

The Story of Patsy eBook

The Story of Patsy by Kate Douglas Wiggin

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THE STORY OF PATSY

by

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

Author of *The Birds' Christmas Carol*

[Illustration: "*Patsy minding the Kennett baby.*"]

[Illustration: *Vignette.*]

To

H.C.A.



IN REMEMBRANCE OF GLADNESS GIVEN TO SORROWFUL LITTLE LIVES

"The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,
The young birds are chirping in the nest,
The young fawns are playing with the shadows,
The young flowers are blowing toward the west—
But the young; young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!
They are weeping in the playtime of the others
In the country of the free."

Mrs. Browning.

The original Story of Patsy was written and sold some seven years ago for the benefit of the Silver Street Free Kindergartens in San Francisco. Now that it is for the first time placed in the hands of publishers, I have at their request added new material, so that the present story is more than double the length of the original brief sketch.

K.D.W.

New York, March, 1889.

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CHAPTER I.

THE SILVER STREET KINDERGARTEN.

"It makes a heaven-wide difference whether the soul of the child is regarded as a piece of blank paper, to be written upon, or as a living power, to be quickened by sympathy, to be educated by truth."

It had been a long, wearisome day at the Free Kindergarten, and I was alone in the silent, deserted room. Gone were all the little heads, yellow and black, curly and smooth; the dancing, restless, curious eyes; the too mischievous, naughty, eager hands and noisy feet; the merry voices that had made the great room human, but now left it quiet and empty. Eighty pairs of tiny boots had clattered down the stairs; eighty baby woes had been relieved; eighty little torn coats pulled on with patient hands; eighty shabby little hats, not one with a "strawberry mark" to distinguish it from any other, had been distributed with infinite discrimination among their possessors; numberless sloppy kisses had been pressed upon a willing cheek or hand, and another day was over. No, —not quite over, after all. A murderous yell from below brought me to my feet, and I flew like an anxious hen to my brood. One small quarrel in the hall; very small, but it must be inquired into on the way to the greater one. Mercedes McGafferty had taunted Jenny Crawhall with being Irish. The fact that she herself had been born in Cork about three years previous did not trouble her in the least. Jenny, in a voice choked with sobs, and with the stamp of a tiny foot, was announcing hotly that she was "NOT Irish, no sech a thing,—she was Plesberterian!" I was not quite clear whether this was a theological or racial controversy, but I settled it speedily, and they ran off together hand in hand. I hastened to the steps. The yells had come from Joe Guinee and Mike Higgins, who were fighting for the possession of a banana; a banana, too, that should have been fought for, if at all, many days before,—a banana better suited, in its respectable old age, to peaceful consumption than the fortunes of war. My unexpected apparition had such an effect that I might have been an avenging angel. The boys



dropped the banana simultaneously, and it fell to the steps quite exhausted, in such a condition that whoever proved to be in the right would get but little enjoyment from it.

“O my boys, my boys!” I exclaimed, “did you forget so soon? What shall we do? Must Miss Kate follow you everywhere? If that is the only way in which you can be good, we might as well give up trying. Must I watch you to the corner every day, no matter how tired I am?”

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Two grimy little shirt bosoms heaved with shame and anger; two pairs of eyes hid themselves under protecting lids; two pairs of moist and stained hands sought the shelter of charitable pockets,—then the cause of war was declared by Mike sulkily.

“Joe Guinee hooked my bernanner.”

“I never!” said Joe hotly. “I swapped with him f’r a peach, ’n he e’t the peach at noon-time, ’n then wouldn’t gimme no bernanner.”

“The peach warn’t no good,” Mike interpolated swiftly, seeing my expression,—“it warn’t no good, Miss Kate. When I come to eat it I had ter chuck half of it away, ’nd then Joe Guinee went t’ my lunch bucket and hooked my bernanner!”

I sat down on the top step, motioned the culprits to do likewise, and then began dispensing justice tempered with mercy for the twenty-fifth time that day. “Mike, you say Joe took your banana?”

“Yes ’m,—he hooked it.”

“Same thing. You have your words and I have mine, and I’ve told you before that mine mean just as much and sound a little better. But I thought that you changed that banana for a peach, and ate the peach?”

“I did.”

“Then, why wasn’t that banana Joe’s?—you had taken his peach.”

“He hadn’t oughter hooked—took it out o’ my bucket.”

“No, and you ought not to have put it *into* your bucket.”

“He hooked—took what warn’t his.”

“You *kept* what wasn’t yours. How do you expect to have a good fruit store, either of you, by and by, and have people buy your things, if you haven’t any idea of making a good square trade? Do try to be honest; and if you make an exchange stick to it; fighting over a thing never makes it any better. Look at that banana!—is it any good to either of you now?” (Pause. The still small voice was busy, but no sound was heard save the distant whistle of the janitor.)

“I could bring another one to Joe to-morrer,” said Mike, looking at his ragged boot and scratching it along the edge of the step.

“I don’t want yer to, ’f the peach was sour ’n you had ter chuck it away,” responded Joe amiably.



“Yes, I think he ought to bring the banana; he made the trade with his eyes open, and the peach didn’t look sour, for I saw you squeezing it when you ought to have been singing your morning hymn,—I thought you would get into trouble with it then. Now is it all right, Mike?—that’s good! And Joe, don’t go poking into other people’s lunch baskets. If you hadn’t done that, you silly boy,” I philosophized whimsically for my own edification, “you would have been a victim; but you descended to the level of your adversary, and you are now simply another little rascal.”

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We walked down the quiet, narrow street to the corner,—a proceeding I had intended to omit that day, as it was always as exciting as an afternoon tea, and I did not feel equal to the social chats that would be pressed upon me by the neighborhood “ladies.” One of my good policemen was there as usual, and saluted me profoundly. He had carried the last baby over the crossing, and guided all the venturesome small boys through the maze of trucks and horse-cars,—a difficult and thankless task, as they absolutely courted decapitation,—it being an unwritten law of conduct that each boy should weave his way through the horses’ legs if practicable, and if not, should see how near he could come to grazing the wheels. Exactly at twelve o’clock, and again at two each day, in rain or sunshine, a couple of huge fatherly persons in brass buttons appeared on that corner and assisted us in getting our youngsters into streets of safety. Nobody had ever asked them to come, their chief had not detailed them for that special duty; and I could never have been bold enough to suggest that a guardian of the peace with an immaculate uniform should carry to and fro a crowd of small urchins with dusty boots and sticky hands.

But everybody loved that Silver Street corner, where the quiet little street met the larger noisy one! Not a horse-car driver but looked at his brake and glanced up the street before he took his car across. The truckmen all drove slowly, calling “Hi, there!” genially to any youngster within half a block.

And it was a pleasant scene enough to one who had a part in it, who was able to care for simple people, who could be glad to see them happy, sorry to see them sad, and willing to live among them a part of each day, and bring a little sunshine and hope into their lives.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Donohue! All safely across?”

“All safe, miss! Sorry you troubled to come down, miss. I can be depended on for this corner, miss, an’ ye niver need bother yerself about the childern after ye’ve once turned ’em loose, miss. An’ might I be so bold, seein’ as how I might not have a better chance—would ye be so kind as to favor me with yer last name, miss? the truth bein’ that ivery one calls ye Miss Kate, an’ the policemen of this ward is gettin’ up rather a ch’ice thing in Christmas cards to presint to ye, come Christmas, because, if ye’ll excuse the liberty, miss, they do regard you as belongin’ to the special police!”

I laughed, thanked him for the intended honor, which had been mentioned to me before, and gave him my card, not without a spasm of terror lest the entire police force should invade my dwelling.

The “baker lady” across the street caught my eye, smiled, and sent over a hot bun in a brown paper bag. The “grocery lady” called over in a clear, ringing tone, “Would you be so kind, ’m, as to step inside on your way ’ome and fetch ’Enry a bit of work, ’m? ’Enry

'as the 'oozing cough, 'm, and I don't know 'owever I'm goin' to keep 'im at 'ome another day, 'm, he pines for school so!"

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I give a nod which means, Certainly!

Mrs. Weiss appeared at her window above the grocery with a cloth wound about her head; appeared, and then vanished mysteriously. Very well, Mr. Weiss,—you know what to expect! I gave you fair warning last time, and I shall be as good as my word! Good heavens! Is that—it can't be—yes, it is—a new McDonald baby at the saloon door! And there was such a superfluity of the McDonald clan before! One more wretched little human soul precipitated without a welcome into such a family circle as that! It set me thinking, as I walked slowly back and toiled up the steps. “I suppose most people would call this a hard and monotonous life,” I mused. “There is an eternal regularity in the succession of amusing and heart-breaking incidents, but it is not monotonous, for I am too close to all the problems that bother this workaday world,—so close that they touch me on every side. No missionary can come so near to these people. I am so close that I can feel the daily throb of their need, and they can feel the throb of my sympathy. Oh! it is work fit for a saviour of men, and what—what can I do with it?”

I sank into my small rocking-chair, and, clasping my arms over my head, bent it upon the table and closed my eyes.

The dazzling California sunshine streamed in at the western windows, touched the gold-fish globes with rosy glory, glittered on the brass bird-cages, flung a splendid halo round the meek head of the Madonna above my table, and poured a flood of grateful heat over my shoulders. The clatter of a tin pail outside the door, the uncertain turning of a knob by a hand too small to grasp it: “I forgitted my lunch bucket, ’n had to come back five blocks. Good-by, Miss Kate.” (Kiss.) “Good-by, little man; run along.” Another step, and a curly little red head pushes itself apologetically through the open door. “You never dave me back my string and buzzer, Miss Kate.” “Here it is; leave it at home to-morrow if you can, dear,—will you?”

Silence again, this time continued and profound. Mrs. Weiss was evidently not coming to-day to ask me if she should give blow for blow in her next connubial fracas. I was thankful to be spared until the morrow, when I should perhaps have greater strength to attack Mr. Weiss, and see what I could do for Mrs. Pulaski's dropsy, and find a mourning bonnet and shawl for the Gabilondo's funeral and clothes for the new Higgins twins. (Oh, Mrs. Higgins, would not one have sufficed you?)

The events of the day march through my tired brain; so tired! so tired! and just a bit discouraged and sad too. Had I been patient enough with the children? Had I forgiven cheerfully enough the seventy times seven sins of omission and commission? Had I poured out the love—bountiful, disinterested, long-suffering—of which God shows us the measure and fullness? Had I—But the sun dropped lower and lower behind the dull brown hills, and exhausted nature found a momentary forgetfulness in sleep.

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CHAPTER II.

PATSY COMES TO CALL.

“When a’ither bairnies are hushed to their hame
By aunty, or cousin, or frecky grand-dame,
Wha stands last and lanely, an’ naebody carin’?
'Tis the puir doited loonie,—the mitherless bairn!”

Suddenly I was awakened by a subdued and apologetic cough. Starting from my nap, I sat bolt upright in astonishment, for quietly ensconced in a small red chair by my table, and sitting still as a mouse, was the weirdest apparition ever seen in human form. A boy, seeming—how many years old shall I say? for in some ways he might have been a century old when he was born—looking, in fact, as if he had never been young, and would never grow older. He had a shrunken, somewhat deformed body, a curious, melancholy face, and such a head of dust-colored hair that he might have been shocked for a door-mat. The sole redeemers of the countenance were two big, pathetic, soft dark eyes, so appealing that one could hardly meet their glance without feeling instinctively in one’s pocket for a biscuit or a ten-cent piece. But such a face! He had apparently made an attempt at a toilet without the aid of a mirror, for there was a clean circle like a race-track round his nose, which member reared its crest, untouched and grimy, from the centre, like a sort of judge’s stand, while the dusky rim outside represented the space for audience seats.

I gazed at this astonishing diagram of a countenance for a minute, spellbound, thinking it resembled nothing so much as a geological map, marked with coal deposits. And as for his clothes, his jacket was ragged and arbitrarily docked at the waist, while one of his trousers-legs was slit up at the side, and flapped hither and thither when he moved, like a lug-sail in a calm.

“Well, sir,” said I at length, waking up to my duties as hostess, “did you come to see me?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Let me think; I don’t seem to remember; I am so sleepy. Are you one of my little friends?”

“No, I hain’t yit, but I’m goin’ to be.”

“That’s good, and we’ll begin right now, shall we?”

“I knowed yer fur Miss Kate the minute I seen yer.”

“How was that, eh?”

“The boys said as how you was a kind o’ pretty lady, with towzly hair in front.” (Shades of my cherished curls!)

“I’m very much obliged to the boys.”

“Kin yer take me in?”

“What? Here? Into the Kindergarten?”

“Yes; I bin waitin’ this yer long whiles fur to git in.”

“Why, my dear little boy,” gazing dubiously at his contradictory countenance, “you’re too —big, aren’t you? We have only tiny little people here, you know; not six years old. You are more, aren’t you?”

“Well, I’m nine by the book; but I ain’t more ‘n scerce six along o’ my losing them three year.”

“What do you mean, child? How could you *lose* three years?” cried I, more and more puzzled by my curious visitor.

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"I lost 'em on the back stairs, don't yer know. My father he got fightin' mad when he was drunk, and pitched me down two flights of 'em, and my back was most clean broke in two, so I couldn't git out o' bed forever, till just now."

"Why, poor child, who took care of you?"

"Mother she minded me when she warn't out washin'."

"And did she send you here to-day?"

"Well! however could she, bein' as how she's dead? I s'posed you knowed that. She died after I got well; she only waited for me to git up, anyhow."

O God! these poor mothers! they bite back the cry of their pain, and fight death with love so long as they have a shred of strength for the battle!

"What's your name, dear boy?"

"Patsy."

"Patsy what?"

"Patsy nothin'! just only Patsy; that's all of it. The boys calls me 'Humpty Dumpty' and 'Rags,' but that's sassy."

"But all little boys have another name, Patsy."

"Oh, I got another, if yer so dead set on it,—it's Dinnis,—but Jim says 't won't wash; 't ain't no 'count, and I wouldn't tell yer nothin' but a sure-pop name, and that's Patsy. Jim says lots of other fellers out to the 'sylum has Dinnis fur names, and they ain't worth shucks, nuther. Dinnis he must have had orful much boys, I guess."

"Who is Jim?"

"Him and I's brothers, kind o' brothers, not sure 'nuff brothers. Oh, I dunno how it is 'zactly,—Jim'll tell yer. He dunno as I be, yer know, 'n he dunno *but* I be, 'n he's afeard to leave go o' me for *fear* I be. See?"

"Do you and Jim live together?"

"Yes, we live at Mis' Kennett's. Jim swipes the grub; I build the fires'n help cook'n wipe dishes for Jim when I ain't sick, 'n I mind Miss Kennett's babies right along,—she most allers has new ones, 'n she gives me my lunch for doin' it."

"Is Mrs. Kennett nice and kind?"

“O-h, yes; she’s orful busy, yer know, ’n won’t stand no foolin’.”

“Is there a Mr. Kennett?”

“Sometimes there is, ’n most allers there ain’t.”

My face by this time was an animated interrogation point. My need of explanation must have been hopelessly evident, for he hastened to add footnotes to the original text.

“He’s allers out o’ work, yer know, ’n he don’t sleep ter home, ’n if yer want him yer have to hunt him up. He’s real busy now, though,—doin’ fine.”

“That’s good. What does he do?”

“He marches with the workingmen’s percessions ’n holds banners.”

“I see.” The Labor Problem and the Chinese Question were the great topics of interest in all grades of California society just then. My mission in life was to keep the children of these marching and banner-holding laborers from going to destruction.

“And you haven’t any father, poor little man?”

“Yer bet yer life I don’t want no more father in mine. He knocked me down them stairs, and then he went off in a ship, and I don’t go a cent on fathers! Say, is this a ’zamination?”

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I was a good deal amused and should have felt a little rebuked, had I asked a single question from idle curiosity. “Yes, it’s a sort of one, Patsy,—all the kind we have.”

“And do I hev to bring any red tape?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, Jim said he bet ‘t would take an orful lot o’ red tape t’ git me in.”

Here he withdrew with infinite trouble from his ragged pocket an orange, or at least the remains of one, which seemed to have been fiercely dealt with by circumstances.

“Here’s an orange I brung yer! It’s been skwuz some, but there’s more in it.”

[Illustration: “HERE’S AN ORANGE I BRUNG YER.”]

“Thank you, Patsy.” (Forced expression of radiant gratitude.) “Now, let us see! You want to come to the Kindergarten, do you, and learn to be a happy little working boy? But oh, Patsy, I’m like the old woman in the shoe, I have so many children I don’t know what to do.”

“Yes, I know. Jim knows a boy what went here wunst. He said yer never licked the boys; and he said, when the ‘nifty’ little girls come to git in, with their white aprons, yer said there warn’t no room; but when the dirty chaps with tored close come, yer said yer’d *make* room. Jim said as how yer’d never show *me* the door, sure.” (Bless Jim’s heart!) “P’raps I can’t come every day, yer know, ’cos I might have fits.”

“Fits! Good gracious, child! What makes you think that?”

“Oh, I has ’em” (composedly). “I kicks the footboard clean off when I has ’em bad, all along o’ my losin’ them three year! Why, yer got an orgind, hain’t yer? Where’s the handle fur to make it go? Couldn’t I blow it for yer?”

“It’s a piano, not an organ; it doesn’t need blowing.”

“Oh, yes, I see one in a s’loon; I seen such an orful pretty lady play on one. She give her silk dress a *swish* to one side, so! and then she cocked her head over sideways like a bird, and then her hands, all jinglin’ over with rings, went a-whizzin’ up and down them black and white teeth just like sixty!”

“You know, Patsy, I can’t bear to have my little Kindergarten boys stand around the saloon doors; it isn’t a good place, and if you want to be good men you must learn to be good little boys first, don’t you see?”



“Well, I wanted some kind of fun. I seen a cirkis wunst,—that was fun! I seen it through a hole; it takes four bits to git inside the tent, and me and another feller found a big hole and went halveys on it. First he give a peek, and then I give a peek, and he was bigger’n me, and he took orful long peeks, he did, ’nd when it come my turn the ladies had just allers jumped *through* the hoops, or the horses was gone out; ’nd bimeby he said mebbe we might give the hole a stretch and make it a little mite bigger, it wouldn’t do no harm, ’nd I’d better cut it, ’cos his fingers was lame; ’nd I just cutted it a little mite, ’n’ a cop come up behind and h’isted us and I never seen no more cirkis; but I went to Sunday-school wunst, and it warn’t so much fun as the cirkis!”

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I thought I would not begin moral lectures at once, but seize a more opportune time to compare the relative claims of Sunday-school and circus.

"You've got things fixed up mighty handy here, haven't yer? It's most as good as Woodward's Gardens,—fishes—'nd c'nary birds—'nd flowers—'nd pictures—is there stories to any of 'em?"

"Stories to every single one, Patsy! We've just turned that corner by the little girl feeding chickens, and to-morrow we shall begin on that splendid dog by the window."

Patsy's face was absolutely radiant with excitement. "Jiminy! I'm glad I got in in time for that!—'nd ain't that a bear by the door thar?"

"Yes; that's a mother bear with cubs."

"Has he got a story too?"

"Everything has a story in this room."

"Jiminy! 'ts lucky I didn't miss that one! There's a splendid bear in a s'loon on Fourth Street,—mebbe the man would leave him go a spell if you told him what a nice place you hed up here. Say, them fishes keep it up lively, don't they?—s'pose they're playin' tag?"

"I shouldn't wonder," I said smilingly; "it looks like it. Now, Patsy, I must be going home, but you shall come to-morrow, at nine o'clock surely, remember! and the children will be so glad to have another little friend. You'll dress yourself nice and clean, won't you?"

"Well, I should smile! but these is the best I got. I got another part to this hat, though, and another pocket belongs with these britches." (He alternated the crown and rim of a hat, but was never extravagant enough to wear them at one time.) "Ain't I clean? I cleaned myself by the feelin'!"

"Here's a glass, dear; how do you think you succeeded?"

"Jiminy! I didn't get much of a sweep on that, did I now? But don't you fret, I've got the lay of it now, and I'll just polish her off red-hot to-morrer, 'n don't you forgit it!"

"Patsy, here's a warm bun and a glass of milk; let's eat and drink together, because this is the beginning of our friendship; but please don't talk street words to Miss Kate; she doesn't like them. I'll do everything I can to make you have a good time, and you'll try to do a few things to please me, won't you?"

Patsy looked embarrassed, ate his bit of bun in silence, and after twirling his hat-crown for a few seconds hitched out of the door with a backward glance and muttered remark which must have been intended for farewell.

CHAPTER III.

TWO 'PRENTICE HANDS AT PHILANTHROPY.

“With aching hands and bleeding feet,
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone;
We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day and wish 't were done.
Not till the hours of light return
All we have built do we discern.”

Patsy had scarcely gone when the door opened again the least bit, and a sunny face looked in, that of my friend and helper.

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"Not gone yet, Kate?"

"No, but I thought I sent you away long ago."

"Yes, I know, but I've been to see Danny Kern's mother: there is nothing to be done; we must do our best and leave it there. Was that a boy I met on the stairs?"

"Yes,—that is, he is a boy in the sense that he is not a girl. Oh, Helen, such a story! We must take him!"

She sank helplessly on one of the children's tables. "Now, my dear guide, philosopher, and friend, did you happen to notice my babies this morning? They were legion! Our mothers must have heard that the Flower Mission intended giving us some Thanksgiving dinners, for there were our five inevitable little cat's-paws,—the identical five that applied just before the Christmas tree, disappeared in vacation, turned up the day before we went to the Mechanics' Fair, were lost to sight the day after, presented themselves previous to the Woodward's Garden expedition, and then went into retirement till to-day. Where am I going to 'sit' another child, pray? They were two in a seat and a dozen on the floor this morning. It isn't fair to them, in one sense, for they don't get half enough attention."

"You are right, dear; work half done is worse than wasted; but it isn't fair to this child to leave him where he is."

"Oh, I know. I feel Fridayish, to tell the truth. I shall love humanity again by Monday. Have we money for more chairs or benches?"

"Certainly not."

"You'll have to print an appeal for chairs; and the children may wear out the floor sitting on it before the right people read it!"

"Yes; and oh, Helen, a printed appeal is such a dead thing, after all. If I could only fix on a printed page Danny Kern's smile when he conquered his temper yesterday, put into type that hand clasp of Mrs. Finnigan's that sent such a thrill of promise to our hearts, show a subscriber Mrs. Guinee's quivering lips when she thanked us for the change in Joe,—why, we shouldn't need money very long."

"That is true. What a week we have had, Kate,—like a little piece of the millennium!"

"You must not be disappointed if next week isn't as good; that could hardly be. Let's see,—Mrs. Daniels began it on Monday morning, didn't she, by giving the caps for the boys?"

“Yes,” groaned Helen dismally, “a generous but misguided benefactress! Forty-three caps precisely alike save as to size! What scenes of carnage we shall witness when we distribute them three times a day!”

“We must remedy that by sewing labels into the crowns, each marked with the child’s name in indelible ink.”

“Exactly,—what a charming task! I shall have to write my cherubs’ names, I suppose,—most of them will take a yard of tape apiece. I already recall Paulina Strozynski, Mercedes McGafferty, and Sigismund Braunschweiger.”

“And I, Maria Virginia de Rejas Perkins, Halfdan Christiansen, and Americo Vespucci Garibaldi.”

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"This is our greatest misfortune since the donation of the thirty-seven little red plaid shawls. Well, good-night. By the way, what's his name?"

"Patsy Dennis. I shall take him. I'll tell you more on Monday. Please step into Gilbert's and buy a comfortable little cane-seated armchair, larger than these, and ask one of your good Samaritans to make a soft cushion for it. We'll give him the table that we had made for Johnny Cass. Poor Johnny! I am sorry he has a successor so soon."

In five minutes I was taking my homeward walk, mind and heart full of my elfish visitor, with his strange and ancient thoughts, his sharp speeches and queer fancies. Would he ever come back, or would one of those terrible spasms end his life before I was permitted to help and ease his crooked body, or pour a bit of mother-love into his starved little heart?

[Illustration: MISS HELEN.]

CHAPTER IV.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

Some children are like little human scrawl-books, blotted all over with the sins and mistakes of their ancestors.

Monday morning came as mornings do come, bringing to the overworked body and mind a certain languor difficult to shake off. As I walked down the dirty little street, with its rows of old-clothes shops, saloons, and second-hand-furniture stores, I called several of my laggards, and gave them a friendly warning. "Quarter of nine, Mrs. Finnigan!" "Bless me soul, darlin'! Well, I will hurry up my childern, that I will; but the baby was that bad with whoopin'-cough last night that I never got three winks meself, darlin'!"

"All right; never mind the apron; let Jimmy walk on with me, and I will give him one at school." Jimmy trots proudly at my side, munching a bit of baker's pie and carrying my basket. I drop into Mrs. Powers' suite of apartments in Rosalie Alley, and find Lafayette Powers still in bed. His twelve-year-old sister and guardian, Hildegarde, has over-slept, as usual, and breakfast is not in sight. Mrs. Powers goes to a dingy office up town at eight o'clock, her present mission in life being the healing of the nations by means of mental science. It is her fourth vocation in two years, the previous ones being tissue-paper flowers, lustre painting, and the agency for a high-class stocking supporter. I scold Hildegarde roundly, and she scrambles sleepily about the room to find a note that Mrs. Powers has left for me. I rejoin my court in the street, and open the letter with anticipation.

Miss Kate.

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Dear Maddam.—You complane of Lafayette's never getting to school till eleven o'clock. It is not my affare as Hildegarde has *full charge* of him and I *never* intefear, but I would suggest that if you *beleeeve* in him he will do better. Your unbeleef sappps his *will powers*. you have only reprooved him for being late. why not incurrage him say by *paying* him 5 cents a morning for a wile to get amung his little maits on the stroak of nine? “declare for good and good will work for you” is one of our sayings. I have not time to treet Lafayette myself my business being so engroassing but if you would take a few minites each night and *deny Fear along the 5 avanues* you could heel him. Say *there is no Time in the infinnit* over and over before you go to sleep. This will lift fear off of Lafayette, fear of being late and he will get there in time.

Yours for Good,
MRS. POWERS,
Mental Heeler.

Oh, what a naughty, ignorant, amusing, hypocritical, pathetic world it is! I tuck the note in my pocket to brighten the day for Helen, and we pass on.

As we progress we gather into our train Levi, Jacob, David, Moses, Elias, and the other prophets and patriarchs who belong to our band. We hasten the steps of the infant Garibaldi, who is devouring refuse fruit from his mother's store, and stop finally to pluck a small Dennis Kearney from the coal-hod, where he has been put for safe-keeping. The day has really begun, and with its first service the hands grow willing and the heart is filled with sunshine.

As the boys at my side prattle together of the “percession” and the “sojers” they saw yesterday, I wish longingly that I could be transported with my tiny hosts to the sunny, quiet country on this clear, lovely morning.

[Illustration: “THE BOYS AT MY SIDE PRATTLE TOGETHER.”]

I think of my own joyous childhood, spent in the sweet companionship of fishes, brooks, and butterflies, birds, crickets, grasshoppers, whispering trees and fragrant wild flowers, and the thousand and one playfellows of Nature which the good God has placed within reach of the happy country children. I think of the shining eyes of my little Lucys and Bridgets and Rachels could I turn them loose in a field of golden buttercups and daisies, with sweet wild strawberries hidden at their roots; of the merry glee of my dear boisterous little prophets and patriots, if I could set them catching tadpoles in a clear wayside pool, or hunting hens' nests in the alder bushes behind the barn, or pulling yellow cow lilies in the pond, or wading for cat-o'-nine-tails, with their ragged little trousers tucked above their knees. And oh! hardest of all to bear, I think of our poor little invalids, so young to struggle with languor and pain! Just to imagine the joy of my poor, lame boys and my weary, pale, and peevish children, so different from the bright-eyed, apple-cheeked darlings of well-to-do parents,—mere babies, who, from morning till

night, seldom or never know what it is to cuddle down warmly into the natural rest of a mother's loving bosom!

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* * * * *

Monday morning came and went,—Monday afternoon also; it was now two o'clock, and to my surprise and disappointment Patsy had not appeared. The new chair with its pretty red cushion stood expectant but empty. Helen had put a coat of shellac on poor Johnny Cass's table, freshened up its squared top with new lines of red paint, and placed a little silver vase of flowers on it. Our Lady Bountiful had come in to pay for the chair and see the boy, but alas! there was no boy to see. The children were all ready for him. They knew that he was a sick boy, like Johnny Cass, tired, and not able to run and jump, and that they must be good to him as they had been to Johnny. This was the idea of the majority; but I do not deny that there was a small minority which professed no interest and promised no virtue. Our four walls contained a miniature world,—a world with its best foot forward, too, but it was not heaven.

At quarter past two I went into Helen's little room, where she was drawing exquisite illustrations on a blackboard for next day's "morning talk."

"Helen, the children say that a family of Kennetts live at 32 Anna Street, and I am going to see why Patsy didn't come. Oh yes, I know that there are boys enough without running after them, but we must have this particular boy, whether he wants to come or not, for he is *sui generis*. He shall sit on that cushion

"And sew a fine seam,
And feast upon strawberries,
Sugar and cream!"

"I think a taste for martyrdom is just as difficult to eradicate from the system as a taste for blood," Helen remarked whimsically. "Very well, run on and I'll 'receive' in your absence. I could say with Antony, 'Lend me your ears,' for I shall need them. Have you any commands?"

"Just a few. Please tell Paulina Strozynski's big brother that he *must* call for her earlier, and not leave her sitting on the steps so long. Tell Mrs. Hickok that if she sends us another child whom she knows to be down with the chicken-pox, we won't take in her two youngest when they're old enough. Don't give Mrs. Slamberg any aprons. She returned the little undershirts and drawers that I sent her by Julie, and said 'if it was all the same to me, she'd rather have something that would make a little more show!' And—oh yes, do see if you can find Jacob Shubener's hat; he is crying down in the yard, and doesn't dare go home without it."

"Very well. Four cases. Strozynski—steps—cruelty. Hickok—chicken-pox—ingratitude. Slamberg—aprons—vanity. Shubener—hat—carelessness. Oh that I could fasten Jacob's hat to his ear by a steel chain! Has he looked in the sink?"

“Yes.”

“Ash-barrel?”

“Certainly.”

“Up in the pepper-tree?”

“Of course.”

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"Then some one has 'chucked' it into the next yard, and the janitor will have to climb the fence,—at his age! Oh, if I could eliminate the irregular verb 'to chuck' from the vocabulary of this school, I could 'make out of the broken sounds of life a song, and out of life itself a melody,'" and she flew down-stairs like a breeze, to find the patient Mr. Bowker. Mr. Bowker was a nice little man, who had not all his wits about him, but whose heart was quite intact, and who swept with energy and washed windows with assiduity. He belonged to the Salvation Army, and the most striking articles of his attire, when sweeping, were a flame-colored flannel shirt and a shiny black hat with "Prepare to Meet Thy God" on the front in large silver letters. The combination of color was indescribably pictorial, and as lurid and suggestive as an old-fashioned Orthodox sermon.

As I went through the lower hall, I found Mr. Bowker assisting Helen to search the coal-bin. "Don't smile," she cried. "Punch says, 'Sometimes the least likeliest place is more likelier than the most likeliest,'—and sure enough, here is the hat! I should have been named Deborah or Miriam,—not Helen!" and she hurried to dry the tears of the weeping Jacob.

[Illustration: "HERE IS THE HAT!"]

CHAPTER V.

I SEEK PATSY, AND MEET THE DUCHESS OF ANNA STREET.

"'Tis pride, rank pride and haughtiness of soul."

I make my way through the streets, drinking in the glorious air, breathing the perfume of the countless fruit stands and the fragrances that floated out from the open doors of the little flower stores in every block, till I left all that was pleasant behind me and turned into Anna Street.

I soon found Number 32, a dirty, tumble-down, one-story hovel, the blinds tied together with selvages of red flannel, and a rickety bell that gave a certain style to the door, though it had long ceased to ring.

A knock brought a black-haired, beetle-browed person to the window.

"Does Mrs. Kennett live here?"

"No, she don't. I live here."

"Oh! then you are not Mrs. Kennett?"

“Wall, I ruther guess *not!*” This in a tone of such royal superiority and disdain that I saw in an instant I had mistaken blue blood for red.

“I must have been misinformed, then. This is Number 32?”

“Can’t yer see it on the door?”

“Yes,” meekly. “I thought perhaps Anna Street had been numbered over.”

“What made yer think Mis’ Kennett lived here?”

“A little girl brought me her name written on a card,—Mrs. Kennett, 32 Anna Street.”

“There!” triumphantly, “I might ’a knowed that woman ’d play some common trick like that! Now do you want ter know where Mis’ Kennett re’ly doos live? Wall, *she lives in the rear!* Her number’s 32-1/2, ’n I vow she gits more credit o’ livin’ in the front house ’n I do, ’n I pay four dollars more rent! Ever see her? I thought not! I guess ’f you hed you wouldn’t think of her livin’ in a house like this!”

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"Excuse me. I didn't expect to make any trouble"—

"Oh, I've nothin' agin *you*, but just let me ketch her puttin' on airs 'n pertendin' to live like her betters, that's all! She's done it before, but I couldn't never ketch her at it. The idee of her keepin' up a house like this!" and with a superb sniff like that of a battle-horse, she disappeared from the front window of her ancestral mansion and sought one at the back which might command a view of my meeting with her rival.

I slid meekly through a side gate, every picket of which was decorated with a small child, stumbled up a dark narrow passage, and found myself in a square sort of court out of which rose the rear houses so objectionable to my Duchess in the front row.

It was not plain sailing, by any means, owing to the collection of tin cans and bottles through which I had to pick my way, but I climbed some frail wooden steps, and stood at length on the landing of Number 32-1/2.

The door was open, and there sat Patsy, "minding" the Kennett baby, a dull little lump of humanity, whose brain registered impressions so slowly that it would play all day long with an old shoe without exhausting its possibilities.

Patsy himself was dirtier than ever, and much more sullen and gloomy. The traces of tears on his cheeks made my heart leap into my throat. "Oh, Patsy," I exclaimed, "I am so glad to find you! We expected you all day, and were afraid you weren't well."

Not a word of response.

"We have a chair all ready for you; it is standing right under one of the plant-shelves, and there are three roses in bloom to-day!"

Still not a word.

"And I had to tell the dog story without you!"

The effect of this simple statement was very different from what I had anticipated. I thought I knew what a child was likely to do under every conceivable set of circumstances, but Patsy was destined to be more than once a revelation to me.

He dashed a book of colored advertisements that he held into the farthest corner of the room, threw himself on the floor at full length and beat it with his hands, while he burst into a passion of tears. "There! there!" he cried between his sobs, "I told 'em you'd tell it! I told 'em you'd tell it! I told 'em you'd—but oh, I thought maybe you wouldn't!" His wails brought Mrs. Kennett from a back piazza where she was washing.

"Are you the teacher o' the *Kids Guards*, 'm?"



“Yes.” It did not strike me at the time, in my anxiety, what a sympathetic rendering of the German word this was; but we afterwards found that “Kindergarten” was thus translated in Anna Street.

“Patsy couldn’t go to-day, ‘m, on account of him hevin’ no good boots, ‘m, Jim not bein’ paid off till Wednesday, ‘n me hevin’ no notice he hed no clean shirt, ‘m, this not bein’ his clean-shirt week, ‘m. He takes it awful hard about that there story, ‘m. I told him as how you’d be after tellin’ another one next week, but it seems nothin’ will comfort him.”

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“Ev’rybuddy’s allers lyin’ to me,” he moaned; “there warn’t another dog picture like that in the hull room!”

“Don’t take no notice of him, ‘m, an’ he’ll git over it; he’s subjick to these spells of takin’ on like. Set up, Pat, an’ act decent! Tell the lady you’ll come when you git your boots.”

“Patsy, boy, stop crying a minute and listen to me,” I said. “If Mrs. Kennett is willing, I have some things that will fit you; you shall come right back with me now,—all the children have gone,—and you and I will be alone with the sunshine and the birds and the fishes, as we were the other day, and I will tell you the dog story just as I told it to the other children this morning.”

He got up slowly, rubbed his tattered sleeve across his wet cheek, and looked at me searchingly to see if I might be trusted; then he limped to the sink, treated his face and hands to a hasty but energetic scrub, seized his fragment of a hat, gave his brief trousers a hitch which had the air of being the last exquisite touch to a faultless toilet, and sat down on the landing to mend his twine shoe-lace.

“Who is your neighbor in Number 32, Mrs. Kennett?” I asked as I rose to go. “I went there to find you.”

“Did you indeed, ‘m? Well, I hope she treated you civil, ‘m, though it don’t be much in her line. She’s a Mis’ Mooney, ‘m. I know *her*, but she don’t know *me* anny more sence she’s riz in the wurld. She moved out of this house whin I moved into it, but none of us ladies here is good enough for her to ‘sociate with *now*, ‘m! You see her husband was in the rag, sack, and bottle business, ‘m, ‘n a wealthy gintleman friend set him up in a fish-cart, an’ it’s kind of onsettled her, ‘m! Some folks can’t stan’ prosperity. If ‘t bed bin grad_joo_al like, she might have took it more natcheral; but it come all of a suddent, an’ she’s that purse-proud now, ‘m, that she’ll be movin’ up on Nob Hill ef she don’t hev no stroke o’ bad luck to show ‘er her place! Good day, ‘m!”

I carved my way through the tin cans and bottles again under the haughty eye of my Duchess of the fish-cart, and in a few minutes Patsy and I were again in Silver Street.

When we entered the room he looked about with an expression of entire content. “It’s all here!” he said with a sigh, as if he had feared to find it a dream.

The chair with its red cushion pleased him greatly; then, after a few moments’ talk to make him feel a little at home, we drew up to the picture, and I took his cleanest hand in mine, and told him the story of Victor, the brave St. Bernard dog.

It was an experience never to be repeated and never to be forgotten!

[Illustration: “THE STORY OF VICTOR.”]

* * * * *

As you sit at twilight in the “sweet safe corner of the household fire,” the sound of the raindrops on the window-pane mingling with the laughing treble of childish voices in some distant room, you see certain pictures in the dying flame,—pictures unspeakably precious to every one who has lived, or loved, or suffered.

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I have my memory-pictures, too; and from the fairest frame of all shines Patsy's radiant face as it looked into mine long ago when I told him the story of Victor.

CHAPTER VI.

A LITTLE "HOODLUM'S" VIRTUE KINDLES AT THE TOUCH OF JOY.

"If you make children happy now, you will make them happy twenty years hence by the memory of it."

The next morning when I reached the little tin shop on the corner,—a blessed trysting-place, forever sacred, where the children waited for me in sunshine, rain, wind, and storm, unless forbidden,—there on the step sat faithful Patsy, with a clean and shining morning face, all glowing with anticipation. How well I remember my poor lad's first day! Where should I seat him? There was an empty space beside little Mike Higgins, but Mike's character, obtained from a fond and candid parent, had been to the effect "that he was in heaven any time if he could jest lay a boy out flat"! And there was a place by Moses, but he was very much of a fop just then, owing to a new "second-hand" coat, and might make scathing allusions to Patsy's abbreviated swallow-tail.

But a pull at my skirt and a whisper from the boy decided me.

"Please can't I set aside o' you, Miss Kate?"

"But, Patsy, the fun of it is I never do sit."

"Why, I thought teachers never done nothin' but set!"

"You don't know much about little boys and girls, that's sure! Well, suppose you put your chair in front and close to me. Here is Maggie Bruce on one side. She is a real little Kindergarten mother, and will show you just how to do everything. Won't you, Maggie?"

We had our morning hymn and our familiar talk, in which we always "outlined the policy" of the new day; for the children were apt to be angelic and receptive at nine o'clock in the morning, the unwillingness of the spirit and weakness of the flesh seldom overtaking them till an hour or so later. It chanced to be a beautiful day, for Helen and I were both happy and well, our volunteer helpers were daily growing more zealous and efficient, and there was no tragedy in the immediate foreground.

In one of the morning songs, when Paulina went into the circle and threw good-morning kisses to the rest, she wafted a dozen of them to the ceiling, a proceeding I could not understand.

“Why did you throw so many of your kisses up in the air, dear?” I asked, as she ran back to my side.

“Them was good-mornings to Johnny Cass, so 't he wouldn't feel lonesome,” she explained; and the tender bit of remembrance was followed out by the children for days afterward. Was it not enough to put us in a gentle humor?

Patsy was not equal to the marching when, later on, the Lilliputian army formed itself in line and kept step to the music of a lively tune, and he was far too shy on the first day to join in the play, though he watched the game of the Butterfly with intense interest from his nook by the piano.

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After the tiny worm had wriggled itself realistically into a cocoon it went to sleep; and after a moment of dramatic silence, the little one chosen for the butterfly would separate herself from the still cocoon and fly about the circle, sipping mimic honey from the child-flowers.

To see Carlotty Griggs “being a butterfly,” with utter intensity of joy and singleness of purpose, was a sight to be remembered. For Carlotty was a pickaninny four years old, and blacker than the Ace of Spades! Her purple calico dress, pink apron, and twenty little woolly braids tied with bits of yellow ribbon made her the most tropical of butterflies; and the children, having a strong sense of color and hardly any sense of humor, were always entirely carried away by her antics.

[Illustration: CARLOTTY GRIGGS “BEING A BUTTERFLY.”]

Carlotty had huge feet,—indeed, Carlotty “toed in,” for that matter; but her face shone with delight; her eyes glistened, and so did her teeth; and when she waved her ebony hands and flitted among the children, she did it as airily as any real butterfly that ever danced over a field of clover blossoms.

And if Patsy’s joy was great in the play, it was greater still in the work that came afterward. When Helen gave him a scarlet and gold mat to weave, his fingers trembled with eagerness; and the expression of his face caused that impulsive young person to fly to my side and whisper, “Oh, why should one ever ‘want to be an angel’ when one can be a Kindergartner!”

* * * * *

From this time on, Patsy was the first to come in the morning and the last to leave at night. He took the whole institution under his guardianship, and had a watchful eye for everybody and everything belonging to it.

He soon learned the family history of every child in the school, and those family histories, I assure you, were of an exciting nature; but so great were Patsy’s prudence and his idea of the proprieties that he never divulged his knowledge till we were alone. Then his tongue would be loosed, and he would break into his half-childlike, half-ancient and reflective conversation.

He had a stormy temper, which, however, he was fast learning to control, and he was not always kind and gentle with his little playfellows; for he had been raised in a hard school, and the giving and taking of blows was a natural matter, to him the only feasible manner of settling a misunderstanding.

His conduct to me, however, was touching in its devotion and perfect obedience; and from the first hour he was my poor little knight *sans peur et sans reproche*.

Meanwhile, though not perfect, he was greatly changed for the better. We had given him a neat little coat and trousers, his hair was short and smooth, and his great dark eyes shone with unutterable content. He was never joyous; born under a cloud, he had lived in its shadow, and sorrow too early borne had left its indelible impress, to be removed only by that “undisturbed vision of the Father’s face, which is joy unutterable;” but for the first time in his life he was at peace.

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The Duchess of Anna Street had moved into a house a trifle better suited to her exalted station in life; one where the view was better, and the society worthy of a fish-peddler's family. Accordingly we transferred the Kennetts into Number 32, an honor which they took calmly at first, on account of the odor of fish that pervaded the apartments. The three and four year old Kennetts were now members of our flock, the dull baby was cared for daily by the Infant Shelter, and Mrs. Kennett went out washing; while her spouse upheld the cause of labor by attending sand-lot meetings in the afternoon and marching in the evening.

So, in the rainy winter afternoons, when the other children had gone, Patsy and I stayed together and arranged the next day's occupations. Slang was being gradually eliminated from his conversation; but it is no small task to correct nine years of bad grammar, and I never succeeded in doing it. Alas! the time was all too short.

It was Patsy who sorted the wools and threaded the needles, and set right the sewing-cards of the babies; and only the initiated can comprehend the labyrinthine maze into which an energetic three-year-old can transform a bit of sewing. It was he who fished the needles from the cracks in the floor, rubbed the blackboards, and scrubbed the slates, talking busily the while.

"Jiminy! (I take that back.) Miss Kate, we can't let Jimmy Buck have no more needles; he sows 'em thick as seed round his chair. Now, now jis' look yere! Ef that Battles chap hain't scratched the hull top of this table with a buzzer! I'd lam him good ef I was you, I would."

"Do you think our Kindergarten would be the pleasant place it is if I whipped little boys every day?"

"No-o-o! But there is times"—

"Yes, I know, Patsy, but I have never found them."

"Jim's stayin' out nights, this week," said he one day, "and I hez to stay along o' Mis' Kennett till nine o'clock."

"Why, I thought Jim always stayed at home in the evening."

"Yes, he allers used ter; but he's busy now lookin' up a girl, don't yer know."

"Looking up a girl! What do you mean, Patsy?"

Patsy scratched his head with the "ten-toothed comb of Nature,"—a habit which prevailed with terrible and suggestive frequency when I first came "into my kingdom,"—and answered:—

“Lookin’ up a girl! Why, I s’posed yer knew that. I dunno ’zackly. Jim says all the fellers does. He says he hates to git the feed an’ wash the dishes orfly, ’nd girls likes ter do it best of anything.”

“Oh!” cried I, light bursting in upon my darkened intellect when dish-washing was mentioned; “he wants to get married!”

“Well, he has ter look up a girl first, don’t yer s’pose?”

“Yes, of course; but I don’t see how Jim can get money enough to take care of a wife. He only has thirty dollars a month.”

“Well, he’s goin’ ter get a girl what’ll ‘go halveys,’ don’t yer know, and pay for her keep. He’d ruther have a ‘millingnary’ girl—they’re the nicest; but if he can’t, he’s goin’ to try for one out of the box factory.”

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"Oh, Patsy! I wish"—

"Why, didn't I ought ter say that?"

"I wish you had a mother, dear."

"If I had, I'd know more 'n I do now," and a great sigh heaved itself upward from beneath the blue jacket.

"No, you wouldn't know so much, Patsy, or at least you would get the right end first. Never mind, dear boy, you can't understand."

"Jim says Mis' Kennett 'nd I needn't set such store by you, 'cause the fust chance you gits you'll git married." (I always did have an elective antipathy for Jim.) "Shall yer, Miss Kate?"

"Why, dear, I think we are very happy as we are, don't you?"

"Yes, ef I could only stay f'rever, 'nd not go ter the reel school. Jim says I ought ter be gittin' book learnin' pretty soon."

"Did you tell him that Miss Helen was teaching you to read and write a little while every afternoon?"

"Yes, I told him. He liked it fust rate. Mis' Kennett said she'd let her childern stay f'rever with yer, ef they never larned a thing, 'nd so would I, dear, dear Miss Kate! Oh, I bet God would like to see you in that pretty blue dress!" and he hung over me with a speechless caress; his first, and last indeed, for he was shy and reticent in emotion, and never once showed his affection in the presence of the other children.

[Illustration: PAULINA'S "GOOD-MORNINGS TO JOHNNY CASS."]

CHAPTER VII.

PATSY FINDS HIS THREE LOST YEARS.

"Now God be thanked for years enwrought
With love which softens yet.
Now God he thanked for every thought
Which is so tender it has caught
Earth's guerdon of regret."

Well, Jim did not succeed in finding his girl, although he "looked" industriously. Either the "millingnaries" did not smile upon him and his slender bank account, or they were

not willing to wash the dishes and halve the financial responsibilities besides; but as the winter days slipped by, we could not help seeing that Patsy's pale face grew paler and his soft dark eyes larger and more pathetic. In spite of better care than he had ever had before, he was often kept at home by suffering all too intense for a child to bear. It was almost as if a sixth sense came to him in those days, so full was he of strange thoughts and intuitions. His eyes followed me wistfully as I passed from one child to another, and when my glance fell upon him, his loving gaze seemed always waiting for mine.

When we were alone, as he pored over picture-books, or sat silently by the window, watching the drops chase each other down the pane, his talk was often of heaven and the angels.

[Illustration: "HE SAT SILENTLY BY THE WINDOW."]

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Daga Ohlsen had left us. Her baby eyes had opened under Norway skies, but her tongue had learned the trick of our language when her father and mother could not speak nor understand a word, and so she became a childish interpreter of manners and customs in general. But we knew that mothers' hearts are the same the world over, and, lacking the power to put our sympathy in words, we sent Daga's last bit of sewing to her mother. Sure enough, no word was needed; the message explained itself; and when we went to take a last look at the dear child, the scrap of cardboard lay in the still hand, the needle threaded with yellow wool, the childish knot, soiled and cumbersome, hanging below the pattern just as she had left it. It was her only funeral offering, her only funeral service, and was it not something of a sermon? It told the history of her industry, her sudden call from earthly things, and her mother's tender thought. It chanced to be a symbol, too, as things do chance sometimes, for it was a butterfly dropping its cocoon behind it, and spreading its wings for flight.

Patsy had been our messenger during Daga's illness, and his mind was evidently on that mystery which has puzzled souls since the beginning of time; for no anxious, weary, waiting heart has ever ceased to beat without its passionate desire to look into the beyond.

"Nixy Jones's mother died yesterday, Miss Kate. They had an orful nice funeral."

"Yes, I'm sorry for the poor little children; they will miss their mamma."

"Not 'nuff to hurt 'em! Them Joneses never cared nuthin' for nobody; they was playing on tin oyster cans the hull blessed ev'nin', till Jim went 'nd stop't 'em, 'nd told 'em it warn't perlite. Say how dretful it must be to go down into the cold, dark ground, and be shut up in a tight box, 'nd want to git out—git out—'nd keep hollerin' 'nd a-hollerin', and nobody come to fetch yer, cause yer's dead!"

"Oh, Patsy, child, stop such fearful thoughts! I hope people are glad and willing to stay when they are dead. The part of them that wonders and thinks and feels and loves and is happy or sad—you know what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes," he said slowly, leaning his head on his hand.

"God takes care of that part; it is His own, and He makes it all right. And as for our bodies, Patsy, you don't care about keeping your poor little aching back, do you? You talk about the cold, dark earth. Why, I think of it as the tender, warm earth, that holds the little brown acorn until it begins to grow into a spreading oak-tree, and nurses the little seeds till they grow into lovely blossoming flowers. Now we must trot home, Patsy. Wrap this shawl over your shoulders, and come under my umbrella."

"Oh, I don't need any shawl, please. I'm so orful hot!"

"That's just the reason," I replied, as I looked with anxious eyes at his flushed cheeks.

I left him at the little door on Anna Street, and persuaded Mrs. Kennett to give him some hot soup at dinner-time.

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The next morning I was startled from a profound sleep by a tremendous peal of the door-bell. Though only half awakened, my forebodings seemed realized; and the bell rang "Patsy" in my ears.

I hastily slipped on my dress, and, going to the door, saw just whom I expected,—Jim.

"What's the matter with Patsy?"

"He's turrible bad, miss; he got took with one o' them fits the worst kind in the night, and liked ter died. Yer could a heerd him screech a block off."

"Oh, my poor boy! Have you had a doctor? What did he say?"

"Well, he said he guessed it was the last one, miss, 'nd I'm afraid it is, sure."

"Who is with him now? Are you going right back?"

"Yes, miss, soon as I go 'nd git leave from the boss. Mis' Kennett's went to her washin'. She couldn't 'ford ter lose a job. I found Mr. Kennett, 'nd he's mindin' Patsy. He cries for you; he says he don't want nothin' but jest Miss Kate, and he's that crazy he wants to git up 'nd come to the Kindergarten."

"Dear little lad!" I said, trying to keep back the tears. "Here, Jim, take the school keys to Miss Helen, and ask her to take my place to-day. I'll start in ten minutes for Patsy."

"Thank yer, miss. I tell yer, he's a crooked little chap, but he's as smart as they make 'em; 'nd annyhow, he's all the folks I've got in the world, 'nd I hope we kin pull him through."

* * * * *

"Pull him through!" Had years passed over Patsy's head since I saw him last? He seemed to have grown old with the night's pain, but the eyes shone out with new lustre and brilliancy, making ready, I thought, to receive the heavenly visions.

We were alone. I could not bear Mr. Kennett's presence, and had dispatched him for the doctor. I knelt by the bedside, and took his cold hand in mine. I could not pray God to spare him, it was so clear that He had better take him to Himself.

"I knowed you'd come, Miss Kate," he said faintly; "I knowed you'd hurry up; you's allers hurryin' up for us boys."

Oh, how beautiful, how awesome, it is to be the messenger of peace to an unhappy soul! So great a joy is it to bear that it is not given to many twice in a lifetime.



The rain beat upon the frail roof, the wind blew about the little house, and a darkness of fast-gathering black clouds fell into the room in place of the morning sunbeams. It was a gloomy day for a journey, but if one were traveling from shadow into sunshine, I thought, it would not matter much.

"Mis' Kennett says I must hev a priest, but I don't want no priest but you," whispered the faint voice as I bent over the pillows. "What does priests do when folks is sick, Miss Kate?"

"They pray, Patsy."

"What fur?"

I paused, for in my grief I could think of no simple way of telling that ignorant little child what they did pray for.

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"They will pray for you, dear," I said at length, "because they will want to talk to God about the little boy who is coming to Him; to tell Him how glad they are that he is to be happy at last, but that they shall miss him very, very much."

"The priest lives clear out Market Street, 'nd he wouldn't git 'ere 'fore God knew the hull thing 'thout his tellin' of it. You pray, Miss Kate."

"O thou dear, loving Father in Heaven, Patsy's Father and mine, who givest all the little children into their mothers' arms, if one of them is lost and wandering about the world forlorn and alone, surely Thou wilt take him to a better home! We send little Patsy to Thee, and pray that his heart may be fitted with joy and thankfulness when he comes to live in Thy house."

"Tell 'im 'bout them three years what I lost, so 't He'll make 'lowance, jest as you did."

"O God, who saw fit to lay a heavy burden on Patsy's little shoulders and take away his three years, make them up to him in his heavenly life."

"Yer never said Amen! 'T ain't no good 'thout yer say Amen!"

"Amen!"

Silence for many minutes. The brain was alive with thoughts, but the poor tired body was weakened already with the labor of telling them. When he spoke again, it was more slowly and with greater difficulty.

"I guess—Heaven—is kind o' like—our Kindergartent—don't you? 'nd so—I ain't goin' to feel—strange! There'll be beautiful places, with flowers bloomin' in 'em, 'nd birds 'nd brooks mebbe, like those in the stories you tell us, and lots of singin' like we have; and the peoples are good to each other, like our children, 'ceptin' Jimmy Battles,—'nd they'll do each other's work, 'nd wait on the angels, 'nd run errants for God, I s'pose—and everybody'll wear clean—white—aprons—like in the picture-books; but I sha'n't like it much 'thout you git there pretty quick, Miss Kate;—but I ain't goin' to cry!"

"Oh, Patsy, my boy, it is for those who are left behind to cry. It must be better to go."

"Well, I'm willin'. I've got enough o' this, I tell yer, with backaches, 'nd fits, 'nd boys callin' sassy names—'nd no gravy ever on my pertater;—but I hate to go 'way from the Kindergartent—only p'raps Heaven is just like, only bigger, 'nd more children—'nd no Jimmy Battleses! Sing about the pleasant mornin' light, will yer, please—Miss Kate?"

And in a voice choked with tears, as Jim came in and lifted Patsy in his arms, I sang the hymn that he had sung, with folded hands and reverent mien, every morning of his life in the Kindergartent:—

“Father, we thank Thee for the night,
And for the pleasant morning light;
For rest and gladness, love and care,
And all that makes the day so fair!
Help us to do the things we should:
To be to others kind and good;
In all we do, in work or play,
To grow more loving every day!”

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The last lingering, trembling note fell upon the death-like stillness of the room, as with one sharp, brief struggle, one look of ineffable love and peace, the tired lids drooped heavily over the eyes never to be lifted again. Light had gleamed upon the darkened pathway, but the silent room, the dying fire, the failing light, and the falling rain were all in fellowship with Death. My blessed boy! God had given him back his three lost years!

“Oh, it is hard to take to heart the lesson that such deaths will teach, but let no man reject it, for it is one that all must learn. When Death strikes down the innocent and young, from every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world and bless it. Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes.”

[Illustration: TAIL-PIECE.]