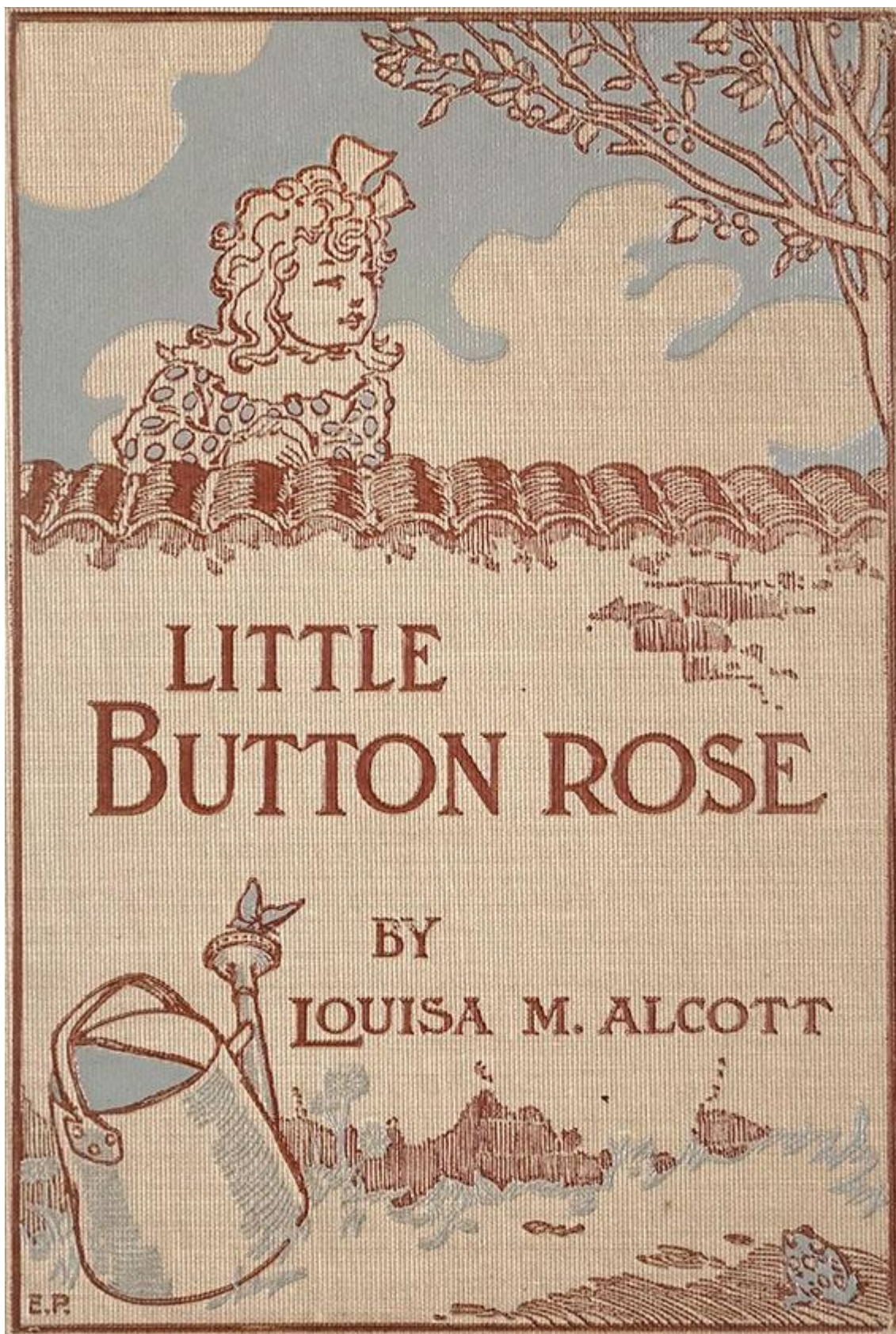


LITTLE BUTTON ROSE



[Larger image](#)

[Pg i]



“Rosamond sat looking about the room.”—[*Frontispiece*](#).

[Pg ii]

LITTLE BUTTON ROSE

BY

LOUISA M. ALCOTT

AUTHOR OF

“LITTLE WOMEN,” “LITTLE MEN,” “JO’S BOYS,” ETC.

Illustrated

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[Pg iii]

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[Pg 1]

LITTLE BUTTON-ROSE

"If you please, I've come," said a small girl, as she walked into a large room where three ladies sat at work.

One of the ladies was very thin, one very stout, and the youngest very pretty. The eldest put on her glasses, the stout one dropped her sewing, and the pretty one exclaimed,—

"Why, it must be little Rosamond!"

"Yes, I've come; the man is taking my trunk upstairs, and I've got a letter for Cousin Penelope," said the child, with the sweet composure of one always sure of a welcome.

The stout lady held out her hand for the letter; but the little girl, after a keen look at the three faces, went to the old lady, who received her with a kiss, saying,—

"That's right; but how did you know, dear?"

"Oh, Papa said Cousin Penny is old, Cousin Henny fat, and Cousin Cicely rather pretty; so I knew in one minute," replied Rosamond, in a tone of innocent satisfaction at her own cleverness, [Pg 2]and quite unconscious of the effect of her speech.

Miss Penelope hastily retired behind the letter, Miss Henrietta frowned so heavily that the gold-rimmed eye-glasses flew off her nose with a clash, and Cicely laughed outright, as she exclaimed,—

"I'm afraid we have got an *enfant terrible* among us, though I can't complain of my share of the compliments."

"I never expected to find Clara's child well mannered, and I see I was quite right. Take your hat off, Rosamond, and sit down. It tires Sister to lean on her in that way," said Miss Henny in a severe tone, with no offer of any warmer welcome.

Seeing that something was amiss, the child quietly obeyed, and perching herself in an ancient arm-chair crossed her short legs, folded her plump hands over the diminutive

travelling-bag she carried, and sat looking about the room with a pair of very large blue eyes, quite unabashed, though rather pensive, as if the memory of some tender parting were still fresh in her little heart.

While Miss Penny slowly reads the letter, Miss Henny works daisies on a bit of canvas with pettish jerks of her silk, and Miss Cicely [Pg 3]leans in the sofa-corner, staring at the newcomer, we will briefly introduce our small heroine. Her father was cousin to the elder ladies, and being called suddenly across the water on business, took his wife with him, leaving the little girl to the care of these relatives, thinking her too young for so long a journey. Cicely, an orphan niece who lived with the old ladies, was to have the care of Rosy; and a summer in the quiet country town would do her good, while change of scene would console her for this first separation from her mother. How she fared remains to be seen; and we need only add that the child had been well trained, made the companion of a sweet and tender woman, and was very anxious to please the parents whom she passionately loved, by keeping the promises she had made them, and being “as brave as Papa, as patient and kind as dear Mamma.”

“Well, what do you think of it, Missy?” asked Cicely, as the blue eyes came back to her, after roving round the spacious, old-fashioned, and rather gloomy room.

“It’s a pretty large, dark place for a little girl to be all alone in;” and there was a suspicious quiver in the childish voice, as Rosy [Pg 4]opened her bag to produce a very small handkerchief, evidently feeling that she might have sudden need of it if some one did not speak to her very soon.

“We keep it dark on account of Sister’s eyes. When I was a little girl, it wasn’t considered polite to say rude things about other people’s houses, especially if they were very handsome ones,” said Miss Henny, with a stern glance over the eye-glasses at the young offender, whose second remark was even more unfortunate than her first.

“I didn’t mean to be rude, but I *must* tell the truth. Little girls like bright places. I’m sorry about Cousin Penny’s eyes. I will read to her; I do to Mamma, and she says it is very well for a child only eight years old.”

The gentle answer and the full eyes seemed to calm Miss Henny’s wrath, for her size was her tender point, and the old house her especial pride; so she dropped the awe-inspiring glasses, and said more kindly,—

“There is a nice little room ready for you upstairs, and a garden to play in. Cicely will hear you read every day, and I will teach you to sew, for of course that *most* useful part of your education has been neglected.”

[Pg 5]

“No, ma’am, I sew my four patches every day, and make little wee stitches, and I can hem Papa’s hank’chifs, and I was learning to darn his socks with a big needle when—when they went away.”

Rosy paused with a sudden choke; but too proud to break down, she only wiped two drops off her cheek with the long ends of her little gray silk glove, set her lips, and remained mistress of herself, privately planning to cry all she liked when she was safely in the “nice little room” promised her.

Cicely, though a lazy, selfish young lady, was touched by the child’s pathetic face, and said in a friendly tone, as she patted the couch where she lay,—

“Come here, dear, and sit by me, and tell me what kind of a kitten you’d like best. I know of a sweet yellow one, and two grays. Our Tabby is too old to play with you; so you will want a kitty, I’m sure.”

“Oh yes, if I may!” and Rosy skipped to the new seat with a smile which plainly proved that this sort of welcome was just what she liked.

“Now, Cicely, why will you put such an idea into Rosamond’s head when you know we can’t have kittens round the house for [Pg 6]Sister to stumble over, not to mention the mischief the horrid things always do? Tabby is all the child needs, with her doll. Of course you have a doll?” and Miss Henny asked the question as solemnly as if she had said, “Have you a soul?”

“Oh yes, I have nine in my trunk, and two little ones in my bag, and Mamma is going to send me a big, big one from London, as soon as she gets there, to sleep with me and be my little comfort,” cried Rosy, rapidly producing from her bag a tiny bride and groom, three seedcakes, a smelling-bottle, and a purse out of which fell a shower of bright cents, also crumbs all over the immaculate carpet.

“Mercy on us, what a mess! Pick it all up, child, and don’t unpack any more in the parlor. One doll is quite enough for me,” said Miss Henny, with a sigh of resignation as if asking patience to bear this new calamity.

Rosy echoed the sigh as she crept about reclaiming her precious pennies, and eating the crumbs as the only way of disposing of them.

“Never mind, it’s only her way; the heat makes her a little cross, you see,” whispered Cicely, bending down to hold the bag, into [Pg 7]which Rosy bundled her treasures in hot haste.

"I thought fat people were always pleasant. I'm glad *you* ain't fat," answered the little girl, in a tone which was perfectly audible.

What would have happened I tremble to think, if Miss Penny had not finished the letter at that moment and handed it to her sister, saying as she held out her arms to the child,—

"Now I know all about it, and you are to be my baby; so come and give me some sweet kisses, darling."

Down dropped the bag, and with a little sob of joy the child nestled close to the kind old heart that welcomed her so tenderly at last.

"Papa calls me his button-rose, 'cause I'm so small and pink and sweet, and thorny too sometimes," she said, looking up brightly, after a few moments of the fond and foolish cuddling all little creatures love and need so much when they leave the nest, and miss the brooding of motherly wings.

"We'll call you anything you like, darling; but Rosamond is a pretty old name, and I'm fond of it, for it was your grandmamma's, and a sweeter woman never lived," said Miss Penny, [Pg 8]stroking the fresh cheeks, where the tears shone like dew on pink rose-leaves.

"I shall call you Chicken Little, because we have Henny and Penny; and the girls and Tab downstairs can be Goosey-Loosey, Turkey-Lurkey, and Cocky-Locky. I'll be Ducky-Lucky, and I'm sure Foxy-Loxy lives next door," said Cicely, laughing at her own wit, while Miss Henny looked up, saying, with the first smile Rosy had seen,—

"That's true enough! and I hope Chicken Little will keep out of his way, no matter if the sky does fall."

"Who is it? A truly fox? I never saw one. Could I peep at him some time?" cried the child, much interested at once.

"No, dear; it's only a neighbor of ours who has treated us badly, at least we think so, and we don't speak, though we used to be good friends some years ago. It's sad to live so, but we don't quite see how to help it yet. We are ready to do our part; but Mr. Dover should take the first step, as he was in the wrong."

"Please tell about it. I have horrid quarrels with Mamie Parsons sometimes, but we always kiss and make up, and feel all happy again. Can't you, Cousin Penny?" asked the child, [Pg 9]softly touching the little white curls under the lace cap.

“Well, no, dear; grown people cannot settle differences in that pretty way. We must wait till he apologizes, and then we shall gladly be friends again. You see Mr. Dover was a missionary in India for many years, and we were very intimate with his mother. Our gardens join, and a gate in our fence led across their field to the back street, and was most convenient when we wanted to walk by the river or send the maids on errands in a hurry. The old lady was very neighborly, and we were quite comfortable till Thomas came home and made trouble. He’d lost his wife and children, poor man, and his liver was out of order, and living among the heathen so long had made him melancholy and queer; so he tried to amuse himself with gardening and keeping hens.”

“I’m glad! I love flowers and biddies,” murmured Rosy, listening with deep interest to this delightful mixture of quarrels and heathen, sorrow, poultry, mysterious diseases, and gardens.

“He had no right to shut up our gate and forbid our crossing that little field, and no *gentleman* would have *dared* to do it after all [Pg 10]our kindness to his mother,” exclaimed Miss Henny, so suddenly and violently that Rosamond nearly fell off the old lady’s lap with the start she gave.

“No, sister, I don’t agree there. Mr. Thomas had a perfect *right* to do as he liked with his own land; but I think we should have had no trouble if you had been willing to sell him the corner of our garden where the old summer-house is, for his hens,” began Miss Penny in a mild tone.

“Sister! you know the tender memories connected with that bower, and how terrible it would have been to *me* to see it torn down, and noisy fowls clucking and pecking where I and my poor Calvin once sat together,” cried Miss Henny, trying to look sentimental, which was an impossible feat for a stout lady in a flowery muslin gown, and a fly-away cap full of blue ribbons, on a head once flaxen and now gray.

“We won’t discuss the point, Henrietta,” said the elder lady with dignity; whereupon the other returned to the letter, bridling and tossing her head in a way which caused Rosy to stare, and resolve to imitate it when she played be a proud princess with her dolls.

“Well, dear, that was the beginning of the [Pg 11]trouble,” continued Miss Penny; “and now we don’t speak, and the old lady misses us, I’m sure, and I often long to run in and see her, and I’m so sorry you can’t enjoy the wonders of that house, for it’s full of beautiful and curious things, most instructive for children to observe. Mr. Thomas has been a great traveller, and has a tiger skin in the parlor so natural it’s quite startling to

behold; also spears, and bows and arrows, and necklaces of shark's teeth, from the Cannibal Islands, and the loveliest stuffed birds, my dear, all over the place, and pretty shells and baskets, and ivory toys, and odd dresses, and no end of wonderful treasures. Such a sad pity you can't see them!" and Miss Penny looked quite distressed at the child's loss.

"Oh, but I guess I will see 'em! Every one is good to me, and old gentlemen like little girls. Papa says so, and *he* always does what I want when I say 'Please' with my wheedulin smile, as he calls it," said Rosy, giving them a sample of the most engaging sort.

"You funny little thing, do try it, and soften the heart of that tiresome man! He has the finest roses in town and the most delicious fruit, and we never get any, though he sends [Pg 12]quantities everywhere else. Such a fuss over an old earwiggy arbor! It is perfectly provoking, when we might enjoy so much over there; and who knows what might happen!"

As Cicely spoke, she smoothed her brown curls and glanced at the mirror, quite conscious that a very pretty young lady of twenty was wasting her sweetness in the great gloomy house, with two elderly spinsters.

"I'll get some for you," answered Rosy, with a nod of such calm conviction of her own power, that Cicely laughed again, and proposed that she should go at once and view the battle-field.

"Could I *run* in the garden? I'd love to, after riding so long," asked Rosy, eager to be off; for her active legs ached for exercise, and the close, shady room oppressed her.

"Yes, dear; but don't get into mischief, or worry Tabby, or pick the flowers. Of course you wouldn't touch green fruit, or climb trees, or soil your little frock. I'll ring the bell for you to come in and be dressed for tea when it is time."

With these directions and a kiss, Miss Penny, as Cicely did not stir, let the child out at the back door of the long hall, and watched her [Pg 13]walk demurely down the main path of the prim old garden, where no child had played for years, and even the toads and fat robins behaved in the most decorous manner.

"It's pretty dull, but it's better than the parlor with all the staring pictures," said Rosy to herself, after a voyage of discovery had shown her the few charms of the place. The sight of a large yellow cat reposing in the sun cheered her eyes at that moment, and she hastened to scrape acquaintance with the stately animal: for the snails were not

social, and the toads stared even more fixedly at her than the painted eyes of her respected ancestors.

But Tabby disliked children as much as her mistress, and after submitting ungraciously to a few caresses from the eager little hands, she rose and retired majestically to a safer perch on the top of the high wall which enclosed the garden. Being too lazy to jump, she walked up the shelves of an old flower-stand moulding in a corner, and by so doing, gave Rosy a brilliant idea, which she at once put into action by following Tabby's example. Up this new sort of ladder she went, and peeped over the wall, delighted at this unexpected chance to behold the enemy's territory.

[Pg 14]

"Oh, what a pretty place!" she cried, clasping her grubby little hands with rapture, as the beauties of the forbidden land burst upon her view.

It was indeed a paradise to a child's eyes,—for flowers bloomed along the winding paths; ripening fruit lay rosy and tempting in the beds below; behind the wire walls that confined them clucked and strutted various sorts of poultry; cages of gay birds hung on the piazza; and through the open windows of the house one caught glimpses of curious curtains, bright weapons, and mysterious objects in the rooms beyond.

A gray-headed gentleman in a queer nankeen coat lay asleep on a bamboo lounge under the great cherry-tree, with a purple silk handkerchief half over his face.

"That's the missionary man, I s'pose. He doesn't look cross at all. If I could only get down there, I'd go and wake him with a softly kiss, as I do Papa, and ask to see his pretty things."

Being quite unconscious of fear, Rosy certainly would have carried out her daring plan, had it been possible; but no way of descending on the other side appeared, so she sighed and [Pg 15]sat gazing wistfully, till Cousin Henny appeared for a breath of fresh air, and ordered her down at once.

"Come and see if my balsam-seeds have started yet. I keep planting them, but they *won't* come up," she said, pointing out a mound of earth newly dug and watered.

Rosy obediently scrambled up, and was trying to decide whether some green sprouts were chickweed or the dilatory balsams when a sudden uproar in the next garden made her stop to listen, while Miss Henny said in a tone of great satisfaction, as the cackle of hens arose,—

“Some trouble with those horrid fowls of his. I detest them, crowing in the night, and waking us at dawn with their noise. I wish some thief would steal every one of them. Nobody has a right to annoy their neighbors with troublesome pets.”

Before Rosy could describe the beauties of the white bantams or the size of the big golden cock, a loud voice cried,—

“You rascal! I’ll hang you if I catch you here again. Go home quicker than you came, and tell your mistress to teach you better manners if she values your life.”

“It’s that man! Such language! I wonder [Pg 16]who he’s caught? That bad boy who steals our plums, perhaps.”

The words were hardly out of Miss Henny’s mouth when her question was answered in a sudden and dreadful way; for over the wall, hurled by a strong arm, flew Tabby, high in the air, to fall with a thump directly in the middle of the bed where they stood. Miss Henny uttered a shrill scream, caught up her stunned treasure, and rushed into the house as fast as her size and flounces permitted, leaving Rosy breathless with surprise and indignation.

Burning to resent this terrible outrage, she climbed quickly up the steps, and astonished the irate old gentleman on the other side by the sudden apparition of a golden head, a red childish face, and a dirty little finger pointed sternly at him, as this small avenging angel demanded,—

“Missionary man, how *could* you kill my cousin’s cat?”

“Bless my soul! who are you?” said the old gentleman, staring at this unexpected actor on the field of battle.

“I’m Button-Rose, and I hate cruel people! Tabby’s dead, and now there isn’t any one to play with over here.”

[Pg 17]

This sad prospect made the blue eyes fill with sudden tears; and the application of the dirty fingers added streaks of mud to the red cheeks, which much damaged the appearance of the angel, though it added pathos to the child’s reproach.

“Cats have nine lives, and Tabby’s used to being chucked over the wall. I’ve done it several times, and it seems to agree with her, for she comes back to kill my chicks as bold as brass. See that!” and the old gentleman held up a downy dead chicken, as proof of Tabby’s sin.

“Poor little chicky!” groaned Rosy, yearning to mourn over the dear departed and bury it with tender care. “It was very naughty of Tab; but, sir, you know cats are made to catch things, and they can’t help it.”

“They will have to help it, or I’ll drown the lot. This is a rare breed, and I’ve but two left after all my trouble, thanks to that rascal of yours! What are you going to do about it?” demanded Mr. Dover, in a tone that made Rosy feel as if she had committed the murder herself.

“I’ll talk to Tabby and try to make her good, and I’ll shut her up in the old rabbit-house over here; then I hope she will be sorry [Pg 18]and never do it any more,” she said, in such a remorseful tone that the old gentleman relented at once, ashamed to afflict such a tender little soul.

“Try it,” he said, with a smile that made his yellow face pleasant all at once. Then, as if ready to change the subject, he asked, looking curiously at the little figure perched on the wall,—

“Where did you come from? Never saw any children over there before. They don’t allow ’em.”

Rosy introduced herself in a few words, and seeing that her new acquaintance seemed interested, she added with the wheedling smile Papa found so engaging,—

“It’s pretty lonely here, I guess; so p’r’aps you’ll let me peep at your nice garden sometimes if it doesn’t trouble you, Sir?”

“Poor little soul! it must be desperately dull with those three tabbies,” he said to himself, as he stroked the dead chicken in his hand, and watched the little face bent toward him.

“Peep as much as you like, child; or, better still, come over and run about. I like little girls,” he added aloud, with a nod and a wave of welcome.

[Pg 19]

“I told ’em I was sure you did! I’d love to come, but they wouldn’t let me, I know. I’m so sorry about the fight. Couldn’t you make it up, and be pleasant again?” asked Rosy, clasping her hands with a beseeching gesture as her bright face grew sad and serious remembering the feud.

“So they’ve told you that nonsense already, have they? Nice neighbors *they* are,” said the old gentleman, frowning as if ill pleased at the news.

“I’m glad I know; p’r’aps I can be a peacemaker. Mamma says they are good to have in families, and I’d like to be one if I could. Would you mind if I tried to peace-make a little, so I could come over? I do want to see the red birds and the tiger skin awfully, if you please.”

“What do you know about ’em?” asked the old gentleman, sitting down on a garden chair, as if he didn’t mind continuing the chat with this new neighbor.

Nearly tumbling off the wall in her earnestness, Rosy repeated all that Cousin Penny had said; and something in the reasonable words, the flattering description, of his treasures, and the sincere regret of the old lady seemed to [Pg 20]have a good effect upon Mr. Dover, for when Rosy paused out of breath, he said in such an altered tone that it was evident the peace-making had already begun,—

“Miss Carey is a gentlewoman! I always thought so. You tell her, with my compliments, that I’d be glad to see you any time if she has no objection. I’ll put my step-ladder there, and you can come over instead of the cat. But mind you don’t meddle, or I might give you a toss like Tabby.”

“I’m not afraid,” laughed Rosy. “I’ll go and ask right away, and I won’t touch a thing, and I know you’ll like me for a friend. Papa says I’m a dear little one. Thank you very much, sir. Good-by till I come again;” and with a kiss of the hand, the yellow head sunk out of sight like the sun going down, leaving a sense of darkness behind when the beaming little face disappeared, though fresh stains of green mould from the wall made it rather like the tattooed countenances Mr. Dover used to see among his cannibal friends in Africa.

He sat musing with the dead chicken in his hand, forgetful of time, till a ring of his own door-bell called him in to receive a note from Miss Penelope, thanking him for his invitation [Pg 21]to little Rosamond, but declining it in the most polite and formal words.

“I expected it! Bless the silly old souls! why can’t they be reasonable, and accept the olive branch when I offer it? I’ll be hanged if I do again! The fat one is at the bottom of this. Miss Pen would give in if that absurd Henrietta didn’t hold her back. Well, I’m sorry for the child, but that’s not my fault;” and throwing down the note, Mr. Dover went out to water his roses.

For a week or two, Button-Rose hardly dared glance toward the forbidden spot from her window, as she was ordered to play in the front garden, and sent to take sober walks with Cicely, who loved to stop and gossip with her friends, while the poor child waited patiently till the long tales were told.

Nursing Tabby was her chief consolation; and so kind was she, that the heart of the old cat softened to her, and she actually purred her thanks at last, for all the saucers of cream, bits of chicken, soft pats, and tender words bestowed upon her by the little girl.

“Well, I declare! Tab won’t do that even for me,” said Miss Henny, one day, when she came upon the child sitting alone in the hall [Pg 22]with a picture-book and the cat comfortably asleep in her lap.

“Ammals always love me, if people don’t,” answered Button-Rose, soberly; for she had not yet forgiven the stout lady for denying her the delights offered by the “missionary man.”

“That’s because *an-i-mals* can’t see how naughty you are sometimes,” said Miss Henny tartly, not having recovered her temper even after many days.

“I shall make every one love me before I go away. Mamma told me to, and I shall. I know how;” and Button smiled with a wise little nod that was pretty to see, as she proudly cuddled her first conquest.

“We shall see;” and Miss Henny ponderously departed, wondering what odd fancy the little thing would take into her head next.

It was soon evident; for when she came down from her long nap, later in the afternoon, Miss Henny found Rosamond reading aloud to her sister in the great dim parlor. They made a curious contrast,—the pale, white-haired, feeble old lady, with her prim dress, high cap, knitting, and shaded eyes; and the child, rosy and round, quaint and sweet, a pretty little [Pg 23]ornament for the old-fashioned room, as she sat among the tea-poys and samplers, ancient china and furniture, with the portraits of great grandfathers and grandmothers simpering and staring at her, as if pleased and surprised to see such a charming little descendant among them.

“Bless the baby! what is she at now?” asked Miss Henny, feeling more amiable after her sleep.

“I’m reading to Cousin Penny, ’cause no one else does, and her poor eyes hurt her, and she likes stories, and so do I,” answered Button, with one chubby finger on the place in her book, and eyes full of pride at the grown-up employment she had found for herself.

“So kind of the little dear! She found me alone and wanted to amuse me; so I proposed a story to suit us both, and she does very well with a little help now and then. I haven’t read ‘Simple Susan’ for years, and really enjoy it. Maria Edgeworth was

always a favorite of mine, and I still think her far superior to any modern writer for the young,” said Miss Penny, looking quite animated and happy in the new entertainment provided for her.

“Go on, child; let me hear how well you can [Pg 24]read;” and Miss Henny settled herself in the sofa-corner with her embroidery.

So Button started bravely off, and tried so hard that she was soon out of breath. As she paused, she said with a gasp,—

“Isn’t Susan a dear girl? She gives *all* the best things to other people, and is kind to the old harper. She didn’t send him away, as you did the music-man to-day, and tell him to be still.”

“Organs are a nuisance, and I never allow them here. Go on, and don’t criticise your elders, Rosamond.”

“Mamma and I always talk over stories, and pick out the morals of ’em. *She* likes it;” with which remark, made sweetly not pertly, Button went on to the end, with an occasional lift over a long word; and the old ladies were interested, in spite of themselves, in the simple tale read in that childish voice.

“Thank you, dear, it is very nice, and we will have one every day. Now, what can I do for you?” asked Miss Penny, as the little girl pushed the curls off her forehead, with a sigh of mingled weariness and satisfaction.

“Let me go in the back garden and peep through the knot-hole at the pretty roses. I [Pg 25]do long to see if the moss ones are out, and the cherries ripe,” said Rosy, clasping her hands imploringly.

“It can do no harm, Henrietta. Yes, dear, run away and get some catnip for Tabby, and see if the balsams are up yet.”

That last suggestion won Miss Henny’s consent; and Button was off at once, skipping like a young colt all over the garden, which now seemed delightful to her.

At the back of the summer-house was a narrow space between it and the fence where certain plump toads lived; peeping in to watch them, Rosy had spied a large knot-hole in the old boards, and through it found she could get a fine view of several rose-bushes, a tree, and one window of the “missionary man’s” house. She had longed for another peep since the flower-stand was gone, and climbing trees forbidden; now with joy she slipped into the damp nook, regardless of the speckled gentlemen who stared at her with dismay, and took a good look at the forbidden paradise beyond.

Yes, the “moss ones” were in bloom, the cherries quite red, and at the window was the gray head of Mr. Dover, as he sat reading in his queer yellow dressing-gown.

[Pg 26]

Button yearned to get in, and leaned so hard against the hateful fence that the rotten board cracked, a long bit fell out, and she nearly went after it, as it dropped upon the green bank below. Now the full splendor of the roses burst upon her, and a delightful gooseberry bush stood close by with purplish berries temptingly bobbing within reach. This obliging bush hid the hole, but left fine openings to see through; so the child popped her curly head out, and gazed delightedly at the chickens, the flowers, the fruit, and the unconscious old gentleman not far away.

“I’ll have it for my secret; or maybe I’ll tell Cousin Penny, and beg her to let me peep if I truly promise never to go in,” thought Button, knowing well who her best friend was.

At bedtime, when the dear old lady came to give the good-night kiss, which the others forgot, Rosy, as Miss Penny called her, made her request; and it was granted, for Miss Penny had a feeling that the little peacemaker would sooner or later heal the breach with her pretty magic, and so she was very ready to lend a hand in a quiet way.

Next day at play-time, Button was hurrying down her last bit of gingerbread, which she [Pg 27]was obliged to eat properly in the dining-room, instead of enjoying out-of-doors, when she heard a sudden flurry in the garden, and running to the window saw Roxy the maid chasing a chicken to and fro, while Miss Henny stood flapping her skirts on the steps, and crying, “Shoo!” till she was red in the face.

“It’s the white banty, and it must have come in my hole! Oh dear, I hope they won’t catch it! Cousin Henny said she’d wring the neck of the first one that flied over the wall.”

Away went Rosy, to join in the hunt; for Miss Henny was too fat to run, and Roxy found the lively fowl too much for her. It was a long and hard chase; feathers flew, the maid lost her breath, Rosy tumbled down, and Miss Henny screamed and scolded till she was forced to sit down and watch in silence.

At last poor, hunted Banty ran into the arbor, for its clipped wings would not lift it over the wall. Button rushed after it, and dismal squalls plainly proclaimed that the naughty chicken was caught.

Miss Henny waddled down the path, declaring that she *would* wring its neck; and Roxy went puffing after her, glad to rest. But the old summer-house was empty. No little girl, [Pg 28]no ruffled bantam, appeared. Both had vanished like magic; and mistress

and maid stared at each other in amazement, till they saw that the long-disused window was open, and a gleam of light came in from the narrow opening behind.

“My patience! if that child hasn’t crept out there, and bolted through that hole in the fence! Did you ever, Miss?” exclaimed Roxy, trying not to look pleased at being spared the distasteful task of killing the poor chicken.

“Naughty girl!” began Miss Henny, when the sound of voices made both listen. “Slip in there, and see what is going on,” said the mistress, well knowing that her stout person never could be squeezed into the small space between house and fence.

Roxy, being thin, easily obeyed, and in a whisper telephoned what went on beyond the hole, causing Miss Henny much vexation, surprise, and at last real pleasure, as the child performed her little part in the mission she had undertaken.

“Oh, please, it’s all my fault! I kept the hole open, Mr. Thomas, and so Banty fled in. But it isn’t hurt a bit, and I’ve brought it home all safe, ’cause I know you love your [Pg 29]chickies, and Tabby ate lots of ’em,” said the childish voice in its most conciliatory tone.

“Why didn’t you fling it over the wall, as I did the cat?” asked Mr. Dover, smiling, as he shut up the truant fowl, and turned to look at the rosy, breathless child, whose pink frock bore the marks of many a tumble on grass and gravel.

“It would hurt Banty’s feelings, and yours too, and not be polite. So I came myself, to make some pollygies, and say it was my fault. But, please, could I keep the hole to peep through, if I always put up a board when I go away? It is so dull in there, and so sweet in here!”

“Don’t you think a little gate would be nicer,—one just big enough for you, with a hook to fasten it? We’ll call it a button-hole,” laughed Mr. Dover. “Then you could peep; or perhaps the ladies will think better of it, and show that they pardon my ill-treatment of Tabby by letting you come in and pick some cherries and roses now and then.”

This charming proposal caused the little girl to clasp her hands and cry aloud,—

“That would be perfully sp’endid! I know Cousin Penny would like it, and let me. [Pg 30]P’r’aps she’d come herself; she’s so thin, she could, and she loves your mother and wants to see her. Only, Cousin Henny won’t let us be nice and friendly. S’pose you send *her* some cherries; she loves good things to eat, and maybe she will say yes, if you send lots.”

Mr. Dover laughed at this artless proposal, and Miss Henny smiled at the prospect of a gift of the luscious black-heart cherries she had been longing for. Roxy wisely repeated only the agreeable parts of the conversation; so nothing ruffled the lady's temper. Now, whether Mr. Dover's sharp eye caught a glimpse of the face among the gooseberry bushes, and suspected eavesdroppers, or whether the child's earnest desire to make peace touched him, who shall say? Certain it is that his eyes twinkled like a boy's, as he said rather loudly, in his most affable tone,—

"I shall be most happy to send Miss Henrietta a basket of fruit. She used to be a charming young woman. It's a pity she shuts herself up so much; but that sad little romance of hers has darkened her life, I suppose. Ah, well, I can sympathize with her!"

Rosy stared at the sudden change in his manner, and was rather bewildered by his grown-up [Pg 31]way of talking to her. But being intent on securing something nice to carry home, she stuck to the cherries, which she *did* understand, and pointing to the piazza said with a business-like air,—

"There's a basket; so we might pick 'em right away. I love to go up in trees and throw 'em down; and I know Cousin Henny will like cherries ever so much, and not scold a bit when I take some to her."

"Then come on," cried Mr. Thomas, relapsing into the hearty manner she liked so much; and away he went, quite briskly, down the path, with his yellow skirts waving in the wind, and Button skipping after him in great glee.

"They actually *are* a-picking cherries, Miss, up in the tree like a couple of robins a-chirpin' and laughin' as gay as can be," reported Roxy, from her peep-hole.

"Rip off the rest of that board, then I can see," whispered Miss Henny, quivering with interest now; for she had heard Mr. Dover's words, and her wrath was appeased by that flattering allusion to herself.

Off came the rest of the board, and from the window, half hidden in woodbine, she could now see over the bushes into the next garden. [Pg 32]The peep-hole commanded the tree, and she watched with eager eyes the filling of the basket to be sent her, planning the while a charming note of thanks.

"Do look, Miss; they are resting now, and she's on his knee. Ain't it a pretty picter?" whispered Roxy, unmindful of the earwigs, ants, and daddy-long-legs promenading over her as she crouched in her mouldy corner, intent on the view beyond.



“Do look, Miss!
they are resting now.”—[Page 32](#).

“Very pretty! He lost several children in India and I suppose Rosy reminds him of them. Ah, poor man! I can sympathize with him, for I too have loved and lost,” sighed Miss Henny, pensively surveying the group on the rustic seat.

They were playing cherry-bob; and the child’s laughter made pleasant music in the usually quiet place, while the man’s face lost its sad, stern look, and was both gay and tender, as he held the little creature close, and popped the ripe fruit into the red, laughing mouth.

As the last sweet morsel disappeared Rosy said, with a long breath of perfect content,—

“It’s *almost* as good as having Papa to play with. I do hope the cousins *will* let me come again! If they don’t, I think my heart will [Pg 33]break, ’cause I get so homesick over there, and have so many trials, and no one but Cousin Penny ever cuddles me.”

“Bless her heart! We’ll send her some flowers for that. You tell her that Mrs. Dover is poorly, and would like very much to see her; and so would Mr. Thomas, who enjoys her little niece immensely. Can you remember that?”

“Every word! *She* is very nice to me, and I love her, and I guess she will be glad to come. She likes *moss-roses*, and so do I,” added the unblushing little beggar, as Mr. Dover took out his knife and began to make the bouquet which was to be Miss Penny’s bribe. He could not bear to give up his little playmate, and was quite ready to try again, with this persistent and charming ally to help him heal the breach.

“Shall you send anything to Cis? You needn’t mind about it, ’cause she can’t keep me at home, but it might please her, and make her stop rapping my head with her thimble when I ask questions, and slapping my fingers when I touch any of her pretty things,” suggested Button, as the flowers were added to the fruit, making a fine display.

“I never send presents to *young* ladies,” said [Pg 34]Mr. Thomas shortly, adding, with both hands out, and his most inviting smile, “But I *always* kiss nice little girls if they will allow me?”

Button threw both arms about his neck and gave him a shower of grateful kisses, which were sweeter to the lonely old man than all the cherries that ever grew, or the finest flowers in his garden. Then Miss Rosamond proudly marched home, finding no trace of the watchers, for both had fled while the “cuddling” went on. Roxy was soberly setting the dinner-table, and Miss Henny in the parlor breathing hard behind a newspaper. Miss Penny and Cicely were spending the day out, so the roses had to wait; but the basket was most graciously received, also the carefully delivered

message, and the child's heart was rejoiced by free permission to go and see "our kind neighbor now and then, if Sister does not object."

Rosy was in great spirits, and prattled away as they sat at dinner, emboldened by the lady's unusual amiability to ask all sorts of questions, some of which proved rather embarrassing to Miss Henny, and very amusing to Roxy, listening in the china-closet.

"I wish I had 'spepsia," was the abrupt remark of the small person as her plate of [Pg 35]drumsticks was removed and the pudding appeared, accompanied by the cherries.

"Why, dear?" asked Miss Henny, busily arranging the small dish of delicate tidbits, which left little but the skeleton of the roast fowl for the kitchen.

"Then I could have the nicest bits of chicken, and heaps of sauce on my pudding, and the butteryest slices of toast, and *all* the cream for my tea, as you do. It isn't a *very* bad pain, is it?" asked Rosy, in such perfect good faith that Miss Henny's sudden flush and Roxy's hasty dive into the closet never suggested to her that this innocent speech was bringing the old lady's besetting sin to light in the most open manner.

"Yes, child, it is *very* bad, and you may thank your stars that I try to keep you from it by feeding you on plain food. At my age, and suffering as I do, the best of everything is needed to keep up my strength," said Miss Henny, tartly. But the largest plate of pudding, with "heaps of sauce," went to the child this day, and when the fruit was served, an unusually small portion was put away for the invalid, who was obliged to sustain nature with frequent lunches through the day and evening.

[Pg 36]

"I'm s'prised that you suffer much, Cousin Henny. How brave you must be, not to cry about it, and go round in horrid pain, as you do, and dress so nicely, and see people, and work 'broidering, and make calls! I hope I shall be brave if I ever *do* have 'spepsia; but I guess I shan't, you take such care to give me small pieces every time."

With which cheerful remark Rosy closed that part of the conversation and returned to the delights of her new friend's garden. But from that day, among other changes which began about this time, the child's cup and plate were well filled, and the dread of adding to her own sufferings seemed to curb the dyspeptic's voracious appetite. "A cheild was amang them takin' notes," and every one involuntarily dreaded those clear eyes and that frank tongue, so innocently observing and criticising all that went on. Cicely had already been reminded of a neglected duty by Rosy's reading to Miss Penny, and tried to be more faithful in that, as in other services which she owed the

old lady. So the little missionary was evidently getting on, though quite unconscious of her work at home, so absorbed was she in her foreign mission; for, like many another missionary, the [Pg 37]savage over the way was more interesting than the selfish, slothful, or neglected souls at home.

Miss Penny was charmed with her flowers and the friendly message sent her, and to Rosy's great delight went next day, in best bonnet and gown, to make a call upon the old lady "who was poorly," for that appeal could not be resisted. Rosy also, in honor of the great occasion, wore *her* best hat, and a white frock so stiff that she looked like a little opera dancer as the long black legs skipped along the street; for this was far too grand a visit to be paid through a hole in the wall.

In the basket were certain delicacies for the old lady, and a card had been prepared, with the names of Miss Carey and Miss Rosamond Carey beautifully written on it by Cis, who was dying to go, but dared not after Rosy had told her Mr. Dover's remark about young ladies.

As the procession of two paused at the door, both the young and the old heart fluttered a little, for this was the first decided step toward reconciliation, and any check might spoil it all. The maid stared, but civilly led these unexpected guests in and departed with the card. Miss Penny settled herself in a large chair and [Pg 38]looked about with pensive interest at the familiar room. But Rosy made a bee-line for the great tiger-skin, and regardless of her clean frock lay down on it to examine the head, which glared at her with yellow eyes, showing all its sharp teeth in the most delightfully natural manner.

Mr. Dover came in with a formal bow, but Miss Penny put out both hands, and said in her sweet old voice,—

"Let us be friends again for the sake of your mother."

That settled the matter at once, and Mr. Thomas was so eager to do his part that he not only shook the hands heartily, but kept them in his as he said like an honest man,—

"My dear neighbor, I beg your pardon! I was wrong, but I'm not too proud to own it and say I'm glad to let bygones be bygones for the sake of all. Now come and see my mother; she is longing for you."

What went on in the next room Rosy never knew or cared, for Mr. Thomas soon returned, and amused her so well, showing his treasures, that she forgot where she was till the maid came to say tea was ready.

“Are we going to stay?” cried the little girl, [Pg 39]beaming from under a Feejee crown of feathers, which produced as comical an effect upon her curly head as did the collar of shark’s teeth round her plump neck or the great Japanese war-fan in her hand.

“Yes, we have tea at five; come and turn it out. I’ve ordered the little cups especially for you,” said her host, as he changed the small Amazon to a pretty child again and led her away to preside at the table, where the quaint china and silver, and the dainty cake and bread and butter proved much more attractive than the little old lady in a big cap who patted her head and smiled at her.

Never had Rosy enjoyed such a delicious meal; for the rapture of pouring real tea out of a pot shaped like a silver melon, into cups as thin as egg-shells, and putting in sugar with tongs like claws, not to mention much thick cream, also spicy, plummy cakes that melted in one’s mouth, was too great for words.

The little maid was so absorbed in her new duties that she never minded what the elders talked about, till the plates were empty, the pot ran dry, and no one could be prevailed on to have any more tea. Then she leaned back in her chair and remarked with an air of calm [Pg 40]satisfaction, as she looked from one to the other, and smiled that engaging smile of hers,—

“Isn’t being friends a great deal nicer than fighting and throwing cats over walls and calling bad names?”

It was impossible not to laugh, and that cheerful sound seemed to tune every one to the sweetest harmony, while the little peacemaker was passed round as if a last course of kisses was absolutely necessary.

Then the party broke up, and Mr. Dover escorted his guests to their own gate, to the great amazement of the neighbors and the very visible pride of Miss Button-Rose, who went up the walk with her head as high as if the wreath of daisies on her little hat had been a conqueror’s crown.

Now that the first step had been taken, all would have gone smoothly if Cicely, offended because Mr. Thomas took no notice of *her*, had not put it into Miss Henny’s head that as the original quarrel began between her and their neighbor, it would not be dignified to give in till Mr. Dover had come and begged pardon of *her* as well as of Miss Penny. This suited the foolish old lady, who never could forget certain plain words spoken in the heat of battle, though [Pg 41]the kindly ones lately heard had much softened her heart toward the offender.

“No, I shall not forget my dignity nor humble myself by going over there to apologize as Penelope has. *She* can do as she likes; and now that he has asked to be forgiven, there is perhaps no harm in *her* seeing the old lady. But with me it is different. *I* was insulted, and till Thomas Dover comes here and solemnly asks my pardon I will *not* cross his threshold, no matter what bribes he sends,” said Miss Henny, with an air of heroic firmness.

But it did cost her a pang when her sister went every now and then to take tea with the old lady and came home full of pleasant news; while Rosy prattled of the fine things she saw, the nice things she had to eat, and never failed to bring some gift to share, or to display to the exiles from Paradise. They ate the “bribes,” however, as they called the fruit, admired the pretty trinkets and toys, and longed to share in the mild festivities of the pleasant house over the way, but stood firm in spite of all Rosy’s wiles, till something unexpected happened to touch their hearts, conquer their foolish pride, and crown the little peacemaker’s efforts with success.

[Pg 42]

One August afternoon Cicely was discontentedly looking over her small store of ornaments as she made ready for a party. She loved gayety, and went about a great deal, leaving many duties undone, or asking the little girl to attend to them for her, neglecting, however, to show any gratitude for these small services so cheerfully done.

As she sat tossing over her boxes, Button-Rose came in looking tired and listless, for it was a hot day, and she had been out twice to do errands for Cicely, besides trotting busily up and down to wait on the old ladies while the young one put fresh ribbons on her dress and curled her hair for the evening.

“Could I lie on your sofa, please, Cis? My head aches, and my legs are so tired,” said little Button, when her tap had been answered by a sharp “What do you want, child?”

“No, I’m going to lie there myself and have a nap as soon as I’m done here. It’s cooler than the bed, and I must be fresh for to-night,” said Cicely, too intent on her own affairs to see how used up Rosy looked.

“Then could I look at your pretty things if I don’t touch ’em?” asked the child, longing to peep into the interesting boxes scattered on the table.

[Pg 43]

“No, you can’t! I’m busy, and don’t want you asking questions and meddling. Go away and let me alone.”

Cicely spoke crossly, and waved her hand with a warning gesture, thereby upsetting the tray which held the beads of the necklace she had decided to wear for want of something better.

“There, now see what you’ve done! Pick up every one, and be quick, for I’m in a hurry.”

“But I didn’t touch ’em,” began poor Button, as she crept about hunting for the black and white beads that looked like very ugly marbles.

“Don’t talk; pick them up and then scamper; you are always in mischief!” scolded Cis, vexed with herself, and the heat, and the accident, and the whole world just then.

Rosy said no more, but several great tears dropped on the carpet as she groped in corners, under the bed, and behind the chairs for the runaways; and when the last was found she put it in her tyrant’s hand, saying, with a wistful look, —

“I’m very sorry I troubled you. Seems to me if I had a little cousin, I’d love to have her [Pg 44]play with my things, and I wouldn’t be cross to her. Now I’ll go and try to *amoose* myself with Bella; *she* is always good to me.”

“Run along then. Thank goodness that doll came when it did, for I’m tired of ‘amooosing’ small girls as well as old ladies,” said Cis, busy with her beads, yet sorry she had been so petulant with patient little Button, who seldom reproached her, being a cheery child, and blessed with a sweet temper.

Rosy felt too languid to play; so when she had told Bella, the London doll, her trials, and comforted herself with some kisses on the waxen cheeks, she roamed away to the summer-house, which was cool and quiet, longing for some one to caress her; for the little heart was homesick and the little head ached badly.

The “button-hole” had been made, the alley swept out, to the great dismay of the spiders, earwigs, and toads, who had fled to quieter quarters, and Rosy had leave to go and come when she liked if Mr. Dover did not object. He never did; and it was her greatest delight to walk in the pretty garden at her own sweet will, always with the hope of meeting its kindly owner, for now they were firm friends. She had been too busy for a run there that day; and [Pg 45]now, as she peeped in, it looked so shady and inviting, and it seemed so natural to turn to her dear “missionary man” for entertainment, that she went straight up to his study window and peeped in.

He too seemed out of sorts that hot afternoon, for he sat leaning his head on both hands at the desk strewn with piles of old letters. Button-Rose’s tender heart yearned over him at once, and stepping quietly in at the long open window she went to him, saying in her tenderest tone, —

“Does your head ache, Sir? Let me soft it as I do Papa’s; he says that always makes it more better. Please let me? I’d love to dearly.”

“Ah, my darling, I wish you could. But the pain is in my heart, and nothing will ever cure it,” sighed Mr. Thomas, as he drew her close and put his wrinkled yellow cheek to her soft one, which looked more like a damask rose than usual.

“You have trials too, I s’pose. Mine trouble me to-day, so I came over to see you. Shall I go away?” asked Rosy with a sigh and the wistful look again.

“No, stay, and we will comfort each other. [Pg 46]Tell me your troubles, Button, and perhaps I can help them,” the kind old gentleman said as he took her on his knee and stroked the curly head with a paternal touch.

So Rosy told her latest grief, and never saw the smile that crept about the lips that asked in a tone of deep interest,—

“Well, what do you mean to do to that unkind Cicely?”

“For a minute I wanted to slap her back when she tried to spat my hands. Then I ’membered that Mamma said a kiss for a blow was a good thing, so I picked up the beads and planned to do it; but Cis looked so cross I couldn’t. If I had a pretty necklace I’d go and give it to her, and then maybe she’d love me better.”

“My dear little missionary, you *shall* have beads to win the heart of *your* heathen, if that is all you need. See here; take anything you like, and give it with the kiss.”

As he spoke, Mr. Dover pulled open a drawer in the desk and displayed a delightful collection of pretty, quaint, and curious trinkets picked up in foreign lands, and kept for keepsakes, since no little daughters of his own lived to wear them.

[Pg 47]

“How perf’ly dorgeous!” cried Rosy, who often fell into baby talk when excited; and plunging in her hands, she revelled for some minutes in sandal-wood cases, carved ivory fans, silver bangles, barbaric brooches, and necklaces of coral, shells, amber, and golden coins, that jingled musically.

“What *shall* I take for her?” cried the little maid, bewildered by such a mine of wealth. “You pick out one, Mr. Thomas, that will please her so much, ’cause you never send her anything, and she don’t like it,” said Rosy, fearing that her own taste was not to be trusted, as she liked the shells and shark’s teeth ornaments best.

“No, I’ll give *you* one, and you shall do as you like about giving it to her. This, now, is really valuable and pretty, and any young lady would like to wear it. It makes me think of you, my Button, for it is like sunshine, and the word cut on the little heart means peace.”

Mr. Dover held up a string of amber beads with its carved amulet, and swung it to and fro where the light shone through it till each bead looked like a drop of golden wine.

“Yes, that is lovely, and it smells nice, too. She will be so s’prised and pleased; I’ll go and [Pg 48]take it to her right away,” cried Rosy, forgetting to ask anything for herself, in her delight at this fine gift for Cis.

But as she lifted her head after he had fastened the clasp about her neck, something in his face recalled the look it wore when she first came in, and putting both hands upon his shoulders, she said in her sweet little way,—

“You’ve made my troubles go away, can’t I make yours? You are so kind to me, I’d love to help you if I could.”

“You do, my child, more than you know; for when I get you in my arms it seems as if one of my poor babies had come back to me, and for a minute I forget the three little graves far away in India.”

“Three!” cried Button, like a sad, soft echo; and she clung to the poor man as if trying to fill the empty arms with the love and pity that overflowed the childish soul in her small body.

This was the comfort Mr. Thomas wanted, and for a few moments he just cradled her on his hungry heart, crooning a Hindostanee lullaby, while a few slow tears came dropping down upon the yellow head, so like those hidden for years under the Indian flowers. Presently [Pg 49]he seemed to come back from the happy past to which the old letters had carried him. He wiped his eyes, and Rosy’s also, with the big purple silk handkerchief, and pressing some very grateful kisses on the hot cheeks, said cheerfully again,—

“God bless you, child, that’s done me good! But don’t let it sadden you, dear; forget all about it, and tell no one what a sentimental old fool I am.”

“I never truly will! Only when you feel sorry about the poor little babies, let me come and give you cuddlings. They always make people feel more better, and I love ’em, and don’t get any now my dear people are away.”

So the two made a tender little plan to comfort each other when hearts were heavy with longings for the absent, and parted at the small gate, both much cheered, and faster friends than ever.

Rosy hastened in with her peace-offering, forgetful now of headache or loneliness as she sat patiently in the wide entry window-seat listening till some sound in Cicely's room should show that she was awake. Before that happened, however, poor Button fell asleep herself, lulled by the quiet of the house,—for [Pg 50]every one was napping,—and dreamed that Mr. Dover stood waving a rainbow over his head, while several Indian gods and three little girls were dancing round him, hand in hand, to the tune of “Ring around a rosy.”



“Poor Button fell asleep.”—[Page 49](#).

A loud yawn roused her, and there was Cis peeping out of her door to see what time it was by the old-fashioned clock on the landing. Up scrambled the child, feeling dizzy and heavy-eyed, but so eager to give pleasure that she lost no time in saying, as she swung the necklace in the sunshine,—

“See! this is for you, if you like it more better than the thunder-and-lightning marbles, as Cousin Penny calls the one you were going to wear.”

“How lovely! Where *did* you get it, child?” cried Cis, wide awake at once, as she ran to the glass to try the effect of the new ornament on her white neck.

“My dear Mr. Thomas gave it to me; but he said I could give it away if I liked, and I want you to have it, ’cause it’s ever so much prettier than any you’ve got.”

“That’s very kind of you, Chicken, but why not keep it yourself? You like nice things as well as I do,” said Cicely, much impressed by [Pg 51]the value of the gift, for it was real amber, and the clasp of gold.

“Well, I’ve talked with Mr. Thomas about missionarying a great deal, and he told me how he made the *savinges* good by giving them beads, and things to eat, and being patient and kind to them. So I thought I’d play be a missionary, and call this house Africa, and try to make the people here behave more better,” answered Rosy, with such engaging earnestness, as well as frankness, that Cis laughed, and exclaimed,—

“You impertinent monkey, to call us heathen and try to convert us! How do you expect to do it?”

“Oh, I’m getting on pretty well, only you don’t *convert* as quick as some of the *savinges* did. I’ll tell you about it;” and Button went on eagerly. “Cousin Penny is the good old one, but rather fussy and slow, so I’m kind and patient, and now she loves me and lets me do things I like. *She* is my best one. Cousin Henny is my cannybel, ’cause she eats so much, and I please *her* by bringing nice things and getting her cushions ready. You are my baddest one, who is cross to me, and fights, and raps my head, and slaps my hands; so I thought [Pg 52]some beads would be nice for you, and I bringed these beauties. Mr. Thomas gave ’em to me when I told him my trials.”

Cicely looked angry, amused, and ashamed, as she listened to the funny yet rather pathetic little play with which the lonely child had tried to cheer herself and win the hearts of those about her. She had the grace to blush, and offer back the necklace, saying in a self-reproachful tone,—

“Keep your beads, little missionary, I’ll be converted without them, and try to be kinder to you. I *am* a selfish wretch, but you shall play be my little sister, and not have to go to strangers for comfort in your trials any more. Come, kiss me, dear, and we’ll begin now.”

Rosy was in her arms at once, and clung there, saying with a face all smiles, —

“That’s what I wanted! I thought I’d make a good *savinge* of you if I tried *very* hard. Please be kind to me just till Mamma comes back, and I’ll be the best little sister that ever was.”

“Why didn’t you tell me all about it before?” asked Cicely, smoothing the tired head on her shoulder with a new gentleness; for this [Pg 53]last innocent confession had touched her heart as well as her conscience.

“You never seemed to care about my plays, and always said, ‘Don’t chatter, child; run away and take care of yourself.’ So I did; but it was pretty dull, with only Tabby to tell secrets to and Bella to kiss. Mr. Thomas said people over here didn’t like children very well, and I found they didn’t. *He* does, dearly, so I went to him; but I like you now, you are so soft and kind to me.”

“How hot your cheeks are! Come and let me cool them, and brush your hair for tea,” said Cis, as she touched the child’s feverish skin, and saw how heavy her eyes were.

“I’m all burning up, and my head is so funny. I don’t want any tea. I want to lie on your sofa and go to sleep again. Can I?” asked Rosy, with a dizzy look about the room, and a shiver at the idea of eating.

“Yes, dear, I’ll put on your little wrapper, and make you all comfortable, and bring you some ice-water, for your lips are very dry.”

As she spoke, Cicely bustled about the room, and soon had Rosy nicely settled with her best cologne-bottle and a fan; then she hastened [Pg 54]down to report that something was wrong, with a fear in her own heart that if any harm did come to the child it would be her fault. Some days before Cicely had sent Button-Rose with a note to a friend’s house where she knew some of the younger children were ill. Since then she had heard that it was scarlet fever; but though Rosy had waited some time for an answer to the note, and seen one of the invalids, Cis had never mentioned the fact, being ashamed to confess her carelessness, hoping no harm was done. Now she felt that it *had* come, and went to tell gentle Cousin Penny with tears of vain regret.

Great was the lamentation when the doctor, who was sent for in hot haste, pronounced it scarlet fever; and deep was the self-reproach of the two older women

for their blindness in not before remarking the languid air and want of appetite in the child. But Cicely was full of remorse; for every quick word, every rap of the hateful thimble, every service accepted without thanks, weighed heavily on her conscience now, as such things have an inconvenient way of doing when it is too late to undo them. Every one was devoted to the child, even lazy Miss Henny gave up her naps to sit by her at all [Pg 55]hours, Miss Penny hovered over the little bed like a grandmother, and Cicely refused to think of pleasure till the danger was over.

For soon Button-Rose was very ill, and the old house haunted by the dreadful fear that death would rob them of the little creature who grew so precious when the thought of losing her made their hearts stand still. How could they live without the sound of that sweet voice chirping about the house, the busy feet tripping up and down, the willing hands trying to help, the sunny face smiling at every one, and going away into corners to hide the tears that sometimes came to dim its brightness? What would comfort the absent mother for such a loss as this, and how could they answer to the father for the carelessness that risked the child's life for a girl's errand? No one dared to think, and all prayed heartily for Rosy's life, as they watched and waited by the little bed where she lay so patiently, till the fever grew high and she began to babble about many things. Her childish trials were all told, her longings for Mamma, whose place no one could fill, her quaint little criticisms upon those about her, and her plans for making peace. These innocent revelations caused many tears, and wrought [Pg 56]some changes in those who heard; for Miss Penny quite forgot her infirmities to live in the sick-room as the most experienced nurse and tenderest watcher. Miss Henny cooked her daintiest gruel, brewed her coolest drinks, and lost many pounds in weight by her indefatigable trotting up and down to minister to the invalid's least caprice. Cicely was kept away for fear of infection, but *her* penance was to wander about the great house, more silent than ever now, to answer the inquiries and listen to the sad forebodings of the neighbors, who came to offer help and sympathy; for all loved little Button-Rose, and grieved to think of any blight falling on the pretty blossom. To wile away the long hours, Cicely fell to dusting the empty rooms, setting closets and drawers to rights, and keeping all fresh and clean, to the great relief of the old cousins, who felt that everything would go to destruction in their absence. She read and sewed now, having no heart for jaunting about; and as she made the long neglected white pinafores, for Rosy, she thought much of the little girl who might never live to wear them.

Meantime the fever took its course, and came at last to the fateful day when a few hours [Pg 57]would settle the question of life or death. The hot flush died out of the cheeks that had lost their soft roundness now, the lips were parched, the half-shut eyes looked like sick violets, and all the pretty curls were tangled on the pillow. Rosy

no longer sung to Bella, talked of “three dear little girls” and Mr. Thomas, tigers and bangles, Cis and necklaces, hens and gates. She ceased to call for Mamma, asked no more why her “missionary man” never came, and took no notice of the anxious old faces bending over her. She lay in a stupor, and the doctor held the little wasted hand, and tried to see the face of his watch with dim eyes as he counted the faint pulse, whispering solemnly,—

“We can only hope and wait now. Sleep alone can save her.”

As the sisters sat, one on either side the narrow bed that day, and Cicely walked restlessly up and down the long hall below, where both doors stood open to let in the cool evening air, as the sun went down, a quick but quiet step came up the steps, and Mr. Dover walked in without ringing. He had been away, and coming home an hour ago, heard the sad news. Losing not a moment, he hurried to ask about his little Button, and his face showed how great [Pg 58]his love and fear were, as he said in a broken whisper,—

“Will she live? My mother never told me how serious it was, or I should have returned at once.”

“We hope so, Sir, but—” And there Cicely’s voice failed, as she hid her face and sobbed.

“My dear girl, don’t give way. Keep up your heart, hope, pray, will that the darling *shall* live, and that may do some good. We can’t let her go! we won’t let her go! Let me see her; I know much of fevers far worse than this, and might be able to suggest something,” begged Mr. Dover, throwing down his hat, and waving an immense fan with such an air of resolution and cheery good-will that tired Cis felt comforted at once, and led the way upstairs entirely forgetting the great feud, as he did.

At the threshold of the door he paused, till the girl had whispered his name. Miss Penny, always a gentlewoman, rose at once and went to meet him, but Miss Henny did not even seem to see him, for just then, as if dimly feeling that her friend was near, Rosy stirred, and gave a long sigh.

Silently the three stood and looked at the [Pg 59]beloved little creature lying there in the mysterious shadow of death, and they so helpless to keep her if the hour for departure had come.

“God help us!” sighed pious Miss Penny, folding her old hands, as if they did that often now.

“Drifting away, I fear;” and Miss Henny’s plump face looked almost beautiful, with the tears on it, as she leaned nearer to listen to the faint breath at the child’s lips.

“No; we will keep her, please the Lord! If we can make her sleep quietly for the next few hours she is safe. Let me try. Fan slowly with this, Miss Henrietta, and you, dear lady, pray that the precious little life may be given us.”

As he spoke, Mr. Dover gave the great fan to Miss Henny, took the small cold hands in his, and sitting on the bedside held them close in his large warm ones, as if trying to pour life and strength into the frail body, as his eyes, fixed on the half-opened ones, seemed to call back the innocent soul hovering on the threshold of its prison, like the butterfly poised upon the chrysalis before it soars away.

Miss Penny knelt down near by, and laying her white head on the other pillow, again besought [Pg 60] God to spare this treasure to the father and mother over the sea. How long they remained so none of them ever knew, silent and motionless but for the slow waving of the noiseless fan, which went to and fro like the wing of a great white bird, as if Miss Henny’s stout arm could never tire. Miss Penny was so still she seemed to be asleep. Mr. Dover never stirred, but grew paler as the minutes passed; and Cicely, creeping now and then to look in and steal away, saw strange power in the black eyes that seemed to hold the fluttering spirit of the little child by the love and longing that made them both tender and commanding.

A level ray of sunlight stole through the curtain at last and turned the tangles of bright hair to pure gold. Miss Henny rose to shut it out, and as if her movement broke the spell, Rosy took a long full breath, turned on the pillow, and putting one hand under her cheek, seemed to fall asleep as naturally as she used to do when well. Miss Penny looked up, touched the child’s forehead, and whispered, with a look of gratitude as bright as if the sunshine had touched her also,—

“It is moist! this is real sleep! Oh, my baby! oh, my baby!” And the old head went [Pg 61] down again with a stifled sob, for her experienced eye told her that the danger was passing by and Rosy would live.

“The prayers of the righteous avail much,” murmured Mr. Dover, turning to the other lady, who stood beside her sister looking down at the little figure now lying so restfully between them.

“How can we thank you?” she whispered, offering her hand, with the smile which had once made her pretty, and still touched the old face with something better than beauty.

Mr. Dover took the hand and answered, with an eloquent look at the child,—

“Let not the sun go down upon our wrath. Forgive me and be friends again, for her sake.”

“I will!” And the plump hands gave the thin ones a hearty shake as the great feud ended forever over the bed of the little peacemaker whose childish play had turned to happy earnest.