of grave disaster.

"At least we shall have had some of Uncle Ben's money," Pattie said, with a faint ripple of laughter. "But if that was all he had to leave behind him, poor man, I don't think he would have been able to cable us much money for our travelling expenses."

"Ah, I ought to have sent to him for some; then we should at least have known whether he had any to spare," said Kitty, with bitter self-reproach in her tone.

"But it is so easy to be wise after the event, and who could have foreseen such disasters as we have had?"

"No one, I am sure," replied Sue, in a soothing tone, and with a warning look at Pattie, as if entreating that the talk might be diverted into safer channels. "Besides, in any case, we are better off here in a home of our own, where we can do as we like, than we should have been in situations in England."

Kitty shrugged her shoulders, and looked as if about to launch into some bitter invective against the little brown house with its scanty accommodation; but Pattie, who had rightly interpreted Sue's glance of mingled warning and entreaty, came adroitly to the rescue by launching into a vivid account of the morning's ramble round their location, and, judging from her description of it, the wilderness of black-currant scrub might have been pretty nearly equal to a gold-mine.

Sue was equally inclined to view the situation through rose-coloured spectacles, and between them they succeeded in awaking a little interest in Kitty before they separated for the work of the afternoon.

When John Elstow came down that evening from his place higher up the creek, he brought his wife and infant son with him, driving them in a funny old box-waggon, similar to the one Sue had seen standing in the barn.

Mrs. Elstow was a kindly little woman, of a rather commonplace description, and with not much tact. She stayed in the house talking to Kitty and Pattie, while her husband gave Sue a riding lesson in the paddock.

Pattie, who adored babies, speedily got possession of little Johnny, carrying him off to the doorstep, where the two sat playing happily in the soft evening light, whilst Mrs. Elstow rattled on about the discomforts and

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disagreeables of life in lonely places, and of her own particular trials in this respect.

"I would not mind about other things so much, if it were not for the Indians ; but I am afraid of them," she said, with a shudder.

"How is it there are so many here ?" inquired Kitty, uneasily, remembering that this was not the first time she had heard the red men mentioned in connection with Silver Creek.

"The Reservations are so close, you see ; our land reaches to within a mile of the boundary, and I often ask John whatever we should do if they some day broke into fighting-madness and swooped down upon us. He laughs, and says they are not likely to do any such thing ; but I maintain that you can never be quite sure what a Red Indian will do next."

"Have you ever known a case of their breaking out like that ?" asked Pattie, from the doorstep, while a little tremor of fear shook her.

"Not in this part. But you have only got to read stories with Red Indians in them to know very well what may happen some day when you least expect it. I ask John sometimes how he would feel when he came home from a day's threshing or ploughing to help a neighbour, if he found his wife and baby lying dead, stuck through with Indian arrows ; but he always laughs and says that I've nothing to be afraid of, if I give them a bit of corn cake and a drink of milk, when they come begging. But oh, I do detest them so ;" and Mrs. Elstow shrugged her plump shoulders, looking very aggrieved indeed.

"You were brought up in a more civilized place than this, I suppose ?" said Kitty, who was finding that a little of Mrs. Elstow's society went a long way.

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"Oh yes, I lived at Templeton, ten miles north of Toronto, all my life until I married John. Then he would come west, because he said there was more room to breathe. Funny idea with some men, isn't it, that longing to be where there are no neighbours close? Now, my idea of happiness has always been a frame-house painted white and with green shutters. Then I'd have long lace curtains and lovely plants in every window. But there is no use in having your windows nice when there is no one to see them," sighed Mrs. Elstow, with quite a plaintive note in her voice.

Kitty nearly laughed outright, for she thought white-painted frame-houses with green shutters about the most hideous style of house architecture that could be imagined, and would rather have lived in the unpretentious little brown house, left them by Uncle Ben, for the remainder of her life, than have dwelt in Mrs. Elstow's ideal residence.

John Elstow and Sue came in shortly after this, Sue a little flushed and tremulous, because of her experience in the saddle, and privately determined to make old Diamond travel from Goshen at a funeral walk, since trotting proved such a disconcerting ordeal.

"I can find no papers of my uncle's, Mr. Elstow; can you give me any idea where he would have been likely to keep them?" Kitty asked, when he had given her the paper, found under Uncle Ben's face, the signature of which had only death for a witness.

"No, I haven't a notion. But there should be some. For instance, you ought to find the receipts for his payments on this location, unless——"

"Unless what?" asked Kitty, sharply, noticing an expression of embarrassed anxiety, which crept over her neighbour's face.

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"I was going to say, unless he had mortgaged it all, in which case the man granting the loan would have the custody of such receipts ; but I should hope there is no burden of such a kind on the place," John Elstow said, looking as uncomfortable as he felt, for such a condition would indeed spell disaster to these three girls who had come so far, only to find disappointment at the end of the journey.

"I should hope not indeed!" cried Kitty, with a high note of consternation in her voice.

She had before affected to despise the little brown house, standing in its lonely fields, but at the merest hint of a possibility of its being mortgaged it at once sprang to a higher value in her eyes.

"If it had been mortgaged, Uncle Ben would hardly have written in this paper that he wished us not to sell it until Pattie was twenty-one," said Sue, with that touch of practical wisdom which always characterized her.

"Of course he would not. I did not think of that," said John Elstow, with an air of relief. Then he told Kitty that it would be necessary for her to attend with him at the magistrate's office, to go through some legal formalities, and he would then hand over to her the twenty dollars remaining from the money found in possession of the dead man, after the funeral expenses had been paid.

"Where in the house was this money found?" Kitty inquired, thinking perhaps the answer would give her a clue to the hiding-place of the treasure, which she persisted in believing was tucked away somewhere on the premises.

"In his coat pocket, the breast-pocket ; Mrs. Morgan can tell you what she did with the old purse," replied John Elstow, gravely.

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When their neighbours had gone, the three girls sat for a while talking soberly of the uncertainties and difficulties which still hovered about their path.

They went to bed at sunset, being desirous of economy in lamp-oil, and also because sunrise must find them astir again.

On this night Sue slept on the settle instead of the trunks, and found it much more comfortable. Pattie, who slept with Kitty on the bed in the inner room, had troublesome dreams of chasing Red Indians through the black-currant scrub, and then being chased by them.

So haunting and worrying did these dreams become, that she became finally broad awake, and, sitting up in bed, gazed out through the open window to the moonlit field beyond.

The stillness and absolute quiet seemed almost appalling, after her recent experiences on shipboard and in the noisy, rattling cars, and she was just about to curl down beside Kitty, thankful to have something living and warm within reach, when she saw a black figure cross the open moon-lit space at a rapid gliding walk, disappearing in the direction of the barn.

Mrs. Elstow's talk of Red Indians came back to her then with startling vividness, and she fell back on the pillow, shrinking, shivering, and too frightened even to rouse Kitty.

Strangely enough sleep dropped on her soon after from which she did not wake until morning. When she told her sisters of her experience, both of them declared that it must have been a bit of nightmare, resulting from her previous dreaming, and because they both said this with such thorough conviction, Pattie herself was presently beguiled into believing it also.

CHAPTER XI

A Would-be Purchaser

IT was something of a marvel to Sue that she succeeded in driving Betsey safely to Mr. Jones's place at Goshen, with old Diamond tied to the waggon tail, following solemnly behind.

But she did it, and was welcomed by Imogen with so many hugs and kisses, that she emerged flushed and tumbled from the ordeal, although Miss Jones, who was smarter and more beflounced than ever, appeared in no way ruffled by the vigorous activity of her embracing.

Then the two girls had a long talk, while Mr. Jones and Jim were still afield. Imogen melted to tears and sobbed unrestrainedly over the pathetic story of Uncle Ben's lonely end. But when Sue spoke of their plans for the future, she broke into open remonstrance.

"Oh dear, oh dear, you three children can't go on living in a lone place like that. It is not to be thought of. Why, even Kitty is not twenty-one yet, while you and Pattie are scarcely out of short frocks."

"Now, that is positively unkind, seeing that I was seventeen last birthday, and that I have got an extra long skirt on, one of Kitty's, in fact, in order that I may present a more respectable appearance to-morrow when

I am riding old Diamond," said Sue, with a merry laugh, although her eyes were full of tears.

"But women can't live alone in this part of the country ; it is not right," Imogen replied, with a shake of her head."

"Women must live alone, if they have no men to take care of them," Sue went on. "You must remember too that we were always a household of women at home in England, or rather it was one woman and three girls. My brother used to come home for school holidays, before he went to sea ; but that is so long ago now, and we are quite used to having no men to protect us."

"It isn't for protection that you need men so much, not in Canada at all events, though it was different in the States ; but they are so necessary for heavy or dirty work, I think ;" and Imogen shook her flounces with a pensive air, which made Sue laugh again.

Mr. Jones took a different view of the case from his daughter, and said he thought that they would do very well in anything they undertook. He was privately very much impressed with Sue's promptitude in bringing back the horse and waggon ; he had thought it highly probable that he would not see either horse or waggon again until he sent for them, and so was most agreeably disappointed in his expectations by seeing the waggon standing in the shadow of the barn, when he came in to his midday meal, while Betsey and a strange horse fed side by side in the meadow.

"You and the delicate sister would do very well on a small place like your late uncle's, especially if you bargained with your neighbour up the creek to do your carting, ploughing, and harrowing for you. But you ought to get some elderly person to come and live

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with you, just to mother you a bit; then Miss Kitty would be free to go and flutter her wings where she wished, for you will never tie her down to life on an up-country location like Silver Creek," Mr. Jones said, with the air of one who knows, and a dim foreboding came to Sue that this was absolute fact, and must indeed come to pass sooner or later.

"Kitty is very pretty and clever," she replied, with the ungrudging admiration she always gave her eldest sister. "But she is too good and kind to leave Pattie and me. Indeed it is chiefly for Pattie's sake that we are going to try so hard to keep a home in the country; she is too frail to work for her living as Kitty and I can and must do."

"She will get stronger, you will find. She appears a bit weakly just now; but you don't look for much strength in growing things. I should say she will bloom into a fine woman one of these days. But Silver Creek is no place for Miss Kitty, and my advice is, persuade her to go away into the city for the winter. She would easily get thirty or forty dollars a month, and her board. The life would be more to her mind, and she would be able to help you with ready money through that part of the year when cash in our business is hardest to come by."

"But we have no one to come to live with us," Sue said, a little plaintively, quite unable to ignore the force and common sense of these arguments, and dismally conscious that a separation from Kitty was only a question of a few months.

"Some one can be found when the time comes. But don't let your sister go taking any sort of a berth; tell her to come to me, for I know just the right sort of people to help her."

"Law, Pa, fancy you setting up for an employment bureau!" cried Imogen. "While you are about it, you had better find something light and easy for me. A winter in bright city society would be a very agreeable change, after the monotony of this dead-alive place."

"It is too late for you, my dear," retorted Mr. Washington Jones, with a waggish smile. "For even supposing I was willing to let you go, Jim wouldn't hear of it."

"Dear, dear, what nonsense you do talk!" cried Imogen, with a becoming blush, but looking so delighted that Sue came at once to the conclusion that, however much Miss Jones might choose to rail at country life, she had quite made up her mind to find her happiness in it, and was therefore not to be pitied.

It was a very pleasant afternoon and evening which Sue spent at Goshen. Even Jim improved upon acquaintance, and she began to think he was rather nice, especially as he appeared in a very correct-looking suit of store clothes, for her special edification. He also saddled Diamond, and swinging Sue up to the horse's broad back, himself mounted Betsey, and took her for a ride, so that she might not find herself at a loss next day.

Mr. Jones, to whom she confided her black-currant jelly scheme, promised to write to a man in Winnipeg with whom he did business, and see if he could get her an order for her stuff.

"It is frightful messy sort of work, though; I'd rather put in six hours at plough any day," he remarked with a snort of good-natured disgust.

"Dear me, Pa, how can you expect to judge a woman's work or compare it with anything like ploughing?" cried Imogen. "Now jam- and jelly-making is

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occupation fit for any lady, and if I were Sue, I would just plant the whole location up with raspberry canes and fruit trees, so as to produce nothing but jam and jelly.

Sue understood then, as in a flash, why it was Mr. Jones thought so highly of his daughter's practical wisdom and sound common sense, for surely nothing could have been more to the purpose than this suggestion of raspberry canes and fruit trees, and she determined that, so far as she could, she would carry out Imogen's idea, only first she must see what sort of success her jelly-making venture was likely to result in.

She started very early the next morning, hoping to get the worst of the journey over before the day got to its hottest ; and she was also anxious to be at work, feeling that much of their hope for the future might depend upon the steadiness of her labours during the next few weeks.

Having ascertained from Jim, who saddled old Diamond, that a horse ought to be able to walk twenty miles without suffering unduly from fatigue, she resolved to do the journey without stopping to rest, because she knew very well that if she once slipped out of the saddle, she could not get into it again without assistance.

Jim saddled the horse for her, and helped her to mount, while Mr. Jones brought her a willow stick for purposes of encouragement and correction ; but Imogen stood on the doorstep admiring Sue's appearance on horseback, telling her that she looked real splendid mounted up so high.

Then, with many nods and smiles, Sue flicked Diamond with her stick. The old horse moved off, and she sat very erect in the saddle, trying to look more secure than she felt, and succeeding quite well. The first mile was

the trying part, after that she was able to accustom herself to the rolling sensation, which made her feel as if she were at sea again.

Diamond appeared to have a pronounced aversion to any pace swifter than a walk, and as Sue was very much afraid to risk her powers of sticking on, there was a very good understanding between the horse and its rider.

Sue was so tired and cramped by the time Sampson Kench's store loomed into view, that she would have dismounted and walked the remainder of the distance, only she was afraid walking would be more painful than sticking on a little longer.

She had propped the field gate open in the morning of the previous day, when she drove through with Betsey and the waggon, and it was standing open still, a tacit kind of welcome which just then she thoroughly appreciated.

At sight of the old horse coming through the field, Kitty came running to the door, while at the same moment Pattie appeared in view, coming round the corner of the barn, both sisters reaching Sue's side at the moment when she simply could not sit in the saddle any longer.

Kicking her foot free from the stirrup, she just slid into Kitty's outstretched arms, slipping thence to the ground, where she lay for a few moments unable to rise, while Kitty and Pattie hovered about her in great consternation. Finally they lifted her up, and half dragging, half carrying her to the house, laid her on the settle, leaving her to recover slowly, while they went back to unsaddle Diamond. Kitty carried a piece of bread for the old horse, an attention it seemed greatly

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to appreciate ; then, when saddle and bridle had been removed, Pattie, who had become marvellously courageous, put her hand to the horse's forelock, leading the creature out to the paddock, while Kitty went back to Sue.

Oh the blessedness of that rest on the settle, where she could lie still and stretch her cramped limbs, after being for five hours perched on Diamond's rolling, swaying back ! To Sue it seemed about the most delightful sensation she had ever experienced.

Then, too, there was a most appetizing smell of cooking, while the table drawn near to the window was already spread for dinner. It was true Uncle Ben's supply of crockery was very limited, and what there was of it was mostly cracked or chipped somewhere. But when one was very hungry and very tired, such things mattered not at all.

Every time they sat down to a meal, they always laughed about the knives, of which there were only four in the house, one a huge carver which might have served as a sword at a pinch, another a peculiar curved affair, antique of pattern and keen of blade, the third a horn-handled variety of knife, and the fourth with a handle of bone and a blade two inches long.

Sue smiled as she looked at the odd assortment of cutlery, and wondered what they would do if a chance guest happened that way. The spoons and forks were all right, being silver of a rather old-fashioned pattern given to Kitty years before, by an old aunt of their father's, and so not included in the list of the home furniture which had been sold under the bill of sale.

Presently the smile deepened into a ripple of amusement, and Kitty, who was stooping to lift a pie from the

oven, turned in great concern, fearing that Sue was becoming hysterical.

"Do you feel bad now, dear?" she asked anxiously, while her conscience pricked her more badly than it had ever done before, because she had not gone the toilsome journey herself instead of leaving it to Sue.

"Oh no, I am all right, thank you, or shall be when I have had some of that pie. I was just laughing at the incongruity of what Imogen calls 'table fixings,' and thinking how shocked poor old Aunt Louisa would be, if she were still alive, to see her beautiful forks and spoons paired off with those old knives. And oh, Kitty, what should we do in the event of company to dinner?"

Sue went into quite a peal of merriment now, in which she was speedily joined by Kitty, who was trying to carve her pie with the long-bladed carving-knife, and finding the task difficult.

"Where is the joke?" inquired Pattie, who had just come in, looking round the room and up at the ceiling, as if she expected to find it written up in large type.

"It is the knives of course; do we ever sit down to a meal without laughing about them? And now Sue is wondering what we should do if a visitor came along," explained Kitty.

"Oh, there would be no trouble if the visitor were a man, because he would be certain to carry a clasp-knife in his pocket; but a woman would be a difficulty, and the only thing to be done would be for the company to have horn-handle, or antique, while I tried to cut my food with the carving-knife," Pattie replied, with a twitching at the corners of her mouth.

"There would be some serious damage done to the person sitting opposite to you in such a case," said

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Kitty ; whereat they all three burst into peals of laughter, and so immediately felt the better for it, since one could not be depressed or anxious with such infectious mirth circling round.

"Sampson Kench came over to see us last evening. What do you think he came for?" Kitty asked, as she waited on Sue with quite unusual tenderness.

"For the pleasure of the walk, perhaps, although I could scarcely imagine him doing anything for pleasure," Sue replied.

"He came offering to buy this place," Kitty said, stooping as if to pick up something from the floor.

"What for?" demanded Sue, in surprise.

"Because he wanted it, I suppose," Kitty answered coolly, but still keeping her head averted.

"What did you say to him?" Sue inquired, drawing a long breath, while her heart beat in an uncomfortably jerky fashion.

"I could say nothing of course, saving that we had no immediate intention of parting with the property."

"I think he showed most indecent haste in coming so soon to see about it," Pattie broke in, with considerable heat in her tone.

Sue stretched out her hand, and patted the younger sister softly on the arm.

"Ah, he evidently knew nothing about that paper written by Uncle Ben, or he would not have come on such a useless errand," she murmured soothingly.

Pattie's face brightened immediately ; but Kitty looked almost careworn, as she said—

"I hardly think that paper would tell for much legally, because it was not witnessed, you know."

"So far as we are concerned it is as binding as if it

were bristling with the signatures of witnesses," Sue answered quietly. "Even if that were not an impediment to our selling, there is the other fact of our being able to find no receipt of the purchase."

"I know that is against it; but supposing no mortgage claim falls in, there is always the possibility of getting a fresh receipt from the Land Office, Mr. Elstow says. However, it is plain we can do nothing at present, saving to stay on quietly as we are," Kitty answered. Then she began to talk of something else.

Sue was too tired for work of any sort that afternoon, and lay in a state of blissful rest on the settle, turning over in her mind all sorts of plans, for the successful working of her jelly scheme.

By-and-by, when Pattie had gone off to see about her chickens and the shadow of the barn had grown out of all proportion to its height, Kitty brought her sewing, and dropped into a chair standing close to the settle.

"Sue, you know what Pattie said about seeing a black figure cross the moonlit space in front of the barn, the night before last," she said confidentially.

"Yes?"

"It couldn't have been nightmare, of that I am certain, because last night I saw it."

"Does Pattie know?" asked Sue, turning pale.

"No, indeed. Or I expect she would have been ill to-day," Kitty said, a little grimly. "But the individual was no Indian, for he wore ordinary clothes, and had a white skin. I expect it was some one who wanted to frighten us; but I mean instead to frighten him."

CHAPTER XII

Kitty's Plan

"How will you do it?" asked Sue, with a shiver.

Kitty laughed. There was a large amount of daring in her nature, and she was more fearless than most girls.

"Oh, I have several plans. To-morrow, when I go with Mr. Elstow to the magistrate's office, I shall demand police protection, which will mean, I expect, a visit from a mounted patrol once in every night for the present. Then I mean to have a dog warranted to bark and bite; perhaps I shall have two, one inside the house, and one out. But for to-night Uncle Ben must protect us," Kitty answered, snipping her cotton off with a jerk, and looking at Sue with laughter in her eyes.

"What do you mean?" Sue demanded, in great mystification.

"I am quite sure that evil-minded people are more easily scared than others, so I am going to make a straw figure, dress it in Uncle Ben's clothes and stand it out on the doorstep. Any one sneaking round the house in the night time, and coming suddenly on a weird figure like that, would be certain to think it was poor uncle's ghost, and a fright of that sort would keep them from wandering about here again, for a long time to come."

"It looks rather horrible to take the poor old man's

clothes for a scarecrow before he has been a week in the grave," Sue said, with an irrepressible shiver.

"I think if Uncle Ben in life had been as kind as in his letter to mother he showed signs of being, he would have done everything in his power to protect us from harm, so that it can be no slighting of his memory to use his old clothes to frighten away this night marauder, who is trying to disturb our peace," Kitty replied, with some warmth.

"We shall have to tell Pattie all about it," Sue replied, nodding her head in approval of Kitty's way of looking at things. For, after all, it could not hurt Uncle Ben to use his garments for their protection; it was not as if they were meaning any disrespect to his memory.

"I don't think we need tell her why we are putting the figure there. She can suppose we are going to use it to scare the birds away from the black-currant scrub, and have merely got it ready over night," Kitty said, as she stitched away with great vigour.

"That will never do, Kitty, indeed it will not," cried Sue, earnestly; "to begin with, it would be untrue, for neither you nor I should put the figure out in the open in broad daylight after having used it for such a purpose. Besides, although it may frighten her at first, she will soon get over it, and will be all the happier for knowing that she is fully in our confidence."

"Well, do as you like, only I do hate to have the child frightened," Kitty answered, with a petulant note in her voice.

Sue did not reply, having a private belief that Pattie would be less upset by knowing all there was to know than by feeling that she was in any degree shut out of the councils of the others.

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So Pattie was told when she came in to supper, and although the colour all drifted out of her cheeks at the first, Kitty's mention of the intruder wearing ordinary clothes and having a white skin served at once to reassure her.

"Oh, I am not afraid of a white person. I thought it was a Red Indian, and that some night we might all be scalped," she said, with a tremulous pant in her tone.

"Silly Pattie," laughed Kitty, stretching out her hand to bestow a playful pinch on her sister's little pink ear; "I don't expect there is an Indian in the Reservation who knows how to scalp anything, unless indeed he is an educated red man and has read Fenimore Cooper's stories."

"It made me creep to hear Mrs. Elstow talk the other evening, and I had horrible dreams afterwards," Pattie admitted in a rueful tone.

"Mrs. Elstow is most endurable taken in small doses, I should imagine," Kitty replied, with a curl of her lip. "But she is a great deal nicer than Mrs. Kench, and that is something to be grateful for."

It took some time and considerable hard work to make the straw figure and clothe it in Uncle Ben's working garments, but when it was done they all declared it to be a huge success. A wooden hay-rake served for backbone and shoulders, while legs and arms were formed of sticks well padded with straw. The head was the worst, but Kitty had a brush-and-comb bag of flesh-coloured sateen, and this stuffed with hay and stuck on a stick served very well when shadowed by the old hat which apparently had been their uncle's daily companion.

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They did the work out in the barn, and when it was complete took it into the house covered round with a blue cotton bed-spread, and stood it in a corner of their bedroom out of sight, for it by no means marched with their ideas, that any one should get the faintest hint of what they had been doing.

Just before night fell John Elstow came riding up the field mounted on a frisky brown colt. He said that he had been along to Kench's store, and had found a letter for them lying there, so thought he would deliver it.

Not a word did Kitty say to him concerning her fright of the previous night. She had not yet made up her mind to trust this kindly neighbour, and still in her inmost heart was disposed to suspect him of knowing more of her uncle's financial position than he chose to tell. But she was very pleasant and gracious to him, for he had shown them much kindness, and it was not fair to condemn a man on bare suspicion only.

He told her that he would take her to the magistrate's office early in the morning, and that he meant to drive his wife and baby out also, calling for her on his way down the creek.

"Do you always have to pass our gate when you want to go anywhere?" Kitty asked, for previously she had supposed that the abode of the magistrate lay out in the other direction.

"Always, unless indeed I wanted to lose myself in the wilderness, in which case I should take a bee-line through the Reservations, and strike out for the North Pole. My place, instead of being called Creek Head, should have been named the Back of Beyond," he replied, laughing; then added in a graver tone, "But it is home, and it is my own, so I would not change places

with any one who lives in a rented house—no, nor, indeed, with any one in creation.”

“That is just how Sue and I are beginning to feel,” put in Pattie, impulsively. “There is such a sense of security in having one’s own house.”

“Especially when, as in our case, the house stands in its own broad acres,” laughed Sue, with a swing of her hand towards the darkening horizon.

“It might easily be a little bigger,” grumbled Kitty, with a disparaging look at the little brown house, for they were all outside, and John Elstow was just mounting to ride away.

“Never mind, there is plenty of room on either side for additions. A wing here, and a tower there, would make the place look very different, you know,” he said, laughing. Then, mounting with difficulty, for the colt was restless, and hated to stand still even for a moment, he cantered away up the field, and was speedily lost in the gathering gloom of the twilight.

“Is it time to put the figure out yet?” asked Pattie, who had a shrinking distaste for going to commence her preparations for bed in the room where that strange, weird figure lurked in the corner.

“Not quite,” replied Kitty. “It will be darker in half an hour, so we will say our prayers, and brush our hair; then we shall be able to slip into bed very easily in the dark, for I am particularly anxious to show no lights to-night, and the moon does not rise for another hour.”

The half-hour went slowly by, and at the end of it the house door was softly opened, and two shadowy figures crept out, carrying another between them. A minute or two of energetic work and the third figure,

a bowed old man in shabby garments, and with a drooping hat-brim, stood by the doorstep, pointing a warning hand in the direction of the barn.

"Is it safe?" breathed Sue, in an anxious tone, giving the old man a little shake to see if he stood firmly on his wooden legs.

"Quite safe!" whispered Kitty, with a low gurgle of laughter. Then the two crept into the house again, the door was softly shut, and silence reigned within and without the little brown house standing lonely in the fields, while the bowed old man in shabby clothes stood sentinel by the doorstep, guarding the repose of the three maidens inside.

Sue, lying on the settle in the outer room, thought she would never be able to go to sleep, because of the excitement of the whole thing.

But the five hours of bumping and swaying on Diamond's back were bound to have a soporific effect upon her, and before very long she was fast asleep in a repose too deep for dreams. Kitty and Pattie were wrapped in slumber also, and only the faint stirring of a mouse in the warm corner under the stove broke the profound silence of the night.

The moon was rising higher and higher, letting a flood of silver radiance down on the quiet fields; then the revealing light caught the bowed sentinel standing by the house door, and he stood fully and sharply defined.

A dark figure skulking round the side of the house, looking here and prying there, caught sight of the still form; then stopped suddenly.

Sue's slumber grew less profound as the night wore on, and presently she began to dream she was riding on

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Diamond, trying to keep the old horse at a walk when it wanted to canter; but with all her pulling and tugging she could not keep it back, and was just holding on as best she could when she saw lying in the road just before them a little child. To stop Diamond was quite impossible, and equally futile were her efforts to turn the racing animal aside from that little form in the roadway. She saw the great feet come crashing down; then suddenly there rang out a fearful yell in a man's hoarse, frightened voice, Diamond and the child vanished as if by witch's magic, and she was standing on the floor beside the settle.

"Sue, Sue, what is it?" cried Kitty, in an agitated undertone, as she appeared in her nightdress at the open door of the inner room.

"I don't know. Some one screamed, I think," Sue replied confusedly, swaying and trembling so much that she was forced to lay hold of the settle for support.

"At first I thought it was you!" panted Kitty, in a jerky fashion, for the noise had frightened her from sound sleep also.

"I was having dreadful nightmare, but I am sure I did not scream, because the noise of it woke me, and was ringing in my ears as I stood here," Sue answered, as she rubbed her face with her hand to take away the horribly faint feeling oppressing her.

"It was a man who made the noise. I heard him quite plainly, for I had waked up the minute before, and was thinking how bright the moonlight was," said Pattie, coming out from the shadow behind Kitty, and standing beside the table.

"Well, we have just about turned the tables on the individual who wanted to frighten us, I think," Kitty

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remarked, with a chuckle of satisfaction, although she was trembling violently, as the other two could see. "Now we must take that figure in quick, before sunrise reveals him as only a man of straw."

"Oh, we shall not dare open the door in the dead of night," Sue cried, with a shudder.

"Dear, we must; and, indeed, there is nothing to hurt us—the visitor is far enough away by this time. I expect fear lent wings to his feet. I will just slip on a cloak to cover my nightgown, then open the door and fetch the shade of my uncle inside. I expect we shall hear some fine stories of how poor Uncle Ben can't rest in his grave;" and Kitty's nervousness spent itself in soft laughter as she thrust her bare feet into a pair of slippers, and wrapped a dark cloak over her white night attire.

They opened the door in a noiseless fashion, and Kitty, stepping on to the doorstep, lifted the figure in her vigorous grasp, and softly retreated with it into the house, while Sue and Pattie promptly shut the door, and dropped the heavy wooden bar into its place again, after which they all felt more secure.

"Where shall we hide the thing?" asked Kitty. "It seems rather a pity to pull it to pieces, when we may soon want to use it again."

"We might want the rake," put in Sue, who felt privately that she would be happier if that weird image of the kinsman she had never seen were taken to bits without more delay.

"Could we stow it in the barn?" asked Pattie.

"No, the place is too public; neighbours might come to help us with outside work, and see the thing, so the secret would be out, and all the good of it undone.

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They might even not understand us, and think we were making fun of the poor dear old man's memory ; and I could not bear that," Kitty answered, with a sudden hint of breakdown in her voice.

"Nor I," murmured Sue, softly.

"Girls, I feel as if we had had a great deliverance to-night, for fear is as hard to bear as actual danger," said Kitty, in a solemn tone. "So let us just kneel down and thank God for His protecting care."

"We will," murmured the other two, falling on their knees by the table, while Kitty, casting her cloak aside, knelt between them clasping a hand of each, and pouring out broken words of thanksgiving, because the "Terror by night" had passed them by. Then their voices joined in repeating the Lord's Prayer, after which they rose to their feet, comforted and strengthened by the assurance of the Heavenly Father's watchful care.

"Oh, where can we hide him ?" sighed Kitty, looking at the shabby bowed figure leaning against the end of the settle.

"We may want the rake," ventured Sue, who hardly dared to glance at the figure her hands had helped to fashion, because it appeared so real and life-like.

"There is another in the barn, and this has three broken teeth, so is not of value," Kitty retorted, a trifle impatiently, not understanding Sue's creeping aversion to the man of straw.

"I know where we can put it !" cried Pattie, clapping her hands. "There is that little trap-door over the stove ; we could stand on the table in the morning and push it up through that into the roof."

"Clever Pattie ! That is just what we will do when morning comes ; until then our poor ghost must remain

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where it is, and Sue shall come into our bed. She is not very big, so we can easily make room for her, and it is only half-past one, so we have a good piece of the night still before us," Kitty said, bustling her two sisters into the bedroom, and shutting the door with a nervous bang, as if she too were glad to turn her back on that quiet bowed figure leaning over the end of the old settle.

"I don't think I can go to sleep again; I feel so fearfully wide awake," said Pattie, as the three sisters, trembling from nervous excitement, cowered close together, drawing a blanket over their heads.

"Oh, you will sleep, never fear," replied Sue, who was already growing drowsy, lulled by warmth and the comfort of companionship.

It was Kitty who remained wakeful longest, and the other two were sleeping soundly, long before she was able to forget all the events of that exciting night.

CHAPTER XIII

Settling Down

TWO weeks had passed since the eventful night when the girls had evoked the ghost of Uncle Ben to guard their slumbers, but no disturbance had come to them since.

Kitty had duly made her complaint to the magistrate, a kindly man with a big family, who had a large acreage under wheat, and a flourishing cattle range about six miles from Silver Creek.

He questioned her closely concerning the nocturnal visitor who had so disturbed them, and assured her he would at once send information to the mounted police, so that they might keep the little brown house in constant careful surveillance. Then, as even the police, vigilant as they were, could not always be on hand, he begged her acceptance of a young mastiff, a magnificent house-dog, but for which he had no particular use, having already more dogs about the place than were necessary.

Kitty was charmed with his kindness, bringing the dog home in triumph with her, though John Elstow told her that it would prove a veritable white elephant, because, being so big, it would require an immense amount of food.

"Never mind, if it bites bad people, and scares away evil-doers, we will not begrudge it meal and milk, and

if it wants meat, it must go hunting for itself," Kitty answered, with a laugh. She was feeling rather shaken with the worry and strain of the nightly scares, and was delighted to have a protector as formidable in appearance as Bruce, the magistrate's dog.

Pattie and Sue made much of the new arrival, which soon became at home and attached to them, while the sense of protection imparted by the dog's presence in the house at night was very welcome to all three of the girls.

They were settling down to the new life of responsibility and steady hard work as cheerfully as possible, even Kitty having apparently become contented to remain for a time in the country.

Sampson Kench had been ill, Mrs. Morgan told Sue, who went over one day to purchase more sugar for her jelly-making.

It was very unusual to find Mrs. Morgan in the store, as she did the housework and attended to the many outside industries, while Mrs. Kench waited on the customers, and gossiped to her heart's content.

"You have got a change of occupation to-day—do you like it better?" Sue asked, as the old woman carefully weighed out the sugar and put it into bags.

"I like this part of it, and it is very much easier than some of the other things I have to do. But it goes to my heart to serve Liquid Sunshine to some of these cattle-riders, who are little more than boys," the old woman answered, with a mournful shake of her head.

"What is Liquid Sunshine?" Sue asked, being as yet unversed in all the ways and doings of country stores.

"Whisky, though the boys themselves call it by all sorts of names—black rod, fiery tail, serpent's tooth, and other things. Some of them ask for the best quality and

pay extra, some want the cheapest drink they can get, and put down what money they have, but it all comes from the same barrel in the first place, though it is put into different bottles for the look of the thing," Mrs. Morgan replied.

"I can understand you don't like tending store, when it includes that kind of work ; but people seem so steady about here that I did not think there was much drinking," Sue said, in some surprise.

"Nor is there on the whole. The settlers in this district are mostly farmers working their own land, and they are not the class who give way to dissipation. But there are a lot of cattle ranges westward from here, where the land has not been taken up, and it is the men who tend the cattle who do the drinking."

"I see," replied Sue, and was gathering up the change, and preparing to take her purchases out to the waggon, when Mrs. Morgan leaned over the rough deal counter and asked in a troubled tone—

"I hope that you and your sisters have not been worried by the stories going about just now?"

"What stories?" demanded Sue, blankly. Very little gossip reached the brown house, for the sisters were too busy for visitors or visiting.

Mrs. Morgan looked round, as if fearful of being overheard, then, lowering her voice, she said—

"I'm always afraid of Mr. Kench a-creeping up behind, to hear what I am saying ; but he's kept his bed mostly for the last ten days, and this morning Mrs. Kench has gone down to the depôt with the waggon to bring up stores, so there ain't so much chance of being spied upon. The story goes, my dear, that your poor uncle can't rest in his grave, and that he walks ; but don't you let it

worry you. The poor man was upright and God-fearing, and he would not want to hang about here frightening folks, when he had a chance of going to heaven."

An indescribable confusion seized upon Sue, and she felt like a culprit, as she faced the kindly pity and concern in the old woman's eyes; but the secret must be kept somehow, no matter how bad it made her feel, so she asked as steadily as she could—

"Who told you?"

"Mrs. Kench; she said that she had heard it from one of the customers, who told her it was town talk."

"But there is no town," objected Sue.

"It is township land, which is the same thing," replied the old woman. "I asked her then if Mr. Kench had seen this ghost, as he seemed to be suffering from shock of some sort, and has really been very queer."

"What did she say to that?" asked Sue, with a little smile quivering at the corners of her mouth, as she decided that the nocturnal visitor so badly scared by the man of straw could have been no other than Sampson Kench, and it immediately brought a feeling of amused satisfaction to think how very badly he must have been scared.

Mrs. Morgan shook her head ruefully, as if to intimate that Mrs. Kench's anger was quite beyond her command of language to describe.

"Oh, she wasn't pleased, and said so pretty forcibly. But the man has had a bad shock of some kind, that is easy to see. I'm glad, though, that you and your sisters have not been scared."

"We have a big dog to protect us now," said Sue. "And I fancy Bruce would be quite equal to anything

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which might happen in our neighbourhood at night. But I must hurry home, for the others will be wondering what has become of me."

"It is a treat to get a sight of you ; and now there always seems something to look forward to," the old woman said, with such yearning in her face that, obeying the prompting of impulse, Sue stepped round the counter and, taking the tired old creature in a vigorous embrace, kissed her on both cheeks.

"God bless you, my dear, and reward you for your goodness to me. May you never have to wait for love or kindness!" Mrs. Morgan said, patting the girl's fresh plump cheeks.

Sue was very thoughtful on the homeward drive, trying to fathom the mystery of Sampson Kench's illness, and why he should have troubled to disturb their nightly peace. But she could find no solution to the mystery, and so had to give it up.

Kitty and Pattie were both away, gathering black currants in the scrub when Sue got back, and only Bruce was on guard at the homestead.

He came to meet her with a joyful clamour of barking, then promptly retired to the sunshiny corner by the doorstep, in order to show that he quite understood the nature of his duties, and was not going to be outdone in devotion by any one.

"Good dog!" said Sue, encouragingly, coming to pat the great head, after she had turned Diamond out to grass. "You would be certain to bite holes in bad people who wanted to harm us!"

The dog growled in a most ferocious manner at this, and had to be patted into peace again.

The girls took most of their meals out-of-doors in

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this fine weather, preferring flies and open air to flies and stuffiness.

It was out-of-doors also that Sue carried on the greater part of her jelly-making industry. Mr. Jones had been as good as his word, and had promptly secured her a small order for jelly from a firm in Winnipeg, which Sue had executed at once. Two days later she received a letter telling her that the firm would take all the jelly she was able to make, and saying that they were sending a case of small pots more suitable than pickle-bottles for holding the preserve.

As this order was accompanied by a remittance for the jelly already supplied, Sue began to feel on the high-road to becoming a millionaire, and talked of the factory they would have to build on Silver Creek, as the business increased. But for the present a rusty stove found in the barn, and set up under the poplar trees at the back of the house, served for factory; while Kitty and Pattie were willing assistants, spending long mornings berry-gathering in the scrub, and coming home to an *al fresco* lunch in the late afternoon. Then, while Kitty attended to household matters, and Pattie looked after the animals, Sue commenced operations on the currants of the morning's picking, by getting the juice drawn ready for draining during the night. She then boiled it with sugar on the following morning.

Kitty had arranged with John Elstow to look after their crops, lending him Diamond for most days in the week, and undertaking to give him a share of the produce when the crops were harvested.

This arrangement left the girls free to concentrate all their efforts on securing the currants before the birds carried them away, or the sun dried them on the bushes.

The long days in the fresh air and sunshine made the three so sleepy that they were glad to go to bed at sundown, in order to get rested before the sun called them up to work again ; but they were well and happy, despite the sorrows which had shadowed their lives, and the disappointment which had met them on their arrival at their new home.

Whilst they ate their lunch that day in the shadow thrown by the house, Sue told the others of the illness of Sampson Kench, and the rumour current concerning the ghost of Uncle Ben.

Kitty went into fits of laughter at this, and declared that Sampson Kench was well served, if in coming to frighten them he got a scare on his own account.

"Oh, how I should have liked to see him run!" she cried, wiping the tears from her eyes which had been brought there by merriment.

"So should I," said Pattie, more soberly. "But is it not wonderful that a grown man should be taken in like that? I do marvel, though, that he should have been hanging about here in the middle of the night. It is not as if the road went straight past the house, or even a footpath."

"They don't have footpaths in Assiniboia, at least I have not seen one in this part of the world ; it is either a road, of a sort, or nothing at all," replied Kitty. "So if it was Sampson Kench who was frightened by our poor ghost, he was plainly here on no good errand, and so thoroughly deserved what he got. It is well, though, to know whom we have to distrust, and may prevent mistakes in the future."

"I wonder why he wanted to buy this place?" Sue broke in musingly.

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Kitty gave a little start. "I had forgotten that for the moment; probably he knows more about Uncle Ben's habits and mode of life than we do, and may guess that there is stealable property hidden on the place. He may have been searching for this, or merely trying to frighten us."

"I don't like him at all," said Pattie, with a shiver. "I am glad that he is not our nearest neighbour, or the one to whom we are most indebted for kindness. The Elstows are so very different."

"They are friendly, certainly, but one has to prove one's friends by time," Kitty remarked sagely.

"I am so grateful to them for being willing to trade that camp bedstead and mattress for the horse-harrow, that I shall always like them, whatever happens. It makes a great difference in one's outlook if one's bed is comfortable or the reverse. Mrs. Morgan seemed to like sleeping on the settle, but I prefer the camp bed," Sue said, as she rose from the table and prepared to make her afternoon plunge into jelly-making.

A week later she drove Diamond and the little box waggon, laden with carefully packed jelly-pots, to the Qu'Appelle railway depôt, and having seen her precious freight stowed safely away on the eastward-bound cars, took her way to Goshen to spend the night with Imogen Jones, since forty miles in one day was too much for the elderly Diamond, considering the state of the track to Silver Creek, which was a road in name only.

Sue found Imogen in bed with a sick headache, and Mr. Jones fussing round trying to cook a dinner for a party of neighbours who had gathered to help him to reap and thresh a twenty-acre field of early oats.

"I will do the cooking if you will unharness Diamond,"

she said, elbowing him gently away from the pudding-bowl, where he was mixing some compound with a piece of stick, because he could not find a spoon handy.

"Ah, if you will, I shall be yours gratefully," he said, with a sigh of relief. "I've perspired more over the thought of getting a meal ready for those hungry men afield than ever I did over breaking colts to harness, though that is ticklish work with some animals."

"What is this meant for?" Sue asked diffidently, as she touched the pudding-bowl with her fingers, and fearing to hurt his feelings by her ignorance.

"Pancakes. Imogen told me to make a stiff batter, and I threw in a few handfuls of raisins to make it more tasty. Isn't it right?" he asked anxiously, seeing the doubtful look on her face.

"It is too stiff. How many eggs did you put in?"

"Oh, I forgot the eggs! Will it matter, or could you get it right by putting them in now?" he asked.

Sue gave a hurried glance at the clock, which showed the time to be half-past eleven; then at the stove, which was already red-hot and waiting to cook something. Finally her gaze came back to the stiff lump which Mr. Jones had been manipulating with the stick, and then she said—

"It won't do for fritters, but I can put it in the oven to bake, and serve it hot with a little cream on the top; then if you will bring me some eggs—I ought to have eight, or even a dozen, if there are many men in the field—I will make a fresh batter, and start frying straight away."

While Mr. Jones brought the eggs, Sue darted to the door of Imogen's room, where the poor girl lay in suffering misery on the bed, and said encouragingly—

"Don't worry about the dinner, I will see to that;

and when the men have been fed, I will come in and make you more comfortable."

"Sue, is it you? Oh, my dear, how glad I am you have come! There is no need to trouble about me, if you will just help Pa to feed those men," said Imogen, in a languid tone, just lifting her head from the pillow, then dropping it back with a moan.

But Sue, having softly shut the door, was already out of hearing, and, tying a big towel round her to serve as apron, was darting to and fro, doing the best she could in the short space of time left to her.

There was abundance of cold meat in the larder, she found; a big joint of boiled beef, and a large ham ready cooked, showed that Imogen had got her preparations well forward, which was fortunate, seeing how little time remained at Sue's disposal.

The new batter—really batter this time—was soon mixed and a portion of it frying merrily on the stove. Having a minute for consideration, Sue found, to her dismay, that no vegetables were forthcoming, Mr. Jones having apparently forgotten to include them in his list of requirements for the day.

"What a pity you did not have some potatoes or a few squashes! Are there any lettuces in the garden that are ready for eating?" Sue asked, when next Mr. Jones appeared in sight.

"Nearly a waggon-load, I should think; we were talking of pulling them up for the pigs, only we have been so busy with the harvest there has been no time for anything," he replied, standing at ease and waiting for orders. His harassed expression had entirely disappeared since Sue had arrived in such an opportune fashion to take command of the situation.

"Please go and pull me a dozen of the best, and wash them as quickly as you can," she said, her work of frying pancakes proving too absorbing to be left for more than a minute at the time.

Mr. Jones departed in great haste, and whilst he was gone Sue began to make preparations for laying the table for fifteen men.

The cooking at Goshen in summer-time was carried on in the little outer kitchen, and so the other room was fairly cool. It was the fashion in that part of the world to put all the food on the table at once, so Sue would be saved any trouble of changing courses. One or two piles of clean plates on the table gave the more fastidious people a chance of changing plates if they wished, but the majority did not even trouble to do this.

When Mr. Jones came in with the lettuces, Sue put half of them in a great bowl just as they were, and set it on the table. The other half were hastily chopped and made into a salad, this being finished just as the harvesters came trooping in from the twenty-acre lot.

Sue decided that she had never felt so nervous before, not even when driving Betsey for the first time, as she did when that party of hungry harvesters sat down to sample her pancakes.

Mr. Jones's mixture came out of the oven well cooked, but rather flat and sad-looking, so she turned it on to a dish, spread it over with a thick layer of stiff cream and a top layer of gooseberry jam, then sent it to table, fervently hoping that the people who partook of it would not suffer very much from indigestion. All the while the meal was going on she ran in and out waiting on the harvesters, her eyes shining with excitement and her cheeks glowing from the same cause.

The men, who were farmers in the neighbourhood, with their sons and their hired men, were friendly and kind in their manner, all the more so when told that Sue was a stranger in the land, and only fresh out from the old country. But when Mr. Jones told the story of how Sue had driven Betsey to Silver Creek, brought that obstinate animal safely back, then ridden another horse the same distance, they with one voice declared her a plucky little girl, and worthy to be a real daughter of the Dominion, instead of merely, as it were, an adopted child of the great new nation. Then they drank her health in strong tea and lemonade, with so many compliments that Sue, blushing furiously, fled to the shelter of Imogen's chamber, and appeared no more until the harvesters had returned to the field.

Imogen began to recover as the afternoon wore on. Sue paid her flying visits, but could not spare much time to be with her, as the remains of the dinner had all to be cleared and an abundant supper provided for the helpers when the work of the day came to an end.

Mr. Jones had gone to work with the others in the afternoon, so Sue had the place to herself, seeing no one but the invalid, until the shadows began to lengthen and Jim came home to do the milking.

"How is Imogen?" he asked, putting his head in at the sitting-room door, where Sue was busy laying supper.

"Getting better, thank you. She has been sleeping nearly all the afternoon," Sue answered reassuringly.

"That is good hearing. If she had not begun to mend, I meant to have ridden over for the doctor after milking. It was lucky you came along to-day, or I don't know what we should have done, for neither the old man nor myself is brilliant at cooking; but your

pancakes were real good, though the baked stuff was rather stodgy and tough ; it was only the cream and the jam that made it go down," Jim said, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Mr. Jones made that. I found him mixing it with a stick, and he thought it was batter for pancakes," Sue answered, with a laugh.

"I fancied as much," Jim said, with chuckling satisfaction. "I've known him make things before, and there is always a strong family likeness ; then, too, he is bound to put raisins in, 'to make it tasty.'"

CHAPTER XIV

The First Snow

THE weeks of summer fled swiftly on, and soon lengthening nights and mornings sharply cold warned the girls that winter was coming.

There were busy days in the autumn when the potato crop was lifted. John Elstow came to help, ploughing the potatoes up, while the girls sorted and measured them. In return, when John Elstow lifted his crop, the three girls went to his place, picking up and sorting for him, so the debt of neighbourly kindness was incurred and paid without any interchange of coin on either side.

Having taken over the working of the fields previously cultivated by Uncle Ben, John Elstow found himself compelled to engage a hired man. The supply of labourers, however, by no means approached the demand, and the only help he could get was a lad of fifteen, whose parents had more sons than they could find work for. This being the case, he was very thankful for any help the three sisters could give him, while they, mindful of all the neighbourly deeds he had done for them, worked for him without stint or spare.

Field work, however, was about over for the winter, so far as women were concerned. Sue had succeeded in

getting five hundred raspberry canes planted before the frost came, while fifty roots of rhubarb had been set in the patch of ground behind the barn. The buying of these had dipped very heavily into the money received from jelly-making, and the girls were wondering anxiously how they would manage to live through the winter without getting into debt.

Kitty, who had learned to ride during the autumn, had been round to various houses in the neighbourhood to see if she could get some plain sewing, and had brought home enough to last them for several weeks.

The pay for this would not be very great, but it would serve to keep them in sugar, tea, and lamp-oil for some time, and apart from these three things, they bought little.

With the first snow that fell a great isolation dropped upon them. For three days they saw no one at all. John Elstow had gone to Winnipeg for a brief holiday, and the boy who still remained in his employ was too much occupied in doing what had to be done to find time for making neighbourly calls.

Twice every day Sue struggled through the drifts to the barn, feeding and watering the animals and milking the cows, for Pattie had a bad cold, and could not leave the house. To Sue these hours of bustling activity in the morning, and again in the evening, were the most enjoyable parts of the day, for Kitty was beginning to moan and complain about the dreariness and stagnation of the days; while Pattie fretted severely from a fear lest they would not be able to pay their way through the winter, which might mean that Kitty would insist on their letting the house and land at Silver Creek and going to live in a town.

On the fourth morning of the snow they had a visitor, just as Sue was coming in from the barn, after the work of the morning was done. This was a stolid-looking Indian, clad in civilized garments, but with his hair hanging in a wild matted mass, stuck through with quills, an iron skewer or two, and some rusty screws and nails, which he evidently regarded as a valuable treasure-trove. He demanded "terbacker" with a professional whine which would not have disgraced individuals of his class in London or Paris.

On being offered food, and assured that there was no tobacco to be had, he turned away in solemn and sorrowful indignation, and it was all Kitty could do to hold Bruce back from flying at him, the big dog evidently regarding the red man as legitimate prey.

"I wish he had taken the food," Kitty said, as they watched the queer figure making its way across the fields to the road.

"I wish he had not come," Sue rejoined brusquely, as she stood in the doorway watching the retreating Indian, who walked with a slow, ungraceful waddle, due in part to his feet being bound up in sacks as substitutes for boots.

Sue watched him swaying from side to side, making great dents in the soft powdery snow at every step; then she gave a sudden start.

"Kitty, that man must have been wandering about the place last night, or very early this morning, for when I went out I saw dents like that in every direction."

"Perhaps he was coming to ask for 'terbacker,' but did not like to disturb us so early. We will tell Bruce to sleep with one ear open to-night," Kitty replied, with a little laugh, as she turned away to her work.

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In the late afternoon came another visitor, and this time it was Sampson Kench. Sue was out in the barn, and Pattie, who was feeling better, had insisted on going out also to do the milking, and there was only Kitty in the house when he walked in at the open door and sat himself down on the nearest chair, panting heavily, as if he had been hurrying.

"Good afternoon, Miss Walsh ; it's cold, but seasonable," he remarked, taking off his hat to wipe his heated forehead, but replacing it on his head again, to Kitty's overpowering indignation.

"Yes, it is cold," she replied, in a tone which matched the weather.

"We are going to have trouble with the Indians, I am afraid," he jerked out huskily.

"What sort of trouble?" she asked, a thrill of fear going through her.

"They are starving, so I hear, and are overrunning the district, robbing lone houses, upsetting women and children, and doing no end of damage."

"I should imagine that the police would be quite equal to the situation," Kitty said, trying not to feel afraid, or at least not to show it.

"The police can't be everywhere ; it stands to reason that they can't in a wide district like this. When I heard of the rumours afloat, I thought of you young ladies directly, and came off as quick as I could to ask if you would all like to come and stay at my place for a few days, till matters settle down a bit," he said, in a tone which was meant to be ingratiating, while his sombre, shifty gaze wandered everywhere except to Kitty's face.

She caught her breath in dismay, and for one moment was disposed to accept the invitation which looked so

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sincere, for it was horrible to think of what they might have to endure at the hands of a mob of starving barbarians.

Suddenly Bruce, who had been lying asleep in the shadowy corner by the stove, and had not roused at the entrance of the visitor, began to growl and show formidable teeth.

The sound inspired Kitty with fresh courage. Slipping her hand down, she quieted the dog with a touch, then said slowly—

"It was very kind of you to think of us ; but I do not fancy there is much danger for us here at present, and we could not shut up our house and go away, leaving our live stock with no one to look after it."

"But the Indians——" he began, with an expression so malevolent that she could scarcely repress a shiver, and was only reassured by feeling the dog's great head pressing against her arm.

"They are scarcely starving at present," she said, with a short laugh. "We had one of them round here this morning begging for tobacco ; but when we offered him food he would not look at it, turning away in sulky disgust."

"Of course it may not be true what has been reported about their condition ; but it seemed better to come and put you on your guard," he replied, rising as if about to take his leave.

"Have you been to warn Mrs. Elstow also ?" Kitty asked demurely, while her fingers moved gently over the dog's head.

"Why, no ; she has a hired man to take care of her while her husband is away," he said.

"The hired man, as you call him, is barely fifteen,

younger than my youngest sister, and Mrs. Elstow has an infant to take care of ; if matters are as serious as you suppose, she is in a much worse plight than we are," replied Kitty, serenely.

"If it is as bad as some people are saying, I guess you will all be in a pretty serious fix before many hours are over," he said, turning away ; then, as if struck by a sudden recollection, he turned back again. "I said something soon after you first came about being willing to buy this place, but you didn't seem to take to the idea. If you'd like to change your minds now, I am willing to give you eighteen dollars an acre, money down. It is a fancy price I know, but I'm getting about tired of keeping store, and I like this neighbourhood well enough not to want to leave it."

Eighteen dollars an acre was a great temptation. Perhaps Kitty might have been disposed to consider it, but for two things, the first being the paper, which was found under her uncle's head, requesting that the place should not be sold until his youngest niece was of age, and the second the inability to find the receipt which proved his title to the land.

"No, I should not care to sell the place even at that figure, thank you," she answered, with considerable dignity. "My late uncle's wishes are as binding on my sisters and myself as if the paper had been legally witnessed."

"You may come to be sorry for not taking a good offer, when you have the chance. I can't hold myself bound to repeat it," he said ; then, wishing her a rather surly good afternoon, he went away.

Pattie came in a few minutes later, flushed with exercise and laden with a heavy milkpail.

"What did Sampson Kench want, Kitty?" she asked, taking the milk into the dairy, which was also pantry and cellar combined.

"A lot of things ; I will tell you about it when Sue comes in. Will she be long?" Kitty followed the younger girl into the dairy, and watched her putting the milk into a pan set ready. The place was almost dark, because of the one small window being blocked with snow, which however helped to keep the temperature above freezing-point.

"About ten minutes, I expect ; she will be earlier of course to-night, because I helped her."

"Shall I make you some milk porridge for supper?" said Kitty, who still stood at the door of the pantry, and still shivered.

"Please ; there is nothing quite so nice I think," Pattie said, coming from the gloomy obscurity to the fuller light of the sitting-room ; then she asked in surprise, "What is the matter with Bruce? Just hear the creature growling. And Kitty, how pale you are! Has Sampson Kench been frightening you?"

"A little ; but I shall soon get over it. Bruce does not like that man, and is angry because I would not give permission for him to be rent in pieces!"

"Oh, you bad Bruce!" cried Pattie, stooping down to put her arms round the dog's neck with an affectionate hug, a proceeding which at once restored the dog to good temper, while she shook him and cuffed his ears, in mock indignation at such bad behaviour.

Sue came in presently declaring that a thaw had set in, and that the air was much softer than it had been for days past.

"I noticed that it was not cold at all," Pattie said,

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as she hurried to and fro getting things in readiness for the long dark night, that would soon be settling down over the silent fields.

It was not until the three girls were sitting at the cheerful evening meal, that Sue noticed how pale and quiet Kitty was, and at once inquired into the cause.

"Sampson Kench has been here, trying to frighten me, and he succeeded, although it is the man I am afraid of, more than the tales he told to scare me," Kitty said, while a nervous twitching about the mouth showed what a hard fight she was having for self-control.

"Not being in his debt, I fail to see how he can make us afraid," Sue answered, with a little toss of her head, meant to imply that she had no fear of him.

"He says the Indians are starving," went on Kitty, who appeared on the verge of tears.

"We know how much truth there is in that after our experience this morning," Pattie said, in scornful unbelief.

Kitty choked back a sob, struggled bravely to speak calmly, but finding the effort beyond her, burst into a storm of tears.

"I would not have minded so much, if it had not been so horribly solitary here. Do you think after supper that we had better wrap up well, and make our way through the snow to Mrs. Elstow? We should at least be company for each other," said Kitty, when she was once more capable of coherent speech.

"No, no; Sampson Kench is uncommonly anxious to induce us to leave our home, which should make us all the more resolute in holding to it at all costs," Sue replied, in a decided tone.

"We thought it was Sampson Kench who tried to

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frighten us when we first came; you know the figure who crept about the place at night," said Pattie. "If the Indians had been really starving, and likely to do desperate things, the police would be certain to know of it, and we should have had a warning from them."

"Just what I think," Sue jerked out, with an emphatic nod of her head. "But the mysterious thing to me is, that man's anxiety for getting rid of us."

"I am afraid of him," Kitty said, with a shiver.

"Bruce isn't. You should have heard the dog growling, Sue, when I came in from the barn. Good old Bruce, seize all bad men, and make short work of them!" cried Pattie, with an encouraging wave of her hand to the dog, which sat attentively regarding her.

That wave of the hand flung the animal into a state of wild excitement, causing it to dash to and fro in the narrow room, barking uproariously.

"Oh, Pattie, do quiet the creature!" implored Sue, putting her hands over her ears, for the noise was deafening.

Pattie laughed merrily, and seizing Bruce by the collar, petted and soothed the animal into quiet, just as if it had been a baby.

Sue looked at her almost enviously. Pattie had a marvellous power over dogs, and could make a restless cow stand still for milking, by the magic of her soothing touch.

"I have to show Bruce a stick if I want to quiet him, but you can manage without the stick," Sue said.

"Bruce would not care a fig for a stick in my hands, because I have no bump of command, but the creature likes to feel friendly fingers," Pattie answered, then read

the dog a long lecture, on the extreme stupidity of such crazy behaviour.

When supper was over and cleared away, they had two hours' rest by the fire, real rest, in which each one did what seemed pleasantest to herself, or remained entirely idle, if that chanced to be her mood.

At the end of the two hours the stove was banked with cinders and moss, to keep it from going out, and they went to bed, leaving the sitting-room door open, so that the warmth of the fire might penetrate to the bedroom.

Kitty had not recovered her spirits all the evening, but when they went to bed, she was the first to fall asleep.

It was drawing on towards midnight, when Bruce flung up his big head, listening intently.

There was a dull red glow from the door of the stove, which was not quite shut. Outside a rising wind moaned round the house.

Suddenly the three sleeping girls were startled from slumber by a loud banging at the outer door, while Bruce dashed about the room, knocking chairs over, and barking furiously.

CHAPTER XV

An Act of Charity

KITTY sprang out of bed, and stood with her bare feet on the floor, trying to gather up her courage for whatever might be in store. But Sue was hastily clothing herself, exhorting Pattie in whispers to do the same.

Then came a fresh burst of knocking, which made the dog more violent than before ; but this was followed by a queer choking cry, at the sound of which the dog became suddenly quiet.

There was no light in the house saving the dull red glow through the chink in the stove door ; but when Bruce ceased barking, Sue heard Kitty fumbling for the matches.

"Don't get a light, dear, not yet, until we are dressed," she said imploringly ; then, turning to Pattie, bade her wrap the thick blue-and-white cotton bedspread about her to keep her from shivering.

"I must, Sue ; I must have a light. I can't die in the dark !" sobbed Kitty, whose strength of mind and courage of heart seemed to have evaporated.

"There is no question of your dying, unless indeed you catch your death of cold, which you are very likely to do if you do not hurry into some clothes," rejoined Sue, sharply, as she snatched the match-box from her

sister's shaking fingers, and commenced to thrust some garments upon her.

"Listen to Bruce, Sue; some one is in trouble," said Pattie, as, after a moment's hush of silence, the dog began to whine, scratching at the door as if eager to be let out.

"Some one in trouble? I had not thought of that," Kitty said, in a dazed tone, as if just awakening from a dream; and then she commenced to scramble into her garments with desperate haste, roused in an instant from the numbing lethargy of terror which had been upon her, ever since that first startled moment when the knocking began.

"Who is there?" called Sue, in a resolute tone, standing by the door with her hand on the bar.

"Don't open it for a minute, dear; wait until I get my shoes on," said Kitty, who appeared at last awake to a consciousness of her bare feet.

"Pattie, come and hold Bruce," called Sue, for the dog was getting excited again.

The fact of having something to do steadied Pattie's nerves, and she came gliding through the darkness, catching Bruce by the collar and holding him fast.

Sue lifted the bar with noiseless fingers, while at the same moment Kitty joined them, having seized upon the big iron fire shovel as the only weapon to her hand.

They were in the dark still, for the stove only cast a patch of light on the floor, leaving everything else in the densest obscurity.

Slowly and softly Sue drew out the bar, waited a moment with beating heart, then gently lifted the latch.

Something was pressing against the door, which, when the latch was lifted, burst it open and fell in a heap on the floor inside. At the same moment Bruce,

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with a roar, wrenched himself from Pattie's grasp, went with a flying leap over the bundle lying at Kitty's feet, and careered out over the snowy waste, barking defiance at everything and everybody, and making noise enough to be heard a mile away, if there had been any one to listen.

"Light the lamp, Sue, quick, dear!" urged Kitty, in a troubled tone; and Sue hastily did her bidding.

"Oh, oh, it is Mrs. Morgan, and she is dead!" wailed Pattie, dropping down beside the figure lying at Kitty's feet.

"Perhaps she has only fainted," said the elder sister, soothingly. "Call Bruce in, dear, and let us shut the door; it is so cold."

While Pattie coaxed the dog back from pursuit of imaginary enemies, Sue flung open the door of the stove, raked out the dust, and thrusting in a handful of dry sticks, soon had a bright fire roaring merrily.

Bruce came back readily enough. There was no one to chase, and the rain falling on the snow made the outside world much less comfortable than his warm corner by the stove.

Pattie shut the door and put up the bar, then came to help Kitty and Sue, who were lifting the poor old woman and laying her on the settle.

"She is wet through!" exclaimed Sue, in deep compassion, as the thin cloak fell back revealing a ragged wool wrap underneath, which was also wet through.

"I wonder how long she has been out in the rain, and why she was coming to us at this time of the night?" Kitty said, as she removed the shabby bonnet and began to strip off the wet wrappings.

"Look at her shoes! The poor old woman must have

walked almost barefoot on the snow ; there is a great hole in this one, and the sole is hanging loose on the other!" cried Sue, holding up a wretched old shoe, soaked through and through with melted snow.

"Run, Pattie, and bring a blanket from our bed ; then hold it to the fire so that it may be really hot by the time we are ready for it," said Kitty, urgently. "There, she is beginning to recover. Sue, make some milk hot, quick, please, while I pull these wet things away, so that we can wrap her in the blankets and get some warmth into her."

The girls put the one armchair the house contained in front of the stove, wrapped Mrs. Morgan in the hot blanket, and put her in the chair, then fed her with hot milk as if she were a baby.

When the poor woman began to revive, she still seemed too dazed and strange to be able to tell them about herself, or how it came about that she should be wandering on to their doorstep at midnight in the snow.

"I am so tired!" she kept saying, as she stretched her thin hands out to the comforting warmth of the fire. "I am so tired, and it was such a long way!"

"Yes, you are very tired, and we are going to put you to bed when you are really warm," Kitty said soothingly.

"Not your bed, the settle will do," Mrs. Morgan said faintly.

"I think it must be Sue's bed, and she must sleep with us. For when morning comes, I mean when daylight comes, I fancy that you will not be fit for much but to lie still and rest," Kitty replied ; and presently, when the grey head drooped to one side, and the tired woman appeared to be dropping to sleep, they carried

her into the next room and tucked her up warmly in Sue's little bed.

It was now past three o'clock, with a raging tempest of wind and rain howling and shrieking about the lone house. Banking the fire once more, the three girls crept shivering to bed, but not to sleep for a long time, as the fright and excitement tended to make them very wakeful, and they lay close together, speculating in whispers as to the reason of Mrs. Morgan's unexpected appearance.

"Perhaps she has run away from that house of bondage," suggested Pattie.

"I don't fancy she had spirit enough to run away, or she would have done it long ago," Kitty answered. "But, whatever happens, she must be sheltered here; we could not turn such a helpless old creature adrift."

"No, indeed we could not," broke in Sue; and then her mind wandered off to that day when she had given Don Gordon two dollars, and Kitty had been so angry with her for flinging away money in indiscriminate charity.

Surely the discipline of narrow means had wrought a change already in the bright capable elder sister, who had been a little disposed to think of her own comfort first, and afterwards of that of other people.

In consequence of the disturbances of the night they slept late in the morning, and Sue had to hurry off to the barn, followed by Pattie with the milkpail, while Bruce hunted round in the melting snow in search of something to bark at.

The pale day was tempestuous as the night had been, and the two girls came in from the barn holding the milkpail between them, both nearly blown away by the raging wind.

"How is the patient?" asked Sue, who had stayed only for a brief glance at the sleeping figure, as she had hurried out from the sleeping-chamber to begin her morning work.

"She is sleeping still, moaning a little, but fairly peaceful, so I don't think that she can be in pain," Kitty replied; then, lowering her voice a little, she went on, "I have burned those fearful old shoes, and the stockings too; they were too bad for anything. We will find her a pair of our mother's when she is able to walk about again. I may have to burn some of her other clothes too, they are such fearful rags, and oh, so thin, she could never have been really warm."

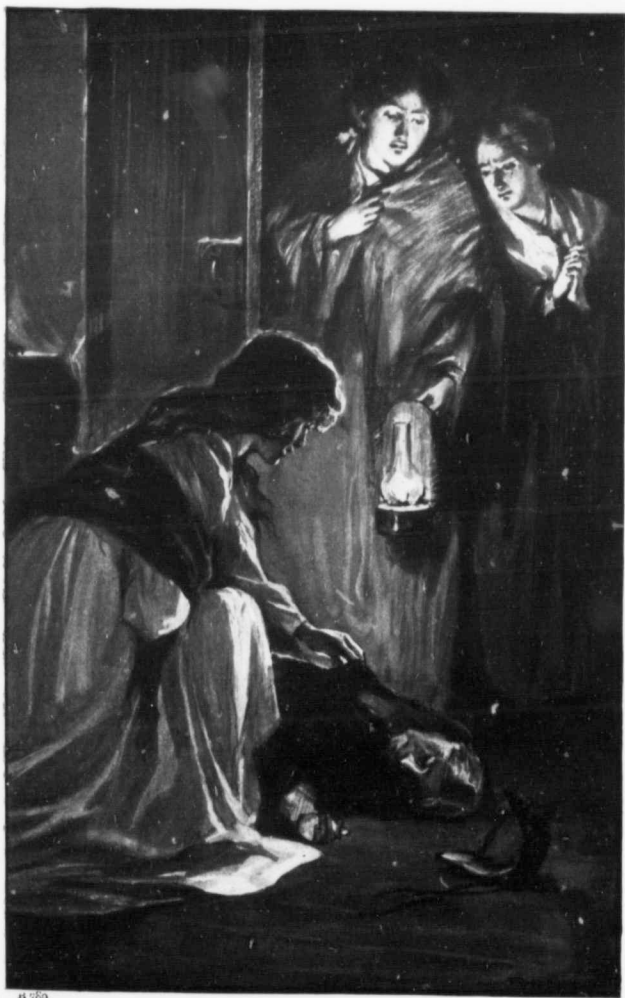
"I wonder why she came?" said Sue.

"We shall have to wait to know that, I expect, unless she is disposed to talk when she wakes; I could not ask her why she came, because it would look a little as if we did not want her, and I could not bear to hurt her feelings, for she is so lonely, and has no one to take her part," Kitty answered, as she tipped the portions of porridge into the basins, and called to Pattie to make haste.

"If no good deed goes unrewarded in this world, you will get very well taken care of some day, when you are in a fix," laughed Pattie, as she came to take her place at the table.

"It might be either you or Sue in a fix, as you call it, and then we should be thankful to think that we had done what we could for some one else," Kitty answered, as she poured out a cup of tea for Mrs. Morgan and carried it into the next room.

All that day the wind raged and the rain came down in sheets; and all that day Mrs. Morgan lay in Sue's



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little bed, dozing fitfully, taking nourishment when they roused her, but seeming disinclined to talk, and giving no reason at all for her strange arrival in the dead of night.

Sue talked a little of harnessing Diamond and driving to the store to find out why the Kenches had allowed the feeble old woman to set out at night under such conditions, when she very easily might have perished in the snow. But Kitty soon dissuaded her from making the attempt, saying that if Sampson Kench wanted to find her, he might come in search himself; the wetting would not harm him as it might do Sue, and certainly a wetting awaited any one who ventured abroad in such a storm.

The snow disappeared like magic under the combined influences of wind and rain, for the wind was warm, making the girls glad to throw doors and windows wide, to let the rush of soft air banish even the memory of the frost.

The next day was colder, but fine, and as the snow had gone, the journey from house to barn and back again could be performed with some degree of comfort.

Mrs. Morgan still lay in much the same condition. Kitty wondered if they ought to have a doctor for her, but fifteen miles was a long journey to go for medical aid, and the reflection that the bill would probably match the distance, and that they had such scanty resources from which to pay it, made her resolve to wait for one more day before sending, especially as the invalid appeared to be in no pain, and a doctor could hardly do more than tell them to keep her quietly in bed.

In the early afternoon of that second day a most welcome visitor made his appearance, in the shape of John Elstow, who had been away for nearly a fortnight.

"I looked in on my way home, because business took me to Goshen, and as I found Miss Jones sitting by the stove writing a letter to you, I could not do less than offer to bring it, and so save the postage," he said, with a laugh, drawing a bulky envelope from his pocket and laying it down in front of Kitty.

"How kind of you! If it had come by post, I might have had to wait days before I got it. We have so few letters, you see, and we do not go to the store oftener than we can help," Kitty said, with a flashing smile of thanks.

"I heard a piece of news, too, as I was coming up from Goshen, that will interest you, though I expect it will make you sad too. You know that poor old Mrs. Morgan at the store, who worked for the Kenches. Well, they've turned the poor old thing adrift in this bitter weather. It seems she hasn't been able to do much for the past few weeks, and the other morning couldn't get up; then Mrs. Kench said she was worse than no help at all, and must find another place at once, that very day in fact."

"Oh, what a cruel thing!" cried Kitty, flushing scarlet with fierce indignation. "The poor old thing has come to us, Mr. Elstow. She reached here about midnight on the night before last, frightening us fearfully, and driving Bruce almost mad with rage. We found her lying unconscious on the doorstep, and we have taken care of her ever since. Won't you just step in and look at her, and tell me if we ought to have a doctor?"

John Elstow followed Kitty into the bare little sleeping-chamber, and bent over the bed where Mrs. Morgan was lying.

She had seemed to be asleep when he entered, but

as he stood looking at her with a great pity on his face, she opened her eyes and smiled up at him.

"I call this house the gate of heaven, Mr. Elstow. I'm just beautifully comfortable," she murmured, with a sigh of deep contentment; then nestling closer in her pillow, went to sleep again.

"It looks like a case where Nature is the best physician. She is plainly in no pain, and if she had been going to have pneumonia, in my opinion it would have started before now," he said, as he came back to the outer room. "I will look in again to-morrow morning to see how she is; then if we think a doctor is necessary, I'll drive over and fetch him, and pay his bill too. It isn't fair that you should have all the burden to bear, and I don't expect the poor creature has got the value of a cent piece belonging to her."

"I don't think she has," replied Kitty; and then she told how Mrs. Morgan had been working off her debt to the Kenches, a white slavery which had lasted for years.

"Poor soul, what will become of her now?" said the kindly farmer, pitifully.

"We shall keep her here. It is one more to feed, but we have milk and potatoes in abundance, so we shall not starve. Why should Sampson Kench be so anxious to get us away from Silver Creek, do you know? And what made him offer me eighteen dollars an acre, cash down, for this farm the other day?" Kitty burst out, wrinkling her brows in great perplexity.

"It is not worth so much, as land values are going down at present. I should have put it at fourteen or fifteen dollars myself. Sampson Kench is usually supposed to be a keen bargain driver, so I don't quite

understand such generosity," John Elstow remarked in extreme surprise.

"At first he tried to frighten us away, told us the Indians were starving, and were preparing to raid the lone houses, where there were only women and children; but we had that same morning had an Indian here begging for tobacco, who had refused food, so we did not think they could be very hungry. Mr. Kench begged us to leave this house and take shelter with him and Mrs. Kench at the store."

"I am glad you did not go," he answered gravely. "In the event of your wanting shelter at any time, my wife would take you in; but those country stores where they sell drink are not suitable homes for girls. However, you are not in crying need of such charity at present; and I must be off home, while you are anxious to read your letter, I don't doubt."

"Look into the barn as you go past, and speak to the girls; they have been sawing wood all the afternoon," said Kitty, as John Elstow left the house.

"I'll be sure to look in on them," he answered cheerily, as he turned from the door; then when he had gone a few steps, he halted to call out, "Mind, I shall come down first thing to-morrow morning to have a look at Mrs. Morgan, so don't worry about her."

Kitty nodded and smiled, then went back to her seat by the stove with a lighter heart. She was conscious, too, of some secret shame because of her suspicions of John Elstow in regard to her uncle's money; but then every one is open to blunder in one's estimate of a stranger, and the great thing is to have the grace to acknowledge one's self in fault.

CHAPTER XVI

A Chance for Kitty

WHEN Sue and Pattie came in to supper, Kitty was flying about with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, while the evening meal showed such extra lavishness in its providing that the girls cried out in amazement, and wanted to know what it was in honour of.

"Oh, we need not go back to stinginess unless you wish. It is entirely for you two to decide, so I thought I would give you a taste of luxury, just to see how it suits you," Kitty said, with an air of mystery, as she opened the oven door, letting out a most appetizing smell of tea-cakes, then promptly shutting it again.

"Have you found that money of Uncle Ben's which you were always so fond of talking about at one time?" asked Pattie, who was in a frolicsome mood, and had been encouraging Bruce to uproarious romping.

"No, I have not. I have only heard of a way of making money, which very much commends itself to me, and I just hate to be poor!" said Kitty, as she dived into the dark little pantry and emerged again with a jug of cream in one hand and a plate of butter in the other.

Sue went rather white, and a frightened look came

into her eyes; but she made no allusion to Kitty's mysteries, only asked how Mrs. Morgan was getting on.

"Just about the same. She is delightfully comfortable, and Mr. Elstow says that if a doctor is needed, he will pay the bill himself."

"Kind Mr. Elstow," murmured Sue, preparing for the supper she needed so badly, yet feeling that the flavour of it was spoiled for her because of the fear lying at her heart concerning the nature of Kitty's mystery.

Mrs. Morgan roused up to take her tea, declaring that she felt quite "peckish;" then when her hunger and thirst were satisfied, sank down again in placid content, leaving the girls free for their own devices.

Kitty refused to say a word about her news until the nice supper had been thoroughly appreciated, then, as they lingered about the table at the close of the meal, she drew a bulky envelope from her pocket and laid it down on the table with a little slap.

"Mr. Elstow brought me a letter from Imogen Jones, enclosing one from her cousin, Mrs. Bonner, who lives in Vancouver City. You may read the two if you wish."

"Tell us about them; the reading can wait," urged Pattie, whose eyes were wide with curiosity. The girls had all heard Imogen talk of Mrs. Bonner, who kept a rather aristocratic boarding-house in Vancouver City, and incidentally was very kind in supplying her country cousin with finery, both new and second-hand, in consequence of which Imogen simply adored her.

"Mrs. Bonner has written to Imogen asking if I will go to her as assistant manageress at a salary beginning at thirty dollars a month and all found," Kitty said quietly, but with a sharply scrutinizing look at Sue.

"How did she know about you?" asked Sue, with a quick uplifting of her head, though previously her gaze had been steadily fixed on the table-cloth.

"Imogen must have written to her soon after we came, I suppose, although certainly I never asked her to do so," Kitty answered, on the defensive now, because of the questioning in Sue's gaze. "I should never have dreamed of leaving you and Pattie here in the wilderness alone. But now the situation is altered; if Mrs. Morgan gets better, she can stay here with you, while I go to the city for a time, have a little flutter of life and pleasure, at the same time earning enough to keep you in flour and groceries for all the winter."

"But we should not have you!" wailed Pattie.

"Mrs. Bonner only needs me for the winter, so I should be home in spring or early summer at the latest," Kitty explained, adding with a touch of bitterness, "But although I have resolved to leave this decision with Sue and you, it is only fair that you should have due regard to the condition of things, if I do not take this post. There will be four of us to live instead of three, and no more money to do it on. By Christmas at the latest we shall have to go into debt for flour, or live on potatoes. If we once get into debt, it will be like a mill-stone about our necks, and we may have to keep in debt for a long time, unless we use our emergency dollars, and that will be dreadful."

"You must go, dear," Sue said bravely, though she was white to the lips. "For your own sake and for ours, we must be grateful that such a chance has come."

"Good old Sue! You always were a common-sense genius, and I'm inclined to think that common sense is preferable to beauty any day in the week!" cried

Kitty, dancing round the room, and thrumming on a baking-tin as if it were a tambourine.

Bruce immediately joined in the dance, having enough of the puppy left in him to make him enjoy a game of romps, and the two circled about the room with much barking, laughter, and thrumming on the tin pan, until Kitty sank exhausted on the settle, fanning herself with the baking-tin in order to recover her breath.

Sue was very quiet. Kitty's allusion to her want of beauty had torn open the old sore, and she was smarting anew because she was plain, and also because people were always reminding her of it.

Pattie looked very dismal, but cheered up presently when Kitty began to talk of the many advantages which must result from her going, but always dwelling with the greatest emphasis on the little income, which would hold the household free from debt during the barren winter months.

"It is very wonderful that Mrs. Bonner's offer should have come just now, and not until now," Kitty said in a serious tone, as they all sat round the stove talking the matter over. "If it had come a week ago, for instance, I must have rejected it, because you two could not have been left alone, and although Imogen very kindly offers that you both stay with her for the remainder of the winter, you could not have left everything here with no one to look after matters."

"Then it must be the fulfilment of the statement that no good deed goes unrewarded," said Pattie. "It was a fine thing that Mrs. Morgan came to us, and that we were willing to take her in, since now her presence means advantages all round, with only the one drawback that you will be away."

"Which won't be so much of a drawback if you consider that I shall be coming home when the winter is over, and that I simply loathe the country in winter," said Kitty, with a shiver.

"I hope Mrs. Morgan will soon be better," said Sue. "Don't you think it might rouse and interest her to know how useful she is going to be to us? It might even help her to get better, for I dare say she has been worrying about being a burden."

"I will go and rouse her up; then see if I can make her understand. You two can clear supper whilst I am gone," said Kitty, springing up and whirling across the room, whereupon Bruce sprang up also with a great roar of barking, probably thinking another frolic was on hand.

"Quiet, old fellow, quiet, or you will frighten every Indian on the Reservation," said Pattie, coming to the rescue in stopping the noise the dog was making. "Kitty, Bruce always forgets his manners when you romp with him."

"I won't romp with him in the house again—not until next time, at least," laughed Kitty, as she pushed open the door of the dimly lighted bedroom, and softly entered.

All the wild gaiety of her manner dropped from her then, as she stooped over the shrunken figure lying in Sue's bed.

"Are you awake, dearie?" she asked, just touching Mrs. Morgan's cheek with caressing fingers.

"Yes, I'm awake, but you need not trouble about me; I'm not needing anything," the old woman said.

But Kitty's fingers, in stroking the worn cheeks, had encountered a big tear slowly meandering over the wrinkles, and, made wise by Sue's words, she at once set about removing the cause for them.

"You are very fond of us, are you not?" she asked, seating herself on the bed.

"I ought to be that, seeing how good you have been to me," replied Mrs. Morgan, brokenly. "And I was just praying that I might die quick, so as not to be a trouble and expense any longer than necessary."

Kitty laughed softly, and her eyes shone with quite a new lustre as she said—

"I am very thankful that God does not see fit to answer all the prayers that are put up to Him. Your death would be nothing but black disaster to us now, and we have had a full share of trouble this year."

"But I'm no use; I haven't strength to take a hired girl's place just yet, and the bread of charity is very bitter," said Mrs. Morgan, wistfully.

"I dare say it is; but there is no reason for you to eat it. Do you think that you could manage, after a few days, to get up and sit in a chair by the stove, just as company for two girls who will be very lonely?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Mrs. Morgan, starting up in bed with a puzzled look on her face.

"I mean that I have a chance to go to the city, and to earn enough money to keep the household here free from debt all the winter, but I can't go, I can't leave my sisters, unless you will get better quickly and stay with them. They are so young, you see; even Sue is not eighteen yet, and they could not be left alone," Kitty said, with her coaxing irresistible smile.

"Do you mean that I should be really useful; that you *need* me?" asked Mrs. Morgan, wistfully.

"I mean that we cannot do without you," the girl said, putting her warm glowing cheek close to the thin one, that was so furrowed and lined with hardship and

care. "We can't pay you a real salary for your services as duenna, or chaperon, whichever you prefer to call it, but home and food you shall have, with love in abundant measure."

"Put my clothes on the chair by my bed, if you please, dear; I will get up to breakfast in the morning. Dear me! life is extraordinarily sweet when there is something to live for. I begin to feel better already."

Kitty laughed. "That is right. I thought you would be equal to the occasion; and, oh, I shall be thankful for the chance to spend a part of the year in the city. Sue and Pattie love the country, but I cannot endure this fearful solitude when the snow shuts us in."

"I shall be quite well in the morning; a little shaky, perhaps, but that will not matter," the old woman said eagerly, with such radiant hope in her face that Kitty slipped away quickly, through a feeling that she should want to cry if she stayed any longer.

They had a great consultation about clothes over the fire that night—not for themselves, but for Mrs. Morgan, whose poor garments, like her shoes, were just a bundle of holes and patches.

"There are all those clothes of mother's that we brought with us because we could not bear to give them away. Would it hurt you too much, Pattie, if we let Mrs. Morgan wear them?" Kitty asked, turning to stroke her youngest sister's hair. Pattie had always been the mother's especial darling, so it was only natural that she should be the first consideration in a case like this.

"It does seem like desecration to touch them; but then, mother will never want them again, and Mrs. Morgan has nothing," Pattie said, her bosom heaving tumultuously in her efforts to repress her sobs.

"Mother was so much bigger than Mrs. Morgan—stouter at least," put in Sue, recalling vividly the active, bustling woman who had been the stay and sunshine of their lives.

"I don't think that will matter. Correct fit is not a thing of stern necessity; if the things are too big they can be pinned over. It would have been more embarrassing if the difference had been the other way round," Kitty replied. "In any case I must have given Mrs. Morgan some shoes and stockings of mother's, because I put those she was wearing in the stove, and we cannot afford to buy her new ones. So I think it is false sentiment to object to her wearing our mother's frocks, especially when her own poor gown is such a horror!"

"Kitty is right," admitted Sue. "But though it is selfish to hoard them, we shall be certain to feel bad when we see the things worn by any one else. So I propose that we get them out to-night; then if there are any tears which must be shed they can drop now, so that we shall not spoil Mrs. Morgan's pleasure to-morrow by letting her see our grief,"

"It would be better to get them out now, for they will want airing I expect, besides. I shall be busy when morning comes," Kitty answered. Then she and Sue went softly into the bedroom, bringing back with them a small trunk which had not been opened since their arrival at Silver Creek.

They were very silent after that, for the opening of the box was like turning backward a page in their history, shooting them at once into the bitter sorrow and heavy anxiety of last June. Their days on Canadian soil had certainly been hard working and full of carefulness, but they had not been sad, neither had they brought

heartache in their train. Nevertheless, the tears were natural, and did them good, so that although two out of the three cried themselves to sleep, they awoke refreshed when morning came.

Sue went through her work in the barn with great activity when the late and feeble daylight came to shed light on the scene, but all the while that she was running to and fro she was conscious of two disagreeables impending. One of them was the necessity for Kitty's departure, and the other was the thought of going indoors presently to see Mrs. Morgan dressed in her dead mother's clothes.

Several times she started for the house when the breakfast hour drew near, then turned back on some pretext or other, until Pattie came running out to ask when she was coming, as breakfast waited.

"Just coming, dear," she called out briskly, keeping her back well turned, and her face averted.

Diamond turned an inquiring head from his breakfast, wondering not a little at the amount of patting that fell to his share so early in the morning, while Sue stood beside him gathering her courage to face the circle indoors.

A hasty glance as she entered the house revealed Mrs. Morgan very frail and shadowy sitting in the armchair, clad in a black dress, and with a grey shawl folded about her shoulders. The old woman had gained in dignity by the tidy clothes, but that was all; there was certainly no reminder in her spare pinched form of Mrs. Walsh's comely proportions.

As she looked, a wonder sprang into Sue's heart that she had ever been afraid of seeing a likeness, while at the same moment her unwillingness that the garments should be worn died out, never to return.

"Why, you look quite bonnie!" she exclaimed, cheerfully, coming to greet the invalid, who certainly had greatly improved in strength.

"My dear, I just had to get well, as soon as I heard that there was a need for it. I shall pick up fast now, you will see, and I am not really very old, fifty-three last birthday. It is hard work and anxiety that have worn me down so badly."

"Only fifty-three? Why, Mr. Elstow said yesterday that he thought you must be about sixty-five," Kitty said, as she came to pour out the coffee.

"Yes, I look quite that, but really I am only what I said, and if I can pick up a little strength, I shall be able to help a great deal; it is so pleasant to feel that I can be of use." Mrs. Morgan beamed upon the three girls as she spoke, looking so supremely happy and content that half the weariness dropped from her face, so that she seemed to be already growing younger.

That day Kitty wrote to Mrs. Bonner, accepting the post of assistant-manager, and as she would have to take up her duties in less than a fortnight, the process of upheaval at once began, a bustle of preparation setting in which lasted until the day when, in a raging snowstorm, John Elstow drove her to the railway depôt in a two-horse sledge.

CHAPTER XVII

In the City

ALL the roar of traffic and the bustle of the busy city was in Kitty's ears as she tripped along in the sunshine, bound upon half a dozen errands rolled into one, and keenly enjoying the motion and activity that were about her on every side.

It was a fortnight since she had left the snowy solitudes of Silver Creek, and already she was beginning to feel at home in that fair young city of the West, which poets call the sunset doorway of the Dominion,

She had expected to find another Winnipeg, but Vancouver City was a vastly different place from the metropolis of immigration, with a surging tide of humanity always ebbing and flowing, coming and going, until Kitty felt as if she were living a'1 the time in a railway depôt.

Mrs. Bonner, a formal but kindly person, who was always attired in the extreme of fashion, declared herself excessively pleased with her new assistant.

Kitty's days were filled to the full with work, but because she loved it the labour seemed like play, while the thought that in two more weeks she would have fifteen dollars to send to her sisters was making her feel on this bright morning as if she must dance along

the busy street, instead of keeping to a sober, decorous walk as other people did.

Mrs. Bonner occupied a large, handsome house in a good quarter, and the boarders were a constantly changing set of English and Americans. Travellers from San Francisco going to England by the Canadian route halted at Mrs. Bonner's in preference to staying at a hotel. Visitors from Vancouver Island doing the round of the city sights, and enjoying nights at the opera, also came to Mrs. Bonner's, while on this particular day the house was crowded with a party of travelling southerners who were staying a week in the city, in order to see the winter sports in the Powell Street Grounds.

Kitty's duties were various. The decoration of the dinner-table fell to her share. She presided at the breakfast-table, and poured out afternoon tea. If any one wanted anything he applied to her; when Mrs. Bonner was not available, she had to see visitors, arrange terms, settle vexed questions of precedence which crop up even in good-class boarding houses; and when there were no other duties demanding attention, she had to overhaul stores, sort and mend house-linen, even take a turn at keeping the books, if Mrs. Bonner needed help.

From the fishmonger's to the stores, from the stores to the florist's went Kitty, sometimes when she turned a corner or crossed an open space getting a glimpse of snow-clad hills away to the north, or having her eyes dazzled with a flashing gleam of heaving, sparkling water. Some people of a more melancholy description might have felt depressed, because in all that crowd of strangers thronging the city streets there was not one familiar face, nor any one to whom she herself was anything saving another stranger.

But there was no sort of depression about Kitty this morning, and the tide of strange faces rather interested than repelled her, until in turning into Granville Street she encountered a face at once so familiar and disagreeable that a chill crept over her, and a shiver shook her.

Just a few yards from where she stood, pausing instinctively from sheer astonishment, a man was stepping off a street car, and at the first glance she had recognized him as that Mr. Hubbard who had held the bill of sale on her old home.

He had seen her as quickly as she had seen him, and jumping off the car, darted across to the side-walk, holding out his hand in the friendliest of greetings.

"Why, Miss Walsh, it is a great pleasure to see you here on the other side of the world, and looking so blooming too!" he exclaimed, in his suavest manner; and because she was so taken by surprise Kitty shook hands with him.

"There is no need to ask if you are well," he said, as he surveyed her; "I hope your sisters are as blooming as yourself. Are they here with you?"

"No, they are in Assiniboia," replied Kitty, quietly; she was recovering from that first shock of surprise, and getting herself into calm control again.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Hubbard, looking as if he had never heard of such a place, and wondered where it could be.

Kitty was about to bow and pass on, having no desire to renew acquaintance with this man, who had caused her some of the sharpest tribulation of her life, when to her amazement she saw him turn to another man, who had followed him from the street car, and commence to introduce her to this stranger.

"Fleming, this young lady is Miss Walsh from Stoneycroft, England."

"Miss Walsh, let me introduce you to Mr. Joseph Fleming, who used to know your late lamented mother when a girl," said Mr. Hubbard, waving his podgy hands with a flourish.

Kitty, who had been turning away with an air of offence at Mr. Hubbard's presumption in wishing to introduce her to his friends, wheeled round quickly at his last words, and at once held out her hand to Mr. Fleming.

"I am glad to meet you, if you knew my dear mother," she said, with a grave dignity which was more impressive than she knew or even guessed at.

"Yes, I knew her, and loved her too, but she wouldn't have me at any price, and as I could not put up with standing still to look on while she married some one else, I just left England and came out to Canada. So you are her eldest daughter? My dear, I am glad to shake hands with you," said Mr. Fleming.

Kitty looked with vivid interest at the plain, elderly man, grey-haired and rather shabby, who stood with uncovered head before her, and she at once decided that she liked him, even though she had met him in the company of Mr. Hubbard, whom certainly she did not like.

"Do you live here in Vancouver City?" she asked a little timidly, not knowing quite what to say.

"No, Brandon is my home, but I am often here; that is how I chanced to meet Hubbard, who is going on round to Frisco by this route," Mr. Fleming said, in explanation, and Kitty instantly felt glad that they were only casual acquaintances, instead of friends as she had

supposed. Of course it could not concern her in the least, but all the same she felt a sort of proprietary interest in this elderly stranger, who had once upon a time loved her mother.

"I am glad to have met you, but I must hurry now as I have a number of things to do," she said, with a rather formal bow for Mr. Hubbard, and a friendly smile and nod for Joseph Fleming.

"May I know where you are staying?" the latter said, detaining her as she was moving off.

"I am with Mrs. Bonner in Templeton Avenue for the winter," Kitty replied.

"I know the house, and stay there occasionally when I bring any of my womenfolks to the city," Joseph Fleming said, with a smile; and then Kitty hurried on, marvelling a little at the strangeness of her encounter with those two men, one of whom had been her mother's creditor, and the other, back in the dim past of which she had but a hearsay knowledge, her mother's lover.

She was so absorbed in thinking of the meeting that she nearly forgot two of her errands, and had to retrace her steps more than half a mile in consequence, which made her so late in getting back that it was quite a scramble to superintend the laying of lunch, a meal on this day more elaborate than usual, because of the number of guests in the house.

With her head and her hands filled with all sorts of duties, it was not wonderful that Kitty speedily forgot about her encounter with Mr. Hubbard and Joseph Fleming, and might not have remembered it again for some time had it not been recalled to her mind the next day, and so fixed in her memory.

It was in the afternoon when she was pouring out

cups of tea in the drawing-room, listening to the gay chatter and laughter all about her, that she suddenly heard a brisk, middle-aged lady, sitting near, say to the girl at her side—

"Do you know, Ethel, I met Joseph Fleming of Brandon yesterday, and he was asking me if you played with dolls still."

"I hope you told him 'Yes,' Aunt Alice, then maybe he will send me a nice new one for a Christmas gift ; by all accounts he can afford to give presents now," laughed the girl, who was lively, full of fun, and still in her teens.

"Is that Joseph Fleming the millionaire?" asked an old lady, who had been sitting in a corner a little remote, but now rose and joined the group on the settee just in front of Kitty's tea-table.

"Yes ; but he has only been a millionaire for a short time. Our acquaintance began with him when he was a comparatively poor man," replied the lady, whom the girl had called Aunt Alice.

"Ah, I too knew him when he was not comparatively, but really poor. But that was some years ago. His prosperity has come to him since. I hope it will not spoil him ; riches are not always an unmixed good, and he used to be such a very nice man," the old lady said wistfully. She was plainly well off herself ; but as she was undeniably gracious and winning in manner, it was evident that riches had not spoiled her.

Kitty was listening most attentively now, despite the interruptions her employment constantly brought her.

"I don't think riches will spoil Joseph Fleming," retorted the lady called Aunt Alice. "His wife's head may be a little turned by too many new hats, but Joseph

is made of sterner stuff. He had such a long fight for his success, you see, that it took all the conceit out of him as he went along. Five years ago, when my husband and I were living in Winnipeg, we used to know him well."

"I did not know that Joseph Fleming lived in Winnipeg; it was in Nelson that I knew him," said the old lady.

"He was in Winnipeg for about a year, I think; then a friend of his, a rather eccentric character named Ben Holt, lent him the money to take up that contractor's business at Brandon, where he has prospered so greatly."

The sugar-tongs dropped from Kitty's fingers with a clatter, while a buzzing, confused noise in her ears made her for a brief moment feel as if her senses were reeling.

She soon recovered, however, and was relieved to find that no one had noted her agitation; the talk, too, had taken a turn which led away from Joseph Fleming and the sources of his wealth, so she was left to digest at leisure the amazing news she had just heard.

Her Uncle Ben had lived in Winnipeg, she knew; and as Joseph Fleming had known her mother when young, it followed as a natural consequence that he must have been acquainted with her uncle also.

It was owing to her uncle that Joseph Fleming had been able to take the business which led to his being a millionaire. This proved clearly that Uncle Ben really did possess money at one time, so that his letter must have had truth in it.

Suddenly an idea occurred to her which made her shiver: Suppose this man who had taken her hand in

friendship to-day had been helped by a loan from her uncle, but had never troubled to pay it back!

The bare supposition raised Kitty's indignation to boiling-point; then suddenly she began to laugh at her own absurdity in getting angry over a mere fancy, when for aught she knew the Ben Holt mentioned in her hearing might not be her uncle at all, but some other man.

This, however, she meant to find out, and she went to bed that night fully intending to write to Joseph Fleming on the very next day, telling him what she had heard, and asking him if he could supply her with any details concerning her uncle's financial position.

But the letter, which at night had looked so easy to pen, became impossible when regarded in the cold clear light of day. Her uncle might have received all the money back, and lost it in some less fortunate speculation, or he might even have given it to his friend.

"I must wait," said Kitty to herself. "I must wait, and let circumstances decide. If Mr. Fleming ever comes here, I might venture to ask him questions about Uncle Ben that I should certainly hesitate to put down in black and white."

Kitty had been feverishly impatient for information about the wealth she supposed that her uncle had possessed during those first weeks of residence at Silver Creek; but as time went on, and she with her sisters began to feel the joy of earning money, and the bliss of independence, this feverish unrest about the riches, which perhaps had no real existence, began to subside.

Since she had been in the city, earning a comfortable salary, and living in such a pleasant bustle and activity, the desire to be independent of daily work had grown

fainter still. It was certainly not nice to be so far separated from Sue and Pattie, but they were very well, and happy in their own way. Even sisters who really loved each other could not always be tied to each other's apron-strings, and arguing after this fashion Kitty grew into a philosophic content, and was quite resigned to the necessity of working for her daily bread.

Mrs. Bonner slipped on the icy side-walk about Christmas time, breaking a small bone in her right ankle. Then descended upon Kitty the full burden of household management. From being merely assistant, she was forced into the position of chief.

It was well for her that she had not shirked her responsibilities when they were lighter, because now that they were heavy she was less oppressed by the burden.

Mrs. Bonner promptly raised her salary upon finding how capable she was of wrestling with the work of two people ; and Kitty worked on with greater vigour than ever, thoroughly satisfied with herself and her surroundings.

March came in, with lengthening days and more sunshine to flood the bright and busy city, before Mrs. Bonner was able to take an active share in the management of her house again.

The tide of visitors had slackened temporarily, and Kitty was feeling thankful for a spell of breathing time, when, one morning early in the month, as she went into Mrs. Bonner's small business-room to take the orders for the day, that lady looked up from her desk, saying—

"Please have the bedrooms four and five got ready this morning, Miss Walsh ; I have just had a letter from Mr. Joseph Fleming, saying that he is bringing his wife

and two daughters to the city, and they will remain with us for a week, whilst he goes over to the island on business."

"Miss Marlowe is in number five, and she has three more days to stay ; what am I to do ?" asked Kitty, her heart beating a little faster at the thought of encountering Mr. Joseph Fleming again.

"So she is. I had forgotten that. Well, she must be asked to change into one on the upper floor. I am sorry, but it can't be helped ; it certainly will not pay to offend a millionaire, and Mr. Fleming insists that the bedrooms shall be adjoining, and on the first floor. His daughters are young—about thirteen and fifteen, I suppose—and he and Mrs. Fleming are really foolish about those children, just as if they would not be perfectly safe anywhere in my house," Mrs. Bonner said, with a rather disgusted air.

"Shall I offer Miss Marlowe the turret room and the sitting-room adjoining ? She will then feel compensated for the inconvenience of being moved," suggested Kitty, who was quick and shrewd in most matters, and well understood the necessity for approaching a situation of this kind with great wariness.

"Oh, please do ; that will be sure to satisfy her, and she talks so much and so fast, that it becomes of the utmost importance to please her," Mrs. Bonner answered wearily ; and Kitty at once went off to catch Miss Marlowe before that energetic lady disappeared on business or pleasure intent, and just succeeded in stopping her on the doorstep.

"Oh, I don't mind changing—at least, if I have no bother of moving things, I mean. I have such a wearing headache that I am just off for a walk, to see if it will

do me good," Miss Marlowe said, putting her hand to her head with an air of suffering.

Kitty noticed then that she was very white, and had dark rings round her eyes, but supposed that she was merely tired from dancing too much the previous night.

"I shall be back soon, in about an hour if my head is not better ; so if the changing could be done by that time it would be very convenient, as I can stay quietly in my room until evening." So saying, Miss Marlowe strolled slowly away, while Kitty ran upstairs to superintend the changing of the rooms without delay.

What a work it was ! Miss Marlowe was a lady who travelled with four large trunks, the contents of which had been all emptied into the drawers and wardrobe of her room, and in consequence had all to be cleared out and carried to the turret chamber, a most desirable apartment up the next flight of stairs.

For an hour Kitty and one of the maids were flying to and fro with Miss Marlowe's finery, her comforts, and her luxuries, which they arranged to the best of their ability ; but when at the end of the hour the lady returned unrefreshed from her walk, she only grumbled because her books had not been arranged in their proper order, and her papers of silk crewels had become rather hopelessly mixed.

Kitty bore with the petulance as patiently as she could, because she knew that Miss Marlowe was feeling ill ; but it did seem rather hard after all her painstaking toil to be grumbled at, because she had happened to put Shelley next to Byron, instead of at the end of the row next to Herbert Spencer.

"But it is all in the day's work," she said to herself,

with a little laugh, as she turned away ; and then her thoughts sprang forward to the coming of the Flemings, with eager curiosity as to the result, for she had determined to make what investigation she could concerning Uncle Ben's financial affairs.

CHAPTER XVIII

Mr. Fleming's Information

SO many duties called for Kitty's attention that day as to make it quite impossible for her to appear at the dinner-table, so it was not until quite late in the evening that she encountered Mr. Fleming on the stairs, as she was returning from a flying visit to poor Miss Marlowe, who was still unwell and had gone to bed in the turret chamber.

"Good evening, Miss Walsh ; good evening !" exclaimed the millionaire, in his genial tones. "I have been talking to Mrs. Bonner about you, and was really disappointed because you were not at dinner."

"I have been so busy that I could not spare the time to dine at table to-day," she said, flushing as she thought of the conversation she had overheard concerning this rich man's former indebtedness to her uncle.

"You should never be too busy to eat ; that is waste effort and poor economy," he said, shaking his head with an air of disapproval.

"Oh, I have not spent the day fasting. I only meant that I had lacked the time to dine ceremoniously," she said, laughing.

"The ceremonious style of feeding is a shocking waste of time," he replied. "But I dare say it is good for the

digestion, as it is one of the weaknesses of mankind to eat too fast, unless they eat in company. Are you busy still, or have you a minute to come in and talk to Mrs. Fleming?"

"I am not busy now; but then, I am only in working dress," Kitty said a little doubtfully, glancing down at the plain serge frock with white collar and cuffs which was her official garb.

"Working fiddlesticks! You look very nice indeed; could not look prettier, in fact, if you tried. Besides, Mrs. Fleming is not in the drawing-room, but in our private sitting-room, and working dress will not frighten her, or should not, seeing that she has had to wear it all her life, until the last year or two."

"I will come, then, if you wish it," she answered demurely, and followed him into the little sitting-room on the ground floor, which had been given up to the use of the millionaire's party.

Mrs. Fleming was an over-dressed woman of a very commonplace description, and she greeted Kitty with an air of patronizing condescension which would have been laughable if it had not been so intensely unpleasant.

"Sit down, Miss Walsh; sit down," said Mr. Fleming, drawing an easy-chair forward, and fairly hustling Kitty into it. "I am going to cross over to the Island tomorrow, and as I shall be away for a week or ten days, there will not be a chance for a talk for some time to come. Mr. Hubbard tells me that you and your sisters came to Canada to live with your Uncle Ben. How is he now?"

Kitty turned suddenly white, and looked at him with dilating eyes—

"Uncle Ben is dead. He died—was found dead—

last July, and we did not reach Silver Creek until the day after his funeral." She tumbled the words out in a breathless fashion, ending up with a little gasp.

"Dead, is he? Poor old Ben! good old comrade! Well, the world is the poorer for his going;" and Joseph Fleming covered his face with his hand for a moment, as though Kitty's tidings had been a real shock to him.

Even Mrs. Fleming appeared affected, and murmured a well-worn platitude about life being painfully uncertain, and only death being sure.

"You say that he died in July? Why, surely it was July when I saw him last," said Mr. Fleming, after a pause. "Yes, I remember it was the 15th of July. I hired a horse and trap at Dan Lemon's, and drove up to his place on Silver Creek. My dear, you will remember, it was the day I took him that last five thousand dollars." Joseph Fleming turned to his wife as he spoke, with a certain repressed agitation in his manner.

"Uncle Ben was found dead by a neighbour on the morning of the 17th," Kitty said, steadying her voice by an effort; then she added slowly, "But he died quite a poor man—that is, there was only the farm belonging to him."

"A poor man, did you say?" exclaimed Joseph Fleming, in amazement. "Why, at one time, and that not so very long ago, Ben Holt was worth at least twenty thousand dollars to my certain knowledge!"

"Are you sure?" Kitty asked, with a whirling confusion in her head, which turned her sick and giddy.

"I ought to know if any one did, seeing that when I took my Brandon business, he lent me fifteen thousand dollars to start with, the only security I could give him being my word of honour. It is true I paid him five per

cent. interest on the loan, and refunded every dollar of it; but that does not lessen the greatness of his kindness, for he trusted me, and was willing to take the risk of my losing it all. Brave old Ben!"

"But what became of the money?" asked Kitty.

"Ah, that is just what I cannot tell you. I know that on the fifteenth of July I paid him five thousand dollars in coin, for which he gave me his receipt. It was the last instalment of his loan to me. When I thanked him for his kindness and his trust in me he laughed a little, and told me that he should not have been quite poverty-stricken if I had lost it all, which I easily might have done, for although fortunes are easily made in my line of life, it is equally easy to lose them." Joseph Fleming was striding to and fro now in a state of agitation and excitement, but Kitty sat still, feeling sick and queer.

"Do you suppose Ben Holt had got all that money hidden on his place instead of being put out to interest?" broke in Mrs. Fleming.

"He was rather queer in some things, but I fancy he would put his money where it would bring him some sort of profit, however small. I should be more inclined to think it had been stolen," Joseph Fleming said thoughtfully.

"That was my first belief, and I began by at once suspecting the people who had charge of things between the death and the funeral," remarked Kitty. "But both John Elstow, who found Uncle Ben dead, and poor old Mrs. Morgan, who took charge of the house, have shown themselves so incorruptibly honest and upright, that it was nothing but a waste of time to suspect them of any wrong-doing."

"Humph, it looks queer. It looks very queer indeed," the millionaire said, as he strode to and fro; then for a minute or so he dropped into a silence, which neither Kitty nor Mrs. Fleming ventured to interrupt, as they sat mutely watching him.

Presently he paused abruptly in front of Kitty, commencing to talk in a brisk, dictatorial fashion.

"Now, see here, Miss Walsh, I've got to go over to the Island to-morrow on business that won't wait, and, as I said before, I shall most likely have to be away for a week or more. But when I come back I'll make it my first business to look into this matter on your behalf."

"You are very good!" murmured Kitty, too much taken aback by this generous offer of help, from one who was so nearly a stranger, to have any great flow of words in which to express her gratitude.

"It is not a question of goodness at all; my honour is involved. For aught you or your sisters know to the contrary I might never have paid the money at all, but forged the receipt. So I shall make it my business to see the matter through," he said, his manner brusque still, and his brow wrinkled into lines of deep perplexity.

"Thank you very much," Kitty said fervently, wondering what Sue and Pattie would say on learning that their cause had been championed by a millionaire.

"I'll tell you what we will do!" exclaimed Joseph Fleming, ceasing to frown, and becoming eagerly excited as a schoolboy planning a holiday. "We will take you along with us. You ask Mrs. Bonner for two weeks' leave of absence and get your trunk packed ready; then we will all travel together. You will like my girls first-rate, and they will be sure to take to you because you are so pretty. Gwendoline and Ruth their names are;

their mother chose the first and I chose the second ; it was my grandmother's name, and is short. I don't like names a yard and a half long ; they seem such a waste of breath."

"Oh, I am afraid Mrs. Bonner could not spare me," protested Kitty, just as soon as she could get the chance to interpolate a word.

Delightful as the proposition sounded, there were serious drawbacks to its being carried out. Kitty knew she could not really afford to take the journey without having to lessen the amount she sent monthly to Sue and Pattie. She was also shrewd enough to see that Mrs. Fleming did not enter into the idea with any degree of enthusiasm.

"She will let you go if I ask her. You need not trouble about the expense either ; I will see to that. I can see the matter through quicker if you are there to help, so you will be doing my business, don't you see ? Get your things ready to start at short notice, and leave the rest to me. I will settle Mrs. Bonner," Joseph Fleming said, and was preparing to sketch out a plan of campaign, when an interruption came in the shape of a summons for Kitty, who was wanted upstairs at once, a maid said, with urgency in face and tone.

"I am very sorry, but I really must go ; my time is not my own, you see," Kitty murmured in an apologetic fashion.

"I understand. I have had to work all my life, and to wait too," Mr. Fleming replied, in his kind, fatherly manner, while Mrs. Fleming bowed in a stiff way, just giving Kitty the tips of her fingers by way of farewell.

"Who wants me ?" asked Kitty, when she got outside

the door of the sitting-room, and saw the maid who had summoned her standing waiting for her.

"It is Dr. Lambert. He has come to see Miss Marlowe; he had been up in her room for ten minutes or so, then down he came to insist on seeing Mrs. Bonner. But she has a gentleman to settle some business with, so he said I was to come for you, and to be quick about it," said the maid, with an indignant sniff.

"Very impertinent of him, Florence, and I will be sure to tell him so, if only he gives me a chance," said Kitty, with a laugh, showing the ready sympathy with ruffled feelings which had always made her so popular, both with guests and servants, in Mrs. Bonner's house. "By the way, who is he—a stranger? I don't remember his name."

"He is a stranger, I think; at least he has not come to this house since I have been here. He says Miss Marlowe sent him a note early in the day, asking him to call, but that, owing to a mistake, he did not get it until late this evening," the maid answered, mollified already because of that touch of sympathy which had soothed her wounded pride.

"I wonder she did not tell me that she had sent for a doctor; but she has seemed so strange and queer all day that perhaps she did not even remember it," Kitty said, then went quickly upstairs to the little sitting-room adjoining the turret-chamber, where Dr. Lambert was waiting.

She expected to find a fussy, elderly man, dictatorial and pompous, who would give a great many orders entailing a tremendous lot of extra work on that busy household, which had already more than enough to do.

Great was her surprise, therefore, on entering the

sitting-room, to find herself confronted by a young man nervous of aspect, and with the most mournful eyes she had ever seen.

"Good evening!" she said crisply, thinking of Florence's wounded feelings, and wondering if she could muster the courage to tell this stranger that, in Canada, even maids must be treated with polite consideration.

"I have been to see Miss Marlowe, and I find her very ill," he said brusquely, ignoring Kitty's "Good evening," and not even bowing by way of greeting.

"I am very sorry for that. She has appeared unwell all day, and suffering from headache, but when I left her an hour ago she was drowsy and seemed inclined to sleep," Kitty replied, in a doubtful tone, as if disposed to think the doctor exaggerated the invalid's condition.

"She is delirious now. Come in and see her. If you were here an hour ago, it will not hurt you to come in again now," Dr. Lambert said curtly, turning back into the turret-chamber and leaving her to follow.

Miss Marlowe, very flushed and apparently in high fever, was tossing restlessly on her pillows, talking in a rapid undertone, her eyes wide open and staring, but with such an unseeing look in them that Kitty shrank back in affright.

"What is the matter with her?" she asked, feeling sick and giddy, and with the same whirling confusion in her head which had troubled her when she was talking to Mr. Fleming.

Taking her hand, Dr. Lambert drew her back to the sitting-room again, and softly closed the door.

"What is the matter with Miss Marlowe?" Kitty asked, with a half-sob catching at her breath.

"I cannot be absolutely certain until the morning

when the rash shall have developed, but the symptoms all point to scarlet fever of a rather bad sort. Have you had the complaint?" he asked abruptly.

"I?" Kitty stared at him, half-uncomprehending, then suddenly remembered that scarlet fever was infectious. "No, I have not had it. But that does not matter; I am not afraid for myself. I cannot imagine what Mrs. Bonner will say, however, because of her other boarders."

"It is very unfortunate, of course, but we will take every possible precaution. I will come round at six o'clock to-morrow morning; then, if the symptoms have declared themselves, we will have the ambulance at once, and remove the poor lady to the isolation hospital before the household is astir," Dr. Lambert said in a reassuring tone.

"Will it be safe to move her if she is so ill?" Kitty asked dubiously.

"Oh yes; we can roll her in blankets and carry her down to the ambulance. It would mean emptying Mrs. Bonner's house to nurse the patient here, but if we remove her at once little harm will be done. You will have to go into quarantine for a day or two just as a matter of precaution, and I will look in to see that you are keeping all right. I suppose Miss Marlowe has not been out of her room to-day?"

Kitty gasped and shivered, as the full horror of the situation broke in upon her.

"Oh yes, she went out for a walk this morning, to see if it would do her head good, and she was at breakfast with the rest of the household. But that is not the worst nor nearly the worst. Miss Marlowe has been occupying a room on the first floor, but this morning,

because that room was required by a fresh set of boarders, we asked her if she would object to the change. As she did not, we moved her things up here for the three days she is remaining in the house."

"Was intending to remain, you mean," the doctor broke in, with a note of grimness in his voice. "I suppose the fresh boarders have not come yet, so it is only a question of fumigating two rooms instead of one?"

"Oh, but they have come, and are already in bed and asleep. Two young girls, school girls they are, and I only changed the sheets, not the blankets!" cried Kitty, in a tone of such poignant distress, that the doctor could not help being sorry for her.

"It is of no use blaming yourself overmuch," he said kindly. "Perhaps, after all, these two girls may escape infection; no one takes disease unless one is in a fit condition for it, you know, so we must hope for the best. Do you feel quite well yourself?"

The last question was put with startling abruptness, and Kitty lifted her head with a movement of impatience.

"It is not a question of feeling well or ill. I am wondering whatever we shall do, or how get over this fearful disaster. If only Miss Marlowe's room had not been changed, it might not have mattered so much, but that Mr. Fleming's daughters should have been put into her room is nothing short of actual calamity."

"I tell you that what has been done cannot be undone, and it is worse than useless to worry so much over the might-have-beens. As a rule scarlet fever is not infectious in the earlier stages; but there are exceptions, so we have got to be careful," Dr. Lambert said. Then he went away, and Kitty was left to face the situation as best she could.

CHAPTER XIX

A Surprise Party

FOR a few days after Kitty went away to Vancouver City, Sue and Pattie felt as if they simply could not endure the little lone house without the cheery presence in it of the elder sister, with her pretty face and bright winning ways. But this feeling soon wore away, and by the time she had been absent three weeks the two had grown used to the altered condition of things.

Mrs. Morgan improved in health slowly but steadily, and showed herself a most useful addition to the household. She knew so much, too, of the requirements of colonial life, that the girls were saved from many blunders and difficulties which had hampered them before.

When Sampson Kench heard where Mrs. Morgan had taken refuge he was excessively angry ; but as he had actually turned her out-of-doors, it was of no use for him to make a fuss and say that the Miss Walshes had enticed away his hired help.

The second snow, which came at the time of Kitty's departure, did not disappear as the first fall had done, but lay on the ground like a warm white blanket for so many weeks that Sue and Pattie got quite used to it.

John Elstow said that it was quite unusual for it to

lie so long, because the chinook, which is the warm wet wind from the Pacific, was wont to make itself felt even so far as the Qu'Appelle district in ordinary winters.

Despite the snow, or perhaps because of it, there was much more social intercourse in the winter than had been possible in the busy weeks of late summer and early autumn.

One afternoon in December, Sue was coming out of the barn just as the light was fading, having finished her work for the day, when she was amazed at the sight of a little procession of four sledges, with two horses in each, coming across the field from the high-road.

Bruce, rushing up to the first sledge, barked a noisy welcome, than dashed back to Sue, wagging an eager tail, and trying to inform her by every means in his power, that the arrivals were all friends, and that there was great fun in store.

But although Sue, from what she knew of her neighbours, was quite prepared to take so much for granted, she was considerably worried by the thought of having so many guests to provide for, and was wondering how their scanty stock of groceries would stand such a strain, when the first sledge arrived with a dash and a clatter of horses' feet on the open space before the house, where the snow had been swept away.

To her delight she recognized in this first vehicle Imogen Jones and her betrothed, Jim, while the occupants of the other sledges were all young people, some of whom Sue already knew, and some she did not.

"This is a surprise party. Tell us if it is not convenient, and we can go somewhere else," Imogen said, laughing as she struggled free of her wraps, and cast herself upon Sue, whom she hugged with the utmost

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affection and delight, while Jim gave a cheery nod of recognition, and then set about unharnessing the horses.

"It will be quite convenient if only Mr. Jim will drive back to Kench's store to get me some coffee, sugar, and things of that sort. But I cannot feed such a multitude on what I have in the house ; it would not go round," Sue said, with an embarrassed laugh.

"Don't you fret about food, Miss Sue ; it is plain you don't know much about surprise parties. At affairs of this sort, it is etiquette for every one to bring his own food, and if there isn't quite enough crockery to go round, why that makes it all the more fun," explained Jim, to Sue's huge relief and satisfaction ; for it was not merely the fact of being out of stores which worried her, but until Kitty's money came, she had no available funds.

"Jim is quite right, Sue ; our little frolic won't cost you more than the trouble of laughing at the fun. It is my affair, and I know pretty nearly what every one has brought. Now whip off your apron and gloves and receive the company, for you are hostess you know, and they will look to you for a welcome," said Imogen.

Feeling rather dazed and very much amused, Sue did as she was told ; while Pattie, running out to see what all the commotion was about, was immediately set upon by Imogen, who hugged her until she was nearly suffocated.

Mrs. Morgan held up her hands in astonished surprise at the swarm of bright girls and alert young men who now came pouring into the house, for surprise parties had not been in the habit of patronizing the abode of Mrs. Kench. But she proved herself quite equal to the occasion, spreading a clean cloth on the table, and

enlarging the sitting accommodation by placing a board across two chairs. Then she promptly wedged herself into an obscure corner, leaving the surprise party to do as they chose, which indeed was exactly what they intended doing.

The men had hitched the horses in the barn somewhere, every horse having brought its own supper, so that Sue was not the poorer by even an armful of hay. Then, the animals being arranged for, the men came indoors to assist in getting supper ready. Some had driven ten miles, some fifteen, Imogen and Jim had done a journey of twenty miles, with the prospect of the same distance back when the frolic was over.

"You are not to interfere," said Molly Derringer, who had driven over with two brothers from Plum Downs; as she spoke she hustled Sue into one chair, and Pattie into another. She was a plump girl of twenty, very active and capable, with a sharp way of speaking, and a smile that belied the sharpness.

"It is not fair to let you do the work," protested Sue, to whom this form of entertainment was entirely novel.

"Oh, but surprise parties always manage things themselves," laughed Miss Derringer, giving her brother a tap on the head with a saucepan, in order to make him hurry in the unpacking of the provision basket. Then she asked, "Is this the biggest saucepan you have got, dear? Because if it is, I will use two or three for making the coffee."

"There is a tin boiler in the pantry if that would do better," Sue replied. Whereupon Jim dived into the pantry, found the boiler, and set about brewing coffee under Miss Derringer's curt directions.

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All the guests talked at once, they all laughed together, while Sue and Pattie looked on in amazement and laughed too, because they really could not help it.

Of course there were not enough cups and saucers to go round, but Tom Derringer found a row of empty jam pots on the shelf behind the pantry door, and every one declared that nothing could have been nicer or more convenient.

A basket had come in every sledge, and these all having been unpacked, a motley supply of provisions was literally heaped upon the table. Cold fowls, a ham, a big joint of boiled beef, two pork pies, tarts of varieties too numerous to mention, big cakes, little cakes, moulds of jelly, stiff and shining, with piles of rosy-cheeked apples, furnished a supper from which twice that number of people need not have been turned hungry away.

One of the party had brought a flute with him, and, sitting in a corner, played steadily through his repertoire of tunes grave and gay, while the others would sometimes join in with their voices, quite drowning his shrill tootling in some rousing chorus.

"We should have come to see you before," one of the girls said to Pattie, "but we supposed you would not feel very lively after reaching here only to find your poor uncle dead; and you had lost your mother just before you left England, I believe?"

"Yes; we have had a lot of troubles this year," Pattie answered, with a sigh.

"I have never been so far up the creek as this before. I should think it is a nice country for farming, but a bit lonely," said a shock-headed young man, leaning past his neighbour to speak to Sue, whom he claimed as an old acquaintance, because he had been one of the harvest

party for whom she had cooked dinner, on that summer day at Goshen.

"It is lonely, but we like it," Sue answered, smiling brightly, for the solitude did not appeal to her as very terrible just then, seeing what a number of friends and neighbours were crowding her little house.

"I've been up here before. I came last summer; it was when I was working for Dan Lemon. He sent me to drive a city gent up here; must have been only a day or two before Mr. Holt was found dead," put in Philip Derringer, who was Molly's elder brother.

"Who was he—a company promoter?" asked the shock-headed youth, who was more than normally eager for information of every sort and kind.

"I figured him out to be a commercial traveller of some kind, especially as he had an uncommonly heavy bag with him—samples as I supposed. He said his business with Mr. Holt was private, and so I was to go back to Kench's store for a feed for my horse and myself, which I did."

"I remember you, for you carried in three buckets of water for me, and offered to carry me too," burst in Mrs. Morgan from the background, with so much vigour that every one burst out laughing except Phil, who was rather shy, and very modest.

"You look a good many years younger and smarter than you did that day, ma'am," he replied, gazing in surprise at Mrs. Morgan, whom he had not previously recognized.

"I feel so too," she said emphatically.

Then the shock-headed young man broke in again with his note of perpetual query—

"Why should a commercial traveller's business be

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private like that? I've often seen them taking orders in public."

"So have other people—if they cared to look, that is," rejoined Phil, in a sarcastic tone. "Besides, I didn't say that the city gent was a commercial traveller, only that I thought he was one. I changed my mind afterwards."

"Let us sing grace now, for the coffee is ready," broke in the sharp voice of Molly Derringer, as she rapped on the table with the long carving-knife to ensure silence.

The flute-player at once started tootling the Old Hundredth, while they sang—

"All people that on earth do dwell."

When this psalm was finished, they sang three verses of "Jerusalem the golden" to a wild, sweet tune, full of such ringing pathos and yearning that the tears started to Sue's eyes, and threatened to brim over.

"I say, what made you leave off thinking that city gent was a commercial traveller?" broke in the voice of the shock-headed youth, with weird persistency, when the singing was finished.

Imogen Jones and Molly Derringer were carving, one at each end of the table, whilst Jim dispensed coffee, and every one else helped or not as seemed to them best.

"How the schoolmaster must have wanted to throw slates at your head when you started asking questions at school!" exclaimed Phil Derringer, as he piled Sue's plate with the best the table contained, and looked daggers at his tormentor.

"It wouldn't have hurt me if he had; my hair is too thick, my skull likewise," retorted the shock-headed one

calmly. "But you can give your reason, I suppose, unless it is a secret, in which case you are to blame for mentioning the affair."

"There is nothing secret in it that I know of," returned Phil, with an air of exasperation. "I went to the store as I was told to, rested a couple of hours, then came back for my passenger, and had driven him some miles back towards the depôt, before I noticed that he had not brought his bag back with him; so I said to him that he had left his bag of samples behind him. He burst into a laugh at that, said they were uncommonly good samples, and that he would send for them if he found himself in want of them."

"I say, what do you expect was in that bag?" asked the persistent one, which was exactly what Sue was wanting to know as she listened to the talk.

"I'm sure I don't know, nor yet care—flat-irons I expect. Didn't you ever hear that Mr. Holt was meaning to set up a steam laundry on Silver Creek, and get up biled shirts at six dollars a gross?" burst out Phil Derringer, in so much irritation that they all began laughing at him and his tormentor likewise.

When supper was over, the remains of the feast were stowed away in the pantry; the table was hustled into the bedroom with as many chairs as could be spared, and then they played games and danced for the remainder of the evening.

There was a general move when the clock struck ten. Horses were hitched to their respective sledges, every one wrapped himself up in a great number of cloaks and shawls, then with many "Good nights" and expressions of the friendliest good-will the surprise party drove away, carrying empty baskets with them.

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"Oh, what a lovely evening it has been!" cried Pattie, who was flushed with laughter and excitement. "I have not had such fun since mother died. Didn't you enjoy it, Sue?"

"Very much, after Imogen said that they had brought their provisions with them; at first I was frightened at the prospect of so many people to feed," Sue replied. Then she began to wonder, as she had done many times before that evening, who Uncle Ben's mysterious visitor had been, and what the heavy bag contained.

"We shall have food enough for a week to come!" put in Mrs. Morgan, who had been looking at the remains of the feast. "There is a clear half-pound of coffee left too, which is a comfort indeed, since it will save buying."

"How kind people are!" murmured Sue, as she too looked at the heap of provisions left over from supper. The little household had been living on rigidly economical lines since the departure of Kitty, and this unexpected plunge into lavish abundance was very pleasant indeed.

"My dear, if you sow goodwill, you mostly reap the same," said Mrs. Morgan, with that touch of profound wisdom which sometimes came to her.

Sue shook her head, as much as to say that on this subject she had no hard-and-fast opinions.

"Do people often have surprise parties in this part of the world?" inquired Pattie, on whom the evening's frolic had made a profound impression.

"That is as it happens. Some places get them oftener than others, I make no doubt. We certainly did not have surprise parties come to Mrs. Kench's house while I lived there—not this kind of surprise, at least, though we've many a time been treated to surprises of a less pleasant kind. A party of cattle-riders would

come along in the middle of the night, perhaps, and rouse us up to get them food and drink, and threaten us with all sorts of dreadful things, such as being burned in our beds, if we did not hurry to get them what they wanted. But that is not so common as it used to be a few years ago, before there were fenced farms in this district," Mrs. Morgan said, as she moved about the sitting-room, straightening things up for the night.

"I am glad we did not live here then, for they might have made a mistake and come to the wrong house, which would not have been pleasant." Pattie shrugged her shoulders distastefully, thinking that already they had been frightened quite badly enough since they had come to live at Silver Creek.

"Oh, look at the time. It is nearly eleven o'clock! I do not think we have been so late getting to bed any night since we have lived here!" cried Sue, dismayed by the lateness of the hour, for people did not, as a rule, stay up until nearly midnight in those rural places. "I wonder what Kitty is doing, and whether she is thinking of going to bed yet."

"Poor Kitty! if she feels half as sleepy as I do, she will be very glad to go to bed," yawned Pattie.

"Kitty is happier in the city than she would be here, so there is no need to speak of her as poor," Sue said gently.

She was thinking of Kitty's dislike to solitude, and wondering how she would have borne the monotonous days if she had been compelled to remain in the country through the winter.

"I shall go to Creek Head to-morrow to tell Mrs. Elstow all about our frolic to-night," said Pattie, as she laid her head on the pillow, then fell asleep before she could say any more.

CHAPTER XX

Anxious Waiting

THERE was no snow on Silver Creek when March came in, and although the nights were cold, the promise of spring was in the air, causing every one to take a more active part in the affairs of life.

Especially at the little brown house was there a full tide of business on hand. Sue was hard at work with an incubator, turning eggs into chickens and ducks, which later, by another sort of development, would be turned into dinners and suppers for those who could afford to buy them.

Mrs. Morgan did most of the housework, so that Pattie was free to help Sue, who toiled perseveringly with her chickens and ducks, but spent every available hour at perfecting her arrangements for fruit-growing, for purposes of jam- and jelly-making.

In addition to the five hundred raspberry canes which Sue had planted in the autumn, she had half an acre of strawberry plantation, from which she was expecting to derive considerable profit if only the season were favourable, for strawberry jam would be sure to command a better price than the more ordinary kinds.

It was her intention, also, to have a large sowing of pumpkins and squashes, for she had learned from Imogen Jones a new way of making pumpkin marmalade, which she believed would prove a very marketable production.

With all these plans and projects on hand, in addition to the daily, indeed hourly, care of the newly hatched chickens and ducklings, Sue and Pattie found the days fly by, and were only brought to a realization of how fast time was going when the middle of the month came and passed without bringing the usual letter from Kitty.

As a rule she wrote once a week, but sometimes, if she were very busy, a week might be missed. When two weeks had passed, however, and no letter was forthcoming, both girls felt concerned, even a little dismal, at the fancied neglect, but not as yet really and acutely anxious; that was to come later.

Diamond lived chiefly at Creek Head during these weeks of early spring, being required to help with the ploughing and seeding, but he was regularly fetched home on Saturday evenings by Sue or Pattie, in readiness for the four-mile drive to church on Sunday mornings.

It was awkward having their only horse away so much, because when anything was wanted from the store, some one had to walk the two miles, which became four by the time the return journey had been accomplished.

Sue and Pattie had taken it in turn to walk over every day for letters, since the strange and unaccountable silence of Kitty. As a rule they had only troubled about their mail twice a week, but now they haunted

the store, which was also post-office, every day, in the hope of news.

Pattie had grown so much stronger since coming to Silver Creek, that there were very few days when she was unable to take her share of the toil. Sometimes, however, she would do too much, and a day of severe headache would be the result.

This was the case one morning when the third week of Kitty's silence was well on its way. Pattie was too ill to lift her head from the pillow, and, in consequence, Sue must face a double portion of work, which would certainly leave little time or energy for the walk to the store.

Fortunately, however, John Elstow looked in soon after breakfast, saying that he had to go as far as Kench's, and would bring anything they wanted.

"Will you ask if there are any letters for us, please? There is nothing else we need, but Kitty has not written for three weeks, and we are getting quite worried about it," Sue said, with a sigh.

She looked rather white and weary this morning, for she, like Pattie, had worked beyond her strength on the day before, only in her case the reaction was not so severe.

"I wouldn't trouble, if I were you, until you know there is something wrong. Perhaps Mrs. Bonner has tumbled down and upset her other ankle—she doesn't seem to be very steady on her feet; and so your sister may be having a double share of work, like you," John Elstow said kindly. He had a great respect and liking for Sue, whose business capacity always won his admiration.

"Oh, my double dose of work is not serious," she

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answered, with a ready smile. "I don't like having to feed chickens and ducks every hour and a half, and I don't like milking the cow. But Pattie will be all right after she has had a good rest, and she likes doing these aggravating small things which bother me so much."

"Ah, you are so ambitious. If it were half a ton of raspberry jam you had to make, or fifteen hundred-weight of black-currant jelly, you would be quite happy, I expect," John Elstow said, with a genial laugh, as he got into his waggon and drove away up the field.

It was nearly an hour later before he reappeared, and Sue, who was at work in one of the fields bordering the road, hurried towards the boundary fence to take whatever he might have brought, so that he might be spared the trouble of driving down the field.

There was a letter at last; she could see him holding it up as she ran.

"Here you are, Miss Sue, a letter for you; but I'm afraid it isn't from your sister, unless, indeed, she has gone to Jamaica for a little holiday," he said, as he gave her the letter.

"Jamaica, did you say? I don't know any one there," she replied, in a disappointed tone, holding out her hand for the letter.

"Some one there appears to know you fairly well, though, and has got your address uncommonly pat. Perhaps it is an order for black-currant jelly," he said banteringly, as he handed the envelope to her. He was so sorry for the disappointment which he read in her face, that he took the only means he could think of to cheer her into brightness again.

"I hope, if it is, that I shan't have to pay carriage on the goods, or my profits will be considerably diminished,"

she said, forcing a laugh, which was, however, sadly lacking in merriment.

There was very active anxiety in her heart as she turned away. In addition to her concern about Kitty, she had also to worry about their own straitened finances. The long-delayed letter from Kitty should have brought the monthly fifteen dollars, and just now was a very expensive time. Farther back in the winter, or later in the spring, it would not have mattered so badly; but at this particular time, so much special food had to be bought for the young poultry, and Sue simply did not know where to look for a dollar.

Great was her amazement, therefore, on opening the envelope, to see enclosed a three-dollar bill, which was folded in a letter signed "Alexander Gordon."

"Why, it is my two dollars back again, with another added!" she exclaimed, her face flushing with surprise and pleasure until she looked quite pretty, only there was no one to see it.

When she had carefully looked at the three-dollar bill, and scrutinized the signature, it occurred to her that she might as well read the letter, which she proceeded to do as she walked across the field in the direction of the house.

The letter was frank, manly, and so independent in tone, that she smiled to herself to think how like it was to the outward appearance of the young man whom she had seen stalking through the crowd at the railway depôt, carrying the big trunk on his shoulder.

"DEAR MISS WALSH (so ran the letter),

"I am writing for my brother to thank you for your kindness in lending him two dollars last

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summer to buy food when we were on the rail. Thanks to that loan, I was able to take to work directly we reached our destination, and your two dollars would have been refunded long since only Don fell ill and was sick for a good many weeks. When he began to get better, the doctor told me that he could not possibly live through a Canadian winter, and I must get him south before the fall if I wanted to keep him. It was a problem to know where to go and how to get there. But kind friends found me a post here in Jamaica, and lent me the money to pay for the journey, which had to be done second class, as Don was too weak for steerage travel. It has taken me ever since then to pay off that loan, or I would have sent to you before. You were so kind to my brother that day in Montreal that I've been wondering if you would not think me presuming if I asked you to send him a letter sometimes; the poor lad's life is so narrow, you see, and time hangs heavy with him. He took such a strong liking to you too, and is always talking about you. I am sending you back the two dollars, with another dollar for interest, and we are both indebted to you for your generosity.

"I have the honour to remain,

"Very faithfully yours,

"ALEXANDER GORDON.

"Ferny Gap, Port Royal, Jamaica."

"What a nice letter! and oh, how pleasant to think that the boy likes me so much!" Sue exclaimed to herself, as she walked down the field thinking of poor sickly crippled Don, while the flush stayed on her cheeks, and a new lustre shone in her eyes. It was so

delightful to think that poor boy was fond of talking about her, and would like her to write to him ; it gave her a new sense of power, and made her feel that to win the world by love was after all as good as being pretty to look at, as Kitty and Pattie were.

"But you won't keep the money, will you?" Pattie asked languidly, when Sue came rushing into the room, where she was lying in bed, and read the letter to her.

"Indeed I will keep it, every cent, and be glad to have it, for we are quite painfully short of cash at this present moment. I could not have sent it back, however much I might have wished to do so, because it would have hurt Mr. Gordon's self-respect ; he is not a beggar, but a very proud and independent person, who not merely refunds money which he chooses to regard as a loan, but pays interest on it also," Sue replied, laughing a little, as she again recalled the picture of the resolute-looking Sandy, as he struggled along under the burden of the big trunk.

"Well, even three dollars are better than nothing," admitted Pattie, as she stretched her weary limbs with an air of restful ease and comfort.

"Indeed they are. But oh, Pattie, I am beginning to worry about Kitty's silence. What can it mean?"

"It means, I expect, that the money she usually sends was needed for something else, and she did not like to write without sending it," the younger sister said brusquely.

"Oh, Pattie, don't even think a thing so unkind ; it is not loyal to Kitty, who has worked so hard and sent us such a lot of money all through the winter!" exclaimed Sue, in a burst of indignation.

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"She has not worked nearly so hard or so unselfishly as you have done, and she has had all sorts of pleasures, while you have had none at all," Pattie answered, in a grumbling tone.

"Hush, darling, don't say such things. Perhaps poor Kitty is having a fearfully hard time of it, that we know nothing about," Sue said gently, and went off to her work again. When she had gone Pattie shed a few tears of contrition into her pillow, then sank into a dreamless sleep which lasted for hours, and from which she awoke quite well.

It was three days later before any news of Kitty arrived, to lift the burden of anxiety from the hearts of the two girls.

Pattie had been over to the store, and came back heated and flushed with the haste she had made.

"Have you been running?" asked Sue, who met her at the field gate, and guessed by the look of her face that there was news of some sort to hand at last.

"Not much; I could not keep it up," panted Pattie, who was very much out of breath. "There is a letter from Vancouver City, but it isn't from Kitty."

"From whom is it, then?" asked Sue, turning very pale, and beginning to tremble.

"I don't know. I did not like to open it as it was directed to you, and was not from Kitty."

Sue gave herself a resolute shake, and tore open the envelope; then, with Pattie looking over her shoulder, began to read the letter contained inside.

A cry of dismay broke from both before they had read more than three lines of that brief and business-like communication, which was—

"DEAR MISS WALSH,

"Your sister, Miss Kitty Walsh, is in the Isolation Hospital, suffering from an attack of scarlet fever. She was very ill for the first fortnight, but is now rapidly mending, although it will be some time yet before she is sufficiently convalescent to write letters. She sends her dear love to you both, and begs you not to worry on her account.

"Sincerely yours,

"A. LAMBERT."

"What a catastrophe! Poor, darling Kitty!" said Sue, with tears raining down her cheeks.

Pattie said no word at all, but stood as if turned to stone, while pangs of keen self-reproach rent her heart, because of the ungenerous thoughts she had cherished as to the reasons of Kitty's long silence.

"Let us go and tell Mrs. Morgan," suggested Sue presently, with that instinctive longing for sympathy which comes to most people in times of heavy trouble.

Pattie turned without a word, walking in her dumb misery by the side of Sue, yet not feeling as if her feet were pressing on the ground, scarcely conscious even that she was moving at all.

"Poor Kitty! oh, how terrible for her to be ill like that, and to be alone amongst strangers!" wailed Sue, on whom the shock of the bad news seemed to have fallen with overwhelming force. "Why don't you say something, Pattie?"

"I don't know what to say. I have had such horribly mean thoughts about Kitty, and now I feel just crushed with shame," mumbled the poor child, in a tone of such exceeding misery that Sue was fain to turn consoler.

"You thought that Kitty was having good times,

and forgetting all about us and our difficulties, I expect. Well, it did look a little like it; but then, you see, it was nothing of the kind, and we ought to be so thankful for that comfort, that we should never be tempted to doubt her again," Sue said softly.

"Oh, Sue, did you feel like that too?" cried Pattie, facing round with a gleam of relief in her eyes.

"I'm afraid I did, and I was in such a stew over our money affairs that I was more ungenerous than I otherwise might have been; and all the while poor Kitty was lying sick in hospital. What a tangle life is to be sure!"

Mrs. Morgan shed bitter tears on hearing of the calamity which had overtaken Kitty, whom she simply adored as a being far beyond every one else in beauty, grace, and kindness; and in trying to comfort her the two girls lost some of their own heavy-heartedness.

"Kitty is getting better fast now, the letter says; and perhaps she will come home for a holiday, when she is out of hospital," Sue said, thinking that such a suggestion might stay the flow of Mrs. Morgan's tears.

"Who wrote the letter? Did Kitty?" asked the old lady, brightening up a little.

"No; scarlet fever patients are not allowed to write letters, I expect, because of the danger of giving infection to the people who receive them. It was written by a person who signs himself or herself 'A. Lambert,'" Sue explained.

"Dear me, how curious; that was how I used to sign myself at one time, A. Lambert—the A. being short for Annie, you know," Mrs. Morgan said, with a retrospective look in her sunken eyes.

"Was your maiden name Annie Lambert?" asked Pattie, with great interest. It was very difficult to

beguile Mrs. Morgan into speaking of her past, and they knew almost nothing of her antecedents.

"No; my maiden name was Rousemore; but my first husband was Thomas Lambert, and I carried that name for twelve years. Would to Heaven I had been content to carry it all my life, then all the sorrows which came after might never have been!" moaned Mrs. Morgan, covering her face with her hands, and weeping bitterly.

Sue and Pattie exchanged swift looks of amazement, this being the first intimation they had had that Mrs. Morgan had been twice married, although they had somehow gathered the idea that her life with the defunct Morgan had been anything but a bed of roses.

"Don't feel so badly about it, dear; it is all past now, you know," Sue said, bestowing little pats of consolation on Mrs. Morgan's bowed shoulders.

"I don't think much about it, as a rule; if I did I should go mad, I think. But just a touch or a chance word will sometimes suffice to bring all the dreadful past back so vividly, that it seems as if I am living it all over again, and, my dears, it was a very dreadful experience," she said, with a shiver.

"But it is all over now, you must remember," Sue reminded her gently, for the poor thing was shivering as if the torture of those past years was upon her still.

"The memory of it will stay with me to the end, and I shall always have to reproach myself because of it," Mrs. Morgan said, sitting erect and beating her hands on the table with an air of despair.

"Why?" asked Sue, more from a desire to show a kindly interest in the old woman's trouble than from any expectation of being taken into confidence.

But Mrs. Morgan was less reticent to-day, or perhaps it was that she was feeling the same need for sympathy as had come to Sue on reading the letter, signed A. Lambert, which had told of Kitty's illness.

"My first husband died leaving me with a boy just nine years old ; delicate rather he was, and high-spirited as his poor father had been. I had spoiled him, too, for you see he was the only one. When I married again, after two years' widowhood, my boy did not take to his step-father, nor the step-father to him, and they were stormy years that followed. I was constantly having to interfere between them to keep the peace, and I felt all the time that the unhappy home life was just ruining the boy."

"How very hard it must have been for you to bear!" murmured Pattie, in a compassionate tone, feeling devotedly thankful that no step-father had ever come to spoil the peace of her own early home.

"It was as nothing compared with what came after," Mrs. Morgan said, clasping her fingers with a convulsive movement. "One day, when my boy was about fourteen, there was a worse disagreement between the two than usual, and it ended in my husband using his riding-whip very freely on the poor lad's shoulders, and the next morning the boy was missing."

"Had he run away?" Sue asked, thinking that, under the circumstances, this was exactly what she would have done herself.

"Yes, my dear ; but he went to his death, poor lad. A neighbour saw him hurrying across the fields to the depôt in the early morning, but he never reached there, for the river was in flood that night and had washed away the bridge. The body was found a fortnight

after, jammed in the wreckage. I have never got over that blow, and Morgan did not get over it either; he never was well again, and we just drifted from one place to another, getting always poorer, until at last he died."

Sue put her arms round Mrs. Morgan in silent sympathy, when the pitiful story was told. But Pattie went creeping out-of-doors, as if she found the atmosphere of the house quite unbearably sad.

Five minutes later she came bounding in again. "Sue, Mrs. Morgan, there is a waggon coming in at the field-gate drawn by a pair of horses that look like Mr. Jones's, and I am quite sure it must be Imogen sitting beside him, for no one else in Qu'Appelle ever has such smart hats," she cried breathlessly.

CHAPTER XXI

The Problem of Ways and Means

SUE hurried out to welcome the visitors, feeling conscious of a secret wish that they had not chosen this particular day for their coming, since now they would have to be told the ill news which had arrived concerning Kitty.

But one look at the sombre faces of the two sitting in the waggon showed her that they too must know of the trouble already. Then remembering that Mrs. Bonner and Imogen were cousins, Sue instantly leaped to the conclusion that Kitty's condition was more serious than the letter of A. Lambert had led her to believe.

Tottering rather than walking towards the waggon, for she trembled exceedingly, she called out in a hoarse tone that hardly seemed like her own, "Oh, please tell me quickly, has Kitty been taken worse?"

"Who told you she was ill?" demanded Imogen, who, clambering down from the waggon with more haste than grace, promptly took poor shivering Sue into a protecting embrace.

"We have just had a letter from somebody, telling us that Kitty is ill with scarlet fever, and in hospital," gasped Sue, who, between the terrors of her own anxious heart and the vigorous hugging of Miss Jones, was fast being reduced to a condition of extreme breathlessness.

"Then Pa and I have just driven twenty miles to find that some one else has done what we were coming to do, unless, indeed, the somebody omitted to tell you that she was getting better fast, in which case we shall not have had a lost journey after all; for she is getting better fast, you understand," Imogen said, giving Sue a shake in order to bring a little colour back into her face and lips, which had become ghastly white.

"When I saw you I thought that you had come to tell me she was worse or—or—" But Sue's voice faltered and broke, so that she could not give utterance to the direful thought which had come into her mind.

"I know how you must have felt, and I'm truly sorry for you; but you must not blame Maria Bonner too much for not having told you about Kitty's illness sooner, for she has been having a truly awful time, according to her letter which came yesterday," Imogen said, with a grave tenderness which was so unusual that Sue shivered afresh, finding it hard to believe that no greater disaster impended, and that Kitty was really on the road to recovery.

"Come into the house. Pattie will help Mr. Jones with the horses," Sue said faintly, feeling as if struck with sudden weakness, such is the unnerving effect of fear.

"I guess Pa is quite equal to unyoking his team without any assistance from any one. But he will like to talk to Pattie, who is a great favourite of his, and you can come with me and hear about Mrs. Bonner's troubles, then you won't feel so mad with her because of her neglecting to tell you about Kitty's sickness," Imogen replied, as she led Sue towards the open door of the house.

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Mrs. Morgan had wiped away her tears, pushed her painful memories into the background, and was moving about in brisk preparation of a meal for the unexpected guests who had driven so far. She greeted Imogen with pleased warmth, then told the two girls to go into the bedroom to do their talking, because she was just going to fry some potato chips, and they would not be able to hear each other talk for the sputtering of her cooking operations.

There was no trace of the bitter grief which had convulsed the lined and careworn face only such a few minutes before. Sue, bowed down by her own burden of trouble, marvelled that the old woman could put the misery of her heart out of sight so quickly, not understanding that years of quiet endurance had given her a strength of repression which happier people were not likely to possess.

Imogen pulled a bulky envelope from her pocket when the door was shut, and the two were sitting side by side on the big chest under the end window. It was a letter so full of blots, dashes, and erasures, that Sue was quite unable to gather its sense, and had to fall back upon Imogen as interpreter.

Mrs. Bonner had apparently written while in a state of extreme agitation, which rendered her entirely oblivious of the claims of spelling, grammar, and punctuation, the result being a hotch-potch of incoherence, from which it was very difficult to get a clear idea of her meaning. There was no beginning and no end, saving that Maria Bonner was scrawled across the bottom of the sheet.

"It took Pa and Jim and me all the time from supper until we went to bed to make this out, and Jim wrote down what he called a free and easy translation

of it for you to read," Imogen said, as she spread another and more legibly written sheet before Sue. "Maria Bonner can write a decent letter when she chooses, but I expect she is in such an awful state of worry as scarcely to know what she is doing just now."

"Read it to me, please," Sue pleaded in a spent tone, pointing to the paper written by Jim, for this seemed to her the quickest way of getting at some understanding of the circumstances.

"Very well, I will read it, only please don't look as if you are going to faint, for really you have not half so much to worry about as poor Mrs. Bonner. Kitty is ill, certainly, and in hospital; but she would have been nearly killed by overwork if she had not taken fever, so in my opinion she ought to consider herself rather fortunate in being so sick, and consequently out of it all. But I will read Jim's paper, and then you will understand for yourself," said Imogen, giving Sue a warm hug, and commencing on her task.

"I am in truly desperate trouble; never in all my life did I have so much to bear in a lump before. Poor Miss Walsh being so ill and in hospital makes it all the worse for me. I have not even written to tell her sisters that she is down with fever, and now I can't remember their address. Will you tell them, and ask them to forgive my neglect, which perhaps they will be more ready to do, as the doctor assures me that Kitty has now taken a turn for the better, and is likely to do well.

"We have had three cases of fever altogether. The first was a boarder named Miss Marlowe, whose room by ill-fortune we changed just as she was falling sick, putting two young girls, daughters of Joseph Fleming

the millionaire, in her bed. A few days after Miss Marlowe was taken to the hospital, Kitty began to show signs of the same complaint, and was also removed ; then Ruth Fleming became ill, her mother flying into a rage with me, and declaring it was all my fault, vowing she would have the law on me for imperilling her children's lives, and a lot more of the same sort. When Ruth was taken to the hospital, Mrs. Fleming would have taken her other daughter, and crossed to Victoria, where her husband had already gone on business, but the doctor would not allow her to leave the house until he was sure the other daughter had not taken infection. Mrs. Fleming railed at the doctor as she had previously done at me, and was threatening him with all sorts of penalties, when a telegram arrived from Victoria to say that her husband had been killed in a street accident. The poor woman read the wire, then fell like a log at the doctor's feet, and was unconscious for a week, but now she is beginning to recover, and the doctor thinks she will pull through. We have had two hospital nurses in the house to take care of Mrs. Fleming, two more to look after her daughter, who has also been very ill, though not with fever ; and I have been driven nearly frantic with work and worry.

“ ‘ MARIA BONNER. ’ ”

“ Oh, poor woman, what a hard time she has had ! ” Sue exclaimed in pitying tones. “ And what a terrible thing for Mrs. Fleming to lose her husband in such a fashion ! ”

“ But what an unpleasant woman to have to endure ! Fancy her railing so at the doctor and Mrs. Bonner ! ” cried Imogen. “ Really, I can't help thinking that it



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was a happy thing for Kitty to be ill in hospital, where at least she would have peace and quiet, and so away from all the turmoil of such a stricken household."

"Perhaps it was ; indeed, I suppose it must have been for the best, though it is not easy to think misfortunes can be for the best in any sense of the word," Sue answered, sighing heavily.

"Kitty is getting better, you must remember ; and I suppose in about a month she will be able to leave the hospital, and come home for a change, which will be delightful for you all," remarked Imogen, cheerfully.

"I wonder if that Mr. Fleming who was killed was the same person Kitty met a few weeks after going to the city. Do you expect so?" Sue asked, after a moment's silence spent in deep thought.

"Very likely. Why?" demanded Imogen.

"Because that Mr. Fleming told Kitty that ever so many years ago he loved our mother, and wanted to marry her, only she would not have him."

"Oh, how romantic ! Poor man ; and now he has come by such a tragic death, one feels it is all the more interesting. Why, Sue, you must feel almost as if you had lost a step-father," Imogen said, looking at her friend with a sentimental dreaminess of expression.

"I don't feel like it in the least," retorted Sue, stoutly. She was thinking of Mrs. Morgan's sad history, and was disposed to lump all step-fathers in the same category. "I should have detested a step-father ; but a man who had loved my dear mother was quite different, and I wish I could have seen him and shaken hands with him, as Kitty did."

At this point Mrs. Morgan called them to the table. Her fried potatoes were a great success ; and as she had

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found time to make a custard also, the meal set before the unexpected visitors was both good and abundant.

Mr. Jones and Imogen did not stay more than two hours. Work was pressing now that the spring had come in so early, and with the two horses away, farm-work was rather at a standstill; for Betsey did not grow nimbler as time went on.

When the visitors had gone, Sue and Pattie had a council on ways and means; but they had it in the barn, because they would not trouble Mrs. Morgan with the knowledge of their financial straits.

All the winter they had paid ready money for everything, and had confidently expected to go through the spring without running into debt. But this sickness of Kitty's would make a great difference to them, and with no remittances from her, credit of some sort seemed an absolute necessity to tide them over the next three months.

"In less than three months my first ducklings will be ready, and so will those chickens we hatched out just after Christmas," Sue said, as she puckered her forehead into lines of grave consideration.

"Then there is the calf, we might sell that," Pattie suggested, but with a sigh, for they had planned to keep that as a cow of the future.

"We must not sell the calf unless absolutely driven to it. Mr. Elstow says the market is very bad for calves just now. I don't see anything for it but getting into debt for the next three months. How I wish that I knew some one who would lend me fifty dollars at reasonable interest, then we could avoid getting on to Kench's books. I do so hate the thought of debt!" groaned Sue.

"But the fifty dollars would be debt, too, would it not?" inquired Pattie, opening her eyes very wide.

"It would have to be repaid certainly, but if interest were paid on it there would be no obligation with the loan, such as there is when one goes to buy pounds of sugar, and bushels of meal, with no present intention of paying for them," Sue answered.

"Would Mr. Jones lend you the money?" Pattie asked.

"I should hate to ask him; he would either want to give it me, or refuse to take interest. I could not ask the Elstows either, for I believe they are as poor as we are. Mrs. Elstow said something last week about having to go without everything which made life pleasant or even endurable, in order to pay off the debt on the farm," Sue replied, in a worried tone.

"Mrs. Elstow mostly does grumble, I think," Pattie said, with a thrill of indignation in her tones. "One would imagine that she would be a little more grateful for her mercies. Think what a good man her husband is, and then Johnny is simply a darling baby."

"Of course she ought to be thankful. But I fear we are none of us so grateful as we ought to be for all the good things which come to us," Sue replied, with a sigh of mingled weariness and perplexity. "Do you know, Pattie, I believe that the best thing I can do is to get Sampson Kench to lend me the money. I would rather do that, and keep on paying ready money for things, than run up book debts."

"Sampson Kench! Is there no one else?" There was a note of consternation in Pattie's tone, as if she instinctively read disaster in such an arrangement.

"I know of no one to whom I could apply. Of

course we could pull through for a few weeks on the twenty dollars emergency money, but with Kitty ill we dare not touch that ; she might need it for her journey home, or for comforts in her sickness. It will be very disagreeable to have money of Kench, but then it is not pleasant to borrow from any source ; so, if you consent, I will go over to-morrow morning and arrange with him about the loan."

There was a great deal of decision in Sue's manner as she spoke, and Pattie, always easily influenced, at once yielded to her superior judgment.

"It must be as you think best ; but, oh dear, I shall feel like wanting to starve myself until the money is paid back again," she replied.

"Indeed, you must do nothing of the kind," said Sue, hastily. "It is the worst sort of economy to weaken one's powers of work and endurance. Besides, if we were to go short of food, Mrs. Morgan would be sure to notice it, and then she would go short too, which would never do, for she is very far from strong."

"Yes, poor old dear ; she looks as if a puff of wind would blow her away, and, as it is, she hardly eats sufficient to keep a sparrow vigorous. Well, do as you think best, Sue ; I always did regard you as being the wisest of us all. I don't pretend to much wisdom myself, and Kitty was always disposed to be reckless."

Pattie turned away as if the subject had ceased to interest her, as indeed it had ; then, too, she had such implicit faith in Sue's judgment that even the process of getting into debt did not seem so harassing if Sue decided that it must be done.

A very wakeful night was passed by Sue in trying to find some other way of bridging the difficulty, but

when morning came showing no clearer course, she decided to act forthwith.

Sampson Kench was at home, and quite ready to do business. Neither he nor Mrs. Kench had ever forgiven the girls for taking poor old Mrs. Morgan into their home and nursing her back to health again; but he did not tell Sue so, only professed himself very willing to do business with her.

"It is like this, you see, Miss Walsh," he said, leaning forward across the rough deal counter of his store; "we have saved a little money here by sheer hard work, but it is no good to us lying idle, and if it is put in a bank on deposit it don't bring much return, so I'm glad to make a dollar now and then by obliging my neighbours with a loan."

"What rate of interest do you charge?" Sue asked timidly, trying to rise to the occasion, and endeavouring to look as if she were very much at home negotiating business of this description.

Sampson Kench looked more sombre than ever; indeed, he might have posed as an embodiment of melancholy when he replied—

"The interest don't amount to much, and depends considerable on the length of time for which the loan is required; so a six months' term comes out at less in reality than one for three months. I should advise your taking it for six months, which will bring you round to next October, and then you'll find the repayment easier than if it falls in June."

This was reasonable, or seemed so to Sue, who accepted his suggestion without demur.

CHAPTER XXII

Kitty's Return

It was the end of April before Kitty was able to return to the little brown house at Silver Creek, and then she came to stay until September.

Great was the rejoicing over her arrival. Jim and Imogen met her at the depôt, and took her to Goshen for the night, driving her to Silver Creek the next morning, where the two younger girls and Mrs. Morgan received her with open arms.

A pale shadow of her former brilliant self she looked, but with a quiet happiness in her eyes which at once attracted the attention of Sue, for Kitty's eyes had formerly been restless and unsatisfied in their glance.

"Handsome as ever you are, just downright beautiful to look at!" murmured Mrs. Morgan, fondly patting the sleeve of Kitty's coat.

"You mean her clothes are handsome," corrected Imogen, who was gazing at Kitty's attire with great approval. "Kitty herself is a mere washed-out rag, but her get-up is stylish beyond belief. There is nothing like the city for style and finish!" she added, with a windy sigh.

"It is Kitty we are glad to see; her garments are a very secondary consideration," put in Sue.

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"And I am very glad to come and see you," Kitty replied, with her old flashing smile; but it faded a moment later as she said, with a touch of petulance in her tone, "But how solitary it all looks, and the wide distances fairly make me shiver."

"Yet it could not have been very lively in the Isolation Hospital," commented Pattie, who was on her knees wrestling with the straps of Kitty's trunk.

"I have been very happy in there, happier than ever in my life before," Kitty said softly, while a lovely rose flush stole over her face from chin to brow.

Pattie looked at her greatly mystified, but a chill crept into the heart of Sue as she realized that although Kitty had come back, it was not the Kitty who went away. Something was altered, she could not tell what, only the knowledge of the change brought with it a sensation of dreariness.

Imogen had gone back to the outer room, and was talking to Mrs. Morgan, so that the three sisters were alone for the moment; but somehow Kitty's blush had put a check on confidences, so their talk was of the most ordinary description. Kitty had brought with her a great pile of needlework from the city—linen to darn, curtains to make, valances and cushion-covers to put in repair. It would be pleasant occupation, she said, and as Mrs. Bonner would pay for the work, it would be profitable also.

When Imogen and Jim had gone, John Elstow and his wife looked in to welcome Kitty, and by the time they had taken their departure Sue had to go off to her work in the barn, whilst Pattie was equally busy attending to the wants of the poultry.

It was not until Mrs. Morgan had gone to bed, and

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the three sisters were sitting by the brisk wood fire, which the chilly spring evenings made particularly acceptable, that there was any real chance for confidential talk.

Even then Kitty sat dreamy and absorbed, stroking the great head of Bruce which rested against her knee, and appearing quite content to let the talking be done by the other two.

"Was it not terrible for you to be carried off to hospital, you poor darling?" Pattie asked, leaning her head against Kitty's shoulder.

"I felt rather bad about it at first, but afterwards I was too ill to care what happened to me, and when I began to get better I liked being there." Again Kitty blushed right up to the roots of her hair, while Sue looked on with a dreary sense of foreboding at her heart, and Pattie was frankly puzzled.

"Kitty, what makes you turn so red, while Sue looks like a person with a bilious attack?" she demanded sharply.

"I don't know what is the matter with Sue, unless indeed the bilious attack is a reality," Kitty answered, with a nervous laugh. "But I have a secret to tell you, only I don't know how to begin."

"A secret? Oh, how lovely! Never mind the beginning; strike in anywhere," said Pattie, with an expansive flourish of her arms.

"Well, then, to put it briefly, I'm in love—I mean some one is in love with me," Kitty said, looking up at the ceiling, as if not caring to meet the gaze of the other two just then.

"Oh!" interjected Pattie, in a tone of blank dismay.

"Isn't it the same thing?" asked Sue, gently, her

face turning as white as the little linen collar about her throat.

"In this case it is, I'm happy to say," Kitty answered, blushing rosier than ever. "But oh, girls, he is so very, very poor, that it will be ages before we can be married, unless indeed we can find Uncle Ben's money."

"Who is he, this man who loves you, I mean?" Sue asked, steadying her voice by a great effort, for here was a trouble, nay, a positive disaster, which she had not expected, and it came upon her like a crushing blow.

"It is Dr. Lambert, who wrote to tell you I was ill. He was the doctor Miss Marlowe sent for when she began to feel ill, and as the doctor usually in attendance at the Isolation Hospital had to go south for his health just at that time, the post was given to Dr. Lambert, who therefore attended me all the time," explained Kitty.

"I think he took a very mean advantage of his privileges," said Sue, in a wrathful tone.

"No, he did not; he waited until I was quite better, and able to do without medical care, before he spoke. I don't think he would have said anything even then, only he knew that I was lonely, struggling, and poor; and when he found me crying one day, he thought I was crying about my circumstances, and so it all came out."

"What were you crying about?" asked Pattie, who appeared to be profoundly impressed.

"I had just heard that Joseph Fleming was dead, and with him died my hope of finding the money; but that is another story, and can be told presently. Arthur came in and found me weeping, so lost his head a little

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and comforted me in his own fashion ; it was a very nice fashion too," Kitty said, smiling and blushing.

"Did you tell him what you were crying about?" asked Pattie, whose eyes were wide with interest.

"Not I! Arthur thinks I am a poor girl; and I mean to let him think so until Uncle Ben's money is found—if ever it is found—then it will be just delightful to tell him I can bring him a dower big enough to buy a practice with," Kitty said fervently.

"You speak of the money as if you were quite sure there is some," said Sue, in a wondering tone.

"So I am. At least I am sure there was some," replied Kitty; then plunged into the story of Joseph Fleming's journey to Silver Creek to pay back the last instalment of his loan.

"Then Mr. Fleming must have been the person whom that young man, Molly Derringer's brother I think it was, mistook for a commercial. The individual in question came to see Uncle Ben, bringing a heavy bag with him, and he left the bag here when he went back," said Sue, remembering the conversation which had puzzled her so greatly at the time.

"I must make that young man's acquaintance as soon as possible," Kitty said, in a brisk, decided manner; and then the talk wandered off to the surprise party. But Pattie soon brought it back to the all-absorbing topic of Kitty's love affair.

"What is Dr. Lambert like? Oh, how I should love to see him!" she said, resting her chin on the pink palm of her hand, while she gazed admiringly at her sister.

"The first time I encountered him I thought him the very rudest young man I had ever seen; but I soon changed my opinion of him," Kitty answered, shivering

a little at the remembrance of that dreadful night when she discovered what was the matter with Miss Marlowe. "But you will not have to wait long before making his acquaintance, Pattie, for he is coming here in the summer to spend a month."

"Here! to this house?" cried Sue, in consternation. "It is impossible, Kitty. Why, we are a tight fit as it is."

"Oh, he won't sleep here, of course; we must get some one to take him in. Perhaps the Elstows would be glad to have him, as, of course, he would pay them for his board," Kitty answered, laughing at the dismay depicted on the countenance of Sue.

"Where do his people live?" inquired Pattie, whose curiosity on the subject of Kitty's love affair seemed perfectly insatiable.

"He has none; not a relative of any kind, I believe. It has been rather sad for him, but it is nice for me in a way, because there will be no one to find fault with me. It has been a strange kind of betrothal; he had no one's wishes to consult, and I was as forlorn as he, saving that I had two dear loving sisters to whom I could tell my joyful news just as soon as an opportunity presented itself." Kitty squeezed a hand of each as she spoke, then rallied Sue on the gravity of her expression.

"You did not consult our wishes beforehand," Sue said, in a grudging tone. At heart she was keenly resentful of this new tie which her sister had formed, regardless of its effect on Pattie or herself.

"Of course not. Why should I?" queried Kitty, looking at Sue with a dancing light of happiness in her eyes. "The pair of you are but a couple of children in reality, and could not be supposed to have

even a hearsay knowledge of love and love-making. Oh dear, it is fearfully pathetic that girls should ever be left so utterly alone as we are! Just think of it; we have absolutely no one in the world to consult in any difficulty or perplexity, saving poor old Mrs. Morgan."

"We should be still more alone but for her," Sue replied, winking hard to keep her tears from falling.

"Of course it is not so bad for you and Pattie as it is for me, because you have me, your elder sister, to help you. I hope that it will be possible for Arthur to get a practice of some kind before long, so that we can be married; then you can both come and live with me," Kitty said, with that air of superior knowledge and superior age which her juniors always found to be especially aggravating.

"No, indeed, we shall not!" burst out Pattie, before Sue had time to open her lips. "We have tasted the sweets of independence too long to give up our liberty in such a fashion. Then, too, just consider for yourself how frightfully *de trop* we should be; to say nothing of the fact of your being compelled to live in some big horrid city."

"Pattie is quite right; we should be in your way. We should also be frightfully out of our element, and half the happiness of our present life would be gone," Sue said, in a tone of quiet decision which caused Pattie to clap her hands in triumph, but brought a frown of dissatisfaction to Kitty's brow.

"Of course Mrs. Morgan is some sort of protection for you, but not much, and I have often been seriously uneasy about you both," she remarked.

"You need not have been; no harm has come to us,

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and we are growing older with every month that passes," Sue replied.

"Besides, Sue is as wise as if her hair were already grey, and her business capacity is simply amazing ; I really think she was meant for a man," Pattie said, tilting her chair a little so that she could reach to bestow an admiring pat on her sister's back.

Sue shot Pattie a warning look, fearing that the fact of the fifty-dollar loan was to be blurted out forthwith. She meant to tell Kitty of it herself, as soon as the occasion warranted, but it did not seem fair to drag out such a piece of information on this their first night of reunion.

"When are we going to bed?" Pattie asked presently, seeing that Kitty was suppressing her yawns with difficulty.

"It is getting very late ; I should think you had better go now," Sue answered, with a look at the clock.

"Sue, let me sleep on the settle ; it is not fair that you should always be the one to be made uncomfortable," said Kitty, as they all began to prepare for bed.

"I am not going to sleep on the settle, but in my hammock ; I have used it for a month now, and I prefer it to the bed," said Sue, drawing a hammock from a box standing in the corner, which she quickly slung from two hooks in the sitting-room ceiling ; two blankets, two sheets, and a pillow followed, when lo ! there was the bed all ready for sleeping in.

"A very good contrivance, and much more restful than the settle," was Kitty's comment ; then she passed into the inner room with Pattie, and was soon fast asleep.

It was some days later, when the three girls were turning over the contents of Kitty's trunk, that she

spoke out plainly concerning the reason why she had come home empty-handed in the matter of presents.

"I don't mean to buy anything in the future that we can possibly do without, because I want to save all the money I can towards furnishing, when Arthur can manage to get a practice. Of course I should have liked to bring presents for you all, but I really could not afford it."

"You have sent us money all the winter ; we do not forget that," Sue answered quietly, yet not without some soreness of heart, because Kitty had felt it necessary to apologize for her lack of generosity. "And your sickness has been expensive for you, too."

"Sickness is always expensive," Kitty remarked, in a rather dogmatic tone, and did not deem it necessary to tell Sue that Mrs. Bonner had continued her salary during all the weeks of her illness, stopping it only on the day when she was well enough to take the cars for Qu'Appelle. But her conscience smiting her a little for her close-fistedness, she added, after a momentary hesitation, "I have managed to save a little money, though, and out of it I can pay two dollars a week towards the housekeeping, while I am at home."

"That will be a great help," Sue said, with a sigh of relief, for the ready-money difficulty seemed always to the fore, and the prospect of even this small income was comforting to the harassed young breadwinner.

"I shall be able to get through a lot of sewing while I am at home, and that will bring in some more money," Kitty went on, as she sorted and folded the contents of her trunk. "I shall wear my smartest hats and blouses when I go to see people, then they are sure to want something equally charming for themselves."

"You have such a heap of pretty things, too," broke in Pattie, with a half-envious sigh.

She and Sue were still wearing the plain black frocks and hats bought when their mother died, but Kitty had come home attired in fascinating half-mourning wear; delicate shades of mauves and greys for her gloves, her blouses, and her hats, until the contrast between her apparel and her sisters' became quite painfully marked.

"One has to dress a good deal in the city; I have found that it does not pay to be dowdy. Have you and Sue had anything new?" Kitty asked, smoothing out the chiffon frills of her best blouse with careful fingers.

"All our money has had to go for housekeeping, and to buy food for our poultry; there has been none to spare for clothes," replied Pattie, rather bitterly. She had expected that Kitty would have brought some pretty things from the city for herself and Sue; consequently the disappointment was keen.

"I expect it has; it is such a nuisance that we cannot find that money of Uncle Ben's. I shall have to see if I can get some inexpensive material, and run you each up a pretty frock for the summer; it is such a blessing that in the country it really matters very little what one does wear," Kitty answered, as she shook out the folds of a flounced silk petticoat, a very recent acquisition which she called upon her sisters to admire.

Sue rose rather hastily, and left the room, remembering some duty which called for immediate attention. In reality it was Kitty's frank selfishness which had driven her out.

She did not forget that Kitty had earned the money to buy the pretty things, and so had a perfect right to spend it as she pleased; it was the feeling that she did

not want to share her good fortune with the others, but to live her life apart from them and in her own way, which hurt poor Sue so sorely.

"I can never tell her about that dreadful loan; I am sure I cannot," Sue murmured, as she went about her work with a heavy heart. "Yet she must know that we needed money from somewhere. Oh dear, what a burden debt is!"

It might be a still heavier burden later, as already she was beginning to understand; but it was a burden that she and Pattie would have to bear alone, since Kitty was plainly not interested in their difficulties.

Sue worked hard all that day, assuring herself that active effort was the best means of drowning discontent, succeeding in doing this so effectually that the coming of night found her worn out but serene.

The days seemed to fly by now that Kitty had come home; the presence of the bright, light-hearted sister made a vast difference in the monotonous round of daily life, for she could be vastly entertaining when she chose, and just now she did choose to do her best in this way, because her inner consciousness told her that her treatment of Sue and Pattie was not so disinterested and kind as it should have been.

Many times she wondered how they had managed to do without the fifteen dollars a month which she had allowed them up to the time of her illness. She had come home prepared to pay up the arrears, but when they complained not at all about money matters, she forbore to do so, telling herself that if they were in want they could ask her to help them, and if not, she had a complete right to keep her money for her own use.

CHAPTER XXIII

John Elstow's Boarder

It was glorious July weather, and Sue's raspberries were just fit for gathering, when Kitty came back from the store one morning, blushing and smiling over an open letter.

"Sue, here is news; Dr. Lambert is coming next week, instead of the tenth of August. Aren't you glad?"

"I don't know; I will tell you when I have seen him," Sue answered, discreetly reserving her judgment.

"How cautious you are; I don't think you could make a mistake or do a rash thing if you tried," Kitty said, with a merry laugh.

Sue shrugged her shoulders, thinking of the money that was owing to Sampson Kench, and which would have to be repaid with interest in October. But as that was not a subject for present thought or discussion, she tried to put it out of her mind, and to interest herself in Kitty's coming happiness.

"Will you go over to the depôt to meet Dr. Lambert?"

"I expect so. Can you spare Diamond for the day?"

"I don't think Diamond could do the forty miles in one day; you would have to go over on the afternoon before and spend the night at Goshen."

Kitty frowned. "That is a nuisance. Imogen is very nice, kind, and hospitable; but when she waxes sentimental, she gets on my nerves rather badly. You know how she talks about Jim, and his devotion to her; if she began in that strain to Dr. Lambert, or even alluded in any way to our betrothal, I should feel horribly uncomfortable. On second thoughts I don't think I will go to the depôt, so John Elstow can meet his own boarder, and I shall be spared the trouble."

"I am going to pick raspberries; will you come too, or must you sew?" asked Sue, gathering up a handful of small fruit-baskets, and piling them on to a barrow.

"I am not obliged to sew, for I have almost finished those three blouses; but the sun is so hot this morning that I don't think I will come out, or I may get my face scorched as red as a boiled lobster, and I am particularly anxious not to look a fright just now," Kitty replied, tilting her big parasol to shade herself more effectually.

"Very well. Pattie is already in the other patch gathering strawberries, so please tell Mrs. Morgan that dinner must wait until we have done gathering to-day, because I have to be busy in other ways this afternoon," Sue said, then trundled her barrow with its burden of small baskets off to the raspberry plantation.

She was rather proud of those baskets, which she and Pattie had woven during the winter evenings of rushes gathered from the margin of the creek, and if they were not finished with professional neatness they were strong and serviceable, which did just as well.

"It is a good thing that you and I have no lovers, Pattie, or I don't know what we should do in fruit-

gathering time," Sue said a little grimly, when she had explained the reason for Kitty's non-appearance.

Pattie laughed blithely. "I hope if I am ever loved it will be for myself, and not for my complexion, and then a little sunburn more or less won't matter." She had come to help Sue with the raspberries now, having finished the strawberry-gathering, which, to put it mildly, was a very back-aching occupation.

"Fruit-picking is quite the nicest work we have to do," Sue said presently, as the two moved slowly side by side down the alley of green canes, each with a basket slung at her waist, so that both hands should be free for stripping off the ripe red berries.

"I would just as soon feed chickens or milk cows; I like things that are alive," said Pattie.

"The worst of things alive is that they have to be sold for money, or killed for food. It is that thought which spoils my pleasure in them, so I prefer inanimate life. How hot the sun is this morning, and one can't hold a parasol and pick berries at the same time!" Sue sighed, as she tried to think of green trees and shady places, in the hope of getting a little coolness by this means, for in the open field even the wandering breezes seemed like the breath from a furnace.

Talk between the two girls flagged after this, though their fingers moved even more briskly than before, for the end of their task meant a rest in the shade, and that was a goal worth striving for.

"Here comes Mr. Elstow, and he wants to speak to you, Sue; he has the fresh colt harnessed to the waggon, and does not want to drive into the field," Pattie said presently. Her eyes were sharper than Sue's, who had merely seen that some one was driving

past their gate, without knowing who the some one was.

"Run to him, Pattie; perhaps he wants Diamond this afternoon. If he does, say that you will ride the horse to Creek Head after dinner, and bring it home this evening, for Kitty needs it to-morrow, you know."

Pattie sped away with a fleet foot, regardless of the heat; and looking at her, Sue wondered what their dead mother would have said to see the once delicate child run like that.

"Thanks to Canada!" murmured Sue, with a thrill of gratitude; then an innate sense of strict justice caused her to add, "And thanks also to unlimited fresh air."

There had been fresh air in abundance at Stoney-croft, only the pity was that Pattie had had so little of it; but circumstances had changed all that, and the troubles which had seemed to threaten the greatest disaster for the delicate sister had in reality been the means of bringing her the greatest good.

John Elstow did not happen to want Diamond that day, but gave Pattie a message for Kitty, to the effect that he was going to drive over to meet Dr. Lambert at the depôt, and would take Miss Walsh if she would care to go.

"No, thank you; I don't think I should," said Kitty, tossing her head a little disdainfully when the message was delivered to her. "Fancy the pleasure of a first talk to Arthur, with that great clumsy farmer man looking on in critical fashion."

"Kitty, you are too bad. Mr. Elstow has been, and is, our best friend," Sue exclaimed, in exasperation.

"I did not say anything about the quality of his

friendship, only that he was big and clumsy, which is undeniable," laughed Kitty, who was in riotous spirits.

"While Dr. Lambert is five feet nothing, I suppose, and slender to match," suggested Pattie.

"Wait until you see him," admonished Kitty, refusing to be betrayed into description of the man who appeared to have won her heart so completely.

Despite her protestations to the contrary, however, Kitty had privately made up her mind to drive over to the depôt with Mr. Elstow, and was setting out for Creek Head, to tell him so, on the day before Dr. Lambert's expected arrival, when, as she came out of the field gate into the dusty track which served as highway, her attention was arrested by the sight of an approaching cyclist.

"Poor misguided man!" she murmured, as she watched the wheelman toiling through the dust. "I wonder who it can be; some one riding for a wager, or for the sake of the heaviest exercise he could find?"

She was turning away, lacking sufficient curiosity to wait until the dusty cyclist came near enough for identification, when a shout in a familiar voice brought her to a sudden stand, while a vivid blush surged over face and brow.

"Arthur!" she exclaimed, half-incredulous even now, although the cyclist had by this time come near enough for her eyes to confirm the evidence of her ears.

Dr. Lambert laughed. "What did you take me for—a tramp, or an up-to-date Red Indian taking the war-path in the fashion of the twentieth century?" he asked lightly, taking her hand, and bowing over it, as if Kitty were a princess.

There was a gleam of mischief in her eyes as she replied demurely—

"It was the bicycle which bewildered me; if you had been on a horse, I should have taken you for a cattle-thief, and probably rushed home to set Bruce at you, for my sisters keep a cow or two, and we could not afford to lose them."

"I wish the bicycle had been a horse, despite the risk of being taken for a cattle-lifter and treated accordingly. I have wished it for nineteen dusty miles of the twenty between here and the depôt; but if I had wished it for twenty more, it would not have altered the fact that it wasn't a horse," he said, looking at Kitty with approving eyes, and thinking she appeared even more charming in the country than she had done in the city.

"What made you come to-day instead of to-morrow?" she demanded, growing confused and shy under the influence of his steady gaze.

"I could get away so easily, that it seemed a pity to grill in the city when one might be in all the enjoyment of this;" and he nodded, as if including summer sky, smiling landscape, and herself.

"You will have to make your peace with Mrs. Elstow as best you can, for she would be certain not to hang out her starched antimacassars and things until the last moment; and if you should happen to walk in upon her before that is done, I can only imagine what her feelings will be like," Kitty said, shaking her head with a reproachful air.

"Is she that sort? I think you will have to go with me to assist in softening her heart towards me. Is that Creek Head yonder?" and he pointed to the little brown house standing back in the fields.

"No, that is where my sisters live. You must come there first and be introduced to my family—what there is of it," she said, with a wistful sigh and a glance at her trim black skirt, as if to emphasize the fact of the mourning which had been so recently.

"I am so dusty," he objected ruefully.

"Of course you are, but what does dust or anything else matter in a place like this? It is not the city, you know, and we cannot appear as trim as if we had just stepped out of a bandbox."

"You do," he said, with another approving glance, which brought Kitty's blushes into evidence again.

"Oh, I have no farm work to do, which makes all the difference. You will find Sue and Pattie looking dusty, blowsed, and broiled, just as you do yourself; but they will be very glad to see you, notwithstanding," she answered, walking by his side along the field-track.

"Very kind of them. What a lonely place for two girls to live in!" he exclaimed, turning to survey the wide landscape, which, from where they were standing, showed no sign of human habitation saving that solitary brown house.

"They do not live alone; an old woman whom we took in out of charity lives with them, and mothers them," she said, with a touch of sharpness.

"I think you said one was younger than you?"

"Both are. Sue is eighteen—here she comes round the corner of the barn with that big bucket—and Pattie, who is going to be the beauty of the family some day, will be seventeen on her next birthday."

"It is funny how little you have told me about your home; I never realized it until this morning,"

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Dr. Lambert said, lifting his hat to Sue, who was coming to meet them, and gazing in amazement at the stranger.

"There was so much else to talk about, which would interest you more," she murmured, with half-apology in her tone. Despite the fact that Dr. Lambert had declared himself sprung from the people, a man who had risen by his own efforts, Kitty had decided that he was of aristocratic parentage, and would therefore rather scorn the petty details of their simple life at home.

She was even a little nervous about what he would think of Sue, who certainly did look rather rough and countrified, as she came towards them laden with the big bucket.

But the roughness was only of the exterior, and Sue's greeting of her sister's friend was just what such a welcome should be—pleasant, kindly, and cordial, and with no false shame about the primitive simplicity of the home and surroundings of their daily life.

"You will not go to Creek Head until this evening. We shall be so pleased for you to stay here with us, and Mrs. Morgan will be sure to have enough dinner for one extra ; it is when our friends arrive in battalions of six or seven, half an hour before a meal is served, that we find it embarrassing," she said, looking up into the stranger's face, and deciding that she was going to like him.

"I shall be very pleased to stay, if you will promise not to regard me as a nuisance. I am rather a lonely person, you know, and it is always a delight to me to get inside a real homely home," he answered.

"We must tell Mrs. Morgan that, and then she will treat you to a special petting," laughed Sue.

"Who is Mrs. Morgan?" he asked, as if struck by the name.

"The little old lady who lives with Pattie and me; she has had a hard life, without much love in it, and she fairly revels in having two girls to take care of. Ah, here she comes!" said Sue, as the small, shrunk figure, in the black frock which was too big, came to the open door, and stood on the threshold peering out at the approaching stranger.

Dr. Lambert stopped suddenly, his alert, vigorous figure becoming for an instant rigid; then starting forward, he cleared the space between himself and the little old woman on the doorstep in a few long steps, and catching her in his arms, cried with quavering, joyful tones—

"Mother, mother! have I found you at last?"

"Arthur!" shrieked Mrs. Morgan, "Arthur, is it really you? But they said you were dead; and I saw your body myself."

"The body of some one else, mother, for I am very much alive, as you see for yourself. I've searched for you in every direction, but I never could find you, although I've been more than once told that you were dead," he said, keeping his voice as steady as possible, in order to quiet her violent agitation, which was painful to witness.

"Arthur! Arthur! can it really be you, my own dear boy, given back to me from the grave after all these weary years? Oh, who am I, and what have I done, that God should be so good to me?"

Kitty and Sue stood in the background with awe and amazement on their faces. Neither Dr. Lambert nor Mrs. Morgan took any notice of them, or seemed

to remember that there were other eyes to witness their meeting.

Then a wave of anger and offended pride surged through Kitty's heart, and turning on her heel she went swiftly round the house and out of sight. She had been so proud of her conquest, and Dr. Lambert, in her eyes, had seemed such a superior being, that she had even been afraid to tell him about the humble surroundings of her home, through a fear lest he should despise her, and so it was mortifying beyond the power of words to express to find him claiming a poor old creature like Mrs. Morgan for his nearest relation, and seeming proud of the discovery.

There was a narrow path from the house, through currant scrub and trailing brambles, to the creek side. Plunging into this, Kitty went forward at a great pace, her one desire being to get as far away from that scene on the doorstep as she could.

She could hear Pattie singing farther away in the scrub as she dashed along, and the sound of the joyous melody made her writhe anew, so ruffled and angry was she at the discovery which had just been made.

It was the day after her return from the city that Pattie had told her of Mrs. Morgan having at the first been named Mrs. Lambert, and when Pattie had talked of how funny it would be if Dr. Lambert should turn out to be some kinsman of the old woman's, she, Kitty, had retorted in a scornful tone—

"That, of course, is entirely absurd and impossible, because Dr. Lambert is so thoroughly a gentleman that he could only have sprung from a refined and cultured stock."

The words recurred to her now, and seemed fairly

to sting her ears. If Sue and Pattie laughed at her now, who could blame them?

Lashing herself every moment into a state of wilder agitation, Kitty went onward almost at a run, sobbing and panting as if disaster had come to her, when by rights she should have been on her knees, thanking God for the happiness which would shine into two lives, because of the unexpected reunion which had just taken place at the little brown house.

When Kitty had hurried away in such a curious fashion, Sue had the feeling that she ought to go also, only it seemed a little hard that there should be no one at hand to rejoice with Mrs. Morgan over this wonderful turn in events, and so she stayed.

There were tears of sympathy raining down her cheeks, only she did not notice them. The old woman was stroking the young doctor's face with her withered fingers, calling him her baby and her darling, lavishing endearments on him, while he stood with the frail, bowed form clasped in his arms, as if he would never let her out of his sight again.

Presently Mrs. Morgan stirred to ask a question. "Arthur, if you weren't killed that time, how was it that you didn't come back?"

"I did, two years afterwards; but then you had gone, and I never could trace you," he answered; then looking round at Sue, who hovered sympathetically near, he said, "Where has Kitty gone? Tell her to come here, and rejoice with me over my wonderful discovery, for one does not find a lost mother every day in the week."

CHAPTER XXIV

Subdued

IT was easy to call Kitty, but not so easy to find her. Sue gave up the attempt, when half an hour of searching yielded no result. She knew her sister well enough to make a guess at the state of mind into which Kitty had probably flung herself, and decided that on the whole it was best to leave her to return at her own time.

"I cannot find Kitty, but she will be sure to come back presently, and as you two must have such a heap to talk about, suppose you sit on that bench in the shade and begin, while I get some dinner ready," she suggested ; then stooped to kiss Mrs. Morgan, because of the wistful yearning in the sunken eyes.

"My dear, I do hope Kitty won't be cross with me," the old woman whispered, clinging to Sue in a sort of dumb ecstasy, while Dr. Lambert picked up the bicycle which was lying on the ground, and wheeled it into the shade of the house.

"There is nothing to be cross about," Sue said decidedly. "We are very glad for your happiness, dear ; it must indeed be a wonderful thing to have one's dead come to life again, after so many years of silence."

"Ay, it is that !" ejaculated the old woman, with a

shake of her head ; then she went off to sit down in the shade with her son, 'whilst Sue wrestled single-handed with the cooking, until Pattie came in laden with a basket of the first ripe black currants, which meant that jelly-making would start that same afternoon.

"Sue, has the world turned upside down, that you should be cooking dinner, while Mrs. Morgan is sitting at ease with her head resting against the shoulder of an utter stranger?" Pattie asked, opening her eyes very wide indeed at the unwonted aspect of affairs.

"The young man is Kitty's Dr. Lambert, and he turns out to be Mrs. Morgan's son who was supposed to be dead. It is tremendously interesting, but I shall be happier about it when dinner is safely disposed of. Can you help me?"

"Of course, though by the look of the two out there dinner does not matter much to them. Where is Kitty? Does she know?"

Sue looked troubled. "I expect she will come back soon, but she has gone off somewhere now, and I can't find her."

"Poor Kitty! I expect it was something of a shock to her to find that Dr. Lambert came of such a very ordinary stock, though indeed a man might have a worse mother than our poor dear old Mrs. Morgan. I only hope that he won't want to take her away from us," said Pattie.

"So do I. Really it would be difficult to get on without her now; but we must wait and let things sort themselves. Call them in to dinner now, Pattie, will you, dear? I shall have to hurry all the afternoon to make up this wasted time." Sue was flurried and out of breath with her hasty dinner preparations; she was also

rather untidy, but in her concern about Kitty, she forgot to put the best appearance on herself.

However, the dinner was good and abundant, served too with a daintiness one would not expect to find amid such primitive surroundings, so that the tired cyclist felt himself to be in very good quarters indeed, doing full justice to his meal, and apparently enjoying himself.

To Sue's unspeakable relief, he asked no questions about Kitty's absence—did not seem to notice it, in fact—but chatted away as intimately as if he had known them for at least a month.

"Here comes Kitty!" exclaimed Pattie, when at length the meal came to an end and a shadow darkened the threshold.

It was not Kitty, however, but Mrs. Elstow, who had left her horse and waggon at the farther gate, and walked up the field to see if she could do any errands for them at the store. She was very much surprised to find that her summer boarder had already arrived, and was only consoled on being told that he would not be at Creek Head until sundown.

"Oh, then I shall have time to go on to the store, do my errands, and get home to finish my work, for I haven't got the place half trimmed up yet," she said to Pattie, with a sigh of relief. "The men are out in the hay to-day, and it leaves everything about the house to me, you know."

"Where is Johnny?" Pattie asked, wondering if his mother had left him in the waggon, and what the consequences would be if she had.

"Frank has taken him to ride on the mower, so I have had him off my hands the whole morning. A real

help it is, too. Where is Kitty?" asked Mrs. Elstow, her gaze sweeping the room in search of the eldest Miss Walsh.

"She is not in just now. Did you want her?" inquired Pattie, trying not to look as uncomfortable as she felt.

"I was only going to speak to her about a blouse I want made, but it will do another day, and I must be getting on now, or my errands won't be done. Then we shall be seeing you up at our place before dark, Dr. Lambert?"

"Unless I lose my way in coming, Mrs. Elstow, in which case it may be after dark; but I will not be late if I can help it."

"What about your luggage; you weren't able to bring that on a bicycle?" she said rather curiously, scrutinizing the young man, who was clearing away the dinner in as handy a fashion as if he were a hotel waiter by profession.

"No, I left it at the dépôt, to be sent forward at the first chance that offered, or, failing that, I will borrow a waggon and fetch it myself; no need to trouble Mr. Elstow in these busy days," the doctor said, as he bustled to and fro, looking as if he were enjoying himself immensely.

"That is real considerate of you, for we are busy just now," Mrs. Elstow replied; then took herself off, much relieved to find that her summer boarder appeared to possess the happy knack of making himself useful.

Sue was out-of-doors, busy with the first stages of her jelly-making, and Pattie, seeing how little she was needed in the house, went off also to the open-air task which needed her most.

Dr. Lambert helped Mrs. Morgan to wash the dishes, then he swept the floor, and leaving his mother to complete the task of putting the place straight, came out to see if he could not help Sue.

"I want to thank you for being good to my mother," he said, his voice sounding harsh because of the strain he was putting on himself.

"She has been good to us too," Sue replied, adding, with a quick glance at his face, "I hope you won't want to take her away from us?"

"I don't think she would like to leave you. But it will be my privilege to see that she is not quite a dead weight on you. Ah, how good you have been! Even the clothes she is wearing were your mother's—so she tells me."

Sue stirred her pot of boiling black currants with a vigorous hand. Pattie called that pot the witches' cauldron; but it was only careful work, not witchcraft, that was needed to turn the boiling liquid into clear, firm jelly.

Dr. Lambert watched the stirring process for a few moments in silence, then he burst out with the question which Sue had so much dreaded to hear—

"Why did Kitty go off in that fashion, and where is she hiding now?"

"I do not know," Sue answered, in very evident confusion and distress.

"But you can guess?" he insisted, in so harsh a tone that she trembled for Kitty's happiness, which seemed to be hanging in the balance.

"Kitty is rather young, and she is not very wise. I expect she will be very sorry presently for having behaved in this fashion; but until then we must have

patience," Sue said, feeling that nothing but utter candour could save the situation now.

"But, pardon me for being so dense, why did she go off in that fashion?" he asked, with such genuine bewilderment that Sue felt really sorry for him, and hastened to explain, though fearing all the time lest it should make matters worse.

"Kitty is rather proud; she has talked a great deal of your position, and has thought it a great honour that you should care for her; and—and—I suppose it was something of a shock to find that after all you were only Mrs. Morgan's son."

For a moment Dr. Lambert stood frowning so heavily that Sue felt frightened; then he burst into a shout of ringing laughter, which brought an echo from the wooded hills beyond the creek.

"Poor Kitty! So it was hurting to her pride to feel that I had sprung from such a humble origin. Well, I have told her the same thing before, only she did not choose to believe it, I suppose. I hope the rest of you are not going to give me the cold shoulder because I have been so happy as to find my mother."

"Oh no. We shall feel that your relationship to Mrs. Morgan is an additional bond of interest," Sue said earnestly, while she had in her heart the unspoken thought that they would feel the greater liking for him because of the manner in which he had rejoiced over finding the mother who had been lost so long.

"Ah, that means you and Miss Pattie prefer to have the gingerbread without the gilt; but Kitty thinks she would rather have the gilt without the gingerbread," he said, with a suspicion of mockery in his tone.

"She is not like that, really; it was only the

suddenness of the discovery which threw her off her balance," pleaded Sue, who was always loyal.

"I am going to find her. She has had time for reflection now, and it is as well to know just how we stand."

"But you don't know where to look," expostulated Sue, shivering a little as she remembered the long weary search of Evangeline in Longfellow's poem; but, of course, the circumstances here were different.

"The search will not be difficult," he replied, laughing. "Over in that direction, open fields as far as one can see—she would not wander in that direction because there is no cover to hide her; back there the creek, only to be crossed by wading, therefore equally out of the question now. That leaves only the patch of scrub, bush, forest in miniature, or whatever you call it; and as I can see a little path winding into it, that is the way I will take. So good-bye for the present."

Sue watched the alert figure, clad in summer tweeds, until it was hidden from view by a bend in the path, and a dip in the ground. There was no doubt in her own mind as to Kitty's good fortune in having won the love of a man like Dr. Lambert, but there were many fears in her heart lest Kitty should make a trouble of what in reality should be matter for rejoicing.

A mile farther on the little track through the currant scrub took its way by stepping-stones across the creek, and finally lost itself among the thickly wooded hills bordering the Indian Reservation.

No one ever used the track now, excepting when the girls went that way for pleasure; but at some time in the past it must have been trodden with great frequency and regularity, for the swampy places had

been filled in, and the stepping-stones across the creek were settled so that they should not wobble.

Kitty was sitting in gloomy dignity on the trunk of a fallen poplar tree. She had been thinking that the little valley in which she found herself would be a fine place for picking up kindling wood, of which Sue had only yesterday been bewailing the lack. She was more than half inclined to set about gathering a bundle now to take back with her, for her passion had spent itself, and she was beginning to be ashamed of herself.

Then away in the direction of the creek she heard a man's voice singing, and instantly she sat stiffly erect on the fallen tree trunk, endeavouring to look coldly dignified and indifferent.

But the man came on very slowly, repeating a line of his song many times, as if he found it difficult to get the melody to his mind.

It was uncomfortable to maintain her stiff pose so long, and Kitty found herself smiling broadly at the inability of the singer to get that particular line right.

She was still smiling when Dr. Lambert came sauntering into view, and although she tried to look sternly forbidding when he flung himself on the ground at her feet, the effort was rather a failure, and she knew it was.

"Do you know, Kitty, I fancy that I am going to enjoy my summer holiday very much indeed," he said, tilting his cap over his eyes to shade them from the sun, and heaving a sigh of deep content.

"I am glad to hear it," she remarked in a frosty tone.

"Of course happening on my poor little mother in this unexpected fashion makes all the difference to

me," he went on. "Every good thing in my life hitherto has been poisoned for me by the uncertainty about my mother. I have often felt that it would be a relief to know for certain that she was dead, and so for ever out of reach of her second husband's brutality ; but although I had heard rumours of her death, I was never able to verify them, and the possibility that he might die and set her free did not occur to me. I have searched for traces of them year after year, yet never could come on the slightest clue, until I walked across the field with you three hours ago, and saw my mother standing on the doorstep."

"It must have been very astonishing." Kitty's tone had thawed a little, although it was still lacking in interest.

"I should not have been so utterly taken by surprise if you had ever talked to me freely of your home and your circumstances," he said, with so much reproach in his tone that Kitty looked at him in surprise.

"What more was there to tell you? I never hid the fact of my poverty."

"That I admit ; but you were unwilling to discuss the affairs of your home, the little details of which would mean so much to a man who had for years lacked even the pretence of a home."

"It seemed foolish to be always talking of myself and my own people," she said, using the old argument in rather a lame fashion.

"That being your attitude, it is of no use blaming me because I also refrained from inflicting on you the details of my past. I told you that I had sprung from the people, and if you chose to regard me as coming

from aristocratic parentage, that was plainly not my fault ; so you have no right to be offended with me for finding my long-lost mother in your home." There was a touch of masterfulness in his manner which appealed to Kitty more than she would have chosen to admit.

"I see no need to discuss the matter any further," she remarked, giving him a glance out of the corner of her eye to see how he took it.

"Just as you please." He was on his feet now, and looking down at her with an expression on his face which caused her to quail with a fear lest she had gone too far. "We will either discuss the matter now, and very fully, too, or I will go back whence I came, and make arrangements for removing my mother from a position which cannot fail to be irksome in the future, whatever it may have been in the past."

A moment Kitty hesitated, battling with her pride ; but misunderstanding her silence, or perhaps willing to precipitate matters a little, Dr. Lambert turned abruptly on his heel, and was moving backward in the direction of the creek, when she started up in a violent hurry, calling out in imploring tones—

"Oh, please don't go away, and don't be angry either, then I won't be bad any more."

It was nearly supper-time. Mrs. Morgan was hovering restlessly about the well-spread table, whilst Sue and Pattie were secretly growing very anxious about Kitty's lengthened absence, when two figures emerged from the narrow path through the currant scrub, walking hand in hand like children coming home from play.

"Here come the wanderers ; now we can have

supper!" exclaimed Sue, with a great relief in her voice, for she realized that a crisis had been safely passed.

"Did you think we were lost?" gaily demanded Kitty, as she came into the house with her alert and springing step.

"We were thinking of having a notice posted at the police barracks to the effect that you were missing; we were also thinking of beginning supper, and only refrained from fear lest we might eat it all, which would have been disastrous for you, as we are very hungry," Pattie said, sweeping the coffee-pot from the stove, just as it was going to boil over.

"Sit there, mummy, close to your son, and I will go to the other side of the table."

Kitty gently hustled Mrs. Morgan into a chair as she spoke, and took her own place opposite, dropping her gaze demurely because of the approval which shone for her in Dr. Lambert's eyes.

"Kitty wasn't cross after all," Mrs. Morgan said, turning to Sue, and speaking under cover of Pattie's rattling of the cups and saucers. Then a great peace came into the worn face. Life had been very hard for the old woman through many weary years, but the stormy weather was in the background now, and her evening sky was bright with happiness.

CHAPTER XXV

The End of the Summer

THE busy weeks of the summer flew by so fast that neither Sue nor Pattie seemed able to keep pace with the hurrying days. Dr. Lambert stayed out his holiday at Creek Head, then left hurriedly, having secured a post in Japan, which would take him away for a year.

Mrs. Morgan fretted a good deal over his departure, for to her it seemed like having found her son only to lose him again. But the girls consoled her amongst them ; Kitty being especially loving and devoted.

When September came, the time of Kitty's departure for the city arrived, and then indeed a great loneliness settled on the dwellers in the little brown house.

But the weeks of autumn were as full of work as the weeks of summer had been, and in the busy daily round even Kitty's absence soon ceased to trouble the two sisters, who had so many tasks to absorb their attention.

Then Mrs. Morgan had a fall, spraining her ankle and bruising herself so much, that for weeks she was an invalid, thus throwing an added burden on the shoulders of Sue and Pattie.

As the weeks of September slipped quietly through, Sue found herself worrying a great deal about the

repayment of the loan from Sampson Kench. The summer had been much more expensive than she had anticipated ; and although her crops of raspberries and strawberries had been fairly successful, the wild black currants on which she had built her hopes were an almost entire failure, the whole of her jelly output not amounting to thirty pints.

The chickens and ducks had paid well. That is to say, they had brought in small sums from time to time, which paid for household stores ; helping to keep expenses on a ready-money basis. But try as she would, Sue found it impossible to save a lump sum of fifty dollars, and the burden of her indebtedness was beginning to press on her very heavily indeed.

Dr. Lambert had volunteered to pay a hundred dollars a year towards the maintenance of his mother, and had promised to send a first instalment of twenty-five dollars at the end of October ; but Sampson Kench would expect to receive double that sum at the beginning of the month, and where it was to come from was more than Sue could tell.

She could not ask Kitty for the money, for Kitty, having spent rather lavishly during the summer, had gone back to the city with very straitened finances.

"What will you do about that loan, Sue?" asked Pattie, on the day before the payment became due.

"I shall tell Mr. Kench that if he will wait until the end of the month, I will pay him half the money and half the interest ; then he must wait until Christmas for the remainder," Sue answered, rather drearily.

"Will he wait, do you expect?" Pattie asked, with a shiver ; she had never lost her dislike to Sampson Kench, nor her fear of him either.

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"I think so, if we make it worth his while. I have ten dollars saved up now, and I might scrape together another five by the end of the week ; but we should only be jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire, because we should have to run into debt at the store."

"Sue, you are a good sister, I shall never be able to make up to you all that you have done for me," Pattie burst out so vehemently, that Sue looked at her in astonishment.

"What is the matter with you? Surely you are not going to cry?" Sue demanded hastily, for tears looked imminent, and she hated to see Pattie weep.

"It makes me feel bad to see you worried so much over the difficulty of making both ends meet, when I know that you might be in a situation where you could earn forty or fifty dollars a month and your board, instead of grubbing on here from year's end to year's end, making a home for me!"

"Silly Pattie to make such a fuss about nothing!" retorted Sue, with an unsteady laugh. "The only way in which a plain individual like myself could earn such a big salary would be by cooking ; and you know I don't like that sort of work. Then, too, I should hate to give up my independence, and, worse still, I should never get on without you."

"It isn't all hardship, then, living in this solitary place, and making one dollar do the work of two?" persisted Pattie, whose eyes were wistful, although happily the tears had not begun to fall.

"Of course it is not. You know I love our life here every bit as much as you do, only we have both got to be as careful as possible until this bad corner is turned. I think we have been rather extravagant this summer ;

that is, we have eaten white sugar at five cents when we ought to have been content with brown at three cents. We have taken cream with our berries when it would have been wiser to be content with skim milk.

"But these are such little things," objected Pattie.

"It is the little things which make the difference," replied Sue, with the air of a philosopher.

"Kitty would not have liked the brown sugar or the skim milk, I fancy," Pattie went on, shaking her head in a decided fashion; for the elder sister's love of dainty food was proverbial, and the others had done their best to humour her in this direction.

"We ought, I suppose, to have told Kitty of the loan, and then she would not have chafed at the small economies—at least, not after Dr. Lambert went away," said Sue, yet without much conviction in her tone.

"She would have chafed just as badly, perhaps worse; and if she had grumbled at us for borrowing the money we should neither of us have felt very happy," replied Pattie.

"Well, we can start on brown sugar and skim milk lines now, only we must have butter for our bread, and lard in which to fry our potatoes," Sue said, with a little grimace. Her active outdoor life provided her with a keen appetite, and the thought of economy in the quality of the daily food was nearly as distressing as if there were to be a limit to the quantity.

Just then the girls heard a sound of horse's hoofs in rapid approach, and both hurried out of the barn to see who the arrival might be.

"Sue, it is Mr. Elstow's Frank, and he looks frightened out of his senses," exclaimed Pattie, in dismay.

There was a new baby at Creek Head, a wee brother

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for little Johnny, which had arrived just a week ago, and the thoughts of both girls went to Mrs. Elstow, who had been very ill since her baby came.

"What is the matter, Frank?" Sue asked, turning white to her lips, as the boy reined up short and tried to speak.

"Mrs. Elstow is dead, and the boss sent me to ask if you'd spare Mrs. Morgan. The nurse has just been sent for to Benslow, and he doesn't know which way to turn," panted Frank.

"Dead!" exclaimed Pattie, in direst dismay. But Sue was battling with her own innate terror of death, and resolving what she could do for the best to help her kind neighbour in his sore strait.

"Mrs. Morgan will be of little use, I fear, because she can't move about; but I will come myself, and do what I can," she said bravely, doing fierce battle with her inward shrinking.

"No, no; oh Sue, do please listen to me!" cried Pattie, thrusting herself forward, and catching hold of her sister's arm. "Mrs. Morgan can sit on a chair, and give orders, and I will go with her and carry them out. I can't be left here alone; but you will not mind, if you have Bruce. Please let me go; remember, there are two babies to tend, and one pair of hands cannot do everything."

"You are right, Pattie; both of you must go," Sue answered, remembering the time when death had invaded their home at Stoneycroft, and how quietly courageous the delicate youngest sister had been then.

"Shall I ride back and say you are coming?" asked Frank, whose face was pinched with misery, and who had plainly been crying.

Sisters of Silver Creek

"No. Get down and harness your horse to our waggon ; then you can drive Mrs. Morgan and my sister to Creek Head. You will have to bring the waggon close to the doorstep, and I expect we shall have to lift Mrs. Morgan into it, because of her bad foot," Sue said ; then sped away with Pattie, to prepare the old lady for the sad duty which lay next to her hand.

"I will go ; at least, I shall be better than no one, and I can take care of the baby," Mrs. Morgan said, with actual joy in her heart because she could be useful to some one.

"We shall have to lift you into the waggon, because of your poor foot," Sue said, as she wrapped a big shawl round the old woman, for the October day was grey and chill.

"Back the waggon to the doorstep, let the tailboard down, and I will show you how to get me in without much trouble, as we used to load bags of meal when I lived down in Illinois. One may learn easy ways of doing most things, if only one keeps one's eyes open," Mrs. Morgan said, as with the help of her stick and Sue's arm she got herself across the floor and out to the doorstep.

Standing close to the tailboard of the waggon, luckily a hinged one, she bade Sue and Frank lift it slowly, tilting her off her feet in the process ; then, when it was level with the floor of the waggon, she crawled forward, and settled herself without difficulty.

"Sue, what will you do if I can't get home to-night, dear ?" Pattie asked, just as she was going to mount on the front of the waggon.

"Don't worry about me ; I have Bruce, you know. It will be very necessary that you should stay at Creek

Head all night, for Mrs. Morgan cannot move about, and there are two babies to care for, you know," Sue said earnestly.

"Dear old Sue, how brave you are!" Pattie exclaimed, her eyes filling with tears. Then she scrambled up into the waggon, followed by Frank, who gathered up the lines and drove away down the field at a smart pace, for every minute was of importance.

Sue watched them go with a feeling of dreary forlornness creeping over her. Mrs. Elstow, although one of their nearest neighbours, was not a very companionable sort of woman, and the family at the little brown house had never been really intimate with her, but her sudden death was disaster all the same, because of the husband and the helpless children left to mourn her loss.

Sue worked hard all day, then when darkness fell went indoors with her big, faithful dog, cooked supper for the two of them, then went to bed and slumbered dreamlessly until morning.

The fact that she could sleep like that with no one but the dog for a companion surprised her not a little, and helped to reassure her in facing the dreary days of the week which lay before her.

Soon after breakfast Frank came back with the waggon and harness, but he brought no very cheering news of the stricken household. He said that John Elstow had neither eaten nor slept since the breath left his wife's body, while the baby was a poor, ailing mite, and little Johnny had scarcely been out of Pattie's arms since yesterday.

"They are just like two angels in the place, Miss Pattie and Mrs. Morgan; what we would have done without them I can't even begin to think," said Frank,

who was even more red-eyed and tearful than on the previous day. "The nurse was capable enough in her way, but she was hard as stones; poor little Johnny couldn't bear her, and the boss didn't like her either; though I will admit she did her best for the poor thing who has gone, and the doctor said he could not have done more or better himself."

"Well, that is a great comfort, and I am glad my people are useful. Is there anything I can do for Mr. Elstow, Frank? Because, if there is, I will come over, though I can't be away long, as there is no one to look after things while I am gone."

"The boss wanted to know if you could go over to Derringer's place this afternoon; Kershaw was to have met him there to-day to settle about coming to plough your land and ours for the fall wheat. But the boss said you would be able to see to that as well as he could."

"Yes, I can manage that; I'll put the saddle on Diamond and ride over after dinner," Sue answered, thinking that it would be a real relief to get away from the deserted homestead for a time, even though the coming back would be so solitary.

Accordingly, when noon came and she had shared her dinner with Bruce, she brought Diamond in from the paddock, fastened on the saddle, and leaving the dog to guard the homestead, rode over to the Derringers' place to arrange about the fall ploughing with Kershaw, who, having more horses than he could find work for on his own land, was going about the district wherever there was need of his services.

Sue came home by way of the store, for she had to interview Sampson Kench, and to ask him to wait

for his money a few weeks longer. It was not a pleasant task, and she shrank from it with actual loathing; but it had to be done, or the man might come over to Silver Creek asking for immediate repayment, and that would be very disagreeable, now that she was alone at the little brown house.

To her amazement, however, Sampson Kench appeared very willing to wait for his money, even offering to increase the loan if it would be of any convenience to her, and was altogether amiable and obliging. This, however, did but add to Sue's instinctive distrust of the man, and as she had already had more than enough of borrowed money, she declined to consider any suggestion of adding to her indebtedness.

Bruce received her with a mighty demonstration of joyful barking when she reached the farm, so her home-coming was not so lonely as it might have been.

The next day she went to Creek Head early to help Pattie to get the house ready for the funeral. They were John Elstow's nearest neighbours, and so on them rested the entire responsibility of helping him through his present trouble. Mrs. Kench was the next nearest neighbour, and she had enough to do for herself without troubling about other people, while the next available woman lived three miles beyond Kench's store, and was at the present time an invalid.

"Who will Mr. Elstow get for a housekeeper?" Sue asked, as she and Pattie dusted and polished rooms and furniture, while Mrs. Morgan nursed the wailing infant, and kept small Johnny amused.

"He cannot get one; women will not come into this lonely place for such work, and in winter time, too, for the small pay that he could afford to give," Pattie replied.

"But he must have some one to take care of those two babies!" Sue exclaimed, with some anxiety creeping into her heart, for Pattie's manner was one of quite aggressive determination.

"The children must be taken care of certainly, and that is what I wanted to talk to you about. You know we are not very busy in winter, and the days are really very long and tedious. Now, why should we not offer to take the children for the winter?"

Sue gave a little jump of surprise; her instinctive fear had been lest Pattie was going to propose that they should go to Creek Head to live through the winter, a plan which would by no means have fallen in with her ideas of what was due to Mrs. Grundy. But to take the two motherless babes into their own home was an entirely different matter, and although such a big family would be rather a tight fit in the little brown house, it would be a fairly easy way of solving a problem for poor John Elstow.

"We could have them, certainly, if their father would give them up, but it would mean a very lonely home for him," she said dubiously.

"There is no way but to give them up that I can see. What can a man do with a motherless week-old infant?" cried Pattie, vehemently. "But leave him to me, Sue; I will talk to him about it, for I am not afraid of him, though Mrs. Morgan and Frank shrink away when he comes near, as if he were some dangerous wild animal. I made him have some supper last night; I took food and drink to him when he was sitting in there by the coffin, and I just made him take it."

Sue laughed softly. She really could not help it, although to indulge in merriment at such a time seemed

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little short of actual wickedness. But the idea of Pattie hectoring any one, even for their own good, was sufficiently diverting to bring smiles to her face, even in that shadowed home.

"Do as you like, dear ; we will manage somehow. But I must be going home now, or Bruce will be raging the place down with impatience to see me back," she said, surveying her work with considerable satisfaction ; then, rolling up her apron, she slipped on her coat and went out to mount Diamond.

The horse was ready saddled and waiting for her in the barn, so getting home was not a long process. Before she reached the field gate, however, Sue knew there was something wrong at the homestead, for the angry barking of Bruce seemed to fill all the empty landscape with sound.

"An Indian, perhaps," she murmured to herself, trying not to feel so horribly frightened ; then, as Diamond carried her up the field, she saw to her dismay that the house door stood wide open.

CHAPTER XXVI

Pattie takes the Responsibility

JOHN ELSTOW had existed like a man in a dream ever since the blow of his wife's death had fallen upon him. Doctor and nurse had both tried to prepare him for what was coming, but he had seemed unable to understand until the disaster had actually come.

The days while his dead lay unburied were mostly spent in aimless wandering to and fro, while at night he sat sleepless by his wife's coffin, trying to face the future which lay before him, and to measure the magnitude of his loss.

When Sue had gone, on the afternoon before the funeral, Pattie went in search of him, determined to get the question of the children's welfare settled without delay.

The boss had gone over the hill, Frank said, when Pattie came out to the barn in the chill of the grey afternoon to look for him.

Over the hill could only mean up to the spot among big sandstone boulders and melancholy willow trees where the creek took its rise, so Pattie turned her steps in that direction.

She had been there several times before, but the place always made her shiver, and she guessed that

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John Elstow must have chosen to walk there because the sombre surroundings suited his mood.

The afternoon was so cold that she had wrapped a big grey shawl over her black frock, which made her a match for the dim dulness of the autumn afternoon, and the neutral-tinted boulders standing sentinel-wise over the source of the creek.

John Elstow was leaning against one of the great stones, looking down at the bubbling spring with eyes which saw only his own misery, when, hearing a light step behind him, he turned to find Pattie standing at his elbow.

"Has anything gone wrong?" he asked hastily.

"No; but I had to speak to you about the children, and so I came here to find you," she answered a little nervously, for John Elstow bowed under his load of grief was a different person from the genial neighbour who had been so kind a friend.

"Yes, what is it?" And he stood erect, squaring his shoulders as if to be ready for any blow which might come upon him.

"Sue and I have been talking about the children, and we wondered whether you would let us have them to take care of for the winter, or until you could find something better for them. Mrs. Morgan understands babies so well that Willie would have his best chance, and I am quite sure that Johnny would be happy with us."

"Do you mean it?" he asked, staring at her in a dazed fashion, as if scarcely able to take in the sense of what she was saying.

"Of course I mean it. I should not dare to insult you at such a time," she retorted hotly.

"But think of the responsibility, child, and the tax on your time! It is no joke taking care of other people's children," he urged in hoarse tones; but a gleam of hope had come into his eyes.

"We are quite willing to take the responsibility," Pattie answered quietly. "You have been a good neighbour to us, and now that our turn has come to help you in your difficulty we are only too glad to be of use."

"God bless you! No one knows what I have suffered because of the children. I had even thought I might have to sell the farm, and go to live in a town until they were old enough to rough it, for no hired housekeeper would come to live in such a lone place if she could get anything better to do," he said brokenly; and then, because the relief was even more unmanly than the strain of his trouble had been, he turned from Pattie to stare down at the bubbling water again, so that she should not see his emotion.

She was stealing away again as quietly as she had come, not liking to intrude longer on his sorrowful meditation, but she had not gone more than a dozen steps when she heard him coming after her, and in another minute he was striding along by her side.

"There is no place where I would rather have the children than your house, for I know that they will be safe and well cared for with you; and, as you say, Willie will have his best chance of life. Only I could not have asked such a favour, because I know what a sacrifice of peace and leisure it must mean." He talked in a breathless fashion, but his tone was more natural, while the gleam of hope in his eyes made Pattie understand that the worst of his trouble was past.

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"One may easily have too much peace and leisure, as you call it, and then the too much grows into a horrible monotony," she answered, smiling up into his haggard face. "We shall not find the children a trouble, but a very great pleasure; only I hope you won't mind if we take them away soon, for I am anxious about Sue staying alone at night in that solitary place."

"So am I. Not that there is anything likely to hurt her, the country is too quiet for that, but it is a strain on her nerves. It is getting rather late this afternoon to take the baby out, but if you would like to go to-morrow morning early, before the time fixed for the funeral, I would drive you all down, and see you comfortably settled," he said, talking now in his natural tone, and with the kindly consideration for other people which always marked him.

"Would you not mind the children being taken away before the funeral?" Pattie asked in surprise, for she had supposed that he would be loth to part with them until after the burial of their mother.

"I should not mind; indeed, I think they would be better away, for little Johnny takes a lot of notice of things, and it is not wise to sadden him with the sight of more grief than we can help. What is that?"

The last words were an abrupt ejaculation of surprise, for they were crossing the last field to the house, and away in the distance, approaching the homestead along the cart-track from the opposite direction, a horse was coming at full gallop with a rider crouched low over its neck.

"Oh, Mr. Elstow, that is our old Diamond with Sue

on its back ; something must be dreadfully wrong ! " cried Pattie, with the colour drifting rapidly out of her cheeks.

" I will go and meet her, you can come on slowly," he said, setting off at a run in order to reach the house as soon as the horse.

But Pattie could run also, and sped along keeping pace with the farmer, so that they both reached the gate by the barn as Diamond came lumbering up at a shaking gallop, with dripping sides, and flecks of foam flying from mouth and nostrils.

" There, there, steady, old chap ! Pretty well winded you are, but you'll soon cool down," John Elstow said, catching the snorting animal by the bridle, and soothing it in the fashion best loved of horses. " Miss Sue, what has frightened you—the old horse surely did not bolt with you ? "

" Some one has broken into our house and is there now, hiding in the bedroom, while Bruce is raging round the sitting-room. The furniture is all upset and knocked about as if a fearful struggle has been going on, and I was too frightened to do anything but come for you. Will you help me ? " panted poor Sue, her voice breaking in a sob, as she stretched out her hands imploringly to her neighbour.

" Of course I will," he answered soothingly. " But you had better stay here a bit, and let Miss Pattie take care of you. Frank and I will go over at once and see what is wrong—the dog won't mind us."

" You must be careful, Mr. Elstow. I am certain there was some one in the bedroom, because of the way in which Bruce was raging and hurling himself against the door. He would not listen to me in the least, and

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so, because I was afraid, I scrambled on to Diamond's back again, and rode as hard as I could for you."

"The best thing you could do. Ah! here comes Frank," said John Elstow, who was lifting Sue down from Diamond's back and handing her over to the care of Pattie. "Here, Frank, lead out the two horses, will you, please, and we will just ride down the creek and see what is wrong at the brown house."

"Do you want a saddle put on?" inquired Frank, as he turned to obey the order.

"No; it doesn't matter, and will only take time," John Elstow answered. Sue noticed that he stepped into the house and returned with a very dangerous-looking cattle-whip; so plainly the intruder, if still shut up in the bedroom of the brown house, would have cause to rue the meeting with the master of Creek Head.

It took about one minute for Frank to disappear through the stable door and return with the two horses, and in another minute he and his master were riding at full gallop along the cart-track, the horses going at top speed from pure joy of motion, for they had been in the stable all day, and so needed nothing in the way of whip or spur.

Sue was still trembling violently, and Pattie sent her into the house to rest, then led Diamond to the barn, pulled down an armful of hay for the panting creature, brought it a bucket of water, wiped the streaming perspiration from its hairy sides, and went indoors to question Sue about her experience.

But Sue had not much to tell; the mad anger of Bruce seemed to have frightened her as much as the condition of the house and furniture.

"The table was lying on its side, the chairs were

mostly knocked over, the matting was scratched up into a heap, and everything was in the wildest confusion," said Sue. "But Bruce was like a mad dog, and I did not dare to open the bedroom door, because I felt quite sure that he would kill whoever was there before I could stop him; he was quite deaf to my calling, and I was afraid of him as well as of the unknown, who was the cause of all the commotion."

"Poor old Sue! you will just have to stay here with us until the morning; then we will take the babies and all go home together," Pattie said caressingly.

"You have quite settled to have the children, then?" Sue asked, with a crease of care wrinkling her forehead.

"Quite. Mr. Elstow is so thankful because we are willing to take care of them; and Mrs. Morgan has been crying for joy, because she will still have the baby to nurse."

"It is very sweet of you to want to have them, Pattie, but it will be a great tax on you," Sue said, with a shake of her head, as she sat down by the stove, and drew Johnny into her arms.

"Oh, I like responsibility," Pattie said, as she bustled to and fro, while the afternoon waned, and the twilight came creeping on.

John Elstow and Frank never once slackened pace until they reached the little brown house.

Bruce was not barking now, and the place looked peaceful enough as they rode across the field from the cart-track. A few fowls and ducks lingered about, in the hope of getting an evening meal, and the cow put her head over the paddock gate with an inquiring "moo," but that was the only sign of life about the place.

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John Elstow pulled his horse up sharply when about a hundred paces from the open door, and giving it to Frank to hold, walked forward with his big whip held ready for action.

The sitting-room was indeed in wild confusion ; some of the chairs were broken, the table was overturned, and broken crockery strewed the floor. There was nothing living in that room, so with a great wonder in his mind and his whip held ready for instant use, he tried the bedroom door, but found that something from the inside prevented it from opening.

Remembering the windows, he went out of the house, and passing the front one, which was shut and curtained, went round the corner to the one in the gable. This stood wide open, while the flower-bed below, which was still gay with Michaelmas daisies and nasturtiums, was trampled as if some one had leaped out of the window upon it.

Being active and alert, John Elstow soon swung himself through the window into the bare, homely room, which was so spotlessly clean. There was little confusion here, only a bedstead had been dragged forward to block the door, and prevent its being burst open.

Pushing this back, John Elstow opened the door and passed through to the sitting-room, and so by way of the outer door to where Frank waited with the horses.

"It is queer where the dog can have gone, unless, indeed, he followed whoever it was that has been in the house. Suppose you tie the horses up and milk the cow, while I have a look round," he said, sending a puzzled gaze out over the level landscape.

"Shall I feed the fowls too?" asked Frank.

"Yes, if you can find anything to give them. I

shall come back and straighten the house up a bit presently ; but I must have a look round first."

Right round the house went John Elstow, hoping to light on something in the shape of a trail, but he lacked the tracker instinct, or perhaps the ground was too dry to leave the print of footsteps. Then he went off down towards the barn, and presently espied something dark lying out on the potato-field behind the barn.

"A man, I believe. Suppose the dog has killed him!" he exclaimed, with a gasp, striding in the direction of the prostrate form, and breathing heavily as he went, for he was so shaken with his own sorrow, that he lacked the strength of mind or body to stand up against the horror of such a tragedy.

But it was no man who lay out on the bare brown earth where the potatoes had been dug and carted away. It was Bruce, the brave defender that had given his life in the performance of his duty.

"Poor dog, quite dead!" muttered John Elstow, stooping over the creature and lifting the limp head that was still warm ; then, seeing a streak of blood on the dog's chest, looked closer, and found a bullet wound.

Going back to the house and leaving the dog still lying in the field, John Elstow took the milking into his own hands, sending Frank on the fastest horse to the nearest magistrate's, to lodge a complaint on behalf of Sue.

"Don't come back here, but ride straight home, and look after things there. You can tell Miss Sue that the dog is dead, and that I shall stay here till daylight. If you should happen to meet one of the mounted police, don't trouble to go on to Mr. Nixey's, but turn back at once."

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"All right, boss ; I'll go. But after everything is done, I will come back here and stay through the night, for your place is at home now," Frank said, in a sudden impulse of bravery.

"Thank you, lad ; it goes without saying that I had rather not be away from Creek Head to-night ; still, if you are afraid to be here alone, don't come," John Elstow said, with a great yearning to spend this last night beside the coffin of his wife, yet giving Frank a chance of drawing back if his nerve were not equal to a lonely vigil at the solitary brown house.

"Oh, I shall be afraid I make no doubt ; but I'm not going to be beaten in pluck by a girl, and if Miss Sue could stay here alone at night, I guess I can do the same," Frank answered with a short laugh, as he mounted the colt, which had more pace in it than the older horse, although it was by no means easy to ride, because of its wicked tendency to shy and to bolt.

"She had the dog, remember," John Elstow remarked. He had no great opinion of his hired man's bravery, although he did not in the least doubt his goodness of heart.

"I will bring Towser down with me ; he isn't so big or so fierce as the creature that is dead, but any dog is better than none when one is alone," said Frank. And then he rode away.

John Elstow milked the cow, shut up the drove of pigs which had meandered home in the twilight from a long day of grubbing in the currant shrub ; then, when there was nothing more to be done, he went into the disordered house, and, lighting a lamp, sat down on the settle to await the coming of magistrate or

policeman. He had changed his mind about straightening up the confusion, and judged it better to leave things as they were, until some one in authority had been to have a look at the place.

He was very tired, for his nights had known no sleep of late, and he was on the verge of a doze when the shrill cry of a nightbird flying past the house roused him with a start from the forgetfulness into which he was sinking,

Then a gleam of something white in a corner under an overturned chair arrested his attention, and, rising from his seat, he made his way with caution amid the overturned and broken furniture to where the white object lay.

It was a letter that had come by post directed to Sue, but it was unopened, and when he inspected it closely under the light of the lamp, he saw that it had come from Jamaica, and that it bore the Qu'Appelle date-stamp of the previous day.

"Well, of all the curious things!" he exclaimed, talking to himself, then stopped suddenly as the galloping of a horse came to his ear, followed by a shout.

Going to the door, he was relieved to see a uniformed policeman riding up to the door in the light of the young moon, and to learn from him that Frank, who had met him a mile or so beyond Kench's store, had ridden back with him and gone on to Creek Head to do the evening work before coming to take John Elstow's place in guarding the brown house for the night.

CHAPTER XXVII

A Coloured Scapegoat

SUE could not rest in the house after John Elstow and Frank had ridden away, but taking a milkpail went out to the barn and milked the cows, which, not being used to women, were disposed to give trouble at first, so had to be coaxed into good behaviour with a handful of carrots apiece.

Creek Head was on an altogether bigger scale than the little brown house lower down the creek. The barn was twice the size of Sue's barn, while a separate stable and a covered shed for cattle made quite an imposing block of buildings. There were more animals, too, for John Elstow was prospering by dint of hard work and careful management, and his prosperity took the form of additions to his live stock.

But small or large, farm work is much alike, varying only in the amount to be done; so Sue, who was very much at home on her neighbour's property, went about her self-imposed task with a steady industry which quieted her nerves more quickly than complete rest would have done.

When all that needed attention had been done, dusk had fallen, and she went indoors followed by the

sheep dog Towser, thankful exceedingly that she had not to face the hours of darkness alone.

Mrs. Morgan sat in the low chair by the stove, nursing the weakly infant, while Johnny crouched at her feet nursing a black kitten in solemn mimicry; in two minutes at the furthest he would be pulling the kitten's tail, or wailing piteously because pussy had used her claws too freely on his chubby arms, but just now all was peace.

Pattie was kneeling before an old orange-box which stood in a corner, into which she was packing the children's clothes in readiness for going away in the morning; and Sue, who felt she would rather do anything than sit still, came to help.

The two girls worked on in silence for the most part, until the expected happened, and the black kitten, mewling and spitting, left two deep scratches on the small boy's arm, which had to be kissed by Pattie before Johnny could be quieted from noisy crying. Then Sue heard a horse coming, and went out to find that Frank had come home to do the milking and feed the animals before going back to the brown house for the night.

"I have done everything, I think, except put out corn for the horses, so if you are going back, you had better come in and get some supper at once," Sue said, detailing the various items of the evening work. Then she asked anxiously, "Did you find any one at the house?"

"No; he had got clear away, whoever it was, but he must have shot Bruce in self-preservation as he went, for the boss found the dog lying dead in the field beyond the barn," Frank answered, jerking out his news awkwardly enough, and feeling frightened lest

Sue should begin to cry over the tragic fate of her protector.

"Oh, I ought to have stayed and not been afraid, then the thief would not have dared to shoot the dog!" she cried, in bitter self-reproach.

"Good thing you didn't stay, for most likely he would have shot you as well as the dog," Frank answered laconically, then went indoors to bolt a hasty supper in defiance of all known laws for the proper digestion of food.

"Make yourself some coffee, if you want it in the night or to-morrow morning; the canister stands on the shelf behind the door; and you will find food in the pantry. Would you mind milking the cow for me? You will find a pan set ready for the milk," Sue said, as she waited on Frank while he bolted his supper in haste to be gone.

"The boss has done it. I fed the poultry and was just beginning with the cow when I had to ride for the police. It was lucky I met West, for they say he is the shrewdest man we have in this district; it saved time too, for I couldn't have reached Mr. Nixey's in less than three-quarters of an hour, however hard I had ridden. Well, now I must be off, for the sooner I'm there the sooner I can set the boss free to come home. Come on, Towser, old chap. I hope and trust no one will want to shoot you," said Frank, as he went off with a great assumption of cheerfulness to his solitary night at the little brown house.

Both girls felt the strain of waiting for the return of John Elstow, who would be able to tell them more of the happenings than Frank had been able to do. Johnny was undressed and put to bed, Mrs. Morgan

and the infant were also settled for the night, and the two sisters sat by the stove, talking in undertones, while in the next room the flower-decked coffin stood faintly shadowed by the moonlight, which stole in through a rift in the curtains.

The master of the house came home just as the harsh little American clock chimed ten, a very late hour for people to be up and about in that part of the world. But police investigation takes time, and West was not the sort of man to shirk his work.

"He couldn't make head or tail of what the thief had come for, whoever he was," said John Elstow, as he thoughtfully stirred the coffee which Pattie had been keeping hot for him. "Plainly it wasn't money, for there were five dollars in a little open tray on the chest in the bedroom, which any one must have seen at half a glance; and in the outer room, a purse with money lay on the shelf over the stove."

"I forgot to put it in a safer place before I came off this morning," Sue said ruefully; she was always rather careless about leaving money in unsafe places.

"The dollars were safe enough as it happened, but there are three chairs broken, and a lot of crockery, while in a corner of the outer room I found this. Had it come before you started this morning?" asked John Elstow, putting the unopened letter into Sue's hand.

A faint colour stole into her face as she looked at the envelope.

"No, I have not seen it before, or I should have opened it," she answered. "It is from Mr. Gordon. I hope Don is not ill again; but perhaps the letter is from him."

"I found it in the corner of the room, as if it had

been swept there in the confusion when the table was overturned. When I told West about it, he decided that it was a clue which should be followed up at once, so we went over to Kench's place to find out whom he had sent with the letter."

"Ah, and what did Mr. Kench say?" cried Pattie, who had been quite silent hitherto.

"He was too ill to say much about anything, poor fellow," returned John Elstow, gravely. "I don't know whether he suffers from some sort of heart disease, but he had a grey, pinched look on his face as if he were very ill, or had just had an awful fright. His wife says that he had an attack like it once before, last summer, I think it was, that is twelve months ago. He had been feeling rather unwell, and had gone out for a walk, and come back in the condition in which we found him."

"I remember that other attack of his, and also what led to it," Pattie said, in a tone so devoid of sympathy that John Elstow looked at her in surprise; whilst Sue, who understood, made a little warning gesture to her sister to be discreet and not indulge in revelations concerning what they had decided to keep secret. But Pattie held her head at an obstinate angle, and asked in a scoffing manner, "Did Mr. Kench bring Sue's letter over to our house at first before his illness came on?"

"No; he appeared to know nothing about it. But Mrs. Kench, when questioned closely, admitted having given a letter to one of the Indians from the Reservation to leave at your house as he went past, and she said she expected it was he who had upset your house and killed the dog."

"A very likely story!" exclaimed Pattie, in hot

indignation ; then remembering the silent presence in the next room, she dropped her voice to a lower key, and went on regardless of Sue's warning looks. "I can tell you the reason of Sampson Kench's last attack, and then you can judge for yourself whether it is not highly probable that he has been the aggressor to-day."

"Stay a moment," said John Elstow, putting out his hand to stop Pattie. "Miss Sue, would you rather that this story should not be told to me? Because if so there is no need for me to hear it."

For a moment Sue hesitated, thinking of Kitty and the compact they had made to keep the matter secret. But the fright of the afternoon had made her feel the need of a stronger judgment than her own in which to trust ; and so because she trusted John Elstow more than any one she knew, she resolved to let him be taken into confidence about the ghostly figure, which Kitty had dressed up and stood on the doorstep.

"I think it would be a comfort to us both if you were told, and if Kitty were here to-night, she would say so too, although at the first we were quite determined to keep it a profound secret," she said, turning rather white, for the thought of that night, and the weird cry which had rung through the silence, always made her feel ill, and she left Pattie to the task of putting John Elstow in possession of the facts of the case.

Pattie was quite willing to tell the story in her own fashion, and when it was done, John Elstow sat for a long time in puzzled silence.

Presently he came out of his reverie with a start and rose to his feet.

"It is about the most mysterious thing I ever heard of," he said ; "but although suspicion points so strongly

towards Sampson Kench, you have no case against him that I can see, nor can I understand his motive in hanging about your place in such a fashion. Perhaps time may make the business plainer, or I may be able to think things out more clearly when I have less on my mind."

"It was very wrong of us to trouble you with our concerns to-night. Please forgive us," Pattie murmured, distressed at her own thoughtlessness.

"There is no need to ask forgiveness," he replied sadly; then lighted a candle and passed into the next room.

"When are you going to read your letter, Sue?" Pattie asked, as they cleared up the room for the night, moving softly, and speaking in whispers, that they might not disturb the sorrowful man in the next room.

"I will read it now; then we shall not wake Mrs. Morgan or the babies, when we go into the next room. Come and sit down, and let us read it together," Sue replied, dropping on a low bench by the stove, and holding out her hand to her sister.

"What a queer girl you are. I should not want to share my love letters with any one," remarked Pattie, as she came to sit beside Sue, and craned her neck for a better view of the sheet which was being unfolded.

"They are not love letters at all," objected Sue, but with a heightened colour. "Oh, there is nothing from Don. I am afraid the poor lad is ill again."

"Read it aloud; Mr. Gordon's letters always puzzle me, although Don's are plain enough," said Pattie, leaning back and shutting her eyes.

"I must read it in whispers, then, for I don't want to disturb Mr. Elstow," Sue answered, and then began—

“DEAR MISS WALSH,

“Don said that your last letter was better than any medicine, and as good as going for a drive, because it was so full of fresh air and sunshine. The poor boy has been very ill again, and one result of the attack is that he is paralyzed on the right side ; his right hand is useless, so to his keen regret he cannot write to you. I can only trust that time may reconcile him to this new limitation, but at present his mood is very despairing and bitter, poor lad. I often think if he had a mother or sister to talk to, he would not suffer so much mental misery as he does with only me for a companion. As it is, yours is the only feminine influence that touches his life, and I pray you do not fail him in his sore need, but write as often as you can, both for his sake and mine. Is there anything I can do to make up to you for this tax on your time? You have said in your letters that you are poor, and have to work hard for your living ; may I send you a few dollars from time to time as a recompense for your trouble, although no money could repay your kindness? I am doing better now, and have found employment in a bank, which means a steady income, and greater comfort for Don. Indeed, we should be riotously happy now, were it not for this new trouble that has fallen upon him. I wish very often that we could change places, so that he might enjoy the satisfaction which I get from hard work, whilst I bore his weakness and suffering. But it is a satisfaction through it all to know that our lot is ordered for us, and to each one is given the burden most suited for him to bear. Don and I have taken a little cottage of three rooms and a verandah. There is a big garden, and we have an old black woman named Belinda to cook and

clean for us. The bank in which I work has a branch down at Indian Head, Assiniboia, which gives Don and me the feeling that we are your near neighbours, in spite of the actual distance there is between us. Don sends his love to you, with my grateful good wishes.

“Sincerely yours,

“ALEXANDER GORDON.”

“That young man is going to be dangerous, Sue ; he is too grateful and friendly for safety ; and now that he has regular employment, and is in a fair way to be prosperous he will be asking you to emigrate to Jamaica, and become Mrs. Alexander Gordon. Then what will become of me ?” groaned Pattie, with a dismal expression of countenance, as she opened her eyes and looked at Sue.

“Oh, you need not worry ; I am not going to run away and leave you ; it is much more likely that you will some day leave me. There ought always to be one old maid in a family, and I feel it in my bones that I am destined to live solitary to the end of my days,” Sue answered with a smile ; and then the smile faded as quickly as it had come, as before the eyes of her mind there flashed again the picture of Sandy Gordon’s resolute face as she had seen it when he strode through the crowd, bowed under the weight of the big trunk. In fancy, too, she heard again Don’s thin rasping voice calling attention to herself as “the little plain one.” It was not likely that any one would ever be attracted by her common-place face and insignificant figure. But even if the higher bliss of life were denied her, there was still a great satisfaction to be got from the daily doing of kindly deeds, the sowing of generous actions,

which would grow to an abundant crop of happiness in after years.

"You would make a very nice old maid, because you are so good-tempered," replied Pattie. "I think it takes a very nice woman indeed to make a pleasant old maid, because she stands alone, and has to be judged on her own merits without any counteracting influence. But, oh dear, I am so sleepy; let us go and lie down for a little while. I want to be up very early in the morning."

"So do I," said Sue. "I mean to ride home at day-break, before you and Mrs. Morgan start with the children, so that I can get the place tidied, for it is in a simply fearful state of confusion now."

Although she had expressed herself as being so sleepy but little slumber came to Pattie that night, while Sue was equally wakeful. They did not speak to each other, but lay side by side, each one busy with her own thoughts, while the night wind moaned round the lonely house, and the slow hours dragged on.

Sue was astir long before the dawn, and with the first lifting of the black curtain of night, went out to saddle Diamond for her ride.

Early as she was, Frank was out-of-doors and looking round to see that all was quiet and undisturbed when she reached the brown house.

"Thank you very much for all your kindness; now ride off to Creek Head as fast as you can, for you will be wanted there very badly this morning," Sue said, as she slipped from the saddle at the house door.

"I will start directly. I think you are the very pluckiest girl I have ever seen, Miss Sue, to have stayed here alone at night; I was pretty nearly scared out of

my wits at the awful loneliness," Frank replied, as he took Diamond off to the barn before bringing his own horse out.

"Oh, I had Bruce for a protector," Sue said, catching her breath in a quavering sob, as she thought of the faithful animal which had died in defending her property.

"And I had Towser, but the stillness was so awful that I could feel my hair stand straight up on end with the terror of it ; sleep was out of the question, so was sitting in the house, and, as it was moonlight, I just went out and dug a grave for the dog at the back of the barn."

"Frank, that was kind of you !" exclaimed Sue, who had been dreading this sad but necessary task.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Persecution

OCTOBER passed and November came in, but to the great consternation of Sue and Pattie the expected remittance from Dr. Lambert did not arrive.

As a matter of fact, he had sent the money to Kitty, who, needing a set of new furs, had used the twenty-five dollars to pay for them, intending to forward the amount to her sisters when her own salary became due. In an ordinary way this delay might not have mattered, and as Kitty knew nothing of Sue's difficulty about the borrowed money from Sampson Kench, she could scarcely be blamed for adding to the trouble.

When Sue went to ask for a little more time in which to repay the loan, she found Sampson Kench in a very bad mood. He was not even civil, and told her in a surly fashion that if the whole fifty dollars and the interest, which amounted to another ten dollars, were not paid within fourteen days, he should take legal proceedings against her.

Sue came back from that interview with a pinched, grey look on her face which frightened Pattie.

"Was he very horrid, Sue? And oh, what shall we do?" cried Pattie, trembling from head to foot, and thinking of those black days at Stoneycroft, when they used to shrink at the sound of Mr. Hubbard's voice.

"He was very unpleasant indeed," Sue answered, with a shiver. "I am going to take an hour or two to think it over; we shall have to sell something, and I want to make up my mind whether we can best spare the cow or the pigs."

"It would be a fearful loss to sell the pigs now, because they are only about half fit for bacon, and what should we do with the little potatoes and the skim milk?" Pattie asked in consternation.

"The potatoes could be saved for the spring, to help out the chickens' food; but if we were to let the cow go, there would be very little milk for the pigs."

"Now that we have Mr. Elstow's cow, we could certainly spare our own cow," Pattie protested, not out of any affection for the pigs, but solely with a view to their market value.

"Yes, dear, I know we could; but the trouble is that the cow would not fetch sixty dollars, for she is not young, you know," Sue said, with a worried air.

When they had brought the two children to the little brown house, John Elstow had had his best cow driven over from Creek Head to supply food for the infant, which had thriven amazingly and bade fair to become as strong as Johnny in course of time. The use of so much milk had been a great advantage to the household, and both Sue and Pattie had felt themselves amply compensated for their care of the children, and refused to take any other payment from their neighbour.

"If the cow did not bring enough money, you might write to Kitty for the rest," suggested Pattie; and Sue went off to some work afieid, meaning to thresh the matter out in her own mind.

Her task that morning left her ample time for reflection. Crossing the creek by the stepping-stones, where Kitty had gone that day in the summer, Sue set to work collecting broken boughs and fallen twigs into heaps ; when enough had been gathered in this manner to fill the waggon, she would go home for Diamond, and cart the various heaps back for firewood. Sometimes, after a great storm, it took only an hour, or even less, to gather sufficient for a load ; but if the weather had been calm, the task would extend over a couple of days.

When Sue had started on her errand of wood gathering, Pattie went back to the house in a fine state of fume, the thought of the borrowed money weighing on her heart like lead. Since the two Elstow babies had formed part of the household, she had been able to do very little work out-of-doors, for Mrs. Morgan's days were spent mostly in gently swaying in a rocking-chair, with the motherless babe on her lap.

This method of passing the time exactly suited the weary old woman, whose life had been so full of toil : it also appeared to agree with the infant ; so Pattie turned her attention to household management, cooking and cleaning with great vigour, looking after Johnny, who followed her like her shadow, and spending her spare moments in sewing.

There was bread to make on this particular morning, and she was kneading the dough, with Johnny to help, when John Elstow came in on his way to the store to see his children, and arrange about any farm-work which might be needing attention.

"See, Dadda, Johnny make bwread," cried the small boy, holding up a well-punched piece of dough.

"That is right, my son ; you can't learn too early to

be useful," replied his father ; then crossed over to the stove to have a look at the infant, and to chat with Mrs. Morgan about the weather and her rheumatism.

"I get pains in places when the storms are brewing, but it is nothing to make a fuss about. What does worry me is because Arthur hasn't sent the money for my keep, as he promised he would," the old lady said, dropping her voice to a confidential undertone, while Pattie was momentarily absent in the pantry, whither she had gone for more flour.

"Perhaps he was hard up," the farmer said soothingly.

"He might have been, for he must have had a hard struggle to rise as he has done. But he should not have promised what he could not perform, because of the disappointment to these poor girls who have been so good to me. They don't talk about it, but I can see there is a black trouble somewhere, and when Sue came back from the store this morning, she had a look on her face that frightened me. I hope and trust she hasn't been getting into debt to Sampson Kench, for it is certain that he will make her suffer if she has," Mrs. Morgan said, with a doleful shake of her head.

"Ah, that would be a pity," remarked John Elstow ; then, as Pattie came back with the flour for her kneading operations, he asked where Sue was to be found.

"She has gone over the creek, collecting firewood. Do you want to see her, or can I give her a message?" Pattie inquired.

"I wanted to borrow a harrow. Do you know where it is? The snow may be upon us any day now, and it will be a fine thing to get as much harrowing done as possible before it comes."

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"You can have it, of course. I will come and see where Sue has stowed it away; she is always so particular to put such things under cover directly they are done with, because she says the weather spoils them," replied Pattie, rubbing the dough from her hands, and throwing a shawl round her shoulders.

It took a few minutes to find the harrow, and a few more to get at it, for it was stowed away in a dark corner of the barn, difficult of access.

"I saw West last night," remarked John Elstow, pausing to wipe his face, when at length the harrow had been dragged out to daylight, "and he told me that he believed he had interviewed every Indian on the Reservation, but not one of them would own to having brought Miss Sue's letter from the store that day, when she had her fright and Bruce was killed."

"I have never believed that an Indian did bring it. Scotty was the only red man who ever did errands for us, and you know he was dead before that day. In my own mind I feel certain that Sampson Kench brought the letter himself, entered the house without Bruce catching sight of him, and was hunting round for purposes of his own, when the dog came rushing in, forcing him to retreat into the bedroom for safety; then he made his escape from the window, but Bruce pursued him so savagely that he was forced to shoot the dog in self-defence."

"The trouble is that we can't prove it, and so for the present Kench has the upper hand," John Elstow said slowly. Then with an abrupt change of tone, he asked, "What is your present trouble with Kench? Have you been obliged to run into debt at the store?"

"It isn't a store debt, but a loan of fifty dollars that

Sue had in the spring, when Kitty was ill and we had no money to go on with ; the interest comes to ten dollars, and Mr. Kench threatened Sue with legal proceedings if the money was not paid in fourteen days," said Pattie.

"What is Miss Sue going to do?" John Elstow asked, in a non-committal tone.

Pattie plunged into details about the cow and the pigs, and her own anxiety lest Sue should bring future disaster on herself, through her frantic efforts to get free from this present difficulty.

"You are quite right. The pigs must not go ; they will be worth nearly twice as much in four or five weeks' time. But it need not be settled offhand ; tell your sister I will come round to-night or to-morrow morning and help her to decide what it is best to do."

"Thank you very much," said Pattie, fervently ; and then the harrow being safely loaded on to the waggon, she ran back to her neglected bread-making, feeling much lighter in heart, because some one else knew of the trouble which pressed so heavily.

Pattie was not by nature so well fitted for standing alone as Sue was ; there was a dependent strain in her character which made her always want some stronger judgment to settle important matters for her.

The morning wore away with its busy round of humdrum duties. The dough was kneaded, set to rise, and part of it in process of being baked. Johnny was fast asleep on the settle, while Mrs. Morgan and the baby dozed by the stove, when Pattie went out with a basket to bring in wood for the fire.

She was busy running to and fro, wondering a little when Sue would be home from her wood-gathering over

the creek, when she saw a figure coming across the field from the road.

It was John Elstow, as she saw at the second glance, and supposing that he had found letters for them at the store, went to meet him at a run.

"Were there letters for us?" she asked, a little breathless with her run, as she met him midway in the field.

"Not to-day," he answered, bringing out a shabby pocket-book, from which he took two papers, which he handed to Pattie.

"What are they?" she asked, half suspiciously.

"You will see when you look at them," he answered quietly. "Please give them to Miss Sue, and tell her to confer with her friends next time she is in difficulties, instead of putting herself into the grip of a money-lender."

"Oh, what have you done? And whatever will Sue say? She is so dreadfully proud, you know!" cried Pattie, with actual dismay on her face as she opened one of the papers, and found it to be a receipt in full for the loan and interest up to date, whilst the other was Sue's acknowledgment of her indebtedness, torn across.

"I know she is proud," he answered. "But there is no sense in making two people miserable, and running into all sorts of difficulties, because of a false shame about being indebted to other people. Tell Miss Sue she can pay me back when and how she likes."

"I am very much afraid she will be angry, but I am so very grateful to you, Mr. Elstow; it has been like living in a nightmare," Pattie said, with tears raining down her cheeks.

"If she is angry, tell her that I was glad to do it, as

a part of what I owe to you for taking care of my babies ; it lifts half the burden of life to know that they are so well looked after," he said huskily ; then strode away up the field at a great pace, as if the sight of Pattie's tears had made him uncomfortable.

She herself was unconscious of them, and indeed had no room in her thoughts for anything but the great relief at being out of the clutches of Sampson Kench.

"Oh, what will Sue say, what will she say?" she murmured, walking back to the house with dancing steps.

News so good ought to be told at once, she said to herself. Then a bright idea came into her head. The bread had reached that stage of being baked when it might be safely left to the care of Mrs. Morgan, so she and Johnny would drive across the creek with Diamond and the waggon to bring home the wood already gathered.

Thrusting the precious papers into the front of her blouse for safety, Pattie carried her load of wood into the house, looked after the bread, which was baking as it should do, then proceeded to wrap Johnny up warmly, for the day though fine was cold.

The small boy, who was just awake, was delighted to go out-of-doors, and, armed with a whip, did his share of the driving after a fashion of his own.

The waggon-way over the creek was by a shallow ford near to the stepping-stones, and Johnny shrieked with delight as Diamond splashed into the water.

Sue, who was coming wearily back from her work to get the waggon to bring home the wood she had been gathering, heard Johnny's shouts and Pattie's laughter, then felt a sudden soreness at heart, because her sister could be so happy while she herself was so burdened

with care. She was tired with her work, and faint for want of food, her breakfast having been a scanty one that morning, because of her dread of the approaching interview with Sampson Kench.

"I wonder why Pattie has brought the waggon?" she said to herself, as she came slowly down the slope. She walked with a limp, a big bough which she had been trying to carry having dropped on her foot and bruised it.

Just then the waggon came in sight, Johnny holding the end of the lines, and shouting in baby treble to Diamond, while the old horse stalked steadily on, paying no heed to the noise.

"How did you know that I was ready for the waggon, and on my way home to fetch it?" called Sue, standing still to rest her hurt foot, while the old horse toiled up the slope with the waggon and the merry passengers. The waggon was not heavy, nor was the slope particularly steep, but Diamond had a way of making work look extremely hard, even when it was fairly easy.

"I have got such wonderful news that I just harnessed up and came to meet you, because I could not wait quietly at home until you came," Pattie said, leaning down towards Sue, her face glowing with happiness as she asked, "What is the thing that would bring you the most peace at the present moment, Sis?"

"To be free from my debt to that odious Sampson Kench, of course," rejoined Sue, crisply; then asked in an eager tone, "Has that money come from Dr. Lambert?"

"No, but I dare say it will some day. Meanwhile read that;" and reaching down from the waggon Pattie flourished Sampson Kench's receipt before the astonished eyes of her sister.



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SUE FELT AS IF SHE HAD BEEN STRUGGLING FOR HOURS

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Sue turned very white as she gathered the sense of the written paper, and for a moment looked as if the relief were harder to bear than even the burden itself.

"Where did you get this?" she faltered.

"Sue, don't be angry with me," pleaded Pattie. "Mr. Elstow came in this morning, and poor old Mrs. Morgan gave him a hint that we had money troubles; afterwards I had to go to the barn to help him to find the harrow, and he asked me if we had been obliged to run into debt at the store. I told him then what the trouble was, and he said that he would come over in the evening and talk the matter over with you; but, instead, he must have gone straight over to Kench's and paid the sixty dollars."

"Very kind of him, but I shall pay him back at the first opportunity," said Sue, whose colour was drifting slowly back into her cheeks.

"He said that you could pay him how and when you liked," Pattie replied; and then, warned by the expression on Sue's face, forbore to give the remainder of John Elstow's message through fear of offending her.

With a quick movement Sue flung up her arms, as if she were ridding herself of some heavy burden, which, like Sinbad's old man of the sea, threatened to crush her beneath its weight; then she clambered into the waggon and took the lines.

"Pattie, I can't tell you what a fearful stew I have been in all the morning," she said, drawing a long breath of relief as Diamond went slowly forward. "At last it got so bad that I just knelt down and prayed to God to help me out of the muddle somehow, and I felt that I did not care how my pride suffered if only I could be free of that odious man's persecution."

"Poor Sue! But you will find things will come right now," Pattie answered soothingly.

"They shall come right if hard work and rigid economy can achieve that result," Sue said, with a fierce air of determination.

"I wonder if we shall ever find that money of Uncle Ben's, or whether there is really any to find," went on Pattie, in a musing tone.

"If the story Joseph Fleming told Kitty had any truth in it, there must certainly be some money hidden somewhere; but I have the feeling that we shall not be allowed to find it until we have learned to help ourselves, and to do without it," Sue remarked soberly. Then she stopped Diamond by the first pile of wood, and jumped down to load it on the waggon.

CHAPTER XXIX

An Adventure for Sue

THE winter passed more swiftly than the previous one had done. The girls were more used to the rugged colonial life, and with two babies to care for, found less monotony in the short, dreary days.

Christmas found them able to finish paying John Elstow the sixty dollars he had advanced to clear off the loan from Sampson Kench, while the sale of the whole of their stock of pigs at the proper time resulted in their having sufficient ready money to carry them forward well into the spring.

Acting on the advice of Mr. Washington Jones, Sue bought a stock of sugar for her summer jam-making in the spring from the Winnipeg firm which took her jams and jellies, and one sunny day, early in May, she drove down to the Qu'Appelle dépôt to bring a load of sugar home.

She was quite an experienced horsewoman now, and Diamond proving so slow on the road, she had borrowed a horse from John Elstow, in order to make the journey to the dépôt and back in one day.

Starting so early in the morning that the sun was only just rising above the eastern spur of the Pheasant

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Hills, she reached Goshen in time for breakfast, of which both she and the horse were in need.

Leaving Goshen an hour before noon, she drove over to the depôt, and hunting up a rather lethargic clerk, who filled in his time by assisting at loading and unloading freight when required, she got her consignment of sugar safely loaded on to the waggon, and the bags snugly covered with sailcloth, although happily there was no prospect of rain ; then mounting on to the waggon seat, she turned her horse's head in the direction of home.

Going straight to Silver Creek from the depôt, it was quickest not to take the road past Goshen, but to go by way of Dan Lemon's hotel, and out from the eastern corner of the township where the houses clustered together.

She took this way to-day, and was driving slowly along the straight half-mile before reaching the hotel, when she saw a sight which seemed to make her heart stop beating for the moment.

A horse was galloping along the road, mad with fright, and raising such a cloud of dust that just at first Sue could not understand what it was that was being dragged along the ground by its side. Then she turned sick and faint with horror, for it was a man with one foot wedged in the stirrup, who was being dragged in such a fearful fashion close to the heels of the frenzied animal.

A sense of utter helplessness fell upon Sue at the first, then her courage came back with a rush, and turning her horse sharply round, she backed her load of sugar across the road, and jumping from the waggon, stood waiting for what must come next.

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The runaway horse seemed to be blind to everything but its own fear, and dashed into the side of the waggon with such force that Sue's horse was frightened too, and laying its ears flat back, tried to bolt also. Foreseeing some such result, she had flung the lines over the fence post, and shouting an encouraging word to quiet the plunging animal, she sprang to the head of the runaway horse as it stood stunned by the shock of its impact with the waggon, and held it fast.

Her position was sufficiently perilous to shake the strongest nerves; her own horse was backing the waggon in a frantic attempt to get away; the other animal, which she was holding with a desperate clutch on both sides of its bridle, was recovering from its momentarily stunned condition, and, snorting loudly, was trying to free itself from her grasp, while all the time the prostrate figure in the dust was in imminent awful peril of having his brains beaten out by the hoofs of the plunging horse.

Sue felt as if she had been struggling for hours to get the mastery of the maddened creature, when a rough voice shouted something encouraging close to her ear, and she was conscious that the man on the ground had been freed from the stirrup and dragged out of danger.

She kept her grip of the horse's bridle only by a desperate effort, as the animal tried by rearing and plunging to shake off her hold, and take to its heels again. Her arms felt as if they were being wrenched from their sockets, and her face was covered with the foam dropping from the horse's mouth. But she knew it could not bolt again while she kept her hold on both sides of its head; so she clung like a limpet to a rock,

and wondered vaguely if help would come, or whether she was destined to go on hanging to the head of the runaway until its strength or hers had triumphed in the fray.

Then two rough, hairy hands, the arms clad in dirty red-flannel shirt sleeves, reached up and seized the bridle with a grip like iron, and a hoarse voice shouted in her ear—

"You git out. I can manage him now, you bet!"

With a sob of relief Sue dropped her hold, and fell back a step; then, fumbling for her handkerchief, wiped the foam from her face.

The horse was now in a fair way to be mastered. The man who had come so opportunely to the rescue was holding the bridle with one hand, and with the other was patting and soothing the animal into quietness.

Then she looked round for her own horse, and was relieved to find it had given up attempting to run away, and had its head down cropping the grass by the fence.

The figure which had been dragged by the horse still lay untended on the side of the road where the red-shirted man had drawn him, and gathering up her courage by a great effort, Sue hurried to the spot, wondering if the injured person were dead that he lay so still.

Her first fearful glance at his face was reassuring, for, although smothered in dust, he had miraculously escaped a battering from the hoofs of the horse.

Kneeling down beside him, Sue dragged the handkerchief from his pocket and commenced to wipe the thick dust from his countenance. She was surprised to

find that he was an old man, and her fingers moved gently among the straggling wisps of thin grey hair.

If only he would move, or give some sign of life, or if the red-shirted man would come to her assistance! But the horse was still giving trouble, and Sue had to act on her own responsibility, doing the best she could.

Unfastening the old-fashioned black-silk stock which the unconscious man wore, she unbuttoned his collar and shirt, then lifted his head a little, gently fanning him the while, and wondering if it were the right thing to do.

Apparently it must have been, for he soon began to draw long sobbing breaths, and finally opened his eyes.

"So the brute did not quite kill me?" he gasped feebly, in a tone of surprise.

"Evidently not, or you would not be alive now," Sue answered, her mouth twitching in an involuntary smile. Then she asked anxiously if he had any limbs broken.

"I don't know; my immediate sensations point to every bone in my body being fractured, but, as first impressions are not always correct, perhaps it is not quite so bad as it seems."

"Can I help you to sit up? You would feel better then, I think; and oh, please do tell me if you can move your legs?" Sue urged gently, expecting to find that at least one must be broken.

"I think so," the unknown answered, feebly squirming the limbs in question, in order to test their soundness. "But the wind is pretty nearly battered out of me."

"I am sure you must feel bad; let me hold you so that you will get the air better, and that will revive you,"

Sue said, slipping her arm under the stranger's shoulders, and lifting him up to a sitting posture.

For a few minutes he leaned against her in silence, breathing heavily and looking so exhausted that she longed for the red-shirted man to come to her help again.

But he was busy tying the horse to a fence-post a couple of hundred yards away, doing it in a leisurely fashion too, as if to-morrow would do as well as to-day.

"You are a kind little girl. Was it you who stopped my horse?" asked the old man, as he leaned against Sue, breathing heavily still.

"I stopped the horse, but it was the man yonder who dragged you out of danger, for I had no hand to spare to free you from the stirrup, and—and——; but it is too dreadful to talk about, and it is just a miracle that you were not killed!" Sue stammered, for reaction was setting in, and it was all she could do to keep from bursting into childish crying.

"If the horse had not been stopped, I guess the man could not have dragged my foot from the stirrup, so I must regard you as my deliverer; and, child, haven't you lived long enough in the world to know that miracles happen every day?" he asked, a smile flickering for a moment over his haggard, dirty face.

Sue looked a little puzzled; in her own mind she had believed the age of miracles past, yet it was plainly a marvellous thing that he had been dragged in such a fashion without more damage to himself. She was still hesitating about her answer when the red-shirted man strolled up to them.

"So you ain't dead? Well, some folks do take a lot of killing!" he remarked in a melancholy tone,

as if disappointed because there was no funeral in prospect.

"They do until their time has come, and then it is just astonishing what a little touch will send them into the next world," the old man answered calmly. Then he asked, "Can you tell me if I am anywhere near Dan Lemon's hotel?"

"Just about half a mile, I should say, and I ought to know, seeing that I am Dan Lemon," he of the red shirt replied.

"Ah, that is fortunate. I have been doing business in Strathcarrol and Katepwe, and was making my way to your place when my horse shied and bolted. I wonder if I can walk the half-mile; I am certainly too bruised and sore to mount into the saddle again."

"I am going past the hotel, and can drive you in my waggon," put in Sue, who was trembling still from her recent fright.

"That is kind; and, Mr. Lemon, may I trouble you to bring my horse along?" said the old man, in a tone of authority.

"Certainly, sir," replied the hotel-keeper, with so much deference in his manner that Sue decided he must have recognized the stranger as being a personage of importance.

It took the united efforts of Sue and Dan Lemon to hoist the bruised and battered stranger on to the waggon seat; and even though Sue made him as comfortable as possible, then drove at a snail's pace along the road, the motion was almost more than he could bear.

"I am afraid you are more hurt than you would admit," she said gravely.

"No, I am very bruised and shaken, but that is all,

thank you, little girl," he said, smiling at her, though his face was grey and drawn with pain.

"I am not really a little girl," she said, with an aggrieved air. "I am not very tall, I know, but I shall be nineteen on my next birthday."

"Will you? I imagined you to be about fifteen or sixteen; you look so young," he remarked in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, it is rather awkward to appear so very juvenile; people are constantly thinking that Pattie, my younger sister, is older than I am," she answered.

A little silence dropped between them after this, until a wooden house, painted yellow, with green shutters, appeared in the distance.

"That is Dan Lemon's hotel," remarked Sue, pointing with her whip to the yellow building.

Dan Lemon himself was walking in the rear of the waggon leading the stranger's horse, which still shied violently, and appeared thoroughly demoralized with its late fright.

"Ah," remarked the stranger, in a musing tone; then went on as if talking to himself, "It would not have been his much longer but for this morning; but that must make a difference—a very great difference."

She made no reply; she thought the old man had forgotten all about her, and was talking to himself. Then presently he turned to her—

"Will you tell me your name? And do you live here?"

"I am Sue Walsh, and I live at Silver Creek, but it is nearly twenty miles from here," she answered.

"Are you going to drive all that way?" he asked in surprise.

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"Yes, I drove down to the depôt, starting very early this morning. I had a long rest at Goshen, Mr. Jones's place ; now I am going home, and ought to get there in good time for supper."

"Is it a lonely road, and are you not afraid to go about alone with a horse and waggon?" he asked, regarding her fixedly, as if trying to determine her social status.

Sue flushed uncomfortably under the scrutiny, but replied with dignity—

"The road is very lonely, but we are used to that now, and so take no notice of it," she said, checking her horse in front of the hotel, around the door of which a knot of loafers were congregated.

"I shall hope to find my way to Silver Creek in a few days, to thank you properly for the great service you have rendered me to-day," the old man said, in a meaning tone, as Sue sprang down from the waggon.

"I do not wish to be thanked any more. It is quite sufficient reward that I was successful in stopping your horse," she answered stiffly, thinking he intended offering her a few dollars for what she had done, and fiercely resolving that she would not be paid for what was merely an act of common humanity.

"You are a very proud little girl," he remarked, smiling down at her from the waggon seat in the friendliest fashion. "Suppose you add to your kindness to me, by asking a couple of those men yonder to lift me down ; tell them I will give them a dollar if they do it gently."

Sue did as she was requested, then supposing that there was no further need of her services, mounted her waggon and drove on again, just as the two men

she had summoned were carrying the stranger into the hotel.

She was terribly shaken with the fright, the strain, and the struggle through which she had gone, and when the last houses of the township were passed, the road stretching silent and solitary before her, she burst into stormy, hysterical weeping, crying and crying, until she had no more tears to shed. After this outburst she felt better, and even a little ashamed of her silliness, although, having been done so strictly in private, this did not matter.

Becoming more cheerful, she gathered up the lines, which for the last mile had been hanging loose, and, intimating to the horse that it had better get on at a brisker pace, proceeded to make some sort of toilet *en route*, for her face was dirty, her hair flying loose, and her frock torn and dusty. She was quite tidy and respectable in appearance when she reached the little brown house, and, springing down from the waggon, was thinking how interested the others would be in her adventure, when Pattie came flying out of the house with a scared white face, crying excitedly—

"Oh, Sue, we are thankful you have come!"

"What is the matter?" asked Sue.

"A letter has come. Frank brought it from Kench's and left it as he went past. It was directed to Miss Walsh, and had a Winnipeg postmark, so I opened it."

"Well?" demanded Sue, sharply, as Pattie paused from want of breath.

"It is from the matron of a hospital there, to say our brother is lying dangerously ill," replied Pattie, in an awed tone.

CHAPTER XXX

A New Care

"WHAT brother?" demanded Sue, in great astonishment as she stood staring at Pattie, wondering whether she or Pattie were dreaming.

"Can't you understand, Sue, that it must be Phil? that he could not have been drowned, after all?" said Pattie, speaking still in the same awed tone.

The colour came with a rush into Sue's pale cheeks, then receded, leaving them whiter than before.

"But if it is Phil, why did he not come home sooner, or write. Why, it is years ago since the news came that he was drowned. And poor mother! Remember how she suffered!" Sue exclaimed, with quivering lips.

"He would have come if he could, be sure of that," rejoined Pattie. "Remember how fond he always was of home, and how he loved us all. But go in and read the letter, while I unharness the horse."

"We must unload the sugar; but that can wait," said Sue; then she ran away to the house to read the letter of the hospital matron. This, however, shed but little light on the mystery, since it contained only the bald information that a young man had been brought to the hospital from the Immigration House, suffering from

fever brought on by exhaustion and poor living. The address to which the matron was writing had been found in the stranger's pocket written on a bill-head, bearing the name of Michael Brown, Grocer, Stoneycroft. In his delirium, the young man who called himself Phil was constantly bewailing the fact of his mother's death, and calling for his sisters. There had also been found in his pocket the photograph of a girl in short frocks, with "Sue" written on the back, and a shabby little New Testament, with the name, Susan Walsh, on the fly leaf.

Sue sank down on the settle, white and trembling, when she read the letter, then suddenly starting up again, rushed out to where Pattie still wrestled with straps and buckles.

"Pattie, what shall we do? Some one ought to go to Winnipeg at once. Supposing it should really be our Phil, and he should die before we can reach him!"

"No one can go to-night, that is certain," replied Pattie, with decision. "The horse has travelled forty miles already and is thoroughly tired out. Don't you think I had better tie the poor creature up in the barn, with a feed of corn for its supper? It has earned so much, I am sure."

"Yes, tie it up, and I will get the corn," Sue answered, going off to the corn-bin and measuring a liberal ration therefrom.

When the horse had been fed, the two girls went to the house together, Sue to get the supper she needed so badly, while Pattie sat on the settle with the letter in her hands, sometimes reading bits from it, and then launching into the wildest conjectures as to what could have happened to Phil, and where he had been all

these years, that he had given no sign of being still alive.

"Perhaps he was castaway where he had no chance to write ; wrecks happen in strange places, you know," suggested Mrs. Morgan.

"But Phil's ship was not wrecked, only a big wave swept over the deck, and Phil was swept off with it," interposed Sue, with a shiver, thinking of her mother's terrible grief when the news came.

"If it is really Phil in the hospital, he must have been saved by a miracle," Pattie said solemnly.

It was on Sue's tongue to say that the age of miracles was past ; then she remembered her adventure of a few hours ago, and how the grey-haired man, whose life she had saved, had said to her that miracles were happening every day. She was shaken and worn out with the excitement of that experience, and now this letter from Winnipeg, with its strange tidings and maddening mystery, seemed like the proverbial last straw to the burden of her endurance.

"Pattie, I must get to the city to-morrow ; I mean I must start then, though I am afraid I cannot reach Winnipeg until the middle of the night or early next morning, because I can't get on board express cars at Qu'Appelle," Sue said presently, turning from the food which seemed to choke her.

"What will you do for money?" asked Pattie ; then burst out, "Oh, Sue, I can't bear to have you going that journey alone, and I cannot possibly come with you, because of the children, and the farm!"

"Of course you cannot come," Sue said, trying to speak cheerfully, although her heart sank at the thought of what lay before her. "Your coming

would mean double expense, and that is not to be thought of."

"What will you do for money? We have not nearly enough in the house," Pattie said.

"I was just wondering. The best thing will be to ask Mr. Elstow to lend it to me, and if it is not convenient for him, I must go to Goshen, and ask Mr. Jones."

"Sue, Sue, do you think Imogen would go to the city with you? She is so good-hearted, and how she would revel in the shops and the stores!" exclaimed Pattie.

"I should not like to ask her, because if I did I must pay her expenses, and think what that would mean. Are you too tired to take this letter to Creek Head, tell Mr. Elstow all about it, ask him if he can lend me twenty-five dollars for a week, and if he could spare Frank to drive me to the depôt, starting at dawn to-morrow?"

"My dear, you will not be fit to take that long journey so soon. Wait until the next day," interposed Mrs. Morgan, anxiously.

"I must go just as soon as I can. Suppose poor Phil comes back to consciousness, or dies, and there are none of his own people near him!" Sue said, breathing hard as if she had been running.

"I will go to Creek Head certainly; but, like Mrs. Morgan, I am quite sure you are not fit to take a long journey again to-morrow," Pattie said; then, reaching for her hat, set out to walk to Creek Head in the pleasant coolness of the spring evening.

Sue packed a bag of necessities for her journey, working with feverish haste; then, sitting down, began to write to Kitty. But she stopped before she had done the first page.

"Oh, I must not tell Kitty yet, or she will come rushing home, before we know whether it is really Phil or not. How I wish Pattie would come back soon!" she said, pushing back her chair and getting up to tramp restlessly about the room.

"Here she comes across the field, and Mr. Elstow is with her; she must have met him on the road," said Mrs. Morgan, who was standing at the open door, watching the sun sink in the glowing west.

Sue paused in her restless pacing to and fro, and sat down abruptly with a sensation of sudden overpowering weakness.

John Elstow came into the house wearing a very gloomy expression of countenance. Pattie had told him the story of their brother, who was Sue's twin, having been drowned at sea so many years ago, and looking at the matter from what he called a common-sense standpoint, he did not for a moment believe that this unknown in the Winnipeg hospital could be the same person.

"Most likely it is some one who knows a little about you all, and wants to impose on your good nature," he said to Pattie.

"But it was so long ago that the news of Phil being drowned came to us! No one would dream of raking that old story up," expostulated Pattie, with irrepressible joyousness.

John Elstow shook his head gloomily. "Rogues do a good many things which honest people would never dream of attempting, and I just hate to see kind, good girls like you and Miss Sue cheated and duped. You have taken so much of other people's burdens too. First there was poor old Mrs. Morgan, then came my babies,

and now I am not going to see this great hulking fellow, who is shamming sick, shifted on to your care without some kind of protest."

"How do you know he is shamming sick? If you think he is an impostor, you had better go to Winnipeg with Sue and see for yourself," Pattie answered, with a laugh, while there was a secret hope lurking in her heart that he would volunteer to go, for she just hated the thought of Sue taking the long journey alone.

"I can't go. If Miss Sue must be away for a week or so at this time of the year, and I don't see how she can make it less, I must look after things on the farm for her. Then, too, if we were both away there would be no one to take care of you, and that is not to be thought of for a moment. What Miss Sue really wants is a woman to go with her, only I don't see who there is available."

"I don't need any one; I am quite capable of looking after myself, thank you," said Sue, languidly, overhearing this last sentence of John Elstow's as he entered the house.

"We all know that you are capable enough for all ordinary things, but there are limits to human endurance; and, then, what I am most afraid of is your being imposed on," he replied gravely.

"Do you think that I should not know at the first glance whether or no it is my brother? Why, Phil and I were everything to each other, and it seems to me that I should know him before Kitty or Pattie would. Can you drive me to the dépôt to-morrow morning in time for the early train?" Sue asked, rousing herself to a semblance of energy.

"No, I cannot; nor are you fit to get up and start at dawn to-morrow morning, considering the journey you

have had to-day. There is nothing takes it out of one more than long drives over these country roads. I find it a great deal more trying than going to plough."

"But I must go to-morrow," said Sue, faintly, feeling how useless it was to strive against the grim determination in her neighbour's face.

"So you shall, only not in the morning. I will drive you to Goshen in the afternoon and get Washington Jones to take you to the dépôt for the night cars, and then you will reach the city comfortably next day about noon."

"Thank you very much; you are most kind!" Sue said, with a tremulous break in her voice; then she asked for the loan of the money she needed, saying afterwards, "If I find it is Phil I shall bring him back with me at once—that is, if the doctors think he can be moved; and we have nowhere for him to sleep; would you lend us the small tent you have and the little camp bed that Dr. Lambert slept on? Then we could manage very well for the summer, and, after harvest, we can build a room somewhere for the poor boy to sleep in."

"I will bring the tent down and get it pitched for you before you come back," he answered, unable to resist the appeal in her eyes, although privately he still stuck to his belief that the young man in the hospital was an impostor.

He said so privately to Imogen when they reached Goshen the next day; and Imogen, who was as full of generous impulses as she was fond of finery, exclaimed eagerly—

"Say now, Mr. Elstow, don't you think it would be a good idea if I went along to the city with her? Pa and Jim could get on, and I am dreadful good at

spotting rogues. Sue is such a dear little girl, I should just hate to see her cheated."

"It would take a considerable burden off my shoulders," he answered. "I can't go myself, for half a dozen reasons, nor should I be of much use if I did."

"Of course not; men are never of any use at times like these, though they do well enough in their own place," rejoined Imogen, serenely.

Sue protested but feebly at Imogen's proposition to accompany her, and she was hugely thankful to have a companion when at the end of the long journey she found herself standing in the great entrance-hall of the hospital, waiting for admission to the ward where Phil was lying.

The sister in charge came to them presently after what seemed an interminable time of waiting.

"I am so glad to see you," she said to Sue. "I was hoping, as there was no letter, that you would come to-day or to-morrow."

"Is—is he worse?" faltered Sue.

"Oh no, the doctors think there is every chance of his recovery, only for the present he can remember nothing, and is delirious most of the time; but his condition is not acutely dangerous. The great trouble is that we are so overcrowded here just now that we do not know where to put our sick. Every bed is full, and we have twenty men, of whom your brother is one, lying on the floor."

"How is that?" asked Imogen, in a shocked tone, for surely people who were sick should not be put to lie upon the floor, whatever the well folk might have to do.

"There was a railway accident at St. Boniface the day before yesterday, and our share of the injured was

a batch of fifty—some of them very bad cases. Then yesterday a building collapsed in Wellington Street, and twenty men, some of them frightfully battered, were brought in, so you see we are very pushed for room just now," the sister replied, as she led the way upstairs to the wide bare room, where mattresses were spread on the floor for the patients for whom no beds were available.

"This is the young man," said the sister, pausing by a mattress on which a thin worn figure lay with closed eyes.

Sue dropped on her knees on the bare wooden floor, gazing intently at the emaciated countenance.

"It may be Phil, but yet it is not the least bit like what he was when he went away, for he was then just a chubby-faced boy, and this is a man," she said, with a pant of hurry in her tone.

"The years would make the difference, and perhaps he has had a very hard time," put in Imogen; adding eagerly, "But, Sue, he is the very image of Kitty."

"Yes, she is my sister—the eldest; then there are Sue, dear little Sue, my twin sister, and Pattie, the little one," the poor fellow said, opening his lack-lustre eyes in an unseeing stare.

"Phil, dear Phil, I am Sue; don't you know me?" she said tenderly, bending over him and venturing to touch his forehead with caressing fingers.

But he closed his eyes again, taking no notice of her, only muttering to himself something about mother and churchyard.

"Is it your brother?" asked the sister, who had stood silently watching the little scene.

"I do not know," Sue answered doubtfully. "I think it must be, because he is so much like Kitty; but we have so long believed him dead that it seems almost

impossible that he should have survived, and yet kept silence for years in this manner."

"I wish you would come into my room and tell me all about it; perhaps we can then find the best way of meeting the difficulty," the sister said, beckoning as she went to a doctor who was bending over a bed at the far end of the ward.

He came at once in response to the signal, the four proceeding to a small apartment at the end of the long corridor, where the sister introduced Sue and Imogen to the doctor, who was the house surgeon.

"Miss Walsh cannot say positively that the young man is her brother," the sister explained to the doctor.

"Probably not, as he is not in a fit state to confirm her identity, and she has so long believed him to be dead," the doctor answered. Then he turned to Sue, saying kindly, "I suppose you would be willing to take care of him, and nurse him back to health, on the strength of your belief that he is your brother?"

"Of course it would be terribly cruel to disown him, now that he has come back to us from the dead. But is he fit to be moved in his present condition?" she asked in surprise.

"He is quite as well able to bear being moved as he is to lie in his present place. Have you a lodging in the city to which you could take him?"

Sue flushed scarlet. It was terrible to have to tell these strangers that she could not afford to have a lodging in the city; it was like failing Phil in the hour of his great need. But the truth had to be told, so she said simply—

"I have not money enough to stay and nurse him here, nor could I spare the time, because my sister and

I have a small farm, and the land needs me every day now. If he is fit to be moved at all could I not take him home with me? Then we could take care of him between us."

"Where is your home?" demanded the doctor, curtly.

"At Qu'Appelle, Assiniboia, twenty miles from the dépôt," she answered quietly.

"That would be nearly three hundred and fifty miles by rail, I should think," said the doctor, as he stood rubbing his chin in an attitude of deep thought; then he burst out excitedly, speaking now to the sister, "I'll tell you what it is, the railway company shall bear the expense of his removal to this place, what is its name?—Qu'Appelle. It is their fault, or owing to them, that we have to turn the poor fellow out in this condition. If he travels in a drawing-room car he will bear the journey well enough, especially if he goes through in the night."

"But the twenty miles by road!" gasped the sister.

"We will send an ambulance. Can you horse it at your end?" asked the doctor, turning abruptly to Sue. But it was Imogen who answered.

"My Pa will find the horses. I will wire to him to have our team at the dépôt as soon as you can tell me what time we are likely to arrive."

"Now we are getting on," exclaimed the doctor, gleefully; "and really the patient will bear moving quite as well now as later. I will make all arrangements for you to start this evening."

Sue bowed her head in silent thankfulness for this unexpected smoothing of her way, and it never once occurred to her to feel ill-used, because so heavy a burden had been laid upon her.

CHAPTER XXXI

Back to Life

PHIL—if it was Phil—bore the journey without apparent discomfort, while to Sue and Imogen the luxurious mode of travel was actual delight. When Qu'Appelle was reached the patient was lifted into the ambulance. Jim was waiting with the colts, and the distance to Silver Creek was accomplished in a little over three hours.

Then came days filled with a whirling confusion of hard work, fierce anxiety, and heavy nursing. It was the time of year when the land cried out for constant and particular attention, when chickens and ducks seemed to be clamouring for food all day long, and the daily work was enough for time and patience.

Sue's great fear was lest Phil should be taken worse and die without regaining his senses and being able to tell them where he had been so long, and why he had not broken silence before. The hospital doctor had said he might not become really conscious for days or even weeks, or he might regain his senses at any time; it was the weakness of the body dominating the brain which kept him wandering and delirious.

The doctor, whom Sue had summoned on getting her patient home, came every other day, and his opinion

of the case was exactly that of the hospital doctor. It was patience and good nursing the poor invalid needed, and nature, the great healer, would do the rest.

Leaving her father and Jim to manage as best they could, Imogen remained at Silver Creek five days, taking half the burden of the nursing, and insisting on Sue having as much rest as possible.

"Working as you do in the fields all day, you ought never to sit up at night," Imogen said, on the day when she was preparing to return.

"There is no one else to do it. Pattie is not strong enough; besides, she takes care of the children entirely now, so that Mrs. Morgan shall be free to help me with Phil. That poor weak old woman is quite wonderful as a nurse, and from seven in the morning, when I start off to my day's work, until midnight, she will be out here in the tent with Phil, doing everything for him. Then, at midnight, I shall come out here, and she goes to bed."

"But when will you sleep?" demanded Imogen.

"I shall leave off work at six o'clock, have my supper, and go to bed with the babies. It will be funny trying to get to sleep in broad daylight; but I shall soon get used to it."

"You ought to send for Kitty."

"We don't like to tell her until we know that it is really Phil, although there seems no reasonable doubt of it," Sue answered.

"Dear me, no. Why, he is as like Kitty as one pea is like another. Sue, are you sure he is not her twin instead of yours?"

"Quite sure," replied Sue, with a faint smile.

"He is very handsome," went on Imogen, who was bending over the camp-bed out in the tent, scanning

the face of the poor sick youth who appeared to be only just alive.

Every one was comforted and helped by the presence of Imogen, who, despite her weakness for frills and furbelows, was so quick and capable at all kinds of domestic work, and a thoroughly good nurse as well. Even the baby appeared to like her, although he yelled lustily every time his fat little fingers became hitched in her laces, or were pricked by her brooches.

When she was obliged to go away, life settled into fiercely strenuous lines, and Sue took the watch as she had planned, from midnight to morning.

It was the third night since Imogen went away, and Sue, who was desperately tired with long hours of weeding in the sun and insufficient spells of sleep, sat nodding in her chair by the sick man's bed, trying hard to keep awake, and succeeding but badly. Sometimes she even began to dream, but her dreams were always about the days of long ago when her mother was alive, and Phil was home for the holidays from boarding-school.

"You are not a bit altered, Sue, and I should have known you anywhere."

She started and cried out, half-believing that she was asleep still, and that Phil was greeting her as he used to do when he came home from school.

But no, she was awake, and, to make sure, she rose to her feet, then suddenly dropped on her knees by the bed with a half-incoherent exclamation of delight, for a fresh expression had come into that worn face on the pillow, and at last there was consciousness in the widely open eyes.

"Sue, why don't you speak to me, or is it only a

dream?" he cried, in pitiful distress, lifting one of his shadowy hands to touch her face.

"Phil darling, it is no dream. I am Sue, and you are at home at last," she said gently, fearful of exciting him, and so inducing a return of the fever.

"At last!" he murmured, with a heavy sigh, then lay silent a long time, while Sue watched him, not daring to speak, but with every atom of sleepiness most effectually banished.

"How did I get here, and what sort of a place is it?" he asked presently, when the time for nourishment having arrived she administered it silently. "It isn't on board ship because there is no motion."

"You are in a tent," she answered. "We have to close it up at night because of the cold; but the flaps are open all day so that you can feel the wind and the sunshine."

"That accounts for the funny dreams I have had about sunshine, daylight, fresh air, and an old woman. Who was she, Sue, and oh, I say, how did I get here, and where are the others? Can't you tell me all about everything?"

"Not to-night," she answered, in a decided tone. "You have been very ill, and unconscious for a long time. If you go to sleep now, you will be stronger when you wake in the morning, then we can tell you what you want to know."

"But will you be here when I wake?" he asked, drawing her hand down on to the pillow that he might rest his cheek upon it.

"I expect so; but if I am not, Mrs. Morgan will call me, and I will come at once."

"You have said so ever so many times before, but

when I have wakened again you have always been gone, and I have found it was only a dream," he said, sighing heavily.

"Pinch my hand, and see if it is not rather more substantial than the stuff dreams are made of," she answered, smiling; then, laying her head down on the pillow beside him, she went on coaxingly, "Go to sleep, dear, then you will get strong quickly. And, Phil, we are so glad to have you back again!"

"Keep your head just like that," he urged, in drowsy entreaty; and then, seeing that she did not vanish or even move, his eyes closed, his breathing grew deep and regular, and he was soon sleeping peacefully as an infant.

"I will send for Kitty in the morning," Sue murmured to herself; then, because she was so tired, and the invalid slumbered so quietly, she fell asleep herself, with her head on her brother's pillow.

Mrs. Morgan came out at seven o'clock feeling a little surprised and anxious, because there was no sign of life stirring about the tent. As a rule Sue had the flaps fastened back and the lantern extinguished long before this time. But when Mrs. Morgan lifted the flap and entered, the lantern swinging from the crosspole of the tent was still shedding a sickly light on the pillow below, where two heads rested close together.

The old woman's first thought was that the invalid was dead and Sue in a swoon, but a second glance showed her that it was natural sleep, and, stepping back into the house, she beckoned to Pattie to come and look.

"Poor Sue, she is just about worn out," Pattie whispered softly; and just then the man who had been

unconscious so long opened his eyes and looked at her.

"Are you Kitty? How you have grown and what a pretty girl you are," he said admiringly.

Pattie came close to the bed, and dropped on her knees by his side.

"Are you really Phil?" she asked, in a doubtful tone.

"Why, yes, of course; but I suppose you have given me up for dead a long time ago. Where is Pattie? Ah, how I have wanted to see you all," he said, with the tears of weakness coming into his eyes.

"I am Pattie; Kitty is not at home, but we will send for her to-day."

Just then, aroused by voices, Sue started out of her heavy slumber, and gazed around in a bewildered fashion.

"What is the matter?" she asked, rising from the low chair where she had been sitting so long, but finding herself so cramped and stiff that she could scarcely move.

"There is nothing the matter, only you have had a long sleep and Phil has come to his senses again," Pattie answered; then, as a wailing cry sounded from the house, she darted out of the tent to see what ailed the infant.

"I have heard that baby cry before. Whom does it belong to?" asked Phil, who, being so much better and in his right mind, was becoming curious about his surroundings.

"That is Willie Elstow, our neighbour's little son. His mother died when he was born, poor mite, and he does cry a great deal sometimes; but he is getting on nicely now, thanks to Mrs. Morgan and Pattie. Now I am

going to milk the cow, and start my morning work, while Mrs. Morgan washes you and makes your bed," Sue said, smoothing back the thick curls from his forehead with a caressing movement.

"Got a cow, have you?" he asked, with eager interest. "I shall do the milking myself in a day or two; but I'm not quite up to it this morning."

Mrs. Morgan and Sue both laughed at the bare idea of the sick boy, who was as weak as a baby, doing anything for a long time save eating and sleeping. But it was good to have him so much better, and Sue went off to her work feeling that the worst was over, and brighter days were in store for them.

"Pattie, can you find a minute to write to Kitty to-day, and tell her about Phil?" asked Sue, when, her morning work done, she came indoors to breakfast before going off to weeding between the rows of potatoes.

"I can do it if I let something else go," answered Pattie, who was feeding the infant and looking after Johnny's breakfast at the same time. "How soon will you want to take it to the office?"

"I shall not take it, if I can find any one else to go for me. Perhaps Mr. Elstow or Frank will be along presently, and if they are going over to the store, I shall be spared the trouble," Sue answered, getting up to pour herself out another cup of coffee, but stopping on her way to the stove, because she had caught sight of a waggon and team of two horses being driven rapidly up the field. "Pattie, look! whose waggon is that?" she cried excitedly.

Pattie sprang up with the baby in her arms, nearly upsetting Johnny, who was sitting close to her, eating bread and milk.

"Washington Jones's waggon and horses, Washington Jones himself on the waggon seat with Imogen. No, it isn't Imogen. Who is it? Sue, Sue, it is Kitty!" cried Pattie, darting out of the house with the baby in her arms, Sue following close behind, while Johnny, who was left alone, finished his bread and milk with more haste than grace, and then helped himself to butter without any bread.

"Kitty, Kitty, what made you come?" cried Sue, joyfully; she had easily beaten Pattie in the race to meet the waggon, because she had no baby to carry.

"I came to see my brother, of course; and now I am here I shall stay and help nurse him," Kitty said, as she sprang down from the waggon. "You ought to have sent for me directly, Sue. Why, I should not have known about it even now but for Imogen writing to tell me."

"We were not sure that it was Phil until last night when he became conscious, but I had just asked Pattie to write and tell you about it to-day," Sue answered, on the defensive now, because of the reproach in her sister's tone, which hurt her sorely.

"Poor old Sue! You look as if all the care of the universe had descended upon you, and I expect you have been working all day and nursing all night ever since Phil came home. But it is of no use trying to do two people's work in that fashion; it only breaks you down and spoils your appearance," Kitty said, bestowing a warm hug on Sue, then turning to greet Pattie and the baby.

"Now take me to Phil. No, I shan't upset him; of course he is weak, but he will soon get over that, and be all the happier for having his people about him," the

eldest sister said briskly, dragging Sue off with her to the tent, while Pattie stayed talking to Mr. Jones as he unharnessed his nervous, restless horses.

Phil looked up in amazement as Kitty, flushed with excitement, and prettier than ever, came into the tent and bent over him.

"Phil, darling, do you know how glad we are to have you with us again?" she asked softly, gathering his wasted hands into a loving clasp.

"I was washed overboard that night of the storm," he said, looking at her with his pathetic eyes.

"Yes, the captain wrote to mother and told her. Poor mother, it nearly broke her heart!" Kitty answered; then asked the question which all this time Sue had been longing to ask but had not dared. "How is it that you escaped drowning and no one knew it?"

"It was just a miracle, a special act of Divine Providence, mother would have said," he replied. "One of the ship's boats was washed overboard by the same wave that swept me off the deck, but it was not turned over, and when I was bumped up against it I clambered in. But though I shouted till I was hoarse I could not make them hear on board, and when morning came the ship was out of sight, and I was adrift in an open boat without food or water."

"Don't tell us any more now; you will overtire yourself," urged Sue, who saw signs of exhaustion and excitement in her patient.

"It won't hurt me, and then it will be over and done with, for it is a nightmare horror that makes me feel bad to think of or speak about. I was adrift for five days, and must have died of thirst only it rained several times. Then when my reason had just about deserted

me I was picked up by some natives of a little island, one of the Samarang group. They were kind, after a fashion, but I was ill for many weeks, and when I got better I had to work out my debt to them, two weeks of work for every one of sickness. After that it was two years before I could get the chance of a passage to Christmas Island, which I reached to find myself one week too late for the mail boat. That meant more months of working and waiting. I wrote twice, sending my letters by captains of vessels, but my letters plainly failed to reach a post-office."

"They must have," said Kitty, "for we never heard a word from you."

"I had to work my way to England as a stoker, and a truly awful life it was," went on Phil. "But when we reached Southampton the captain gave me my railway fare to Stoneycroft, and I thought my troubles were over, for it never once entered my mind that there might be changes at home. Going from the station I took the path through the churchyard, the short cut, you know, that leads past father's grave, and it was when I saw mother's name on the lower part of the stone that I realized the dear old home was gone for ever."

"Poor Phil!" murmured Sue, with a full understanding of what this must have meant to the son who had gone to sea in opposition to his mother's wishes.

"I stayed by the grave a long time, lacking the courage to go home to find more changes. Micky Brown, the grocer, found me there; knew me because of my likeness to Kitty, and took me to his own house for the night. He told me where to find you, wrote down the address for me, and loaned me some money

to come to you, but the blow of mother's death had taken all the hope out of life, and every day of the journey I felt more ill and despairing. I remember boarding the cars at Halifax and being carried on for days, which seemed like years ; but from that time all was blank, then muddled, until last night, when I came out of what seemed like a mist, to see Sue sitting beside me."

"You must not talk any more now," said Sue, in a decided tone ; then carried Kitty off into the house for breakfast.

CHAPTER XXXII

The Missing Rake

PHIL'S convalescence was slow but steady after he regained consciousness, and Kitty, who at once constituted herself head nurse, spoiled him so thoroughly and systematically, that the others declared he would be simply unbearable later, when he was really strong again.

"Oh, I have to pet him for mother as well as myself; but in spite of all I do for him he loves Sue best," Kitty would always reply, with a merry laugh; and Sue's heart would thrill with a new joy as she realized that love and self-sacrifice were, after all, greater powers in the world than beauty.

"I think we all love Sue best," Pattie said one day, when Kitty had been pretending to grumble about Phil's devotion to his twin sister. "She is our housebond, the one who truly makes home for us. I always feel that if Sue went away we should cease to have a home, even though we might still have a house to live in."

Pattie spoke warmly, but she was quite unconscious of Sue's presence in the house at the moment. She and Kitty had just come in from Phil's tent, and did not know that Sue was putting her hair tidy, before driving over to the store.

"She is a dear loving sister," Kitty answered, "but I don't think you need be afraid of her going away, Pat, for she is not the sort of girl who marries."

"I think I should break my heart if she did," Pattie said. Then hearing a cry from out of doors where the infant had been put to sleep in the shade, she darted away to see what was the matter with her charge, while Kitty returned to the tent, and neither of them knew that Sue in the other room had heard what had been said.

The horse was already harnessed, and was waiting for her in the shade of the barn, for the afternoon was very hot.

Sue was a long time in the bedroom, and when she did at length come out there was a set look on her white face, that told of a resolution taken amid much suffering. Crossing the room with a quick step, she thrust a torn and crumpled letter into the stove, and watched it burn before she left the house.

Her smile was serene as usual when she put her head inside the tent to speak to Phil, before going on to the store; but it died away as soon as she was out of sight of everybody, driving slowly down past the raspberry plantation out to the highway beyond.

Two days before she had gone to the store as she was going to-day, for various things for the house, and any letters there might be found waiting there. She had brought back a letter from Japan for Kitty, and one for herself from Alexander Gordon. He wrote to her very often now because Don could not write, but this letter she spoke of to no one. It was a purely personal matter, and the answering of it had cost her more heartache than she had ever known in her life before.

"A piece of great good fortune has come to me,"

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(so the young man wrote). "The manager of the bank here who gave me employment in the first instance, because he knew something of our family history and was sorry for Don and me, fell ill with a mortal disease, and sent for the chief director of the banking house, Mr. Forbes, who lives at Indian Head, Assiniboia. Mr. Forbes has been, and the upshot of his visit is that I am to be the new manager.

"Now that I shall have a good income, I can dare to ask you what has been in my heart for a long time : will you come here to be my wife, and Don's sister? I know that I have never spoken to you, but I saw you when Don pointed you out to me. 'The little plain one,' he called you, but to me you were utterly beautiful. I loved you then and I shall until I die. Please come, because we want you so badly."

There was more in the letter, but this was the part that rang in Sue's ears as she sat in the waggon driving towards the store. Nearly all through the previous night she had lain sleepless in her hammock, wondering if she might take this happiness that was held out to her, arguing that now Phil had come home, he could stay at Silver Creek taking care of Pattie ; so she had decided that she was free to live her life after her own fashion, and getting up before the others, had written to Alexander Gordon, saying that if Phil were strong by winter, she would come to him. It was that letter which she had burned, and in place of it she had scribbled a hasty note, which was more pathetic than she knew, saying that her duty held her fast, that she could not leave those who needed her so much, and though she was grateful for his kind thought of her, it was of no use for him to waste years in waiting for her.

This second letter had been written because of that chance talk between Kitty and Pattie which she had overheard, and now as she sat in the waggon on that June afternoon, she was bravely facing the future, putting aside her own desires, and intent only on doing her duty by those who needed her so much. Of course it was very foolish of her to have fallen in love with a man to whom she had never spoken, but then the very wisest and strongest people have a weak place somewhere, and Sue had a large heart for loving.

Phil was able to sit up for part of every day now, even to walk a few steps in the sunshine, leaning on Kitty's arm, and enjoying the pleasant summer weather.

He was pottering round with his eldest sister in this fashion, looking at the chickens and ducks, after Sue had started for the store, when Pattie came to show them the fragments of a wooden hay rake, which Master Johnny had somehow contrived to break, when riding astride the handle with the wooden teeth on the ground, pretending it was his horse.

"I am so sorry, because Sue had put the rake out to use when she came back from the store, and now she will have to wait until we can borrow one from Creek Head," said Pattie.

"But we have another," put in Kitty, briskly.

"I think not. I heard Sue saying, only the other day, that she would soon have to buy a new rake," Pattie answered ruefully. She always took it to heart rather badly if Johnny's pranks resulted in serious damage to anything about the house or farm.

"There is another. Don't you remember, Pattie, we built it into the ghost?" cried Kitty, clapping her hands gleefully. "I will bring Phil indoors, and clamber

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up to get the rake from the roof before Sue comes home."

"What ghost are you talking about?" asked Phil, who always found great entertainment in Kitty's stories.

She plunged into a spirited narration of how they had made a ghost out of their uncle's working clothes, and stood it on the doorstep to frighten away the midnight intruder who had scared them so badly.

Phil laughed until he could hardly stand, when she went on to describe how very effectual the ruse had been; but between laughing and walking he was so tired on reaching the house, that he sank quite exhausted on the settle, while Kitty put a chair on the table, and mounting on to it, tried to reach the little trap-door in the roof, through which nearly two years previously she had pushed up that figure of sticks and hay.

But although standing on the chair she could touch the trap-door, and even push it a little way up, she could not reach to pull down the figure, and she was glancing round the room to see what she could get to make herself higher, when Pattie, who was standing in the doorway with Willie in her arms, suggested the ladder from the barn as an easier way of solving the problem.

"Of course. I wonder I did not think of it before. I will go and fetch it this minute!" Kitty exclaimed gleefully, whisking down from her perch on the table with so much haste that, catching her foot somewhere, she fell to the floor, bringing the chair with her, and overturning the table also.

Pattie dumped the baby on the settle beside Phil and ran to help her. But Kitty was already scrambling

to her feet, laughing at the mishap, and declaring herself not a bit hurt.

"That table was the cause of the trouble. It does not stand firm," she said, shaking herself into order once more, while Pattie picked up the chair, and tilted the table into its normal position again.

"You would make a fine sailor, Kitty, if you can fall like that without getting hurt," said Phil, who was nursing the baby, which Pattie had thrust so unceremoniously into his arms, and looking as if he rather liked the occupation.

"Yes, I believe I should have made a very fine sailor, so it is quite a pity that I was born a girl," she answered with a laugh, going off to the barn for her ladder, which she soon brought in and reared up to the little trap-door in the ceiling.

"Help her, Pattie, will you?" said Phil. "I will nurse this chappy, who appears to think I am rather a good sort by the way he is gurgling and sucking my finger. But Kitty may break her neck if that ladder slips."

Pattie sprang forward and steadied the ladder, and well it was she did so, for no sooner had Kitty peeped up through the trap-door, than she uttered a little shriek, then jerked the ladder violently and nearly tumbled off it.

"Steady there!" exclaimed Phil; while Pattie cried out to her to be more careful.

"Oh, I've had such a scare!" said Kitty, coming a few steps down the ladder, and leaning against it, panting heavily. "There is a shingle slipped a little aside farther down the roof, just enough to throw a streak of light across the figure of my poor ghost, which

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looks exactly like a real man crouching there, and pointing at me."

"It sounds thrilling," said Phil, jerking the baby up and down on his knee. "Haul the figure down, Kitty, and let us have a look at it; there must be something fearfully uncanny about anything that could frighten you."

"Oh, I know you think my nerves are steel, my constitution cast iron, and my heart granite; but I am going to be a doctor's wife, you know, and so I need to be made of good hard material," said Kitty, with a laugh. Then she called out, "Stand clear, Pattie, or you will be smothered!"

Pattie dodged round to the under side of the ladder, while Kitty descended a step or two, dragging the figure after her. Then came a cloud of dust as she dropped it on to the floor, and she clambered up once more, poking her head up through the small trap-door.

A minute or two she remained so, while the others waited silently below. Then they heard a queer choked cry, while the ladder oscillated violently, as if she were shaking it under stress of great agitation.

"What is the matter? Have you encountered another ghost?" called Phil, in ironical tones. But Pattie cried out to her not to shake the ladder so badly, or she would cause it to slip from the framework of the trap-door.

"There is a bag up here, fearfully heavy, and it is full of money, I believe!" Kitty cried out, gasping hysterically.

"Stones you mean," said Phil, giving a jump which nearly toppled the baby off his knee.

"It is coin, not stones. I must throw it down because it is so heavy. Stand clear, Pattie!"

"I am all right," replied Pattie, who was cowering on the under side of the ladder.

A few steps down the ladder came Kitty again. Then she paused, and there was the sound of a heavy flop on the floor, followed by the chink of money, and a great cloud of dust.

"It is the bag with the five thousand dollars, which Joseph Fleming brought here two days before Uncle Ben died. I am sure of it!" cried Kitty, who still remained on the ladder, and was trembling violently.

"Are there any more bags of a similar kind up there? Because if so I will step outside before you throw them down; the atmosphere of so much money is rather overpowering," remarked Phil, who was coughing and choking with dust.

"But you don't even know that it is money until you look," put in Pattie. "Do please come down, Kitty, for I want to begin clearing up this muddle. Suppose any one were to drop in and find the house in such a condition at three o'clock in the afternoon!"

Kitty, however, did not move, but clung to the ladder, crying stormily—

"Just to think of all the shifts we have had to make, our hard work and narrow means, while that money has been lying all the time just over our heads!" she gasped, in the intervals of her sobbing.

"Come down and look; perhaps it isn't money after all," suggested Pattie; and at the bare idea of such a disappointment Kitty's tears dried as if by magic, and she came down the ladder with a quick step and pulled open the bag, which was shut but not fastened.

"Sue is coming—Sue is coming!" piped a childish treble from the door; and Johnny, who had been

playing just outside, started at a run to meet Sue, who was driving across the field.

"Johnny broke the rake rather conveniently," remarked Phil, as he sat watching Kitty taking little packets, of a hundred dollars each, out of the bag and ranging them in a row along the floor.

"It is just as Mr. Fleming told me he brought it," said Kitty, in a low voice. "Pattie, will you run to Sue and tell her not to wait to unharness, but to come at once?"

Pattie darted out of the door, leaving the muddle just as it was. Mrs. Morgan was sitting, knitting and dozing, on the shady side of the house; but she could be told later. Sue must be the first to hear the wonderful news.

"Why, how white you are, Sue! What is the matter?" she asked in keen anxiety.

"I feel rather white, too," answered Sue, with quivering lips. "There is fearful trouble at the Kenches'. Sampson is down with small-pox, and no one will go to help Mrs. Kench in nursing the poor man."

"Sue, you are not to go. We will not let you!" burst out Pattie, with angry vehemence.

"I had not even thought of going, dear; and now with the fruit coming on I could not be spared; besides, it would be like inviting disaster, as I have not had the disease. But Mrs. Morgan has had it, I know; and I believe she is a good enough Christian to go to the help of those people, who treated her so badly. I am going to ask her, and if she is willing I shall drive her over to the store."

"Are you sure it is small-pox?" Pattie asked.

"Yes; the doctor is there, and he told me. He will

not come to see Phil to-day, because he has been so long shut up with Kench. He talked to me from the bedroom window, so you need not be afraid that I have been near enough to take infection. It was he who suggested Mrs. Morgan, for, of course, he cannot stay there all the time, nor can he leave the poor man alone."

"There is Mrs. Kench," suggested Pattie.

"She will not go near her husband because of the business and the post-office. Besides, she is in awful terror of taking the complaint. It is quite painful to see her and to hear her talk," Sue answered gravely.

"Kitty has found Uncle Ben's money to-day—some of it, at least," said Pattie, as the two walked back to the house together.

"Where?" cried Sue, with a startled look.

Pattie began to tell her about it; but when she spoke of Kitty's fall, which had knocked the table over, Sue exclaimed, in an excited tone—

"Why, that must have been what Sampson Kench was trying to do that day when poor Bruce caught him in the act, and forced him to take refuge in the bedroom. He must have discovered by some means that money was hidden about the place, and guessed by our poverty that we had not discovered it."

"We ought to be very grateful to the poor old dog, then, for if once Sampson Kench's fingers had closed on that bag, it would have been all over with our chance of ever seeing it again, for the five thousand dollars are in coin," said Pattie.

"So much?"

Sue stopped short, with a dismayed look on her face and a sick fluttering at her heart. Oh, why had she been in such a hurry to answer that letter? If she had

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but waited until now it might have been possible to have said something different.

That was her first thought; but her second was truer. No amount of money could release her from her duty, and it was her love that was needed in the home. Their housebond Pattie had called her, and she knew that now Phil had been flung penniless and delicate on their hands there would be even more need for her tact and thoughtfulness than before; so that, all things considered, she had done wisely in putting temptation from her before it grew too strong to be resisted.

Going straight to where Mrs. Morgan sat resting in the shade, she told the old woman of the trouble which had come upon Sampson Kench.

"My dear, they will need some one to nurse the poor man. Can you spare me to go? Women to help in trouble are so scarce in these parts, and Mrs. Kench has a fearful horror of sickness in any shape or form," Mrs. Morgan said, 'starting up before Sue's story was half told.

"You are not afraid to go?" Sue asked gently.

"Not in the least. I have had the complaint, you know, and if I had not, one can only die once, and the death that finds us at the post of duty is as kind as sleep."

"Very well, I will help you to put some things together, and drive you over now, for they need help very badly, and the doctor said he was sure that you would come."

"Of course I will go. It is good to be of use in the world, and to lighten a burden where one can," the old woman said, getting up briskly and hurrying into the house to make her preparations.

Kitty was still sitting on the floor, with the bags of money ranged in a row before her, talking gleefully of what they would do with their new-found wealth ; while Phil sat on the settle with his arm round the baby, throwing in comments here and there.

On this scene came Mrs. Morgan and Sue, with the story of the trouble at the Kenches' ; then Kitty, who was warm-hearted and never cherished a grudge, sprang up, and hurried to help to pack a bag of necessities, slipping into it one or two bottles of toilet vinegars and perfumes, which might be of use to the poor sufferer.

"It seems to me, sonny, that it is you and I who have to take care of the money, after all," remarked Phil to the placid baby, who still contentedly sucked the young man's finger.

"Yah-ah-ah !" gurgled the infant, as if in derision, then made a futile grab at a fly which had settled on Phil's coat-sleeve, bursting into a loud cry because of its failure to catch it.

Pattie came with flying feet to see what ailed her charge ; while Phil, freed from nursing, set to work to gather up the packets of dollars and stow them away out of sight in the bag where they had remained hidden so long.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Visit to Indian Head

THE girls and Phil had a long consultation that evening, as to the best thing to be done with the bag of money which Kitty had found in the loft that afternoon.

"I wish you would lend a part of it to Arthur to buy a practice with, then he could come home from that horrid Japan, and we could be married," Kitty said, looking at Sue.

"The money is quite as much yours as mine. I only wish it were safely in a bank out of the reach of thieves," replied Sue, with a shiver.

"Sampson Kench is fortunately unable to come hunting round after it just now, and no one else seems to have any idea that there was anything to steal," Pattie said.

"If I were you I would put it in a bank of some kind as quick as I could get it there. You can decide later how you will spend it," put in Phil.

"But there is no bank near here, and it has been safe in the loft for so long, I don't see that we need hurry about it," objected Kitty, who appeared to derive no small satisfaction from handling the little bags of coin.

"I agree with Phil that we shall all feel more secure

when the money is banked, and I suggest that we tell Mr. Elstow about it, and take his advice," remarked Sue.

"Here he comes riding up the field on the colt, so you will not have to wait long for your opportunity," said Pattie, who was sitting on the doorstep sewing.

"Is the meeting agreed that Mr. Elstow be consulted?" demanded Phil, with an air of mock seriousness. "Those who approve, kindly hold up the right hand."

Kitty was the only one whose hand did not go up. "The majority must decide the matter, of course; but it would be a clever thief who stole any of that money while it was under my care," she said, tapping her foot impatiently on the floor.

"If you bank it, you will have interest for it; but all the time you keep it at home, stowed away in a stocking, it is so much dead money," went on Phil, with the air of an oracle.

"Oh, I know that; but I just love to have money in my possession, it is such a satisfying sensation."

The others laughed. All her life Kitty had shown a tendency to hoard, to keep money by her and gloat over it; but happily for her the good-humoured ridicule of the others had kept the tendency in check.

"I am glad you can be cheerful to-night. I was afraid the news about Sampson Kench would have frightened you into melancholy," said John Elstow, coming into the house and greeting them in the grave fashion which was his wont since his heavy sorrow had come upon him.

"The tidings made us feel rather bad when it came; but Mrs. Morgan is sure to do her best for the poor man, and she is a really good nurse," Pattie answered,

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speaking before the others because she was the nearest to the door.

"Ah, she has gone to help them? I thought she would," he said in a quiet tone of satisfaction.

"We want your advice, please," began Sue, who had to broach the subject of banking the money, because Kitty would not; and then she told him of the hoard they had found that afternoon.

"So the poor old man really had money after all. I find it hard to believe even now; he always appeared so poor and struggling," John Elstow remarked in great surprise. "If you want my opinion I should suggest that you take the money to the Colonial Bank at Indian Head. I know Mr. Forbes, the chief director. He is a straight man, and will do his best for you."

"How could we get it there? Would it be possible to drive?" asked Sue, in a worried tone, for the burden of the money was pressing on her rather heavily to-night. Of course it was pleasant to feel that there was something between them and the poverty which had at times pressed so sorely, but she felt certain there would be no ease of mind for her, until it was in safer keeping than at present.

"Quite possible; but it is a goodish distance, more than thirty miles. If you and Miss Kitty like, I will drive you both over to Indian Head to-morrow. It would be rather an awkward road for you to find alone."

"It is very kind of you. I should hate to drive over with so much money, and only Kitty for a protector. I should be afraid that everybody we met would want to steal it. How fearfully suspicious the possession of a little wealth does make one!" said Sue, with a shrug.

"Pattie, can you manage with both of us away?" asked Kitty, suddenly remembering that Mrs. Morgan was not there for a stand-by in case of need.

"I expect so. It will be rather a rush; but what I cannot find time to do can remain undone, and Phil can look after Willie some part of the time at any rate," Pattie answered.

"We could take Johnny with us; that would make a difference, and lighten the work a little," suggested Sue, who was always in dread of overworking Pattie.

"It would be a great relief if you could, for unless I tie him up to the fence post I am never quite sure where he is, or what he is doing," she replied, laughing.

"Johnny is a pickle, without doubt," said Kitty to Johnny's father. "Pattie fastened him to the fence the other day, but he untied the cord, and we found him half an hour later taking an impromptu bath in the horse-trough with all his clothes on!"

"Miss Pattie spoils him, I am afraid," said John Elstow; but there was a deep note of satisfaction in his voice, which betrayed how thankful he was that some one was ready and willing to spoil his motherless babes.

"But Johnny deserves a treat, and he shall have one too, for if he had not broken the rake that money might have remained unfound for another two years, perhaps longer," Kitty went on. "So I mean to buy him the best box of chocolate I can find in Indian Head, and he shall eat as many as he pleases."

"You must not do that!" exclaimed Pattie in alarm. "Chocolates always make Johnny sick."

"Don't worry about him, Miss Pattie; I will eat the chocolates, box and all, before he shall be allowed to make himself sick, and bring you more trouble," John

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Elstow said quietly ; and she knew that Kitty's rash generosity would be kept in due bounds.

A very early start was made next morning, John Elstow driving down from Creek Head with two horses by five o'clock. Pattie gave him some breakfast, while Kitty and Sue put the bag of money into the waggon, with a small hamper containing lunch. Then Johnny was lifted on to the front seat to sit beside his father, the two girls settled themselves behind, and the party started, leaving Phil and Pattie in solitary possession, the infant not counting except in the matter of noise.

John Elstow's horses were young and fresh, while the road, although rough, lay through fairly level country ; so the miles flew past, and before Sue could have believed it possible the houses of Indian Head appeared in the distance.

She was secretly very much interested at the prospect of seeing Mr. Forbes, because he was the director to whom Alexander Gordon owed his promotion, only she wondered whether he could have returned from Jamaica so soon, and whether he would be at the bank on this particular morning.

It was this which made her heart flutter so much, while her face went red and white by turns, as she entered the bank doors with Kitty, the two carrying the heavy bag between them.

The place seemed to be full of people—clerks writing as fast as if their lives depended on their getting so much done within a certain time, other clerks gathering money up or counting it into neat little piles, people bustling in with money or coming to take money away, and everywhere so much movement, that Sue was momentarily bewildered.

Kitty's voice asking for Mr. Forbes seemed to come from a long way off, and Sue was straining her ears for the answer, when a frail-looking elderly man, with thin wisps of grey hair, darted forward and caught her by both hands.

"My kind little preserver, how delighted I am to see you! I was meditating a visit to Silver Creek to see you next week. I should have come before, but for an unexpected trip to the West Indies. I hope Dan Lemon forwarded the little note I left in his care."

"I have had no note," began Sue, dubiously, trying to remember where she had heard this voice before. Then, the mention of Dan Lemon's name stimulating recollection, she recognized the well-dressed banker as the poor old man whose life she had helped to save on that momentous day when the letter about Phil came.

"Too bad of Dan Lemon, but unfortunately very much like him. Is this your sister?" And Mr. Forbes seized upon the amazed Kitty, shaking hands with her as cordially as if he were greeting an old friend.

Then he drew them both into a side room, away from the hurry and bustle of people coming and going, explaining to Kitty as he went how it was he had recognized Sue, and how much he was indebted to her pluck and resourcefulness.

"Sue did not tell us," Kitty said, with a reproachful glance at her sister.

"I told Pattie; but there has been so much to think of since we have had Phil to take care of," Sue murmured, in blushing apology, for it was something of an embarrassment to find herself suddenly famous.

"I intended coming to thank you in person much earlier, but I was cabled for, and had to start for the

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West Indies at practically two hours' notice, and as I was not quite sure about your address, I sent to Dan Lemon, asking him to forward a letter, which I suppose he did not do. Very tiresome of him, very !”

Kitty was just opening her lips to explain the errand which had brought them there, when Mr. Forbes asked a question which made her jump.

“I think you said you lived on Silver Creek. Do you know a Mr. Benjamin Holt who lives in that district?”

“He was our uncle, but he has been dead for two years,” answered Sue, and would have gone on to state the manner of his death, but for a warning glance from Kitty.

“Dead! and so long ago! Pray why was I not communicated with?” he demanded sharply.

“Why should you have been told? We did not even know your name,” said Kitty, with a touch of defiance in her tone; but she went rather white as she wondered if this banker had some claim to their dead uncle's estate, of which Sue and she knew nothing.

“He was a client of ours,” replied Mr. Forbes, with a troubled look.

“Do you mean that he owed the bank money?” asked Sue, whose mind was dominated by the same thought as Kitty's.

Mr. Forbes laughed outright, but immediately apologized for his rudeness. “I beg your pardon for laughing. You are not very worldly wise, although you are so brave, or you would know that banks don't wait for their money in that fashion. You say that Mr. Holt was your uncle. Do you mind telling me to whom he left his money, and who his executors are?”

“He had no money to leave—at least, we thought so

then, only the poor little house and the farm where we live. He left no will, only an unwitnessed slip of paper, saying he wished us, his nieces, to have everything he had to leave. But we could find no papers of any kind, not even the receipt for the purchase of the farm," Kitty answered, in an aggrieved tone.

"Then they must have been stolen," Mr. Forbes said.

"There was no one to steal them," put in Sue. "Mr. Elstow, of Creek Head, was the one who found Uncle Ben dead; certainly he would not have touched them; and old Mrs. Morgan, who stayed in the house until the funeral, is equally above suspicion."

"I can answer for John Elstow's honesty, but I have not the pleasure of Mrs. Morgan's acquaintance. Will you tell me about his death; was it sudden?" asked the banker, sitting down in front of them and looking from Kitty to Sue, and then back to Kitty again.

They told him all the history of their coming to Silver Creek, to find, instead of the welcome they expected, only an empty house, which they had kept for their home by dint of sheer hard toil.

"But it was better than nothing, of course," said Sue, brightly. "We have done very well with the farm too. If it is a good season for fruit, we shall have money to save or to spend on improvements."

"Spend it on improvements, then, for you have no especial need to be saving; or, at least, you will not have, if you can clearly prove your title at law as the heirs of Mr. Holt," replied Mr. Forbes, smiling at her puzzled face.

"We proved that very clearly on taking possession of the farm," Kitty remarked, with considerable dignity.

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Mr. Forbes smiled again ; then looking at Sue, he said quietly—

"You did me the very greatest service that one person can do another, and you did it at the risk of considerable injury to yourself, so I am going to speak now, when otherwise I might have kept silence, leaving you to find out by chance, or perhaps to go without knowing, that your uncle left a considerable amount of money behind him."

Kitty's hand instinctively gripped the bag, still standing at her feet, while she uttered the one word—

"Where?"

"Here," answered the banker. "Did I not tell you that Mr. Holt was a client of ours? Speaking roughly, and without reference to books, I should say there are about fifteen thousand dollars to his credit."

"Then Mr. Fleming was right," burst out Kitty. "He told me that Uncle Ben was worth twenty thousand dollars, and that, with the five thousand we have here, makes the exact amount."

"Do you mean the late Joseph Fleming, of Brandon?" asked Mr. Forbes.

"Yes," replied Kitty. Then she told the banker of the strange chance which brought her into Mr. Fleming's notice, and how he promised to investigate the matter of the missing money, but was prevented by death from making his promise good. Then followed the history of the find of money hidden away under the shingles of the little brown house, and by the time it was told, a clerk had come to say several people were waiting to interview Mr. Forbes.

Both girls rose hurriedly to their feet, with apologies for having detained him so long ; but he only laughed,

bidding them sit down again, and begging that they would lunch with him in half an hour's time.

Kitty was accepting in her bright, graceful manner, when Sue burst in hurriedly—

"But there are Mr. Elstow and Johnny, we could not leave them; besides, we brought our luncheon with us."

Tears of vexation rose in Kitty's eyes. Sue was so brusque and countrified, she would have liked to tread on her toes for mentioning that homely luncheon-basket, while she wished plain John Elstow and the small, irrepressible Johnny at the North Pole, or some region equally remote. The chance of lunching with a banker did not come every day, and so would have been something to remember and talk over afterwards.

"Mr. Elstow and Johnny will join us, of course, and the luncheon-basket which you brought will come in useful on the journey back to Silver Creek. Thirty miles did you say it was? Dear me, what a drive! But Mr. Elstow has good horses, no doubt," Mr. Forbes said with such genuine friendliness of manner that Kitty was charmed with him.

But it was a novel experience for her to see Sue treated with greater consideration than herself. The lunch was taken at the hotel standing at the corner of the next block, and during the progress of the meal, Kitty was amazed at the deference paid to her plain little sister by the wealthy banker; she was even a little piqued, for it had always been so natural to her to take the first place, while Pattie and Sue occupied the background.

Then, too, it was rather surprising that a rich man like Mr. Forbes should be so interested in fruit-growing,

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and in farming generally. He knew a lot about the science of agriculture too, and Kitty, who cared not at all for discussions on the raspberry mildew, or the usefulness of ensilage, felt herself decidedly out of it, and was not sorry when luncheon came to an end.

Just as they had taken their meal, which was served for them in a private room, Mr. Forbes turned to Kitty and said—

“Now about that money of your late uncle’s which we have on deposit. I should advise you to employ a good lawyer. I must not recommend one, through fear of prejudice, but Mr. Elstow will be able to advise you. Failing a will, you will have to prove to my bank that you are without doubt the next of kin. It is, of course, most awkward for you all that the deposit-book is missing, but perhaps even that might be found by judicious advertising.”

“Thank you, it is most kind of you to tell us what to do,” replied Kitty.

“Ah, but remember my debt to your sister,” said Mr. Forbes, with a shake of his head. “Mrs. Forbes is at present in Europe, with our married daughter, but when she returns, she will, I know, be most anxious to make Miss Sue’s acquaintance.”

CHAPTER XXXIV

The End of Sampson Kench

WITHOUT doubt Sampson Kench was very ill, and used to sickness as she was, Mrs. Morgan decided before she had been an hour in attendance on him that his chances of recovery were very remote.

Probably the doctor thought so too, and that was why he had stayed so long with his patient, leaving all the other sick folk to get on as best they could without him.

When Mrs. Morgan came on the scene, however, the doctor was free to go about his other business, and telling her that he would most likely pay his visits in the late evening, after his other work was done, he left her to do the best she could with a case which was plainly hopeless from the very first.

A bad patient to nurse was Sampson Kench. Morbid, vindictive, and cruel, he seemed to think Mrs. Morgan entirely to blame for the dire disaster which had come to him. No language was too foul, no abuse too outrageous to be launched at her, and during the first day or two before his great strength waned he was so active in flinging all sorts of missiles at her, that she had to become expert in dodging in order to avoid them. Her task grew in a measure easier as he became weaker,

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but it was plain he had something on his mind which would not let him rest, and that made him fiercely resentful every time she attempted to make his hard bed a little more comfortable.

The Kenches had not wasted much of their money on household conveniences, and a barer place than the sick-room it would be difficult to imagine.

Mrs. Morgan, who did not dare to leave her patient night or day for more than a few moments at a time, had to take her exercise in keeping his room clean, and her sleep in snatches, sitting in a broken chair, with her feet resting on an old cheese-tub, which stood by the side of the bed. But she was well inured to hardship by this time, and since the sleep had to be taken in snatches, she was careful that an opportunity for a brief doze should never be neglected, being able to enjoy a nap at any hour of the day or night, and yet to awake active and alert at the first moment necessity demanded it.

Sampson Kench had been four days ill, and as the hours of the fourth night wore on, he lay so still Mrs. Morgan thought he must be sleeping, and promptly settled for a nap on her own account, since he would probably be delirious later, when she might need all her strength to cope with her fever-maddened patient.

She was sleeping peacefully, dreaming of the family at the little brown house, when a slight movement awoke her, and opening her eyes, but without moving her body, she saw Sampson Kench getting out of bed.

Her first impulse was to start up and insist on his lying down again at once, then she resolved to remain quiet a moment to see what he was doing.

Slowly and cautiously he crept along, gripping the

wooden bedstead for support with one hand, while in the other she saw to her horror he held a long chisel.

Where had he got it from, and what was he going to do with it? An instinct of self-preservation caused her to droop her eyelids over her eyes, so that if he glanced round he should believe her to be still fast asleep.

There was a rusty stove in one corner of the room, in which a handful of fire smouldered in readiness for warming beef-tea and gruel. Stooping down just beyond the stove, and rather out of Mrs. Morgan's range of vision as she sat in the broken chair, the sick man began to work with his chisel at one of the boards, trying with all his fast-failing strength to wrench it from its place.

She watched him, not daring to stir hand or foot. The door was on the other side of the room ; to reach it she must pass within a yard of where he crouched on the floor, with that murderous chisel clutched in his hand. Even supposing she did reach the door, there was no one whom she could summon to her aid, however much she might call ; for Mrs. Kench, the only other person in the house, would rather run a mile than venture near the infected chamber, even although it was her own husband who needed her.

So Mrs. Morgan kept quiet. Fortunately her nerves were of the steadiest, and she made up in calmness of mind what she lacked in strength of body.

Sampson Kench succeeded in his task at length ; the board flew up with considerable noise, and he lifted from under it a small parcel. He had apparently forgotten all about Mrs. Morgan's presence in the room, for replacing the board, he dropped the chisel on the floor with a clatter, and rising to his feet with difficulty,

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stuffed the little packet he had taken from under the board into the stove.

An intense curiosity to know what it was that he desired to burn seized upon Mrs. Morgan, and when, with a groan or utter anguish, he dropped half-fainting on the bed, she started up, as if just awake, commencing a mild remonstrance, because he had flung his bed-clothes on the floor.

But he was wandering in his mind now, and muttering persistently, "It is the dead hand that holds—the dead hand that holds!"

Covering him up, and taking care to draw the blanket right over his face, she stepped quickly to the stove, and drawing from it the little packet, which already was beginning to burn, she squeezed out the fire with her hand, and slipped the packet into her pocket for examination at some more convenient time. Then thrusting a handful of loose paper into the stove, she went back to the broken chair once more.

Presently the paper caught alight and blazed up the stove pipe with a roar.

"What is that?" demanded Sampson Kench, flinging back the blankets and sitting erect on the bed.

"Only some paper burning in the stove. Lie down again; you know it is bad for you to be sitting up," she answered soothingly, coming to his side to cover him over once more.

He dropped back on his pillow. "Ha, I've done it now, and they may whistle for their money," he said, staring up at Mrs. Morgan with a horrible, glassy glare in his eyes. "I only wish I could have found that five thousand dollars. I should have got it that day in spite of the dog, I know I should, only *he* was up there

crouching under the shingles. That is the second time I've seen him ; the first time he was standing on his doorstep in the moonlight, guarding his precious house and those upstart girls. It is the dead hand that holds, the dead hand that holds !"

"Sampson Kench," said Mrs. Morgan, solemnly, "it seems to me that if you've got any wrongs to confess, you had better do it now, since it is pretty clear to me that your time is growing short in which to make your peace with Heaven."

"It is the dead hand that holds, and if I don't confess they will never get the money, never!" he said with a chuckle, then rambled off into a broken account of how he had gone to Ben Holt's house and found the poor man sitting by the table dead, with his head resting on an open Bible. "But I dared not look for the money then ; for he was there, and it is the dead hand that holds," he muttered.

* * * * *

It was a week later, and the three girls were sitting outside the house with Phil in the gloaming, talking over the perplexing question of how to get their uncle's property into their own hands. No lawyer had been consulted yet. John Elstow had advised the delay of a week or two while they turned the matter over in their minds, and to this even Kitty had consented, for the money was safe enough where it was, and would probably remain in the same place even after their title to it had been established.

"With the five thousand dollars we put in the bank last week, there will be five thousand dollars each for us," said Kitty. "It isn't riches, but on the other hand it lifts us a long way out of poverty, and Arthur will be

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able to come home from Japan to settle down in a city not too far away."

You can leave me out of the count entirely ; the money was not intended for me, and I will not take it," Phil remarked in a decided tone.

"It would have been intended for you as much as for us, if any one had had the least idea that you were still alive," Kitty retorted, with a touch of asperity. Phil showed signs, now he was gaining strength, of possessing a pretty decided will of his own, of which Kitty, who liked to rule, did not approve.

"I should like to stay at home and work, if Sue will have me," Phil said, drawing his twin sister's head down to rest on his shoulder. "And I shall not be above accepting a reasonable wage for my services ; but I am not going to take any of Uncle Ben's money, please understand that."

"Don't worry yourself, Kitty," said Sue, as the elder sister began a spirited protest. "Twins are not like other people ; what belongs to one is equally the other's, so my portion and Phil's will be identical."

"I have made up my mind," went on Phil, with a resolute squaring of his jaw ; but Sue put her hand over his mouth, and would let no more words come.

"That you will stay at home and help me to manage the land, of course," she said, with a merry laugh. "But that is only your plain duty, so there is no need for you to plume yourself upon your decision as if it were a virtue. I will pay you well, never fear, and I will order you about so unmercifully that you will only be too thankful to take your share of that money when you come of age, in order to escape from my clutches. If it were not for you we should have been compelled to

have a hired man, which would not have been pleasant, for one cannot bully a stranger about as one can one's own people."

"Oh, indeed! That is a cheerful prospect for a poor fellow newly risen from a sick-bed; but I think I will risk it. If the worst comes to the worst, I can always run away and join the Indians on the Reservation."

"There is a horse trotting along the road; I wonder if it is any one coming here," said Pattie, who was sitting on the doorstep trying to sew in the fast fading light.

"Perhaps it is Mr. Elstow," remarked Sue, whose sight and hearing were both inferior to Pattie's.

"I think not; the creature does not trot like one of the Creek Head horses, and it is coming the other way. I believe it is the doctor," Pattie said, giving up the attempt to sew, and leaning at ease against the doorpost.

"Look here, girls," broke in Phil, hastily, "there is no need for that doctor to come any more, and I will tell him so, plainly. Just think what a bill we shall have from him; it will take me months to work it out, and I am quite well now; in fact, I mean to do the milking to-morrow morning, for I can't stand loafing round in bed while you girls do the work."

"Hired man," began Sue, in whimsical protest, "I wish you would be so good as to remember that I am the boss, and that it is not your place to say that you will do this or that. The doctor will come as often as he thinks fit and proper, and we will pay the bill."

"Not if I know it," began Phil; but by this time the visitor, who proved to be the doctor, had ridden up,

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and he was forced to reserve his protest for another time.

The doctor greeted them all round, coming to Phil last.

"Ah, I shall have to cross your name off my list, I can see; that is what comes of good nursing!" he exclaimed, with mock regret.

"You might have spared yourself the trouble of coming to-night, so far as I am concerned," the young man answered, a trifle brusquely.

"I did not come to see you; don't be so conceited, always believing yourself the centre of attraction! I came to see your sisters, and as I have not felt your pulse the visit will not be charged in the bill, which will be quite long enough without it."

"Of that I have not the slightest doubt," Phil muttered under his breath; upon which Sue pinched his arm smartly. But the doctor, whose hearing was of the best, replied calmly—

"I shall charge top price for my attendance on you of course, because I find you are all so well able to pay, and it is medical etiquette to get a profit from the wealthy. That man Sampson Kench is dead," he announced, with an abrupt change of manner.

"Dead!" exclaimed Sue. "Poor man! But now we shall be able to have Mrs. Morgan home."

"Not if I know it, until every risk of infection is over," growled the doctor. "I'm not anxious to have any more small-pox cases in the neighbourhood."

"When did he die?" asked Kitty, with a thrill of awe creeping into her tone.

"Last night, and we bury him at dawn to-morrow; but Mrs. Morgan and I shall be the only mourners,

for his wife vows that she will not be present for fear of infection, and I forbid any of you to come."

"Is that what you came for?" inquired Kitty.

"No; I came to bring you this packet, which in his delirium Sampson Kench unearthed a few nights ago, and tried to burn. Mrs. Morgan managed to save the papers from utter destruction. You need not be afraid to touch them, for I have had them at my house for two or three days under strong disinfectants. I took the liberty to read them, and I heartily congratulate you all. If my bill is bigger than you expected, you must put the fact down to my having had a sight of those papers. Good night!" Waving his hand, in a farewell which included them all, the doctor mounted his horse, and rode away, while the gloaming deepened into night, and the stars came out.

"Sue, let us go in and get a light!" cried Kitty, eagerly; for it was into her hands the doctor had given the packet of papers, and she had been peering at them in a vain endeavour to find out their contents. "Perhaps this is something that Sampson Kench stole from Uncle Ben."

Pattie lighted the lamp which stood on the table, and the others clustered round to look at the partly burned fragments rescued by Mrs. Morgan.

There was a bank-book very badly scorched, an envelope containing the deeds of the house and farm, another envelope from which they drew a brief will, made in the year after Mrs. Walsh was left a widow, and leaving all he possessed to his sister, and after her to her children; there was also a small envelope directed to the Colonial Bank, Indian Head, with a letter inside, dated the day after Joseph Fleming's visit, in which

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Benjamin Holt asked that a responsible agent might be sent to Silver Creek, to convey five thousand dollars to the bank, as he himself did not feel well enough to undertake the journey.

"Ah, it is this letter which explains the situation so clearly," said Kitty. "Sampson Kench must have read it, and so tried hard to get possession of the money; hence his desire to buy us out, and his attempts to frighten us away."

"You will have to take your share of the money now, Phil, whether you like it or not; the lawyers will see to that," put in Sue. "This will is properly signed and witnessed; it was made before you were supposed to be drowned, and leaves everything to mother with reversion to her children."

"It will help to pay the doctor's bill," Phil remarked, with a sigh of relief.

"The book is dreadfully burned," Pattie said ruefully, as she carefully turned over the fragments.

"Never mind, there is enough of it left to show that it is, or was, Uncle Ben's bank-book; and Mr. Forbes is so grateful to Sue, that he is sure to make things easy for us," Kitty answered.

Nor was she mistaken.

CHAPTER XXXV

After Long Waiting

SIX years slipped away, and a person revisiting Silver Creek after a long absence would scarcely have recognized the neighbourhood. All the land on the south side of the creek, from the store which had been Sampson Kench's to Creek Head, had been planted with fruit trees, or laid out in raspberry plantations and strawberry fields.

The little brown house was brown still ; but it had thrown out a wing on either side, and showed a big jam factory in the rear. There was a stable, too, on the farther side of the barn, while a verandah spread along the front of the house, and made a pleasant spot to rest in on a sunny day.

Sue and Phil lived there alone, except for Mrs. Morgan, who appeared to lose something of her feebleness as the years went on.

Kitty was married, and had gone to live in Vancouver city. She and Dr. Lambert had begged Mrs. Morgan to share their home ; but the old lady declared herself not grand enough in her ways for the fine house in the city over which Kitty ruled as mistress, and elected to stay on with the others at the lonely farm on Silver Creek.

It was five years since Kitty's marriage, and she had a small son and daughter to bring with her now, when she came every summer to stay with her people in the country. Dr. Lambert came, too, whenever he had time for a holiday, making so much of his mother in his brief visits, that Phil used to pretend to be nearly heart-broken from jealousy, causing the old woman, who had once been so lonely, to weep tears of joy, because now there were two sons to love her in her old age.

Two years ago Pattie had married also; but as she had only gone to Creek Head as the wife of John Elstow, it was hardly like losing her from the home circle.

Phil, who had developed into a regular tease, was wont to declare that Pattie had persuaded John Elstow to marry her because she was afraid some one else would marry him and take the children away from her. But Sue knew very well that it was gratitude for Pattie's care of his babies which had first drawn John Elstow's heart to the youngest of the Walsh family, and that, had Pattie refused to marry him, he would probably have lived lonely for the remainder of his life.

Sue herself had worn considerably with the passing of the busy years; the others noticed this, and had dropped into the habit of calling her old maid Sue, commenting on the prim little ways into which she had fallen.

She kept her own counsel on the reason of her choice of a single life. More than one lover had come to her during the years that had gone; but she had sent them all away, cherishing in secret still her liking for the man

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to whom she had never spoken, but who was her friend and her close correspondent.

Poor Don had lain in his grave for six months now, and since his brother's death Alexander Gordon's letters had come less frequently. Indeed, for some weeks now they had ceased altogether; and there was a sense of lurking foreboding in Sue's heart, lest some disaster had crept upon the man who had been such a devoted nurse to his invalid brother.

It was this fear which made her pale and languid during the busy summer days, while the jam-making was in full swing.

When the greatest rush of the work was over Kitty came, bringing her two children with her, and this time bringing also a capable nurse; but that was because Phil had written, saying that Sue was not in a fit state of health to be overworked or worried. Mrs. Elstow had written after much the same fashion, and between the two letters Kitty became genuinely frightened on Sue's account.

Before she had been a week at Silver Creek Kitty fished out the cause of Sue's languor and pale looks. It was largely guess-work, of course; but Kitty had always been good at that sort of thing, and coming upon Sue one day unexpectedly, when she was turning over a box of letters from Jamaica, with a tell-tale tenderness on her face, the clever elder sister jumped rapidly to a conclusion as to what ought to be done, and the very next day insisted on Phil driving her to Indian Head, because she desired to consult Mr. Forbes on a matter of business.

After that visit matters went on as usual for a week or more; then Kitty had a letter from Mr. Forbes which

made her heart flutter considerably, whilst she watched Sue with covert interest and anxiety.

Sue, entirely unconscious of the conspiracy against her, went her quiet way as usual, a little wearily, perhaps, but with never a sign outwardly of the dull heartache which robbed her days of peace and her nights of rest.

"What are you going to do this afternoon, Sue?" Kitty asked one hot morning in the middle of August.

"Oh, ever so many things, but chiefly I am going the round of the plum trees; some of the earlier sorts are getting on fast, and should be ready for gathering in a day or two," Sue replied.

"Leave the plums alone for one more day, and stay at home and rest. There are a packet of new magazines Arthur sent this morning, and if you are at home Mrs. Morgan can come to Creek Head with us this afternoon. We are all going to have tea in the harvest-field."

"I can stay at home, certainly, and as it is going to be very hot, an idle time will be a real holiday," Sue answered; then went off about her morning's work with a quicker step, because of the prospect of rest in the afternoon.

Phil was at Creek Head the whole day helping with the harvest, and when after the early dinner Kitty and Mrs. Morgan with the children and the nurse drove off to Creek Head also, a great silence seemed to settle down on house and fields.

Sue was resting on the verandah, not attempting to read, when she was startled by the quick trot of a horse's feet, while at the same moment Phil's dog, which had been lying asleep in the shade, got up and growled, a sure sign that the approaching horseman was a stranger.

She rose to her feet as he came nearer the house ; then, when he dismounted from his horse to come and greet her, she uttered a low, startled cry of recognition : " Mr. Gordon, I thought you were in Jamaica."

Alexander Gordon had the same resolute face and manner as when Sue had seen him eight years before in the railway depôt in Montreal, but there were deep lines made by care and sorrow on his countenance now, while his hair was plentifully streaked with grey.

" I came from Jamaica two weeks ago," he answered, taking her hand in greeting and holding it fast. " I have been made manager of the branch at Indian Head, and shall live there in future."

" So near ? That will be very pleasant," she said, her pale face flushing under his gaze.

" So far you mean, unless you will consent to come to Indian Head, too," he replied, still holding her hand in a close grip. " Sue, your family don't need you half as much as I do ; don't say no to me this time."

Her head drooped then, for how could she say no when all her heart was shouting *yes* ?

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