The Palace Beautiful

by L. T. Meade

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THE PALACE BEAUTIFUL.

A STORY FOR GIRLS.

BY

L.T. MEADE,

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THE PALACE BEAUTIFUL.

A STORY FOR GIRLS.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY DAYS.

The three girls were called after flowers. This is how it came about:

When Primrose opened her eyes on the world she brought back a little bit of spring to her mother's heart.

Mrs. Mainwaring had gone through a terrible trouble—a trouble so dark and mysterious, so impossible to feel reconciled to, that her health had been almost shattered, and she had almost said good-bye to hope.

The baby came in the spring-time, and the soft, velvety touch of the little face, and the sight of the round baby limbs, had made Mrs. Mainwaring smile: had caused her to pluck up heart, and to determine resolutely to take this new blessing, and to begin to live again.

The baby came in the month of March, just when the primroses were beginning to open their pale and yet bright blossoms. Mrs. Mainwaring said that the child was a symbol of spring to her, and she called her Primrose.

The next girl was born in Italy, in the middle of a rich and brilliant summer. Flowers were everywhere, and the baby, a black-haired, dark-eyed little mite, had a starry look about her. She was called Jasmine, and the name from the very first suited her exactly.

The third and youngest of the sisters also came in the summer, but she was born in an English cottage. Her mother, who had been rich when Jasmine was born, was now poor; that is, she was poor as far as money is concerned, but the three little daughters made her feel rich. She called the child from the first her little country wild flower, and allowed Primrose and Jasmine to select her name. They brought in handfuls of field daisies, and begged to have the baby called after them.

The three girls grew up in the little country cottage. Their father was in India, in a very unhealthy part of the country. He wrote home by every mail, and in each letter expressed a hope that the Government under which he served would allow him to return to England and to his wife and children. Death, however, came first to the gallant captain. When Primrose was ten years old, and Daisy was little more than a baby, Mrs. Mainwaring found herself in the humble position of an officer's widow, with very little to live on besides her pension.

In the Devonshire village, however, things were cheap, rents were low, and the manners of life deliciously fresh and primitive.

Primrose, Jasmine, and Daisy grew up something like the flowers, taking no thought for the morrow, and happy in the grand facts that they were alive, that they were perfectly healthy, and that the sun shone and the sweet fresh breezes blew for them. They were as primitive as the little place where they lived, and cared nothing at all for fashionably-cut dresses; or for what people who think themselves wiser would have called the necessary enjoyments of life. Mrs. Mainwaring, who had gone through a terrible trouble before the birth of her eldest girl, had her nerves shattered a second time by her husband's death; from that moment she was more ruled by her girls than a ruler to them. They did pretty much what they pleased, and she was content that they should make themselves happy in their own way.

It was lucky for the girls that they were amiable, and had strength of character.

Primrose was delightfully matter-of-fact. When she saw that her mother allowed

them to learn their lessons anyhow she made little rules for herself and her sisters—the rules were so playful and so light that the others, for mere fun, followed them—thus they insisted on their mother hearing them their daily tasks; they insisted on going regularly twice a week to a certain old Miss Martineau, who gave them lessons on an antiquated piano, and taught them obsolete French. Primrose was considered by her sisters very wise indeed but Primrose also thought Jasmine wise, and wise with a wisdom which she could appreciate without touching; for Jasmine had got some gifts from a fairy wand, she was touched with the spirit of Romance, and had a beautiful way of looking at life which her sisters loved to encourage. Daisy was the acknowledged baby of the family—she was very pretty, and not very strong, was everybody's darling, and was, of course, something of a spoilt child.

Primrose had a face which harmonized very well with her quaint, sweet name; her hair was soft, straight, and yellow, her eyes were light brown, her skin was fair, and her expression extremely calm, gentle, and placid. To look at Primrose was to feel soothed—she had a somewhat slow way of speaking, and she never wasted her words. Jasmine was in all particulars her opposite. She was dark, with very bright and lovely eyes; her movements were quick, her expression full of animation, and when excited—and she was generally in a state of excitement—her words tumbled out almost too quickly for coherence. Her cheeks would burn, and her eyes sparkle, over such trivial circumstances as a walk down a country lane, as blackberry-hunting, as strawberry-picking—a new story-book kept her awake half the night—she was, in short, a constant little volcano in this quiet home, and would have been an intolerable child but for the great sweetness of her temper, and also for the fact that every one more or less yielded to her.

Daisy was very pretty and fair—her hair was as yellow as Primrose's, but it curled, and was more or less always in a state of friz; her eyes were wide open and blue, and she was just a charming little child, partaking slightly of the qualities of both her elder sisters.

These girls had never had a care or an anxiety—when they were hungry they could eat, when they were tired sleep could lull them into dreamless rest—they had never seen any world but the narrow world of Rosebury, the name of the village where they lived. Even romantic Jasmine thought that life at Rosebury, with perhaps a few more books and a few more adventures must form the sum and substance of her existence. Of course there was a large world outside, but even Jasmine had not begun to long for it.

Primrose was sixteen, Jasmine between thirteen and fourteen, and Daisy ten, when a sudden break came to all this quiet and happy routine. Mrs. Mainwaring without any warning or any leave-taking, suddenly died.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST MONTH OF THEIR TROUBLE.

There are mothers and mothers. Mrs. Mainwaring was the kind of mother who could not possibly say a harsh word to her children—she could not be severe to them, she could never do anything but consider them the sweetest and best of human beings. The girls ruled her, and she liked to be ruled by them. After her husband's death, and after the first agony of his loss had passed away, she sank into a sort of subdued state—she began to live in the present, to be content with the little blessings of each day, to look upon the sunshine as an unmitigated boon, and on the girls' laughter as the sweetest music. She had been rich in her early married life, but Captain Mainwaring had lost his money, had lost all his large private means, through a bank failure, and before Daisy came into the world Mrs. Mainwaring knew that she was a very poor woman indeed. Before the captain went to India he insured his life for £1000, and after his death Mrs. Mainwaring lived very placidly on her small pension, and for any wants which she required over and above what the pension could supply she drew upon the £1000. She did not care, as a more sensible woman

would have done, to invest this little sum as so much capital; no, she preferred to let it lie in the bank, and to draw upon it from time to time, as necessity arose. She had no business friends to advise her, for the few acquaintances she made at Rosebury knew nothing whatever of the value of money. Like many another woman who has been brought up in affluence, neither had Mrs. Mainwaring the faintest idea of how fast a small sum like £1,000 can dwindle. She felt comfortable during the latter years of her life at the knowledge that she had a good balance in the bank. It never occurred to her as a possibility that she who was still fairly young could die suddenly and without warning. This event, however, took place, and the girls were practically unprovided for.

Mrs. Mainwaring had never really worked for her children, but a mother who had worked hard for them, and toiled, and exerted all her strength to provide adequately for their future, might not perhaps have been loved so well. She died and her children were broken-hearted. They mourned for her each after her own fashion, and each according to her individual character. Primrose retained her calmness and her common sense in the midst of all her grief; Jasmine was tempestuous and hysterical, bursting into laughter one minute and sobbing wildly the next. Little Daisy felt frightened in Jasmine's presence—she did not quite believe that mother would never come back, and she clung to Primrose, who protected and soothed her; in short, took a mother's place to her, and felt herself several years older on the spot.

For a month the girls grieved and shut themselves away from their neighbors, and refused to go out, or to be in any measure comforted. A month in the ordinary reckoning is really a very short period of time, but to these girls, in their grief and misery, it seemed almost endless. One night Jasmine lay awake from the time she laid her head on the pillow till the first sun had dawned; then Primrose took fright, and began to resume her old gentle, but still firm authority.

"Jasmine," she said, "we have got our black dresses—they are made very neatly, and

we have done them all ourselves. Staying in the house this lovely weather won't bring dear mamma back again; we will have tea a little earlier than usual, and go for a walk this evening."

Jasmine, whenever she could stop crying, had been longing for a walk, but had crushed down the desire as something unnatural, and disrespectful to dear mamma, but of course if Primrose suggested it it was all right. Her face brightened visibly, and as to Daisy, she sat down and began to play with the kitten on the spot.

That evening the three desolate young creatures put on their new black dresses, and went down a long, rambling, charming country lane. The air was delicious—Jasmine refused to cover her hot little face with a crape veil—they came back after their ramble soothed and refreshed. As they were walking up the village street a girl of the name of Poppy, their laundress's child, stepped out of a little cottage, dropped a courtesy, and said, in a tone of delight—

"Oh, Miss Mainwaring, I'm glad to see you out; and Miss Jasmine, darling, the little canary is all reared and ready for you. I took a sight of pains with him, and he'll sing beautiful before long. Shall I bring him round in the morning, Miss Jasmine?"

"Yes, of course, Poppy; and I'm greatly obliged to you," answered Jasmine, in her old bright tones. Then she colored high, felt a good deal ashamed of herself, and hurried after Primrose, who had pulled down her crape veil, and was holding Daisy's hand tightly.

That night the sisters all slept well; they were the better for the fresh air, and also for the thought of seeing Poppy and the canary which she had reared for Jasmine in the morning.

Sharp to the hour Poppy arrived with her gift; she was a pretty little village girl, who adored the Misses Mainwaring.

"The bird will want a heap of sunshine," she said; "he's young, and my mother says that all young things want lots and lots of sun. May I pull up the blind in the bay

window, Miss Primrose; and may I hang Jimmy's cage just here?"

Primrose nodded. She forgot, in her interest over Jimmy, to remember that the bay window looked directly on to the village street.

"And please, miss," said Poppy, as she was preparing to return home, "Miss Martineau says she'll look in this evening, and that she was glad when she saw you out last night, young ladies, and acting sensible again."

Primrose had always a very faint color; at Poppy's words it deepened slightly.

"We've tried to act in a sensible way all through," she said, with gentle dignity. "Perhaps Miss Martineau does not quite understand. We love one another very much; we are not going to be foolish, but we cannot help grieving for our mother."

At these words Jasmine rushed out of the room and Poppy's round eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Miss Primrose—," she began.

"Never mind, Poppy," said Primrose; "we'll see Miss Martineau to-night. I am glad you told us she was coming."

The neighbors at Rosebury were all of the most sociable type; the Mainwaring girls knew every soul in the place, and when their mother died there was quite a rush of sympathy for them, and the little cottage might have been full from morning till night. Primrose, however, would not have it; even Miss Martineau, who was their teacher, and perhaps their warmest friend, was refused admittance. The neighbors wondered, and thought the girls very extraordinary and a little stuck-up, and their sympathy, thrown back on themselves, began to cool.

The real facts of the case, however, were these: Primrose, Jasmine and Daisy would have been very pleased to see Poppy Jenkins, or old Mrs. Jones, who sometimes came in to do choring, or even the nice little Misses Price, who kept a grocery shop at the other end of the village street; they would also have not objected to a visit

from good, hearty Mrs. Fry, the doctor's wife, but had they admitted any of these neighbors they must have seen Miss Martineau, and Miss Martineau, once she got a footing in the house, would have been there morning, noon and night.

Poor Jasmine would not have at all objected to crying away some of her sorrow on kind Mrs. Fry's motherly breast; Primrose could have had some really interesting talk which would have done her good with the Misses Price; they were very religious people, and their brother was a clergyman, and they might have said some things which would comfort the sore hearts of the young girls. Little Daisy could have asked some of her unceasing questions of Poppy Jenkins, and the three would really have been the better for the visits and the sympathy of the neighbors did not these visits and sympathy also mean Miss Martineau. But Miss Martineau at breakfast, dinner, and tea—Miss Martineau, with her never-ending advice, her good-natured but still unceasingly correcting tone, was felt just at first to be unendurable. She was sincerely fond of the girls, whom she had taught to play incorrectly, and to read French with an accent unrecognized in Paris, but Miss Martineau was a worry, was a great deal too officious, and so the girls shut themselves away from her and from all other neighbors for the first month after their mother's death.

CHAPTER III.

MISS MARTINEAU.

Primrose was the soul of hospitality; having decided that Miss Martineau was to be admitted that evening, it occurred to her that she might as well make things pleasant for this angular, good-humored, and somewhat hungry personage. Primrose could cook charmingly, and when dinner was over she turned to her sisters, and said in her usual rather slow way—

"I am going to make some cream-cakes for tea; and Jasmine, dear, you might put some fresh flowers in the vases; and Daisy—"; she paused as she looked at her sister—the child's blue eyes were fixed on her, she noticed with a pang that the little face was pale, and the dimpled mouth looked sad.

"Daisy," she said, suddenly, "you can go into the garden, and have a romp with the Pink."

"The Pink" was Daisy's favorite kitten.

Daisy laughed aloud, Jasmine started up briskly from the dinner-table, and Primrose, feeling that she had done well, went into the kitchen to consult with Hannah, the old cook, over the making of the cream-cakes.

The result of all this was that when Miss Martineau, sharp at four o'clock (the hours were very primitive at Rosebury), arrived at the Mainwarings' door, the outward aspect of the house bore no tokens of violent grief on the part of its inmates—the blinds were drawn up, not quite to the top, for that would have been ugly, and Jasmine was full of artistic instincts, but they were drawn up to let in plenty of sunlight, the white muslin curtains were draped gracefully, some pots of fresh flowers could be seen on the window-ledge, and a canary in a rather battered cage hung from a hook above, and disported himself cheerfully in the sunlight.

Miss Martineau was very old-fashioned in her ideas, and she did not much like the look of the bay window.

She comforted herself, however, with the reflection that even under the direst afflictions blinds must be drawn up some time, and that she would doubtless find the poor dear girls in a state of tempestuous grief within. She imagined herself soothing Jasmine, holding Primrose's hand, and allowing Daisy to sit on her knee. Miss Martineau was most kind-hearted, and would have done anything for the three girls, whom she dearly loved, only, like many another good-hearted person, she would wish to do that anything or something in her own way.

"Good evening, Hannah," she said, as the old cook opened the door; "you have had a sad affliction—a terrible affliction. I hope the dear young ladies are—" Miss Martineau paused for a word, then she said—"tranquil."

"Oh yes, miss," answered Hannah. "Walk in, please, Miss Martineau—this way—the young ladies is hoping you'll take a cup of tea with them, miss." Miss Martineau found herself the next instant in one of the most cheerful sitting-rooms to be found at Rosebury—it had always been a pretty room—furnished daintily with the odds and ends of rich and choice furniture which had belonged to Mrs. Mainwaring in her wealthy days. Now it was bright with flowers, and the western sun poured in at one angle of the wide bay window. The three girls, in their very simple black dresses, with no crape, came forward in a little group to meet her. In their hearts they were slightly excited and upset, but rather than give way they put on an air of extra cheerfulness. Miss Martineau, fond as she was of them, felt absolutely scandalized—to keep her out of the house for a whole month, and then to admit her in this fashion—such a lot of sunlight—such a heap of flowers, no crape on the black dresses, and Jasmine's face quite bright and her hair as curly as usual. Miss Martineau began a little set speech, but Jasmine interrupted her.

"Do come, and have some tea," she said. "Primrose has made some delicious cream-cakes, and we are all so hungry, aren't we, Eyebright?" turning to her little sister as she spoke.

"Yes," replied Daisy; "Pink is hungry, too—I chased Pink about fifty times round the garden, and she's quite starving. May Pink have some cream in a saucer for her tea, Primrose?"

Primrose nodded, took Miss Martineau's hand, and led her to the place of honor at the table, and sitting down herself, began to pour out the fragrant tea.

If Miss Martineau had a weakness, it was for really good tea and for cream-cakes. She took off her gloves now, arranged her bonnet-strings, put back her veil, and

prepared to enjoy herself. Instead of talking common-place condolences, she chatted on little matters of local interest with the sisters. Jasmine took care to supply Miss Martineau with plenty of cream-cakes—Primrose saw that her cup was well replenished. Miss Martineau was poor and very saving, and it occurred to her, as she partook of the Mainwaring's nice tea, that she might do without much supper by-and-by. This reflection put her into an excellent humor.

When the tea was over Primrose led her to a comfortable seat by the window.

"My dear," she said, "it is well that I should sit just here, within full view of the street?—your window is, well, a little too like seeing company, my loves, and if my bonnet is seen by passers-by you'll have everybody calling directly."

"Oh, we mean to see everybody now," said Jasmine "we—we—we think it best, don't we, Primrose?"

"Yes," said Primrose, in her gentle tones. "It does not make us think less of dear mamma to see people—and—and—we have decided to go on much as usual now."

"You might have admitted me before, dears," replied Miss Martineau—"I felt so intensely for you—I could never get you out of my head. I was a good deal hurt by your refusing to admit me, my dear girls, for in all respects I would have wished to be a mother to you."

"Please, don't," said Jasmine.

"We couldn't have another mother," said little Daisy, clinging close to Primrose, and looking up into her sister's sweet face.

Primrose stooped and kissed her.

"You may run into the garden, darling, and take the Pink," she said.

Miss Martineau had no intention of leaving the Mainwarings without speaking out her mind. It was one of this good lady's essential privileges to speak out her mind to the younger generation of the Rosebury world. Who had a better right to do this than

she? for had she not educated most of them? had she not given them of the best of her French and her music? and was she not even at this present moment Jasmine's and Daisy's instructress? Primrose she considered her finished and accomplished pupil. Surely the girls, even though they had refused to admit her for a month, would turn to her now with full confidence. She settled herself comfortably in the arm-chair in which Primrose had placed her, and saying, in her high-pitched and thin voice—

"Now, my dears, you will take seats close to me—not too close, loves, for I dislike being crushed, and I have on my Sunday silk. My dear girls, I want us now to have a really comfortable talk. There is a great deal that needs discussion, and I think there is nothing like facing a difficult subject resolutely, and going through it with system. I approve of your sending Daisy into the garden, Primrose. She is too young to listen to all that we must go into. I purpose dears, after the manner of our school-hours, to divide our discourse into heads—two heads will probably be sufficient for this evening. First, the severe loss you have just sustained—that we will talk over, and no doubt mingle our tears together over; take courage, my dear children, such an unburdening will relieve your young hearts. Second—Jasmine, you need not get so very red, my dear—second, we will discuss something also of importance; how are you three dear girls going to live?"

Here Miss Martineau paused, took off her spectacles, wiped them, and put them on again. She felt really very kindly, and would have worked herself to a skeleton, if need be, for the sake of the Mainwarings, whom she sincerely loved. Jasmine's red face, however, grew still redder.

"Please, Miss Martineau—yes, Primrose, I will speak—please, Miss Martineau, we cannot discuss dear mamma with you. There is nothing to discuss, and nothing to tell—I won't—I can't—Primrose, I won't listen, and I won't talk."

Miss Martineau shook her head, and looked really angrily at Jasmine.

"Nothing to tell," she said, sorrowfully. "Is your poor dear mother then so soon forgotten? I could not have believed it. Alas! alas! how little children appreciate their parents."

"You are not a parent yourself, and you know nothing about it," said Jasmine, now feeling very angry, and speaking in her rudest tone.

Primrose's quiet voice interposed.

"I think, Miss Martineau," she began, "that the first subject will be more than Jasmine and I can quite bear—you must forgive us, even if you fail quite to understand us. It is no question of forgetting—our mother will never be forgotten—it is just that we would rather not. You must allow us to judge for ourselves on this point," concluded Primrose, with that dignity that suited her so well. Primrose, for all her extreme quietness and simplicity of manner and bearing, could look like a young princess when she chose, and Miss Martineau, who would have quarrelled fiercely with Jasmine, submitted.

"Very well," she said, in a tone of some slight offence; "I came here with a heart brimful of sympathy; it is repulsed; it goes back as it came, but I bear no offence."

"Shall we discuss your second subject, dear Miss Martineau?" continued Primrose. "I know that you have a great deal of sense and experience, and I know that you have a knack of making money go very far indeed. You ask us what our plans are—well, I really don't think we have got any, have we, Jasmine?"

"No," said Jasmine, in her shortest tones. "We mean to live as we always did. Why can't people leave us in peace?"

Miss Martineau cleared her throat, looked with some compassion at Jasmine, whom she thought it best to treat as a spoilt child, and then turned her attention to Primrose.

"My dear," she said, "I am willing to waive my first head, to cast it aside, to pass it over, and consider my second. My dear Primrose, the first thing to consider in making your plans—I take no notice of Jasmine's somewhat childish remarks—is on

what you have to live."

Primrose knit her brows.

"I suppose," she said slowly, "we shall have what we always had—we spent very little money in the past, and, of course, we shall require still less now. We are fond of Rosebury; I think we shall do for the present at least just what Jasmine says, and stay on quietly here."

Miss Martineau cleared her throat again.

"My dear girl," she said, "even to live here you must have something to live on. Now, are you aware that your mother's annuity as a captain's widow ceases with her death? I believe something very trifling will still be allowed to you, as his orphans, but on that point I'm rather in the dark."

"Mother always did get ten pounds a year apiece for us," said Primrose.

"Well, yes, my dear, we will suppose, and trust, and hope that that small sum will still be continued; but even at Rosebury you three girls cannot live on thirty pounds a year."

"But there is the money in the bank," said Jasmine speaking in a more interested tone. "You remember Primrose dear, how whenever mother wanted some money she just wrote a cheque, and we took it down to Mr. Danesfield, and he gave us nice shining gold for it. Sometimes it was ten pounds, sometimes it was five pounds, and sometimes it was only two pounds; but whenever we went to Mr. Danesfield's bank with mother's cheque he gave us the money. I suppose, Primrose, you can have a cheque-book now, and Mr. Danesfield can give you the money."

"Yes," said Primrose, in a cheerful tone, "I forgot about the money in the bank; mother often told me there was plenty. Even if we can't quite live on our thirty pounds a year, we can manage with what money dear mamma had in the bank."

Miss Martineau's face had become extremely lined and anxious.

"My dears," she said, "I fear I've done a rude thing; I fear I've taken a liberty; but the fact is, you are so alone, poor darlings, and Mr. Danesfield is an old friend of mine—and—and—I took the liberty of asking him what your mother's balance was. He said, my dears—my poor dears—that it was not quite two hundred pounds."

CHAPTER IV.

TO THE RESCUE.

Miss Martineau told her news with considerable agitation. She considered it a terrible revelation. It seemed to her a very fearful and disastrous thing that three girls brought up like the Mainwarings, three girls still almost children, should be thrown on the world without any means for their support.

Simple and primitive as their lives had been at Rosebury, they still had been tenderly nurtured and warmly sheltered—no cold blast of unkindness or neglect had visited them—they had been surrounded ever by both love and respect. The love came principally from their mother and from one another, but the respect came from all who knew them. The Mainwaring girls, in their plain dresses and with their unsophisticated manners, looked like ladies, and invariably acted as such.

Soon after making her communication Miss Martineau took her leave; she hurried home, and sitting down in her dingy little parlor, began to think.

"No, thank you, Susan," she said to her little maid-of-all-work, "I shan't want any supper to-night. I have been at tea with my dear pupils, the Misses Mainwaring. You may bring the lamp presently, Susan, but not quite yet; it is a pity to waste the daylight, and there is quite another quarter of an hour in which I can see to knit. Yes, give me my knitting-basket; I can get on with Widow Joseph's mittens."

"And, if you please, ma'am," asked Susan, lingering for a moment at the door, "may I ask how, all things considering, the dear young ladies is?"

"On the whole, tranquil, Susan—yes, I may say it with confidence; my dear pupils may be considered in a resigned state of mind."

Susan closed the door after her, and Miss Martineau took up her knitting. Knitting woollen mittens is an occupation which harmonizes very well with reflection and while the old lady's active fingers moved her thoughts were busy.

"Thirty pounds a year," she said softly to herself, "thirty pounds certain, and a lump sum of two hundred in the bank. Doubtless they owe some of that for their mother's funeral and their own mourning. They probably owe quite thirty pounds of that, and to make it safe, I had better say forty. That leaves a balance of one hundred and sixty; just enough to put away for emergencies, illness, and so forth. My dear girls, my dear Primrose, and Jasmine, and my pretty little pet Daisy, you cannot touch your little capital; you may get a few pounds a year for it, or you may not—Mr. Danesfield must decide that—but all the money you can certainly reckon on for your expenses is thirty pounds per annum, and on that you cannot live."

Here Miss Martineau threw down her knitting, and began with some agitation to pace up and down her tiny room.

"What was to be done with these lonely and defenceless girls? how were they to meet the world? how were they to earn their living?"

Miss Martineau had never before found herself propounding so painful and interesting a problem; her mind worked round it, and tried to grapple with it, but though she stayed up far into the night, and even had recourse to figures, and marked down on paper the very lowest sum a girl could possibly exist on, she went to bed, having found no solution to this vexed question.

Even Miss Martineau, ignorant and narrow-minded as she was, could scarcely pronounce Primrose fit to do much in the educational world; Jasmine's, of course, was only a little giddy pate, and she required a vast amount of teaching herself; and pretty Daisy was still but a young child.

Miss Martineau went to bed and to sleep; she dreamed troubled dreams, but in the morning she awoke strengthened and restored, even by such restless slumbers, and quite resolved to do something.

"Sophia Martineau," she said—for living quite alone she was fond of holding conversations with herself—"Sophia Martineau, those girls are placed, to put it figuratively, at your door, and take them up you must. Gold you have none to bestow, but you can give interest; you can, in short, rouse others to help the helpless. This is your bounden duty, and you had better see to it at once."

Miss Martineau went briskly downstairs, ate her frugal breakfast, and then made her plans. These plans were decisive enough. At Rosebury no one thought of being so silly as to be over-educated. None of the young brains of the rising generation were over-forced or over-stimulated, and Miss Martineau felt no compunction whatever in writing a short note to each of six little pupils, and telling them that they need not come to her that morning, for she meant to give them a holiday.

Having done this, and sent Susan out with the notes, she went upstairs, and once more put on her black silk dress, her old-fashioned mantle, and her high poke bonnet. Thus attired, she started on an expedition which she trusted would lead to many happy results for the Mainwarings.

CHAPTER V.

THE CONTENTS OF THE CABINET.

The uneasiness Miss Martineau felt was by no means shared by the girls. Primrose had in reality a very practical nature; she could housekeep well, and no baker or butcher who ventured to show his face in Rosebury would dream of cheating this bright young lady. No one could make half-a-crown, or even a shilling, go farther than Primrose could. No one could more cleverly convert an old dress into a new,

but her little experiences ended here. She had kept the house for her mother, and been both thrifty and saving, but real responsibility had never been hers. The overpowering sensation of knowing that she must make so much money meet so many absolute necessities had never touched her young life. Miss Martineau's words had made her a little thoughtful, but by no means anxious. If she and her sisters could not live on thirty pounds a year there was still the money in the bank.

Primrose thought two hundred pounds, if not a large, at least a very comfortable sum. The only real effect that her old governess's words had on her was to make her a little extra saving.

Jasmine never liked Primrose when she was in a saving mood, and she grumbled audibly when, the morning after Miss Martineau's visit, her elder sister suggested that they should do without some black cotton dresses which the day before they had decided to buy and to make for themselves.

"Such nonsense!" said Jasmine, stamping her little foot impatiently; "you know we want the dresses, Primrose. You know poor Daisy can't run and play in the garden in her black cashmere frock, and I can't dig or weed. You know, when we decided to go on just as usual, just as if mamma—was—was—"

Here Jasmine paused, gulped down a sob, and said, hastily, "We want our print dresses, and we can't do without them. You are just frightened, Primrose, by what Miss Martineau said."

"I am not at all frightened," answered Primrose, calmly; "only I think we ought to be careful."

"And we are so rich, too," said Jasmine. "I never thought we had two hundred pounds in the bank. Why it's heaps and lots of money. Primrose, what are you so grave about?"

"Only," said Primrose, in her slow voice, "only Miss Martineau thought it very, very little money. She looked so grave when she spoke about it—indeed, she seemed

almost sad. Jasmine, I really think Miss Martineau quite loves us."

"Perhaps," said Jasmine, in an indifferent tone. "Well, Rose, if you are quite determined to be shabby and saving, I may as well join Daisy in the garden."

Jasmine stooped down, kissed her sister lightly on the forehead, and then ran out of the room. A moment or two later Primrose heard laughing voices floating in through the open window. She was glad in her heart that Jasmine and Daisy were beginning to do things just as usual, and yet somehow their laughter gave her a pang.

The little cottage was a tiny place; it consisted downstairs of one long low room, with a bay window at the extreme end. This room the Mainwarings called the drawing-room, and it was really furnished with great daintiness and care. At one end was the bay window, at the other were glass doors which opened directly into the garden. The kitchen was at the other end of the narrow hall, and this also looked on the garden. Hannah, the one servant, was often heard to object to this arrangement. She gave solid reasons for her objections, declaring roundly that human nature was far more agreeable to her than any part of the vegetable kingdom; but though Hannah found her small kitchen rather dull, and never during the years she stayed with them developed the slightest taste for the beauties of Nature, she was sincerely attached to the Mainwaring girls, and took care to serve them well.

Upstairs were two bedrooms—one looking to the street, in which the girls slept, the prettiest room with the garden view being reserved for Mrs. Mainwaring. Hannah occupied a small and attic-like apartment over the kitchen.

When Jasmine ran into the garden Primrose slowly rose from her seat and went upstairs. It occurred to her that this was a fitting opportunity to do something which she longed and dreaded to accomplish.

Since her mother's death, since the moment when the three young girls had bent over the coffin and strewed flowers over the form they loved, the sisters had not gone near this room.

Hannah had dusted it and kept it tidy, but the blinds had been drawn down and the sun excluded. The girls had shrunk from entering this chamber; it seemed to them like a grave. They passed it with reverent steps, and spoke in whispers as they stole on tiptoe by the closed door.

It occurred, however, to Primrose that now was an opportunity when she might come into the room and put some of her mother's treasures straight. She unlocked the door and entered; a chill, cold feeling struck on her. Had she been Jasmine she would have turned and fled, but being Primrose, she instantly did what her clear common sense told her was the sensible course.

"We have made up our minds to go on as usual," she said to herself; "and letting in the sunlight and the daylight is not forgetting our dear mother."

Then she pulled up the blinds, and threw the window-sashes wide open.

A breath of soft warm air from the garden instantly filled the dreary chamber, and Primrose, sitting down by an old-fashioned little cabinet, slipped a key into the lock of the centre drawer, and opened it.

Mrs. Mainwaring had been by no means a tidy or careful person—she hated locks, and seemed to have a regular aversion to neatly-kept drawers or wardrobes, but this one little cabinet, which had belonged to the girls' father, was a remarkable exception to the general rule.

Mrs. Mainwaring never, even to Primrose, parted with the key of this cabinet. Whenever the girls were present it was locked—even Daisy could not coax mother to show her the contents of any of those tempting little drawers—"only mementoes, darling—only mementoes," the lady would say, but the girls knew that mother herself often in the dead of night looked into the locked drawers, and they generally noticed that the next day she was weaker and sadder than usual.

On the top of the cabinet a miniature painting of Captain Mainwaring was always to be found, and the girls used to love to keep a vase of the choicest flowers close to

father's picture.

When Mrs. Mainwaring died, Jasmine cried nearly the whole of one night at the thought of the little old-fashioned cabinet—for now she felt quite sure that no one would ever dare to open it, "and I don't like to think of the mementoes being never seen again," she sobbed: "It seems cruel to them."

Then Primrose promised to undertake this dreaded task, and here was her opportunity.

Primrose was not at all a nervous girl, and with the soft summer air filling the chamber, and driving out all the ghosts of solitude and gloom, she commenced her task. She determined to look through the contents of the little cabinet with method, and she resolved to begin with the large centre drawer. She pulled it open, and was surprised to find that it was nearly empty.

A few papers, on which verses and quotations from Books of Sermons were copied in her mother's hand-writing, lay about; these, and one parcel which was carefully wrapped up in soft white tissue-paper, were the sole contents of the centre drawer. Primrose pulled the parcel from where it lay half-hidden at the back of the drawer. She felt self-possessed, but her fingers trembled slightly as she touched it. It was folded up most carefully—the wrappings were kept in their place by white satin ribbon, and on a slip of white paper which had been placed on the top of the parcel, and secured by the ribbon, Primrose read a few words:

"Arthur's little desk—for Primrose now."

She felt her color coming high, and her heart beating. Who was Arthur?—she had never heard of him—her father's name had been John. Who was the unknown Arthur, whose desk was now given to her?

She untied the parcel slowly, but with shaking fingers.

The little desk was a battered one, ink-stained, and of a slight and cheap construction. Inside it contained one treasure, a thick letter, with the words "For

Primrose" written in her mother's writing on the envelope.

An unexpected message from those who are dead will set the strongest nerves quivering. At sight of this letter Primrose laid her pretty yellow head down on the little old cabinet, and sobbed long and bitterly.

How long she might have wept she could never say, but her tears were suddenly brought to an abrupt termination. When she entered her mother's room she had not locked the door, and now a voice sounded at her elbow:

"Eh!—my word—dear, dear, deary me! Now, Miss Primrose, to think of you creeping up like this, and 'worriting' yourself over the secrets in the little bit of a cabinet. Your poor mamma knew what she was about when she kept that cabinet locked, and for all the good they'll ever do, she might well have burnt the bits of fallals she kept there. There, darling, don't spoil your pretty eyes crying over what's dead and gone, and can never be put right again—never. Shut up the cabinet, Miss Primrose, and put your hair a bit straight, for Mrs. Ellsworthy, from Shortlands, is down in the drawing-room, and wanting to see you most particular 'bad.'"

CHAPTER VI.

MANY VISITORS.

Miss Martineau's plans had been full of directness. Having made up her mind, she wasted no precious moments. The girls must be helped; she could only give them counsel, but others could do more. Miss Martineau determined to go at once to the fountainhead. In short, she would attack the one and only rich person who lived in the neighborhood of Rosebury. Shortlands was a big place, and the Ellsworthys were undoubtedly big people. Money with them was plentiful. They considered themselves county folk; they lived in what the Rosebury people believed to be royal style.

Miss Martineau had for one short blissful week of her life spent the time at Shortlands. She had been sent for in an emergency, to take the place of a nursery governess who was ill. Her French had been of little account in this great house, and her music had not been tolerated. The poor old lady had indeed been rather snubbed. But what of that? She was able to go back to her own intimate friends, and entertain them with accounts of powdered footmen, of richly-dressed London ladies, of a world of fashion which these people believed to be Paradise.

Twice during her week's sojourn she had been addressed by Mrs. Ellsworthy. No matter; from that day she considered herself one of the great lady's acquaintances. Miss Martineau could be heroic when she pleased, and there was certainly something of the heroic element about her when she ventured to storm so mighty a citadel at eleven o'clock in the morning.

Her very boldness, however, won her cause. The footman who opened the door might look as supercilious as he pleased, but he was obliged to deliver her messages, and Mrs. Ellsworthy, with a good-humored smile, consented to see her.

Their interview was short, but Miss Martineau, when she launched on her theme, quite forgot that she was poor and her auditor rich. Mrs. Ellsworthy, too, after a few glances into the thin and earnest face of the governess, ceased to think of that antiquated poke bonnet, or the absurdly old-fashioned cut of that ugly mantle.

The two who talked so earnestly were women—women with kind and large hearts, and their theme was engrossing.

Mrs. Ellsworthy bound herself by no promises, but she contrived to send the governess away with a heart full of hope.

Mrs. Ellsworthy had never yet called on any of the people who lived in the straggling village of Rosebury. Therefore, when her carriage, with its prancing horses and perfect appointments, drew up at the Mainwarings' door, the old-fashioned little place felt quite a flutter through its heart.

Poppy Jenkins, the laundress's pretty daughter, came out into the street, and stared with all her eyes. The doctor's wife, who lived at the opposite side of the street, gazed furtively and enviously from behind her muslin blinds. The baker and the butcher neglected their usual morning orders; and Hannah, the Mainwarings' servant, felt herself, as she expressed it, all of a tremble from top to toe.

"Let me brush your hair, Miss Primrose," she said, when she had at last succeeded in inducing her young lady to dry her tears; "and are your hands nice and clean, Miss Primrose? and your collar, is it neat? It's very condescending of Mrs. Ellsworthy to call."

"I wonder what she has come about," said Primrose; "she never knew my mother."

Primrose felt at that moment the great lady's visit to be an intrusion.

"I'll just run into the garden and stop Miss Jasmine and Miss Daisy rushing into the drawing-room all in a mess," said Hannah. "Oh! sakes alive! why, the young ladies will be seen anyhow from the French window."

Hannah hurried off, wondering if she could smuggle these troublesome members of her flock out of sight through the kitchen.

Alas! she was too late—when Primrose, slim and graceful, and with her pretty eyes only slightly reddened by her crying fit, entered the drawing-room, she saw the French doors open, and her guest pacing tranquilly round the garden, hold the Pink in her arms, while Daisy danced in front of her, and Jasmine, chattering volubly, walked by her side.

"I'm so glad you like those carnations," Jasmine was saying. "Mamma was very fond of them. Shall I set some slips for you? I will with pleasure."

"If Pink ever has a kitten you shall have it," said Daisy solemnly.

At this moment Primrose joined her sisters.

"Oh, Primrose—something so delightful!" began Jasmine.

"She thinks the Pink a perfect beauty. She wants another pussy just like it," burst from Daisy's pretty dimpled lips.

Mrs. Ellsworthy, still keeping the Pink in her arms, held out her other hand to Primrose.

"I have introduced myself to your sisters, dear Miss Mainwaring. I am Mrs. Ellsworthy, of Shortlands—a near neighbor. You must not consider my visit an intrusion."

Before Primrose could reply Jasmine exclaimed volubly—

"Indeed we don't—we are quite delighted; we were feeling ourselves awfully dull. Miss Martineau said every one would call now she had been. We did not want to see every one, but you are different."

"You are delightful," echoed Daisy.

Primrose felt herself almost cross. "Girls, do stop chattering," she said. "Mrs. Ellsworthy, I hope you will excuse my sisters; and won't you come into the drawing-room?"

"I am charmed with your sisters," answered the great lady—"they are fresh, they are original. Dear Miss Mainwaring, why need we leave this delightful garden? can we not have our little talk here?"

"With pleasure," said Primrose, but her stiffness did not disappear; she still had a slightly sore feeling at the bottom of her heart, and the thought that Mrs. Ellsworthy never took the trouble to know dear mamma kept recurring.

Mrs. Ellsworthy was quite woman of the world enough to read Primrose, and to guess what was in her heart. She saw at a glance that the girls were ladies, and would not be patronized. Her task had seemed easy enough when she assured Miss Martineau that the poor young Mainwarings must be helped. When she ordered her carriage and drove into Rosebury she made up her mind to discuss their affairs

boldly with them, and to offer them practical advice, and, if necessary, substantial assistance. The eldest girl, if she was at all presentable, might be got into some family as a nursery governess or companion, and she felt quite sure that she had sufficient interest to procure admissions for Jasmine and Daisy into some of the schools especially started to educate the orphan daughters of army men.

But in the garden, although it was a very shabby little garden, this programme did not seem quite so easy. Jasmine and Daisy were delightful children; they hailed her instantly as a comrade; they thought nothing whatever of her wealth or her position. Shortlands conveyed no meaning to their unsophisticated minds; they fully believed that Mrs. Ellsworthy envied them their carnations, and would have been made happy by the possession of a kitten similar to the Pink. Primrose, on the contrary, was proud and shy, and had no idea of treating any stranger in a confidential manner.

Mrs. Ellsworthy chatted on, but she never got beyond commonplaces; she invited the girls to visit her at Shortlands, and Primrose, reading a great desire in Daisy's blue eyes, answered simply, "Thank you; we shall like to come very much."

"I'll manage it when I get them to my own house," thought Mrs. Ellsworthy; "it's quite absurd to be baffled by three little chits, but I'll settle everything in a satisfactory fashion when I get them to Shortlands."

Aloud she said, "My dears, I shall be very glad to see you—and can you come to-morrow? To-morrow I shall be quite alone."

"Primrose," burst from Daisy, "there's a Newfoundland dog, and a mastiff, and two English terriers at Shortlands. The Newfoundland is black and woolly and the mastiff is tawny, like a lion."

"Will you really show us over your beautiful conservatories?" asked Jasmine. "Primrose, she was telling us about her flowers; and they must be lovely."

"I'll show you everything, and take you everywhere," responded Mrs. Ellsworthy, stooping down to kiss Jasmine's upturned face. "You'll bring your sisters to-morrow,

Miss Mainwaring," she continued, turning to the grave Primrose.

"Thank you—yes. It is kind of you to ask us," answered Primrose.

Mrs. Ellsworthy drove away in state, and the sisters saw her off from their door-steps. They made a pretty group as they stood together—Daisy's arms clasped her elder sister's waist, and Jasmine shaded her dark eyes from the full blaze of the sun with her little white dimpled hand.

As the great lady drove away Jasmine had actually the audacity to blow a kiss to her.

The neighbors at the opposite side of the street felt quite scandalized, and said to themselves that surely the poor young ladies had seen the last of Mrs. Ellsworthy, after such a piece of impertinence. But the lady of Shortlands was really delighted.

"To think of my being here all these years, and never knowing those charming creatures," she soliloquized. Just then she saw Miss Martineau crossing the street, and she ordered her coachman to draw up.

"I have been with them, dear Miss Martineau—they are delightful—so fresh—and so—so pretty! They are coming to Shortlands to-morrow. Good-bye—warm morning, is it not? Home, Tomlinson."

The girls had entered the little house, cheered by Mrs. Ellsworthy's visit. Primrose, it is true, did not share her younger sisters' enthusiasm, but even she was pleased, and owned to herself that Mrs. Ellsworthy was a very different neighbor from the village folk.

Primrose's mind, however, was a good deal absorbed by what she had discovered in her mother's little old-fashioned cabinet. A letter directed to herself lay there unopened. She longed to break the seal, and to acquaint herself with the contents of this message from the dead. She longed to read the letter, but she knew she could only do so at some quiet moment. She must peruse those beloved words when she was alone and quite sure of being undisturbed. She thought she might slip away into a little glade at the back of the house that afternoon, and there read her letter, and

ponder over its contents.

Events, however, were to occur which would prevent Primrose carrying out this scheme.

Immediately after dinner Miss Martineau's well-known knock was heard at the hall-door, and Miss Martineau herself, bristling with excitement and curiosity, invaded the girls in their drawing-room.

"Now, my dears, tell me all about her. Is she not fascinating? She is greatly pleased with you three—you have made a most proper impression; and you are to go to spend the day at Shortlands to-morrow. Now, my loves, tell me what arrangements she has come to—I am so deeply interested, my poor darlings."

Miss Martineau, as she spoke, kept her eyes fixed on Primrose; but that young lady only gave her a puzzled look, and, after a short pause, said quietly—

"I don't understand you. We have made no special arrangements. Mrs. Ellsworthy was friendly, and she asked us to come and see her at Shortlands; and we are going. Miss Martineau, I am so very busy this afternoon; will you forgive me if I run away?"

Primrose left the room, and Miss Martineau, turning to Jasmine, clasped her hands in some excitement.

"Oh, my dear!" she exclaimed, "I do hope Primrose won't spoil everything by those little proud airs of hers; they really are—yes, I am grieved to be obliged to say it—but they really are affected. Now, Jasmine darling, a great deal depends on this visit—yes, a great deal. You and Daisy must be on your very best behavior. You have never been in a great house like Shortlands, and it is only right that I, your instructress, should tell you how you are to behave. You must take no liberties, dear; and you must not speak too much, or too fast; and you must look very grateful when Mrs. Ellsworthy notices you, loves. Oh, my poor dears! I feel over anxious, for so much depends on to-morrow."

It was now Jasmine's turn to stare, and to begin to say—"I don't understand you." But Daisy burst out volubly—

"We are going up to Shortlands to run about—she said so. She said we were to see the dogs—the black woolly Newfoundland and the tawny mastiff; and she has got a snow-white Persian kitten, only she likes the Pink best; and I promised her that if ever the Pink had a little kit of her own she should have it. Mrs. Ellsworthy didn't say a word about being horrid, and proper, and waiting until you are spoken to. I won't go to Shortlands if I have to behave like that, I won't," concluded spoiled Daisy, pouting her lips.

Jasmine bent forward and kissed her. "You may do just what you like, darling little Eyebright," she said.

"Oh, Miss Martineau, really Mrs. Ellsworthy is not at all what you picture her. I should say she was the kind of lady who likes a real romp. Anyhow, she does not at all want people to be stiff with her. Daisy, and she, and I were as jolly as possible until Primrose came downstairs, and I suppose Primrose agreed with you, and thought it was manners to be formal. But, poor dear, she did not like it a bit. We three were having such a chatter before Primrose came. She is going to show me all her conservatories to-morrow, and she took a great fancy to my carnations. I promised her some slips. Oh dear! oh dear! who is that knocking at the hall door? Daisy, run and peep from behind the curtain, and let me know."

Daisy started off on the instant, and returned in a moment with the intelligence that Mr. Danesfield, the manager of the bank, was standing on the steps, and that his face was very red.

On hearing this intelligence poor Miss Martineau's face also became suffused with a deep flush, and she pushed her poke bonnet a little backward in her excitement. An awful idea had suddenly darted through her brain.

Perhaps Mr. Danesfield had called to announce some misfortune. Perhaps the two

hundred pounds was lost; perhaps there was no balance at the bank!

When the good gentleman was ushered into the room she glanced at him mysteriously, and even while he was shaking hands with Jasmine and Daisy, began letting fall short, but mysterious sentences—

"Mrs. Ellsworthy has called—much pleased—inclined to take them up. They are to spend to-morrow at Shortlands." Mr. Danesfield raised his eyebrows, pulled Daisy to stand between his knees; and, staring at Miss Martineau over his gold-rimmed glasses, said—

"Eh! eh!—Shortlands—Ellsworthy's—worthy folk!" here he laughed, pleased with his pun; "yes, Miss Martineau, a good opportunity, undoubtedly!"

At this moment Primrose came into the room, and Miss Martineau, judging that she might best serve her cause by retiring from the scene of action, went away.

Mr. Danesfield did not pay a long visit. He had known the Mainwarings, although not very intimately, for years. He was a good-hearted, kind, and very busy man, and during their mother's lifetime he had taken but little notice of the girls.

To-day, however, he seemed to regard them with fresh interest. He assured Primrose that if he could assist her in any business capacity he would only be too pleased to do so. "Our good friend Miss Martineau assures me that your means are likely to be a little straitened, my dear. I am sincerely sorry, although there are worse troubles—yes, assuredly, far worse troubles. It cannot do a healthy girl any harm to work. Yes, come to me for advice if you care to, and look on me as an old friend. And hark ye, Miss Primrose, I am glad Mrs. Ellsworthy has called. Make the most of your opportunity at Shortlands, my dears. Yes; I'll look in another day with pleasure. Good-bye, good-bye."

When Mr. Danesfield went away the two elder sisters looked at each other. What did it all mean? What mystery was there in the air? Jasmine thought both Miss Martineau and Mr. Danesfield very disagreeable but Primrose pondered these things

and felt anxious.

CHAPTER VII.

SHORTLANDS.

"A most extraordinary thing has happened," said Mrs. Ellsworthy that evening to her husband. "We have lived for several years at Shortlands, and except when we have people in the house I have actually been without any society. My dear Joseph, you will forgive my counting you as nobody at all. Well, we have lived here, and I have often been dull beyond words, and yet the nicest creatures have been within a stone's throw of me."

Mr. Ellsworthy was at least twenty years older than his wife—a reserved individual, with a rather long and melancholy face. Mrs. Ellsworthy was plump, and round, and pretty—kittenish some people called her.

She was certainly fond of emphasizing her words, and of going into raptures, and her husband now only raised his eyebrows, and said, "Well, Kate?" in a somewhat lethargic voice.

Mrs. Ellsworthy left her seat, and drew a small easy-chair close to the fire, for though the weather was hot Mrs. Ellsworthy always insisted on indulging in this evening luxury.

Planting herself luxuriously in this chair, the little lady began her narrative.

"Now, Joseph, I will tell you my story. Do you remember that outlandish-looking governess who came up here for a week to try to keep Frankie in order before we sent him to school? Oh, what a blessing it is to have that boy at school! Do you remember Miss Martineau, Joseph?"

"There was an authoress of the name, my love; but surely she died before we came to Shortlands?"

"Joseph, how stupid you are! I mean a dear, obsolete creature in the village. However, it is not the slightest matter whether you remember her or not. She came here again this morning, and begged of me to interest myself in the cause of three destitute orphans who lived in a little house in the village. She spoke most kindly about them, but said they were a little unfinished, and not, in her opinion, very capable; but she described them as pretty and young, and, oh, so appallingly poor! And somehow the good old creature touched my heart, and I said I would certainly help them. I ordered the carriage and drove into the village. I expected to see—well, you know, the sort of girl who is likely to be found in a little village like Rosebury, Joseph—the awkward and shy young miss. I imagined them as being so grateful for my notice; indeed, a little overpowered; for, you know, I don't know the Rosebury folk. Well, my dear, what do you think I found?"

"It is really difficult to tell, Kate. I should judge, however, from your excited manner and your unusual enthusiasm, that you found young ladies."

"Joseph, you are a genius. I did. In the funniest, pokiest, queerest little house that you can possibly imagine; I discovered three charming, well-bred girls. The two youngest made friends with me in their shabby little garden. They greeted me, I assure you, with the most delightful frankness and ease. I told them who I was, and they were not the least impressed; on the contrary, the one they called Jasmine—oh! she is a pretty creature—fancied I was dying for some carnations like hers, and the little one holds out hopes that some day I may possess a kitten similar to the one she thrust into my arms. They were as shabbily dressed as possible, but who could look at them, dear pets, and think twice about their dresses? We got on most pleasantly, and found we had many interests in common, for the little one shared my love for animals, and the elder my passion for flowers. On this scene the eldest sister made her appearance. I assure you, Joseph, it is almost too absurd, but it is a fact; she actually contrived to snub me. I read as plainly as possible in those pretty, serene eyes of hers the question, 'How is it that you, who never condescended to know my

mother, intrude upon us now, in our loss?' She was most gentle and most dignified, but I could as soon take liberties with her as with—with—you, Joseph, when you choose to exert your authority. After Miss Mainwaring came, I thought it best to run away; but before I went I extracted a promise from the three darlings to come and spend the day here to-morrow. Really, Joseph, I have had a surprising day; but I remember now that Miss Martineau did say something about these children being well born."

Mr. Ellsworthy again raised his eyebrows.

"I had an acquaintance once of the name," he said, "but I lost sight of him years ago. It is a good name. Well, Kate, you will do what you can for your protegées. I am glad you have found some objects of interest close to your own gates."

Here Mrs. Ellsworthy dropped her slightly frivolous tone, and rising from her seat, went up to her husband.

"Joseph," she said, "I want you to contrive to be at home for lunch to-morrow. I want you to see my girls, and to advise me how best to help them. Primrose is so proud and so inexperienced; the two younger ones, of course, know nothing of either poverty or riches; they live as the flowers live, and are happy for the same reason. Do you know, Joseph, that the eldest of these sisters is not seventeen, and the youngest only ten; that they seem to be absolutely without relations, almost without friends, and that between them they have only a Government grant of thirty pounds a year."

Here Mrs. Ellsworthy's pretty bright blue eyes filled with tears, and her husband, stooping down, kissed her.

"I will make a point of seeing those girls to-morrow Kate," he said. "I am glad you have come across them."

Then he went off to his library, where he sat, and read, and lost himself in great thoughts far into the night. It is to be feared that during these hours he forgot the

Mainwarings and their troubles.

Mrs. Ellsworthy had appointed noon the next day to receive her young guests, and punctual to the moment the three walked into her drawing-room.

Daisy instantly commented on this fact. "There's the last stroke of twelve striking from the church clock," she exclaimed. "Oh, please! where's the Persian kitten?"

"I have brought you all the carnations that were in flower," said Jasmine. "Smell them; aren't they delicious? Mamma used to love them so—I would not give them to any one but you."

Mrs. Ellsworthy stooped and kissed Jasmine, and taking her hand, gave it a little squeeze. "Thank you, my love," she said—"I value your beautiful flowers—you shall arrange them yourself in this amber vase."

"They are such a vivid crimson, they would look best against white," answered Jasmine, raising her eyes a little anxiously. "I like to arrange flowers to look like a picture. Mamma always allowed me to arrange the flowers, and Primrose will in the future." Here Jasmine went up to Primrose, and took her hand, and the elder sister smiled at her with great affection, and said, looking at Mrs. Ellsworthy, "We call Jasmine our artist at home."

"And our poet—she makes poetry about the Pink at home," said Daisy. "Oh, dear!" she continued, giving a deep sigh, "I can't see the Persian kitten anywhere. I do hope what Miss Martineau said is not true."

"What did she say, my dear?" asked the lady of Shortlands.

"Oh, a lot of nonsense—that this was a great house, and we were to sit on chairs, and not speak unless you spoke to us, and we were not to play with the Persian kitten, nor see the dogs. She said you were a very grand lady, and that was the proper way to go on—we didn't agree with her, did we, Jasmine?"

"No, of course we didn't," said Jasmine; "we knew better."

"We said you were a romp," continued Daisy. "You seemed like it in our garden. I wouldn't have come if I thought you were one of those ladies who wanted little girls to sit on chairs. Oh! do say you are a romp."

Here there was a laugh heard behind them, and Mr. Ellsworthy came up and joined the group. He greeted the girls kindly, and very soon discovered that their father had been the old acquaintance whom he had known of the name. Then he and Primrose went off together, and Mrs. Ellsworthy took the two young girls' hands.

"My darling," she said, "with the single exception of my only son, Frankie, who is at present at school, I am the greatest romp in existence. Now let us come out into the sunshine and enjoy ourselves."

The few hours the girls spent at Shortlands passed only too quickly for Jasmine and Daisy. Mrs. Ellsworthy laid herself out to be charming, and no one could be more charming than she when she chose. She had naturally a good deal of sympathy, and taking her cue from the little ones, she entered into their lives, and became one with them. Jasmine and Daisy became quite merry. An indiscriminating observer would have said: "How shocking to hear such merry laughter—their mother has only been dead a month." But Mrs. Ellsworthy had far too kind a heart to do these children such an injustice. She knew that the dark lines under Jasmine's bright eyes were caused by the passion of a great grief; but she also knew that with such a nature sunshine must follow storm. Daisy in the midst of her play, too, began suddenly to cry.

"What is the matter, my little one?" asked the lady of the house. The child put her arms round her neck, and whispered through sobs: "I am so happy now; but I know I'll be miserable bye-and-bye. I'll want so badly to tell mamma about you, and mamma won't be there."

Primrose was also serenely happy—she was glad to hear her sisters' laughter, and she liked to walk about the beautiful place, and to feel the soft summer air on her

cheeks.

The village of Rosebury lay low; but Shortlands stood on rising ground, and the more bracing air did Primrose good. When she saw how happy Mrs. Ellsworthy made her sisters she forgave her for not calling on her mother.

Mr. Ellsworthy took a good deal of notice of Primrose, and showed her some of his pet books, and talked to her in a sensible grown-up way. Jasmine and Daisy were young for their years, but Primrose was old, and she liked to ask practical questions. Had she known Mr. Ellsworthy a little better she might have even consulted him as to the best way of laying out thirty pounds per annum, so as to cover all the expenses of three girls who wished to live as ladies; but she was both shy and reserved; and when Mr. Ellsworthy, goaded on by certain looks from his wife, referred to the subject of money, Primrose started aside from it like any frightened young fawn.

The day, the happy day for all three, passed only too quickly, and it was Mrs. Ellsworthy at last who determined to plunge boldly into the heart of the subject which was uppermost in her thoughts.

"Primrose," she said, taking the elder sister aside, "you must forgive me for speaking plainly to you, dear. I call you Primrose, because you do not seem to me altogether a stranger, and my husband knew your father. I may call you Primrose, may I not, love?"

"Please, do," said Primrose, with that sweet smile which came only rarely to her quiet face; "I like it—it is my name. When people say Miss Mainwaring I feel—lonely."

"You are Primrose, then, to me, dear. Now, Primrose, take my hand, and sit quietly in this chair. I am going to confess something to you. I called to see you and your sisters yesterday morning, intending to patronize you."

"To patronize us—why?" asked Primrose.

Mrs. Ellsworthy laughed in a slightly nervous manner.

"My dear child, we won't go into the whys and the wherefores. I found I could not do it, that is all. I have not, however, half finished my confession. I called to see you because Miss Martineau asked me to."

Here Primrose flushed a very rosy pink, and Mrs. Ellsworthy saw a displeased look fill her eyes.

"You must not be angry with Miss Martineau, Primrose. She loves you three girls very much. She is most anxious about you. She—my dear, she told me of your poverty."

Here Primrose rose from her seat and said, in the quietest tone—

"We are certainly poor, but I don't think that is anybody's concern. We don't mind it ourselves—at least, not much. You see, we have never known riches, and we cannot miss what we have never had. It would be a great pity for people to try to make us discontented. I think it was ill-bred of Miss Martineau to mention our private affairs to you; but still, as we have got to know you through these means, I forgive her. You are a very delightful friend. Mrs. Ellsworthy, I think you must let us go home now—Daisy is not accustomed to being up so late."

"Of all the tiresome, hard-to-be-understood young people I ever came across, Primrose Mainwaring beats them," thought Mrs. Ellsworthy to herself; but aloud she said very sweetly—

"Yes, dear—and you shall drive home in the carriage I could not hear of your walking."

CHAPTER VIII.

THIRTY POUNDS A YEAR.

Miss Ellsworthy thought Primrose both tiresome and obtuse, but here she was mistaken.

Miss Martineau's solemn looks, Mr. Danesfield's emphatic injunctions to make the most of their visit to Shortlands, and, above all, the expression of deep distress on Mrs. Ellsworthy's charming face when she spoke of their poverty, were by no means thrown away on her.

She felt very grave as the three sisters were driven home in the Ellsworthys' luxurious carriage. She scarcely joined at all in Jasmine's chatter, nor did she notice Daisy's raptures over a tiny white pup—Mrs. Ellsworthy's parting gift.

On their arrival at home the Pink greeted this unlooked-for addition to the family with a furious assault; and Jasmine, Daisy, and Hannah were all intensely excited over the task of dividing the combatants; but Primrose felt but small interest, and owned that she had a slight headache.

Nevertheless, when the younger girls retired to bed she sat up, and, taking out an account-book, began an impossible task. Even all the resources of this young and vigorous brain could not make thirty pounds cover a year's expenses. Again and again Primrose tried. The rent of the cottage was twelve pounds a year. She pronounced this extravagant, and wondered if they could possibly get a cheaper dwelling.

Then there were Hannah's wages. Well, of course, they could do without Hannah—it would be very painful to part with her, but anything would be better than the humiliating conclusion that Mrs. Ellsworthy and Miss Martineau considered them too poor to live. Then, of course, they could do without meat—what did healthy girls want with meat? Only—and here Primrose sighed deeply—Daisy was not very strong. Eggs were cheap enough in Rosebury, and so was butter, and they could bake their own bread; and as to clothes, they would not want any more for a long time. Here Primrose again felt herself pulled up short, for Jasmine's walking-shoes were nearly worn through.

She went to bed at last, feeling very depressed and anxious. Thirty pounds was

really a much smaller sum of money than she had given it credit for being. Try as she might, it would not stretch itself over the expenses of even the humblest establishment of three. She was much comforted, however, by the reflection that there remained a large sum to their credit in the bank. Primrose found her faith shaken in the capacities of an income of thirty pounds a year; but a sum total of two hundred pounds she still believed to be almost inexhaustible. She resolved to go and consult Mr. Danesfield on the morrow.

Mr. Danesfield was generally to be found in his private room at the bank by ten o'clock in the morning. Very soon after that hour on the following day a clerk came to say that one of the young ladies from Woodbine Cottage wanted to see him. "The eldest young lady, and she says her business is very pressing," continued the man.

The bank at Rosebury was only a branch office of a large establishment in the nearest town. It happened that that morning Mr. Danesfield was particularly busy, and anxious to get away to the large bank at an early hour. For more reasons than one, therefore he felt annoyed at Primrose's visit.

"Poor child," he said to himself, "I have certainly nothing very good to tell her; and I have undoubtedly no time to waste over her this morning."

Aloud, however, he said to his clerk—

"Ask Miss Mainwaring to step this way—and, Dawson, order my trap to be at the door in ten minutes."

"I won't keep you very long, Mr. Danesfield," began Primrose, in a quick and rather nervous manner for her.

Mr. Danesfield was always the soul of politeness, however irritable he might feel.

"Sit down, my dear young lady," he said; "I am delighted to see you, and I can give you exactly five minutes."

"I want to ask you two questions," began Primrose. "The questions are short. They

are about money; and you understand all about that."

"Not all, my dear girl—money is far too great a theme to be wholly comprehended by one single individual."

Primrose tapped her foot impatiently—then, after a brief pause, she raised her clear brown eyes, and looked full at the banker.

"How much money have we in the bank, Mr. Danesfield?"

"My dear child, not much—very little, scarcely anything. 'Pon my word, I am sorry for you, but your entire capital does not amount to quite two hundred pounds."

Primrose received this information calmly.

"Thank you," she said—"I just wanted to know from yourself. Now, I have one other question to ask you, and then I will go. My sisters and I have thirty pounds a year to live on. By drawing a little on our capital, say, taking ten or fifteen pounds a year from it, can we live, Mr. Danesfield?"

Mr. Danesfield rose from his seat, and coming over to Primrose, laid his hand on her shoulder—

"Live! my poor, dear child; you and your sisters would starve. No, Miss Mainwaring, there is nothing for you three girls to do but to turn to and earn your living. Your friends, I doubt not, will help, and you must take their help. I shall be delighted to give advice. Now, my dear child, my trap is at the door, and I must go. Good morning—good morning."

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE LETTER AND A PROPOSED VISIT TO LONDON.

Primrose was always direct in her movements—she made up her mind quickly; from her earliest childhood she was in the habit of acting with decision.

After her short interview with Mr. Danesfield she went straight home, and without paying any attention to the clear voice of her pet Daisy, who called to her from the garden, or to Jasmine's little impatient—"Sister, I want you to help me to arrange the trimming on my new black skirt," she ran upstairs, and locked herself into her mother's room.

There she once more opened the old davenport, and took from it the thick packet, which contained a shabby little desk, inside of which lay a letter directed to herself.

Now at last she opened the letter, and in her own great perplexity read the message from the grave.

The letter was dated about three months back, and was in her mother's neatest and most easily read writing.

"My dear daughter," it began, "I have no present reason to suppose that my life will be cut short, therefore I cannot tell whether this letter will be read by you now, while you are young, or years hence, when your youth is over.

"One thing I have resolved—you shall not know the little secret it contains during my lifetime. I keep it from you, my darling, because I could not bear you to speak of it to me, because at the time it gave me such agony that I have locked it up in my heart, and no one, not even my own child, must open the doors where my dead secret lies.

"Primrose, whenever I die, this letter will reach you—you will find it in the ordinary course of things in my cabinet; but even in this letter I cannot tell you all the story—you must go to Hannah for particulars—she has been with me all my married life, and knows as much as I do.

"Once, when you were a little child of only six years old, I came into the room where you slept, and I heard her saying to you, as she tucked you up for the night—

"You must be very good to your mamma, Miss Primrose, for she has known trouble."

"Neither you nor she saw me, and you raised your dear eyes to her face, and I heard you say—

"'What is trouble, nursey Hannah?'

"'Trouble is a burden too heavy to be borne,' Hannah answered, 'but when you came, Missy, it went away—you were like the spring to my missus, and that is why she called you Primrose.'

"That night I called Hannah aside, and I made the faithful creature promise that she would never again allude to my trouble to any of my children. She promised, and kept her word.

"Now, darling, you shall learn what nearly broke my heart; what would have quite broken it had God not sent me my three girls.

"Primrose, something more bitter than death came to your mother. Your father is dead—I know where his bones lie—I know that I shall meet him again, and I don't rebel. My other trouble was far, far worse than that—

"Darling, you are not my eldest child—you are not the first bonny baby who lay in my arms. Years before you were born I had a son. Oh! how can I speak of him?—he seemed to be more beautiful than any other child—he had ways—he had looks—Primrose, I can't go on, you must ask Hannah to tell you what my boy was like. I had him for five years, then I lost him; he did not die—he was stolen from me. Can you wonder now that your mother sometimes looks sad, and that even you and Jasmine and Daisy fail now and then to make me smile?

"My bonny boy was stolen. I never saw him dead; I never could go to his grave to put flowers there—twenty years ago now he was taken from me, and I have had neither trace nor tidings of him.

"Hannah will tell you particulars, Primrose, for I cannot. My trouble far surpassed the bitterness of death. Only for you three, I could not have lived—

"Your mother, "Constance Mainwaring."

Primrose had scarcely finished reading this letter, and had by no means taken in the full meaning of its contents, when light, soft footsteps paused outside the room, and she heard the handle of the door being very softly turned.

Cramming the letter into her pocket, and shutting the lid of the little cabinet, she ran and unlocked the door. Jasmine was standing without.

"I looked for you everywhere, Primrose, and I did not mean really to disturb you here; I thought you might be here, and I tried the handle very softly, meaning to steal away again. Are you very busy, Primrose?"

"I can come with you if you want me for anything, Jasmine," answered Primrose, putting her hand to her head in a dazed sort of way.

Jasmine's brow cleared, and her face grew bright instantly.

"It's rather exciting," she said; "I'm so glad you can come. It is about Poppy Jenkins—Poppy is downstairs—she is going away—she has come to say good-bye. Do you know, Primrose, that she is actually going to London?"

Jasmine looked so delighted and eager that Primrose could not help smiling, and taking her sister's hand, they ran downstairs together.

Poppy, who had very black eyes, cheeks with a brilliant color, and hair like a raven's wing, was standing in the drawing-room twisting her apron strings and chatting volubly to Daisy. She had known the girls all her life, and not only loved them dearly, but respected them much. To Poppy Jenkins there never were three such beautiful and altogether charming young ladies as the Misses Mainwaring.

When Primrose appeared she dropped her a curtsey—perhaps she respected Primrose the most, and loved her the least.

"It's to say good-bye, miss," she began, "I called in, hoping for last words with you three dear young ladies. I is summoned to London, Miss Primrose."

Nothing could exceed the air of modest pride with which Poppy made this declaration; she quite expected Primrose to be both startled and dazzled, and said afterwards that it was rather like a little stream of cold water trickling down her back when Miss Mainwaring replied quietly—

"London is a long way off, Poppy—why are you going there?"

"I has an aunt in the boarding-house way, Miss Primrose—she keeps a very select establishment; and most particular; don't admit no gentlemen. It's for ladies only, aunt's boarding-house is, miss, and she wrote to mother that it's a flourishing concern, and she wants a girl who will be honest, and handy, and country-bred, to help wait on the ladies. She has offered the situation to me, miss, as in duty bound, I being her own niece, and mother is pleased to accept. I calls it a dazzling prospect, Miss Primrose."

"I am delighted," began Primrose; but Jasmine interrupted her. "Dazzling," she repeated, "of course it is dazzling, Poppy. I am so very glad you are going. I only wish I were going. If there is a wonderful, delightful, charming place, it is London. I have read about it, and I have dreamed about it, and I have pictured it. What fun you will have! Of course your aunt will take you to see all the sights. Oh, do sit down. Primrose, we ought to tell her about the places she should see, ought we not?"

Primrose nodded, and Poppy dropped on to the edge of the nearest chair, and, clasping her red and hard-worked hands in front of her, prepared herself to listen.

"First of all, Poppy," began Jasmine, after waiting for her sister to speak; but Primrose was strangely silent.

"First of all, Poppy, you must go to the places which improve your mind; now, I do hope you are not going to be giddy, running just after pretty things; but I suppose your aunt, who is so wise, and who keeps the boarding-house, will see to that. Well, first of all you had better go to Westminster Abbey. Oh, Poppy! I have read such glorious descriptions of it—the lights from the painted windows—the wonderfully

ancient look of the old pillars, and then the music; it peals down the aisles and echoes through the fretted roofs; you will be greatly overpowered at Westminster Abbey, Poppy; but you must remember that you are a very privileged person, and be thankful for being permitted to see with your own eyes such a lovely, lovely, glorious place!"

"It do sound, from your description, very awe-inspiring, Miss Jasmine," answered Poppy. "Is there no other place where one might get more, so to speak, into the festive mood, miss?"

"Oh yes, you silly Poppy, lots and lots; but we'll come to those presently. You'll have to see the Houses of Parliament, where our laws are made—if you don't feel grave there, you ought. Then you must visit the Tower, where people's heads were cut off—it's very solemn indeed at the Tower; and, of course, you will pay a visit to the Zoo, and you can see the lions fed, and you can look at the monkey-house."

"I likes monkeys," said Poppy, whose face had been growing graver and graver while Jasmine was talking; "and if you'll throw in a little bit of gazing into shop windows, Miss Jasmine, and learning the newest cuts of a bonnet, and the most genteel fit of a mantle, why, then, I'll do even that dreadful Tower, as in duty bound. My mother calls London a vast sea and a world of temptation, and nothing but vanity from end to end; but when I thinks of the beautiful ladies in aunt's boarding-house, and of the shop windows I feels that it is dazzling."

"I wish that I were going," repeated Jasmine, whose cheeks were flushed, and her starry eyes brighter than usual; "I wish I were going. Oh, Primrose, think of you, and Daisy, and me saying our prayers in the Abbey!"

"We must not think of it," said Primrose; "God hears our prayers wherever we say them, Jasmine, darling."

"Yes," answered Jasmine; "and I am not going to complain. Well, Poppy, you are a very lucky girl, and I hope you'll be as good as gold, and as happy as the day is

long."

"And if ever you does come to London, Miss Jasmine," said Poppy, rising to her feet, "you'll remember aunt's boarding-house, for ladies only; and proud I'll be to wait on you, miss."

"But we can't come, Poppy dear—we are very poor now—we have only got thirty pounds a year to live on."

To Poppy, who had never been known in her life to possess thirty pence, this sum sounded by no means modest.

"Might I make bold to inquire, miss," she asked, "if the thirty pounds is once for all, or if it's a yearly recurrence?"

"Oh, it's an income, Poppy—how stupid you are!"

"Then I'll consult my aunt in town, miss, and try to find out if you three dear young ladies couldn't contrive a London visit out of part of the savings."

After this sapient speech Poppy bade the Mainwarings good-bye. They looked after her retreating form down the street with many regrets, for they were very fond of her, and Jasmine at least envied her.

CHAPTER X.

WAYS OF EARNING A LIVING.

That night, after her sisters were in bed, Primrose again sat up late—once again she read her mother's letter; then burying her face in her hands, she sat for a long, long time lost in thought.

Jasmine and Daisy, all unconcerned and unconscious, slept overhead, but Hannah was anxious about her young mistress, and stepped into the drawing-room, and said in her kind voice—

"Hadn't you better be getting your beauty sleep, missie?"

"Oh, Hannah! I am so anxious," said Primrose.

"Now, deary, whatever for?" asked the old servant.

Primrose hesitated. She wanted to talk to Hannah about her mother's letter; she half took it out of her pocket, then she restrained herself.

"Another time," she whispered to herself. Aloud she said—

"Hannah, Mrs. Ellsworthy and Miss Martineau hinted to me what Mr. Danesfield said plainly to-day—we three girls have not got money enough to live on."

"Eh, dear!" answered Hannah, dropping on to the nearest chair, "and are you putting yourself out about that, my pretty? Why, tisn't likely that you three young ladies could support yourselves. Don't you fret about that, Miss Primrose; why, you'll get quite old with fretting, and lose all your nice looks. You go to bed, my darling—there's a Providence over us, and he'll find ways and means to help you."

Primrose rose to her feet, some tears came to her eyes, and taking Hannah's hard old hand, she stooped and kissed her.

"I won't fret, Hannah," she said, "and I'll go to bed instantly. Thank you for reminding me about God." Then she lit her bedroom candle and went very gently up the stairs to her bedroom, but as she laid her head on the pillow she said to herself—"Even Hannah sees that we can't live on our income."

The next morning early Primrose said rather abruptly to her two sisters—

"I have found out the meaning of Miss Martineau's fussiness and Mrs. Ellsworthy's kindness. They are both sorry for us girls, for they know we can't live on thirty pounds a year."

"Oh, what nonsense!" said Jasmine; "any one can live on thirty pounds a year. Didn't you see how Poppy opened her eyes when we mentioned it;—she thought it quite a lot of money, and said we could come to London out of the savings. I am sure,

Primrose, if any one ought to know, it is Poppy, for her mother is really very poor."

"Mr. Danesfield, too, says we can't live on it," continued Primrose; "and when I asked Hannah last night, she said 'Of course not'—that no one expected us to. Now look here, Jasmine, this is all quite fresh to you and Daisy, but I'm accustomed to it, for I have known it for twenty-four hours, and what I say is this, if we can't live on our income we have got to make some more income to live on. If thirty pounds a year is not enough for us at the end, neither is it enough for us at the beginning, so we had better see about earning an income at once, or we'll get into debt, which will be quite awful. Jasmine, I am afraid the days of our merry childhood are over, and I am so sorry for you and Daisy, for you are both very young."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Jasmine—"I—I—I'd do anything—I fancy I could make dresses best, or—Oh, suppose I wrote poetry, and sold it? You know you and Daisy do like my poems. Do you remember how you cried over the one I called 'An Ode to the Swallow?'"

"No, I didn't cry over that one," interrupted Daisy. "I thought that one rather stupid—I cried over the one in which you spoke about my darling Pink being caught in a trap, and having her leg broken."

"Oh, that one," repeated Jasmine—"I thought that one a little vulgar. I only made it up to please you, Daisy. Primrose, don't you notice what a lot of poems there are in all the magazines, and of course, somebody must write them. I should not be a bit surprised if I could add to our income by writing poetry, Primrose. All the books, nearly all the magazines and newspapers, come from London. Poppy will not be going to London until to-morrow—I'll run round this morning and ask her to try and find out for me which of the publishers want poems like my 'Ode to the Swallow.' Perhaps they'd like it in the —— Review; only the —— Review is so horribly deep. My ode is deep too, for Daisy cannot understand it. Perhaps I could send my poem about Pink to one of the other magazines. Oh, Primrose! may I run round to Poppy,

and see if she can help us?"

Primrose smiled very faintly, and it dawned across her again in rather a painful manner what a mere child her little sister was.

"I think I wouldn't, darling," she said. "Poppy could not really help you about publishers. Look here, Jasmine and Daisy; here is a letter I found in mamma's cabinet yesterday—it is directed to me, but the news it contains is for us all; will you and Daisy go out into the garden and read it together. You will be very much astonished when you read the letter—poor mamma, what she must have suffered! While you are reading I will go out. Mr. Danesfield says I may consult him, and as I know he is a wise man, I will do so."

"Would you like to take my ode with you?" inquired Jasmine.

"No, not to-day, dear—if I am not in to dinner, don't wait for me."

"I know one thing; we'll be very saving about that dinner," remarked Jasmine, shaking back her curly locks. "If you are not in, Primrose, Daisy and I will divide an egg between us—I read somewhere that eggs were very nourishing, and half a one each will do fine. Come into the garden now, Eyebright. Oh, Primrose! I don't feel a bit low about adding to our income. If we choose we can eat so very little, and then if the —— Review likes my poetry, I can spin it off by the yard."

CHAPTER XI.

BREAD AND BUTTER.

Primrose, her head a little more erect than usual, her step firm, and a proud bright light in her eyes, went quickly down the little rambling village street. The plain black dress she wore set off her yellow hair and extremely fair complexion to the best advantage. She had never looked sweeter or more independent than at this moment, when, for the first time in her young life, she was about to ask for help.

Mr. Danesfield was not so busy this morning, and he saw his young visitor without delay.

"Sit down, my dear," he said; "I am very pleased to see you. You want to ask for my advice? I will give it with the greatest pleasure."

Primrose raised her head slowly. "I have been thinking over what you said yesterday," she began. "As it is quite impossible for my sisters and me to live on our little income, even with the help of what you have in the bank, we must try to help ourselves, must we not?"

"This is a brave thought, my dear—of course you must help yourselves, and you will be none the worse for doing so."

"We must earn money," continued Primrose. "How can girls like us, who are not educated—for I know we are not really educated—add to our incomes?"

Mr. Danesfield knit his brows. "Child," he said, "you ask me a puzzler. I have no children of my own, and I know very little about young folk. Of one thing, however, I am quite certain; Daisy can earn no money, nor can Jasmine. You, Primrose, might with some difficulty get a little place as a nursery governess; you are a nice, presentable-looking girl, my dear."

Primrose flushed, and the tears, wrung from great pain, came into her eyes.

"There is just one thing," she said, in a tremulous voice; "whatever happens, we three girls won't be parted. On that point I have quite firmly made up my mind."

Mr. Danesfield again knit his brows, and this time he fidgeted uneasily on his chair.

"Look here, Primrose," he said: "I am an old bachelor, and I don't know half nor a quarter the ways in which a woman may earn her living. I have always been told that a woman is a creature of resources. Now it is a well-known fact that an old bachelor has no resources. You go and put your question to Miss Martineau, my dear. Miss Martineau is a kind soul—'pon my word, now, a very kind soul—and she has

managed wonderfully to exist herself on absolutely nothing. You go to Miss Martineau, Primrose, and get some secrets from her. Everything in my power you may depend on my doing. I will exert my interest, and my purse is at your service."

Here Primrose got up.

"Good-bye, Mr. Danesfield," she said. "I know you mean to be very kind, but we three must keep together, and we must be independent." Then she left the office, and went again down the street.

Mr. Danesfield looked after her as she walked away.

"Poor, proud young thing!" he said to himself. "Life will be a tussle for her, or I am much mistaken. She is really growing wonderfully nice-looking, too. How she flushed up when I said she was presentable—poor child! poor child! That mother of theirs might have done something to provide for those girls—lady-like girls—distinguished-looking. I expect the mother was a weak, poor soul. Well, I hope Miss Martineau will think of something. I must call and see Miss Martineau; 'pon my word I don't know what to suggest for the children to do."

When Primrose arrived at Miss Martineau's, that lady was just dismissing the last of her morning pupils. She was standing on her steps in her neat brown alpaca dress, over which she wore a large black apron of the same material with a bib to it. This apron had capacious pockets, which at the present moment were stuffed with her pupils' French exercises. On her head she had an antique-looking cap, made of black lace and rusty black velvet, and ornamented with queer little devices of colored beads.

She was delighted to see Primrose, and took her at once into her little sitting-room. "Now my dear, you will stay and have dinner with me. You don't mind having no meat, dear. My middle-day meal to-day consists of a salad and a rice soufflée. You are welcome to share it with me, Primrose."

"Thank you," said Primrose, "but I am not at all hungry. If you do not mind, I will

talk to you while you dine. Miss Martineau, I have come to ask your advice."

Miss Martineau came up instantly and kissed the young girl on both cheeks.

"My love, I am delighted. It gives me the sincerest pleasure to give counsel to the young and inexperienced. Have you come from Mrs. Ellsworthy, dearest?"

"Not at all," answered Primrose. "Mrs. Ellsworthy has nothing to say to me. She is only a friend, nothing more. Miss Martineau, we have discovered that we cannot live on our little income. Please will you tell me how we can add to it, so that we three can keep together?"

"Keep together—impossible!" replied Miss Martineau. "There is nothing whatever before you, Primrose, but to face the inevitable. The inevitable means that you must break up your home—that you obtain, through the kind patronage of the Ellsworthys, a situation as governess, or companion, or something of that sort—and that the little girls, Jasmine and Daisy, are put into a good school for the orphan daughters of military men. The Ellsworthys will use their influence toward this end. They are very kind—they have taken up your cause warmly. Primrose, my dear, it sounds hard, but plain speaking is best. You must be parted from your sisters. This is inevitable. You have got to face it."

"It is not inevitable," answered Primrose—then she paused, and her face turned very white.

"It is not inevitable," she repeated, "for this reason because neither you nor Mrs. Ellsworthy have the smallest control over my sisters or myself. I asked for your advice, but if this is the best you can give, it is useless. Mrs. Ellsworthy never cared to know my mother, and she is not going to part my mother's children now. Good-bye, Miss Martineau—no, I am not hungry, I have a headache. Oh, I am not offended—people mean to be kind, but there are things which one cannot bear. No, Miss Martineau, the inevitable course you and Mrs. Ellsworthy have been kind enough to sketch out, my sisters and I will certainly not adopt."

CHAPTER XII.

THEY WOULD NOT BE PARTED.

Primrose walked down the street, passing by the little cottage which for so many years had been her home. Her sisters did not expect her to return to dinner, and her heart was too full to allow her to go in just then.

So they were to be parted—this was the advice of those who called themselves their friends. Primrose, Jasmine, and Daisy, her three flowers, as mother had called them, were no longer to grow sweetly in one garden together. They were to be parted—Primrose was to go one way, and the little ones another. Impulsive Jasmine would no longer cry out her griefs on Primrose's neck, or tell her joys and griefs, her hopes and aspirations, to the calm and elder sister. Daisy—their baby, as Primrose called her—might be ill or sad, or lonely, and she, Primrose, would no longer be there to comfort her.

Parted! No, they should not be parted—all their young lives they had lived together, and whether they starved, or whether they feasted, they would live together still. Thank God, no one had any real control over them—their very loneliness would now, therefore, be their safety—they might sketch out their own career, and no one could prevent them.

Primrose said to herself—

"After all, I am glad I know the very worst. People mean to be kind; but, oh! how can they understand what we three girls are to one another?"

She walked quickly in her agitation, and passing the village green, came suddenly upon Poppy Jenkins, who was hurrying home to her mother's cottage.

"Well, Miss Primrose, I'm off to-morrow," said Poppy, dropping one of her quick curtseys, and a more vivid red than usual coming into her bright cheeks.

"Yes, Poppy," answered Primrose; "I hope you will be very happy in London"—then a sudden thought occurring to her, she ran after the young girl and laid her hand on her shoulder.

"Poppy, give me your London address—I may want it."

"Oh law! Miss Primrose, do you think you'd be saving out of the thirty pounds regular income and coming up to London on a visit?"

"We may come to London, Poppy—I can't say," answered Primrose in a sad voice—"anyhow, I should like to have your address—may I have it?"

"Surely, miss—aunt lives in a part they call central—she says the rents are very high, but it's all done for the convenience of the beautiful ladies who boards with her. Aunt's address is Penelope Mansion—Wright Street, off the Edgware Road. It's a beautiful sounding address, isn't it, Miss Primrose?"

Primrose smiled again—a smile, however, which made poor little Poppy feel rather down-hearted, and then she continued her walk.

"It is very difficult to know what to do," she said to herself—"it makes one feel quite old and careworn. If only that brother who was lost long ago was now living, how nice it would be for us girls. I wonder if he is really dead—I suppose he is, or mamma would have heard something about him. Twenty years ago since it happened—longer than my whole life. Poor mother! poor, dear mother! what she must have suffered! I understand now why her pretty sweet face looked so sad, and why her hair was grey before her time. What a pity my brother has not lived—he certainly would not wish us girls to be parted."

Primrose walked on a little farther, then she retraced her steps and went home. She found Jasmine and Daisy in a state of the greatest excitement. Mrs. Ellsworthy had called, and had been nicer and sweeter and more charming than ever—she had brought Daisy a doll of the most perfect description, and had presented the flower-loving Jasmine with a great bouquet of exotics, which looked almost out of

place in the humble little cottage.

"And there is a long letter for you, Primrose," continued Jasmine; "and she says she hopes you will read it very quickly, and that she may come down to-morrow morning to talk it over with you. She says there is a plan in the letter, and that it is a delightful plan—I wonder what it can be? Will you read the letter now, Primrose?—shall I break the seal and read it aloud to you?"

"No," answered Primrose, almost shortly for her—"Mrs. Ellsworthy's letter can keep," and then she slipped the thick white envelope into her pocket.

"Why sister darling, how pale you look!—are you tired?"

"A little," said Primrose—"I had no dinner—I should like a cup of tea."

Jasmine flew out of the room to get it for her, and Daisy nestled up to her elder sister's side.

"Primrose," she whispered, "Jasmine and I read that letter in the garden together. Oh! we were so surprised to know we had a little baby brother long ago. We went to Hannah and asked her about him, and Hannah cried—I never saw Hannah cry so long and so hard. She said he was the sweetest baby. Oh, how I wish we had him now!—he would be much, much nicer than my new doll."

"But if he were with us now he would be a man, Eyebright—a big, brave man, able to help us poor girls."

Daisy considered—

"I can only think of him as a baby," she said. "Hannah said he was lost in London. How I wish we could go to London and find our brother!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. ELLSWORTHY'S LETTER.

The girls had finished tea, and Hannah had removed all traces of the evening meal before Primrose would even glance at the thick letter which was addressed to her. She did so at last, at the earnest entreaties of her two sisters—for Daisy climbed on the sofa beside her, and put her arms round her neck, and coaxed her to read what dear Mrs. Ellsworthy had written, and Jasmine took the letter and placed it in her lap, and seated herself on a footstool at her feet, and the two young girls looked interested and excited, and their eyes were bright with anticipation, and even some impatience.

Primrose, on the contrary, appeared indifferent. She broke the seal of the thick letter languidly, and began to read its contents aloud, in an almost apathetic voice.

This was what Mrs. Ellsworthy had written:

"MY DEAR PRIMROSE,

"(You remember our compact that I was to call you Primrose.) I had not courage to say to you the other day all that was in my heart. My dear child, it seems rather absurd to say it, but I felt afraid of you. In the eyes of the world I am considered a great lady—for I have riches, and my husband holds a good position—whereas you, Primrose, would be considered by that same world nothing but a simple village maid. Nevertheless, the innocent and unsophisticated girl contrived to keep the woman of the world at a distance, and to let her see very plainly that she thought her curious questions impertinent. When I read this expression of opinion so plainly in your eyes, Primrose, I felt afraid, and questioned no further. My dear, it is a fact that cowards always resort to pen and ink when they want to express a frank opinion. I am now going to say on paper what I feared to put into so many words the other night. First of all, you are mistaken about me. I am not what you think me.

"Oh, yes! I know very well what that proud little heart of yours tells you about me. It says, 'She is great and rich, and she is curious about us girls, and she wants to patronize us—'"

Here Primrose had to put down her letter, for she was interrupted by an exclamation from Daisy—

"But we don't think like that of our darling, pretty Mrs. Ellsworthy—do we, Jasmine?"

"Go on reading, Primrose," said Jasmine.

Primrose continued—

"You are all wrong about me, my dear, dear girls, and yet, after a measure, you are right; for in a certain sense I am curious about you; and most undoubtedly I want to help you. I know already a certain portion of your story, and already I can partly read your characters. The part of your story I know is this: You are ladies by birth—you are very ignorant of the world—and you have not at all sufficient money to live on. Your characters are as follows:

"Primrose, I am not at all afraid of you on paper. You, Primrose, are proud and independent. You are also sadly obstinate, and it is extremely probable that you will take your own way, which I can see beforehand will not be a wise one."

"Oh! oh! oh!" came interruption No. 2 to the reading of the letter, and Jasmine's arms were flung tightly round Primrose's neck.

"How can she talk of you like that? How little she knows you, my 'queen of roses.'"

Primrose smiled, kissed Jasmine between her eyebrows and went on reading.

"Jasmine's character," continued Mrs. Ellsworthy in her letter, "is as yet unformed. She has high aspirations and generous impulses—if she is well managed, and if you don't spoil her, Primrose, she will probably develop into a very noble woman. I love Jasmine very dearly already.

"As to your little sister, she is as fresh, and innocent, and dainty as her name; but take warning, Primrose, she is not over strong—there is a look about the little one which makes me dread the thought of her encountering any of the roughnesses of

life.

"Now, my dear girl, I have read my little bit of a lecture; you are probably extremely angry with me, but I don't care. I now come to the practical part of my letter; I am desirous to help you three, and I want to help you in the way most suited to your individual characters. The sad fact cannot be gain-said—you must give up your home—you must earn your livings. May I help you to find a way to put bread into your mouths? I have thought it all out, and I think I know a plan. If you will agree to it, you may keep your independence, Primrose; Jasmine may be developed into the kind of woman God meant her to become; and little Daisy need not fear the rude blasts of adverse fate."

Here Daisy, who only partly understood the letter, burst into tears, and Primrose, taking her in her arms, allowed the closely written sheets to fall on the floor.

"I know what it means," she exclaimed, speaking with sudden fire and passion; "the same thing has been said to me by two different people already to-day. Mr. Danesfield said it after his fashion, Miss Martineau after hers, and now Mrs. Ellsworthy repeats the words. Oh, yes, I know what it means—separation—I will never consent to it!"

Jasmine had been kneeling on the floor and picking up the scattered sheets of Mrs. Ellsworthy's letter; she now raised her eyes in utter astonishment to her elder sister's face. Primrose was not accustomed to giving utterance to strong feelings. Primrose's words were wont to be calm and somewhat measured. Jasmine knew that she herself flew into tempests of grief, or anger, or excitement—she was always being chided for not restraining her feelings—she was always being gently lectured for using too strong expressions. What did Primrose mean by throwing down this kind though somewhat mysterious, letter, and by making use of so ghastly a word as "separation?" Who was going to divide them? Certainly not kind Mrs. Ellsworthy.

"Had we not better hear what she says, even though you don't seem quite to like her,

Primrose?" asked Jasmine, holding up the sheets.

"There are two sheets more, quite full of writing—shall I read them aloud to you and Daisy?"

But Primrose had not got over the excitement which was growing within her all day; she took the letter out of Jasmine's hands, folded it, and returned it to its envelope.

"I must speak," she said; "we can finish that letter afterwards—the letter does not greatly matter, after all. Do you know, Jasmine, and do you know, Daisy, that these people who all mean to be so kind, and who, I suppose, really feel good-natured towards us, are trying to take our lives into their own hands? They are not our guardians, but they want to rule us—they say we cannot live on our income, and they will show us how we are to live. Mr. Danesfield will give money, if needed; Miss Martineau will give us heaps and oceans of advice; and Mrs. Ellsworthy will give patronage, and perhaps money too. They mean to be kind, as I said, and they think they ought to guide our lives. Of course, they consider us very young and very ignorant, and so they say they will provide for me in one way, and Jasmine in another, and Daisy in another. Now what I say is this; let us choose our own lives, Jasmine and Daisy; don't let us do anything rude to our friends, for I know they are our friends, but let us be firm and keep together. These people want to divide us; I say, let us keep together."

"Of course," said Jasmine; "is that really what the letter means—separation? Here, give it to me—" She snatched it from her sister, and flung it with energy to the other end of the apartment. Daisy nestled her soft little face up close to her eldest sister's—Daisy was still feeling things incomprehensible, and was also a little frightened.

"Go on," continued Jasmine, "go on talking, Primrose—we are quite with you, Daisy and I—what nonsense the people must have in their heads if they think we three are going to part!"

"But we are in a very painful and difficult position," continued Primrose. "We have certainly got to earn our bread, and we don't at all know how to earn it. We are not educated enough to go anywhere as governesses, although Miss Martineau did say that I might perhaps get a little place in the nursery; but in any case people would not want three governesses in one family, and, of course, Daisy is too young to earn anything for many a long day. Jasmine, I have been thinking over all this most seriously—I have been thinking over it for some hours, and it seems to me there is nothing at all for us to do but to go to London."

"Where Poppy is going?" interrupted Jasmine; "delicious—lovely—my dream of dreams! Go on, Primrose darling; I could listen to you all night."

"But we mustn't go only for pleasure," continued Primrose; "indeed, we must not go at all for pleasure. We must go to work hard, and to learn, so that bye-and-bye we may be really able to support ourselves. Now, there is only one way in which we can do that. We must take that two hundred pounds which Mr. Danesfield has in the bank, and we must live on it while we are being educated. We can go to a cheap part of London, and find poor lodgings—we won't mind how poor they are, if only they are very clean, with white curtains, and dimity round the beds. We'll be quite happy there, and we'll make our two hundred pounds go very far. With great care, and with our thirty pounds a year, it might last for four or five years, and by that time Daisy will have grown big, and you, Jasmine, will have grown up, and—and—perhaps you will have found a magazine to take your poems."

"Oh! oh! I never heard of anything so delicious!" exclaimed Jasmine. "Long before the five years are out I'll be on the pinnacle of fame. London will inspire me; oh, it is the home of beauty and delight! Where is Mrs. Ellsworthy's letter?—we will never finish it? I am going to burn it on the spot rather than allow any other idea to be put into your head, Primrose?"

Primrose smiled again, and before she could prevent her, her impetuous sister had

torn Mrs. Ellsworthy's letter into ribbons, and had set fire to it in the empty grate.

"We must not be too sanguine about London," she said; "only it does seem the only independent thing to do. Then, too, there is that letter of dear mamma's and all that sad account of the little baby brother who was lost so long ago. Hannah says that he was lost in London—he must be a man now; perhaps we shall meet him in London. It certainly does seem as if it were right for us to go."

CHAPTER XIV.

QUITE CONTRARY.

"I have done it, my dear Joseph," said Mrs. Ellsworthy. "I went to see the children, and I wrote to that little proud princess Primrose. It will be really very nice if they all come here. We have such heaps and heaps of money, more than we know what to do with; money becomes uninteresting when you have so much. I think I have tried most of the pleasures that money can buy. I have heaps of dresses, and quantities of jewels, and my lovely country home, and my season in town, but what I have never yet had, and what I have earnestly longed for, was a daughter. A boy, after all, has to go to school, and to fight his way in the world—our boy is at school, and a very good place for him—but a woman wants a girl of her own to quite satisfy her heart.

"Now it seems to me that I may have three girls. We must keep up the fiction of Primrose being useful to you in your library, Joseph—you must give her letters to write, and you must be very patient with her when she makes mistakes, for the dear child has not been educated, and will probably make the worst of secretaries. Never mind, you must try to appear delighted, and to seem as if you never could have got on until Primrose Mainwaring came to help you.

"Then the little ones—of course they are coming under the supposition that they are only to stay until I have found them berths in one of those horrid charity schools for

the orphan daughters of military men—but I promise you those berths shall be hard to find. The three will insensibly consider themselves our adopted children. Oh, what a delightful plan it is! and how picturesque I shall feel with my girls! Joseph, did you ever see a brighter or more bewitching little soul than our Jasmine?"

"Our Jasmine?" repeated Mr. Ellsworthy; "she is by no means ours yet, my love. Well, I trust your plan will succeed—they are nice girls, and I like to feel I am doing a kindness to poor Mainwaring's daughters. I shall be very pleased indeed if they make your life any happier, Kate."

Mrs. Ellsworthy stooped down and kissed her husband's brow—she was all impatience for the morning to arrive, for surely early then would come an answer to the letter she had written.

But Mrs. Ellsworthy was doomed to disappointment. The next day brought no answer from the Mainwaring girls. The good little lady bore her suspense as best she could until noon, then she ordered her carriage and drove into the village.

Jasmine herself opened the cottage door for her. Jasmine was looking excited, and there were red rings round her eyes as if she had been crying, and yet at the same time those bright eyes of hers were shining, and her lips were quivering between smiles and tears.

"Oh, you have come!" she exclaimed; "Primrose is in the village—she has gone to Mr. Danesfield about our money. Please come into the drawing-room. We are rather upset, for we are beginning to pack, and Hannah is washing out the anti-macassars and the white muslin curtains, for we think the muslin curtains will look so nice in our cheap lodgings. We are very busy, awfully busy, but do come in and sit down. Eyebright, here is Mrs. Ellsworthy. Mrs. Ellsworthy, isn't Eyebright a silly?—she is quite fretting because she won't see those last seeds of hers come up in the garden. Now, if she was asked to leave the Pink I would say nothing, but of course the Pink comes too."

"Yes, dear, and Daisy shall have plenty of garden ground for fresh seeds. Oh! my dear children," continued Mrs. Ellsworthy, "I shall be so delighted to welcome you all to Shortlands, only I think you might have replied to my letter."

Mrs. Ellsworthy was by this time seated in a low arm-chair by the window, and Jasmine was standing before her, while Daisy sat demurely on the floor, and folded up the anti-macassars.

"We might have answered your letter?" repeated Jasmine. "Well now, do you know, to be quite frank and open, your letter was a little bit of a lecture. You did give it to darling old Primrose, and somehow or other you made Daisy cry. You spoke about a plan, and you said it was a delightful plan, but—but before we read that part of your letter Primrose thought of another plan of her own, and it was so exquisite, so perfect, that we tore up your plan for fear we should be tempted by it. We don't know your plan, Mrs. Ellsworthy, and we don't want it, for we have made our own, and ours is—yes, ours is lovely!"

Mrs. Ellsworthy had an expressive face, and while Jasmine was talking it changed and grew anxious; her husband's words, "She is not our Jasmine yet," returned to her. Like many rich and pretty women, she was unaccustomed to opposition, and when it came it but whetted her desire, and made her also feel irritable.

"It is rude to tear up the letters of kind friends," she said. "I made a proposal which would have been in every way suitable to you girls, and you did not even trouble yourselves to read it. No, my loves, I am not angry. Daisy, come and give me a kiss; Jasmine, hold my hand. Now shall I tell you the little plan which you would not read about last night?"

"Oh, we would not be rude to you for the world," said Jasmine. "Daisy, come here, and give Mrs. Ellsworthy one of your sweetest kisses. Of course I will hold your hand—I love you, and so does Daisy, and so does—"

"No, so does not Primrose," answered Mrs. Ellsworthy. "Primrose is the opposing

element—still I trust I may conquer her. Now, my children, may I tell the plan?"

"Oh yes, do tell us," they both answered; but Jasmine added, "It will not be of the slightest use, for we have made our own."

"Well, dear, plans of girls as young as you are made to be altered. Now listen to my scheme.

"Mr. Ellsworthy writes for the papers and for one or two magazines. He has scientific tastes, and writing in this way gives interest to his life; but his eyes are not very strong, and he has for some time been wishing for some nice girl to whom he can dictate his thoughts. It seems to him, and to me too, that Primrose is just the sort of girl he wants, and if she will come and live with us at Shortlands, he will pay her something for giving him a couple of her hours daily—thus, you see, she will be earning her living and will be quite independent. You and Daisy, Jasmine, are to come to us on a visit, until we can find a school where, for your father's sake, your education may be finished."

"You mean a school for the orphan daughters of army men," said Jasmine, "I know. Well, thank you very much, but I'm afraid your plan won't answer. Neither Daisy nor I would at all like to go to a school for orphans. We don't fancy the idea of school, and dear mamma once said that she would never allow her girls to be taught at school, so, of course, that point is settled. Then you know we could not always remain with you on a visit, for we are no relations of yours—you never heard of us at all until a few days ago, although we have lived here most of our lives. Of course you don't mean to keep us always on a visit, so it would be very silly to begin a thing which could not go on. Then about Primrose—may I be quite honest with you about Primrose?"

"Oh yes, my dear."

"Well now, she doesn't write well—not really—her hand moves so slowly, and I have seen some spelling mistakes now and then in her letters—I fly over the page

myself, but then I only can read my own writing. I am greatly afraid that poor Mr. Ellsworthy would find Primrose a bad secretary. No, no, no; ours is a much, much better plan. You see, Mrs. Ellsworthy, you must not be angry with us—we love you very much—we are greatly obliged to you, but we have quite made up our minds—we will not be separated. Ah! here comes Primrose. Primrose, darling, here is Mrs. Ellsworthy—she is just going to listen to our plan—she has told us hers, and I have been explaining to her that it will not answer, for Daisy and I are determined not to go to school, and you know, Primrose, you are really stupid with your pen."

"How do you do, Mrs. Ellsworthy?" said Primrose—she came in looking fagged and tired, and with a worried expression between her eyebrows. "Mrs. Ellsworthy," she said, "I am most grateful to you for being so kind to us. I know you won't approve at all of our plan—you will agree with Mr. Danesfield, who said he thought we had taken leave of our senses, but I think we have made up our minds, and as we have no guardian, there is no one to prevent us doing as we please."

"Oh, Primrose, how sad you look!" said Jasmine. "Has Mr. Danesfield been disagreeable to you? Well, I know our darling Mrs. Ellsworthy won't. Tell her our plan quickly. Primrose, she says you don't love her—tell her you do love her. Oh, she is sweet and dear and kind—tell her our plan—she won't throw cold water on what we wish to do—she won't think it wrong that we three girls should wish to keep together."

"Our plan is this," said Primrose, "I have asked Mr. Danesfield to give us what money he has of ours, and then we three are going to sell our furniture here, and to give up the cottage, and say good-bye to dear Hannah, and we are going to London. In London we shall learn. I am going to have lessons in painting, and Jasmine shall study English composition, and she shall be taught how to write properly; and Daisy, too, must be taught, and we will do that with our money which is now in the bank, and when it is spent we shall be able to support ourselves. After all, it is a very

simple plan, and the best thing about it is that it will keep us together."

When Primrose began to talk Mrs. Ellsworthy threw down her hands in her lap with a gesture of great impatience. Now she asked in a short dry voice, "May I ask what money you have in the bank?"

"Yes, certainly—we have two hundred pounds—a little of that must be spent in paying one or two small accounts, but then we shall have the money as well from the sale of our furniture. Yes, I think we shall have quite two hundred pounds to take to London."

"And we are going to be very economical," interposed Jasmine. "We are going at first for a couple of nights to a boarding-house for ladies only. It is called Penelope Mansion, and is in a street off the Edgware Road—we have a friend, she is only a village girl, but we call her our friend—her name is Poppy Jenkins, who has just gone to Penelope Mansion to help her aunt, who is the owner of the boarding-house. While we are there we will see the sights, for of course that must be part of our education. We will go to Westminster Abbey to be solemnized, and we will go to the Tower to perfect our knowledge of the tragical part of English history, and we must take Daisy to the Zoo, for she has always longed to see a lot of monkeys all together. I don't think we'll have any time for looking in at the shop windows, for we shall be very busy, and very, very earnest, but these places we must see. I daresay Poppy and her aunt, and some of the nice ladies in the boarding-house, will go with us. When Poppy has dusted up and put things straight in the morning, of course she'll have lots and lots of time. Oh, it does seem such an easy, sensible plan."

"My poor, poor children!" exclaimed Mrs. Ellsworthy, "my poor, deluded, silly, obstinate children!" and then the good little woman burst into tears.

CHAPTER XV.

IN SPITE OF OPPOSITION.

But although Mrs. Ellsworthy wept and lamented, although she tried both persuasions and scoldings, and finally left the cottage in a state of deep offence, vowing within herself that she would never trouble her head again over the affairs of such silly and obstinate girls, she could not in the least shake Primrose's quiet resolve.

Primrose said over and over again: "Two things are absolutely indispensable—we must be independent, and we must keep together. I can think of no better plan than this—it may fail, but we can but try it—we are certainly going to try it."

Mrs. Ellsworthy kept up her offence for twenty-four hours, then she began to soften, and to agree with her husband, whose solitary remark was, "My dear, you cannot coerce the children, and upon my word it's a plucky notion, and if those girls are brave enough to carry it out they must have real stuff in them."

"They may have plenty of stuff, and the plan may be as plucky as you like, Joseph," replied his excitable little wife. "I am quite willing to admire it in the abstract, but I am quite determined, if I have any influence whatever, to prevent them carrying it through."

Then she went off to Miss Martineau, invading the schoolmistress in the sacred hour when she was engaged with her pupils. Mrs. Ellsworthy carried Miss Martineau away from her school, and shutting the door of that lady's little parlor, clasped the governess's thin hands, and poured her troubles into her ears.

"Joseph calls it plucky," said Mrs. Ellsworthy at the end of her narrative.

But Miss Martineau's face was perfectly aghast.

"Plucky!" she ejaculated. "Dear Mrs. Ellsworthy, pardon me, but your husband is a man—what can a man know about the intricate workings which go on within the breast of a perverse girl? Plucky!—I call it wicked—I call it wanting in all decorum, in all right sense. Primrose Mainwaring has disappointed me deeply; she showed

undue temper when I spoke to her here the other day—oh yes, this thing must be prevented by main force, if necessary."

Miss Martineau's pupils could not imagine what was the matter with her that morning. She was known to be a most strict disciplinarian, she was reported to have the sharpest eyes, and the quickest ears; her pupils believed that nothing ever could pass Miss Martineau's observation; nevertheless, after Mrs. Ellsworthy's visit she was distrait, she was indifferent to mistakes, and she allowed her naughtiest and most troublesome scholar to gabble through her French translation without once correcting her. School over, Miss Martineau discovered that she had no appetite for her dinner; she left quite a nice little repast, cooked in French style, untasted on the table, and hurrying up to her bedroom, put on her mantle and poke bonnet and went out. She had made up her mind to visit the Mainwarings, and to expostulate with these headstrong and naughty girls on their daring scheme. "Wicked, I call it," she ejaculated many times under her breath!—"a wicked scheme, wicked, and a tempting of Providence. Oh, my poor orphan children, I must do my utmost to prevent your having your own perverse way in this matter!"

She arrived at Woodbine Cottage to find the neat little house already in sad confusion. Hannah favored her with an expressive look, and a grave shaking of her head.

"I don't know if they'll see you," she said—"they won't see you if it is on a lecturing errand you've come, ma'am. Their minds is made up, ma'am, and obstinate is no word for them. Dear Miss Martineau, you means well, and you has known them most of their lives, poor darlings, so sit you down in the hall, and I'll see if I can get them to have a word with you."

Jasmine, however, had heard her old governess's voice, and now running out, looking extremely untidy but very pretty, she exclaimed in her eager tones—

"Now, you dear Miss Martineau, say you're not—do say you're not!"

"Not what, my dear?" asked the governess, who really felt quite angry with Jasmine at this moment. "If you mean that I am not displeased—I am displeased; and if you mean that I am not to oppose you, my dear, I should not be doing my solemn duty, the duty which I owe to your poor dead mother, if I did not oppose you to the very uttermost. My dear, Mrs. Ellsworthy has told me all about your mad scheme; my poor child, it cannot be allowed for a moment."

"Come into the drawing-room and hear what Primrose has to say," answered Jasmine, in quite a meek and unruffled voice. "Primrose is very busy, for she is dusting and packing all our books and little knick-knacks. Do you know, Miss Martineau, that just when I heard your ring at the hall-door I came across a pincushion which you gave me ages and ages ago. You gave it to me when I could say, Le thé est chaud with a Parisian accent. It was such a pretty pincushion made of pink silk, and dotted over with steel beads to look like pins. Just when you were ringing the bell I had it in my hand, and I felt so soft and loving towards you, and of course I had to run out to see you, and—; Primrose, dearest, here is Miss Martineau. She is dreadfully opposed, and she says she won't let us go."

Primrose was bending over a battered old trunk which had been hauled down from the lumber-room. She was filling it with books, and her fair face was slightly flushed, and her eyes were brighter than usual.

"How do you do, Miss Martineau?" she said, rising to her feet. "It is very kind of you to call. I feel sure you are annoyed, and think us girls rather silly, but I'm afraid we must do what we think right ourselves in this matter. We have taken our first steps, and now that we have quite and absolutely made up our minds, mean to leave Rosebury as quickly as possible. It is very kind of you to be interested in us, and I am sorry that I spoke bitterly the other day, but the plan which was to divide us girls was of course impossible, and we could not listen to it for a moment. We have made our own little scheme, and perhaps we shall not fail. Daisy, darling, hand me dear

old 'Sandford and Merton,' I have just got a nice corner for it here."

Primrose went down again on her knees, and serenely continued her packing, while Miss Martineau, standing over her, then and there gave way to a burst of passion.

She was well aware that she lost ground with her pupils by not controlling her temper, but as she said afterwards, she really could not help herself. Such coolness, such perversity, such a headstrong flying in the face of their elders, she had never encountered in three young girls before.

Poor Daisy quite sobbed, and even Jasmine felt a little frightened at Miss Martineau's bitter and angry words; but no language she could use, no threats of the direst failure she could utter, had power to shake Primrose's resolve.

"We have no guardian, and we can go if we please, and we have really made up our minds to go," replied that perverse young lady.

As a last resource Mr. Danesfield was appealed to, but he, being an old bachelor and not quite at home with girls, although in his heart he was very fond of them, declined to interfere.

"I gave Primrose Mainwaring some uncalled-for advice when she came to see me the other morning," he said. "She is perfectly at liberty to choose her own life, and I, for one, am not going to add to her troubles by needlessly opposing her. Very likely the girls will get on in London—they are spirited girls, and they may do better for themselves by struggling for independence than by living with the Ellsworthys. I always did maintain that work hurts no one."

So Primrose carried out her little plans, and made all arrangements, and her friends, when they found she would not yield, came round her, and began to counsel her as to the best place to go to.

Mrs. Ellsworthy was, after all, the first to forgive the girls. She felt very indignant, and stayed away for more than a week; but one evening, when the day's packing was over, and the three, rather tired but quite cheerful and full of hope, were sitting down

to their tea, her carriage was seen to draw up to the door, and the little lady, bustling and good-natured as ever, entered the drawing-room.

"My dears," she said, holding out a hand each to Primrose and Daisy, but imprinting a kiss on her favorite Jasmine's brow, "my dears—Oh, of course, I am still very angry! I see, too, that you are at that horrid packing; but if you must go, there is a Mrs. Moore—such a good soul, a widow, and quite a lady—indeed, I may say highly connected. She lives in Kensington, and I have written to her. My dears, she would be charmed to take you all into her family. She would give you comforts—oh! I don't mean luxuries, but the necessary comforts that young girls who are using their brains require. She would feed you well, and chaperone you when you went out, and, in short, see to you all round. I know her house so well. It is very pretty—indeed, charming—and she would take you in for a pound a week between you. She would give you board and lodging, and all you require, for a pound a week. I hope, my dear Primrose, you don't consider that too dear. It is, I believe"—here Mrs. Ellsworthy coughed slightly—"considered cheap for Kensington."

This torrent of words, poured forth with rapidity and yet with distinctness, rather astonished the girls. They were afraid they had lost Mrs. Ellsworthy for their friend, and they, every one of them, hailed this overture of kindness with delight. Innocent Primrose never even suspected that a pound a week for the lodging and maintenance of three girls was at all unusually cheap. She little guessed that Mrs. Ellsworthy had written to her special friend, Mrs. Moore, telling her the girls' story, begging of her to give them a home, to provide them with every comfort, and even luxury, and asking her to look to her, Mrs. Ellsworthy, for the necessary payment.

Jasmine began to dance about, and to say, softly—

"Oh! this is too delightful! You darling Mrs. Ellsworthy, you are beginning to approve of our scheme. Oh, yes; I know you are, although you were too proud to say

so. Now, is it not a little bit wrong of you to be proud after the way you lectured Primrose? Well, Primrose, shall we go to Mrs. Moore? I don't know anything about Kensington, but I suppose it is as good as any other place. I don't suppose, either, a pound a week is too much for the three of us. Shall we go to Mrs. Moore, Primrose?"

Daisy also joined her voice in favor of going to Mrs. Ellsworthy's friend, and after all, but for that obstinate young person Primrose, the good little lady might have had her way, but Primrose, although she was quite ignorant of fashionable localities or of any London expenses, was very firm, very firm indeed, when she made up her mind.

"It is most kind of you to call and say all this to us," she answered. "Oh, yes, we would come if we had not quite decided on an altogether different plan. That being the case we cannot go to Mrs. Moore—thank you so much."

When Jasmine heard her sister speak her face first fell and then brightened up considerably. "How stupid of me to forget!" she said. "Oh, yes, we have made a lovely plan, and of course we could not go to anybody whom anybody knew. Oh, no, of course not. I cannot think how I came to forget."

Again Mrs. Ellsworthy tried persuasion and even entreaty, but again she had to own herself vanquished by that most obstinate girl Primrose. "I really cannot make out why I care for them all," she said to herself as she drove away. "I do care for them, poor children! I would do anything to help them, but I am simply not allowed. Well, Primrose, no doubt you would be a great trial to me if you were my daughter; I could never bear obstinate characters, and yet to a certain extent I admire you."

Miss Martineau also made up her mind to forgive these naughty girls, and to give them the benefit of her most sapient counsel. She too wrote a private letter to a London friend, and arrived at Woodbine Cottage primed with what she considered valuable information. "Now, my dears, you must go to Shepherd's Bush—that is the

place, and the only place where you can live within your means. My friend Constantia Warren has rooms there, and she says—I have written to her, my loves—she says if you will let her accompany you in your search she may be able to secure you a clean, respectable bedroom in a fairly good locality. Constantia is an excellent woman; she is fifty, and plain in her tastes, and has no nonsense about her. She has promised me, for my sake, to accompany you to church in the evenings, and to see that you wear your veils down when you go out, and that you are back in your bedroom—you can't afford a sitting-room, so don't think of it—that you are back in your bedroom by five o'clock in the evening, as all girls who have any idea of what is correct and proper are of course in by that hour in London. Now, my dears, Constantia will be a sort of protectress to you three, and I had better write to her at once. My dears, it is a relief to me to know you will be near Constantia, for London is a pit—a pit, and a snare."

Miss Martineau had talked herself quite out of breath, and looked quite pleading, but the same obstacle which had prevented the girls' acceding to Mrs. Ellsworthy's request now debarred their taking up their quarters near Constantia Warren.

They spoke of their plans, but would not tell what they were, and Miss Martineau again went away offended.

"There is no secret in the matter," she said, when talking over the affair with Mrs. Ellsworthy. "Primrose tries to make a mystery, and Jasmine likes to look mysterious, but there is not the smallest doubt that all the girls really want is to have their own way, and to be beholden to none of us."

"Nevertheless, I love them, and shall always love them," answered Mrs. Ellsworthy.

"Oh, for the matter of that, so will I always love them, Mrs. Ellsworthy. It seems to me they want a lot of pity, poor misguided young things!"

Primrose, Jasmine and Daisy all this time felt wonderfully serene. They were very sorry to hurt their friends, but it is quite true that they did want to have their own

way. They had made distinct plans, but they must go to London to carry them out. They thought their wisest course was to go up to Penelope Mansion for a few days, and make their final arrangements from there.

"I'd be very lonely in London if I wasn't near Poppy," said Jasmine; and Primrose too said that she thought their wisest course was to go up to Penelope Mansion, and make their plans from there.

Accordingly, one afternoon, when Poppy Jenkins had been three weeks in her new place, she received a letter from Primrose Mainwaring, to which she sent the following reply. Poppy's spelling need not be copied, but her language ran as follows:—

Penelope Mansion, Wright street, off the Edgware Road, July 22.

HONORED Miss,—

"Your letter was that gratifying. I am so glad you have put by your savings, and are coming to visit this vast Babylon. Miss Primrose, it will do me a sight of good to see your face, and the face of Miss Jasmine, and the face of Miss Daisy. The ladies here, miss—for I must own to the truth—are not as beautiful as was to be expected. Neither in their visages nor in their manners are they beautiful. Sharp's the word from morn till night here, and many a time I cry. I hasn't had no moment yet to visit the sights, for aunt's hands are very full, and she looks most natural to me to assist her, which I do, as in duty bound. I'm told that there isn't much of the real London to be seen from Penelope Mansion, so I live in hopes that it is as beautiful as we pictured it beyond these dull walls. Miss, I has spoken to my aunt, and she will be very pleased to receive you three, and will put you in a bedroom to the front of the house. You'll be fretted by the roar from the continuous multitude which passes these windows all day and all night, but otherwise the room is cheerful, although somewhat hot. Miss Primrose, I'll give you all such a welcome.

"Your humble and most devoted friend, "POPPY JENKINS."

This letter was received by the girls while they were eating their breakfast. Primrose read it aloud to her sisters, and the effect of Poppy's words was certainly not enlivening. Jasmine was the first to recover her spirits.

"Never mind," she said; "Poppy feels a little dull and it is more than ever our duty to go up to London, and try and cheer her. Poor Poppy! it is very wrong of her aunt not to let her go out to see the sights, and you see, Primrose, she really knows no part of London yet, except Penelope Mansion. Poor Poppy! how she did long to go to see the wonderful city; but she was a little frivolous, and seemed only to want to look at the shop windows and to examine the newest fashions. We go to this grand, great London in a different spirit—we go determined to conquer, don't we, Queen Rose?"

"We go to do what seems to be our duty," answered Primrose, solemnly. "Oh, Jasmine! I hope we are doing right—I hope, I pray that God may help us."

Then a letter was written to Poppy, in which the noisy room was secured for the following Thursday, and as this was Monday, the girls were too busy packing to give many mere thoughts to poor Poppy's somewhat melancholy epistle.

CHAPTER XVI.

PENELOPE MANSION.

The last time in the funny little old-fashioned garden, the last loving look at Jasmine's carnations, the last eager chase of the Pink across the little grass-plot, the last farewell said to the room where mother had died, to the cottage where Daisy was born, the final hug from all three to dear old Hannah who vowed and declared that follow them to London she would, and stay in Devonshire any longer she would not, and the girls had left Woodbine Cottage.

Notwithstanding all their obstinacy, and their determination to have their own way, quite a bevy of friends accompanied them to the railway station—Miss Martineau

was there, looking prim and starched, but with red rims round her eyes, and her lips only stern because they were so firmly shut, and because she was so determined not to show any emotion—Mrs. Jenkins, Poppy's mother, was also present; she was sending up a great bouquet of wild flowers and some eggs and butter to Poppy; and a lame boy, whom Jasmine had always been kind to, came hobbling on to the platform to bid the young ladies good-bye; and Mr. Danesfield drove up on his trap at the last moment in a violent hurry, and pushed an envelope, which he said contained a business communication, into Primrose's hand. Last of all, just at the very end, Mrs. Ellsworthy arrived panting on the scene; a footman followed her, also hurrying and panting, and he put into the railway carriage a great basket containing hot-house flowers, and grapes, and peaches, and then Mrs. Ellsworthy kissed the girls, giving Primrose and Daisy a hurried salute, but letting her lips linger for a moment on Jasmine's round cheek. During that brief moment two tears dropped from the kind little lady's eyes.

It was in this manner that the girls went away.

They arrived in London in the evening, and after a surprisingly successful search for their luggage at Waterloo, managing not to lose anything, got into a cab, and drove to Penelope Mansion.

Poppy's aunt boasted of the pleasing name of Flint, and when the girls drove up with their cab piled with luggage to the door of the mansion, Mrs. Flint herself came out to welcome them.

Jasmine, whose excitable temperament had been going through many changes during the journey to town, had now worked herself up into an ardent desire to see Poppy—she jumped out of the cab first of all, and, running up the steps of Penelope Mansion, said eagerly—

"Oh, if you please, Mrs. Flint—I know, of course, you are Mrs. Flint—may I run down to the kitchen, and find Poppy?"

"My niece will come to you presently, Miss Mainwaring," answered Mrs. Flint.

Somehow Mrs. Flint's calm and carefully modulated voice had an instant effect in subduing Jasmine. The mistress of Penelope Mansion resembled perhaps more a cushion than a flint—she was fat, round, and short, had a good-humored and unruffled face, and a voice which was always pitched in one key.

"We call my niece Sarah in these premises," she said; "Poppy signifies nothing whatever but a weed, untidy, straggling, the worry of the farmers. Sarah will see to your comforts presently, young ladies. At the present moment tea is on the table. We tea at six o'clock precisely—we sup at nine. Will you like to go upstairs and wash your hands, or will you come at once with me, and partake with the other inmates of the meal which is now going forward?"

"I don't like her, but she seems to speak very correct English," whispered Jasmine to her sister: "I wonder, does everybody in the great city speak like that? I suppose she'll do as a study in style. I must study style, mustn't I, if I'm to make money by writing?"

This speech was tumbled into Primrose's ear with wonderful rapidity, while Mrs. Flint stood gently by, looking most contented and uninterested.

"Hush, Jasmine!" whispered Primrose. "Daisy darling, hold my hand. Thank you very much, Mrs. Flint; we will have some tea now, if you please, and then go at once to our room."

"Does Poppy—I mean Sarah—wait at the tea-table?" inquired Jasmine, as their hostess led the way up a flight of stairs, and down a passage. "I hope she does—I want to see her so badly."

"Sarah's duties at the present moment are in the kitchen," responded Mrs. Flint, with some graciousness. "Now, young ladies, let me precede you, and introduce you to my guests. Miss Mainwaring, Miss Jasmine and Miss Daisy Mainwaring—Mrs. Mortlock, Mrs. Dredge, Miss Slowcum. Young ladies, will you seat yourselves at

the table?"

Mrs. Flint moved to her place at the head of the board; the three girls dropped into seats, and were stared broadly at by Miss Slowcum and Mrs. Mortlock. Mrs. Dredge, however, did not stare, but stretching out one rather plump white hand, took Daisy's within her own and gave it a little squeeze.

"Tired, pretty little dear!" she said; "tired and cold. Ah, I know all about it."

"No, she's not cold, she's hot," responded Jasmine; "this is the hottest, closest room I've ever been in. You are Mrs. Dredge, are you not? Please, Mrs. Dredge, can you tell me how near we are to the real glories of the city from here?"

"I don't know, my dear—I fancy a very long way," answered Mrs. Dredge, with a sigh—this sigh was instantly taken up by Mrs. Mortlock and Miss Slowcum, and Miss Slowcum remarked that the situation might certainly be considered the worst in London.

"Ha, ha!" said Mrs. Mortlock, "you will have to come down in your prices after that, Mrs. Flint. Ha, ha! your question was a very leading one, Miss Jasmine Mainwaring."

Poor Jasmine began to feel quite alarmed, and instantly resolved not to open her lips again during tea.

The meal proceeded, and very dull it was; nor was the fare appetizing, for the tea was weak and the bread was stale. The three young faces, so fresh from the country and from home, began to reflect the general dulness. Mrs. Flint always made it a rule never to speak except when obliged—Daisy was nearly asleep, Primrose felt a dreadful lump in her throat, and Jasmine's dark curly head was bent low, and her bright eyes were not seen under their long lashes, for she was very well aware that they were full of tears.

She was a most impulsive creature, however, quick and variable in her moods, unselfish in her character. Suddenly it dawned upon her that it was not fair to the

rest of the party that she should be so dull. She had always been considered the sunbeam at home; why should she not try to become the sunbeam of Penelope Mansion?

"I know what will do it," she exclaimed, jumping from her seat, and nearly upsetting her own tea and Daisy's. "Of course, how silly of me!—I know what will alter things directly." Then she flew out of the room, returning the next moment with Mrs. Ellsworthy's great basket of fruit and flowers.

"Primrose," she said, "mightn't we share these with the ladies? They are all quite fresh from the country. Oh yes, of course we may share them. Mrs. Flint, which will you have, some flowers, a bunch of grapes, or a peach?"

Mrs. Flint selected a good-sized bunch of grapes with a placid smile, and a "Thank you, Miss Jasmine"—Mrs. Mortlock also took grapes, Miss Slowcum selected flowers, and Mrs. Dredge partook of a peach with great relish, calling it, as she did so, a "sweet reminiscence of the blooming country."

After this little incident the ladies of Penelope Mansion and the Mainwaring girls became quite friendly; nevertheless the three cried themselves to sleep that night.

CHAPTER XVII.

ESCORTED BY MISS SLOWCUM.

"Within the house at least," remarked Poppy Jenkins, "it ain't what we dreamt of."

She was standing the next morning in the room where the three sisters had slept—it was early, only five o'clock in the morning, but this was Poppy's London hour for rising. Jasmine was sitting up in bed and regarding her earnestly, Primrose was also awake, but Daisy slept like a cherub.

"It ain't what we dreamt of," continued Poppy—"it's work, and it's dirt, and it's dust, and it's smuts. Oh, my word! the smuts is enough to turn one crazy. Nothing is white

here, as you calls white in the country—speckled is more the word. No, no. Penelope Mansion is, taking it all in all, a biting disappointment."

"Well Poppy, Penelope Mansion is not the whole of London," said Jasmine, in a rather quavering, but would-be wise voice.

"Yes, but it's the London I has got to do with," answered Poppy Jenkins—"and oh! the worst of all is, that aunt won't have me called by my home name—she speaks of it most bitter as a 'weed.' She says poppies are what are meant in the Scripter by the tares. Don't it sound real awful?—I trembled all over when she told me that. So Sarah I am here, and Sarah Ann, and Sarah Jane, and Sarah Mary the ladies calls me. When they're in a very good humor I'm Sarah Mary, and when they're a bit put out it's Sarah Jane they calls for, and now and then I'm Sarah Ann—then I know I'm in for a scolding. Oh yes, Miss Primrose, London is not what we thought it."

"Never mind," said Primrose sweetly; "you'll always be Poppy to us, dear, and I know the tares were not poppies, so don't you fret—the poppy is a sweet flower, and Poppy is a sweet name for a girl. Why we four are all called after flowers, and we must just be very friendly, and very brave and loving and sweet in this London, and then, perhaps, it won't disappoint us."

"You're real kind, Miss Primrose," said Poppy. "Yes, it's a great ease to me to know as you three are in the house. I won't be so lonesome-like now, and I won't be dreaming that I'm a tare. It's awful to think of yourself as a tare, but I know now that aunt made a mistake. Oh, ain't Miss Daisy beautiful in her sleep? Now look here, you're all tired, and I'll bring you up your breakfasts in bed. You shall have some of mother's fresh eggs and real country butter. I'll run downstairs, and bring you up some breakfast the very first thing."

The girls spent that morning in their room. They unpacked a few of their things, and put their mother's picture on the mantel-piece, and Primrose opened Mr. Danesfield's letter. It contained an enclosure within and on this enclosure was written, in a funny

little printing hand, "When you want me, use me; don't return me, and never abuse me."

Primrose's face grew rather red. She read the funny little motto two or three times, then put the enclosure unopened into her trunk.

"I think," she said, looking at Jasmine, "that we will not send this back. I had a queer dream last night. It seemed to me that mother came to me and said, 'Are you not foolish to cast away all your kind friends? Try to remember that true independence is not too proud to lean on others. Primrose, for my sake do not be over proud.' Mr. Danesfield was always a friend of mother's," continued Primrose, "so I will keep his letter until we want it, and will write him a little note to thank him for it."

Then the girls sat down by the open window and looked out into the street. It was a very dull street, and the day was warm and murky, with no sun shining.

"This afternoon we will go out," said Primrose. "I shall speak about it at lunch, and ask Mrs. Flint to allow us to take Poppy with us. I am so sorry Poppy feels dull. Now, girls, we must just make up our minds not to do that—we must keep up brave hearts, and not sigh and look dismal; that would never do. We have elected our own course, and if we are not courageous we shall be beaten. I for one am determined not to be beaten."

"I've always heard," said Jasmine, "that to sigh was very weakening. What I propose is this—that we give each other a fine whenever we are heard sighing, and another much more severe fine if we grumble, and the worst fine of all if we cry. Now, what shall the fines be?"

After a little consideration the girls decided that the fines might as well lead in the direction of their education. Accordingly they marked out for themselves some of the most ponderous passages in "Paradise Lost" to learn by heart, and as a severe punishment they selected little bits of a very incomprehensible book, called Butler's "Analogy." When they had carefully made these selections a rather feeble bell was

heard to tinkle in the mansion, and they went downstairs to lunch.

"I hope you are comfortably unpacked now, young ladies?" inquired Mrs. Flint.

"And I trust you have recovered from the fatigues of your long journey?" questioned Mrs. Dredge. "It is a weary way from Devonshire—a long and weary way."

"You speak of it as though it were a kind of disappointment to come from Devonshire to London," remarked Miss Slowcum, "whereas London is the place for aspiring souls."

"Oh, I'm so delighted to hear you say that!" said Jasmine—"Poppy—I mean Sarah—spoke quite dismally this morning, but I knew she must be wrong."

"The young country servant," responded Miss Slowcum, "Sarah Jane, I think her name is—oh, well, her judgment need scarcely be depended on. Yes, London is the place of places. I have lived here for years, and I ought to know."

"We quite believe you," said Jasmine—"don't we, Primrose?—we have come up here because we quite feel with you; we are going out after lunch to see the beauties of the city."

"May I ask, young ladies, if this is your first visit to the metropolis?" suddenly inquired Mrs. Mortlock.

Primrose answered her "Yes; we have never been here before."

"Then, Mrs. Flint, I put it to you, is it safe to allow these young unfledged birds out into this vast and bewildering place? ought not some one to chaperon them?"

"We thought of asking for Poppy," answered Jasmine.

Here Mrs. Flint frowned at her.

"Allow me to make one request, Miss Jasmine Mainwaring; the young person you speak of is not known here by a name which signifies a tare or a weed. Yes, I shall be pleased to allow Sarah to go out with you this afternoon for a short time, but she knows as little of London as you do. I cannot go myself, as Friday is a busy

afternoon. I can, however, give you a map, and if you all keep close together and don't wander too far, and are careful only to inquire of policemen your destination you may get back safely. Don't forget, tea at six."

Here Miss Slowcum, turning her eyes slowly, looked carefully all over the three girls.

"I am most particular," she said; "I never wander abroad without carefully choosing my company, but on the whole I feel satisfied a kindred spirit to my own lurks in your eyes, Miss Jasmine. Permit me, young ladies, to escort you forth this afternoon."

This offer was accepted very gladly, although Jasmine had quickly to remember her fine, or she would have given a very deep sigh when Miss Slowcum pointed a comparison between them. In the delight, however, of going into real London all these minor considerations and discomforts were forgotten.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL.

Miss Slowcum was right in saying that she was very particular with regard to her company. She prided herself on having select taste. She thought it well to assume distant airs to the other inmates of Penelope Mansion—Mrs. Dredge she thought quite beneath her notice, Mrs. Mortlock was slightly more tolerated, but Miss Slowcum never really unbent to either of these ladies. As she said to herself, she could never forget that she came of the Slowcums of ——shire that her father had been Captain Slowcum of the Royal Navy, and that, all things considered, her true position in society was with the county folk. What, therefore, could a lady of such patrician birth have in common with a Mrs. Mortlock or a Mrs. Dredge? Alas! however, Miss Slowcum was poor—she was very poor, and she was a great deal too

genteel to work. The terms at Penelope Mansion were by no means high, and in order to live she was obliged to put up with uncongenial company. She was a very tall and angular person—her face was long and thin, her eyes small, her mouth undecided, but in her heart of hearts she was by no means wanting in good nature; and when, the night before, Jasmine, with her charming little face, offered her some of the country flowers, she began to take an interest in the fresh girls who had come to the rather antiquated house in Wright Street.

It was really good-natured of Miss Slowcum to offer to accompany the girls on their first walk in London. She had the greatest horror of ever appearing remarkable and she felt really alarmed at the thought of taking four unsophisticated country lasses abroad. It was bad enough to offer to escort the Mainwarings, who, however gauche they might appear, were undoubtedly ladies, but to take Poppy, alias Sarah, as well, was really trying. Without Poppy, however, the girls refused to stir. There was no help for it, and Miss Slowcum only trusted that their first walk might be short and uneventful.

"It is an unpleasant arrangement, but I do not see any help for it," she said, addressing her little party as they assembled in the hall; "we must sally forth as though we were a school. You, Miss Jasmine, will have the goodness to walk in front with me. Miss Mainwaring and her youngest sister can immediately follow us, and Sarah, you will please to keep behind."

"Oh, lor!" ejaculated Poppy, "I thought me and Miss Jasmine was to stay together—it's what I has been looking forward to through all the toils of the work, and the smuts and the Sarah Janes, and the Sarah Marys this morning. It is another biting. Well, London seems to be made up of them. All right, Miss Slowcum, I'll keep behind. I suppose there's nobody to forbid me gazing well into the shop windows. I hope you'll take us into a gay street, miss, where there are lots of new bonnets and hats to be seen."

"I'm going to walk with you, Poppy," said Jasmine; "Miss Slowcum is very kind, but I should not think of walking with any one else. Please, Miss Slowcum will you go in front, with Primrose and Daisy, and Poppy and I will promise to behave very well behind."

In this order the little party did set out, and in an incredibly short space of time they left the dull region of Penelope Mansion far behind, and found themselves in Oxford Street, and then in Bond Street, and finally walking along Piccadilly towards the Park.

Primrose could always restrain her emotions, but Jasmine and Poppy, notwithstanding their promise to behave well, were certainly guilty of many extravagant exclamations. Jasmine became nearly as excited over the new bonnets as her companion. The picture-shops were marvels of wonder and delight to her, and poor Miss Slowcum was obliged to draw up short on many occasions, or she would have lost the little loiterers, as they stood still to gaze. At last she made a proposition which nearly took her own breath away with the magnitude of its generosity. She would treat the entire party to a drive in the omnibus to St. Paul's Cathedral. Poppy earnestly begged to be allowed to go with Jasmine on the roof, but this the good lady negatived with horror. She finally ushered her young charges into the seclusion of an omnibus going citywards, and then was conscious of breathing a sigh of relief. Inwardly she made a vow that never again should her good-nature lead her into such a troublesome adventure.

"We must be solemn here, Poppy," said Jasmine, as they were entering the cathedral; "we must forget the beautiful bonnets, and those dear little tight-fitting jackets, and those muslin dresses. We must forget the little story we made up of imagining ourselves rich enough to buy all these things. Perhaps we may think a very little of one or two of the pictures, but we must forget the vanities now. It has always been one of my dreams to come in here—oh! oh!—Poppy." Jasmine clasped

her companion's hand, and her excitable little face grew white—the magnitude of the great cathedral, the solemn hush, and quiet, and sense of rest after the rushing noise outside, was too much for her—her eyes filled with tears, and she was very nearly guilty of committing the offence which would have obliged her to learn some of Butler's "Analogy" by heart. The rest of the party wandered about the cathedral, and looked at the monuments, and presently went up into the Whispering Gallery, but Jasmine felt suddenly tired and disinclined to move about.

"Go on with Daisy, Poppy," she said to her companion; "I will rest here for a little;" then she seated herself on one of the chairs, and in a moment or two went down on her knees and covered her childish face with her hands.

Not at all long was Jasmine's prayer, but somehow it was very fervent, and it certainly reached a Presence which gives strength and peace. She was no longer oppressed by St. Paul's—she was comforted and strengthened.

"I do hope God will help us," she said to herself. "Oh! was it very, very rash of us to come up here?—and yet, what else could we do? It was Primrose's thought, too, and she is always so wise, and so grown-up."

Jasmine looked round the cathedral, hoping to see her party—they were, of course, nowhere within sight, and the little girl began to walk about by herself, hoping soon to rejoin them. She dropped her umbrella, and a gentleman who had been watching her for some time with interest stooped to pick it up. He was a young man of about six-and-twenty, with a bright and pleasant face.

"This is your first visit here?" he said, looking kindly at the child.

"Oh, yes," said Jasmine. Then feeling that she had a sympathetic listener, she continued—"It is so beautiful here!"

"Yes," answered her companion; then he added, with a second glance at the forlorn little figure, "Are you alone, or have you lost your party?"

Jasmine half laughed.

"I cannot find my party at the present moment," she said; "but I am by no means alone—my two sisters have come here also to-day for the first time, and a friend is with us, and a lady has very kindly brought us here."

"I see," said the stranger. "Well, it is a curious coincidence, but neither am I alone—I have brought a little lad here to show him the cathedral—he has gone into the Whispering Gallery, and I am waiting for him. Perhaps your friends have also gone into the gallery. While we are both waiting, shall we look round this delightful place? and may I tell you a little of what I know about it?"

It was in this manner, and apparently quite by accident, that Jasmine made the acquaintance of Arthur Noel, who turned out to be one of the best friends the girls were to make in London. Mr. Noel had taken a fancy to Jasmine's sweet little face, and Jasmine, when she met with a sympathetic listener, could be only too communicative. Before Miss Slowcum and her sisters and Poppy joined them Mr. Noel knew something of Jasmine's ambitions and of Primrose's modest hopes. Jasmine had even confided to him the brave resolve the three sisters had made not to sigh, or grumble, or wear themselves out with useless tears. He was very kind, although he could not be persuaded to say that he thought Primrose's scheme a wise one, but this chance encounter might never have led to anything further but for a little coincidence which shows what a small place the world is, after all. When Primrose and Daisy, Poppy and the sedate Miss Slowcum, joined Jasmine, as she stood with her companion examining Nelson's monument, they were accompanied by a handsome, bright-faced boy, who ran up to Mr. Noel, and linked his hand within his arm. This boy turned out to be young Frank Ellsworthy, and, as the girls all exclaimed on hearing the name, Mr. Noel assured them that the Ellsworthys were his greatest friends—that he loved Mrs. Ellsworthy almost as if she were his own mother.

"I felt that I must speak to you," he said to Jasmine. "I cannot tell you why nor

wherefore, but your face seemed familiar—I did not think you would turn out to be an absolute stranger."

Thus the girls made a very valuable acquaintance; nevertheless, owing to circumstances, it was many a long day before they met Arthur Noel again.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BRIGHT DAY.

Last times are always sad to write about and think about, but first times are generally pleasant. Notwithstanding a certain sense of disappointment which certainly did assail the three girls on their entrance into London, notwithstanding the fact which Jasmine only too quickly discovered, that the streets were not paved with gold, nor the air replete with promises, yet there was still something left in that same London air, a sort of mystery and wonder about it. There was still something of untold fascination in the busy and crowded streets, which brought a great sense of delight and exhilaration to the three young adventurers.

Jasmine spoke about the stories which met her at every turn; she felt almost melted to tears at the sight of the sadness in the eyes of some women, and some little children. But again, beautiful ladies driving past in carriages made of almost fairy lightness caused her to laugh with pleasure.

Primrose was more gravely impressed by London than Jasmine. Her emotions were not so keen as her younger sister's, her purpose was far more steadfast; and even in the first few days when the girls gave themselves up to seeing the wonderful sights of the great metropolis she could never forget the real object for which they had come.

Daisy, when she had become reconciled to the smuts and disagreeables, and the slights to which the Pink was exposed all day long in Penelope Mansion, began to

enjoy life in a serene but unqualified manner. Each of the girls had her own particular tastes; and these they were by no means slow to express to one another.

Primrose, who intended to study china painting—to make it, in short, a profession—liked to stand opposite some large shop in Oxford Street, and to study and try to carry away in her mind's eye the shape and beauty of the many lovely things displayed in the windows.

Jasmine, who during the first few days had quite made up her mind not to worry at all about the future, did not much care for these gazing fits of Primrose's. She wanted to get into the parks. She exclaimed in ecstasy over the horses, and those picture-galleries which were free to the public quite enchanted her. Daisy frankly admitted that she liked toy-shops, and of all toy-shops those which displayed rows of dolls in their windows the best. Primrose had decided that the three should have one week's holiday, and it was during this week that they began to make a certain first acquaintance with London. "It is the heart of the world," Jasmine was heard to say. "Primrose, it is what we pictured it; in many ways it is even greater than what we pictured it. Oh, don't your cheeks glow, and don't you feel that your eyes are shining when you look down Oxford Street? Yes, it is lovely and grand, and I think we ought to show poor dear Poppy some more of its delights."

Primrose was only too glad to give Poppy all the happiness in her power, and she and Jasmine arranged that they would take the little girl out with them on another expedition before they settled down finally to the great work of their lives.

"We'll spend five shillings," said Primrose, "we must not on any account spend more, but we will be extravagant, and give poor Poppy a real treat with one crown piece."

"We had better ask her to come to-morrow," said Daisy; "five shillings seems a lot of money. Do you think there will be enough over, Primrose, to buy me a tiny, tiny little doll?"

Primrose kissed Daisy, and said she would try somehow to manage the doll, and Jasmine was elected to go downstairs and sound Poppy on the subject of the morrow's treat.

The little maiden had made herself pretty well at home in the Mansion by this time, and she soon discovered Poppy in what was called the back scullery. The ladies had all finished their mid-day meal, and were out. Even Mrs. Flint had sallied forth to a distant market to secure some cheap provisions, and Poppy had the back scullery to herself. She was handling the dinner-plates in a rather clumsy manner, and, after the fashion of a discontented little girl, was sighing over her work, and not doing it properly.

"Oh, let me help you!" said Jasmine, dancing up to her: "I hate washing china, or delf, or whatever you call it, after people have eaten, but I like wiping it if the cloths are clean. Poppy, I have come to you about a most delicious and important scheme."

"Lor, Miss Jasmine," said Poppy, her fingers trembling violently, and the large dish which she was washing nearly slipping out of them. "Lor, miss, you do startle me. I was in the dumps, and you are for all the world like the sun coming out. Why, deary me, the back scullery ain't by no means such a bad sort of place when you're in it, Miss Jasmine."

"It is very damp and gloomy, all the same," answered Jasmine. "I do hope you will be quick, Poppy, in washing up those uninteresting dinner-plates. Now, look here, Primrose and Daisy and I have been making up such a lovely plan. We want to take you out with us to-morrow; we are going to spend five shillings, quite lots of money, you know, and we are going to have dinner out, and perhaps tea out; and we are going a good long way. Can you come with us to-morrow, Poppy?"

"Hold me," said Poppy, suddenly stretching out her hand, "the scullery is damp and close, and my head a-going round. Let's get out into the back yard, Miss Jasmine. Now I can breathe. Oh, didn't I say that London was dazzling, and isn't it you three

that has got the hearts of gold. Say it all over again to me, please, Miss Jasmine. What is it we're all a-going to do to-morrow?"

"Oh, what a silly, Poppy, you are," said Jasmine; "why even I do not get as excited as you do. We are going out, and you are coming with us, and we are going to spend five shillings."

Poppy's cheeks flushed a vivid crimson, her eyes sparkled, and her small feet began involuntarily to dance.

"I has set my heart on something beauteous," she said, "and, oh, dear, Miss Jasmine, you will do it, won't you? You won't let none of them biting disappointments with which the air is choke full, as full as it is of smuts, come in the way. If you three darling ladies spend a crown piece, and take me abroad, we'll be on pleasure bent, and on pleasure alone. Say so, do, Miss Jasmine."

"Why, Poppy, of course we are going for pleasure; what do you mean?"

"Only that we won't be going Cathedraling and Towering. I don't say nothing ag'in them places, but when I wants real pleasure, and a crown piece spent on me, I don't go in for no Cathedraling."

Jasmine laughed. "I tell you what," she said, "you shall choose the pleasure yourself, Poppy. It's your treat, and you shall choose. Now, do say what hour you will be ready to start to-morrow, for we want to go early, and have a real long day."

"Let's think," said Poppy. "To-morrow is, yes, to-morrow is Thursday. Cold joint to-morrow, and a salad made with stale lettuce which we gets cheap; potatoes boiled plain and not mashed, and a apple dumpling to follow. The ladies is very particular that their pastry should be light. Miss Slowcum says she can't sleep a bit at night if her pastry is heavy. She called me Sarah Martha Ann the last time I made it, and she looked most vinegary. Yes, Miss Jasmine, the dinner's plain to-morrow, and I'll get up with the daybreak, and do my cleaning. I don't see why Aunt Flint shouldn't let me go with you, miss."

Mrs. Flint, when properly attacked, proved herself quite vulnerable. She was anxious to please the Mainwarings who she hoped would take up their abode with her, for naughty Primrose had by no means divulged her real plans. Accordingly, Poppy was allowed to get her dinner beforehand, and a very happy little quartet left the Mansion soon after eleven o'clock.

They had gone some little distance from Penelope Mansion, and found themselves in a far more cheerful and bright-looking street, before Poppy divulged her plans.

"I has got to choose," she said, "and as I stated distinct to Miss Jasmine yesterday, I don't go in for the glooms of the Tower, nor the solemns of the Cathedral. I'd like to walk from end to end of Oxford Street first, and then I'd like to take a penny boat on the river."

"A penny boat!" exclaimed the three sisters in a breath, "that does sound delightful, and so cheap. Where did you hear of penny boats, Poppy?"

Poppy's face became radiant.

"It was the last charwoman at the Mansion," she answered. "She said that if you wanted a pleasure, and a pleasure cheap, there was nothing in all the world like a penny boat. You sit in it, and there you are, as snug as snug; plenty of room and plenty of company, and plenty of sights. Mrs. Jones said that if there was a pleasure to rest a tired charwoman it was to be found in a penny boat."

"Well, we are not charwomen, but we may as well have a little rest and fun while we can," answered Jasmine. "I think yours is a lovely treat, dear Poppy, and we will try and get into the penny boat as fast as possible."

"I don't know how we are to reach the boats," said Primrose. "I begin to know my way a little about Oxford Street, but how are we to find the river?"

Poppy, however, had made good use of her acquaintance with Mrs. Jones the charwoman. She knew the name as well as the color of the omnibus which would safely convey them near to the pier at Westminster. She also knew, being instructed

by Mrs. Jones, that a policeman was the right person to give her information as to where this special omnibus was to be found. She was by no means shy in making her desires known to one of these useful and worthy members of society, and in a short time the four found themselves bowling away in the direction of Westminster, and then, without any insurmountable difficulty, secured comfortable seats on one of the river steamers.

The day was perfect, neither too hot nor too cold, and the summer breezes fanned the young cheeks pleasantly, and raised the youthful spirits to an exhilarating height. Poppy forgot her troubles in Penelope Mansion, her difficulties with regard to the name of Sarah. She forgot the gloom of the back scullery, and the discontented frown quite vanished from her brow. London was again dazzling in her eyes, and her own future was replete with hope.

Primrose also ceased to worry over the anxieties and cares of the future; she ceased to reflect on the plan which was so soon to be carried into execution. Her serene face looked sweet and careless as in the happy days of her mother's lifetime. She leaned back in her seat, gazed at the beauties of the river, and gave herself up to the happiness of the hour.

The two younger girls, being never over anxious and being always more or less full of hope, were to-day only more hopeful and bright than usual. Many people turned to look at the pretty sisters, and to laugh at Poppy's innocent expressions of rapture.

They landed at Battersea, and wandered about the pretty park, and had refreshments in a quaint restaurant, where they really managed to satisfy their hunger at a very moderate charge.

That evening they returned to the Mansion, having kept within the limits of the prescribed five shillings, and each of them declaring that she had never known a happier day.

"But now," said Primrose, addressing her two sisters solemnly, "we must remember

that after to-night we have done with pleasure. To-morrow we must seriously set about forming our plans."

CHAPTER XX.

GETTING LOST.

Primrose's scheme had, of course, been considered most wild and most foolish by all her friends at Rosebury but even they were not prepared for her crowning act of folly. She, Jasmine and Daisy had a consultation together. This consultation was really nothing but a matter of form, for Primrose, quiet as she appeared could lead her two sisters as she willed—her slightest word was law to them, and the most outrageous plan proposed by her would have been delightful in their eyes. Her suggestion to them was as follows:

"We will go to London," she said—"we will try to be independent, and to earn our own living, and in order to do so really, and to prevent ourselves being tempted by Mrs. Ellsworthy's riches, or by Miss Martineau's advice, we will not give our address. We will stay for a short time at Penelope Mansion, and then we will go away. We will find those nice, clean, cheap lodgings, where we can hang up our muslin curtains, and keep things lovely and fresh, even though we are in London, and we will stay there without troubling our friends about us until we have succeeded. The moment we have succeeded in earning enough to live on we will write home."

Jasmine, and of course little Daisy, approved of this idea—Jasmine said it was both romantic and strong—Daisy said she only wanted to be with her own Primrose and her own Jasmine, and if the Pink might always stay with her too she would be quite happy.

Accordingly, when the girls' week of pleasure had quite come to an end, Primrose

reminded her sisters that it was time for them to begin to get lost.

"We are not really lost here," she said. "Mrs. Ellsworthy thinks nothing of coming to town, and she could come to us at the Mansion any moment; and now that we have met that friend of hers, that Mr. Noel, she may be sending him to see about us—so you see it is more important than ever that we should find a place where we can really commence our work."

"I don't dislike Mr. Noel at all," said Jasmine. "It is a great pity he is related to our darling Mrs. Ellsworthy, for we might have had the comfort of his advice without being considered dependent. Oh, Primrose! is it possible that we are too independent—I can't help it, Primrose; I do feel lonely. I must cry just for a minute. I'd rather do a page of the 'Analogy' to-night than not cry for a minute."

"My darling," said Primrose, putting her arms round Jasmine, "I am sure that girls like us cannot be too independent, but I won't go on with it if it really breaks your heart, Jasmine."

"Oh, but it doesn't really," said Jasmine; "I think it's a noble plan; I wouldn't give in for the world. I have had my cry now, and I'm better—but, Rose, how are we to look out for these nice, clean, cheap lodgings if we aren't to consult any one?"

"We can consult people, and find out the locality we want, but we need never tell the people we consult what number in the street we really choose. Oh, there are lots of ways of finding out what we really want to know."

"I'll talk to Mrs. Dredge to-night," said Jasmine. "I think Mrs. Dredge is very practical and kind, and I don't know why Miss Slowcum should dislike her so much. I'll get her all by myself this evening, and talk to her."

Accordingly that evening, after the inmates of Penelope Mansion had, as Mrs. Flint styled it, "tea'd," Jasmine sat down on a footstool at Mrs. Dredge's feet, and laid herself out to be bewitching. No one could be more charming than this little maiden when she chose, and she had tact enough to adapt herself on most occasions to her

company.

"I'm sure you have lots of experience, Mrs. Dredge," she began; "you look as if you had—your face tells me that you have gone through many episodes"—(Jasmine was rather proud of this expression; she began to consider that her style was forming).

"Episodes, my dear, and experiences?" answered Mrs. Dredge. "Well, well, I'm not to say over young, and years bring knowledge; but if you mean, Miss Jasmine, that I'm up to the acquirements of the present day, that I'm not, and I never will be,—no, thank Heaven! that I never will be."

"Do you mean with regard to education?" remarked Jasmine. "Is the education of the present day wrong?—is that why you're so thankful you are not up to it?"

"My dear Miss Jasmine," answered Mrs. Dredge, with great solemnity, "the education of the present day is to the heart hardening, and to the mind demoralizing. No, no; none of it for me. Miss Slowcum, now! Miss Jasmine, between you and me I don't admire Miss Slowcum."

"Oh, she's very kind," answered Jasmine; "but look here, Mrs. Dredge, what I want to consult you about has nothing at all to say to education, and it has a great deal to say to experience. It's a great secret, Mrs. Dredge, but we want to find cheap lodgings."

"Oh, my dear! and don't you want to abide at the Mansion—all things considered, it's a respectable and safe quarter—you are all three young and attractive, my dears, and you have the advantage of being guarded here by women who have years on their shoulders. Yes, my dear Miss Jasmine, with the exception of your three selves and the maid Sarah, there is no one in Penelope Mansion who will ever see fifty again. Don't talk to me of Miss Slowcum being younger than that—I know better."

"Dear Mrs. Dredge, it is a secret, but we are really not going to stay here long, and we want, if possible, to find very cheap lodgings."

"Very cheap, love; and you think I can guide you? Well, well, I have had, as you

wisely say, my experiences. About what figure would you be inclined to go to, my dear?"

"I don't know," answered Jasmine. "Our house in the country was twelve pounds a year—I don't think we ought to pay as much as that, for of course we should not want a whole house, only two rooms. A nice, large, airy bedroom, and a cheerful sitting-room. We should not mind how plain the furniture was, if only it was very, very clean. You know the kind of place, with snow-white boards—the sort of boards you could eat off—and little plain beds with dimity frills round them, and very white muslin blinds to the windows—we have got our own white muslin curtains; Hannah washed them for us, and they are as white as snow. Oh! the place we want might be very humble, and very inexpensive. Do tell us if you know of any rooms that would suit us."

While Jasmine was speaking Mrs. Dredge kept on gazing at her, her round face growing long, and her full blue eyes becoming extended to their largest size.

"My dear child," she said, "wherever were you brought up? Don't you know that the kind of lodgings you want are just the hardest of all to get? Yes, my dear, I have experience in London apartments, and about them, and with regard to them, there is one invariable and unbroken rule—cheapness and dirt—expense and cleanliness. Bless you! you innocent child, you had better give up the notion of the cheap lodgings, and stay on contented and happy at the Mansion."

Jasmine smiled faintly—said "Thank you, Mrs. Dredge," in a pretty gentle voice, and a moment or two later, with a deeper carnation than usual in her cheeks, she quietly left the room.

"Primrose," she said upstairs to her sister, "we mustn't ask advice about our lodgings; we must take the map with us, and go and look for them all by ourselves. Mrs. Dredge says that clean lodgings are very, very dear, and it is only dirty lodgings that are cheap."

When Jasmine ran into the room Primrose was standing by the dressing-table, and in her usual methodical fashion was putting tidily away her own things and her sisters'; now she faced Jasmine with a little smile on her face.

"There is just one thing," she said, "that we can do—we can with our own hands make the dirty lodgings clean. Never mind, Jasmine darling, we won't ask anybody's advice; we'll go out and look round us to-morrow."

Early the next morning the three sisters set out—Daisy having first locked the Pink in their room. It may be remarked in parenthesis that the Pink did not like her new quarters, and had already made herself notorious by breaking two saucers and a cup, by upsetting a basin of milk, and by disappearing with the leg of a chicken. In consequence, she was in great disgrace, and Mrs. Flint had been heard to speak of her as "that odious cat!" The Pink, however, was safe for the present, and the girls set out on their little pilgrimage of discovery.

"London," said Primrose, in a somewhat sententious voice, has "points of the compass, like any other place. It has its north and its south, its east and its west. The west, I have been told, is the aristocratic and expensive quarter, so of course we won't go there. In the east, the miserably poor and dirty people live—we won't trouble them—therefore our choice must lie between the south and the north. On the whole, I am inclined to try the north side of London."

"For dark and true and tender is the North,"

quoted Jasmine with enthusiasm. "By all means, Rose, we will go northwards, but how shall we go?"

"We'll inquire at the post-office just round this corner," answered Primrose, with decision.

Accordingly, having received some rather lucid instructions the girls found themselves in a few moments in an omnibus going towards Holloway. About noon they were landed there, and then their search began. Oh, the weariness of that long

day! Oh, the painful experience of the three! They knew nothing about London prices—they had not an idea whether they were being imposed upon or not.

"On one point we have quite made up our minds," said Jasmine, sturdily; "we won't go back to the Mansion until we have found rooms."

The truth of Mrs. Dredge's prophecy became only too apparent. All the apartments that were bright and clean and cheery were quite too expensive for Primrose's slender purse. At last she came to a resolution.

"Girls," she said, "we must take rooms that look dirty, and make them clean. We have at least been taught how to polish, and how to scrub, and how to clean. You know, Jasmine, how shocked Miss Martineau was when she saw you one day with a pair of gloves on down on your knees polishing the drawing-room grate at Rosebury. You said you liked to do it. How distressed she was! and how that grate did shine!"

"Don't let us talk about Rosebury just now," said Jasmine, with a quiver in her voice. "Yes, Primrose darling, of course we can make our own rooms clean—we can even re-paper the walls, and we can whitewash the ceilings. Now we know exactly what to do. At the very next house where we see 'Apartments to Let,' we'll ask for dirty rooms, then of course we'll get them cheap."

"Those attics that we saw at that last house?" questioned Primrose, thoughtfully. "They were rather large, and not very dark. If we took down that paper, and put up a fresh one, and if we whitened the ceilings and scrubbed the floors, why, those rooms might do. They were not very expensive for London—only twelve shillings a week."

"A frightful rent!" said Jasmine. "No wonder the people here look careworn, and pinched, and old. We'll go back to that house, Primrose. On the whole, the rooms may suit us. What is the landlady's name?—Oh, Mrs. Dove. We'll go back to Mrs. Dove and take her rooms."

Accordingly, in a funny little street off the Junction Road, the three Mainwaring

girls found a nest. It was a queer nest, up at the top of a tall and rambling house; but Mrs. Dove appeared good-natured, and had no objection to the young ladies doing their own papering and white-washing, and as Primrose took the rooms on the spot, and paid a week's rent in advance, she became quite gracious. Every morning, as soon as ever breakfast was over at Penelope Mansion, the girls started off to the new home they were preparing for themselves. There they worked hard, papering, white-washing, and, finally, even painting. By the end of a week Mrs. Dove scarcely knew her attic apartments—elegant she now called them—a charming suite. The enthusiasm of the three young workers even infected Mrs. Dove, who condescended to clean the windows, and to rub up the shabby furniture, so that when, at the end of the week, the attics were ready for occupation, they were by no means so unlike Jasmine's ideal London rooms as might have been expected. The girls kept their own counsel, and during the week they were preparing for their flight to Eden Street—for No. 10 Eden Street would be their future address—they told no one at Penelope Mansion of their little plans. The good ladies of the Mansion, Mrs. Flint excepted, were very curious about them; they wondered why the girls disappeared every day immediately after breakfast, and came back looking hot and tired, and yet with bright and contented faces, at night; but Jasmine had ceased to confide in Mrs. Dredge; and Primrose, when she chose to be dignified, had quite power enough to keep even Miss Slowcum at a distance. Mrs. Mortlock, who was stout, and rich, and good-tempered, tried the effect of a little bribery on Daisy, but the sweet, staunch little maid would not be corrupted.

"Oh, thank you so much for those delicious chocolate creams," she said. "Yes, I do love chocolate creams, and you are so kind to give them to me. Where do we spend our day?—but that is Primrose's secret—you would not have me so naughty as to tell!"

So the week drew to an end, and the nest, as the girls called their rooms, was finally ready for its inmates. The snowy-white muslin curtains were really put up to the

now clean windows—the walls, covered with a delicate paper, had a soft, rosy glow about them—some of the pretty home ornaments were judiciously scattered about, and the rather small bedroom had three very small, but very white, little beds in it.

"We'll go in for lots of flowers, you know," said Jasmine. "I don't suppose even in London flowers are very dear."

At last there came a morning when the girls went away from Penelope Mansion as usual, and only Mrs. Flint and Poppy knew that they were not returning in the evening. Mrs. Flint felt rather indignant with the young ladies for deserting her—not that she said anything for she always made it a rule not to wear herself out with unnecessary words, or with fretting, or with undue excitement; nevertheless, on this occasion she was a little indignant, for surely, what place could compare with the Mansion? Poor Poppy bade the young ladies, whom she loved, good-bye with an almost breaking heart.

"It's all one, Miss Jasmine," she exclaimed; "if it was my dying breath, I'd have to own that London is not what we pictered it—vanities there is, and troubles there is, and disappointments most numerous and most biting. But for the one happy day I spent out with you dear young ladies, I hasn't known no happiness in London. Oh, Miss Jasmine," drawing up short and looking her young lady full in the face—"what dreadful lies them novels tells! I read them afore I came, and I made up such wonderful picters; but I will own that what with the ladies in this mansion, as worrit me almost past bearing, and what with you going away all secret like, and what with me being no longer Poppy the tare, but Sarah Jane the drudge, even if I was to get one of the bonnets that they show in the shop windows in Bond Street, why, it wouldn't draw a smile from me Miss Jasmine!"

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW TO PAINT CHINA AND HOW TO FORM STYLE.

Mrs. Dove had a great many lodgers—she let rooms on each of her floors, and she called her lodgers by the name of the floor they occupied—first floor, second floor, third floor came and went to 10, Eden Street. The girls were known as "the attics," and Jasmine felt very indignant at the name.

"It's almost as bad as being a tare," she said to Primrose. "Dear, dear! I never thought I should turn into an attic! What an unpleasant place London is! I begin to think Poppy is quite right in what she says of it."

"I begin to suspect," said Primrose, "that London, like all places, has its shady side and its bright side. We are in the shady side at present, dear Jasmine—that is all."

Mrs. Dove had not only lodgers who seemed to worry her from morning to night—for, unlike her name, she was always fretting or scolding somebody—but she also had a husband, and this husband made his presence felt by every lodger in the house. He was often away for a whole week at a time, and then comparative peace reigned in No. 10; but he would come back at unexpected moments—he would enter the house, singing out, in a loud rasping voice—

"Mrs. Dove, My only love!"

And then poor Mrs. Dove would get flushed and uncomfortable and lose what little self-possession she ever had, and would own in confidence to the first floor, or the second floor, or the attics, just as they happened to be present, that Mr. Dove's honeyed phrases were only words after all, and meant quite the contrary.

The girls were not a week at No. 10, Eden Street, before it became very apparent to them that there was little of the real Eden to be found in the place. They kept themselves, however, quite apart from the other lodgers; they began to get out their books and their employments, and what with housekeeping, and what with cleaning their rooms, and going out for long rambling walks in all directions, they were busy from morning to night. Primrose said they would spend a fortnight in the attics, and

then the education which was by-and-by to lead to bread-winning must commence. Never did three more ignorant girls gird themselves for the fray. Primrose had a natural love for painting. She had none of the knowledge, none of the grounding, which is essential for real success in all departments of art in the present day; but she had a quick and correct eye for color, and all that Miss Martineau knew she had imparted to her. Primrose looked in at the shop windows, and saw the lovely painted china, and resolved to take lessons in this art. After some little difficulty, and after questioning first Mrs. Dove, and finally the much-dreaded Mr. Dove, she was directed to a teacher, who promised to instruct her at the rate of three pounds three shillings for twelve lessons. Primrose did not know whether her teacher was good or bad, or whether she was paying too much or too little—she resolved to take the lessons and to spend some of her little capital in buying the necessary materials.

"After I've had my twelve lessons Mr. Jones thinks I may begin to offer some of my plates and things for sale; he says he will be very glad to put them up in his own shop window. He thinks," continued Primrose with her sweet, grave smile, "that I may be able to recoup myself for the expense of learning at the end of a few months."

"And now," said Jasmine, "what am I to do? It's all settled for you, Primrose—you will be an artist—and you shall paint a breakfast set for our nest in your odd moments, and I'll buy it from you when my ship comes home. Oh! and we are both going to be very successful, are we not, darling? and we won't have any trouble at all in supporting our pet Daisy and her kitty-cat. You know, Primrose, my gifts lie in the poetic and novelistic line. I have really thought of a glowing plot for a story since I came to London, and Mr. Dove is to be the ruffian of the piece. I'll introduce Mrs. Dredge and poor Miss Slowcum too, and, of course, you'll be the heroine, my beautiful sister. I mean to buy some paper, and work away at my novel in the evenings next week; but as we have come up to London expressly to have our education perfected, and our gifts developed, don't you think I ought to be having

some lessons in English style? After all, Primrose, I do not think Mrs. Flint's way of speaking was correct. Arthur Noel did not talk in the least like her, nor did dear Mrs. Ellsworthy; and after all, they are a real lady and gentleman. I wonder, Primrose, who would teach me proper style. I wish I could meet Arthur Noel again, that he might tell me!"

"Oh, Jasmine, it is dreadful of you to speak of a perfect stranger by his Christian name! Don't do it, dear—I know it is not right."

"He did not seem the least like a stranger," said Jasmine, pushing back her curling locks. "Well, Rose, who is to teach me style?—you see, if I am to earn money by my pen I must be polished up. I have got a poem now in the back of my head which would exactly suit the —— Review. It's almost exactly on the lines of one they published not long ago by Tennyson; but I'd rather not send it until I've had a lesson or two from some gifted person here—who shall I go to, Primrose?"

"You must go to a school, of course," answered Primrose. "There is a seminary for young ladies just round the corner—we will call there this afternoon, and find out if the lady can give you lessons."

Miss Egerton, the principal of the seminary in question, opened her eyes a good deal at Jasmine's modest request.

"I don't want French, nor German, nor music," quoth the young lady, "but I do want to be helped to make very smooth and flowing verses, and I want to have the plots of my novels cut up and criticised—for I don't mind telling you," continued Jasmine, looking full into Miss Egerton's deeply-lined and anxious face, "that I mean to live by my pen. My sister is to be an artist, and I am to be a novelist and poet."

Miss Egerton owned to herself afterwards that she had never met such extraordinary girls; but then they were so pretty, and so fresh, and the times were hard, and the High Schools were carrying off all her pupils, so though she knew little or nothing of making up verses or developing plots, she promised to receive Jasmine as a pupil,

to direct her reading, and to help her to the best of her ability. She was a good and kind-hearted woman, and she made a further suggestion.

"What is to become of your little sister while you are both so busy, young ladies?" she said.

"Oh, Daisy promises to be very good," said Primrose with a tender smile at the little one. "Daisy will stay at home, and take care of the Pink, and she is learning to sew very nicely. When Daisy is good and stays quietly at home she helps our plan, and does as much for our cause as any of us."

Miss Egerton looked straight into Daisy's eyes. Long ago this dry and hard-looking old maid had a little sister like Daisy—a pretty little lass, who went away to play in the heavenly gardens many and many a year ago. For the sake of little Constance Miss Egerton felt a great kindness welling up in her heart towards Daisy Mainwaring.

"Your little sister must not stay at home by herself," she said. "She shall come to me. While I am teaching Miss Jasmine, Daisy can play or work as she pleases, only not by herself in your lodgings, young ladies, but in the room with her sister."

So it was arranged, and the three girls might fairly have been said to commence their work.

When Primrose had gone to Mr. Danesfield and asked him to allow her to draw their little capital out of his bank, he had made wonderfully few objections. Of all their friends, he was the one who had opposed Primrose's scheme the least, and perhaps for that reason she was more willing to take his advice, and to be guided by him, than by either Mrs. Ellsworthy or Miss Martineau. Mr. Danesfield had said to her: "My dear, you and your sisters are in some particulars in a very unique and unfortunate position. You are all three very young, yet you are absolutely your own mistresses. No one in all the world has any real control over you. If you ask me for your money, I cannot refuse you—I have absolutely no choice in the matter; the

money is yours, and when you want it you must have it. Now I tell you plainly that Mrs. Ellsworthy and Miss Martineau are dreadfully shocked with your scheme. I may be wrong, but I confess I am not shocked. I fancy that you are the kind of girls who will come out victorious, and that though you will have rather a hard struggle, you will not be beaten; but there is one thing I am most anxious to do for you, and that is to keep part of your money. You have exactly two hundred pounds. How much of this little capital do you propose to spend a year?"

"As little as ever we can," answered Primrose.

"Yes, my dear young lady, but you must have some sort of idea with regard to your expenses. I would counsel you on no account to spend more of your capital than seventy pounds a year; by restricting yourselves to this sum you will have a very tiny but certain, income for two years, and will have something to fall back on even in the third year, if you are not then earning enough. Suppose I divide your seventy pounds into four quarterly instalments, and send it to you as you require it. You know nothing of keeping a banking account yourself, and it will absolutely not be safe for you to live in London lodgings, and have a large sum of money with you. Take my advice in this particular, Miss Primrose, and allow me still to be your banker."

"There is one little difficulty," said Primrose; "we really want to be independent, and as we know that there will be difficulties and discouragements in the career we are marking out for ourselves, and that we may often grow faint-hearted and lonely, Jasmine and I feel that we had better put ourselves quite out of the way of temptation. We have, therefore, made up our minds not to give our address to any one in Rosebury for at least two years. How can you send us the money, Mr. Danesfield, if you don't know where to send it?"

"My dear young lady, I fear you are a little bit too headstrong, and though I admire your spirit, I cannot quite approve of your cutting yourselves off from all

communications with your friends. However, it is not for me to interfere. Will this satisfy you, Miss Primrose?—shall I give you my solemn promise only to use the address with which you favor me to forward your money each quarter, and never to divulge your secret to anybody else?"

Finally this plan was adopted, and Primrose received her small quarterly allowance with great regularity.

CHAPTER XXII.

CROSS PURPOSES.

After his interview with Jasmine in St. Paul's Cathedral, Arthur Noel went home to his very luxurious chambers in Westminster, and wrote the following letter to Mrs. Ellsworthy:—

"MY DEAR MOTHER-FRIEND,

"The most curious thing has happened. I came accidentally to-day across the three girls about whom you were so interested. I met them at St. Paul's, and could not help speaking to the second one. The brightness, and yet the melancholy, of her little face attracted my attention. She was not with the rest of her party, but sat for some of the time on one of the chairs, and then knelt down and covered her face. Poor little soul! I think she was crying. My sympathies were roused by her, and I spoke. She flashed up a very bright glance at me, and we became friends on the spot. I took her about the cathedral, and showed her one or two objects of interest. She was full of intelligence. Then her sisters joined her, and your boy came up, and, of course, his name came out; and there was confusion and wondering glances, and the girl whom I had spoken to turned first crimson, and then white, and her dark grey eyes became full of tears. 'I know the Ellsworthys; they are my dear, dear friends!' she exclaimed.

"I found out where the three lived before I left them. They were accompanied by a

prim-looking maiden lady, who was introduced to me as a Miss Slowcum, and who appeared to be taking excellent care of the pretty creatures. All three are delightful, and I have lost my heart to them all.

"Can I do anything for them? Of course you have already told me what perverse creatures they are, and Miss Jasmine confirmed your story, only, of course, she put her own coloring on it. I pity them, and yet, to a certain extent—forgive me, mother-friend—I admire their spirit. That eldest girl had a look about her face which will certainly keep every one from being rude to her. Such an expression of innocence and dignity combined I have seldom come across. Now, can I help them? It is an extraordinary thing, but I have a wonderful fellow-feeling for them. I can never forget the old days when I too was alone in London, and you took me up. Do you remember how you met me, and took my thin and dirty hands in yours, and looked into my face and said: 'Surely this is a gentleman's son, although he is clothed in rags?' I could just remember that I was a gentleman's son, and that I used to put my arms round a beautiful lady's neck and kiss her, and call her mother. Between her face and me there was a great horror of darkness, and suffering, and ill-usage; and my memories were feeble and dream-like. I don't even now recall them more vividly. You took me up, and—you know the rest of my history.

"Well, it is a strange thing, but those girls, especially that little Jasmine, brought back the memory of the lady whose sweet face I used to kiss. Can I do anything for your girls? There are a thousand ways in which I could help them without hurting their proud spirits.

"Yours affectionately, "ARTHUR NOEL."

In a very short time Mr. Noel received a brief communication from Mrs. Ellsworthy:—

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

"Your letter has been an untold relief. It was a special and good Providence that

directed your steps to St. Paul's on that afternoon. My dear little Jasmine!—she is my pet of all the three. My dear Arthur, pray call on the girls at that dreadful Penelope Mansion; they are so naughty and so obstinate that they simply must be caught by guile. You must use your influence to get them out of that dreadful place. Look for respectable and nice lodgings, and go beforehand to the landlady. If she is very nice, confide in her, and tell her she is to look to me for payment, but she is on no account to let out this fact to the girls. Kensington is a nice, quiet, respectable neighborhood; you might take the drawing-room floor of a very quiet, nice house, and ask the landlady to offer it to the girls for five shillings a week, or something nominal of that sort. Primrose is so innocent at present that she will think five shillings quite a large sum; but tell the lady of the house to let it include all extras—I mean such as gas and firing. I suppose you could not get a house with the electric light?—no, of course not; it is not used yet in private dwellings—gas is so unwholesome, but the girls might use candles. Tell the landlady to provide them with the best candles, and tell her I'll pay her something handsome if she'll go out with them. And, my dear Arthur, don't let them go in omnibuses. Do your best, and, above all things, take them away from that awful mansion as soon as possible.

"Your affectionate Mother-Friend, "KATE ELLSWORTHY."

But alas! when Arthur Noel, in accordance with Mrs. Ellsworthy's instructions, went to see the girls, he was confronted first by Mrs. Flint, who assured him in her soft and cushion-like style that the young ladies had left, and as they had been undutiful enough not to confide in her she could furnish him with no address. As he was leaving the mansion Poppy Jenkins rushed up to him.

"I heard you asking for my young ladies, sir, but it ain't no use, for they're gone. Flowers of beauty they was—beautiful in manner and in face—but they ain't to be found here no more. The Mansion didn't suit them, and the people in the Mansion didn't suit them, and that isn't to be wondered at. I suppose they has gone to a more

congenial place, but the address is hid from me; no, sir, I know nothing at all about them. Yes, sir, it's quite true—I misses them most bitter!"

Here poor Poppy, covering her face with her hands, burst into tears and disappeared down the back staircase.

Noel wrote to Mrs. Ellsworthy, and Mrs. Ellsworthy wrote back to him, and between them they made many inquiries, and took many steps, which they felt quite sure must lead to discovery, but notwithstanding all their efforts they obtained no clue to the whereabouts of the Mainwaring girls.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DARK DAYS.

"How bitterly cold it is, Primrose!"

The speaker was Jasmine; she sat huddled up to a small, but bright fire, which burned in the sitting-room grate.

The girls had now been several months in Eden Street, and all the summer weather and the summer flowers had departed, and the evening in question was a very dull and foggy one in late November.

The little sitting-room still wore its rose-tinted paper, but the white curtains at the windows had assumed a decided and permanent tint of yellow, and the fog found its way in through the badly-fitting attic windows, and made the whole room look cloudy. The girls' faces, too, had altered with the months. Jasmine had lost a good deal of her vivacity, her expression was slightly fretful, and she no longer looked the spruce and sparkling little lass who had gone away from Rosebury in the summer. Primrose had lost the faint color which used to tinge her cheeks; they were now almost too white for beauty, but her eyes were still clear, calm, and sweet; her dress was still the essence of simplicity and neatness, and her bearing was gentle and

dignified as of old. The alteration in Daisy was less apparent at this moment, for she was stretched on two cushions in one corner of the sitting-room, and with a warm rug thrown over her, and with the Pink curled up in her arms, was fast asleep.

"How cold it is, Primrose," repeated Jasmine; then, as her sister made no reply, but went on calmly darning some stockings, she continued, "I think you have really grown stingy. Why can't we have some more coal? this is much too small a fire for weather with snow on the ground, and a horrid, odious fog filling every corner."

"Hush!" said Primrose, laying down her work, and stooping towards her younger sister, who sat on the hearthrug, "I am keeping the coal to put on until Daisy wakes. You know, Jasmine, we resolved not to run up any bills, and I cannot get in any coal until Mr. Danesfield sends us our next quarter's allowance—wrap my fur cloak round you, darling, and then you will be quite warm."

Jasmine shivered, but rising slowly, she went into the bedroom, and returned in a moment, not with the fur cloak, but with a white woolly shawl. "The day for Mr. Danesfield's money will arrive in less than a week," she said. "Oh, Primrose! I thought you were going to be a good manager; I did not think you were going to bring us to this."

Primrose smiled.

"Jasmine, dear," she said, "you are not quite brave to-night, or you would not speak to me in that tone. You forget that we should not have been short of money had not that five-pound note been stolen from us. When Mr. Danesfield's allowance comes in we shall be able to go on as usual, and then you need not suffer from a short allowance of fire. Jasmine, I know what is the matter with you; you did not eat half enough dinner to-day. When I was out this afternoon I called to see Miss Egerton, and she gave me three delicious new-laid eggs—really new-laid—we'll have them for supper."

"No, we won't," said Jasmine, her eyes suddenly filling with tears, and her pettish

mood changing to a tender and very sad one—"those eggs were given for Daisy, and no one else shall eat them. Do you know, Primrose, that Miss Egerton does not think Daisy at all strong?"

"Oh, she is mistaken," said Primrose. "No one who does not know her thinks Daisy strong; she has a fragile look, but it is only her look. All my courage would go if I thought Daisy were ill—she is not ill; look at her now, what a sweet color she has on her cheeks."

"Miss Egerton says she is like a little sister of her own," continued Jasmine. Then she stopped suddenly. "Oh! Primrose, you are not going to cry? oh, don't; it would be dreadful if you gave way! No, Primrose, she is not like little Constance Egerton; she is just our own Daisy, who never looks strong, but who is very strong—she shall never be cold, and she shall have all the nourishment—you and I don't mind how plainly we live, do we, Queen Rose?"

Primrose had quickly wiped away her sudden tears. She rose to her feet, and, going up to Jasmine, gave her a hasty kiss.

"We'll remember our good old resolution," she said brightly, "not to grumble, not to fret, not to cry. Ah! here is our dear little birdie waking from her sleep. Now, Jasmine on with the coals, and let us have a merry blaze while I see to the supper—porridge for you and me, and a nice fresh egg and a cup of warm milk for the Daisy-flower."

"The Pink must have some milk too," said Daisy, as she tumbled lazily out of her soft nest of cushions; "the Pink isn't half as fat as she used to be—I can feel all the bones down her spine—I know she wants cream. Oh, Primrose! I had such a darling dream—I thought the Prince came and found us!"

"The Prince, Daisy?"

"Yes; and he had the look of the gentleman we met long, long, long ago at St. Paul's Cathedral! Oh, Primrose, I'm so tired of London!"

"Never mind, darling," answered Primrose; "I'm always telling you you are only seeing the shady side at present. Only wait till Christmas comes, and Mr. Danesfield sends us our money."

"I wrote another poem last night," said Jasmine; "I called it 'The Uses of Adversity.' It was very mournful indeed; it was a sort of story in blank verse of people who were cold and hungry, and I mixed up London fogs, and attic rooms, and curtains that were once white, and had now turned yellow, and sloppy streets covered with snow, with the story. It was really very sad, and I cried a great deal over it. I am looking out now for a journal which likes melancholy things to send it to. I have not ventured to submit it to Miss Egerton, for she is so dreadfully severe, and I don't think much of her taste. She will never praise anything I do unless it is so simple as to be almost babyish. Now 'The Uses of Adversity' is as far as possible formed on the model of Milton's 'Paradise Lost'—it is strong, but gloomy. Shall I read it to you after supper, Primrose?"

"If you like, dear," answered Primrose; "but why do you try to write such very sad things, Jasmine?"

"Oh, I don't know; they suit me. Primrose, do you know of a very, very melancholy periodical?"

"Several of the periodicals seem to me rather melancholy," answered Primrose; "there is one I sometimes see on Mrs. Dove's table—it is called The Watch. I glanced at it one day, and I thought it seemed very morbid."

"Oh, I know," answered Jasmine; "but there is a worse one than that—Mrs. Dove showed it to me. Mrs. Dove is very fond of reading, and she told me that she would not give a farthing for any literature that could not draw forth the salt and bitter tear; she says the magazine she likes best at present is a new one called The Downfall. She says it is very little known, but its melancholy is profound. Shall I send my verses to The Downfall, Primrose?"

"If you like, dear; but I don't at all admire the name, and I really do not think Mrs. Dove ought to be your guide in such matters, Jasmine."

"Oh, she has very good taste," answered Jasmine; "she says that only real talent is admitted on the staff of The Downfall. Of course I'd rather write for one of the shilling magazines. Well, if you like, I'll send my poem to one of them first."

Before Primrose could answer Jasmine on this weighty point there came a knock on the sitting-room door, and Mrs. Dove, with her face wrapped up in a thick woollen shawl, entered the room.

"Very sorry to disturb you, young ladies," she said, "but could you oblige me with the loan of three and tenpence-halfpenny. Dove has put in no appearance, and unless I can pay three and tenpence-halfpenny on account to the baker he refuses positive to allow me sufficient bread to see Sunday through."

When Mrs. Dove made this request Primrose's face became intensely pale. She was silent for half a minute, then she said—

"I will lend you the money this time, Mrs. Dove, but please don't ask me again; you know that at this present moment you owe me very nearly two pounds."

"Thank you, my dear Miss Mainwaring," answered Mrs. Dove, in a very suave voice, as she hastily pocketed poor Primrose's few shillings. "You are always obliging, and this, with the other trifle due, shall be returned the moment Dove comes in—Dove is on a very good piece of work just at present, and the money is as safe as safe. Oh, Miss Jasmine, I have brought you this week's copy of The Downfall—the serial in it is really of the most powerful order. I have shed a deluge of tears over it. The lowest person of rank in the pages is a marquess; but the story mostly deals in ducal families. It was a terrible blow to come down to the baker from the duke's ancestral halls—you read it, Miss Jasmine; you'll be very much overcome."

CHAPTER XXIV.

DOVE'S JOKE.

Primrose had always been considered a very good manager. Her talents for contriving, for buying, and, in short, for making a shilling do the utmost that a shilling was capable of, had been observable from her earliest days. In the last years of her mother's life Primrose had been entrusted with the family purse, and the shopkeepers at Rosebury had known better than not to offer this bright-looking young lady the best that they had at the lowest price. Primrose, therefore, when she came to London, had felt pretty confident that the talents which she knew she possessed would stand her in good stead. She still hoped to find the cheapest shops and to get the best for her money. She laid her plans with accuracy and common sense, she divided the little sum which the three had to live on into weekly instalments—she resolved not to go beyond these. But, alas! Primrose had never reckoned on a certain grave difficulty which here confronted her. Hitherto her dealings had been with honest tradespeople; now it was her misfortune, and her sisters', to get into a house where honesty was far from practised. In a thousand little ways Mrs. Dove could pilfer from the girls—she would not for the world have acknowledged to herself that she would really steal; oh, no—but she did not consider it stealing to use their coal instead of her own—of course, by mistake; she by no means considered it stealing when she baked a little joint for them in her oven on Sunday to boil it first, and in this way secure a very good soup for various hungry young Doves; she did not consider it stealing to so confuse the baker's account that some of the loaves consumed by her children were paid for by Primrose; nor did she consider it stealing to add water to the milk with which she supplied the Mainwarings; above all things, and on this point she was most emphatic, she thought it the reverse of stealing to borrow. Primrose had not been a fortnight in her house before she began to ask first for the loan of an odd sixpence, then for half-a-crown,

for a shilling here, and two shillings there. When she returned the half-crown it was generally done in this fashion—

"Oh, if you please, miss, I want to settle my little account. Oh, dear, dear! I was certain I had half-a-crown in my purse. Well, to be sure, I forgot that Dove took it with him when he went out to his work this morning. Please, Miss Mainwaring, will you accept one and sixpence on account, and we'll settle the rest in an hour or two. There, miss, that's quite comfortable."

Yes, the arrangement was certainly quite comfortable for Mrs. Dove, who could score out the half-crown debt from her slate, and quite stare when Primrose ventured to ask her for the odd shilling still owing.

Still, incredible as it may sound, Mrs. Dove considered herself a strictly honest woman. Perhaps, had the girls only to deal with her they might have struggled on, badly, it is true, but still after a fashion. But, alas and alas! if Mrs. Dove considered herself honest, Mr. Dove did not pretend to lay claim to this very excellent quality. Poor Primrose little guessed that that lost five-pound note, which had given her such trouble, and which had almost brought gray hairs to her bright yellow head, had been really taken by Dove, who had come up to the attics when the girls were away, had quietly taken the hinges off Primrose's trunk at the back, had lifted the lid, and had helped himself neatly and deftly to that solitary note!

When the girls discovered their loss no one had been more indignant than Dove. He had come up himself to speak to them about it, had examined the trunk in their presence, had told them that he had a cousin of his own in the detective business whom he would put on the scent of the thief, and in the meantime he'd be very pleased, although he was a remarkably poor man, to lend the young ladies ten shillings.

Although they would not think of accepting his loan, the girls thought that Dove had behaved rather kindly on this occasion, and they certainly never in the least

suspected it was into his pocket their money had gone.

Without being at all, therefore, to blame, poor Primrose found herself, as Christmas approached, and the days grew short and cold, with very little money in her possession; of course, her quarter's allowance would soon be due, but some days before it came she had broken into her last sovereign. Still, she had a resource which her sisters had forgotten, and which, luckily for her, Dove knew nothing at all about—she still had that letter of Mr. Danesfield's. She had never opened it, but she always kept it safely locked up in her trunk. Not for worlds would she yet break the seal—no, no, this letter was meant for an hour of great need. Primrose fondly and proudly hoped that that dark and dreadful hour would never approach and that, having won success, she and her sisters might yet return the letter unopened to its kind donor. In these dark days before Christmas she kept up her heart, and worked hard at her china-painting, achieving sufficient success and power over her art to enable her to produce some pretty, but, alas! as yet unsaleable articles. Mr. Jones, her master, assured her, however, that her goods must ere long find a market, and she struggled on bravely.

Perhaps, on the whole, Jasmine was more tried by her present life than her sister. Jasmine's was a more highly-strung temperament; she could be more easily depressed and more easily elated—hers was the kind of nature which pours forth its sweetest and best in sunshine; did the cold blasts of adversity blow too keenly on this rather tropical little flower, then no expansion would come to the beautiful blossoms, and the young life would fail to fulfil its promise. Jasmine was never meant by nature to be poor; she had been born in Italy, and something of the languor and the love of ease and beauty of her birthplace seemed always to linger round her. She had talents—under certain conditions she might even have developed genius, but in no sense of the word was she hardy; where Primrose could endure, and even conquer, Jasmine might die.

The little sister, who was too young to acutely feel any change which did not part her from Primrose and Jasmine, was, perhaps, the only one of the three whose spirits were on a par with what they were in the old Rosebury days; but although Daisy's little mind remained tranquil, and she did not trouble herself about ways and means, nor greatly fret over the fact that the skies were leaden, and the attic room foggy, still Daisy also suffered in her rather delicate little body. She caught cold in the London fogs, and the cold brought on a cough, and the cough produced loss of appetite. The two elder sisters, however, were scarcely as yet uneasy about her, and it was only Miss Egerton who saw the likeness to little Constance growing and growing in Daisy's sweet face. Thus Christmas drew near, and the girls had not yet found their mission in life; they were by no means crushed, however, nor was Primrose tired of repeating what she firmly believed, that with the New Year some of the sunshine of London life would be theirs.

The quarterly allowance from Mr. Danesfield always arrived on the first of the month. On the first of December this year the welcome letter, with its still more welcome enclosure, was duly received. The girls celebrated the event with a little breakfast feast—they ate water-cresses, and Primrose and Jasmine had a sardine each to add flavor to their bread and butter. Whatever happened, Daisy always had her fresh egg, which she shared with the Pink, for the Pink had been brought up daintily, and appreciated the tops of fresh eggs. On this occasion Mrs. Dove herself brought up Primrose's letter. Letters came so seldom to the girls that Mrs. Dove felt it quite excusable to gaze very hard at the inscription, to study the name of the post town which had left its mark on the envelope, and lingering a little in the room, under cover of talking to Jasmine, to watch Primrose's face as she opened the cover.

"It is from Mr. Danesfield, is it not, Primrose?" exclaimed Jasmine—"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Dove; no I didn't much care for that new story which is begun in The Downfall."

Mrs. Dove had a habit of dropping little curtseys when she meant to be particularly deferential—she now dropped three in succession, and said in a high-pitched, and rather biting voice—

"It isn't to be expected that the opinions of young ladies and of women who have gone through their world of experience, and therefore know what's what, should coincide. I leave you ladies three to read your refreshing news from absent friends."

Mrs. Dove then turned her back, and meekly shutting the door behind her, left the girls to themselves.

"Them attics have become rather too uppish for my taste," she said to Dove when she got downstairs. "I took them a letter just now, and, my word! they had not eyes nor ears for me, though I toiled up all the weary stairs, which my shortness of breath don't agree to. It wasn't even 'Thank you very much, Mrs. Dove,' but all three of them, their eyes was fixed on the letter as if they'd eat it. It's my belief, Dove, that they're short of funds, for when I went yesterday to ask for the trifling loan of tenpence three-farthings to pay the cobbler for Tommy's boots, Miss Mainwaring said, as pretty as you please, but very prim and firm—'I haven't really got the money, Mrs. Dove.' Well, well, I've done a deal for those girls—elbow grease I've given them, and thought I've given them, and books for the improving of their intellecs I've lent them, and that's all the return I get, that when I bring up a letter it isn't even 'Thank you, Mrs. Dove.' What I say is this, Dove, shall I give the attics notice to quit?"

"By no manner of means," answered Dove—"you mark my words, Mrs. Dove, my only love, that why they were so flurried over the letter just received was because there was money in it. Don't you turn away nice, genteel, quiet-spoken young ladies from this house. There's most likely a postal order in that letter, and my name ain't Dove if I don't get my gleanings from it."

"Oh, fie, Dove! you will have your joke," answered his wife; but she said nothing

further about giving the Mainwarings notice to quit.

CHAPTER XXV.

DAISY'S PROMISE.

Mr. Danesfield always forwarded the girls' allowance in such a way that Primrose could easily obtain it—he did not trouble her with cheques or bank notes, but sent a money-order, which she could cash at the nearest post-office.

The three went out gleefully that day, and obtained their much needed money—then Primrose bought a new pair of boots for Daisy, and allowed Jasmine to spend sixpence on scribbling paper. Having obtained this delightful possession, Jasmine determined to begin her great work of fiction without a moment's delay; she felt that she had listened quite long enough to Miss Egerton's gentle warnings—that she had been discouraged sufficiently, and that what she had really to do was to prove the stuff which was in her, and to take the world by storm. She hesitated a little as to whether her great work was to appear before the world in the form of a novel or a poem. She thought that to produce a second "Evangeline" would be a matter of but slight difficulty, but on the whole she was inclined to give the world her experience in the fiery and untrammelled words of prose.

"My theme burns within me," she said to herself. "I won't be kept back by metres or rhymes, or numbers of feet, or any of those tiresome rules which Miss Egerton tries to instil into me. Oh, I shall be happy over my work! I will forget that we are poor, and forget that we live in attics. I will work with Miss Egerton in the daytime, and I will help Primrose in her house-keeping, and take Daisy for a walk, but morning and evening I will get into my Palace Beautiful, and write away, and forget the sordid cares of life."

The little maid had really a certain amount of genius to guide her, and although all

her ideas were crude and unpractised, she managed to be happy in the castle which she built, and her dark eyes grew bright once more, and her pretty face resumed its animated and contented expression.

Primrose, who worked very steadily at her china-painting, was much cheered at this time with one or two small, but bona-fide orders for work. They came not through Mr. Jones, who pocketed her money and exhibited her wares in a dusty and uncertain fashion, but through Miss Egerton, who was proving herself a real friend to the girls. Primrose was immensely cheered by these little orders, and, in consequence, Christmas Day—the girls' first Christmas Day without a home and a mother—passed not uncheerfully. Things might have gone well with the three but for an incident which occurred just at the beginning of the New Year.

One morning Daisy awoke shivering, and complaining of fresh cold. She refused, however, to stay at home by herself, and begged of Jasmine to wrap her up, and take her across to Miss Egerton's, but when the two girls reached the kind mistress's door they were informed that she had been suddenly sent for to the country, and would not be back until the following day.

"You must go back now, my pet," said Jasmine. "I'll take you back myself, and I'll build up such a nice fire for you, and you shall look at the dear old scrap-book which we made when we were all happy at Rosebury."

"I wish we were back at Rosebury," said little Daisy, in a very sad and plaintive voice. "I don't think London is at all a cheerful place. We made a great mistake about it, didn't we, Jasmine? Oh, Jasmine, darling, you are not going to leave me by myself, for I really don't feel well this morning."

"I'll come back ever so quickly, Eyebright, but I really think I must do Primrose's shopping for her, now that I am not going to Miss Egerton. Primrose is working very hard at her china-painting order, and it is not fair she should be interrupted. You won't be selfish, will you, Eyebright? You know we arranged long ago that the way

you were to help matters forward was not to hinder us older girls in our work."

"I know," answered Daisy, with a patient sigh. "I won't be selfish, Jasmine. Just kiss me before you go."

Jasmine went away, and Daisy, taking the Pink into her arms, sat down close to the fire. She was not exactly nervous, but she scarcely liked to be left in the attics by herself. She wished Mrs. Dove would come up, or even that Tommy Dove, who was a rude boy, and whom, as a rule, she particularly disliked, would pay her a visit. Any company, however she reflected, would be better than none, for she was feeling heavy and depressed with her cold. The warm feel of the Pink's furry little body, elapsed tightly in her arms, comforted her not a little. She remembered with some satisfaction that Jasmine had locked the door, and she began already to count the moments for her sister's return.

An hour passed, and still Daisy listened for Jasmine's light and springing step on the attic stairs.

She was very tired now, and her head ached. She thought she would go into the bedroom and, lying down on her little white bed, sleep away the weary moments. Taking the Pink with her, she did so, wrapping the counterpane well up over them both.

In a very few moments the child was in a heavy slumber.

She awoke, after what seemed to herself a very short nap, to hear sounds in the bedroom. She stirred sleepily, and, opening her eyes, said—

"Oh, Jasmine, what a time you've been away!"

No answer from Jasmine, but a smothered exclamation from some one else; a heavy tread on the uncarpeted boards, and Dove, his face red, his shoes off, and something which looked like a screw-driver in his hands, came up and bent over the child.

"Oh! what are you doing here, Mr. Dove?" exclaimed little Daisy. The man bent

down over her, and stared hard into her wide open blue eyes.

THE MAN BENT DOWN OVER HER.

THE MAN BENT DOWN OVER HER. Palace B.

"I didn't know you was here, missie; it was very cunning of you to feign sleep like that—it was very cunning and over sharp, but it don't come round me. No, no; you has got to speak up now, and say what you has seen, and what you hasn't seen. I allow of no nonsense with little girls, and I can always see through them when they mean to tell a lie. You know where the children who tell lies go to, so you'd better speak up, and the whole truth, missie." Dove spoke in a very rough voice, and poor Daisy felt terribly frightened.

"I didn't see anything," she began, in her innocent way. "I was fast, fast asleep. I thought you were Jasmine—Jasmine should have been back long ago. I have a bad cold, and I was trying to pass the time by going to sleep. I haven't seen anything, Mr. Dove."

"Let me look into your eyes, miss," said Dove; "open them wide, and let me look well into them."

"Oh! you frighten me, Mr. Dove," said Daisy, beginning to cry. "I was very lonely, and I'd have liked you to come up half an hour ago; but you look so queer now, and you speak in such a rough voiced—what is the matter? Perhaps you were bringing up some of those books for Jasmine. Oh! I don't know why you should speak to me like that."

Dove's brow cleared; he began to believe that the child had really been asleep, and had not seen the peculiar manner in which he had been employing himself for the last ten minutes.

"Look here, miss," he said, "I don't mean to be rough to you, you pretty little lady. Look here, what I was after was all kindness. I only spoke rough as a bit of a joke. I has got some lollipops in my pocket for a nice little maid; I wonder now who these

yere lollipops are for?"

"For me, perhaps?" said Daisy, who, although she could not have swallowed a sweety to save her life at that moment, had sense enough to know that her wisest plan was to propitiate Dove.

"You're fond of lollipops then, missie? you didn't think as 'twas because poor Dove guessed that, that he travelled up all these weary stairs? Kind of him, wasn't it? but you're real fond of lollipops, ain't you, missy?"

"Some kinds," answered Daisy, who was really a most fastidious child, and who shrank from the sticky-looking sweetmeats proffered to her by Dove. "I like the very best chocolate creams; Primrose brings them to me sometimes, but they are rather expensive. Oh! and I like sticky sweets too," she continued seeing an ominous frown gathering on Dove's brow. "I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Dove." Then making a great effort, she put out her little white hand to take one of the sweeties.

But Dove drew back quickly.

"No, no," he said, "not till they're arned—by no means until they're arned. You don't suppose as a poor man—a poor man with a large family, and an only love of a wife—can afford to bring sweeties all for nothing to rich little ladies like yourself. No, no, miss; you arn them, and you shall have them."

"But I'd rather not, please," said Daisy, "I'm not very hungry for sweeties to-day on account of my cold, and I think, on the whole, you had better keep them, Mr. Dove. Indeed, I don't know how to earn them—Primrose and Jasmine say I'm too young to earn."

Here Dove drew himself up to his full height, and stared hard at the child.

"There's one way of arning," he said, "and one only. Look you here, Miss Daisy Mainwaring, you are young, but you ain't no fool. Ef you please, miss, you has got to make me a promise—you has got to say that you will never tell, not to Miss Primrose nor to Miss Jasmine, nor to no one, that you've seen me in this room. I

don't wish it to be known. I has my reasons, and whatever happens, you are never to tell. Ef you make me the promise true and faithful, why you shall have the sweeties, and I'll stick up for you, and be your friend through thick and thin. You'll have Dove for your friend, Miss Daisy, and I can tell you he ain't a friend to be lightly put aside. But if you ever tell—and however secret you do it, I have got little birds who will whisper it back to me—why, then Dove will be your enemy. You don't know what that means, and you won't like to know. I was my own boy Tommy's enemy once, and I locked him up in the dark for twenty-four hours, where no one could hear him screaming. Now, miss, you had better make me your friend; I'm real desperate in earnest, so you promise me."

Daisy's face had grown deadly white, her breath came in gasps, her eyes were fixed on the cruel man.

"You promise me, miss?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Dove."

"That's right, missy. Now you say these words after me:—'Mr. Dove, I promise never to tell as you came up to my room to give me the nice sweeties. I'll never tell nobody in all the wide world, so help me, God.'"

"Oh, I don't like that last part," said little Daisy. "I'll say it—I'll say all the words, only not the last ones, and I'll keep my promise as true as true; only please, please, please, Mr. Dove, don't ask me to say the last words, for I don't think it's quite reverent to say them just to keep a secret about sweeties."

"Well, missy, as you please. Now put your hands in mine, and say all the other words."

Daisy did so.

"That's right, miss; now my mind's easy. I have got your promise, miss, and I'll keep the little birds a-watching to find out if ever you go near to breathing it. There's a dark cellar, too, most handy for them children who turn out to be Dove's enemies,

and you know where the people who tell lies go to. Now, good-bye, miss—eat up your sweeties."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DELIGHTFUL PLAN.

Neither Primrose nor Jasmine could quite understand their little sister that night—her cold was worse, but that fact Primrose accounted for by Jasmine's imprudence in taking her out; but what neither she nor Jasmine could understand was Daisy's great nervousness—her shrinking fear of being left for a moment by herself, and the worried and anxious look which had settled down on her usually quiet little face. Primrose determined to do what she had never done yet since they had come to London—she would commit the unheard-of extravagance of calling in a doctor.

"I think Daisy is very feverish," she said to Jasmine; "only that it seems impossible, I would say she has got some kind of shock, and was trying to conceal something. You are quite sure that you locked the door when you left her alone here this afternoon, Jasmine?"

"Oh, yes," answered Jasmine, "and I found it locked all right when I came back. I was rather longer away than I meant to be, for I did such a venturesome thing, Primrose—I took my 'Ode to Adversity' to the Editor of The Downfall. I saw him, too—he was a red-faced man, with such a loud voice, and he didn't seem at all melancholy—he said he would look at the poem, but he wasn't very encouraging. I told him what Mrs. Dove said about his readers liking tearful things, and he gave quite a rude laugh; however, I shouldn't be surprised if the poem was taken; if it fails in that quarter, I must only try one of the very best magazines. Oh, what was I saying about Daisy? I think she was asleep when I came back—she was lying very

quiet, only her cheeks were rather flushed. Of course, Primrose, nothing happened to our little Daisy; if there did, she would tell us."

"I will send for the doctor, at any rate," said Primrose; "I don't like her look. I will send for the doctor, and—and—"

But Primrose's brave voice broke, and she turned her face away.

Jasmine ran up to her, and put her arms round her neck.

"What is it, Rose darling?—are you really troubled about Daisy? or are you thinking of the expense? I wonder what a London doctor will charge? Have you got any money to pay him, Primrose?"

"I've got Mr. Danesfield's money," said Primrose; "I have always kept it for an emergency. I had hoped never to need it, but if the real emergency comes it is right to spend it. Yes, Jasmine, I can pay the doctor and you had better go down and ask the Doves the name of one, for I don't know a single doctor in London."

"Yes," said Jasmine, "I'll run down at once."

Mr. and Mrs. Dove were greatly concerned when they heard of Daisy's illness—in especial, Mr. Dove was concerned, and expressed himself willing to do all in his power for the sweet, pretty little lady. He said he knew a doctor of the name of Jones, who was a dab hand with children, and if the young ladies liked he would run round to Dr. Jones's house, and fetch him in at once.

Jasmine thought Mr. Dove very good-natured, and she expressed her great gratitude to him for the trouble he was about to take, and requested him to seek Dr. Jones and to bring him to see Daisy without a moment's delay. Accordingly, in a very short time the doctor of Dove's selection stood by Daisy's bedside and pronounced her to be suffering from nothing whatever but a common cold, ordered some medicine for her cough, and went away with the assurance that she would be as cheerful as ever on the morrow. But Daisy was not cheerful the next day; and day after day passed without bringing back either her sweet calm, or any of the brightness which used to

characterize her little face. Daisy possessed in a certain degree Primrose's characteristics, but she was naturally more highly strung and more nervous than her eldest sister. After a little time her cold got better, but her nightly terrors, the look of watchfulness and anxiety, grew and deepened as the time wore on. Daisy's sweet little face was altering, and Primrose at last resolved to dismiss Dr. Jones, who was doing the child no good whatever, and to consult Miss Egerton about the little one. It may be added that Primrose was able to pay Dr. Jones's account without breaking into Mr. Danesfield's money.

Miss Egerton from the very first had taken a great interest in the girls, and when Primrose went to her, and told her pitiful little story, the kind governess's eyes filled with tears.

"My dear," she said, in conclusion, "whatever is or is not the matter with that nice little sister of yours, I am sure she wants one thing, and that is change. Now, I am not so greatly taken with those rooms of yours, Primrose. You remember I paid you a visit at Christmas, and you tried to show me all the beauties of your apartments. They were neatly kept, dear, and were clean, and were furnished with some little attempt at taste, but the ceilings were very low, the window sashes fitted badly, and there was such a draught from under the door—and, my dear child, now that you have come to me in confidence I may as well tell you that I did not admire your landlady Mrs. Dove."

"She is rather fond of borrowing money, certainly," said Primrose, in a thoughtful voice, "but on the whole I believe she is good-natured—she lends Jasmine books, and yesterday she baked a cake herself for Daisy, and her husband brought it up to her."

"All the same," repeated Miss Egerton, "I don't admire the woman. I have never seen the man; but I would rather you were in a nice house. Now I have a proposal to make. I too have got some attics—they are quite as large as Mrs. Dove's, and can

soon be made as cheerful. I can also promise you that the windows will not shake, nor will a draught as keen as a knife come in from under the door. My attics, however, I grieve to say, are unfurnished. Now, my dear, what do you pay at Mrs. Dove's?"

"Twelve shillings a week," said Primrose.

"That is a great deal for such rooms; I knew you were being imposed upon. Now, I would let you have mine for five, only somehow or other you must contrive to help me to furnish them. I can give you a carpet for your sitting-room, and a warm rug for your bedroom floor, and I believe I can supply you with bedsteads and beds, and there is a famous deep cupboard in the sitting-room, and two in the bedroom where you could easily keep all your clothes; but do you think you could provide the rest of the furniture? I would help you to get it as cheap as possible and would show you how to make old things look like new; for, my dear, I've gone through the contriving experience a long time ago. Now what do you say to my plan? You will not be cheated, you will be cared for, and you will be in the house of a friend—for I want to be your friend, my dear girl."

"Oh, how kind you are!" said Primrose, her eyes glistening. "Yes, you know how to give real help—the kind of help we girls want. I should love your plan, but I must try and find out if we really have the money. How much money will it take to put in very simple furniture—just enough for us to go on with, Miss Egerton?"

"You might manage it for ten pounds, dear, perhaps even for less, if you have that sum by you; you will soon save it in your lowered rent. Go home, and think it over, Primrose. I know Daisy will be much, much better in my house than at the Doves'. Go and think about it, and let me know what you decide to-morrow."

Primrose thanked Miss Egerton, and went back to her lodgings with a full heart. This offer from so good a friend had come, she felt, at the right moment. Accept it she must; find the ten pounds she must; and once again she thought with a feeling of

satisfaction of Mr. Danesfield's letter, and felt glad that she had been able to pay Dr. Jones's bill without breaking into its contents.

She went upstairs, and instantly told Jasmine of the proposed change.

"But we can't do it," said Jasmine; "you know that we have not ten pounds to spare."

"I think," said Primrose, "that perhaps the time has come when we should open that letter Mr. Danesfield put into my hand the morning we left Rosebury. You know, Jasmine, how we determined to keep it, and return it to him unopened some day if we possibly could; but we also resolved to use it if a time of necessity really came—we resolved not to be proud about this. You know, Jasmine, it has come over me more than once lately that I have been headstrong in coming to London, only I could not endure being dependent on any one."

"Of course you could not, darling," said Jasmine. "I am certain you have done right; of course we are rather depressed now with difficulties, but I think yours was a grand plan. I have a kind of feeling, Primrose, that our worst days are over; I think it more than probable you will have a great run on your china-painting bye-and-bye, and if The Downfall and the other magazines begin to wish for my poetry, why, of course, I shall earn two or three guineas a week. I am told that a guinea is not at all a large sum for a good poem, and I have no doubt I could write two or three a week; and then my novel—it is really going to be very good. Mr. Dove says that he would recommend me to put it in a newspaper first, and then offer it to a publisher to bring out as a book. I said I would only let my first work appear in a very high-class newspaper. I never much cared for newspaper stories, but I might put up with one of the illustrated weekly papers if it paid me well. Yes, Primrose, I feel hopeful; and I have not the smallest doubt that we can earn the ten pounds for our furniture very quickly, so let us borrow the money out of Mr. Danesfield's letter. But Rose, darling, how do you know there is any money in the letter? You have never opened it and you can't see inside."

"I've never opened it, certainly," said Primrose, "but from a hint Mr. Danesfield gave me on the last day I saw him, I believe there are three five-pound notes in the letter. Of course I am not sure, but I am nearly sure."

"Well, let us get the letter and open it," said Jasmine, "and then our minds will be at rest. Oh! there is Daisy waking out of her nice nap. Daisy, darling, would you not like to go and live at Miss Egerton's? You know you are fond of Miss Egerton, and she is turning out a very kind friend. Won't you like to live always in her nice house, Daisy love?"

Daisy's little face had flushed painfully when Jasmine began to talk, now it turned white, and her lips trembled.

"Are there—are there any little birds there?" she asked.

"Oh, Eyebright, what a silly question! Primrose had she not better have her beef-tea. I think Miss Egerton keeps a canary, but I am not sure."

"I'd rather not have any little birds about," said Daisy, with great emphasis, "and I'd greatly, greatly love to go. I like Miss Egerton. When shall we go, Primrose?"

"In a day or two," said Primrose. "We have just got to buy a little furniture, and I'm going to open my trunk now, and get a letter out which I know has money in it. Yes, we'll very soon go away from here, darling, and Miss Egerton has thought of this delightful plan entirely to please you. She says you will be much, much better when you are out of this house. Oh, Daisy! how bright your eyes look, and how pleased you seem."

"Yes," said Daisy, "I am delighted; we need never walk down this street again, need we, Primrose? and we need never to have anything to say to the Doves, most particularly to Mr. Dove; not but that he's very kind, and he's—oh, yes! he's my friend; yes, of course he told me he was my friend, but we needn't ever see him again, ever, ever again, Primrose, darling?"

"Oh, Daisy! what a funny child you are! If Mr. Dove is your friend, why should you

not wish to see him? He is not my friend, however; indeed, I may say frankly that I don't like him at all. Now drink up your beef-tea, darling."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE POOR DOVES.

The next morning early Primrose opened her trunk, and unlocking a certain little morocco case, which contained her mother's letter about her lost brother, one or two trinkets which had belonged to that same mother, and Mr. Danesfield's envelope, she took the latter out of the case, and slipped it into her pocket. After breakfast she went round to see Miss Egerton.

"An old friend," she said, "in the village where we lived—I would rather not say his name—gave me this. I believe it contains money. I have a kind of idea that it contains three bank notes for £5 each. I have never opened it, and I never wish to. I meant to return it some day to this kind friend—yes, I know he meant to be very kind. This is what he has written on the outside of the envelope."

Miss Egerton read aloud—"When you want me, use me; don't return me, and never abuse me."

"There must be money here, my dear," she said.

"Yes, I know there is money," said Primrose, "for he wanted to press fifteen pounds on me when I went to say good-bye; but I was too proud to accept it, so now I think he has thought of this way of helping us. We could buy our furniture out of some of that money, Miss Egerton."

"Quite so, dear," said Miss Egerton, in a very cheerful voice. "Give me the letter, Primrose, and I will put it carefully away for you; you need not open it just at this moment. I will order just as little furniture as possible, and have it sent in to-day, and then when the bill comes you shall pay out of this envelope. I should not be

surprised if we did our furnishing for seven pounds; I thought of so many nice, cheap little expedients last night. Now go home, dear, and come to me again in the evening, and I will tell you what I have done. I have no doubt I can have your rooms ready by to-morrow; is Daisy pleased at the idea of coming?"

"Yes, she is delighted," said Primrose; "her dear little face quite changed when I spoke about it. I am sure you are right, Miss Egerton, and the change will do her lots of good."

"I mean to make your attics quite charming," said Miss Egerton. "They shall be converted into a kind of beautiful palace for my brave young workers. Yes, Primrose, I admire your spirit, and if I can do anything to aid you three girls to conquer fate, I will."

The moment her school duties were over Miss Egerton went out. She visited certain shops that she knew of—queer little, quaint, out-of-the-way shops—quite pokey little places; but from their depths she managed to extract one or two round tables, one or two easy-chairs, a few brackets, which could be easily converted into book-shelves, a certain sofa, with not too hard a back, a couple of fenders, some fire-irons, some cups and saucers, some dinner plates. These and a few more necessary articles she bought for what would have seemed a ridiculously low figure to any one who was not in her secret. The furniture was all conveyed to her neat little house that afternoon, and there it was absolutely pounced upon by her willing and hard-working servant who washed it, and scrubbed it, and rubbed it, and polished it; and, finally, Miss Egerton purchased bright chintz, and slipped it over the ugly little chairs, and covered up the antiquated old sofa, and that very night a certain amount of her work was got through, and the attics began already to look habitable.

"I mean to do a great deal more," thought Miss Egerton; "fortunately the paper is fresh and the paint clean; but I must put up two or three pictures, and I shall fill

these book-shelves with the books I used to love when I was young. My own white sheep-skin rug shall go in front of the fire. Daisy will like to see the Pink curling down into the depths of that sheep-skin. Ah, yes! the girls shall have a good time—a cosy, home-like time—in these rooms, if I can give it to them."

Then Miss Egerton went downstairs to meet Primrose with a smile about her thin lips, and a serene, beautiful light in her kind eyes.

"They are getting ready—the rooms are beginning to look charming, dear," she said. "Oh no, you must not see them yet. It is my fancy not to show them to you until they are quite ready, and I fear that won't be until the day after to-morrow; but to-morrow, Primrose, you and Jasmine and little Daisy may occupy yourselves packing your trunks."

"It all sounds delightful," said Primrose. "You cannot think, Miss Egerton, how cheered we all are at the thought of coming to you. As to Daisy, I simply should not know her—she is a changed child. I told the Doves that we were leaving as I went out this afternoon. They looked rather cross, and Mrs. Dove asked for a week's rent, instead of the usual notice. But I can manage to pay that nicely. I won't stay now, dear Miss Egerton. I'm going round to see Mr. Jones about the plates he was to try and sell for me, and then I shall hurry back to Daisy."

"Take her this fresh egg and this little sponge-loaf for her supper," said Miss Egerton. "Now good-bye, dear. God bless you, dear!"

"It is wonderful what kind friends we girls seem to meet at every turn," thought Primrose to herself, as she hurried down the dirty, sloppy street. "It would be very strange if we did not succeed with so many people wishing us well. Oh! I feel in good spirits to-night. Even if Mr. Jones has not sold the plates I shall not complain."

Mr. Jones assured his industrious pupil when she entered his dark little shop that he had "all but" got a customer for her. The customer was a wealthy old gentleman, who had a passion for collecting china, and, in special, liked the work of beginners.

The old gentleman had looked at Primrose's plates, and had said that they were very fine, and had a certain crudity or freshness about them, which, for his part, he took to; and if she had three or four more lessons he felt morally certain that he would purchase her wares.

"He's a splendid customer, but he was most explicit on the point of more lessons, Miss Mainwaring," said Mr. Jones.

"But you have found me so many 'all but' customers who just wished me to have a few more lessons, Mr. Jones," said Primrose, smiling sadly.

"None like the present man—none like the present man, my dear young lady," answered Mr. Jones, rubbing his fat hands softly together. "A man who likes crudity, and calls it freshness, ain't to be found every day of the week, Miss Mainwaring."

Primrose admitted this fact, and, bidding her teacher good evening, without committing herself to any definite promise of taking further lessons, she turned her steps homewards. Even Mr. Jones had scarcely power to depress her to-night. She felt brave and bright, and all her youth made itself manifest in her springing, elastic step. Now that she was about to leave them, she felt horrified at the thought of having lived so long with the Doves. Her sense of relief at the thought of making her home with Miss Egerton was greater than she could express.

She entered the house, and came upstairs singing a gay air under her breath.

At the door of their attics she was met by Jasmine.

"Oh, Primrose! I have been watching for you. I am so glad you have come. I cannot think what is the matter with Daisy."

"With Daisy?" echoed Primrose; "but I left her so bright two hours ago."

"She was bright an hour ago, Primrose; she was sitting on the floor with the Pink in her arms, and laughing and chatting. I put on my bonnet, and left her alone for about ten minutes while I ran round the corner to get what we wanted for our supper, and

when I came back she was sitting with her hands straight before her in her lap, and the Pink standing by her side, and looking into her face and mewing and Daisy not taking a scrap of notice, but with her eyes fixed straight in front of her in quite a dreadful way. When I went up to her and touched her, she began to shiver, and then to cry, and then she said, 'oh Jasmine! we can't go away from here—we can't; oh, we can't! We mustn't do it, Jasmine; we must stay here always, always!'"

"Poor little darling!" said Primrose. "She must have had a bad dream; certainly Miss Egerton is right, and her nerves are very much shaken and she wants change as soon as possible. Is she in the bedroom, Jasmine?"

"Yes."

"Will you cook the supper, and I will go to her?"

Jasmine nodded, and Primrose went straight into the other room. Her little sister had once more flown to the Pink for consolation; she was holding the little animal tightly in her arms, and was rocking herself backwards and forwards, and sobbing under her breath.

Primrose knelt down by her.

"What is it, my own little darling?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing, Primrose," said poor little Daisy, raising her tear-stained face; "nothing really, dear Primrose, only I don't like to leave the poor Doves."

"Oh, is that all?" said Primrose, in a very cheerful tone. "Why, Daisy, you did not at all mind leaving them a couple of days ago; but if you are really fond of them you can still see them occasionally, for we are not going far away."

"I don't wish to leave the poor Doves," repeated Daisy, bending down over the Pink, and her tears falling afresh.

"But, Daisy dear, how very funny of you to speak like this! You know, darling, you must allow Jasmine and me to decide for you; we feel that you will be much happier

and much more comfortable with Mrs. Egerton. Come, Daisy, these tears are very bad for you in your weak state. Let me wash your face and hands, and take you into the other room to a nice surprise supper sent by Miss Egerton."

But Daisy only shook her head, and bent lower over her cat, and repeated over, and over, and over:

"I can't go away from Mr. and Mrs. Dove."

Poor Primrose became really alarmed at last.

"Daisy," she said, "there must be some reason for this sudden change in your wishes. You were quite delighted at the thought of going to Miss Egerton's an hour ago, when Jasmine was here; Jasmine went out, and when she came back she found you in this state. Did you see anybody while Jasmine was out?"

"N—n—no—I mean—I mean I can't say. Don't ask me, Primrose. Oh, Primrose, I'm such a miserable little girl! but please, please, please don't take me away from the poor Doves."

Daisy cried herself nearly into hysterics, and Primrose had at last to pacify her by assuring her that they were not going away from the Doves just yet.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

All through her dreams that night Daisy sobbed and moaned. Primrose, lying awake by her side, felt more and more alarmed and concerned. What was the matter with her little sister? She felt completely puzzled. The bright little castle in the air she and Jasmine had been building; the cheerful thought of the cosy rooms which the girls were to share together in their friend's house; the dear delight of having furniture of their very own again; all these very healthful and natural dreams were fading and fading, for whenever Primrose even alluded to their leaving their present quarters

Daisy clutched her hand, and looked at her with such pleading eyes, and used hurried words of such anguished entreaty, that at last the eldest sister felt obliged to say—

"We will stay where we are, Daisy, until you wish to leave."

Then the poor little thin face relaxed into a wan smile, the lids drooped over the tired blue eyes, and the child slept more peacefully.

When Primrose felt her head, however, it was feverish, and her little hands burned to the touch. She went into the next room and called Jasmine.

"Jasmine," she said, "I am going round to Mrs. Egerton's; I am going to tell her all about Daisy's alarm and terror. I am going to consult her, for I know she means to be a good friend to us. Jasmine, promise me one thing—don't leave Daisy alone while I am out. I cannot in the least understand how it happened, but I feel sure she must have got some fright when you were out last night."

"Oh, she couldn't have," answered Jasmine—"I locked the door after me. I never leave Daisy alone without locking the door. I won't leave her now, of course, Primrose—I will take my little writing table close to her bedside, and if she wakes I can read her a part of my novel."

Primrose gave one or two more directions, and then hurried out, and Jasmine, after she had washed up the breakfast things, and put the little sitting-room perfectly tidy, moved her small writing-table into the bedroom, and sat down by Daisy's side. She was in the scribbling stage of her great work, and with her head bent low, her cheeks flushed, and her fingers much stained with ink, was writing away with great rapidity, when she was startled by some very earnest words from the little sleeper.

"Oh, no, indeed, Mr. Dove—oh no, you may be quite certain. I know where I'd go if I told a lie, of course, Mr. Dove. Yes, yes, you are my friend, and I'm your friend—yes, yes."

"Daisy, do wake up," said Jasmine; "you are talking such rubbish about Mr. Dove,

and about telling lies, and Mr. Dove being your friend—open your eyes, Daisy, and let me give you such a nice little breakfast."

"Is that you, Jasmine?" said Daisy—"I thought you were Mr. Dove—I was asleep, and I was dreaming."

"Yes, Eyebright, and talking in your dreams," said Jasmine, stooping down and kissing her.

Daisy held one of Jasmine's hands very tightly.

"Did I say anything, Jasmine—anything that you shouldn't hear—anything about—about sticky sweetmeats, Jasmine?"

"No, you silly pet, not a word. Now sit up in bed, and let me give you your breakfast. Daisy, I really do think my novel is going to be a great success. I am going to put Mr. Dove into it, and Mrs. Dove, and Tommy Dove, and our dear old Poppy, and of course ourselves. One reason why I feel so confident that the novel will be a success is that all the characters will be sketched from the life."

"But please don't put in about the Doves," said Daisy. "I think they are such dread—I mean, of course, they are my friends, particularly Mr. Dove, he's my real, real friend, but I mean that I don't think they'd come well into a book, Jasmine—I don't think they're book people a bit—book people should be princes and knights and lovely ladies, and there should be no houses, and no attics, only there might be fairy palaces, and all the little girls should be happy, and kept safe from ogres—the little girls in the books shouldn't even have an ogre for a friend. Oh, Jasmine, Jasmine! I'm so very miserable!"

Daisy again broke into weak sobs, and poor Jasmine could scarcely soothe her.

A little before noon Primrose and Miss Egerton, and a tall, grave, kind-looking man, who went by the name of Dr. Griffiths, and was a great friend of Miss Egerton's, came up the stairs.

Both Dove and his wife saw them go, and Dove shook his hand at Dr. Griffiths, as that gentleman walked up the stairs. They all three went into the attics, and the doctor had a long talk with the little patient—he felt her pulse and her head, and looked into her eyes, and tried to induce her to laugh, and did succeed in getting one little startled and half-frightened sound from the child; then he went back into the sitting-room, and had a long talk with Primrose and Miss Egerton. The upshot of this was that Miss Egerton went sorrowfully away, for the doctor absolutely forbade the girls to move from their present quarters for another week or fortnight. At the end of that time he said Daisy would be better, and might have got over the foolish fancy which now troubled her, but for the time being she must be yielded to, and at any risk kept easy in her mind.

Miss Egerton went very sorrowfully away, and upstairs to the rooms she meant to make so pretty.

"There is no special hurry about the furnishing, Bridget," she said to her servant. "Little Miss Daisy is too ill to be moved for the present."

"The men have come round to be paid for the bits of furniture, leastways, ma'am," answered Bridget, "and the foreman from the other shop is standing in the hall, and wants to know if you'll settle with him now, or if he shall call again."

"I'll settle with him now, Bridget. Dear Miss Primrose left some money in my charge yesterday morning, and I can pay the man at once."

One of the rules of Miss Egerton's life was never to leave a bill unpaid for twenty-four hours, if possible—she hated accounts, and always paid ready money for everything. She now ran downstairs, and unlocking her desk, took out Mr. Danesfield's envelope. Primrose had begged of her to open it when the bills came in, and pay for the furniture—Primrose seemed to have an absolute prejudice against unfastening that envelope herself.

Miss Egerton opened it slowly now, smiling as she did so at the quaint inscription on

the cover. A folded sheet of paper lay within—she spread the paper before her, expecting to see the three five-pound notes folded within its leaves—blankness and emptiness alone met her view—no money was inside the envelope—the whole thing was a cruel fraud. The poor governess fairly gasped for breath—there lay the bill for six pounds nineteen shillings which she had incurred, making sure that she could meet it out of Primrose's money. Primrose had spoken so confidently about her little nest-egg, and behold, she had not any!—the envelope was a fraud—the girl had been subjected to a cruel practical joke.

Miss Egerton was extremely poor—it was with the utmost difficulty she could make two ends meet. She thought hard for a minute—then her brow cleared, and she rose to her feet.

"Better I than those orphan girls!" she said, under her breath, and then she went to her desk again, and filled in a cheque for the amount.

"I can do without my winter cloak, and my black merino dress will last me for some weeks longer if I sponge it with cold tea, and re-line the tail," she said to herself. "Any little privation is better than to hurt the hearts of the orphan girls."

She paid the man, who signed the receipt, and then she let him out herself. As she did so a young man came hastily up the steps—he had a bright face, and running up to the governess, he seized both her hands in his.

"Oh, Arthur, how glad I am to see you!" said Miss Egerton.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A BLESSING.

Miss Egerton took Arthur Noel—for it was he—straight back into her little sitting-room, and sitting down on her worn little horse-hair sofa, and raising her eyes anxiously to the young man's face, she told him the story of the attic upstairs, of the

furniture she had purchased, of the girls she had meant to serve. She showed him, with hands that trembled, the envelope with its queer inscription, and she unfolded for his benefit the empty sheet of blank paper. She told her story at once without any reservation, even relating with a little hasty blush how she felt obliged to pay for the furniture herself.

Perhaps Arthur Noel was the only person in the world to whom she would have made this confession; for she was one of those who made it a practice never to let her right hand know what her left did, but she had known Arthur from his boyhood, and he was one of those men who inspire trust and sympathy at a glance.

He listened to the story with interest, and even excitement—he was naturally enthusiastic, but even Miss Egerton had never seen him so perturbed and so moved as he was at present.

"I know about those girls," he said at last; "what are their names?—I am sure I know about them. Nay, let me ask you a question—Is not one called Jasmine? Has she not a piquant face, and very soft and yet bright eyes, and a great lot of curly brown hair? Yes, Miss Egerton, I am sure the girls you speak of are in a certain sense my girls; for if they are the ones I mean I took them under my protection long ago."

"Their name is Mainwaring. My dear Arthur, where and how have you met them? My dear boy, I fully believe, I have always believed, in your good intentions, in your wish to do your utmost for every one; but if you have really known Primrose, and Jasmine and Daisy, and have taken them, as you say, under your protection, I must say that of late you have lost sight of them—you have not been as kind as you generally are to people in difficulties, for I never met three more absolutely friendless girls than these."

"It was a good Providence sent me here this morning," said Noel. "You are quite right, Miss Egerton; I did lose sight of the children. I tried to follow them, but they managed to hide themselves most effectually. Think of my coming up to see you

this morning, with a message from Mrs. Ellsworthy, and finding that our lost lambs are all but safe in your kind fold. How relieved my dear mother-friend will be!"

"Mrs. Ellsworthy is the kindest and best of women," said Miss Egerton; "I will receive your message presently, Arthur, but you puzzle me more and more when you tell me that she too knows my girls. I came across them quite accidentally. They called to ask me to give Jasmine lessons in English composition, and I took a fancy to them, and, in particular, felt drawn to the little one—for she reminded me of—, but no matter! The girls have been in and out of my house ever since. I saw that they were fearfully independent, but in many trivial ways I tried to help them. Well, Arthur, it is most surprising—it is altogether incomprehensible, but never during the months we have been seeing each other daily have they alluded to you or the Ellsworthys. They seemed perfectly unconstrained, and chatted many times of their cottage home in the country, but they never spoke of the Ellsworthys."

"They would not be likely to do," answered Noel. "I think, Miss Egerton, I must now tell you Mrs. Ellsworthy's and my side of the story."

Certainly Miss Egerton appeared to neglect her duties that morning; fortunately, her school had not yet re-opened, but Bridget waited for orders, and the tradesman left the house unattended to. Bridget knew that Miss Egerton was always greatly taken up with Mr. Noel, and she had to admit that he was a bonny-looking young man with a pleasant face; but Bridget hitherto had given her mistress credit for always putting duty before pleasure. What, therefore, did her present neglect of household management mean?

Arthur Noel had a long story to tell, and Miss Egerton listened, weighing each point, and not giving too undue sympathy to either party. Noel was of course enthusiastic in Mrs. Ellsworthy's cause, and announced his intention of going to see her that very day.

"She is in town," he said; "and if you give me the girls' address I can bring her to

them this afternoon."

But here Miss Egerton laid her thin hand on the young man's arm.

"No, Arthur, I won't betray their secret, poor little dears! they may have been headstrong, and silly, and rash, and, poor children, they may fail utterly, but they have not failed yet by any means, and if they wish not to be tempted into a luxurious and dependent life, even by the kindest friend, I, for one, will stand by them. You have come on me by accident, Arthur, and have learned about the girls by accident; you have no right to tell what you have thus discovered. I have studied those girls' characters and I know that Primrose at least would die of a broken heart if her independence were taken from her. No, Arthur; if you wish really to help them you must put them in the way of earning their own living, and in this manner the Ellsworthys can doubtless assist, for they are rich, and have influence."

Then Miss Egerton and her guest had another long and earnest discussion, at the end of which time a compromise was arrived at. Noel might tell the Ellsworthys that he and Miss Egerton knew where the girls lived, and the Ellsworthys might give in-direct help by aiding him in his efforts to find suitable work for Primrose and Jasmine—he too, could be their open and acknowledged friend, and he arranged with Miss Egerton to call and see them that very afternoon.

Finally, Miss Egerton again drew his attention to the envelope, which was only given to mock, as it contained nothing but blank paper.

Noel examined it carefully.

"This must have been given to the girls by Mr. Danesfield, the banker at Rosebury," he said. "I know him well; he is the last person who would play them such a trick. Don't you think, Miss Egerton it is quite possible that this envelope may have been opened, and the money removed?"

"But the envelope does not look tampered with," answered Miss Egerton, turning it round, and examining it carefully.

"Thieves are very clever," answered Noel. "It is easy to open an envelope by holding it over steaming water."

"But Primrose always kept this letter locked up in her trunk."

"Well, I will settle the point by writing direct, and in strict confidence, to Mr. Danesfield. In the meantime let us say nothing to Miss Mainwaring; and you will let me pay for the furniture, kind friend."

But Miss Egerton's face flushed brightly, and she drew back a step or two.

"No, my dear boy, I cannot. Since I drew that cheque I have felt strangely happy. I think this very small act of self-denial will bring me a blessing, and I don't wish to be deprived of it. Good-bye, Arthur; come to see me again at three, and I will take you to my girls."

CHAPTER XXX.

VOICE OF THE PRINCE.

Daisy felt quite certain that the Prince had come. Jasmine greeted her old friend of St. Paul's Cathedral with sparkling eyes and effusive words of welcome. Primrose, too, was very pleased to see any one who brought such a contented look into Daisy's little face, for the child asked herself to sit in his arms, and laying her head on his shoulder, she listened with pleasure to some wonderful fairy stories which he related. While Noel was by, Daisy seemed quite to forget her nervous fancies—she even spoke confidentially of ogres who tried to make themselves friendly, and she asked Arthur, with a very puzzled, anxious face, if a little girl, who was so unfortunate as to have an ogre for a friend, could ever get rid of him.

"Oh, yes; he might turn into an enemy," answered Arthur.

But here poor Daisy shuddered violently, and turned very white.

"No, no," she said; "not into an enemy, never into an enemy, dear Mr. Arthur."

"What matter is it to you, little maid?" answered Arthur cheerily, though he regarded her with very keen observation. "There is no ogre going to trouble you as either friend or enemy; If he does he will have to meet me. I am the Prince, you know, and my mission in life is to slay the wicked ogres."

"Oh! but his poor wife and his children!" half sobbed Daisy; "couldn't you lock him up in a tower, dear Prince?"

Arthur smiled, and gradually managed to lead the child's thoughts into another direction. He was already gaining the greatest possible influence over her, and he managed, on the occasion of his second visit, to coax her to let him carry her across to Miss Egerton's for a couple of hours. Dove met them as Arthur was carrying the child away, and he first scowled, and then smiled obsequiously. Daisy turned deadly white, and Noel felt that she trembled.

DOVE MET THEM.

DOVE MET THEM. Palace B.

"I'm coming back to-night, Mr. Dove," she called out, in a shaky little voice; and Dove answered—

"Pleased to hear it, missy; the attics would be lonesome without you, missy."

"Daisy," whispered Noel, "tell me something—is Dove the ogre?"

"Oh, don't, don't, Mr. Prince!" answered back the child. "No, no, of course not; why, he's only poor Mr. Dove—a friend of mine."

When Daisy reached Miss Egerton's and found herself seated in that lady's cosy little drawing-room, with sponge-cakes ad libitum to eat, and Noel sitting by and willing to give up all his time to her benefit, she cheered up wonderfully; a faint color came to her white little cheeks, and Miss Egerton, as she passed the open drawing-room door, heard one or two silvery peals of laughter coming from her lips.

"Bless the child!" thought the kind woman; "how much better she is when she is out

of that house. What nice influence that good fellow, Arthur, has over her. I do trust the silly little one will soon give up her fancies—for they surely can be nothing but fancies—and come to live with me."

But when the twilight fell Daisy ceased to laugh, the anxious and troubled look returned to her face, and after a time she said to Arthur, in her pretty coaxing way—

"Take me home now, please, Mr. Prince."

Two days afterwards Noel called at the girls' lodgings Daisy alone was in, but to all his entreaties she now turned a deaf ear. No, she did not want to go out; she would rather stay in her own dear, nice old attics; she was never so happy anywhere as in her own attics. She was very fond of Miss Egerton, but she did not think she would like to live with her. Miss Egerton kept a bird, and Daisy had a great dislike to birds.

"Please, Mr. Prince," she said, in conclusion, "stay with me here for an hour or two, and tell me a beautiful story."

Noel was rather clever at making up impromptu stories, and he now proceeded to relate a tale with a moral.

"There was a kind lady who had prepared lovely guest-chambers—beautiful they were, and worthy of a palace."

Here Noel stopped, and looked hard at his little listener.

"Do you know why they were so lovely, little maid?"

"No; please tell me, Mr. Prince. Oh, I am sure this is going to be a real true fairy tale—how delicious!" and Daisy leaned back on her sofa with a sigh of content.

"The rooms were beautiful, Daisy," continued Arthur "because the walls were papered with Goodness and the chairs, and the tables, and the carpets, and the sofas, and the thousand-and-one little knick-knacks, were placed in the rooms by Self-Denial, and the windows were polished very brightly by Love herself, and she kept the key which opened the chamber doors."

"How sweet!" said Daisy.

"Yes; there were two rooms, and they were very sweet. To live there meant to get into an abode of peace. As to ogres, they would fall down dead on the threshold of such rooms. There were only two, and they were up high in a small house, and without the gilding and the glory which I spoke of they would have seemed humble enough, but to those who knew their secret, and what their owner had done for her expected guests, they appeared a very Palace Beautiful. Now, Daisy, I must tell you something so sad. The rooms were ready, but the guests did not arrive. Three guests were expected, but the kind lady who had prepared the rooms, who had papered them with Goodness, and furnished them with Self-Denial, and brightened them with Love, waited and longed for her visitors in vain.

"Two of the visitors were most anxious to come, but one—a little one—although she looked very gentle and had a sweet expression and blue eyes, and seemed quite the sort of little girl who would not willingly hurt a fly, held back. It never entered into her head that she was selfish, and was making two or three people who loved her both anxious and unhappy. She preferred to live in rooms which, by comparison, were like dungeons; for the owners had never put Love into them, and had never thought of Self-Denial in connection with them. There, Daisy-flower, I have done. It seems a pity that the little girl should have been so selfish, does it not?"

"But how does the story end, Mr. Arthur? You have really only just begun."

"I only know the beginning, Daisy," said Noel, as he rose to leave. "I have not an idea whether that Palace Beautiful will ever receive its visitors, whether that kind lady will ever be made happy, or whether that little girl will ever cease to be selfish."

A few moments afterwards Noel went away, and poor Daisy turned her face to the wall and wept.

Of course, the very obvious moral had hit her hard, poor little maid! Oh! if she could really only confide in Arthur—he was so nice and strong, and he looked so

contemptuously at Mr. Dove that day when he was carrying Daisy across the road to Miss Egerton's.

"I don't believe he would be afraid of Mr. Dove," she whispered softly, under her breath. "Oh dear! why am I so terribly frightened? Why does he make my heart beat? and why do I shake so when I see him? Well, I'll never tell about his bringing me up the sticky sweetmeats—of course I'll not tell. I promised I wouldn't; it would be dreadful to break one's promise. Of course I know where people go who break their promises. No, I promised Mr. Dove, and I must always, and always, and always keep my word; but I did not promise him that I'd stay here. He wanted me to, and I just had it on the tip of my tongue, for I was dreadfully frightened, but he heard a noise, and he went away. I'm so glad I didn't promise, because the Prince says I should go and live in the Palace Beautiful. He thinks I'm a selfish little girl. Oh dear! how terrified I shall be, but I won't be a selfish little girl, and keep Primrose and Jasmine away from the Palace, and break the kind lady's heart. I must try and write a very private little note to Mr. Dove, and tell him that though I am going away I'll always and always keep my word about the sweeties, and I'll always be his truest of friends, although I do fear him more than anything in the world."

Here Primrose came in, and poor little Daisy roused herself, and tried to talk cheerfully.

"Primrose," she said, "do you mind my writing a letter which nobody is to see?"

Primrose laughed.

"You funny pet!" she said; "if no one is to see the letter why do you trouble to write it?"

"I only mean, Primrose," continued Daisy, "that you are not to see it, nor Jasmine, nor Miss Egerton, nor Mr. Noel. It is to—to somebody; but you are not to be curious, Primrose, nor to ask any questions. It's a most terribly important letter, and when it's written I'm going to put it in the post myself. I'll go out with you, and you

must turn your back when I drop it into the pillar-box. You'll be very happy when it's written, Primrose, and I'm doing it for you and Jasmine, and because I won't be a selfish little girl."

Primrose stooped down and kissed Daisy.

"You may write your letter and post it," she said, "and I'll try not to be the least bit curious, Eyebright. Now sit down and write away, you have a nice quiet hour before Jasmine comes in to tea."

"So I have," answered Daisy; "thank you, Primrose. Please don't say anything to me when I'm writing."

Then Daisy in her corner blotted her fingers, and brought a deep flush to her little pale face, and ruined several sheets of note-paper, all of which she carefully tore up to the smallest fragments. At last an epistle, over which she sighed and trembled, and even dropped tears, was finished. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR FRIEND, MR. DOVE,—I always and always will be most true to you. I would not be such a wicked little girl as to break my word for anything I'm going always to keep it, and tortures, even the Inquisition, and even the rack, wouldn't get it out of me. Did you ever hear of the rack, Mr. Dove? but perhaps you had better not know. Yes, I'll always keep my word, the word that I promised, and no one shall ever know about you and me and the sticky sweetmeats; but I won't keep the word that I didn't promise. You remember how you wanted me to give you another word that I'd always stay here, and keep Primrose and Jasmine here, instead of letting them go and going with them to the Palace Beautiful. I almost promised you, for you looked so fierce, and your eyes were so bloodshot, and cruel, and terrible, and I'd great work to keep remembering that you were really my friend; but I'm so glad I did not give you that word too, for now I know that I'd have done very wrong. A Prince has come to me, Mr. Dove, and told me I am very selfish to try to keep my sisters out of the Palace Beautiful. He says the walls are covered with Goodness and the

furniture is put there by Self-Denial, and the windows are shining because Love has polished them up. He says there's no Love and no Goodness here, and he calls your rooms dungeons. He's a very, very strong Prince, and he kills ogres—he even kills ogres who are friends to little girls. Please, Mr. Dove, this is to say that I'm going away to the Palace Beautiful, and that I'll always keep my word about the sweeties.

"Your true little friend, DAISY."

Then Daisy fastened her letter, and directed it to Mr. Dove, No. 10, Eden Street, and she asked Primrose for a stamp, and then she and her eldest sister went out, and Primrose turned her back while Daisy dropped the letter into the nearest pillar-box.

The moment this was done the child gave a little skip, and caught Primrose's hand, and squeezed it hard, and said, in an excited voice—

"Now I've done it! I'm not going to be the selfish little girl who breaks people's hearts. Primrose, darling let us hurry back to the dungeons, and put all our things together, so that we may reach the Palace Beautiful to-night."

Poor Primrose, who was not in Daisy's secret, and knew nothing of Arthur Noel's allegory, was conscious of a momentary wild fear that her little sister had taken leave of her senses; but she soon began to see meaning in Daisy's words, and was only too glad to yield to the child's caprice at once.

That very night, therefore, Miss Egerton's nice rooms were occupied, and that good lady laid her head on her own pillow with a light and thankful heart.

Fortunately for Daisy, Dove was out while the packing was going on, and only Mrs. Dove, with a very black scowl on her face, saw the girls drive away in a four-wheeler. She refused to say good-bye to them, and was heard to mutter that the "ongratitude of some folks was past enduring."

"Here, Dove," she said, when late that night her lord and master came in, "those pretty young ladies as you thought so much of—'the attics' I called them, and always will call them—well, they're gone. They had a four-wheeler, and off they've gone,

bag and baggage. For my part I ain't sorry, for now that them attics are painted up and cleaned, which they did out of their own money, I may be able to rise my rent. Those young ladies and I couldn't have kept together much longer. Disobliging, I call them—disobliging, and shabby, and mistrustful; it was only this morning I asked Miss Mainwaring for the loan of seven and sixpence, and she up and said, 'I'm sorry I can't oblige you, Mrs. Dove.' Those kind of young ladies don't suit me, and I'm thankful they're gone. Why, Dove, how you do stare!—there's a letter waiting for you on the table."

Dove took up his letter and read it carefully once or twice; after his second reading he put it into his pocket, and turned to his wife—

"They've gone round to Miss Egerton's; isn't that so, my love?"

"Who do you mean by 'they,' Dove?"

"The three young ladies, of course."

"Oh, I suppose so; but I neither know nor care—I wash my hands of them from this day forward!"

"Well, then, look here, Mrs. Dove, my love," said the husband, "I don't wash my hands of them—no, not by no means. It's all right if they're gone to Miss Egerton's—there are trap-doors in the roof at Miss Egerton's; I know the build of the house. There are trap-doors in the roof, and quarter-day is coming on, Mrs. Dove, my only love!"

"Law, Dove! you have a most startling way of saying them poetic lines," answered his wife.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A "CONTINUAL READER."

A few days after the girls were comfortably settled in their new quarters Primrose

went out. She went out all alone, for by this time London streets and London ways were familiar to her. Neatly and very quietly dressed, with the usual serene light on her sweet face, and that dignity about her whole bearing which prevented any one from ever being rude to her, she went, not to her china-painting as usual, but simply to take exercise in the London streets.

The fact was, Primrose wanted to be alone—she wanted to think out a problem. She was beginning to be perplexed, and even slightly alarmed. Her alarm was not caused at present by anything in connection with Daisy, for Daisy seemed almost bright and well again; but money matters were not too prosperous with the young housekeeper, the life of independence she had hoped to attain for herself and her sisters seemed to recede from her view day by day—the china-painting brought in no apparent results; Mr. Jones never did anything except "all but" get customers—the quarter's allowance from Mr. Danesfield looked smaller and more inadequate to Primrose the more her experience in expenses grew, and now something about Miss Egerton added to her cares. It seemed to Primrose that Miss Egerton was holding back something—she had always been frank and open with the girls, but when Primrose asked her how much their furniture had cost, and whether she had opened Mr. Danesfield's letter to pay for it the good lady's brow had grown troubled, and she had replied—

"I am busy to-day—I will go fully into the matter presently, Primrose;" but when morning after morning Miss Egerton was still too busy to go into the question, Primrose began to have nameless little fears, and had to scold herself for being fanciful and nervous.

On this afternoon she walked quickly, and without being herself aware of it she presently found herself in the neighborhood of Regent's Park, and at last not very far from Penelope Mansion. She was thinking hard, and paying little attention to any of the objects that met her eyes, when she was suddenly pulled up short by a round and

hearty voice, a fat hand was laid on her shoulder, and she found herself face to face with Mrs. Dredge.

"Well, my dear, how are you, Miss Mainwaring? Oh, yes, I'm delighted to see you. You did give us the slip, you and your pretty sisters. I don't think Mrs. Flint quite liked it; we all questioned her, me, and Miss Slowcum, and Mrs. Mortlock, and we said, 'At any rate give us their address, Mrs. Flint—we take an interest in them—they are pretty-spoken young ladies, and they were a credit to the establishment.' But Mrs. Flint only frowned and bit her lips, and colored. Then Mrs. Mortlock put her foot in it as far as Miss Slowcum was concerned, for she said 'I'm sorry the girls from the country have departed, and that they found us so disagreeable that they had to do it unbeknown and quiet, for it was a real pleasure for ancient females like ourselves to have young and bonny creatures about us.'

"Miss Slowcum got very stiff at this, for she apes youth, my dear, in a way that's past belief, and Mrs. Mortlock had her little fling on purpose. Well, dear, and how are you? You look thin to what you were, and a bit pale. How is that pretty little sister of yours who wanted the cheap lodgings, that was to be so clean you might eat on the floor?"

"We are all fairly well, Mrs. Dredge," replied Primrose, when she could edge in a word—for Mrs. Dredge was extremely voluble—"we are fairly well, only Daisy has been suffering from cold. We have got clean rooms too, thank you, Mrs. Dredge."

"Well now, dear, I'm glad to hear it; that pretty child amused me when she spoke of cheapness and cleanliness going hand in hand. Bless her little heart! little she knew.

"We have learned a great many things we knew nothing about six months ago Mrs. Dredge," answered Primrose, a tinge of sadness in her voice. "Yes, I am very glad to see you again—please, remember me to all the ladies at Penelope Mansion."

"Oh, my dear, they'll be glad to hear I met you—even Miss Slowcum will, though she's a little bitter on the subject of age; and as to that poor Sarah Maria, or Sarah

Martha—I forget which she is, only I know she's Sarah, with something tacked to the end of it—why, she'll be fairly skipping with delight. That poor girl, she just worships the ground you three young ladies walk on."

"Oh, do give our dear love to Poppy," said Primrose tears springing to her eyes.

Those sudden tears did not escape the notice of fat, good-humored Mrs. Dredge.

"I hope you're getting on comfortably in every way, dear," she said, "money matters and all. I had sore worries myself in the money line until poor Dredge made his fortune in the chandlery business. My dear, I was almost forgetting to tell you that we've had an affliction at the Mansion."

"I'm very sorry," began Primrose.

"Yes, dear, and it's an affliction which is likely to continue, and to grow heavier. It's poor Mrs. Mortlock, dear—I'm afraid she's losing her sight, and very troublesome she'll be, and a worry to us all when it's gone, for poor woman, she has a passion for politics that's almost past bearing. Miss Slowcum and me, we take turns to read her the papers now, but though our throats ache, and we're as hoarse as ravens, we don't content her. Mrs. Mortlock is looking out for what she is pleased to call a 'continual reader,' dear, and what I'm thinking is that perhaps you or your sister would like to try for the post—I believe you'd suit her fine, and she can pay well, for she's fairly made of money."

Primrose colored. To read to Mrs. Mortlock was about the last occupation she would have chosen, but the thought of the purse at home which was getting so sadly light, and the feeling that after all her efforts she might never do much in the china-painting line, caused her to reflect anxiously.

"May I think about it and let you know, Mrs. Dredge?"

"No, no, my dear, not by any means, for she has advertised, and they are pouring in. Poor Sarah Susan is almost off her head answering the door to them. Stout readers and thin readers, old readers and young readers, they're all flying to the post, as if

there were nothing in life so delightful as being 'continual reader' of politics to poor Mrs. Mortlock. She ought to have been suited long ago, but I've a strong hope that she isn't, for she's as fidgety and particular as if she were a countess. Your best chance, dear, is to come straight home with me—we'll see Mrs. Mortlock on the spur of the moment, and try and arrange it all."

In this way Primrose obtained her first situation, for Mrs. Mortlock was glad to feel her soft young hand, and her gentle and refined tones had an instant and soothing effect on the poor lady's irritable nerves.

"My dear," she said, "what with rasping voices, and piping voices, and droning voices, to say nothing of voices that were more like growls than anything else, I felt nearly demented. Yes, Miss Mainwaring, this is a sore affliction that has befallen me, and I knew there was nothing before me but the services of a 'continual reader,' for poor Mrs. Dredge, though she did her best, was decidedly thick in her utterance; and Miss Slowcum, oh dear! the affectations of Miss Slowcum were quite beyond me, besides our differing altogether in politics—me holding for Gladstone, and she fairly hating the poor man. You'll do very well, Miss Mainwaring, and I hope you'll study your papers well while you're at home, so that you may know what you are reading about, and read intelligent accordingly. I always like both sides of the question, which was my poor husband's habit, for he was a very intelligent man, Miss Mainwaring. And then I like my bit of gossip and my Court news. I adore my Queen, Miss Mainwaring, and it is a real bonâ fide pleasure to learn when and where she drives abroad. You'll come, please, in the morning, and set to work at your continual reading. Salary, fifteen shillings a week certain. Now, now, you needn't hesitate at taking what I call a lofty salary, for it always was my way to pay down handsome. There now, that's settled. Shake hands, dear; good-bye till the morning. Sarah Maria, you needn't show up no more of the 'continual readers,' for I believe I have made a bargain with this young lady."

"Oh, Miss Primrose!" said poor Poppy, as she showed her out, "I am more than thankful that you are coming here, miss—that's for my sake, miss, though I'm dreadful afraid you'll suffer yourself. I'm awful afraid you'll get muddled in your head, miss, for as to mine, it has swam away long ago. I begin not to know in the least who I am, miss. Poppy, why it ain't nowhere! only I'm Sarah, with all the other words in the dictionary tacked on to it. I don't mind it now; they say folks can get accustomed to anything, so I don't mind being Sarah, and everything else too, only it has a very swimming effect on the head, Miss Primrose. Oh, my darling young lady! do ask Miss Jasmine and Miss Daisy to let me come and see them."

"Yes, Poppy, you shall come and see us all again, if you will only keep our little secret, for just at present we don't want the people at home to know where we are; and remember, Poppy dear, that you are always Poppy to us three girls."

"I'll hold on to that," said poor Poppy, "when my head's fairly reeling. I'll clutch on to it, and hold firm. Poppy, which means a tare, I am, to my own dear young ladies. Oh dear! oh dear! they're calling me—it's Sarah Matilda this time. Good-bye until to-morrow, dear Miss Primrose."

CHAPTER XXXII.

JASMINE BEGINS TO SOAR.

When Primrose went home and told her sisters and Miss Egerton what she had done, Jasmine's eyes had grown first bright, and then misty.

"To be continual reader to Mrs. Mortlock!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Primrose, it is an act of self-denial to you—it is, isn't it? Own at once that you were very brave to do it, darling."

"I don't think so," said Primrose; "there may be a certain little amount of drudgery in it, and perhaps I would rather have orders to paint beautiful roses and lilies on china

plates, but you see, Jasmine, this work has been sent to me—I think God sent it, and I must not refuse it because perhaps I would like something else better."

"That's bravely spoken, Primrose," said Miss Egerton who was sitting by, for she often spent odd half-hours with the girls. "Look at everything in the same spirit, my love; try to see God's hand in all the little events, and you will have a brave life and a happy one."

"And a successful, I hope," added Jasmine. "Miss Egerton, how awful it would be if we girls were to fail!"

"My Prince says," here interrupted Daisy, "that whenever we do a good thing and a right thing, we bring something fresh and lovely into our Palace Beautiful. Isn't it nice to think that dear old Primrose has done this?"

"The money, too, will be of great help," added Primrose. "Why, Jasmine, we may even be able to save a little."

Thus encouraged, Primrose commenced her duties, and though her throat ached—and she certainly found the continual reading of politics, interspersed with very sharp discussions on the part of Mrs. Mortlock, anything but agreeable—she did not give way.

Miss Egerton was pleased to see Primrose so bright, and was glad to know she was really earning something; and Jasmine and Daisy prepared the cheeriest welcomes possible for her evening after evening on her return.

Jasmine, however, by no means intended Primrose to be the only one who was to bring assistance to the household purse.

Jasmine knew that they had all come up to London on purpose to be educated, or to educate themselves, sufficiently to earn their livings. She considered that six months' experience of the ups and downs of London life might bear fruit in her case as well as in her sister's.

Jasmine was supposed to be having her style formed by Miss Egerton's daily tuitions, but Miss Egerton's words of encouragement over her pupil's productions were decidedly meagre; and Jasmine, though she loved her, had long ago confided to Daisy that she considered Miss Egerton's manner had a damping effect on enthusiasm.

One bitterly cold March day Jasmine had been sitting for hours scribbling away at her novel. Daisy petted the cat, looked over some well-known picture-books, and finally sank back into the recesses of one of the most comfortable chairs in the room and began to think about the Prince.

"Don't go to sleep, Daisy," called out Jasmine presently. "I'm coming over in a minute to consult you."

Nothing could possibly be more gratifying to Daisy than to know that Jasmine wished to ask her advice. She accordingly roused herself, ceased to think of the Prince, and said, in a very bright little voice—

"I'll help you the best I can, Jasmine."

"It's just this," said Jasmine, dashing down her pen on the top of her manuscript, and causing thereby a great blot—"it's just this, Daisy; I've got to do something, and you have got to help me."

"Oh, I'm sure if I can," said little Daisy, still in that slightly patronizing voice, for the little maid's head was almost turned by being thus appealed to. "Is it to sew on buttons for you, Jasmine? for though I don't like sewing on buttons, I'll do it, or even—even—I'll darn your stockings, dear Jasmine."

Jasmine laughed.

"It's nothing of that kind, Eyebright; it's something much, much more important. You know, Daisy, what we came up to London for—why, of course you know why we left all our dear friends, and are living in about the very dullest part of London—of course you know?"

"Was it?" said Daisy, looking dubious; "was it—I never could quite make out—because Primrose did not like Mrs. Ellsworthy?"

"Oh, you silly, silly little thing! What a dreadful thing to get into your head, Daisy-flower! I did think you knew why we came to town, and gave everything up, and made ourselves so miserable."

"We did make ourselves miserable," sighed Daisy, "and I had to take Mr. Dove for my friend. I like to have him for my friend, though. What was the reason, please, Jasmine?"

"We came to London for the glorious privilege of being independent," chanted Jasmine, in a majestic voice. "Daisy, I'm going to be it. I'm going to fling my shackles to the winds. I'm going to soar."

"It sounds lovely," said Daisy. "You always were a poet, Jasmine, and I suppose poets do talk like that; but how are you going to be independent, Jasmine?"

"I'm going to earn money, little woman. Miss Egerton has kept me in shackles. I've worn them patiently, but now I burst the bonds. Daisy, I have formed a little theory. I believe girls are sent into the world with a strong bias in a particular direction. You see, it always did seem to be meant that dear Primrose was to be a companion, or secretary, of some sort; for Mrs. Ellsworthy wanted her to be Mr. Ellsworthy's secretary, and to write his letters for him. She would not be that, even though it was her bent, and now she's got to accept something far worse; for it really must be dreadful to be 'continual reader' to poor old Mrs. Mortlock. Now, Daisy, what I say is this—there's no use in wasting time or money looking after things which don't suit us. Primrose was meant to be a secretary or continual reader, and so she has to be one; and I have always been meant to belong to the rather higher order of novelist or poet, and there's no use in my being damped any longer by Miss Egerton. I don't mean to be conceited, but I know that I have got the flutterings of a poet's wings in my soul, and soar I must."

Jasmine looked very pretty while she was speaking, and little Daisy admired her high-flown words, and fully believed in her genius.

"Do soar, Jasmine, darling," she said; "I have not a notion how you are to do it, but do begin at once. It will make these rooms more than ever like a Palace Beautiful if you take to soaring in them."

"I've nearly finished my novel," said Jasmine; "and I've also written a poem. It is called the 'Flight of the Beautiful,' and is in seven parts. Each part would take up two or three pages of a magazine. To-morrow, Daisy dear, I am going to take my novel and poem into the market. I shall offer them to the highest bidders. I won't send them by post, for I always notice in books that, when gifted authors send their contributions by post, they are declined with thanks, because they aren't read. I am going to take my own manuscripts to the publishers, Daisy, and I shall propose to them to read aloud a few extracts."

"You can't be at all shy if you do that, Jasmine," said Daisy, looking in a rather awe-struck way at her sister.

"Shy?" echoed Jasmine. "If one feels it, one has only to get over it. Is that the way to conquer difficulties, Daisy?—just to be baffled by a little nervous feeling. No, I really want to fill the purse, and I also wish to give the publishers what I am sure they must be always looking for; for I have looked in vain, month after month, in several magazines, and nowhere have I seen three or four pages of continual blank verse. I suppose they can't get it, poor things! but they will in my 'Flight of the Beautiful!'"

"I think blank verse a little dull," said Daisy, softly, and half under her breath; but, when Jasmine frowned, she added hastily, "Of course you're splendidly brave, dear Jasmine; and who'll go with you to the publisher's when you do go?"

"I've been considering that," said Jasmine; "and I think I'll take Poppy. Poppy is to have a whole holiday on Tuesday next, because her quarter's wages are due, and I'll

ask her to come with me. She'd enjoy it—Poppy would—and very likely in the evening I'll be able to tell you and Primrose that I've made my first success. Oh, how happy and how proud I shall be!"

A few minutes afterwards Jasmine went out, and Daisy wondered solemnly if her bent in life was to keep on friendly terms with Mr. Dove.

"I'm very glad I took the Prince's advice," she said to herself. "I'm much, much happier since I came to the Palace Beautiful, and I don't think Mr. Dove minds much, for he has never answered my letter. Oh dear! perhaps I was too much afraid of Mr. Dove. I am so glad the Prince explained to me about being a selfish little girl. And, oh dear! there is the Prince!"

Arthur Noel often came to see Daisy. He came in the evenings at an hour when the elder girls were often away, and then Daisy sat on his knee, and chatted to him volubly.

This afternoon she told him about both her sisters.

"Is having a bent the same as destiny, Mr. Noel?" she inquired anxiously. "Jasmine says she has a bent, and she must follow it, and no one can prevent her."

"The bent can be guided, Daisy," said Arthur; but he looked puzzled and seemed uncomfortable at the little girl's news. The Ellsworthy's had begged of Noel to promote the interests of these girls. He was only too anxious to do so, but he found his task by no means an easy one. What wild imprudence would poor little Jasmine commit if she was not aided and helped; surely Primrose's work was too uncongenial for her long to continue it. Why did the girls persistently reject the kindnesses of those who would help them? Where was it all to end? Their money could only hold out to a certain date. How fragile Daisy looked, even now; had anybody been cruel to the little one? What was the mystery about Mr. Danesfield's letter? and above all things, why did not Mr. Danesfield reply to a long epistle which Arthur had sent him some weeks ago?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VISITING THE PUBLISHERS.

Jasmine had begged of Daisy to keep her secret from Primrose's ears. She said that half her pleasure in bringing home money for her contributions would be destroyed if Primrose knew about it beforehand. Jasmine hoped that if she were very successful she might be able to buy a little present apiece for both her sisters. Primrose badly needed some new gloves, and Jasmine pictured to herself how her eldest sister's sweet eyes would fill with tears, and how touched she would be by her little offering. Yes, certainly Daisy must keep her secret faithfully.

On Tuesday morning, as Primrose was preparing to start for Penelope Mansion, Jasmine announced her intention of accompanying her. Her face had a slightly guilty look as she made this suggestion; and Daisy quite blushed, and kept her eyes fixed on her plate, and wondered how Jasmine would smuggle a large roll of manuscript out of the house. Primrose immediately guessed that there was a little mystery afloat, but she was not a curious girl, and was only too pleased to see that her sisters had something to interest them.

"You can walk with me if you like, Jasmine," she said; "but it is a rather dull morning, and I fear it will rain."

"Torrents wouldn't keep me in to-day," said Jasmine. Then fearing she had betrayed herself, she added hastily, "I want to see Poppy. Poppy is to have a holiday to-day, and I want to take her out."

Primrose made no further objection, and Jasmine having packed her manuscript into a small leather bag, and having given Daisy a somewhat solemn farewell, the two girls set out.

When they arrived at the Mansion Primrose went upstairs at once to Mrs. Mortlock's sitting-room, but Jasmine began to enter into an earnest conversation with Poppy.

"Are you quite ready, Poppy? Oh, you've got your working dress on still; how tiresome!"

"I won't be a minute changing, Miss Jasmine; the hours for the working maid's holiday are from ten to ten, and I won't be denied them. The clock has just gone ten, miss, and not another stroke of work shall Aunt Flint get out of me to-day, miss."

"Quite right, Poppy," said Jasmine; "run upstairs now, and be as quick as possible, and I will wait for you in the hall."

Poppy did not need to be told to hasten; she flew up to the small attic which she occupied at the top of the house, and made a hasty and, she hoped, a brilliant toilet. She had been thinking for weeks of this day; for since Primrose had come to Mrs. Mortlock's Jasmine had promised Poppy that she was to spend her holiday with her, and Poppy had been getting ready her toilet with a view to the occasion.

Her dress, after all, was only an ordinary and somewhat shabby brown one, but she had adorned her tight-fitting black jacket with a sky-blue bow, which hung down in front with what she considered "truly hartistic folds." Poppy's hat, however, was her master-piece; it was a rather small white straw hat, trimmed with dark blue velvet, and adorned with a scarlet tip and a bunch of yellow daffodils.

Poppy's black eyes gleamed mischievously under the shade of this brilliant hat, and her cheeks rivalled the scarlet tip in their color.

With her little purse clasped tightly in her hand she tripped downstairs and joined Jasmine.

Jasmine was too excited and too eager to be off to notice Poppy's attire particularly, and when her hat and general get-up were received without a comment the little maid whispered to herself, "It's only another of the bitings; life's full of them—choke-full."

"Where are we going, Miss Jasmine?" she asked aloud, smothering back a slight sigh.

"Business first, Poppy," said Jasmine—"business first and then pleasure. I thought we'd make a little programme in this way—we'd visit the publishers at their seats of learning in the morning hours; in the afternoon we might go to Madame Tussaud's or a picture gallery—I'd prefer that, but of course naturally you'd go in for Madame Tussaud's, Poppy; then in the evening we'll go and have tea with Daisy. We'll bring something nice in for tea, and Daisy will be so happy. I expect to have very good news to bring to my little sister to-night, Poppy."

"Oh, indeed, miss, I'm sure I'm gratified to hear that same. I think, Miss Jasmine, that the programme sounds sensible—the dull part first, and then the pleasure, and then the needed refreshment for our hungry bodies. All things considered, Miss Jasmine, seeing that I eats the bread of toil from morn to eve, and have a swimming head, owing to being Sarah with every other name tacked on, I think it might be best for me to be enlivened with the waxen figures, miss, and not to have my poor brain worrited with picters."

"All right, Poppy, we will certainly go to Madame Tussaud's—but you must not consider the first part of our day dull, dear Poppy—it is business, certainly, but you don't know what it means to me. To-day, Poppy, I am about to take my first soaring flight."

"Oh law! Miss Jasmine—I always knew you were clever, miss, and I suppose it is because I'm so worried in my business days that I've got that stupid that I can't see no meaning at all in your words, miss."

"All right, Poppy, you need not see any meaning in them—all you have to do is to come with me, and look very grave and solemn, and say 'Yes' when I say 'Yes,' and shake your head and look stern when I do. You are older than me, Poppy, and you are coming as a sort of chaperon. Oh dear! Poppy, I wish you would not wear that scarlet wing and those yellow flowers in your hat."

"The cruellest of all the bitings," whispered Poppy under her breath. Aloud she said,

in a meek but determined little voice—

"That hat's as it's trimmed, Miss Jasmine, and must remain according, for it can't be denuded in the street."

"All right, Poppy. Your own dear face looks sweet and home-like under it; now let us get into the very first omnibus, and find our way to the city."

When the girls arrived within the sacred precincts of the far-famed Paternoster Row, Jasmine held her breath a little, and stood still while she eagerly considered as to which publishing house she should offer her wares. Finally, she determined that her first pilgrimage should be to the editor of The Downfall, who had not yet returned or even written to her about her "Ode to Adversity."

The office of The Downfall was not in Paternoster Row, but in a very narrow street adjoining, and Jasmine, followed by Poppy, plunged boldly down this narrow alley, and then up, and up, and up, and up the winding stairs to the editor's office at the top of the house.

Jasmine had not been at all agreeably impressed by Mr. Rogers on the occasion of her former visit. Unaccompanied by Poppy, she would scarcely have again ventured to approach him, but Poppy looked quite determined and resolute enough to give her little companion courage, and Jasmine's childish voice was presently heard in the outer office demanding to see the editor.

It so happened that Mr. Rogers was not particularly engaged, for The Downfall was rapidly proving the truth of its title, and was having a very quick descent into an early and untimely grave—consequently its editor had very little to do.

Mr. Rogers consented to see Miss Jasmine Mainwaring and her companion, and accordingly the two girls were ushered into the editorial presence.

Mr. Rogers commenced his interview with Miss Jasmine by apparently forgetting all about her. This had a most disconcerting effect on the young author.

"But surely you must remember that I came to see you nearly three months ago, and brought you a poem called an 'Ode to Adversity,'" pleaded Jasmine—"we had rather a long talk about it; I don't know how you can absolutely forget."

"My dear young lady, so many people call, and leave so many poems, and each poem is so like the last, that really you must pardon me, but my head gets confused."

"Taken with a kind of swimming, sir?" here burst in Poppy. "I suppose it is a sort of Sarah case over again."

The editor stared rather fiercely at this unexpected interruption, deigned no reply whatever to Poppy, and continued his conversation with Jasmine.

"I am sorry that I have forgotten both you and your poem—it is, doubtless, docketed with others to be returned in due course—I am sorry, but of course I could not use it—did you expect me to? Why, the name alone—an 'Ode to Adversity,' was quite sufficient to make me decline it."

"But, but," said Jasmine, coloring crimson and very nearly crying, "I was told by a lady who reads your paper that the name was just what you like. She said that your paper was called by a melancholy name, and of course you wanted melancholy subjects."

The editor smiled in a very bland, though disagreeable manner—"The Downfall," he said; "we chose that title for political reasons." Here he sounded a gong. "Jones," as an attendant came in, "look in pigeon-hole D, and put into an envelope for this young lady some verses entitled an 'Ode to Adversity.' Sorry I can do nothing more for you this morning, Miss Mainwaring. Good morning—good morning."

When the two girls got out on the landing Jasmine thrust her rejected poem into Poppy's hand.

"Put it into your pocket, Poppy," she said, "and don't on any account let me see it—I must try to forget it, or my courage will go. Evidently, Poppy, names go by contraries. I wrote some dismal papers on purpose for The Downfall; I will now

offer them to a magazine which has a cheerful title."

"Look there, Miss Jasmine," said Poppy, when they got into the street. "Right there, facing us at the other side, is what I call a pleasant magazine—it has lots of pictures, for see, it's pressed up to the window wide open, and it's called The Joy-bell—I'm a great deal more taken with that sound than with the sound of The Downfall."

"So am I, too," said Jasmine, the April cloud quickly leaving her expressive face—"I'm so glad I have you with me, dear Poppy; I was feeling so low just now that I should never have noticed the office of The Joy-bell—it has a very nice, high-class sound, and I should say was a more attractive magazine than even a shilling one. We'll go there at once, Poppy, and be sure you support me, and say 'Yes' when I look at you; and if I happen to frown in your direction, you'll know that I want you to help me not to accept too low a price. Now come, Poppy; I feel that destiny leads my steps to the office of The Joy-bell."

The editor of The Joy-bell happened also to be disengaged, and after keeping the young aspirant for literary fame waiting for about a quarter of an hour, consented to see her and her companion.

Jasmine's interview with this editor caused her to come away in very high spirits, for he had not only promised most carefully to consider her poem, "The Flight of the Beautiful," but he had also said he was wanting a serial story to run through the pages of The Joy-bell, and if hers happened to suit him he would be happy to use it. Finally, she went away, leaving both her story and her poems in his hands, and with a large parcel of Joy-bells under her arm.

"I will let you know my decision in a few days," said the editor, with a very suave smile. "Oh, yes, as to terms, we can talk them over when I discover if your story is likely to suit me."

Then Jasmine went away trembling with delight.

"Oh, Poppy!" she said, "how very, very happy I am."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A PLAN.

Mrs. Ellsworthy had by no means forgotten the girls—they had all three taken her fancy, and, as she said to her husband, she could not get them out of her head. Arthur Noel, who was a sort of adopted son of the house, often now brought her information about her favorites, but the good little lady was impatient to see the girls herself, and felt much annoyed at not being able to induce Arthur to give her their address.

"I don't want them to succeed," she said, talking one day to the young man. "I have plenty of money, more than I really know what to do with, and I particularly want to spend some of it on these girls. If they succeed in what they are about they won't want my money, and of course that is the last thing I wish. If I cannot adopt all three, why at least can I not have Jasmine?—Jasmine is my favorite, although I love that little pet Daisy too. Arthur, you may talk to me from morning to night, but you will never persuade me but that Jasmine is the sort of girl who would shine better in prosperity than in adversity."

"You cannot take her from her sisters," said Noel; "I do not believe you would get her to leave them—but if you were to try and were to succeed, you would certainly lower her character, and having done this, you could not say she would be a better girl in prosperity than in adversity."

"You are so particular, Arthur," half grumbled Mrs. Ellsworthy; "you must have forgotten your own very poor days, or you would not speak so warmly for adversity."

"I don't quite forget them," said Arthur, a cloud coming over his face, which was a particularly bright one. "I have a dim memory about them, and a very, very dim memory about a mother and an old nurse, who loved me very much. I can just recall

crying night after night for my mother, and being beaten, and silenced, and half starved. Then I suppose I was ill, for I know there is a blank which I never can fill up; but I shall always remember that day when I stood in the snowy street, and cried so bitterly, and tried to ask for pennies, and how my hat blew off, and I ran to catch it, and then—"

"Oh, it was horrible!" said Mrs. Ellsworthy, covering her face with her hands. "I shudder at it even now—the coachman could not keep the horses in, and they went over you, and we thought you were killed. You were lifted into the carriage—such a ragged, thin little figure, with such a lovely face. You came to—you were not so badly hurt—it was nothing short of a miracle, for you ought to have been almost killed. My brother Arthur was with me, and when you opened your eyes you stretched out your arms to him. He just took you to his heart on the spot, and you were his son from that day forward. Well, Arthur, I don't think, prosperity has done you any harm."

"I had no choice," said Noel. "Prosperity came to me as God's gift. It so happens that I am now a rich man and I suppose even rich people can find their mission. The girls at present are poor; our cases are in no way parallel. Oh! how gladly I would help them, but believe me, I would help them to keep their independence."

Mrs. Ellsworthy frowned.

"If you are going to thwart me, Arthur, I am done," she said.

"Can you not help them without adopting them?" asked Arthur.

"Oh! my dear boy, what am I to do? I know lots of influential people, but I can't go to them and say, 'I know three charming girls; they are all as ignorant as possible; they don't know any of our manners and customs; they are not educated up to the required standard; they are fearfully independent. Will you, my dear friend, take the eldest into your family, and give her a governess's salary, although she cannot teach? and will you, my other beloved friend, speak to the editor of the magazine you most

admire, and ask him to accept poems which do not scan, and stories which are the feeble productions of an ambitious child? And will you, my last friend, come to the rescue by employing a certain sweet little girl to look after your kittens?' Arthur, how can those girls be independent unless they are taught?"

"Still I believe the girls can be helped; and that it is the right and only thing to do," said Noel. "I propose to talk to Miss Egerton about them. I will ask her to go into figures with me, and to state what sum she thinks ought to be expended on their education. She probably knows something about what talents they have by this time. After she and I have talked our plans over together we will ask you whether you are inclined to advance the necessary money. If you say 'Yes,' Miss Egerton will speak to the girls, and tell them quite openly what you are doing, and appeal to their common sense not to reject their only real chance of obtaining an independence bye-and-bye. They can, if they think right, arrange to pay you back within a certain term of years. I believe you will do best for them by making such an arrangement."

Mrs. Ellsworthy both frowned and smiled, but finally agreed to allow Arthur Noel to have his own way.

That very afternoon the energetic young man went to see Miss Egerton. They discussed the subject in an its bearings, and Miss Egerton arranged to speak to Primrose at the first opportunity.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THEIR QUARTER'S ALLOWANCE.

"Two letters," said Daisy, holding them up in her hand; "actually two letters; one for Primrose—oh, yes! of course that must be from Mr. Danesfield; and one for Jasmine—oh! Jasmine's is such a funny-looking letter, quite thick and interesting, and with a darling little picture on the back. What can the picture be?—oh! some

little bells, and The Joy-bell written over them."

"Give it to me," said Jasmine, her face suddenly turning crimson. "Oh, Daisy! why do you examine my letters so curiously? This was meant to be quite private. Oh, oh, oh! how my fingers tremble."

"We are all alone, you know, Jasmine," said Daisy; "dear Primrose is not in. She went to her continual reading nearly an hour ago. Dear Primrose! she sometimes looks quite pale and tired. Perhaps the letter is about our secret, Jasmine; please do read it to me—please do."

But by this time Jasmine had torn the envelope open, and was oblivious to all Daisy's comments. Her eager eyes devoured the contents of an official-looking sheet of paper, then she danced up and down the room, then she tossed the paper up to the ceiling, and finally caught Daisy in her arms, and covered her little face with kisses.

"Oh, Daisy, it's too good!—I'm so happy, I could almost cry. Daisy, darling, he wants to see me about my story—he thinks it's very fine—he says there are masterly bits in it—I'm to go and see him as soon as possible."

"Him?" repeated Daisy; "but who is he, Jasmine?"

"He's the editor of one of the most powerful of all our magazines," said Jasmine; "the magazine is called The Joy-bell—hasn't it a delicious title? Oh, Daisy! I must go at once to see him."

"Take me with you," said Daisy, coming up close to her sister—"take me with you, darling, dear Jasmine. I'm much better, I've nearly lost my cough, and the spring is coming; the air feels quite warm to-day—do take me, Jasmine, for it is our own secret, and then, after you've got your money—for I suppose you'll get a lot of money—we can both tell Primrose to-night."

Jasmine hesitated, but the sun was shining warmly, and Daisy's little face was very pleading—Jasmine felt so happy at this moment that she greatly longed to give happiness.

"Yes," she said, suddenly, "I don't suppose Primrose will really mind, and you must wrap up well; only there's just one thing, Daisy, we'll have to call for Poppy. I would not on any account go to the publisher's without Poppy."

As Jasmine and Daisy were hurrying quickly down the street to catch the first omnibus which went in the direction of the Edgware Road, Daisy suddenly clutched her sister's hand, the color left her pretty face, and she began to hurry forward at a very rapid pace.

"What is the matter, Daisy?" said Jasmine: "you have quite hurt my hand; has anything frightened you? have you seen any one?"

"Oh, it's nothing—I mean I'm subject to starts," said poor little Daisy, in a sad voice. "I'll be better when I get into the omnibus with you, Jasmine; and please, Jasmine, may I sit very close to you? and may I hold your hand?"

"You poor little darling!" said Jasmine, affectionately, "you are not a bit strong yet—you must have some more chemical food; I am told there is nothing so good for starts as chemical food."

Daisy gave another start and a very gentle sigh. She knew well in her little breast that no amount of chemical food would take away the terror which inspired her when she saw the face of Mr. Dove. She had seen him just now, although Jasmine had not—he was standing with several other men at the corner of the road, and his blood-shot eyes had seemed to look through her, and as she passed by he had raised his hand, and shaken it at her in a truly menacing manner.

Dove had not forgotten Daisy, as Daisy had fondly hoped. Daisy Mainwaring meant to him a certain amount of money. Dove was not the sort of man to allow the chance of gaining money dishonestly to go by. As to earning money, and coming by it as the sweet fruits of honest toil, that did not at all suit his idea. When he saw the child going out with her sister he recollected, with much pleasure, that quarter-day was about due. Feeling in his own pockets, he confessed they were unpleasantly light

and empty, and then he wondered if he might find any agreeable little pickings in the girls' trunks. He had subjugated poor little Daisy so completely that he would have ventured to rob even in her presence, but of course he preferred doing his burglary work alone.

He very quickly made up his mind to pay a visit that very day to the girls' new rooms in Miss Egerton's house. He made an excuse to get away from his companions, and then, walking quickly in the direction of Miss Egerton's house, he took his bearings carefully. At this hour Miss Egerton was busy with her school and Bridget was employed in the kitchen. He might do what he liked, therefore, in that part of the house which the girls called the Palace Beautiful. He knew a way by which he could get on the roof—from the roof there was an easy entrance to the girls' rooms. By the time Jasmine, Daisy, and Poppy were joyously driving towards the city Dove had taken possession of their nice bright rooms. When he got in he locked the outer door, and then he felt quite comfortable, and at leisure to look around him.

The first thing he saw was the letter directed to Primrose on the sitting-room table. He took it up, and examined it closely. He could spell out—for he was by no means a proficient reader—the word Rosebury on one of the post-marks; that was enough for him; the letter was tucked neatly into his pocket, and then he went round the room in search of fresh spoil.

He found very little, for the Palace Beautiful showed none of its charms to his eyes; in Dove's opinion it was a poor sort of place—clean, certainly, but what of that? Dove considered that cleanliness meant poverty. Dove's tastes lay in the direction of rooms thickly carpeted; he liked two or three carpets, one on the top of the other, on a floor; he liked the rooms to be well crowded with furniture—furniture of the good old mahogany type, heavy and dark—and the windows draped with thick merino. A room so furnished would, as Dove expressed it, look solid, and mean a heavy purse,

and perhaps a nice little nest-egg laid by tidily in one of the drawers or bureaus. Such a room would be very interesting to examine, but this sitting-room, with its crimson drugget, and its white flooring, its one or two choice engravings on the walls, and its little book-case filled with good and valuable books, was, Dove considered, very shabby indeed. He found nothing more worth taking, and having given the Pink a kick by way of a parting blessing, he left the room, made his exit again by the roof, and so departed unperceived. He had Primrose's letter in his pocket, and he thought himself very lucky to have so nicely secured her quarter's allowance. He returned to his own house in Eden Street, and in the privacy of his back parlor opened Mr. Danesfield's letter. It was a short letter, and, as it happened was not written by Mr. Danesfield at all. Dove, however, by patient spelling and peering, presently mastered its contents.

"The Bank, "High Street, Rosebury, "April 21.

"MADAM,

"In Mr. Danesfield's absence, I send you a cheque for £17 10s., according to his orders. The cheque will require your signature at the back, and if you will kindly sign it you, or any one else, can obtain cash for the amount at the Metropolitan Bank, Strand.

"I expect Mr. Danesfield home in about six weeks; he has been wintering abroad.

"Yours faithfully, "JOHN DAVIS."

Dove took the greater part of an hour to make this letter out; next he fingered the cheque, turning it backwards and forwards; then his face grew very blank—for, unsigned, that cheque was valueless. He was a violent man, and he uttered some strong expressions, and his wife, on hearing them, took good care to keep out of his way. She could not make out why Dove sat so long in the back parlor, and why he refused to eat his dinner, which was very hot and tasty. After a time, with a sigh of relief, she heard him go out.

Dove had hastily fastened up the letter, trusting to no one's noticing that it had been opened. Again he reached Miss Egerton's house; again he made his way from the roof to the upper landing, and from the upper landing to the girls' rooms; the letter was not placed on the table, but was skilfully slipped down between some books which lay in a pile on Jasmine's little writing-table. It might have been put there by any one who was dusting the room, and it might have lain in its present position unseen for many days. Dove hoped no one would perceive it; he scowled at the poor little Pink, who crouched away from him, and turning on his heel again, left the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE JOY-BELL.

It is to be feared that Poppy stole away from her work that morning. Poor Poppy was getting into a sadly defiant mood. She was getting thoroughly tired of her aunt, Mrs. Flint, and when Jasmine appeared and said a few coaxing words the naughty girl left her work undone, disregarded the many cries for Sarah Ann and Sarah Maria, and putting on her brilliant hat and her smart jacket, sallied forth citywards with Jasmine and Daisy. In due time the three reached the office of The Joy-bell and were admitted into the presence of the editor.

"You musn't let me accept too low terms, Poppy," said Jasmine, as they were going in at the door.

Poppy nodded very brightly in reply, and Jasmine took the seat the editor offered her with a certain little air of modest elation.

"I got your note," she began, "and I thought you'd like to see me immediately, so I came. This is my sister; she knows all about it; she's in the story herself. I've drawn all my characters from the life; and my friend, Poppy Jenkins—you saw her a

fortnight ago—she's in the book too."

The editor—Mr. Potter was his name—had a habit of waving his hand when anything that he considered superfluous was being said; he now waved both Daisy and Poppy into the background, and addressed himself to Jasmine in a style which, as she said afterwards, riveted her attention on the spot.

"I wrote to you, Miss Mainwaring," he said, "because I saw germs of promise in your composition—it is young, of course, for you are very young, but it is fresh, and with due correctness, which I myself am willing to supply, I do not see why 'The Pursuit of Happiness' should not appear in our journal. We publish, however, only under certain conditions, and before I make any offer for your writings I should like to know whether you are able to fulfil them."

"That sounds in the nature of a bargain," here burst from Poppy's lips. "Now, Miss Jasmine, please will you listen very sharp, and see what the gentleman is after? Bargains seem to me to be all in favor of them that makes them. Aunt Flint made a bargain with me, and, oh my! I thought it good enough to leave the country and come up to a town whose name is wanity. Nothing have I got, Miss Jasmine, from my share of the bargain but a swimming head and the name of Sarah!"

"If this young person will cease to interrupt us," proceeded the editor, in his blandest tones.

"Oh, yes; Poppy, please stop talking," said Jasmine. "I beg your pardon, sir; I only wanted Poppy to help me when we came to terms. We have not come to the money part yet, dear Poppy. Yes, sir, I am most anxious to listen to you."

"Well, Miss Mainwaring, the facts are these—yes, I fear it is a question of money, after all. The Joy-bell is a new magazine; we are most anxious to extend its circulation by every means in our power. We have hit on what we consider a novel, but effective expedient. Each contributor to our pages is expected to subscribe for a hundred copies per month of our magazine—these copies he is asked to disseminate

as widely as possible amongst his friends. The magazine is only sixpence a month. Of course you get your friends to take the copies off your hands. Your story will, I think, run for six months—you are really put to no expense, for, of course, you must know a hundred people who will gladly take a magazine in which you appear. Thus you gain the advantage of having your story widely read and published not at your own expense."

"But please—" began Jasmine.

"If I might speak who am brought here for the purpose," here burst from Poppy, "what pay is the young lady to have for the words of genius that she has wrote upon the paper? Yes, Miss Jasmine, you said I was to let my voice be heard here—I'm not afraid, not of nobody, and here, I puts down my foot, and I says, 'What's the pay?'"

"The pay?" echoed the editor. "Surely the young lady does not expect to be paid for anything so very amateur—no, she cannot expect to be paid in money—in another way she is paid, and largely; she obtains a reputation, and what immature talent she has is brought to the fore! I am afraid, Miss Mainwaring, I must not take up any more of your valuable time—I think I have explained myself quite clearly—do you accept my offer? If you are willing to become a subscriber for one hundred copies monthly of The Joy-bell your story shall appear; if not, I must return you your MS. with regret."

Poor Jasmine's white little face grew piteous.

"Oh, Poppy!" she began.

"Do you want it, Miss Jasmine?" said Poppy. "I calls it a cheat; but do you want it?"

"Oh, dear Poppy, I thought my words would look so lovely in Print—I am disappointed!"

"Then you shan't be, Miss Jasmine, darling. Here, sir, you're another of the Aunt Flint tribe, but my darling Miss Jasmine shall not look as she does now if I can prevent it. Please, sir, will you look in this here little purse given to you by the

honest hand of toil, and see if it contains the price of a hundred of those nasty Joy-bells. There's my three months' wage in that purse, sir, so I expect it will prove sufficient."

The editor opened the little purse gingerly.

"Do you wish your friend to subscribe for you?" he asked, looking at Jasmine. "I will allow you to have the first instalment at a reduction. The full price for a hundred copies of The Joy-bell at sixpence a copy will be, of course, fifty shillings. On this occasion you shall have these delivered to you at your residence for forty-five shillings."

"It's in the purse, sir," said Poppy, with an air of modest pride. "Forty-five shillings, and fifteen shillings over, for my wage with Aunt Flint comes exactly to three pounds a quarter. The fifteen shillings will find me in boots and house shoes, Miss Jasmine; and as my 'at is fresh trimmed, and I have enough cotton dresses to go on with, you are more than welcome to the two pound five."

"We will arrange it so, then," said the editor. "Miss Mainwaring, you must give me your address, and you shall receive proofs in a day or two. This sum of money provides for the appearance of the first instalment of your story. From the sale of the hundred copies you will be provided with funds for the second instalment, and so on."

"But how am I to pay Poppy back if I must give you the money that I get for the magazines?" asked Jasmine, her face becoming more crimson each moment.

"Ah! that," said the editor, with a slightly sarcastic smile, "that is surely not my affair."

After this a few comparatively trivial arrangements were made. Jasmine gave the address of the Palace Beautiful to Mr. Potter, and walked downstairs, feeling excited, pleased, and disappointed.

"Oh, Poppy!" she said, "how light, how very light your purse is."

"No, Miss Jasmine," answered Poppy, "you're out altogether there, for fifteen shillings in silver weighs more than three pounds in gold. It's my heart, not my purse, that's light, Miss Jasmine—it has done me a sight of good to help you, Miss Jasmine; I know he is a cheat in there, but never mind, when your pretty, beautiful tale appears there'll be a run on it, I think, and that Joy-bell will be asked for high and low. You'll pay me back, never fear, and I'll be real proud to my dying day to feel that I was the first to help you."

That evening, as Jasmine and Daisy sat together waiting for Primrose to return, Daisy said suddenly—

"Did you soar to-day, Jasmine, when you took Poppy's wages to have your story printed?—was that what you call a soaring flight?"

Daisy spoke innocently, and with real desire for information, but at her words Jasmine covered her face and burst into tears.

"What a cruel remark, Eyebright," she said. "Do you know I'm quite miserable about this; I've been getting more and more wretched ever since I left that man's office. Suppose, Daisy, I don't sell a hundred copies of The Joy-bell; then I shall never be able to have any more of my story printed, and I shall never have it in my power to pay Poppy back. I think I must have yielded to temptation that time; perhaps I'm nothing but a vain little girl, and think myself cleverer than I am."

"Oh, I'm sure you're a genius, Jasmine," said Daisy. "I know, for I have studied your face a great deal; in the story-books I generally notice that the geniuses have the same kind of face that you have—they generally have a little discontented, surprised look about them. I admire the expression very much myself, and sometimes when I'm alone—for you know you and Primrose have to leave me a good deal alone—I try to practice it before the glass. I think it's mostly done with a rise of the eyebrows, but I never can keep mine up long enough."

Jasmine laughed.

"I do hope I am a genius," she said; "I have always longed so to be one. If I really am, it will be all right about Poppy's money, for, of course, the public will try to buy my story. It's really rather a striking story, Daisy. There's a girl in it who does such wonderfully self-denying things—she never thinks of herself for a moment—she is very poor, and yet she earns money in all sorts of delightful ways, and supports her family—she has got two sisters—they are not half as clever as she is at earning money. The story begins by the sisters rather despising Juliet, but in the end they find out how much she is worth. The leading idea in the story is the inculcation of unselfishness—oh dear! oh dear! I hope I shall prove myself a genius in having developed this character. If so, I shall be able to pay Poppy back."

"There is something so beautiful in unselfishness," said Daisy, in a rather prim, moralizing little tone. "Do you know, Jasmine, that I was once going to be frightfully selfish?—I should have been but for the Prince, but he spoke to me; he made up a lovely little story, and he told me about the Palace Beautiful."

"I never can make out why you call these rooms the Palace Beautiful, Daisy," said Jasmine.

"It's because of the way they've been furnished," said Daisy. "They are full of Love, and Self-denial, and Goodness. I do so dearly like to think of it. I lie often on the sofa for hours, and make up stories about three fairies, whom I call by these names; they are quite playmates for me, and I talk to them. I often almost fancy they are real, but the strange thing is, Jasmine, they will only come to me when I have tried to be unselfish, and cheerful, and done my best to be bright and happy. Then Goodness comes, and makes the walls shine with his presence, and Self-denial makes my sofa so soft and easy, and Love gives me a nice view through the window, for I try to take an interest in all the men and women and little children who pass, and when I sit at the window and look at them through Love's glass you cannot think how nice they all seem. I told the Prince about it one day, and he said

that was making a real Palace Beautiful out of our rooms."

Jasmine sighed.

"I hear Primrose's step," she said. "Oh, Daisy! you are a darling! how sweetly you think. I wonder if these rooms could ever come to mean a Palace Beautiful to me! I don't think fairies could come to me here, Daisy. I don't think I could see things through their eyes. I want my palace to be much larger and grander than this. Perhaps if I am a real genius it will come to me through my story; but, oh! I hope I did not do wrong in taking Poppy's money."

"No, for you are a genius," said little Daisy, kissing her affectionately.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ENDORSING A CHEQUE.

Primrose's life was very busy at this time. Certainly nothing could be more irksome than the daily task of reading to poor Mrs. Mortlock, but the fifteen shillings a week which she now earned regularly was a wonderful help to the household purse, and Primrose performed her irksome duties with a cheerful, and even thankful heart. Her anxieties about Daisy were almost laid to rest. Since the child had been moved to Miss Egerton's house she seemed quite a changed creature. Her old cheerfulness and sweet calm were returning to her. Morning after morning she bade Primrose good-bye with a bright smile on her little face, and however long and dull her day was, she greeted her sister happily at night. What, therefore, was poor Primrose's consternation to find, on returning home the evening after Jasmine had made arrangements for the publication of her manuscript not only Jasmine, but Miss Egerton and Bridget all surrounding poor little Daisy, who lay on the sofa with a ghastly white face, and burst into nervous troubled weeping whenever she was spoken to.

"We found her in such a queer state," said Jasmine; but Miss Egerton held up a warning hand.

"Let it rest now, my dear," she said; "we need not go into the story in Daisy's presence; she wants perfect quiet. Primrose, she has been longing so for you; will you sit down by her, and hold her hand?"

Daisy opened her eyes when she heard Primrose's name, and held up a hot little hand to her sister, who clasped it very firmly.

"I want to speak to you all by yourself, Primrose," she whispered. "Please ask Jasmine, and Miss Egerton, and Bridget to go away. I want to say something most important to you."

"Leave us for a moment," said Primrose to the others; and Jasmine went down with Miss Egerton to the sitting-room.

The moment Daisy found herself quite alone with Primrose she raised her head, ceased crying, and looked at her sister with bright feverish eyes, and cheeks that burned.

"Primrose," she said, "would you think it very, very wrong of me if I did something that wasn't in itself the very best thing to do, but something that I had to do to prevent a dreadful ogre putting me down into a dark dungeon? Would it be very wrong of me to do a very little thing to prevent it, Primrose?"

"My darling," said Primrose, "your poor little head must be wandering. I don't understand what you mean, my dear little one. Of course it would be only right of you to keep away from an ogre, and not to allow one to touch you—but there are no ogres. Daisy love—there never were such creatures. You need not make yourself unhappy about beings that never existed. The fact is, Daisy, you are too much alone, and your little head has got quite full of the idea of fairies. I must ask Mr. Noel not to talk to you in so fanciful a manner."

"Oh don't, Primrose, for it is my one and only comfort. Oh! I am glad you think I

ought to keep out of the ogre's power. He is a dreadful, dreadful ogre, and he has tried to get into the Palace, and I am awfully afraid of him."

Then Daisy laughed quite strangely, and said, in a wistful little voice—

"Of course, Primrose, this is only fairy-talk. I always was fond of fairies, wasn't I? Primrose, darling, I want you to do a little thing for me, will you?"

"Of course, Daisy. Why, how you are trembling, dear!"

"Hold my hand," said Daisy, "and let me put my head on your shoulder. Now I'll ask you about the little thing, Primrose; there's your letter from Mr. Danesfield on the table."

"Has it come?" said Primrose; "I am glad. I expected it yesterday morning."

"It's on the table," repeated Daisy. "Will you open it, Primrose? I'd like to see what's inside."

"Oh, there'll be nothing very pretty inside, darling; it is probably a postal order for our quarter's money."

"Yes, but let me see it, Primrose."

Primrose moved slowly to the table, took up the letter, and opened it.

"It's just as I said, Daisy," she remarked, "only, no—it's not a postal order, it's a cheque. I must write my name on the back, and take it to the Metropolitan Bank to cash to-morrow."

"Let me see you writing your name on the back, please, Primrose," said Daisy, in a queer, constrained little voice.

Primrose smiled to herself at the child's caprice but, taking up a pen, she put her signature across the back of the cheque.

"May I take it in my hand, Primrose?" said Daisy. "Oh, thank you! My hand shakes, doesn't it? but that's because I'm so dreadfully subject to starts. Isn't it funny, Primrose, to think that this little paper should mean a lot of golden sovereigns?

Doesn't it make you feel rich to have it, Primrose?"

"It makes me feel that with it and the help of my weekly salary we shall be able to pay for our bread and butter, Daisy."

Daisy turned ghastly white.

"Oh, yes," she said, "oh, yes, dear Primrose. Will you put the cheque back into the envelope, and may I sleep with it under my pillow? I'll stay so quiet and still, and I'll not start at all if I have the cheque that you have signed under my pillow."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DAISY'S REQUEST.

Primrose was so anxious to soothe Daisy that she allowed her without a moment's hesitation to have her way. The moment the child felt her hot little fingers clasping the letter with its precious enclosure she became quiet, and ceased to speak. Primrose had undressed her, and placed her in bed, and she now turned her back on her sister, and still clasping the letter tightly, closed her eyes. Primrose hoped she was asleep, and went softly out of the room to talk over matters with Jasmine and Miss Egerton. Miss Egerton could throw no light on the subject of Daisy's queer attack, and when Primrose at last went to bed she had to own that her anxieties with regard to her little sister had returned.

The next morning she was obliged to leave earlier than usual, and rather to Daisy's astonishment, and very much to her relief, said nothing about Mr. Danesfield's letter. Primrose had not forgotten the letter, but she knew she would not be able to go to the bank that day, and she thought it would comfort Daisy to take care of it.

"Jasmine," she said to her second sister, "must you go out this morning? I think it is hardly well to leave Daisy alone."

Jasmine's face clouded over.

"Have you forgotten, Primrose, that Miss Egerton and Mr. Noel were to take me to South Kensington Museum to-day? They arranged that I should go with them quite a week ago, and it would never do to put them off again now. I'll tell you what I'll do, Primrose; I'll take Daisy too; I'll see that she is not over tired, and Mr. Noel will take great care of her; they are very fond of each other."

"Try to arrange it so, then, Jasmine," said Primrose; "for I do not feel happy about her being left."

Primrose went away to spend her day as usual with Mrs. Mortlock, and sat down to her "continual reading" with a heavy heart.

Mrs. Mortlock was losing her sight rapidly—cataract was forming on her eyes, and she could now only dimly see the face and form of her young companion. Primrose, however, always managed to soothe the somewhat irascible old lady, and was already a prime favorite with her.

To-day she took up the newspaper with a heavy heart, and the anxiety which oppressed her made itself felt in a certain weary tone which came into her voice.

Mrs. Mortlock was fond of Primrose, but was never slow in expressing an opinion.

"Crisp up, Miss Mainwaring," she said; "crisp up a little; drawling voices give me the fidgets most terribly. Now, my dear, try to fancy yourself in the House of Commons; read that speech more animated, my love. Ah, that's better!"

Primrose exerted herself, and for a few minutes the reading came up to its usual standard, but then, again, thoughts of Daisy oppressed the young reader, and once more her voice flagged.

"There, my dear, you had better turn to the bits of gossip; they are more in your line, I can see, this morning. Dear, dear, dear! I can't tell what's come to girls these days; they don't seem to find no heart nor pleasure in anything. Now, if there is a girl who, in my opinion, has fallen on her feet, it's you, Miss Mainwaring; for, surely, the handsome salary I allow is earned with next to no trouble. When once a girl can read

she can read continual, and that's all I ask of you."

"I'm sorry," said Primrose; "some things at home are troubling me, and I cannot help thinking about them. I shall do better over the gossip."

"That's right, my love! I'd ask you about the home troubles, but my nerves won't stand no worriting. Get on with the gossip, dear, and make your voice chirrupy and perky, as though you saw the spice of it all, and enjoyed it—do."

Just at this moment, while poor Primrose was trying to train her unwilling voice, the door was opened, and Poppy, red in the face, and with her best hat and jacket on, came in.

"Miss Primrose, I'm come to say good-bye, I am. No, Mrs. Mortlock, when about to quit I don't fear you no longer—not all the Sarahs in Europe would have power over me now. I'm going. Aunt Flint and me we has quarrelled, and I has given her fair warning, and I'm going back to my native place, maybe this evening. Never no more will this city of wanities see me. I'm off, Miss Primrose; I leaves Penelope Mansion now, and I go straight away to your place to bid Miss Jasmine and Miss Daisy good-bye."

"For goodness sake, Sarah Matilda Ann!" here interrupted Mrs. Mortlock, speaking with great excitement, "before you go see you bring me up my beef-tea—Mrs. Flint won't give it a thought, and my nerves won't keep up without the nourishment. Run down to the kitchen this minute, Sarah Mary, and bring me up the beef-tea, and a nice little delicate slice of toast, done to a turn, to eat with it. Mind you, don't let the toast get burnt, for if I can't see I can taste, and well know when my toast is burnt."

Poppy was about to give a saucy answer, but a look from Primrose restrained her, and before she left Penelope Mansion she had provided the old lady with her luncheon. Primrose said a few words of farewell and regret, and then Poppy set out, determined to take her chance of finding Jasmine and Daisy at home.

"I'll go back to my own place to-night," she said to herself, "and tell my mother that

wanity of wanities is London—my fifteen shillings will just buy me a single third, and I needn't eat nothing until to-morrow morning."

When Poppy arrived at Miss Egerton's she was told by Bridget that Miss Jasmine was out, but that she would find Miss Daisy by herself upstairs. Poppy ran nimbly up the stairs, and knocked at the sitting-room door; there was no answer, and turning the handle, she went in. Daisy was lying with her face downwards on the sofa—sobs and quivers shook her little frame, and for a time she did not even hear Poppy, who bent over her in some alarm.

"Now, Miss Daisy, darling, I'm real glad I has come in—why, what is the matter, missie?"

"Nothing, Poppy; nothing indeed," said Daisy, "except that I'm most dreadfully unhappy. If I was a really quite unselfish little girl I'd go and live in a dungeon, but I couldn't do it—I couldn't, really."

Whatever Poppy was, she was practical—she wasted no time trying to find out what Daisy meant, but bringing some cold water, she bathed the child's face and hands, and then she made her take a drink of milk, and finally, she lifted her off the sofa, and sitting down in an arm-chair, took her in her arms, and laid her head on her breast.

"There now, pretty little dear, you're better, aren't you?"

"My body is better, thank you, Poppy—I like to feel your arms holding me very tight. My mind will never, never be well again, dear Poppy."

"Would it ease it to unburden?" said Poppy. "Sometimes it's a wonderful soother to speak out about what worries one. At Aunt Flint's I used to let fly my worries to the walls for want of a better confidant. You think over about unburdening to me, Miss Daisy. I'll promise to be a safe receptacle."

Daisy shook her head mournfully.

"It would be no use," she said; "even telling now would be no manner of use. Oh, Poppy, I wish I had been strong enough, and I wish so dreadfully I had not minded about the dungeon. If the Prince was here he would say I ought not to live any longer in the Palace Beautiful, and I don't think the rooms do look like the rooms of a palace to-day. Please, Poppy, look round you, and see if you can see any goodness shining on the walls, and if you can see through Love's glass into the street."

"Oh lor! no, Miss Daisy; I'm not so fanciful. The walls is just fairly neat, and the windows, they're just like any other attic windows. Now, missy, you're just fairly worn out, and you shall shut your eyes and go to sleep."

Poor little Daisy was so weary and weak that she absolutely did close her eyes, and comforted and soothed by Poppy's presence, she fell into a short and uneasy doze. She awoke in about an hour, and lay quite still, with her eyes wide open. Poppy said something to her, but she replied, in an imploring tone.

"Please let me think. I had a dream when I was asleep. I did something in the dream, and I think I'll do it now really—only you must let me think Poppy."

"Think, away, pretty little miss," said Poppy: "and while you are worriting your poor little brain over thoughts I'll take it upon me to prepare a bit of dinner for you."

Poppy made some tea, and boiled an egg, and toasted some bread to a light and tempting brown. When the meal was prepared she brought it to Daisy, who said wistfully—

"If I do what I want I must be strong, so I'll eat up that egg, and I'll take some toast, and you must take something too, Poppy."

"Seeing as I can't get no meal till to-morrow morning I'm not inclined to refuse a good offer," said Poppy. "You don't know, missy, as I'm going back to my native 'ome to-night."

"Poppy," said Daisy, suddenly, taking no notice of this remark, "do you know if Mrs. Ellsworthy is a very rich woman?"

"Mrs. Ellsworthy of Shortlands?" said Poppy; "why, in course; ever since I can remember, my mother has said to me, 'Poppy, child, them there Ellsworthys is made of money.'"

"Made of money," repeated Daisy, a little shadowy smile coming to her face; "then they must be really rich. Do you think, Poppy, that Mrs. Ellsworthy is rich enough to give away £17 10s. to buy the daily bread, and to help a little girl who could not help being selfish out of a dreadful dark dungeon? Mrs. Ellsworthy has always been very kind, and I used to love her when I lived at home, but if I thought she was not really very, very rich, I would not ask her, for that might be putting her to great trouble. Losing money makes one's heart ache terrible, Poppy, and I would rather bear my own heartache than give it to another person."

"Mrs. Ellsworthy is made of money," repeated Poppy, "and £17 10s. would be no more than a feather's weight to her. All the same, I can't make out what you're driving at, Miss Daisy."

"I wonder if Mrs. Ellsworthy is at Shortlands now," continued Daisy.

"To be sure she is, Miss Daisy; shall I take her any message when I goes back home?"

"Oh, no, Poppy, thank you very much. Poppy, I wish you had not lent all that money to Jasmine two days ago—you have not any money in your pocket now, have you, Poppy?"

Poppy gave a slight sigh.

"Just the price of a third single to Rosebury, and no more, Miss Daisy, darling."

"Oh, dear me," said Daisy, "it's just exactly that much money which would make me perfectly happy. Must you go to Rosebury to-night, Poppy?"

"Well, missy, I'd do something to make you 'appy, but I don't know where to go if I don't go to my home—to be sure, Aunt Flint would give her eyes to get me back

again, but I fears that even for you, Miss Daisy, I can't bear no more of that Sarah game."

"But don't you think you might be able to bear it just for a week, Poppy? If I loved you always and always all the rest of my life, do you think you could bear it just for one little week longer? I'd be sure to let you have the money back again then, dear Poppy."

Poppy gazed hard at the child, who was sitting upright on her sofa, with her cheeks flushed and her eyes shining, and a fitful quiver about her pretty lips.

"What does it all mean?" thought practical Poppy; "it's more than common worries ails the little dear. I'm sure I'd bear Sarah to my dying day to help her, the sweet lamb! I wonder, now, has she lost some of Miss Primrose's money. I know they're short enough of means, the darling ladies, and maybe the child has mislaid some of their money, and is frightened to tell. Dear me, I shouldn't think Miss Primrose would be hard on any one, least of all on a sweet little lamb like that; but there's never no saying, and the child looks pitiful. Well, I'm not the one to deny her."

"Miss Daisy," said Poppy, aloud, "I have got exactly fifteen shillings in my purse, and that's the price of a third single to Rosebury, and no more. It's true enough I meant to go down there to-night, and never to see Aunt Flint again, but it's true also that she'd give her eyes to have me back, and was crying like anything when I said good-bye to her. 'Sarah,' she says, 'it's you that's ongrateful, and you'll find it out, but if you comes back again you shall be forgiven, Sarah,' she says. So I can go back for a week, Miss Daisy, and if you have lost fifteen shillings, why, I can lend it to you, dearie."

"Oh, Poppy, you are a darling!" said little Daisy. "Oh, Poppy, how can I ever, ever thank you? Yes, I have—lost—fifteen shillings. You shall have it back again, Poppy, and Poppy, I will always love you, and always remember that you were the best of good fairies to me, and that you took me out of the power of a terrible ogre."

"All right, Miss Daisy," said Poppy, returning the child's embrace; "here's the fifteen shilling, and welcome. Only I never would have called sweet Miss Primrose an ogre, Miss Daisy."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE JOURNEY.

Poppy went away presently, and the moment she was gone Daisy began to make some hasty little preparations.

"I'll take the Pink with me," she said to herself. "I'll empty all the things out of my little work-basket, and my darling Pink can sleep in it quite snugly, and she'll be great company to me, for I cannot help feeling very shaky, and I do start so when I see any one the least like Mr. Dove in the distance. I mustn't think about being frightened now—this is the least I could do, and if I'm terrified all over I must go through with it."

Then Daisy wrote a tiny note—a little note on half a sheet of paper—which she tore out of her copy-book. It was blotted with tears and almost illegible. This was what she said:—

"Primrose, darling, I and the Pink, we have gone away for a little bit. Your money is lost, Primrose, and I cannot look you in the face until I get it back again. Don't be a bit frightened about me—I and the Pink will come back when we have got the money.

"Your loving little "DAISY."

This note was left open on the table to greet Primrose when she came in, and then Daisy buttoned on her little jacket, and put on her strongest pair of boots, and the neat little hat which Primrose had trimmed for her the week before, and popping the Pink into her work-basket, she stole softly downstairs and out of the house without

old Bridget, who was busily engaged in the back kitchen, hearing her.

The poor little maid got into the street just when the shades of evening were beginning to fall. She had the Pink in her basket, and fifteen shillings clasped tightly inside one of her gloves. Fifteen shillings paid for a third single to Rosebury, and she was going to Rosebury—so far her plans were definite enough; beyond this broad fact, however, all was chaos.

Daisy knew very little more about London than she had known nine months before, when first she and her sisters arrived in the great city. She had gone out much less than the other two, and she had never gone alone. Whenever she had walked abroad she had gone with a companion.

Now her only companion was the Pink, and the poor little heart felt very lonely, and the little feet trembled as they walked along the pavement.

She had been so terrified about Poppy finding out what she really wanted to do with the fifteen shillings that she had been afraid to ask her any questions about Rosebury. She had not an idea from what railway station she was to go, and she feared, as she walked through the streets, that she might have to walk many miles.

At first she walked very rapidly, for she was anxious to get out of Mr. Dove's neighborhood, and she also thought it just possible that she might meet Primrose or Jasmine returning home. Besides the fifteen shillings which were to pay for her ticket she had threepence of her own in her pocket. When she had walked about half an hour, and thought that she had gone a long way, and felt quite sure that she could not be very far from the railway station which led to Rosebury, the Pink awoke, and twisting and turning in her narrow basket began to mew loudly.

"Oh, poor Kitty Pink," said Daisy, "she must be wanting her supper, poor dear little kitty! I'm not at all hungry myself, but I think I ought to buy a penno'th of milk for my kitty. I'll just go into that shop over there—I see that they sell bread and milk. Perhaps they'll give me some bread and milk for kitty for a penny, and oh, perhaps

they will know if I am near the right railway station for Rosebury."

Summoning up all her courage, for Daisy was naturally a timid child, she ventured into the shop, and having asked for some bread and milk for her cat, which was given with a little stare of amusement by a good-natured looking woman, she put her important question in a very faltering voice.

"Rosebury, my little dear?" said the shopwoman; "no, I never heard of the place. Is it anywhere near London, love?"

"No," said Daisy; "it's miles and miles away from London. I know the county it's in—it's in Devonshire and a third single costs fifteen shillings, and I have got fifteen shillings in my glove. Now, perhaps, you'll know where it is."

"In Devonshire?" repeated the woman. "And a third single costs fifteen shillings? Surely, miss, you are not going all that long way by yourself?"

"Yes," said Daisy, in a dignified little tone. "I'm obliged to go. Thank you very much for Pussy's milk. How much am I to pay? Oh, a penny? Thank you. Good evening."

The Pink was once more shut down into her basket, and Daisy hurried out of the shop. The good-natured woman stared after her, and felt half inclined to call her back; but, like many another, she reflected that it was no affair of hers. The child went on to the end of the long street, and then stood at a corner where several omnibuses came up. A conductor, seeing her wistful little face, jumped down from his stand, and asked her if she wanted to go anywhere.

"To Rosebury, in Devonshire," said poor little Daisy. "It's fifteen shillings a single third."

The man smiled at the anxious little face.

"You want to get to Devonshire, missy," he said. "Then I expect Waterloo's your line, and this here 'bus of mine goes there. Jump in, missy, and I'll put you down at the right place."

"I've only got two pennies," said Daisy, "Will two pennies pay for a drive to Waterloo for me and kitty?"

The man smiled, and said he thought he might manage to take her to Waterloo for that sum.

CHAPTER XL.

A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

There are little girls of ten years old who in the present day are possessed of a large amount of self-possession. Some of these little maids are, in their own way, quite womanly—they can ask their way without faltering, and they can even walk about alone in a great world like London without losing themselves.

But to this class of self-possessed little girls Daisy Mainwaring did not belong. She had a charming, babyish little face, and was something of the baby still in the confiding and wistful way in which she leaned on others for support. Daisy was, perhaps, in all particulars younger than her years. When at last, after inconceivable difficulties—after being jostled about by an indifferent crowd, and pushed rudely against by more than one stupid, blundering porter—she did find her way to the right ticket-office, and did secure her single third to Rosebury, and then get a very small allowance of room in a crowded third-class carriage her heart was beating so loudly that she almost wondered it did not burst. The great train, however, moved out of the terminus, and Daisy felt herself whirling away through the night, and then she became conscious of a little sensation of thankfulness. Surely the worst of her journey was over now; surely she and the Pink would be received very kindly and very lovingly by Mrs. Ellsworthy; surely Mrs. Ellsworthy would listen with full credence to the little tale Daisy would make up about an ogre having stolen away her money, and would hasten to fill the poor empty little purse from her own

abundant stores. Daisy thought such happy and hopeful thoughts as she was commencing her weary journey, and then she clasped the basket which contained the Pink tightly in her little arms, and presently, from sheer weariness, dropped asleep. When the little head bobbed forward two or three times a good-natured neighbor put her arm round the child, and after a little even took her into her arms, where Daisy, after many hours of deep slumber, awoke. The night train to Rosebury went very slowly, stopping at every little wayside station, and sometimes seeming to the exasperated passengers scarcely to move at all; but all these weary hours Daisy slumbered peacefully, and when she awoke the sun was shining brightly, and a new day had begun.

"Well, my dear, you have had a hearty sleep," said the good-natured woman; "and where are you bound, if I may make so bold as to ask, little miss?"

"I am going to Rosebury," said Daisy. "Oh! how kind of you to let me sleep in your arms. I've had quite a nice nap, and I'm not so very tired. Thank you very much for being so very good to me. Are we near Rosebury now, please?"

"In half an hour you'll get there, dear. Now I must say good-bye, for this is my station. Good-bye, missy, and a safe journey to you."

"I'm so sorry you are going away," said Daisy, and she raised her little lips to kiss her friend.

"God bless you, love," said the nice, pleasant-faced woman, and then she got out of the carriage, nodding her head to Daisy as she walked away.

The loneliness which had more or less been soothed or kept in abeyance by this good woman's company now returned very strongly, and Daisy had to feel a certain empty little purse which she held in her pocket to keep up her resolution. She did not seem so certain about Mrs. Ellsworthy being nice and kind as she was the night before. The third-class carriage in which she had travelled was now nearly empty, and when she at last arrived at Rosebury she was the only passenger to alight. She

gave up her ticket and walked out of the station, a forlorn and unnoticed little personage. It was still very early in the morning, not quite six o'clock, and there were very few people about, and the whole place had a strange, deserted, and unhomelike feeling. Could this be the Rosebury where Daisy was born, where she had been so petted and loved? She did not like its aspect in the cold grey morning light. There was a little drizzling mist falling, and it chilled her and made her shiver.

"I know I've been very, very selfish," she kept murmuring to herself. "I oughtn't to have minded the dungeon. I ought not to have been so terrified at the ogre. I'm afraid God is angry with me for being so dreadfully selfish, and for letting the ogre take Primrose's money. I always did think the sun shone at Rosebury, but perhaps even the sun won't get up because he is angry with me."

Daisy knew her way down the familiar and straggling village street, but there were one or two different roads to Shortlands, and she became puzzled which to take, and what with the drizzling rain, and her own great fatigue of body, soon really lost her way.

An early laborer going to work was the first person she met. She asked him eagerly if she was on the right road; but he answered her so gruffly that she instantly thought he must be a relation of Mr. Dove's and ran, crying and trembling, away from him. The next person she came across was a little boy of about her own age, and he was kind, and took her hand, and put her once more in the right direction, so that, foot-sore and weary, the poor little traveller did reach the lodge-gates of Shortlands about nine o'clock.

But here the bitterest of her disappointments awaited her, for the woman who attended to the gates said, in a cold and unsympathizing voice, that the family were now in London, and there was no use whatever in little miss troubling herself to go up to the house. No use at all, the woman repeated, for she could not tell when the family would return, probably not for several weeks. Daisy did not ask any more

questions, but turned away from the inhospitable gates with a queer sinking in her heart, and a great dizziness before her eyes. She had come all this weary, weary way for nothing. She had taken dear Poppy's last money for nothing. Oh, now there was no doubt at all that God was very angry with her, and that she had been both wicked and selfish. She had still twopence in her pocket—for the good-natured omnibus conductor had paid her fare himself. She would go to the nearest cottage and ask for some milk for the Pink, and then she wondered—poor, little, lonely, unhappy child—how long it would take her to die.

CHAPTER XLI.

MRS. DREDGE TO THE RESCUE.

High tea at Penelope Mansion was an institution. Mrs. Flint said in confidence to her boarders that she preferred high tea to late dinner. She said that late dinner savored too distinctly of the mannish element for her to tolerate. It reminded her, she said, of clerks returning home dead-beat after a day's hard toil; it reminded her of sordid labor, and of all kinds of unpleasant things; whereas high tea was in itself womanly, and was in all respects suited to the gentle appetites of ladies who were living genteelly on their means. Mrs. Flint's boarders were as a rule impressed by her words, and high tea was, in short, a recognized institution of the establishment.

On the evening of the day when poor little Daisy had disappeared from her Palace Beautiful Mrs. Flint's boarders were enjoying their genteel repast in the cool shades of her parlor. They had shrimps for tea, and eggs, and buttered toast, and a small glass dish of sardines, to say nothing of a few little dishes of different preserves. Mrs. Dredge, who was considered by the other ladies to have an appetite the reverse of refined, had, in addition to these slight refreshments, a mutton chop. This she was eating with appetite and relish, while Miss Slowcum languidly tapped her egg, and remarked as she did so that it was hollow, but not more so than life. Mrs. Mortlock,

since the commencement of her affliction, always sat by Mrs. Flint's side, and when she imagined that her companions were making use of their sight to some purpose she invariably requested Mrs. Flint to describe to her what was going on. On this particular evening the whole party were much excited and impressed by the unexpected return of Poppy, alias Sarah.

"It took me all of a heap!" said Mrs. Flint; "I really thought the girl was saucy, and had gone—but never a bit of it. If you'll believe me, ladies, she came in as humble as you please, and quite willing to go back to her work in a quiet spirit. 'Sarah,' I said to her in the morning, 'you'll rue this day,' and she did rue it, and to some purpose, or she wouldn't have returned so sharp in the evening. She's a good girl, taking her all in all, is Sarah, and being my own niece, of course I put up with a few things from her which I would not take from a stranger."

"She spoke pretty sharp this morning about you, Mrs. Flint, to my continual reader," said Mrs. Mortlock; "I wouldn't take no airs, if I was you, from Sarah Maria. Miss Slowcum, I'll trouble you for the pepper, please. Seeing that I'm afflicted, and cannot now use my eyesight, I think there might be a little consideration in the small matter of pepper shown to me, but feel as I will I can find it in no way handy. Thank you, Miss Slowcum; sorry to trouble you, I'm sure."

"She grows more snappish each day," whispered Miss Slowcum to Mrs. Dredge; but just then the attention of all the good ladies was diverted by a ringing peal at the hall door-bell, followed by eager voices in the hall, and then by the entrance of Poppy, alias Sarah, who broke in upon the quiet of high tea with a red and startled face.

"An awful trouble has happened," she began, breathlessly. "Oh, ladies, you'll pardon me, but this is no time for standing on ceremony, when my own darling little lady, Miss Daisy Mainwaring, has gone and left her sheltering home."

"Good gracious! my continual reader's little sister!" exclaimed Mrs. Mortlock. "Left her home! you must be mistaken, Sarah Jane."

"No, ma'am, it's a most sorrowful fact," said poor Poppy, who looked terribly dejected, and nearly sobbed as she spoke; "the other two dear young ladies has come for me, and I must go back with them. I'm sorry, Aunt Flint, to part again so soon, but this is unexpected, and my duty lies with my young ladies."

"Your duty lies with your aunt, miss," here exclaimed the exasperated Mrs. Flint. "Sarah, I was taking your part, but your airs are now past standing. Ladies three, I feel convinced that this story is all a make-up. I don't believe for a moment the child has gone away. It's a make-up of Sarah's, who is turning into a most wicked girl."

"I don't believe it," here exclaimed Miss Slowcum. "Sarah Bertha has spoken the truth, I feel convinced. I had a warning dream last night. I dreamt of white horses, and that always signifies very great trouble. It's my belief that the poor dear innocent little child has been murdered!"

"Murdered!" almost screamed Mrs. Mortlock. "Miss Slowcum, I'll thank you to come and take the seat next me, my dear, and tell me all your reasons in full for making this most startling remark. My dear, I don't object to holding your hand while you're pouring forth the tale of woe. How and where, Miss Slowcum, did the child meet her death?"

Meanwhile, during this wrangling and fierce disputing, Mrs. Dredge, more kind-hearted than the others, had left the room. She had gone into the hall, where Primrose and Jasmine stood side by side. She had listened to their bewildered and agitated little story, and then asking them to sit down and wait for her, she had returned to the parlor.

"Mrs. Flint," she said, "I have been talking to the two elder Mainwaring girls; they are in the hall. No, Mrs. Mortlock, you can't see Miss Primrose at present. The girls are in great trouble, for the little one has gone away, and there seems to be a mystery about it all. Your niece Sarah seems to be the last person who has seen the child, Mrs. Flint, and, of course, Miss Primrose and Miss Jasmine want to talk to her, and

she had better go home with them. The friend they live with, a Miss Egerton, left home this very afternoon to spend a week in the country, and so the girls are quite defenceless, and have nobody to consult. That being the case, I'm going back with them also to their lodgings in a four-wheeler. Sarah Ann, go and fetch a four-wheeler this instant, and don't stand gaping. Mind, a four-wheeler, girl, and don't bring a hansom on no account near the place. Yes, ladies, it's my duty to go with the poor orphans, and go I will."

While Mrs. Dredge was speaking Mrs. Mortlock ceased to hold Miss Slowcum's very thin hand. Miss Slowcum's face looked decidedly jealous, for she would have dearly liked to have been herself in Mrs. Dredge's interesting and sympathizing position. Mrs. Mortlock raised her almost sightless eyes to the fat little woman's face, and remarked in a slightly acid voice—

"I'm obliged to you, Mrs. Dredge, for thinking that in the moment of trial the sight of me and a sympathizing squeeze from my hand would have done my continual reader any harm. It's very good-natured of you to go with the orphan girls, Mrs. Dredge, and I'm glad to think you've just had the support of your chop to sustain you under the fatigue. Please remember, Mrs. Dredge, that we lock up the house in this home at ten o'clock, and no latch-keys allowed. Isn't that so, Mrs. Flint?"

"Under ordinary circumstances, quite so, ma'am," answered Mrs. Flint, who would not have minded snubbing Miss Slowcum, but was anxious to propitiate both the rich widows; "under ordinary circumstances that is so, but in a dire moment like the present I think the ten minutes' grace might be allowed to Mrs. Dredge's kind heart."

"Here's the four-wheeler!" exclaimed Mrs. Dredge.

"Good-bye, ladies. If I'm not in at ten minutes past ten don't look for me until the morning."

When Mrs. Dredge, Primrose, Jasmine, and Poppy got back to the girls' pretty sitting-room the good-natured little widow proved herself a very practical friend.

First of all, she listened carefully to Poppy's account of all that had transpired that day. She then got Primrose to tell her as much as possible about Daisy. All the child's distress and nervousness and unaccountable unhappiness were related, and the sage little woman shook her head several times over the narrative, and said at last, in a very common-sense voice—

"It's as clear as a pikestaff to Jemima Dredge that that sweet little child has been tampered with. Somebody has been frightening the bit of a thing, Miss Primrose, and it's for you to find out who that somebody is. As to where she's gone? Why, she has gone back to where she was born, of course, and you and me will follow her by the first train in the morning, my dear."

"She was taking care of a cheque of mine for seventeen pounds ten shillings," exclaimed Primrose, "and in her little note she speaks of the money being lost. I think nothing of the loss of the money beside Daisy, but, Mrs. Dredge, Jasmine and I cannot afford even a third-class ticket to Rosebury just at present."

"Tut, tut, my dear," said Mrs. Dredge, "what's the good of a full purse except to share it? My poor husband Joshua was his name—we was two J's, dear—he always said, 'Jemima, thank God the chandlery is prospering. A full purse means light hearts, Jemima. We can shed blessings with our means, Jemima.' Those was Joshua's words, Miss Mainwaring, and I hear him now telling them to me from his grave. You and me will go down to Rosebury in the morning, dear, and Miss Jasmine will stay at home with Sarah Mary for company, for there's no sense in waste, and one of you is quite enough to come."

While this conversation was going on Bridget knocked at the girls' door, and presented Jasmine with a thick parcel, which had just arrived for her by post. It was some of the manuscript, and the first proofs of her story. The parcel came to hand at a sorrowful moment, and Jasmine laid it on the sofa, made no comment about it, and did not attempt to open it. Primrose scarcely raised her head from her hands, and

was not the least curious, but Poppy's eyes gleamed brightly, for sharp Poppy guessed what the parcel contained, and she sincerely hoped that whatever happened this story would prove a great success, and that it would bring in so many gold coins to her young lady that she would become not only rich herself, but able to pay back what she had borrowed from her. For although Poppy was the soul of generosity, she did want her wages back.

CHAPTER XLII.

A NEW EMPLOYMENT.

At an early hour the next morning Mrs. Dredge and Primrose started for Rosebury, and poor Jasmine and Poppy prepared to have a long and lonely time by themselves. Poppy hoped that Jasmine would cheer up, and look at that lovely printed story of hers, and perhaps read it aloud to her; but poor Jasmine was really nearly broken-hearted, and said once almost passionately—

"How can I look at it, Poppy, when I don't know where our little darling is? Did she not share my secret? And she was so proud of me and she always would believe I was a genius. I can't look at it, Poppy—no, I can't; but if you like to open the manuscript, and read what is printed of the story, why you may. Yes, I expect you will find it exciting. Sit down and read it, Poppy, and I will go to the window and look out. Oh, dear! oh, dear! Primrose promised to send me a telegram when she got to Rosebury. Oh, what shall I do if I don't soon hear some news of my darling little Daisy?"

"Seeing as I can't comfort you, Miss Jasmine, I may as well take to reading the mysterious, lovely story," answered Poppy. "Maybe when you're having your dinner bye-and-bye, miss, you won't object to me telling you what I thinks of it."

"Only I shan't care in the least what you think to-day, dear Poppy," answered poor

little Jasmine, in a tone of deep melancholy.

She went and stood by the window, and Poppy ensconced herself comfortably on the sofa, and began to enjoy herself as best she could under the circumstances.

In about an hour there came a tap at the door, and Arthur Noel came in. Jasmine gave a little pleased exclamation when she saw him; then she ran forward, took his hand in hers, and burst into tears.

"Daisy is lost," she said; "our sweet little Daisy, who loved you so much, is lost."

"It's inferred that she's gone down with a single third to Rosebury, sir," here interposed Poppy.

"Come and tell me all about it, Jasmine," said Noel, in his most sympathizing tones. He led the poor little girl to the sofa, and, sitting down by her, listened attentively to her story.

"But the Ellsworthys are in London," he said, when he heard that Daisy had gone to them.

On hearing this news poor Jasmine burst into floods of fresh weeping.

"Oh, then she's sure to be quite lost!" she said. "Oh, Mr. Noel, if you are in any sense a true friend, won't you try to find her?"

"Yes, Jasmine; I will never rest until I find her. I am glad I came in to-day. I came to ask you to do something for me, but I find you want my help instead. I will come here this evening, about the time your sister is likely to be back, and I will then go and look for Daisy, in case she is not found. Don't be frightened, Jasmine, I am quite sure we shall soon get tidings of the dear little girl."

"And do you know," said Jasmine, who felt a little comforted, "that we have not only lost Daisy, but all our quarter's money. It is most mysterious. Primrose gave Daisy a check to take care of for her, and Daisy says she has gone away because the cheque is lost. We have no money now that the cheque is lost, except just what

Primrose earns from Mrs. Mortlock."

"There's a likelihood of some more earnings presently, Miss Jasmine," here interposed Poppy, in a cheerful voice; "there's a likelihood of a good bit more money when this powerful and thrilling romance is published."

"Your story, Jasmine?" said Noel, "and in type? Who did you get to publish it, my dear child? Oh, you must let me read this."

"Another time, please, Mr. Noel. I don't think I could quite bear it to-day," said Jasmine.

Noel looked at her earnestly.

"I wonder, Jasmine," he said, "even though you are in such trouble, if you would be brave enough to help me, and to earn a little money to day? I want you to do quite a simple thing, and something you will probably enjoy. I have never read any of your romances, but I have often noticed that you possess rather remarkable artistic tastes, and that you have a very correct eye for the arrangement of color. I have been struck with this even in this little room, and I happened to mention my observations one day to a lady who is a friend of mine. That lady is giving a dinner-party to-night, and she wants some one to arrange the flowers on her table in as fresh and new a style as possible. Will you come with me to her house now, and see what you can do? She will provide you with the flowers and the glasses to put them into, and you can arrange them on the table just as you like best. She will give you a guinea for the work, and I think you will find it light and pleasant."

Jasmine's eyes began to sparkle.

"Oh! at another time it would be delightful," she said.

"But don't you want a guinea very badly now? Don't you think you had better put on your hat and come away with me, and try to earn it?"

"I will," said Jasmine, with sudden enthusiasm. "Oh, Mr. Noel, how good you are!

How I wish I had a brother, and that you were he!"

Noel took Jasmine to his friend's house, where the little girl began by being almost frightened, but soon forgot herself in the strong interest of her pleasant work. Noel was right when he said Jasmine had true artistic instincts. Certainly, hers was untaught genius, but her unerring taste came to her aid, and Mrs. Daintree's dinner-table never looked prettier or fresher than when the little maiden had completed her work. The room was bright and sunny, but Jasmine gave the table a bower-like and cool effect, and she not only dressed the dinner-table but placed flowers here and there about the room. Mrs. Daintree was delighted, and asked the pretty little girl to come again to arrange a dinner-table for her the following week.

With her golden sovereign and her shilling tucked tightly away in her glove Jasmine did not feel altogether miserable as she went home; even though Daisy might still be lost, those first earnings were sweet. She rushed upstairs and told her tale to Poppy, who sympathized most warmly with her. Very soon after her arrival a four-wheeler was heard to draw up to the door, and Mrs. Dredge alone returned.

"I have left Primrose at Rosebury," she said; "we have made inquiries, and there is no doubt a child resembling Daisy went down by the night train yesterday. We have searched high and low, however, but cannot at present get any trace of her. Don't look so pale, Jasmine, she must soon be found. Primrose is staying with Miss Martineau, and they are not leaving a stone unturned to find her. Most likely they have done so by now. Don't cry, Jasmine; take example by your sister—she's a fine plucky bit of a lass, and does not waste her time in tears when there's something to be done."

"Yes, that's just it," said Jasmine; Primrose has got something to do, but I haven't—I can do nothing to find my little darling! Oh, Mrs. Dredge, are not you awfully frightened about her?"

"Tut, tut, my dear, not a bit of it! Of course, when a little lass runs away all by

herself there are most times difficulties in getting trace of her, but don't you be in a way, for they won't last long."

Poor little Jasmine sighed, and all her deep depression returned. She was soothed again, however, by the sight of Noel, who came in very soon afterwards. He said he had seen the Ellsworthys, and meant to go down to Rosebury by the night train.

"I'm pleased to hear it, young man," said Mrs. Dredge; "you're doing just what my Joshua would have approved of had he been alive. Even though Joshua was in the chandlery line he had a truly noble heart, and one of his mottoes was that the strong should help the weak, and if shoulders are made broad they should carry big burdens, so you go down to Rosebury, young man, and prosper in your work."

Noel smiled.

"I will certainly do my best," he said; "I quite agree with your husband's sentiments."

"Well, well, young man, Joshua would have liked to know you in his day. Dear, how stupid I am! but I didn't rightly catch your name. What are you pleased to call yourself, sir?"

"My name is Arthur Noel."

"Well, what a small world we live in; it was only to-day I heard talk of you. When Miss Primrose and I were down at Rosebury we came across a gentleman of the name of Danesfield, and he came straight up to Miss Primrose and said he had had a letter from you which he had not been able to answer, because he was away. He said a lot to Miss Primrose about the letter you wrote him; it seems that somebody must have stolen three five-pound notes, which Mr. Danesfield put into a closed envelope, and gave Miss Primrose for a kind of emergency fund when she left her home. The poor lassie turned as white as a sheet when he talked to her. Well, young man, you look white enough yourself at the present moment, but I'll tell you, now, what has struck me, that whoever took the three five-pound notes helped himself or herself to

that cheque of Miss Primrose's, and that poor little Daisy knows about it."

"I should not be the least surprised if you were right, Mrs. Dredge," answered Noel. "Well, I must go now if I want to catch my train. Good-bye, Jasmine keep up your heart—expect good news soon, and get all the orders you can for dressing dinner-tables."

CHAPTER XLIII.

IN THE FIELD.

Poor little Daisy, very faint and tired, and with a feeling of almost despair in her little heart, presently crept through a gap in one of the hedges, and sat down on the grass in a large field. She was so foot-sore she could not walk another step; she was also terribly weak from long fasting, and as she now had no hope at all of bringing Primrose back her money, she felt disinclined to walk another step.

"I suppose I'll soon die," she said to herself. "I wonder if God will take me to heaven? I know I was very selfish about the dungeon. I might have gone to the dungeon, and dear Primrose would have had her money, and she and Jasmine would not have starved; but Mr. Dove did so terrify me I really had not courage. Please, dear Jesus, I had not courage. I'm only a very weak, frightened little girl, and I gave Mr. Dove Primrose's money, and now I can't get it back from him, and I think my heart is broken. I know, Jesus, you are angry with me, but please don't go on being angry; please forgive me, for I am all alone now without Primrose and Jasmine, and I think I'll soon die, for I feel so very weak. I didn't tell a lie, either, Jesus; I never told any one about Mr. Dove and the sticky sweetmeats—no, though I am a coward about the dungeon, I would not go so far as to break my word. I often longed to tell the Prince, for I felt he would deliver me from the ogre, but I couldn't tell a lie even to be saved. Please, Jesus, forgive me for being such a cowardly little girl."

By this time the drizzling mist of the early morning had passed away, the sun had come out, and the robins and thrushes in the hedge close to Daisy began to sing. They poured out full notes of thrilling sweetness and their music comforted the child, and she began to smile very faintly to herself, and to hope that as God had let the sun come out, and the birds sing, so He had forgiven her.

The poor little Pink began to mew loudly in her basket, and Daisy let her out of her prison, and when kitty rubbed her soft head against her little mistress's sleeve the child felt some fresh thrills of comfort. She felt terribly disinclined to move, however, and was really more weak and exhausted than absolutely hungry. The day wore on, and the little girl and her cat remained unnoticed in their corner of the large field. There was a right of way through the field, and foot-passengers came and went, but Daisy in her sombre little black dress failed to attract any attention. She was quite in the shade under her hedge-row, and it is to be doubted if any one saw her. At last from utter weariness she sank down on the ground and fell asleep. The Pink curled herself up by her little mistress's side and slept also. It was then that the sun, slowly travelling across the heavens, found them out in their shady corner, and kissed them, and made pussy's soft little grey coat shine. The child and the cat were thus made visible, and attracted the attention of a woman who was walking across the field with a market-basket on her arm. She came up at once to examine the little group; then she bent down close, then she gave an exclamation half of horror, half of delight, and then she took the sleeping child up in her arms, and covered her with passionate kisses.

SHE CAME UP TO EXAMINE THE LITTLE GROUP.

SHE CAME UP TO EXAMINE THE LITTLE GROUP. Palace B.

"Oh! my own little Miss Daisy—my own little darling precious lamb! And is it thus you have come back to your poor old Hannah again!"

Nothing could have comforted Daisy more under present circumstances than to find

herself in her old nurse's arms. She quite gasped with the joy and relief, and putting up her little hand to Hannah's face, she stroked it fondly.

"Now, my darling, where have you come from? and what are you doing? and—why, if that isn't the little Pink, I declare! Now, my pet, tell me, have you all three come back to Rosebury again?"

"No, Hannah, I'm the only one who has come back. Oh Hannah, will you please take me to our little cottage for a few hours—I should so like to die there—I was born there, wasn't I, Hannah?"

"Yes, love, but you're not going to die there, nor nowhere else. I can't take you back to the cottage, dearie, for it's let, and I'm not living there. I've a little bit of a place of my own in the village of Teckford and I keep a small shop, and don't do so bad. You must come home now with me, darling. Oh, yes, you must—not a word must you say against it; then, when you've rested, and have had some nice bread and milk, you shall tell old Hannah your story; and if so be as you're in any trouble, why, your old nurse Hannah will set her wits to work to find a way out of it. Now, my darling, I'm going to carry you to my cottage."

Daisy was certainly very weak. She tried to expostulate with Hannah—she tried to say that her one and only duty was to try and get tidings of Mrs. Ellsworthy's whereabouts, and then to follow her on foot if necessary; but if the little spirit was willing, the flesh was weak. The comfort of seeing her nurse again was too much for Daisy—the knowledge that those were the very arms which had carried her as a baby, and soothed her and tended her as a little child, was quite too cheering to be resisted. Daisy made a valiant effort to say "No," but instead, her lips formed a faint "Yes, Hannah, take me to your home," and then Hannah, who was a strongly-built woman, lifted the slight little girl in her arms, and carried her across the fields to her tiny cottage at Teckford. All the time, while she was being carried in those kind arms, Daisy kept repeating to herself, "I'll have some bread and milk, for I am a little

hungry, and I'll rest for perhaps an hour, and then I'll go away on foot with my dear Pink to find Mrs. Ellsworthy."

But when the child and the woman reached the house in the village Daisy was too faint and weary to take more than a spoonful or two of bread and milk, and long before the night arrived she had forgotten that she meant to undertake any journey, and lay with burning cheeks and bright, feverish eyes on Hannah's bed in her little home.

CHAPTER XLIV.

TOO MUCH FOR DOVE.

Mrs. Dredge's remarks had by no means been lost on Noel. When he left Miss Egerton's house he consulted his watch, and found that he had still an hour to spare before he need try to catch his train. He thought for a moment or two, recalled certain expressions on Daisy's face, certain words which dropped from her lips, and, above all, a look which had filled her pretty eyes on the one and only occasion when they had met Dove together.

Noel began to feel more and more certain that this man, to whom he had taken a great dislike, had something to say to all the child's misery. Noel knew, however, that suspicion in such a case would be of little avail—he must have certainty, and certainty could only be his by cautious and wary movements.

Again he consulted his watch, and now he determined on a bold course. He remembered that the girls had once told him that Dove was a painter by trade, but that he seldom or never had anything to do. Noel was extremely fastidious, and, if possible, almost over-refined in the arrangements of his own home. He made his little plan with a sigh, but he would have done more than this for the sake of pretty little Daisy.

Walking quickly, he soon found himself at the Doves' address in Eden Street. His knock at the hall door was answered by Tommy Dove, who assured him that both his father and mother were having high tea with shrimps and watercresses in the back parlor.

Noel said he wanted to see Dove on business, and Tommy, remarking that the back parlor was as good a place as any other for this purpose, ushered the visitor in direct.

"I believe you are a painter," said Noel—"I have chambers at Westminster, and want to have my balcony and front windows painted. I've heard of you through the Miss Mainwarings, and as I'm in a hurry to get the job completed at once, I have called round to know if you are disengaged."

"Of course you are, Dove," said his wife.

"Softly, my only love," replied her husband. "Sir, be pleased to take a seat. I shall be glad to do my best for you, and any recommendation from the young ladies you mention is most gratifying to me. Sweet young ladies they was, and ever will be—and my wife and me, we mourns unceasing for their departure."

"Speak for yourself, Dove," said the wife—"we are doing better with our present attics than we ever did with our late attics. Sir, you'll excuse me, but truthful I ever will be at all costs."

"Can you paint my windows or not?" said Noel, rising to his feet, and speaking with some asperity. "If you are too busy to undertake the work pray say so, and let me seek some one else, for my time is precious."

"Of course he'll do it, sir," said Mrs. Dove. "Say yes to the gentleman, Dove, and thank him, and have done with it."

"Well, sir, I am very busy," said Dove. "I haven't a moment to call my own for weeks to come, but all the same, I wouldn't disoblige the late attics for a good deal, so I'll just put off the Cooks, who are wild to get their house-cleaning through, and Mr. Martin, who keeps the bacon and 'am shop, must wait. Yes, sir, I wait your

pleasure, sir—I can come."

"To-morrow morning, then, early," said Noel, "this is my address. Ask for my servant when you arrive, and he will show you what you are to do, and will also give you directions as to the colored paint I wish used. I must hurry off now, for I'm going down to the country on some very sad business. You will be sorry to hear, Mr. Dove, that Miss Daisy Mainwaring has lost a considerable sum of money, and the poor little child is in such trouble about it that she has run away. Of course, I don't believe for a moment that she has really lost the money—of course it was stolen from her. Well, good-bye, I'm going to seek her, and to try to catch the thief. Be sure you arrive at my house in good time in the morning, Dove."

"Yes, sir, very sorry to hear your bad news," said Dove, in a self-possessed voice, but Arthur saw that his color had changed, and he wanted no stronger clue to confirm his suspicions. When he got into the street he not only consulted his watch, but a time-table. A later train than he had intended to travel by would take it to Rosebury early in the morning. He would go by this train. Now he jumped into a hansom and drove to his chambers. His servant came to him, to whom he gave hasty directions.

"You're to buy the paint yourself, Lawson; see that it is properly mixed, and the right shade. Move the plants from the balcony early in the morning—the man will arrive in good time, and listen, Lawson, I don't want him to be too closely watched."

"What do you mean by that, sir?" said Lawson.

"Only that you need not stay in the room all the time—come in and out, of course—but don't imagine the man to be a thief until he is proved such."

"Well, sir, your commands must be obeyed, of course, but you have many articles of virtue and elegance about."

"Never mind that, Lawson—do as I tell you."

When his servant left the room Noel took a five-pound note out of his pocket, and

enclosing it in an open envelope laid it carelessly on the chimney-piece. There was no writing on the envelope, and the note might well have been slipped into it by mistake. Noel also slipped a ring of some value from his finger, and dropped it into a little tray, which contained odds and ends of different descriptions.

"Now I've laid my trap," he said to himself. "My poor little Daisy, I hope I may ensnare your ogre to his destruction."

The next morning early Dove, well pleased with his job, and never guessing that the smallest suspicions had attached themselves to him, arrived at Noel's rooms. He was a most idle man, and seldom cared for work, but he was pleased at Noel's singling him out, and imagined that notwithstanding her running away, he owed this visit to little Daisy.

"She's a pert little thing," he said to himself, "and if she's so true to me as all this, why I suppose I must leave her alone in the future. I made a nice little haul out of her the other day, and I've got several of them sovereigns about me still; but lor, wasn't she in a piteous fright when I took that cheque away with me!"

Dove was highly pleased with the appearance of Noel's rooms. He could see no beauty in the simplicity of the girls' Palace Beautiful, but although he was quite incapable of judging of the value of the pictures and exquisite little statuettes which adorned the walls, he was judge enough of the depth and richness of the Turkey rugs, and of the wealth which must have been expended over the very select furniture of Noel's sitting-room.

Lawson, wondering much at his master's directions but supposing that Dove must be a very special protégé, received him with much cordiality, gave him directions with regard to his work, and then left him alone. Dove painted and cleaned, and whistled as he worked; he felt quite cheerful and virtuous, and began to consider that the position of British workmen was not such a bad one after all. He felt more and more pleased with Daisy Mainwaring for having put him in the way of such agreeable and

profitable occupation, and more and more resolved to leave her alone for the future.

"Maybe if I was to talk to the pretty little dear she'd find me a deal more jobs of this yere sort," he said to himself. "A little lady she is, and no mistake, and she keeps very genteel friends, as any one can see with half an eye."

After Dove had worked for two or three hours he began to feel thirsty, for he was quite unaccustomed to any continuous labor. The sun was shining brightly on the balcony, and he was also a little hot, and the inside of Noel's room looked deliciously cool and inviting. He had just seen Lawson walking down the street, too, so he was quite sure of having the premises to himself. Slipping off his shoes he stepped into the room and began to look about him with an appreciative air. He handled some of Noel's choicest books, and looked through a portfolio of rare engravings but neither books nor engravings were quite in Dove's way, and after a time he strolled over to the mantel-piece, as he said, to see how he looked reflected in the over-mantel glass. There were letters there directed to Noel. Dove would have dearly liked to acquaint himself with their contents, but he was a slow and deficient reader. Some cigars lay in a little cigar-case at one end. Dove, as a matter of course, and without weighing the question at all, slipped a couple into his pocket. After doing this he did not feel quite so virtuous, nor so like the proverbial British workman; he jingled some of Daisy's sovereigns in his pocket, and laughed when they made a pleasant sound. Still eagerly peering at all the articles on the mantel-piece his quick eyes presently detected amongst a heap of rubbish and odds and ends Noel's valuable signet-ring; it was of heavy workmanship, and its gold alone made it worth money.

"Why, Isaacs the Jew would give me two pound ten, or perhaps three pounds for this," queried Dove. "It has plainly been forgotten here, and if the gent does miss it he'll lay the blame on that fine fellow Lawson."

It took a very small parley with Dove's seared conscience to make him pocket the

ring, and by the time Lawson returned to the house the five-pound note had also been appropriated. Dove whistled more cheerily than ever over his work that afternoon, and in the evening he went home quite unsuspecting any little trap which might have been set for him.

He had scarcely gone before a boy arrived with a telegram directed to Lawson, and with a reply pre-paid. Lawson read the following words:—

"Look on the mantel-piece in my sitting-room for a blank envelope, open, which contains a five-pound note—No. 11267. I also left my ring in the cigar tray. Wire reply if note and ring are safe.—ARTHUR NOEL."

The address to reply to was added.

Poor Lawson spent an agonized ten minutes in searching over the contents of the mantel-piece. In the end he had to fill in the reply telegram with the news that nowhere could the five-pound note nor the ring be found.

A little over two hours passed, and again the worthy servant was startled by a telegraphic dispatch. This was what it contained:—

"Have reasons to believe that the painter Dove is the thief. Go instantly to the nearest police-station, give them the number of the note, and go with one of their staff to Dove's house. His address is, 10, Eden Street, Junction Road, Holloway. The note and ring will probably be found on his person. Get him apprehended if possible. Take all necessary cabs.—ARTHUR NOEL."

Thus it came to pass that when that evening Dove sat down tranquilly to a luxurious supper of lobster salad, chops, and bottled stout, he was unpleasantly interrupted. When two policemen, accompanied by Lawson, came into his room, he was guilty of using very violent language, and altogether conducted himself in a most excited manner; but, notwithstanding his resistance, and Mrs. Dove's hysterics, and some terribly distressing chuckles, really sounding more like laughter than tears, which were heard to issue from the lips of that naughty boy, Tommy, a strict search of his

person was instituted, and in consequence he was that very night locked up in jail.

Oh, if only poor little Daisy, tossing on her hot and feverish pillow, could have known!

CHAPTER XLV.

THE PRINCE TO THE RESCUE.

Hannah was doing well in her little shop at Teckford. She had always been a most saving body, and although Mrs. Mainwaring had never been able to pay her high wages, she had managed to put the greater portion of what she received away. Hannah was one of those fortunate individuals on whom even a shabby dress will look neat. Her boots lasted twice as long as any one else's, her caps retained their starch and their whiteness long after another servant's would have had to be resigned to a fresh cleaning process. Hannah therefore required little or no money to spend on dress, and in consequence, when the Mainwaring girls went away, she had a little nest-egg laid by to stock a shop. She found a suitable little house at Teckford, laid in her little store of provisions with care, for she argued wisely that however poor people were they required food, and was living very comfortably on the proceeds of her sales. Hannah, as a rule, had a smooth and unruffled brow; she was a careful woman, but not a troubled one. At the present moment, however it could scarcely be said of this good soul that she was without cares. The neighbors who came in to buy their bacon, and fresh eggs, and candles, and tea, remarked that Hannah had no longer a cheery word and a pleasant smile to give them, and the children, when they tumbled out their halfpennies and asked for "a little piece of taffy, please, ma'am," noticed that Hannah's eyes had red rims round them, and they wondered if she was naughty, and that was why she cried.

Yes, poor Hannah had a troubled heart during those early summer days, for Daisy

lay so weak and languid, and indifferent to all external things, on her tiny little bed, never giving Hannah any information as to why she had wandered alone to Rosebury, never saying anything about the weight of sorrow which rested on her little heart, only now and then moaning out that she must get up and go to Mrs. Ellsworthy, and now and then feebly saying that she wished so very much that the Prince was there.

Hannah knew all about Mrs. Ellsworthy, and how she had taken the girls up, and tried to help them, after their mother's death; but who was the Prince?

Finding that the child continued slightly feverish, and most unnaturally weak—finding that the dainties she prepared were only just tasted by the little sufferer—Hannah looked well into her little store of hardly-earned money, and finding that she had sufficient to pay him, called in the village doctor.

Of course, with his limited experience, this good man could little understand Daisy's case. He ordered medicine for her, and plenty of cooling drinks, and said that he could not find anything very much the matter, only she was most unnaturally weak.

"It's my thinking, sir," said Hannah, "that this is the kind of weakness that ends in death. My little lady is all on the pine for something or some one, and unless she gets what she wants soon she will die."

Hannah's view of the case was rather puzzling to the doctor, who stared at her, and considered her from that day forward a very fanciful woman. He repeated his injunctions to give Daisy plenty of milk, and to see that she took her tonic three times a day; and then he took his leave.

When he was gone Hannah went to her next-door neighbor and asked her if she would be so very kind as to go and sit in the child's room for a couple of hours. Then she put on her bonnet and neat black cloak, and started off on foot to Rosebury. She had made up her mind to get Mrs. Ellsworthy's address from some one, and to write to her about Daisy. In due time she arrived at the lodge, saw the woman who kept

the gates, obtained from her without much difficulty Mrs. Ellsworthy's address, and then prepared to return home. Just as she reached the stile, however, which led into the field where she had found Daisy, a thought struck her—she had no writing-paper in the house, and what could be bought at Teckford was almost too bad to use. Hannah made up her mind to go to Rosebury, which was a much more important village than Teckford, and get a few sheets of note-paper, and an envelope or two. She walked very fast, for she did not like to leave Daisy so long by herself, and, panting and hurried, she at last arrived at the little stationer's shop. The stationer's wife knew Hannah, and greeted her with effusion.

"I'm truly pleased to see you, Mrs. Martin," she said. "Why you're quite a stranger in these parts, and I did not expect to see you round now, with one of your young ladies returned and all."

Hannah heaved a profound sigh.

"She's very, very ill, poor darling," she said. "Very dangerously weak and ill; and I must trouble you to hasten with the paper, Mrs. Jones. One penn'orth of your most shining note, and two envelopes to match. Mind you, give me a paper with a good gloss on it, Mrs. Jones."

Mrs. Jones stared at Hannah Martin; but fetching down a box of note-paper, prepared to wrap some sheets in tissue paper.

"I shouldn't say Miss Primrose was ill," she remarked as she did so, "though she do seem worried, dear young lady."

When the shop-woman made this observation Hannah's pence tumbled down on the counter with a crash.

"Goodness gracious me, ma'am!" she exclaimed, "you don't mean to tell me that Miss Primrose Mainwaring is at Rosebury?"

"Why, of course, ma'am; why, don't you know? why you said but now how weak and ill she was."

"Never mind the paper," answered Hannah, "and never mind a word I said about anybody; just have the goodness to tell me where I'll find Miss Primrose."

"She was staying with Miss Martineau but yesterday and there's a gentleman come down, too—a very 'ansome, harristocratic-looking young man, I call him, and for all the world as like our pretty Miss Jasmine as if he was own brother to her—and they two and Miss Martineau are fairly scouring the place for that poor little tot Miss Daisy, who it seems 'as run away from home. Why, Hannah—Hannah Martin, woman! are you daft?"

For Hannah had rushed from the shop while Mrs. Jones was speaking, leaving her neglected paper and two or three pence behind her on the counter. A few moments later the good soul was knocking at Miss Martineau's door, and very soon Primrose and Arthur Noel too were in possession of all the facts that Hannah could give them.

"Oh, Hannah! it is so good to think you were the one to save her and find her," said Primrose, as she kissed her old nurse, and shed some thankful tears.

"You had better come back with me now, Miss Primrose," said Hannah, "and perhaps the gentleman or Miss Martineau will send a telegraphic message to poor Miss Jasmine."

But Primrose's difficulties had not come to an end. She instantly started to walk across the fields with Hannah; but when Daisy heard she had come she absolutely refused to see her, and cried so piteously, and got into such an excited state, that Primrose felt herself obliged to yield to the child's caprice, and to keep out of the room.

"I can't see her, Hannah," poor little Daisy said. "Of all people in all the world, I can't see my own Primrose. Oh, if only I were well enough to go to Mrs. Ellsworthy, or if only the Prince would come!"

Primrose heard Daisy's weak little voice through the thin walls of Hannah's cottage.

"Hannah," she said, "I know who Daisy means by the Prince. The Prince is that kind

Mr. Noel, who has been helping me to find the little darling. If he has not gone back to London, for he said he would go back at once after he knew we had found Daisy, he could come to her. Oh, Hannah," continued poor Primrose, "I cannot think what has happened to your dear baby, Daisy. I begin to believe what Mr. Noel has been hinting to me—that some one has got a secret influence over her."

"We had better see and find this Mr. Noel at once, miss, now," said practical Hannah. "We can think of secret influences and all that sort of thing when we have found the gentleman whom the dear child is pining to see. If Mr. Noel is still at Rosebury you had better put on your hat, Miss Primrose, and walk across the fields to the village, and bring him back with you. I'll stay with Miss Daisy and soothe her the best way I can. She's dreadful agitated and very weak and trembling ever since you came in, miss."

Primrose said she would go back to Rosebury directly, and she was so fortunate as to meet Noel as he was starting for London.

"You must come with me," she said earnestly. "I fear our dear little Daisy is even worse than Hannah represented her to be. She has absolutely refused to see me, and talks only about you and Mrs. Ellsworthy. I don't know what she can want with either of you, but it is quite evident that she thinks you can help her and save her from some great trouble. Poppy said she wanted Mrs. Ellsworthy to give her money; I suppose to replace what she lost of mine. Well, Mrs. Ellsworthy is not here; so can you come to see her to-night?"

"I will come at once, Miss Mainwaring," answered Noel. "If we walk down this street we shall pass the post-office, and I can send a telegram to Mrs. Ellsworthy and also to my servant, Lawson. I must try and get into town some time to-morrow, however, for I have got to attend the trial of no less a person than your old landlord, Dove. He was apprehended for stealing a bank-note and a ring from my mantle-piece."

"I never liked that man," said Primrose; "indeed, I never thought either of the Doves quite honest. Mrs. Dove made a rule of keeping back a little of the money she borrowed from me on all occasions."

Then Primrose and Noel walked as quickly as they could down the village street. Noel despatched his necessary telegram, and in a short time they both found themselves in Hannah's humble cottage.

"She is asleep," said Hannah, as she came out to meet them. "She is moaning in her sleep, and she gives sighs enough to break your heart. You had better, both of you, stay in my little sitting-room until she awakes."

"If you will allow me," said Noel, "I will go and sit beside her bed; she is accustomed to me. I will promise to be very careful in my dealings with her. I believe I can talk to her without startling her in the least."

Hannah looked dubious, but Primrose interposed in her gentle voice—

"Yes, Hannah, Mr. Noel will not startle Daisy; he has always had a most happy influence over her."

Poor little Daisy! the sight of her wan face, the anxious expression which seemed indelibly stamped on her childish brow, gave Noel so strong a sense of pain and indignation that he sincerely longed to secure for Dove as severe a punishment as the law would give. He sat down gently by the humble little bed, and when the child moaned and tossed in her sleep he laid his cool hand on her forehead. That hand had a magnetic effect—even in her sleep Daisy seemed to know it. She murmured, "The Prince, has he come?" and a moment after she opened her dark blue eyes and fixed them on Noel, while a very faint smile flitted across her little face.

"You have come at last, Mr. Prince. I am very, very glad; I have wanted you," she said.

"I have wanted you, Daisy; I have been looking for you everywhere. I have been in great trouble about you," answered Noel, in his gentlest tones.

"Have you?" said little Daisy; "I am sorry you have been in trouble. Do you know that Primrose came to-day and I could not see her? I can see you, but not Primrose. Please let me hold your hand. I don't feel so dreadfully weak when I hold your hand. Will you stoop down, and let me talk to you. I can't talk at all loud, for I'm dreadfully weak. Do you know, Mr. Prince, that I'm going to die?"

"No, Daisy, I don't think you are," answered Noel. I am the Prince who delivers little girls from ogres. I never heard of a little girl dying after she was delivered from the ogre."

"Wicked little girls are not delivered," answered Daisy. "I was so dreadfully cowardly. I was afraid of a dark dungeon, and so—and so—but I mustn't tell you. I did lose Primrose's money, and I was a coward, but I haven't been so bad yet as to tell a lie. You mustn't ask me to tell you what it all means, Mr. Prince, for I can't. I hope very much you'll forgive me for being a cowardly little girl; God has, long ago, for I asked Him, and I am not really afraid to die. I shouldn't feel a bit afraid or unhappy about it if I thought Primrose and Jasmine could have their money."

Here Daisy's voice quite failed her, and she looked so dreadfully white and weak that Noel began to fear there was some truth in her poor little words. He saw that their interview must not be prolonged, and that he must give the child relief as soon as possible.

"Daisy, you have got to listen to me," he said. "You need say very little yourself, but you can listen to my words. I know why you want to see Mrs. Ellsworthy—yes, dear, you can hold my hand as tightly as possible. No, don't tremble; you want Mrs. Ellsworthy to give you some money. She is not here; I know she would help you, and feel sorry for you, but there are others who do that. Daisy, suppose I give you back your money instead of Mrs. Ellsworthy? Give me your little hand, dear, and let me put the money into it. Here; it makes quite a small parcel—a ten-pound note, a five-pound note, two sovereigns and a half. Now, Daisy, shall we keep this as a little

secret between ourselves? Primrose will ask no questions if you beg of her not, and when you have put that money into her hand will you not be able to have her with you again?"

Daisy's little hot hand closed tightly over the money. She did not speak, or even attempt to thank Noel, but her eyes, wider and wider open each moment, were fixed intently on his face.

"That is settled, then, Daisy," continued Noel, "and we need not think of Mrs. Ellsworthy just at present, for you do not now need her services. Of course a Prince is the right person to deliver a little girl from a dreadful ogre. I don't see that Mrs. Ellsworthy should have anything to do with it. Now, my dear, I'm going to say one or two other things to you—you need not feel the least frightened."

"May I really keep the money?" whispered Daisy at last.

"Of course, I said so. We will not say any more on this subject at present. I have given you the money to-night, because I want you to have Primrose sitting by your side and nursing you and comforting you. When Primrose is with you again you will cease to think those gloomy thoughts about dying. Now I have something else to add before I leave you."

Noel had now taken a very firm hold of Daisy's little hand. She had been trembling a good deal, but she had certainly grown calmer. Perhaps the knowledge that she really did possess some money to give to Primrose was comforting her. Noel felt a sense of distress at disturbing even for her eventual good the child's present calm. It must be done, however, and he thought a moment how he could most gently deal with her.

"I'm going to tell you a story, Daisy," he said—"a very sad story, and, alas, a true one. There lives a little girl, I will not tell her name, although I know it, who has been unfortunate enough to get into the power of a very bad man. The man is very, very bad, but I will not mention his name here, although I know it also. The man

came to the little girl and talked to her, and no doubt he threatened her, and at last he made her promise him something—what, I cannot say. From the moment this little girl made this promise she became thin and white, and anxious and unhappy. She struggled against the terrible promise which seemed to bind her with fetters of iron, but she could never get away from it, and the man appeared like a terrible ogre to her, and she longed for a Prince to come and deliver her from him. The wicked man having terrified this poor little girl, did his best to use his influence over her to his own ends. At one time she lived in the house with him, but although she struggled against it her friends induced her to go elsewhere. Even in the new palace, however, she was not safe from the terrible ogre; he followed her, and, it is to be feared, although nothing is absolutely known, that he used cruel threats to induce her to give him some money which was not hers to give. The poor little weak girl was afraid to consult any one on account of her promise. It was quite natural she should think it right to keep her promise, although it was very sad. She was so completely under the power of the wicked man, or the ogre, as we will call him, that she gave him her sister's money—the money that was to support them all for some months, and then in her great despair she ran away." Here Noel paused—Daisy's eyes were fixed on him. Her face was white as death.

"You see, dear, it is a painful story," he said, "but it is not quite finished yet. The poor little girl ran away, but she never knew what was happening to the ogre. That wicked man was not allowed to continue his evil ways without punishment. At the present moment he is locked up safely in prison, where he can hurt no one. He was put there because he stole a five-pound note and a ring from the gentleman whom the little girl used to call the Prince. It is believed, though of course nothing is certainly known, nor will be until the little girl is taken out of the thraldom of the ogre and confesses what has happened, that this wicked man has also stolen a good deal of money from an envelope which the elder sister used to consider her 'Emergency Fund' envelope. In short, it is thought that his one object in frightening

the poor little girl was simply to rob her and her sisters. Now that he is in prison, however, and quite out of the way of harming any one, it is greatly hoped by those who love her that the poor little one, who was made to suffer so cruelly, will be released from the thraldom of the wicked ogre, and be made to see that there are times and circumstances during which even the most truthful little girl would do better to break her word than to keep it. Now, Daisy, that is the end of my story; I've got nothing more to say about it, for at present I know nothing more. Good-night, dear—I will send Primrose to you. I will come to you when you want me again."

CHAPTER XLVI.

DELIVERED FROM THE OGRE.

"Here's the money, Primrose—here's all the money," said little Daisy, in a weak, weak voice, when her sister came up to her bedside, and bent over her. "It was lost and the Prince brought it back; you won't ask me any questions about it, will you, Primrose?"

"No," exclaimed Primrose, in her very quiet and matter-of-fact voice—the kind of voice which was most soothing to the excitable and nervous child at the present moment.

"I'm glad to have it back, Daisy, dear, for I have missed it; but of course, I shan't ask you any questions about it. I shall just put it into my purse, and you shall see what a nice fat purse I have got once more."

Then Primrose held her little sister's hand, and shook up her pillows, and tended her as only she knew how, but all that night Daisy grew more and more restless. The drowsy state in which she had hitherto been had changed to one of wakefulness. All through the long night the little creature's bright eyes remained open, and her anxious face had a question on it which yet she never spoke. At last, as the bright

summer's morning broke, she turned to Primrose and said eagerly—

"Kneel down, Primrose, and ask God what a very ignorant, very unhappy little girl ought to do. Oh, Primrose, it's all about a promise—a promise that was most faithfully given. What shall I do about it?"

"Do you want to keep it, or to break it?" asked Primrose.

"It seems to me I ought to keep it, Primrose, because a promise, faithfully given, ought always to be kept; but Mr. Noel says I ought to break this promise; oh, I don't know what to do!"

"Your heart won't be at rest, Daisy, and you won't really get better, until you do know what to do," answered Primrose. "Of course, I will kneel down and ask God to tell you."

Then the elder sister prayed aloud a very few earnest words, and the little one joined her in whispered sentences. The prayer was not long, but in Daisy's case it was quickly answered. When the morning quite broke, and the real working-day had begun, Primrose sent a message to Noel to come at once to see the child. Daisy received him with a touching little smile.

"Was the little girl me?" she asked. "And was the wicked, wicked ogre, Mr. Dove?"

"It is clever of you to guess that much, Daisy," answered Noel.

"Am I the little girl?" continued Daisy, "who made a promise which she ought now to break? Will God forgive me for breaking a promise which I made so very, very faithfully? Mr. Noel, I will tell you something. That promise has nearly killed me. The old Daisy went away when that promise was made, and such a poor, cowardly, wretched Daisy came in her place. She'd have been selfish, too, but for you; but you taught her a little bit about the Palace Beautiful, and she was trying to be good in spite of the dreadful promise. Then the ogre came again, and the second time he was so dreadful that she even became very selfish to get rid of him. Oh, Mr. Noel, is it right for me—will God think it really right for me—to break that dreadful promise?"

"He will, Daisy. The promise ought never to have been made. Only an innocent and ignorant little child would have made it; yes, Daisy, dear, yours is one of the rare cases of a promise better broken than kept. See, I am the Prince, and I'm going to take the spell of the ogre from you. The wicked ogre is locked up in a dungeon instead of you, and the Prince commands the poor little captive to tell him everything."

Then Daisy, with some broken sobs, and with a piteous light in her blue eyes, told Noel the whole cruel story. He listened without once interrupting the little narrator. When she had finished, he kissed her, and told her that she now had nothing to fear, and then, bidding her sleep away all her troubles, he left her to Primrose's care. By the next train he himself went to London in full time to attend Dove's trial.

That worthy was at first inclined to brazen matters out, but when Noel, primed with Daisy's confession, appeared on the scene, his face underwent a remarkable change. Its rubicund tints quite deserted it, an alarming pallor spreading over every feature. Tommy Dove, who might have been seen in a foremost position amongst the crowd of spectators, was heard audibly to exclaim—

"Law, I guess there ain't no leg for my respected pa to stand on now!"

This, although not expressed aloud, seemed also to be Dove's opinion, for he then and there made a full confession of his wicked practices, and of the cruel threats he had employed to terrify Daisy. He received his sentence, which was a severe one, with much stoicism, and, as he was led away from his place in the prisoner's dock, addressed a parting word to his affectionate and hysterical spouse—

"Never mind, Mrs. Dove, my only love, even fourteen years comes to an end somehow, and when we meets again we'll make a rule for there being no attic lodgers."

"To the very end his was a poetic turn," his wife afterwards remarked to her favorite cronies.

CHAPTER XLVII.

ALMOST DEFEATED.

With the weight of her secret removed Daisy began slowly, very slowly, to mend. The strain she had undergone had been too great for her quickly to recover her strength; but little by little a faint color did return to her white cheeks, she slept more peacefully, and began to eat again.

"There's nothing at all for you to do, Miss Primrose," said Hannah, "but to give up that post of continually screaming out book and newspaper stuff to a deaf old lady."

"She isn't deaf, Hannah," interrupted Primrose. "She wants me to read to her because her sight is very bad."

"Well, well," replied Hannah Martin, in a testy tone, "whether she's deaf or whether she's blind, it ain't no way a fit post for you, Miss Primrose. You've got to stay here now, and take care of that precious little lamb, and you had better send for Miss Jasmine to keep you company."

"I am certainly not going to leave Daisy at present," replied Primrose. "I've got money enough to go on with, but I must go back to town as soon as possible in order to earn enough to return Mr. Noel's money to him. As to Jasmine, do you know, Hannah, she has got quite a nice way of making a little income? You remember how cleverly she always arranged the flowers in our drawing-room at dear Rosebury, and how our mother always asked her to make bouquets for her? It now seems that Jasmine has got rather remarkable taste, and some fine ladies in London are employing her to arrange flowers on their dinner-tables. They pay her very well indeed for this, and the labor is nothing at all."

"Hoot!" said Hannah; "I think it's rather demeaning of herself. Well, Miss Primrose, I suppose the poor dear will want a holiday the same as the rest of you. To tell the truth, Miss Primrose, my old eyes ache to see the darling, she was always such a

bonny one."

Primrose smiled.

"When the fine ladies go out of town, Hannah, we will have Jasmine down, and you shall squeeze us all into that nice, cosy little bedroom of yours. What a good thing it was, Hannah; that you did not follow us to London, but that you started this nice shop in the country, for now we three girls can have our change in the country at such small expense."

Tears started to Hannah's eyes.

"I've been always saving up for this, Miss Primrose, and if you will talk of paying me at all, I'll never forgive you; aren't you my nurslings, all three of you, and the only creatures I have got to live for?"

In the meantime while things were mending for Primrose and Daisy, and Daisy was beginning once more to get that soft pink in her cheeks which gave her such a curious and touching likeness to her name-flower, poor little Jasmine, left behind in her Palace Beautiful, was not having quite so good a time.

Jasmine was beset by several worries and anxieties; she was also extremely lonely, for Miss Egerton, owing to the dangerous illness of a near relation, was still absent from home, and Poppy, driven by the dire necessity of earning bread to eat, had been obliged to return, as little maid-of-all-work, to Penelope Mansion.

Jasmine was alone, but she was a brave child, and her strong longing now was to help Primrose, and above all things not to ask for any money from her.

For the first few days after Primrose had gone to the country the poor little girl's resources were very meagre indeed. She had thought that first sovereign she had earned simply inexhaustible, but it was surprising how it melted in her inexperienced grasp, and how very, very little it seemed capable of purchasing.

In her first delight at finding herself capable of earning money she had written an

extravagantly hopeful letter to Primrose.

"You need not think at all of me, dear Primrose," she wrote; "keep all the money you can collect to buy nice nourishing things for dear little Daisy. Perhaps I shall become quite famous as an arranger of flowers on great London dinner-tables. If I do get orders, and I think I am sure of them, I shall not only be able to pay my own London expenses, but will save something towards our emergency fund. Oh, Primrose, my heart burns with longings to earn lots of money, and to be great and strong and famous!"

This poor little enthusiastic letter reached Primrose when Daisy was at her worst, and it so happened that it lightened her cares about the little sister alone in London. She felt quite sure that Jasmine was getting plenty of orders, and was earning sufficient money for her own modest wants in the pretty way she spoke of; and in consequence she did not send her any of the money which Daisy had returned to her.

But poor little Jasmine was not receiving orders so fast as Primrose anticipated. One or two other ladies did ask her to dress their dinner-tables for them, and one or two more promised to do so, and then forgot all about it; but no one paid her as well as Mrs. Daintree had done. Noel was out of town, and was unable to interest himself in her behalf, and so it came to pass that the slender purse could not supply the modest needs, and Jasmine was much too proud, and too determined to help herself, to write to Primrose for money.

These were hard days for the little girl—days which were to prove the stuff she was made of to the very uttermost—but doubtless they gave her, as all anxious days of pain bravely borne do, a valuable experience and a depth of character which she could not otherwise have acquired.

The lesson she was to learn, however, was a painful one, and its sharpness was to be felt very quickly.

Jasmine's hope of hopes lay in her beloved manuscript. That story, the first-fruits of

her young genius, must surely make her purse bulky, and must wreathe her little brow with laurels. That story, too, was to refund poor Poppy the money she had lent, and was to enable Jasmine to live in comfort during her sister's absence.

One day, about ten days after Primrose had gone to Rosebury, Jasmine stood by the windows of the Palace Beautiful to watch the postman. He was coming up the street, and Jasmine greatly, greatly hoped he would stop at Miss Egerton's and drop into the letter-box, perhaps, a letter from Primrose, and more delightful still, a roll of proofs of her dear story. The postman, however, passed on his way, and gave his loud rat-tat at the doors to right and the doors to left, but neither sounded the bell nor gave his double-knock at Miss Egerton's door. Jasmine sighed deeply, and retiring from the window, sat down to her frugal breakfast. She looked pale, and her eyes were not as bright and starry as usual. Presently she took out her purse and looked at its contents. This was Thursday. She had dressed a dinner-table on Monday, and had received seven and sixpence. Her purse now contained three shillings, and she certainly could not accuse herself of any extravagance in the matter of diet.

"This will never do," she said to herself. "I believe if I do not get any more money I shall be obliged to apply to Primrose, and it was only last night I heard from dear old Rose saying how glad she was that I was able to support myself. She said Daisy's illness had cost a great deal, and we must all economize in every possible manner for some time. Dear darling old Primrose, I will not ask her to help me—I will manage for myself. Now how shall I do it? I am afraid those ladies did not care for the star arrangement of flowers which I made at that last house. I thought them lovely, peeping out through their dark green leaves, but I heard Mrs. Lee whispering to Mrs. Mansell, 'How peculiar! do you quite like it?' and then Mrs. Mansell said nothing more about my dressing her dinner-table. Her dinner-party was to have been to-day, and she almost promised to have me when I arrived in the morning. Well, there is no use thinking of that; I cannot swell my purse in that manner this day, that is very evident. Oh, dear! oh, dear! what shall I do?"

Here a sudden thought came to Jasmine. Under its influence her cheeks flushed, and her eyes began to shine.

"Why, of course," she exclaimed; "how very silly of me to forget!—my hundred copies of The Joy-bell ought to have arrived by now. Yes, of course they ought, and perhaps I shall be able to sell some of them. I have no doubt Mrs. Dredge would buy a couple if Poppy asked her and perhaps Mrs. Mortlock and Miss Slowcum would also like to see my first story in print. Yes, of course, I can sell a few copies. Bridget said she would buy one, and she said she had two cronies who would be sure to take a copy each. Yes, I expect I shall make a few shillings by the sale of The Joy-bell to-day, and that will keep me going fine. Oh, dear! the very moment I have earned a little money by them I must send a copy down to Daisy. Won't the darling like to show my words of genius to Primrose? I'll run downstairs this minute, and ask Bridget if she has not got a parcel for me."

But alas! no Joy-bells had arrived for Jasmine, and after the little girl had wondered a great deal, and talked the matter over with Bridget she determined to put on her hat and go off to consult with Poppy.

She was not long finding her way to Penelope Mansion, and Poppy opened the door for her, but greeted her in a sad voice, and looked decidedly depressed.

"I have come about The Joy-bell" began Jasmine at once, in an excited voice. "It ought to have come—my hundred copies, you know, and they haven't. I must go to inquire about it at once; and, Poppy, dear, could you come with me?"

Poppy turned very red.

"No, Miss Jasmine, darling, I couldn't," she said, in the meekest voice.

Poppy's tones were so unlike those she usually employed that Jasmine glanced at her in some surprise.

"Why, Poppy, how funny you are!" she exclaimed. "Is anything the matter?"

"Don't you notice it, Miss Jasmine, but I'm a bit low-like," said Poppy. "I has my low fits and my high fits same as t'other folks, and this is a low fit day—that's all, miss."

"Oh! I am so sorry. Poor Poppy! And is the swimming in your head as bad as ever?"

"It's continual, Miss Jasmine. It seems to have become a kind of habit, same as the smuts and the Sarah Janes. A swimming head is most certain the London style of head for a girl like me. Yes, I am sorry I can't go with you, Miss Jasmine, darling, but I can't this morning. I hope you will get safe to the City, miss, and that you will see the editor, and give it to him sharp for not sending you your Joy-bells. Oh, my, Miss Jasmine! to think that your beautiful words is in print at last! Most likely the whole of London is flooded by them now, and the editor will be asking you for more of your words of beauty and wisdom. You make a sharp bargain with him, Miss Jasmine, and before you put pen to paper again for him, you get your money down. There's nothing so safe in clinching a bargain as money down. Oh, dear! I wish I could go with you. And, Miss Jasmine, if you could find it convenient to pay me back say one and sixpence of the little loan, I'll be for ever obliged, darling."

At this moment Mrs. Flint's voice was heard calling Poppy, and demanding who she was standing gossiping with. Mrs. Flint's voice sounded quite sharp, and Jasmine guessed that something unusual must have occurred to disturb her, for Mrs. Flint was known on principle never to excite herself.

"What is the matter with her?" she inquired of Poppy, who flushed up at her tones.

"Oh, nothing, miss. She's only a bit put out about the broken boots. There, I must run."

Poppy almost shut the door in Jasmine's face. She was certainly very unlike her usual self.

Jasmine walked down the steps of the Mansion, and slowly, very slowly, went up the street to meet the omnibus which was to convey her Citywards.

She was quite a clever little Londoner now, and knew which were the right omnibuses to take, and, in short, how to find her way about town. She hailed the City omnibus, and hastily and humbly took her place amongst its crowded passengers. She was the unlucky twelfth, and her advent was certainly not hailed with delight. The bright morning had turned to rain, and the passengers, most of them women, were wrapped up in waterproof cloaks. Jasmine, when she entered the omnibus, looked so small, so timid, and unimportant, that no one thought it worth while even to move for her, and at last she was thankful to get a little pin-point of room between two very buxom ladies, who both almost in the same breath desired her not to crowd them, and both also fiercely requested her to keep her wet dress from touching their waterproofs.

At another time Jasmine would have been quite spirited enough to resent the unfriendly behavior of the inmates of the City 'bus; but her interview with Poppy had depressed her greatly, and she had a kind of terrified little fear that she knew the reason of Mrs. Flint's sharp tones, that she could guess why Poppy's bright face should look so dismal, and why she was obliged so earnestly to beg of her to return her one and sixpence.

"She wants her own money—her wages, that she earned with a swimming head and all," thought poor Jasmine. "How selfish of me not to remember before that of course, poor Poppy would want her wages; it is perfectly dreadful to think of her doing without them. Why, of course, Mrs. Flint would be likely to scold her if she went about with her ragged boots when she earns such good wages. Poor, dear, brave Poppy! she would never tell what she did with her money. Well, she must have it all back to-day. Yes, I am determined about that, she shall have it back, to-day."

Jasmine was thinking so hard, and so absorbing was her theme, that she leaned unconsciously against the fat neighbor on her right. This good person immediately

pushed her with some vigor into the arms of the portly neighbor on her left, who exclaimed, in a cross voice—

"Lor' sakes! my dear, sit upright, do."

"I hope the young person will soon get out," exclaimed the other neighbor. "I call it downright unconscionable to crowd up Christian women like this. Might I make bold to inquire, miss, when you are thinking of alighting?"

"I am going to Paternoster Row," said Jasmine, in a meek voice. "I do not think I am very far from there now."

"Oh, no, miss! we have only to go down Newgate Street, and there you are. It's a queer place, is Paternoster Row, not that I knows much about it."

"A mighty bookish place," took up the other neighbor "they say they are all bookworms that live there, and that they are as dry as bits of parchment. I shouldn't say that a bright little miss like you had any call to go near such a place."

Jasmine drew herself up, and her face became sunshiny once more.

"You would not think," she began, with an air of modest pride, "that I belong to the booky and the parchmenty people, but I do. I am going down the Row to inquire about one of my publications, perhaps I ought to say my first, so I am anxious about it."

"Lor', who would have thought it!" exclaimed both the ladies, but they instantly fell back and seemed to think it better to leave so alarmedly learned a little girl alone. For the remainder of the ride they talked across Jasmine about the price of onions, and where the cheapest bacon was to be purchased, and they both breathed a sigh of relief when she stepped out into the rain and they could once more expand themselves in the space which she had occupied.

Meanwhile the forlorn little adventurer walked down the narrow path of this celebrated Row. It was still raining heavily, and Jasmine's umbrella had several rents

in its canopy. Now that she was so close to her destination she began to feel strangely nervous, and many fears hitherto unknown beset her. Suppose, after all, The Joy-bell which contained the first portion of her story had not had a large success; suppose, after all, the public were not so delighted with her flowing words. Perhaps the editor would receive her very coldly, and would tell her what a loss her story had been, and how indisposed he felt to go on with it. If this was the case she never, never would have courage to ask him to give her Poppy's wages. If the editor scolded her she felt that she would be incapable of saying a word in her own defence. Nay, she thought it extremely probable that then and there she would burst into tears. Undoubtedly, she was in a very low frame of mind to-day. She, as well as Poppy, had her low fit on, and she greatly trembled for the result of the coming interview. Since that pathetic little last speech of Poppy's about her broken boots Jasmine had quite forgotten how sorely she needed money for herself. Her one and only desire just now was to restore Poppy's money.

"I must do it," she said to herself; "I must do it, and I will. I have made up my mind, and I really need not be so frightened. After all, Poppy and Daisy are both quite sure that I am a genius. Daisy says that I have got the face of a genius, and Poppy was in such great, great delight at my story. It is not likely that they would both be wrong, and Poppy is a person of great discernment. I must cheer up and believe what they told me. I daresay Poppy is right, and London is half-flooded with my story. Ah, here I am at the entrance of the court where the editor of The Joy-bell lives. How funny it is to be here all alone. I really feel quite like a heroine. Now I am at the office—how queer, how very queer—I do not see any Joy-bells pressed up against the window. No, not a single one; there are lots of other books and papers, but no Joy-bells. Dear, dear! my heart does beat, for I am thinking that perhaps Poppy is right, and that all the copies of The Joy-bells are bought up; that, of course, is on account of my story." Then Jasmine entered the house, and went into a little office where a red-haired boy was sitting on a high stool before a dirty-looking desk. The

boy had a facetious and rather unpleasant face, and was certainly not remarkable for good manners.

"I want to see the editor of The Joy-bell," asked Jasmine, in as firm a tone as she could command.

The red-haired boy raised his eyes from a huge ledger which he was pretending to occupy himself over, and said, "Can't see him," in a laconic tone, and dropped his eyes again.

"But why?" asked Jasmine, somewhat indignantly. "I have particular business with him; it is most necessary that I should see him. Pray, let him know that I am here."

"Very sorry," replied the boy, "but can't."

"Why not?"

"'Cause he ain't in town."

"Oh!"

Poor Jasmine fell back a pace or two; then she resumed in a different tone—

"I am very much disappointed; there is a story of mine in The Joy-bell, and I wanted to speak to him about it. It was very important, indeed," she added, in so sad a voice that the red-haired boy gazed at her in some astonishment.

"My word," he said, "then you do not know?"

"Don't know what?"

"Why, we has had a funeral here."

"A funeral—oh, dear! oh, dear! is the editor of The Joy-bell dead?"

Here the red-haired boy burst into a peal of irrepressible laughter.

"Dead! he ain't dead, but The Joy-bell is; we had her funeral last week."

Poor Jasmine staggered against the wall, and her pretty face became ghastly white.

"Oh, boy," she said, "do tell me about it; how can The Joy-bell be dead, and have a

funeral? Oh, please, don't jest with me, for it's so important."

The genuine distress in her tones touched at last some vulnerable point in the facetious office-boy's breast.

"I'm real sorry for you, miss," he said, "particular as you seems so cut up; but what I tell you is true, and you had better know it. That editor has gone, and The Joy-bell is decently interred. I was at her birth, and I was at her funeral. She had a short life, and was never up to much. I never guessed she'd hold out as long as she did; but the editor was a cute one, and for a time he bamboozled his authors, and managed to live on them. Yes, The Joy-bell is in her quiet grave at last, and can't do no more harm to nobody. Lor', miss, I wouldn't take on if I was you, you'd soon get accustomed to it if you had a desk at an office like this. In at the births, and in at the deaths am I, and I don't make no count of one or t'other. Why, now, there was The Stranger—which went in for pictorial get up, and was truly elegant—it only lasted six months; and there was The Ocean Wave, which did not even live as long. And there was Merrie Lassie—oh, their names is legion. We'll have another started in no time. So you must be going, miss? Well, good morning. If I was you, miss, I wouldn't send no more stories to this yere office."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ONE SHOE OFF AND ONE SHOE ON.

"I must see you, Poppy—I must see you, and I can't come into the house. I could not face Mrs. Mortlock, nor Mrs. Dredge, nor Miss Slowcum. I am a dreadful failure, Poppy, a dreadful, dreadful failure, and I cannot look any one in the face. Do come out with me, dear Poppy, and at once; for if I can't speak to you at the present moment my heart will break."

"They're teaing just now," said Poppy, in a reflective tone; "they are all in the

dining-room as snug as possible over their high tea. They have shrimps for tea, and a wonderful new kind of paste that Aunt Flint brought in to-day. It's called Gentlemen's Relish, and eats well on hot toast, and I made a lot. Oh, my! won't the ladies go in for it! Though Miss Slowcum always is so bitter against gentlemen, she will eat their relish, and no mistake. Well, Miss Jasmine they are all engaged over the pleasures of the social board, and what's to hinder you and me going down to the back scullery and having our talk there? You see, miss, if I went out with you I'd have to tidy up a bit first, and that would take time."

"You are quite sure they won't hear me, Poppy, if I walk across the hall. Miss Slowcum is dreadfully curious, and if she heard my step in the hall she would run out even though she was eating Gentlemen's Relish. I do not want any one to see me now that I am a failure."

"Step on this mat," said Poppy—"now on this; now make a spring here. There you are. Now we'll be down in my scullery long before Miss Slowcum can get to the dining-room door. Now, miss, let me put a seat for you. The scullery ain't so damp to-day, is it, Miss Jasmine?"

"I don't know," said Jasmine, who looked very tired, and almost ill. "Poppy, dear, I have not brought the one and sixpence."

"Oh, it don't matter," said Poppy. "One and sixpence never fretted me yet, and it ain't going to begin. You'll pay me when you can, Miss Jasmine, and there ain't no hurry."

But Jasmine noticed that Poppy moved her little feet out of sight, and in spite of her brave words Jasmine observed a look of dismay creeping into her bright eyes.

This slight action on Poppy's part—this little lurking gleam of disappointment—were as the proverbial last straw to poor Jasmine. Her fortitude gave way, and she burst into the bitterest tears she had ever shed.

Poppy was much alarmed, and stood over her dear little lady, and brought her cold

water, and tried to comfort her by every means in her power.

When Jasmine had a little recovered herself she told the whole bitter story of her morning's adventure to Poppy. That young person's indignation knew no bounds.

"The editor must be put in prison," she said; "he must be caught and put in prison. Mrs. Jones the charwoman has a second cousin once removed, whose first cousin is married to a policeman, and Mrs. Jones is coming here to-morrow, and I'll get her to see her second cousin, and the second cousin shall see her first cousin who is married to a policeman, and he will tell us what is to be done. That's going to the fountainhead, ain't it, Miss Jasmine? Never you fear, miss, darling, that editor shall be locked up in prison, and be made to give back your money. Never you fear, dear Miss Jasmine, it will all come right when Mrs. Jones sees her second cousin who has a first cousin who is married to a policeman!"

Poppy became quite cheerful when she remembered Mrs. Jones's remarkable means of getting at a policeman, but Jasmine could not be comforted; she shook her head almost petulantly.

"It's all most puzzling for me," she said, "about Mrs. Jones and her policemen; it sounds exactly like the House that Jack Built, and I shall have a swimming head myself if I listen to you. No, Poppy, that policeman will never lock the wicked editor up in prison; he is a great deal too clever to allow himself to be locked up. Oh, dear! Poppy, what shall I do? All your money is gone, and my story is gone, and I know you are wanting boots as badly as possible. You are a dear, brave Poppy, but I know you have not a boot to your foot."

"Yes, Miss Jasmine, I has, I has one boot and one shoe; the shoe is an out-door one, and heavy, and the boot is a light one. Worn together, they make one walk a little one-sided, and the ladies, in particular Miss Slowcum, don't like it, but, lor', that don't matter nothing to speak of; they can't do nothing to me except tack on a few more names to Sarah. It don't fret me, Miss Jasmine, and it needn't fret you."

"All the same, I am going to get you your money, Poppy. I have absolutely made up my mind. I don't know how to do it, but do it I will. I had to come here to-night to tell you what had really happened; but now I am going home. You won't have to wear that dreadful boot and shoe together much longer."

After this Jasmine managed to walk through the hall without being detected by Miss Slowcum; and very tired and weary, in process of time she found her way back to the Palace Beautiful. She drank a glass of milk which Bridget had laid ready for her, and ate two or three slices of bread and butter. Then she went into the little bedroom, with its three pretty white beds, and opening her own special trunk began to examine its contents. She was dreadfully frightened at what she was about to do, but all the same she was determined to do it. She would pawn or sell what little valuables she possessed to give Poppy back her wages.

When the girls left Rosebury, Primrose made a very careful division of her mother's possessions. To Jasmine's share had come some really beautiful Spanish lace. Jasmine had not particularly admired it, but Primrose fancied that it would some day suit her speaking and vivacious face better than it would herself or Daisy. Jasmine had jammed the lace into a corner of her trunk, and but for the memory of dear mamma which it called up, would have made it a present to anybody. But one day it so happened that Miss Egerton caught sight of it; she exclaimed at its beauty, and said that it was really worth a considerable sum of money.

The lace consisted of a handsome shawl of black Spanish, and what was more beautiful, and also rarer, two very lovely flounces of white.

Miss Egerton was quite right when she spoke of the lace as valuable, but her ideas of value and Jasmine's were widely different. Jasmine would have thought herself well repaid if any one had given her Poppy's wages for the old lace; she would indeed have opened her eyes had she known at what sum Miss Egerton valued it. In addition to the lace Jasmine had a little thin gold ring which Mrs. Mainwaring had

worn as a guard to her wedding-ring. Jasmine much preferred the ring to the lace, but she slipped it on her finger, intending to part with it also, if the lace did not fetch enough money. She knew that Primrose would be deeply hurt at the lace being sold, for she had over and over said that come what might, they would not part with their few little home mementoes; but Jasmine was past caring even for what Primrose said to-night. With her lace wrapped up in an untidy parcel she slipped downstairs. Bridget came into the hall to speak to her.

"Look here, missie, is it not a little late for you to be going out?"

"Oh, not at all, Biddy, dear. I am going a little way. I won't be long."

Then Jasmine went up to the old servant and spoke in her most coaxing and fascinating tones.

"Biddy, what did you say was the sign of a pawnshop?"

"A pawnshop, Miss Jasmine? Why, bless us and save us, miss, what have you got to say to such places?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, Bridget, only I thought I would like to know. I am always trying to get information on every kind of subject. Is the pawnshop the sign of the three balls, Biddy?"

"Yes, yes, miss—what a curious young lady! There, run out and take your walk quick, and come back as soon as possible, for though it's close on Midsummer Day we'll have the night on us before you return if you are not quick."

Jasmine left the house, nodding brightly to Bridget as she did so, and the old servant returned to her interrupted work.

"She's a bright bonnie girl," she said to herself, "and hasn't she got a winsome way? I hope she drank up her milk, for she is looking a bit pale, and I hope she won't stay out late, for it may turn damp when the dew begins to fall."

Bridget was busy over her work, and was thinking of Jasmine after all in only a very

lazy and comfortable fashion when a cab drew up to the door, and Miss Egerton most unexpectedly returned. She was not in the house a moment before she asked for Jasmine.

"She's just gone out, ma'am," answered Bridget. "She had a parcel in her hand, and she said she was going out for a run. No, ma'am, I don't say she's looking at all particularly well. She's very white and worried looking, and she is scarcely ever in the house. She says she must improve her mind, and that is why she is out, and she do ask the funniest questions. Just now it was to know what was the sign of a pawnshop."

"The sign of a pawnshop?" echoed Miss Egerton; "and did you tell her, Bridget?"

"Why, of course, ma'am. She said she wanted to know for the improving of her mind. She had a little parcel in her hand, and she said she would be back again in no time. Shall I get you a cup of tea, ma'am?"

"No, thank you, Bridget. I cannot eat until I find out about Miss Jasmine. I do not like her asking you those questions, Bridget, and I do not like her taking a little parcel with her. The child may be in want or trouble. I must see to it at once. Bridget, have you any idea which is the nearest pawnshop to this?"

"Oh, ma'am, there's Spiller's round the corner, and there's Davidson's in the main road. Now, Miss Egerton, I am most certain Miss Jasmine wanted to hear about the pawnshop for the sake of improving her mind, and for that reason only. I wish you would stay, ma'am, and have your cup of tea, for you look real tired."

But Miss Egerton was gone.

CHAPTER XLIX.

SPANISH LACE.

She walked quickly down the street, hoping every moment to overtake Jasmine.

Miss Egerton had old-fashioned ideas about many things, and nothing could exceed her horror at the thought of this pretty and refined-looking child finding her way alone to a pawnshop.

"Poor little girl!" she said to herself. "She must be really in absolute want. What has she taken to pawn? Oh, dear! this anxiety is terrible—and yet, and yet, how glad I am to know those orphan girls."

Miss Egerton was very tired, had just returned from the death-bed of her dearest friend, had certainly heaps of worries of her own; but that did not prevent her whole heart from going out to Jasmine with an affection which was almost motherly.

When at last she found the little girl just coming out of Spiller's pawnshop she laid a trembling hand on her arm.

"Jasmine, oh, my dear child, you have been in there! You have been pawning something."

Jasmine was in such a depressed state of mind that even Miss Egerton's unexpected return failed to astonish her. She said, raising two sad eyes to the good lady's face—

"It was only that old Spanish lace. I always knew it was not worth much. The man only laughed when I asked for Poppy's wages for it. He has given me ten shillings, and I am going off with it to Poppy to-night. Yes, Miss Egerton, I must, I really must."

"What have you tried to pawn, Jasmine?" asked Miss Egerton, when she could find her voice. "Surely not that lovely, valuable Spanish lace. My dear child, come back with me into the shop this moment."

"But I must keep my ten shillings," exclaimed Jasmine "Oh! Miss Egerton, don't, don't! You don't know what has happened to me!"

Miss Egerton took Jasmine's little hand in hers.

"My poor child, you shall tell me all. Jasmine, dear, that lace is worth pounds. I shall

redeem it at once, for my sake, if not for yours. There, poor little girl, keep your ten shillings, if it makes you happy."

The man who had lent Jasmine half a sovereign on the Spanish lace of course knew little or nothing of its true value, and the good lady had therefore small difficulty in getting it back. She walked home holding Jasmine's hot little hand, took her into her own pretty drawing-room, feasted her on many good things, which she had brought from the country, and finally made her tell her all her sorrowful little story.

"You always said that my writing was not up to much," said Jasmine, in conclusion. "I did not like you to say it, and I was most anxious to prove you wrong, but now I know that you are right."

Miss Egerton looked quietly at the excited child.

"My dear," she said, in her gentle tones, "I do not know—no one knows—whether in the future you will be able to write. Our writers ought to be our teachers. Do you think you are fit to teach, Jasmine?"

"I do not know," said Jasmine, hanging her head.

Miss Egerton got up, and laid her hand tenderly on the pretty little curly head.

"This day has taught you a grand though painful lesson, dearest. You will be better able to write in the future for and because of the suffering you have gone through to-day. Now, Jasmine, I will say no more—you must go straight to bed and to sleep. In the morning you can take your ten shillings to Poppy. Yes, dear, of course it is yours, and for the present the Spanish lace is mine."

Jasmine, notwithstanding all her troubles, slept soundly that night, but Miss Egerton lay awake.

"The time has come," she said to herself, "when energetic measures must be taken. The girls—dear, brave, sweet girls—have undoubtedly to a certain extent failed. Poor little Jasmine! she might have had a worse experience than the loss of that silly

manuscript. But what terrible dangers sweet little Daisy ran! Yes, I shall go and have a talk with Mrs. Ellsworthy to-morrow—I know she is in town."

Accordingly, when Jasmine went off to see Poppy holding her half-sovereign firmly inside her glove, and dimly wondering if she would have any money of her own left to buy some dinner with presently, Miss Egerton stepped into an omnibus which presently put her down in the vicinity of Park Lane. She was fortunate in finding Mrs. Ellsworthy at home, and also disengaged.

The good little lady received her with delight, for Miss Egerton was a prime favorite with her.

"Arthur tells me that you know my girls," she said presently. "He hints to me that you and he have a secret knowledge of the address of my naughty, troublesome girls."

"I do know where they are to be found," said Miss Egerton in her gravest tones; "but before I begin to talk about them I want to transact a little business with you. I know how kind you are, and how fond of helping people in distress. At the present moment a lady of my acquaintance is in great poverty; she has got some valuable Spanish lace. I should like to sell it for her."

"I adore Spanish lace," said Mrs. Ellsworthy, her eyes sparkling.

"I thought I once heard you say you did, so I have brought it with me. May I show it to you?"

"How good of you, dear Miss Egerton; let me see it at once. Real Spanish lace is of great value. Oh, and white, too! What lovely flounces!"

"The lady to whom they belonged know nothing of their real value; she was disposing of both shawl and flounces yesterday evening for ten shillings."

"Oh, Miss Egerton! oh, poor, poor thing! I will gladly give her fifty pounds for them."

Miss Egerton coughed, and colored slightly.

"The fact is," she said, "I do not think she ought to sell them; they are mementoes, and belonged to her mother. Mrs. Ellsworthy, I won't deceive you any longer. This lace is now the property of Jasmine Mainwaring. She took it to a pawnshop last night, and but for me would have absolutely given it away; I was just in time to redeem it. Now the fact is, I happen to know that Primrose does not wish this lace to be sold; I offered, long ago, to find a purchaser for it, but she looked terribly distressed at the idea. What I should like to do would be this; in short, in short—I do not quite know how to put it—"

"I know, I know," said Mrs. Ellsworthy, clapping her hands, "you want me to be a pawnbroker, and to lend money on it. I will, I will, with pleasure; oh, this is quite a fresh and delightful idea."

"Give me ten pounds to help the poor child over her present difficulties," said Miss Egerton, tears in her eyes. "Yes, ten pounds is quite enough. I will not take a penny more."

"Now, Mrs. Ellsworthy, as we have comfortably disposed of this little matter, I want to talk to you most seriously about the girls."

Mrs. Ellsworthy bent her head to listen with rapt attention; and the two women were engaged for a couple of hours in most earnest conversation.

That afternoon, when Jasmine, very weary and very depressed, toiled up the stairs to her Palace Beautiful, she found two letters awaiting her. One was from Primrose, containing very cheerful news about Daisy. Daisy was really getting better, and had even been out for a few minutes. The other letter had not come by the post, and Jasmine wondered who her correspondent could be. She opened it eagerly. It contained a folded sheet of paper, out of which dropped two crisp Bank of England notes for five pounds each. The sheet of paper itself contained the following words:—

"DEAR JASMINE:—I have found a pawnbroker who better understands the value of your old lace. I have borrowed ten pounds for you on it, with liberty for you to redeem the shawl and flounces at your convenience. You can pay me back the ten shillings I lent you last night when you get change; but there is no hurry. Come and have tea this evening at six, dear. I have much to talk over with you.

"Your affectionate friend, "AGNES EGERTON."

Poor little Jasmine's delight can scarcely be conceived. She found it an easy matter to change one of the notes, and Poppy was in possession of the balance of her money long before the evening. Her radiant face seemed scarcely to belong to the same girl when she entered Miss Egerton's room in time for that good lady's tea.

"Jasmine," said Miss Egerton, when the meal was over, and Jasmine had exhausted her many expressions of rapture, and astonishment, and gratitude, "I have news to tell you. That dreadful man Dove has received a long term of imprisonment. He won't trouble our dear little Daisy again."

"And Daisy is beginning to get better," said Jasmine. "I heard from Primrose to-day, and she wrote quite hopefully about her. Yes, I suppose I am glad that Mr. Dove is locked up; it was so very wicked of him to frighten our little pet."

"I also had a letter from Primrose," said Miss Egerton. "She is unhappy because she thinks that I am at personal inconvenience for the money which I lent her instead of that which Dove stole. I am not inconvenienced for it—I can never regret making matters a little smooth for you poor children. I am going to write to Primrose to-night; but before I do so I should like to have a little talk with you, Jasmine."

"Oh, yes," said Jasmine, "I feel very humble to-night, and very thankful. I am in the kind of humor to-night when I could listen to any amount of good advice."

"Notwithstanding, Jasmine," said Miss Egerton, with a slight smile, "that advisers are never considered the most agreeable people. Jasmine, dear, I have seen Mrs. Ellsworthy to-day."

"Our darling Mrs. Ellsworthy," said Jasmine, flushing brightly; "and how was she? Does she know that I still care for her?"

"I think she does, Jasmine, and undoubtedly she cares for you. She again offers to help you, and, Jasmine, dear, I think the time has come when you must accept her help."

Jasmine smiled, and flushed brightly.

"I do not mind," she said; "I mean I do not mind as Primrose minds, but I know, I fear that it will go very hard with Primrose."

"It is often very hard to do right, Jasmine," said Miss Egerton, "and I can quite believe that Primrose will find it difficult to accede to our plan. At the same time I feel convinced that although she will have a great struggle, in the end she will yield to it. This is like the 'Hill Difficulty' to Primrose, but she is not the sort of girl to turn away from it without conquering its steepness and its toils. Jasmine, dear, you three have tried bravely to help yourselves, and you have—yes, I must say it, dear—you have failed. Primrose cannot spend her life as continual reader to Mrs. Mortlock; you see now, my dear little girl, that you are much too young to earn anything by your pen, and little Daisy—ah! Jasmine, how thankful we ought to be that we have our little Daisy still with us—but Daisy must never again have her peace of mind so seriously imperilled. Jasmine, you three girls want two things—you want education, and you want protection. You want to be thoroughly educated, first of all, in those general matters which all cultivated women ought to know about; and secondly, in the special matter which each of you has a taste for. That special taste or talent ought to be developed to the very uttermost, so that bye-and-bye each of you girls can take up a profession and earn her living usefully to others, and with ease and comfort to herself. If Primrose feels that she can after a time paint very exquisitely and very beautifully on porcelain, she ought to be apprenticed to one of the best houses, and there properly learn her trade; and you, Jasmine, whether you eventually earn your

bread by writing beautiful stories, or lovely poems, or whether the artist within you develops into a love for making painted pictures instead of word pictures, you must for many years to come be taught to think and have your little mind and vivid imagination fed on the wise and great thoughts of others. Daisy's future we none of us can talk about, but I have no doubt she also has her special gift.

"Now, Jasmine, what a long, long lecture I am giving you, only the sum and substance of it all is, dear, that I want to protect you, and Mrs. Ellsworthy is willing and anxious to advance a sufficient sum of money to have you all properly educated. When you go to bed to-night I am going to write very fully to Primrose on the subject."

"I wonder if she will refuse," said Jasmine, speaking in a very thoughtful tone; "she is very, very determined. You think she will regard it as a 'Hill Difficulty' which she ought to climb. I think she will regard it as a fearful, dreadful temptation which she ought to put away."

Miss Egerton smiled, for Jasmine's sunny little face looked so grave and anxious, and there was such a disturbed frown between her brows.

"At any rate, dear," continued the governess, "you will not oppose my scheme. You will see, dear, that the greatest strength sometimes shows itself in yielding. Jasmine, dear, are you not quite tired of having your own way?"

"A little," answered Jasmine. "I mean," she added, "that I never again will offer my stories to papers recommended by people like Mr. and Mrs. Dove."

CHAPTER L.

A DAZZLING DAY.

Mrs. Ellsworthy felt very much excited when Miss Egerton left her. She paced up and down her pretty boudoir, her cheeks were flushed and her pretty eyes bore traces

of tears. Miss Egerton had told the good little lady for the first time the sad story of Daisy's terrible adventure with Mr. Dove. All the poor little child's terror, and her final flight into the country, were graphically described by the good woman.

"She went to find me, little darling, little darling," repeated Mrs. Ellsworthy, tears running down her cheeks. "Oh, my dear little girl! to think of her being turned away from my very gates."

When Miss Egerton at last took her leave Mrs. Ellsworthy felt too much excited to stay quiet; and when her husband came into the room he found her much perturbed.

"Joseph," she said, running up to him, "I have such a story for you," and then she once again repeated little Daisy's adventure.

"And Joseph," she added, "Miss Egerton and I have quite agreed that you and I are to educate the girls; and, Joseph, the dear good creature is resolved that they shall stay with her in town, and that you and I are only to have the pleasure of spending any amount of money on them; but I will not have it. Joseph, I am resolved that they shall come to us at Shortlands, and have the instructions of the very best governess I can procure for them, and then in the spring the darlings shall come up to town, and have masters for every conceivable sort of accomplishment. Oh, Joseph, we shall have our Jasmine yet, as our very own."

Mr. Ellsworthy smiled, kissed his wife, patted her on the cheek, told her to do just what she liked, and went downstairs to his beloved books. But Mrs. Ellsworthy's excitement kept her on thorns for the greater part of the evening.

That night she dreamt of the Mainwarings; dreamt that she saw Daisy's piteous little face when she was turned away from her gates; dreamt again a brighter dream, that Jasmine had her arms round her neck, and was calling her mother; that Primrose, with none of her sweet dignity abated, was smiling at her, and saying gratefully, "I accept your kindness; I will gladly take your money; I will come and live with you at Shortlands, and be to you as a daughter." And Daisy was saying, in that funny

little sententious voice of hers which she sometimes used, "Weren't we all naughty, and aren't we good now, and is it not a good thing that our pride should have a fall?"

Mrs. Ellsworthy sighed deeply when she awoke from this beautiful dream.

"It was but a dream," she said to herself, and she went downstairs sadly and soberly to her breakfast.

Mr. Ellsworthy had breakfasted at a much earlier hour, and the little lady had her beautifully-appointed table to herself.

"Now, if the girls were all here," she thought, "how pleasant and cheerful it would be! Primrose should sit just opposite to me, and pour out the coffee; she would do it very nicely and deftly, and would look so sweet and daughterly. And Jasmine—little witch!—I do not suppose she would keep the same seat two mornings running, and I should have to tell her over and over not to jump up every moment to rush to the window. Daisy would sit near me, and, of course, I should have to have a special chair made for that funny kitten of hers. I would dress the three girls in white—white is so sweet for girls—and how Jasmine and Daisy would chatter; their voices are very sweet in tone, and they never talk too fast, so as to make one's head ache. I often fancy I hear Jasmine talking to me now, her voice is so bright—and—oh, dear! is not that very like her voice? Who is that asking for me in the hall? Surely, surely, it must be Jasmine Mainwaring. No other voice that I know has such a ring about it."

Mrs. Ellsworthy half rose from her seat, half sat down again, and the color of eager anticipation flushed her cheeks.

The eager voice outside came nearer, light steps sounded in the hall, and the next moment Jasmine had her arms round her friend's neck, and was kissing her, while both woman and girl wept.

"I had to come to you," said Jasmine, while she wiped some bright falling tears away. "I have not come to stay, nor to give you our address, nor to do anything of

which Primrose would not approve; but after Miss Egerton told me last night all that you wanted to do for us, and how you still loved us, I just had to run round and thank you and kiss you. Primrose and Daisy are still in the country, and Daisy is better. Aren't you glad she will be all right again soon?"

"Have breakfast with me, Jasmine," said Mrs. Ellsworthy. "I was thinking so much about you, and so longing to see you, and to have you in the room seems like a beautiful dream realized. Sit down now and have some breakfast with me."

"I did not have any at home, so I will," answered Jasmine. "I stayed awake half the night thinking about you. Oh, you are a real, real friend!"

"And I spent the greater part of the night dreaming about you three girls," said Mrs. Ellsworthy. "Have some buttered toast, Jasmine, and some of this apricot preserve."

"Did you dream about us last night?" asked Jasmine. "Did you really? You must love us very much."

"I believe I do. Now, Jasmine, I will not ask you for your address. I will do nothing more to really help you until we get Primrose's letter, but I want you all the same to spend this whole long day with me."

Jasmine smiled, and her cheeks flushed.

"It would be very luxurious," she said, "and such a change from our attics, although Daisy does call them a Palace Beautiful. Will you take me for a drive, if I stay, Mrs. Ellsworthy, and will you let me imagine myself quite a rich little girl all day long? You must not give me any presents, you know, for Primrose would not like that; but I can imagine I have got all kinds of things, and I wonder, oh! I wonder, if we might call to see Poppy this afternoon?"

"We will take her too for a drive in the Park," said Mrs. Ellsworthy. "I have heard a great deal of that Poppy of yours, and I think she is quite a splendid kind of girl."

Thus a very delightful programme was unexpectedly realized by two little

hard-working London girls, for Mrs. Ellsworthy gave herself up to be enchanting, and took Poppy away from her work of drudgery, and from the astonished ladies of the boarding-house.

Poppy, in her dazzlingly brilliant hat, and with her cheeks quite flaming with excitement, stepped into the carriage, and drove away, facing Mrs. Ellsworthy and Jasmine, to the great scandal of the footman, who was obliged, sorely against his will, to assist her to her place.

Mrs. Ellsworthy took the girls all round the Park, and then to a place of amusement, and finally she presented Poppy with a very neat brown dress and jacket, and hat to match, saying, as she did so, that really Jasmine, even though she forbade her to offer her any presents, could not lay a like embargo with regard to her friends.

"It's of all the dazzlings, the most blindingly beautiful," was Poppy's oft-reiterated comment. "Oh! won't I have something to tell them ladies about bye-and-bye! Oh, my! Miss Jasmine, what a neat hat, miss! I don't mind denuding this one now, for I has got a 'at from a West End shop what beats anything that Miss Slowcum wears for gentility."

Finally, Jasmine and Poppy both returned to their respective homes, tired, but wonderfully happy little girls.

Mrs. Ellsworthy also laid her head that night on her pillow with a wonderful sense of satisfaction.

"Even if they do not come to me—although they must come," she soliloquized, "I am glad—I shall all my life be glad that I gave Jasmine a happy day."

CHAPTER LI.

A LETTER.

A morning or two after this, when Daisy had greatly advanced towards

convalescence, and was sitting up in Hannah's tiny little sitting-room to partake of a very dainty little breakfast, Primrose received a long letter from Miss Egerton. This was what it contained:—

"MY DEAR PRIMROSE,

"You of course know that that wicked man Dove has received the sentence which he so richly deserves. Alas, we cannot get back all the stolen money, but we must manage without it, dear, and you are never even to talk of repaying me for the furnishing of dear little Daisy's Palace Beautiful. It has been a joy to me to have you, dear, and I hope you will be able to bring Daisy back with you, and to live here in peace and comfort next winter. Dear Primrose, it is more and more evident to me that young girls should not venture to come to London alone. You showed much bravery in your undertaking; but, my dear girl, the pitfalls you exposed yourselves to were awful to contemplate. I don't want to make you unhappy, dear, after all you have suffered with regard to Daisy, but I must now tell you of a little adventure which our poor dear Jasmine has had. You know how very anxious she has been to see herself in print. Of course, I could not conscientiously encourage her, for although she may have talent (this I am not prepared to say), yet she is a great deal too young to have anything printed. All books worth anything should teach, and surely our dear little girl is only at the age to be taught herself.

"Well, Primrose, the little maid was fired with the strongest ambition. She wrote her novel in secret, and one day, accompanied by that good-natured Poppy Jenkins and sweet little Daisy, went Citywards, and simply plunged—for I can use no other word—into the unknown and to me rather awful realm of publishers.

"Poor child, of course none of the good houses would even look at her immature productions; but she was taken in by a man who professed himself to be the editor of a monthly paper—The Joy-bell was its silly title. On an understanding that her story was to be printed in the pages of The Joy-bell—of course I've never seen the paper,

and should not dream of reading anything so rubbishy—poor Jasmine was induced to subscribe two pounds five shillings, or, in other words, to undertake to buy one hundred copies of The Joy-bell. Of course she imagined that her printed words would immediately bring her fame. She paid her money, and looked out for her story."

"Where did she get the money from?" thought the anxious reader.

"Primrose, how wrinkled up your brows are;" called out little Daisy.

Primrose sighed, and resumed her perusal of the closely-written sheets.

"On the very evening our little Daisy ran away Jasmine received her first proofs. They were barbarously printed on wretched paper, but the poor child was in such trouble then that she scarcely noticed them. Afterwards she did read them with care, and was surprised to find what a very small portion of her story had been printed.

"You know that I was unexpectedly detained in the country by the serious illness and death of my poor cousin. Jasmine was not doing as well as we supposed by her profession of dressing dinner-tables. The dear child was determined not to ask help from any one, not even from you, Primrose, and she made a valiant effort to support herself on her tiny earnings. Alas, her purse was all too soon emptied, and she had also upon her the awful load of debt, for Poppy Jenkins it seems, lent her the money to get that rubbishy story published. In her despair she thought of The Joy-bell, and went off to see the editor.

"She was met at the office (poor child, how she could venture there alone is a mystery to me) with the intelligence that The Joy-bell had ceased to exist, and the editor had decamped with poor Poppy's wages.

"Luckily I came home that evening, and found your poor little sister in sad trouble. I am thankful to say I have been able to relieve her present necessities without the slightest inconvenience to myself. Jasmine has been greatly shaken, but she is better again now, and is most anxious that you should not be troubled. I only tell you this

much, dear Primrose, because I consider it my bounden duty that you should know how matters really stand. Rest happy about Poppy; her money has been returned to her, and Jasmine has sufficient for her present necessities. On second thoughts, I had better perhaps let you into my little secret. I have borrowed ten pounds for Jasmine on that valuable Spanish lace of her mother's. Do not imagine that the lace is gone; it will be returned to Jasmine whenever she can refund the money. It was necessary, dear Primrose, to take it, and I acted as I am sure you would think right in the matter. Poppy had to be paid her wages.

"Now, dear Primrose, I want to talk with you very seriously on another matter. You must own, dear, that though you have tried bravely you have not yet, any of you, succeeded in earning your living. It is almost a year since you began to try, and you have made, I fear, but small headway. You, Primrose, have done best, and have made fewer mistakes than your sisters, but even you would not care to spend all your life in continual reading to Mrs. Mortlock. Jasmine can only earn a precarious and uncertain living by dressing dinner-tables. Of course, no one even expects dear little Daisy to contribute to the family purse at present, but at the same time she need not put us into terrible frights, nor be in the power of wicked and designing people. My dear girls have had a trial of their own way; and now I think they ought to take the advice of those older and wiser than themselves.

"If, dear Primrose, you want to earn your living well—and nothing makes a woman braver and better than being able to support herself—you must be educated to take up some one profession in an efficient manner. Money must be spent for this purpose, and you must not be too proud to accept money from those who really love you. I have been to see Mrs. Ellsworthy, and she and I had a long, long talk about you girls. She is full of kindness, and she really and truly loves you. It would be worse than folly, it would be wicked, to throw such friendship away. Mrs. Ellsworthy tells me that she has been consulting your old friend Mr. Danesfield about you. Both he and Mrs. Ellsworthy are arranging plans which they trust you

will all listen to with patience. These plans shall be fully disclosed to you on your return to town, but I may as well mention here that it will be absolutely necessary that you should give up your present lives, and should enter seriously on the great work of education. Money must be spent for this object; but when you are able to earn well, bye-and-bye it will be in your power to repay the money to the kind friends whose happiness it is now to lend it to you.

"Dear Primrose, "I am, yours affectionately, "AGNES EGERTON."

There was much in this letter to pain Primrose, and a year before she might have torn it up and determined in no way to be guided by it; but a year had brought her some very strange and some very sad experiences. She was troubled and shocked to think that Jasmine should have taken poor Poppy's hard earnings. She was deeply distressed at owing herself so much to Miss Egerton, and now also so large a debt to Arthur Noel. She had worked hard, and had done wonderfully well considering, but nevertheless at the present moment, owing to adverse circumstances, she was plunged in debt in many directions, and saw little hope of repaying what she owed. Life seemed very difficult to Primrose just then, and hot tears rose to her eyes.

Should she go still farther in debt, and give up the great struggle to be independent? Oh, no, she could not—she could not. Her pride rose up in rebellion; her passionate longing to be free and her own mistress, to be beholden to no one for the necessaries of life, was too strong to be easily crushed. Better the dullest life, better be a "continual reader" all her days than take the money of strangers. This was her feeling, and it grew so strong moment by moment, that she might have sat down to answer Miss Egerton's letter there and then but for a rather innocent little remark made by Daisy.

"Dear Primrose, I forgot it in all the other great trouble, but I do want to send fifteen shillings as soon as possible to dear good Poppy. She lent me fifteen shillings to buy a single third to come to Rosebury, and I forgot all about it. Please, Primrose, try and

spare me fifteen shillings to send to Poppy."

"So you too are in debt, Daisy," said Primrose. "Oh, dear, what shall I do? Daisy, dear, forgive me, I ought not to mind anything now you are growing better, but my heart is heavy, and I feel almost crushed. Yes, Daisy, dear Poppy must have her money. I won't write to Miss Egerton until to-morrow."

Here Primrose wiped some tears from her sweet brown eyes, but she took good care not to allow Daisy to see that she was crying.

CHAPTER LII.

"I LOVE MRS. ELLSWORTHY."

The next afternoon, to the surprise of both Primrose and Daisy, Noel arrived. Daisy greeted her Prince with rapture, but refused to hear any particulars of Dove's trial.

"I want to forget him," she said. "You say he is in the dungeon now. I don't want to think of it. If I think of it long I shall begin to be so sorry for him."

"We will talk of something better and pleasanter," said Noel. "How soon are you coming back to your Palace Beautiful, little Princess?"

Daisy looked anxiously across the room at Primrose. Primrose was bending over some needlework, and a ray of sunlight was shining on her fair head. She did not raise her eyes or respond in any way to the little sister's glance.

"We did think of coming back to Miss Egerton's in the autumn," said Daisy, "but last night Primrose—May I tell, Primrose?"

Primrose put down her work suddenly and came up to where Noel and Daisy were sitting.

"It is just this," she said; "Daisy did not know she had such a proud and obstinate sister. We had made our plans for the autumn—at least we simply intended to

struggle on, and hope and watch for brighter days—but yesterday I had a letter from Miss Egerton, and some of its contents troubled me a good deal. Daisy saw that I was unhappy, and I told her what Miss Egerton wanted. I thought the dear little one would object, but she only said, 'Oh, let us be brave, Primrose; our Palace Beautiful will be all the brighter if we really earn it.' Then she added, 'I am beginning to wish to earn a little money myself, for I want to give a very kind person back what he gave me.'"

Noel gave Daisy's thin little hand a squeeze. Primrose looked at the two, and stopped speaking. After a moment's pause she said suddenly—

"I don't like the plan; I never can like it. Mrs. Ellsworthy is all that is kind, but she is no relation of ours. She lived in the same place with us for years, and she never even called on our mother. Oh, I don't blame her; she naturally thought that people who lived in an humble little cottage at Rosebury were not ladies, but you see we are ladies, and we cannot help feeling sore. I may agree to the plan—I may be forced to agree to it for Jasmine's and Daisy's sakes—but I can never, never like it."

Here Primrose went out of the room.

"She was crying for a long time last night," whispered Daisy; "it hurts her dreadfully to take Mrs. Ellsworthy's money. I don't suppose I mind it so much, because I was coming to Mrs. Ellsworthy to ask her for some money. I did not find her, and I was miserable until you found me and helped me, Prince. Then I love Mrs. Ellsworthy, and so does Jasmine."

"That is it, Eyebright," answered Noel; "we do not mind receiving kindnesses and favors from those we love. Yes, I am very sorry for Primrose; I wish matters could be differently arranged for her."

While Noel was speaking Hannah came into the room with a cup of beef-tea for the little invalid.

"You have done her a sight of good already, sir," she said, peering with her

short-sighted eyes into the young man's face. "I don't know what we'd have done for her if you hadn't come that day, and talked to her, and got her to tell you what that most villainous person in London was after."

"Oh, don't, Hannah," said Daisy, "he's in a dungeon now—poor, poor Mr. Dove; I must not think about him if I mean to get well."

Here Daisy shivered, and added under her breath, with her little pale face working—

"I did promise it very faithfully that I would never tell about the sweetmeats."

"He was a bad man, Daisy, and he richly deserves his punishment," said Noel, in an almost stern voice, for he wished to check any unhealthy sentimentality on the part of the delicate child. "You must think of what you and your sisters have suffered, and be glad he has been prevented doing any more mischief."

"Drink up your beef-tea, missy," said Hannah. "Please, Mr. Noel, sir, will you hold the cup for little miss? Oh, my heart alive, what—what is that?"

"I don't see anything," said Noel, "what has frightened you, Hannah?"

But Hannah had grown white, and looked very queer, and a moment after she hurried out of the room.

"I never knew your servant was nervous," said Noel to Daisy.

"Nervous?" she repeated, laughing merrily. "Is it Hannah? why she always says she hasn't a nerve in her whole body. She's sometimes almost cross with me for being nervous, Mr. Prince."

Noel stayed some little time longer with the sisters, and then returned to Rosebury in time to catch the evening train to London. When he got there he went straight to Mrs. Ellsworthy's house. That little lady was anxiously expecting him, and plied him with many questions on the spot.

"How is she taking it, Arthur?" she asked. "I have been forming and maturing my plans, and I now think a resident governess at Shortlands would be the nicest

arrangement for the girls. They cannot be parted, that is very evident, and as Primrose must be more than eighteen she would not care to go to school. Yes, a resident governess seems the plan of plans. I would take them up to London early in the spring, and give them the advantage of the very best masters."

"Primrose seems very unhappy about it," replied Noel. "She may in the end consent to some scheme for perfecting her education, but I'm quite sure she will not go, nor allow her sisters to go to Shortlands to live a life of simple luxury. I am sorry for you, Mrs. Ellsworthy, but I know Primrose will never consent to that."

"I don't think you are sorry for me, Arthur," answered the pretty little lady. "In your heart of hearts you quite agree with that naughty, bad Primrose. You had rather the girls lived in their attic, and encountered another dreadful Mr. Dove, and fell into the hands of another designing publisher, than have them safe and happy at Shortlands. Oh, it is a plot between you all to deprive me of my great pleasure. Oh, why will girls, and young men, too, be so perverse?"

Noel smiled.

"I am sorry for both you and Primrose," he said. "I am convinced she will never agree to your present scheme, although she may allow you to help her to perfect her education."

CHAPTER LIII.

TELEGRAPH WIRES.

Daisy was quite right when she said that Hannah was not subject to nervous attacks. Hannah scorned nerves, and did not believe in them. When she was told that the human body was as full of nerves as an electric battery was full of electricity, that nerves, in short, were like numberless telegraphic-wires, prevailing the whole human frame, she stared at the speakers, and pronounced them slightly daft.

Yet Hannah went out of her own little sitting-room on that summer afternoon with, as she expressed it, trembling sensations running down her back, and causing her fingers to shake when she handled her cups and saucers.

"Dear, dear," she said to herself, "one would think I had some of those awful telegrams in me which Miss Primrose said was the nervous system. Why, I'm all upset from top to toe. I never had a good view of him before, for I didn't pay no heed to nobody when my dear little Miss Daisy was so ill; but I do say that the cut of the hand and the turn of the head is as like—as like as two peas. Now I do wonder—no, no, it can't be. Well, anyhow, my name ain't Hannah Martin if I don't find out where he comes from, and who he really is. Well, well, well—why this trembling won't leave me, and I don't dare go back into the room. I suppose I have got a few telegraphs, and I mustn't never laugh at poor little Miss Daisy again when she says she's nervous."

Hannah sat and rested for about half an hour—then she drank off a glass of cold water—then she washed her face and hands—then she said aloud that the telegrams should not get the better of her, and then she prepared as nice a little dinner as she could for Noel and the two sisters.

That evening, after Daisy was in bed, she came into the room where Primrose was quietly reading.

"You haven't never come across no one the least like that brother of yours in the London streets, Miss Primrose?" she asked. "London's a big place, and strange things happen there—yes, very, very strange things."

"Oh, Hannah, how you startle me!" said Primrose. "I come across my poor little brother Arthur? How could I? Why, he must be dead for many and many a year."

"Not a bit of him," said Hannah; "I don't believe he's dead. He was a fine, hearty, strong child, and nothing ever seemed to ail him. Oh, it rises up before me now what a beautiful picture he made when he stood in his little red velvet dress by your

mamma's knee, and she so proud of him! There's no mistake, but he was the very light of her eyes. She took him up to London, and a nursemaid—not me, you may be quite sure—took him out. She went into a big shop, and the child was by her side. She kept him standing by her as she ordered some things across the counter, and, I suppose, she turned her head for a minute, for when she looked round again he was gone. From that day to this he was never heard of, though everything you can think of was done. Oh, my poor, poor mistress, what she did suffer!"

"Hannah, how excited you look!" said Primrose. "Why, you are all trembling. It is a terrible story, but as I say to Daisy about Mr. Dove, don't let us think of it."

"Right you are, honey," said Hannah; "what can't be cured, you know. If you don't mind, Miss Primrose, I'll just sit down for a minute. I'm not to say quite myself. Oh, it ain't nothing, dearie; just a bit of the trembles, and to prove to old Hannah that she is getting on in years. I nursed you all, darling—him, my beautiful boy, and you three. Miss Primrose, dear, how old would you say that Mr. Noel was. I didn't have a fair look at him until to-day, and he seems quite a young sort of man."

"Miss Egerton says that he is twenty-six, Hannah."

"Twenty-six," answered Hannah; "don't interrupt me for a minute, dear. I'm comparing dates—twenty-six—twenty-six. Law, goodness gracious me! You haven't never noticed, Miss Primrose, that he have a kind of a mole—long-shaped, and rather big, a little way up his left arm? Have you, now, dearies?"

"No, really, Hannah, I've never seen Mr. Noel's arm without his coat-sleeve. How very queerly you are speaking, Hannah."

"Not at all, dearie; it's only because I've got the trembles on me. Well, love, and so you don't want to be under no compliments to that Mrs. Ellsworthy, who never took no notice of your poor dear ma?"

Primrose sighed.

"I feel sore about it, Hannah," she said. "But I must try not to be too proud. I will ask

God to help me to do what is really right in the matter."

"That's it, honey, and maybe you won't have to do it after all. I wonder, now, dear, if Mr. Noel is well off."

"Really, Hannah, I think you have got Mr. Noel on the brain! Yes, I have heard Miss Egerton say that he is a rich man. He was the adopted son of a very wealthy person, who left him all his property."

"Adopted, was he?" said Hannah. "On my word, these tremblings are terrible! Miss Primrose, dear, I have come in to say that I may be going a little journey in the morning. I'll be off by the first dawn, so as to be back by night, and the shop needn't be opened at all to-morrow. There's a nice cold roast fowl for you and Miss Daisy, and a dish of strawberries which I gathered with my own hands not an hour back, so you'll have no trouble with your dinner. You see that Miss Daisy eats plenty of cream with her strawberries, dear, for cream's fattening; and now good-night."

CHAPTER LIV.

A DISCOVERY.

Hannah Martin had never been much of a traveller. It was years since she set her foot inside a railway carriage. She often boasted of her abnormal lack of nerves, but she was also heard to say that accidents by rail were fearful and common, and likely to happen at any moment. She sighed for the old coaching days, and hated the thought of all locomotives propelled by steam. Nevertheless, early in the morning of the day following her interview with Primrose, Hannah, in her usual neat print dress, was seen to enter the little railway station at Rosebury, was observed to purchase for herself a third-class return ticket, and after carefully selecting her carriage, to depart for London.

In the afternoon of that same day Hannah reached her destination, and securing the

first porter whose attention she could arrest, she placed a bit of paper in his hand, and asked him to direct her to the address written upon it. The man screwed up his eyes, stared at the paper, and suggested that Hannah should place herself in a hansom, and direct the driver to take her to Park Lane. Hannah had not an idea what a hansom meant; she had never visited London since her early days. She stared with horror at the proposed vehicle, and finally selecting the creakiest and most uninviting of the four-wheelers, drove off to her destination.

Mrs. Ellsworthy was enjoying some very fragrant tea in her little boudoir when a servant announced that a person of the name of Martin had come up from the country in a four-wheeler, and would be glad to see her as soon as possible.

"What kind of person, Henry?" asked the little lady. "I am very tired just now, and I must go out to dinner in less than two hours. A person from the country in a four-wheeler? What can she want with me?"

"She seems a respectable sort of body, ma'am," answered the footman, "but nervous and shaky, and mortal afraid to step out of the cab; the cabby and me we had both to lend her a hand in alighting, ma'am. She's sitting now in a chair in the hall, and I can see she's upset with her journey, but respectable; there's no word for the neatness of her person, ma'am."

"She is probably poor, and wants me to help her," replied Mrs. Ellsworthy. "I hate seeing beggars, for I find it absolutely impossible to say no to them. Show her up, Henry, and give her a hint that I'm going out to dinner, and can only spare her a very few moments."

Hannah could not certainly be accused when she entered Mrs. Ellsworthy's room, of any want of nerves. Her hands were shaking, her lips were tremulous, and her face, as she entered the room, became perfectly white.

"You'll excuse me, ma'am," she said. "I'm most sorry to trouble you, but I'm that anxious, I scarce know what I'm doing. I undertook a railway journey—which I

don't think right—and I came here through most crowded streets in a dreadful vehicle, for I just wanted to ask you a single question, ma'am."

"Sit down, my poor woman," said Mrs. Ellsworthy, who, the moment she looked at Hannah, began to have a dim sort of idea that she had seen her before, and also became full of pity for her. "Sit down. How you tremble! I am sorry to see you are so nervous."

"Nervous, ma'am!" echoed Hannah. "That I should hear that said of me! No, ma'am, it ain't nervous I am, but I'm rather worried with the tremblings during the last few hours. I've come to ask you a plain question, ma'am, plain and direct. It's about the young man Mr. Noel. Have he, ma'am, or have he not, a mole on his left arm? I'd like yes or no, ma'am."

"A mole on his left arm!" echoed Mrs. Ellsworthy. "My good woman, what a very extraordinary question; you really quite startle me. Has Arthur Noel a mole on his left arm? Yes, of course he has; I used to notice it when he was a child. I suppose people don't outgrow moles, so he probably has it still. Why, Mrs. Martin—I am told your name is Martin—how very white you are. Would you—would you like a glass of wine?"

"Thank you, ma'am—no wine, thank you, ma'am. I'm a bit upset. Yes, I'm a bit upset, for I believe Mr. Arthur Noel is my long-lost baby."

The footman downstairs had given Mrs. Martin careful directions not to occupy more than a moment or two of his mistress's valuable time; but though he waited on the stairs and lingered about in the entrance-hall, no bell summoned him to show out this remarkable visitor. An hour passed away, an hour and a half, and still Mrs. Martin remained in close conversation with Mrs. Ellsworthy. At the end of the hour and a half Henry looked earnestly at the clock, sighed, and felt that it was his duty to go into the room to let Mrs. Ellsworthy know that she would be late for her dinner-party. He found that good lady sitting by her writing-table with very flushed

cheeks and tearful eyes, and Hannah standing in quite a familiar attitude by her side.

"Give this note to Mr. Ellsworthy when he comes in, Henry, and order the carriage to be brought round directly. I am not going to dine out to-night. I will just go upstairs to change my bonnet. And Henry, take Mrs. Martin down to the servants' hall, and give her some dinner. She is coming out with me in the carriage, so be quick, please."

As Mrs. Ellsworthy stood before her glass re-arranging her toilet her maid saw her wiping some tears from her pretty eyes.

"Oh, my bonny Arthur," she said under her breath. "Oh, what your poor, poor mother must have suffered."

When the carriage came to the door Mrs. Ellsworthy gave the coachman Noel's address, and the two women drove there at once. They were fortunate in finding the young man within. He too was engaged to dine out that night, but he did not go. Hannah, Mrs. Ellsworthy, and he had a long conference, which lasted until late in the evening, and when Mr. Ellsworthy joined them he was told a very wonderful story. Hannah returned to Devonshire on the following morning very well pleased with her successful expedition.

"If there had been any doubt," she said to herself, as she was being whirled homewards in her third-class carriage, "if there had been any doubt after the sight of that mole on his dear, blessed arm, why, the little shirt which Mrs. Ellsworthy showed me, and which she took off his back herself after them horses had all but killed him, would prove that he's my own boy. Could I ever forget marking that shirt in cross-stitch, and making such a bungle over the A, and thinking I'd put Mainwaring in full, and then getting lazy, and only making the mark A.M.? Well, I was served out for that piece of laziness, for my boy might have been brought back to his mother but for it. Dear, dear! Well, there's no mistaking my own A.M., and when I peered close with my glasses on I could even see where I unpicked the A.

and did it over again. Dear, dear, shall I ever forgive myself for not doing the surname in full—his poor, poor mother! Well, I mustn't think of that—it's a merciful Providence that has led me to him now, and he's as darling and elegant a young man as ever I clapped eyes on, and as fond of the young ladies as can be even now.

"'I always felt somehow as if they were my sisters,' he said to me. Well, well, God be praised for his mercies."

CHAPTER LV.

AN INVITATION FOR THE LADIES OF PENELOPE MANSION.

"There are limits to all things," said Mrs. Mortlock; "there's a time, as the blessed Bible says, to sorrow, and a time to rejoice, and what I say too is, that there is a time when a woman's patience may be exhausted. Yes, Mrs. Dredge, you may look at me with as round eyes as you please—I know they are round though I can't see them, but I will say, if it's my last dying breath, that the moment for my 'continual reader' to return has arrived. Miss Slowcum, no doubt you'll corroborate what I say, ma'am."

"It's hot weather for young bright flowers to shed their fragrance on the London streets," replied Miss Slowcum; "it's the kind of weather when flowers fade. I should imagine, Mrs. Mortlock, that your 'continual reader' was doing better for herself in the country."

Mrs. Mortlock's face became very red.

"Better for herself, is she?" she said, "and is that all the thanks I get for keeping my post vacant, and living through days the weariness of which none may know. If Miss Primrose Mainwaring is doing better for herself in the country she is welcome to stay there. The post is a good one, a light and an easy one, and I can get many another lass to fill it."

"I think, ma'am," said Mrs. Dredge, whose face had grown wonderfully smooth and pleasant of late, "that the dear girls will all be in town this week, and most likely Miss Primrose will come to pay you a visit. Oh, they are nice girls, pretty, elegant girls, just the kind of girls my good man would like to have been papa to. I can't help shivering, even now when I think of that wicked man Dove, and what a state he put dear little Daisy into."

"If praises of the Mainwarings is to begin," answered Mrs. Mortlock in her tartest voice, "what I say is, let me retire. It's all very well for them as has right to talk well of the absent, but when one of the absent ones is neglecting her duty the lady who has weak eyes feels it. Miss Slowcum, ma'am, have you any objection to moving with me into the drawing-room? I can lend you that pattern you admired so much for tatting if you read me the latest gossip from the evening papers, ma'am."

Mrs. Mortlock rose from her chair, and, accompanied by Miss Slowcum, left the room. Miss Slowcum took a ladylike interest in all kinds of needlework, and the desire to possess the tatting pattern overcame her great reluctance to read aloud to the very tart old lady.

Mrs. Mortlock placed herself in the most comfortable arm-chair the room afforded, and having secured her victim, began instantly to tyrannize over her.

"Now, Miss Slowcum, read up chirrupy and cheerful please. None of your drawling, by way of genteel voice, for me—I like my gossip crisp. I will say this of that dear girl Primrose Mainwaring, that she did her gossip crisp."

"You really are a very unaccountable person, Mrs. Mortlock," replied Miss Slowcum. "You begin by abusing Primrose Mainwaring, and then you praise her in the most absurd manner. I hope the refined reading of a cultivated lady is not to be compared to the immature utterances of a school-girl. If that is so, Mrs. Mortlock, even for the sake of the tatting pattern, I cannot consent to waste my words on you."

"Oh, my good creature," said Mrs. Mortlock, who by no means wished to be left to

solitude and herself, "you read in a very pretty style of your own—obsolete it may be—h'm—I suppose we must expect that—mature it certainly is; yes, my dear, quite mature. If I praise Primrose Mainwaring, and a good girl she was when she was with me—yes, a good, painstaking girl, thankful for her mercies—it's no disparagement to you, Miss Slowcum. You're mellow, my dear, and you can't help being mellow, and Primrose Mainwaring is crisp, and she can't help being crisp. Oh, goodness gracious me! what sound is that falls on my ear?"

"An old friend's voice, I hope, Mrs. Mortlock," said a pleasant girlish tone, and Primrose Mainwaring herself bent down over the old lady and kissed her.

Notwithstanding all her grumbling Mrs. Mortlock had taken an immense fancy to Primrose. She returned her embrace warmly, and even took her hand and squeezed it.

"I'd like to see you, dear," she said, "but I'm getting blinder and blinder. Have you come back to your continual reading, dear? I hope so, for you do the gossip in a very chirruping style."

While Mrs. Mortlock was speaking to Primrose Miss Slowcum had taken Daisy in her arms, and covered her sweet little face with kisses, for Miss Slowcum was not all sour and affected, and she had shed some bitter tears in secret over the child's unaccountable disappearance. Mrs. Dredge and Mrs. Flint had both surrounded Jasmine, who, in a white summer frock, was looking extremely pretty, and was entertaining them with some animated conversation.

"Yes," said Primrose to Mrs. Mortlock, "I will come to read to you as often as ever I can. I shall know my plans better after to-morrow. We three girls returned to London a couple of days ago, and we received a letter from our kind friend Mrs. Ellsworthy. You don't know her, perhaps, but she is a very kind friend of ours. She is making some plans for us, but we don't quite know what they are. She has written us a letter, however, and it is on account of that letter that we have all come to you to-night.

She has invited us to come to her to-morrow, and she wants all the friends who were kind to us, and who helped us in every way during our year in London, to come in the evening to hear what the plans are. Even if you can't see, Mrs. Mortlock, it will amuse you to come, and I hope so much you will do so. I will try to stay close to you myself when you do come, so you need not feel lonely."

"My dear, you are very kind," said Mrs. Mortlock, and the other ladies also said the Mainwarings were kind, and they sent their dutiful respects to Mrs. Ellsworthy and were pleased to accept. Accordingly, Primrose gave them full directions with regard to the right address, and the hour at which they were to be present; and finally the girls left Mrs. Flint and her three lady boarders in a state of considerable excitement and so deeply interested in what was about to occur that they forgot to grumble at each other.

CHAPTER LVI.

A PALACE BEAUTIFUL.

Hannah Martin had come up with her young ladies to London, and she also was invited by Mrs. Ellsworthy to come to her house. The girls all thought Hannah very much altered; they could not understand her queer illusions, or her mysterious little nods, or in particular the way she used to stare at Jasmine, and say under her breath, "Yes, yes, as like as two peas. What a blind old woman I was not to see it when I clapped eyes on him."

"I cannot make out what Hannah is always muttering," Jasmine said to her sisters. "Who is it I am so remarkably like. To judge from the way Hannah frowns and shakes her head, and then smiles, the fact of this accidental likeness seems to have a very disturbing effect upon her."

"I know whom you are like, Jasmine," said little Daisy. "I've seen it for a long time.

You are the very image of my dear Prince. You have got just the same colored eyes, and just the same curly hair, and both your foreheads are broad and white. It's perfectly natural," continued Daisy, "for you are both geniuses, and all geniuses must have a look of each other."

Hannah had old-fashioned ideas on many subjects. One of these was that people could not remain too long in mourning. She liked very deep black, and wished those who had lost relations to wear it for a long, long time. The girls, therefore, were quite amazed when she suggested that they should all go to Mrs. Ellsworthy in white. They began to consider her quite an altered Hannah; but Jasmine took her advice, and bought many yards of soft flowing muslin, which the old servant helped her dear young ladies to make up.

At last the day and hour arrived when, as Primrose said sorrowfully, "Our fate is to be sealed and we are to bid 'Good-bye' to dear independence."

The girls, looking as sweet as girls could look, arrived at Mrs. Ellsworthy's at a fairly early hour in the afternoon. The good little lady received them with marked tenderness, but said, in an almost confused manner, and by no means with her usual self-possession that a slight change had been found necessary in the afternoon's programme, and that the meeting of friends and acquaintances to hear their future plans was not to take place at her house after all.

"We are to go to another house not far from this," she said, "indeed, only a stone's throw away. It is so close that we will walk it. Come, Daisy, I see a number of questions in your eyes, but they shall all be answered presently. Take my hand now, and let us lead the way. The other house is very pretty, but it is smaller than mine."

The other house was quite close to Mrs. Ellsworthy's luxurious mansion. It was built more in the cottage shape, was much smaller, and had a charming little garden and grounds round it. The hall door opened into a porch, which was covered with roses, so that though the house was really in London, the effect was quite that of the

country. Standing in the porch, and looking extremely pretty in its flickering light and shade, stood Poppy Jenkins, in the neatest of handmaiden's attire, and as the girls all came into the shade of the cool porch, Noel himself, looking somewhat pale, and with a curious agitation in his manner, came out to meet them.

"This is my house," he said, "and Poppy is engaged as one of the servants. I thought we might all meet here to discuss the new plans. Poppy, will you take the young ladies to their room? I've had a room prepared," he continued, blushing slightly, "for I thought Daisy might like to rest a little."

Poppy instantly tripped forward, and in quite a demure manner took the girls up some broad stairs, and into a long, rather low-ceilinged room on the first floor. There were three little white beds in the room, and three toilet tables, and, in short, three sets of everything. It was the prettiest, the brightest, the most lovely room the girls had ever seen. It contained luxury, and neatness, and comfort, and refinement, for beautiful pictures were placed on the walls, and flowers peeped in at the windows, and the furniture was of that sort which can best accommodate girls' pretty dresses and knick-knacks.

"What a room!" said Jasmine. "Why, it's just like a girls' room! Any one would suppose Mr. Noel had sisters."

Daisy began to skip about, and to poke her little fingers amongst the curiosities and treasures which were scattered broadcast. Primrose became silent, and walked over to one of the windows, and Poppy, suddenly dropping her demure air, said in a voice of ecstasy—

"He's a lovely young man, and I'm engaged here permanent, and it's no more Sarah Ann, nor Sarah Jane, but Poppy I'm to be from this time and for ever. Oh, Miss Primrose, don't it make you real happy even to take off your bonnet in a room like this?"

"I do feel happy," said Primrose, in that slow voice of hers. "I feel happy, and I can't

tell why. I am just going to give up my independence, and I ought to be miserable, but at the present moment I have a peculiar sense of rejoicing."

"And so have I," said Jasmine, "I could skip all day long; and as to Eyebright, she looks fit to dance this very moment."

"I'm happy because I'm with the Prince," said Daisy; "that's always quite enough for me."

Then the three sisters linked their arms round one another, and went downstairs.

In Noel's very lovely drawing-room many friends were assembled. Mr. and Mrs. Ellsworthy, of course, were present; also Mr. Danesfield, Miss Martineau, and Miss Egerton. Old Hannah stood in the background and when the three pretty sisters came into the room they were surrounded by eager and loving faces, and were most warmly welcomed. Mrs. Ellsworthy, it is true, still appeared much agitated; she had an intense longing to take Jasmine in her arms and cry over her, but she had, of course, too much sense to do anything so unsuitable and silly. The girls were asked to sit down, and Mr. Ellsworthy, who had been elected spokesman, stood up, cleared his throat, and looked at his wife. Twice he made an attempt at utterance; finally he said in a voice which trembled—"My dear, I can't manage it—you had better do it yourself."

"I presume you are addressing me, Joseph," said Mrs. Ellsworthy. "I—I—this is unexpected; but anything to get it over. My dear girls, you have come here to-day to hear what we have arranged for you. We felt you could not go on as you have been doing."

"Impossible," here interrupted Mr. Danesfield. "They were the victims of thieves and rogues. The thing could not have gone on a day longer."

"So we made plans—very nice plans," continued Mrs. Ellsworthy. "It never occurred to us that they would be knocked on the head, crushed, obliterated. Oh, I am very happy, of course, but I could cry at having my plans spoiled a second time."

"I don't think they are really spoiled," said Primrose who had grown very white, and now rose to her feet. "I know I was proud about accepting help. I had such a longing to be independent. Perhaps I feel sore about accepting help still, but I have made up my mind; for all our sakes it is best. I submit—I give in—I am very grateful."

"Perhaps, Primrose," said Mrs. Ellsworthy, whose bright eyes were now full of tears, "I may convince you yet that you have no cause to feel sore, and that proud heart of yours will not be pained. I believe the help you need is coming to you three sisters in such a guise that you cannot fail but to accept it gladly, and as your natural right."

"It cannot quite be our natural right," said Primrose. "There are no possible circumstances under which it can be quite natural for girls to take money help from even the kindest friends who are not related to them."

"In this case there may even possibly be a relationship," proceeded Mrs. Ellsworthy. "Primrose, suppose that little brother who was lost long ago—little Arthur your mother called him—suppose he came here to-day, and said, 'I am grown up, and rich—I am the right person to help my sisters,' you would feel no soreness of heart at accepting help from your own brother, Primrose?"

"My own brother," repeated Primrose in a wistful and longing voice; "it is cruel to remind me of my brother. He was lost many, many years ago; he has probably long been dead."

"I should be the happiest girl in all the world if I could find my brother," here interrupted Jasmine; "I often dream of him at night; he must have been a darling little boy."

"But if he were to come here twenty times," said Daisy, "I could never love him better than I love the Prince."

There was quite a little buzz of admiration through the room when Daisy made this innocent little speech, and all eyes were turned on Arthur Noel. Then there was a pause. Mr. Ellsworthy was again heard to clear his throat, and no one seemed quite

to know what to do next. Suddenly Hannah Martin broke the spell—

"Goodness gracious me!" she said, "how long are the darling young ladies to be kept in suspense? Miss Primrose, why, you have got a brother, and there he stands. Mr. Arthur, come and kiss your sisters, my dear. Oh, my darling, darling girls, it's perfectly, perfectly true; he's the boy your mother broke her heart about long ago."

The confusion and agitation which followed can scarcely be described—the joy of the sisters can scarcely be painted. Daisy took this wonderful and important discovery more coolly and calmly than the others.

"It doesn't make a bit of difference in my love to him," she said, "for I always loved him as if he were my brother."

"And now, Primrose," said Arthur, "you are mistress of this house, and please remember that visitors are coming here presently, and that you are to entertain them."

"Are we always to live with you, Arthur?" asked Jasmine. "It seems better than a dream. Oh, Arthur," she continued, not waiting for her brother's reply, "don't you remember how we made friends the very first moment we met? we must have always known, deep down in our hearts, that we were brother and sister."

"And this is to be our new Palace Beautiful," said Daisy, "and Poppy is to live here too. Oh, Primrose, do you not feel almost too happy?"

"I've given up my independence," said Primrose, "and yet I never felt more happy or more thankful."

The party that evening was a success. The astonishment of the good ladies from Penelope Mansion when they heard the wonderful news passed all bounds. Mrs. Dredge sat plump down on a chair, placed her fat hands on her lap, and fairly cried.

"Oh, if only my poor dear husband had lived to see this beautiful day," she said. "Young man, I have liked you from the first; you're the kind of young man whom

my good husband would have rejoiced to be papa to."

Miss Slowcum sighed most deeply when she heard the news. "It's a touching romance," she said, "quite worthy of the olden times. I could imagine Mr. Noel—Mr. Mainwaring, I suppose we must call him now—as belonging to the old knights of chivalry. Yes, I am a person of discernment, and I long ago saw that the dear girls belonged to the upper ten."

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," said Mrs. Mortlock. "In this case, ladies and gentlemen, I beg to reverse the familiar words, for amid all your joy I have lost my 'continual reader.' She had her faults—no, I'm not going to deny that being young she had her faults—but she was ever good-natured, and she did her gossip chirrupy."

Of course the girls' future was now assured, for Arthur was a very rich man. Miss Egerton, at his earnest request, came to live with them, and they are now known to possess one of the happiest and brightest homes in London—in short, they live in a "Palace Beautiful."

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