

THE HEROES' CHANCE.

There's a cottage hid by roses
In a garden bright and fair,
And on a summer evening,
Dear friends are gathered there;

One day just after business,
A friend the father met;
Who through entreats and promises,
Out to the tavern set;

A woman through the crowded street,
In poverty and sin,
Passed the tavern keepers door,
She turns and walks straight in;

The woman leaves the tavern door,
And to her home she goes;
She hears her children beg for bread,
And from her eye there flows

Oh fathers who hold daughters dear,
Rise up, put down the drink;
And brothers let your sisters not
Into such misery sink;

MAGGIE E. FRASER.

MAID MATTIE.

(New York Times.)

There was always a profusion of old-fashioned blossoms in the garden that sloped from the little white house to the water's edge.

Mattie was maid to Miss Priscilla and her sister, Miss Miriam, who dwelt in the cottage then.

The Misses Lorimer were spoken of as "very genteel ladies," although their antecedents were unknown.

On the day Mattie learned something of the past and realized fully the precarious future of her old ladies, life became an astounding, but above all, a stern reality to her.

Mattie handed the letter to Miss Priscilla where she sat at the head of the frugal but dainty breakfast table.

"He is dead, Miriam! Oh, Miriam, George is dead!"

"What!" cried Miss Miriam. "No, no, it is not possible. The debt! God would not call him home before his work was done!"

"His work is done. The last of the debt was cleared a week ago," Miss Priscilla answered with a forced calm that hurt the listener more than her poignant cry.

"George gone, George gone—and he the youngest. We have nobody now. What will become of us?" Fear made the last words faint.

"We have God," said Priscilla.

"You do not say, 'Our Father!'" Miriam's voice had hardened strangely.

"Don't sister, don't!" cried the elder quickly. "Your bitterness gives him another wrong to answer for at the last judgment—and he has surely enough."

"Poor father! You are right, sister."

A sorrowful silence fell on the sunny room, the windows of which faced the south and the sea.

The thoughts of the sisters were incommunicable even to each other.

"We have not seen George for 25 years," Miriam remarked after a time.

"Ay, he grudged the expense of the long journey—dear laddie!" Priscilla's voice broke in a dry sob, but neither of the sisters had shed a tear.

"Poor father! You are right, sister."

"What does the lawyer say about—about his circumstances?" It was Miriam who put the anxious question.

"He had a decent burial, and—"

There seems to be a little over—enough to do our turn."

"Thank God!" It was at this moment the little maid outside the door burst into uncontrollable weeping, and the elder of the sisters rose from her place and followed her to the kitchen.

Through her tears the girl saw how Miss Priscilla's expression altered when alone with her—it had turned to one of blank despair.

"Mattie," she whispered, "I must tell somebody, or it will be too much for me. I had to spare poor Miriam, but that was a falsehood I told her."

"You may call it that, ma'am! I don't," and Mattie set her lips in a determined way she had, while a look of loving admiration shone through her tears.

"I'm afraid you don't understand, Mattie," continued Miss Priscilla, speaking with painful effort. "My sister and I will be hard put to it now not to starve. My brother is dead. We have nothing to depend on for a living—nothing and nobody."

"You've me," quoth Mattie brusquely. "We'll not be able to afford a servant now, Mattie," said the old lady very sorrowfully.

"You'll have a servant, Miss Priscilla, as long as I've a pair of hands to do your work."

And for no reasoning of Miss Priscilla's would Mattie budge an inch from her decision.

Miss Lorimer had a feeble constitution, and the shock of her brother's sudden death made a chronic invalid of her. Miss Miriam was almost as helpless in her way and it is hard to tell what would have become of the sisters had it not been for Mattie.

As soon as possible Mattie started the various small industries by which she managed to keep the pot boiling for three. The little white house belonged to the sisters, and that lessened her difficulties somewhat; still it was no light task she had undertaken.

To the villagers who quizzed her about her industry and her earnings she declared she was "laying by" for her "providing"—she was not minded to be a portionless-brid.

Her visits to the neighboring town with supplies of fruit and vegetables for the market had set the gossips agog, and they had many dark hints to make regarding her honesty. When the girl invaded their own ground, however, and began to buy and retail the creels of fish, the sight of her depravity could no longer be endured, and they went in a deputation to inform and caution the old ladies.

The only bad effect of the ignorant interferences of these busybodies was to make Miss Miriam more intolerant in private of "Mattie's eccentricities" and a little suspicious that the girl was greedy. Mattie's indefatigable energy became a source of irritation to the delicate old maid who had not the key to it, and poor Miss Priscilla's office of mediator was not always a sinecure.

Mattie's bright face would look round the sitting room door of a morning. "Oh, Miss Miriam, if you're not too busy would you mind plucking a few young peas? I must finish the washing, but I would like to take them to the market to-day. They're scarce."

"I'm so sorry, ma'am, but the peas will be past their best, and—"

"The peas, indeed! And what of my ideas? If I do not pluck them when they are ripe, they wither, also."

"But think of the price they'll fetch!" cries the maid, her mind upon the peas.

"The price! Thank goodness, I have never put my gift to base uses—and never will! Mattie, it grieves me to see you becoming so mercenary. I do not think I can possibly afford time for the peas this morning."

"Dear Miss Miriam, not if I tell you I want the money to buy a chicken for Miss Priscilla! She enjoyed the last so much. I assure you, it's not for myself this time."

"That alters the case entirely. Certainly, certainly, we must get a chicken for Priscilla." Then the good lady sets her cap straight and takes her way contentedly to the sunny garden.

It was during the first winter—a severe one, as luck would have it—that Mattie had her darkest struggle to keep the wolf from the door. She had not yet started the little poultry farm which yielded her

a tolerable income later on. The garden was empty, save for the small household supply of winter potatoes. Fruits, flowers and vegetables were no longer available, and the sailings and catches of the fishing fleet were most irregular.

It was Miss Priscilla's painful anxiety on account of her sister and Mattie that roused the latter to her utmost endeavor. She bethought her of a plan, and straightway entered into a compact with a cousin of hers, a young fisherman, who had shown himself very friendly toward her of late.

The plan worked well, and Mattie spent many a long hour on the cold, dark waters after her old ladies were safely disposed of for the night.

Meanwhile, it had dawned upon the heavy but calculating brain of Peter Small, Mattie's cousin, that the girl would make a desirable wife; she was so active and so well-gathered, if report spoke truly.

Peter was not an ill-favored fellow, and Mattie, being one of those who are keenly sensitive to kindness, felt most kindly disposed toward him. She was so free from self-interest herself that it was the last thing she suspected in others.

Before long Peter spoke of marriage. The girl received his proposal encouragingly, but told him she was not free to marry so long as the old ladies lived. The young man's amazement was followed by something like contempt. Still, he did not believe that this was anything more than a whim.

As the weeks passed, however, and his persuasions were of no avail to move Mattie from her resolve, he became very angry in secret. He did not quarrel with her outright, because of his exaggerated notion of her monetary value.

He cudgelled his brains for some way of bringing her to reason, as he phrased it, and at last he hit upon a scheme. It was one only likely to occur to a selfish and unscrupulous man, but that was of no consequence to Peter.

One night, on the plea of helping Mattie with the lines, Peter stepped aboard the cobble and rowed her out to her fishing ground. Anchoring the boat securely, he seated himself on a thwart within reach of the painter.

Mattie had tried to dissuade him from accompanying her, and she was surprised he should ignore her wish. Still, she was not altogether displeased to have his company.

It was one of those nights in which the lim starlight seems to intensify the darkness of land and sea. The heaving waters had a phosphorescent gleam, and the waves mounted sullenly as the wind from the east swept across them in stinging gusts.

But for Peter's companionship Mattie would have felt the solitude "eerie." Yet they had little to say to each other. They worked with a will. Fish were plentiful, and in a couple of hours they had caught as many as Mattie wanted.

"We'll be weighing anchor now," she said.

"Not quite yet, lass," quoth Peter in a dry tone. "I came here to-night meaning to get your promise to marry me a fortnight from now, and we'll up anchor only when you've given it."

"You'll row me ashore at once, Peter, or I'll never forgive you," cried Mattie amazed and indignant.

"I'll row you ashore as soon as you give me your word—not till then," said Peter, doggedly.

"You're never in earnest?" Mattie was beginning to tremble a little in the darkness.

"Am I not? I'm thinking I've pinned you this time, my lass!" and he laughed exultantly.

Mattie was speechless for the moment—dazed by the revelation of his character. It seemed to her that she looked suddenly into a gulf of horrid darkness. What a cruel heart he must have to think of taking so mean an advantage! He knew so well how afraid she was of the old ladies should learn of these midnight excursions of hers.

"Well, are you content to stop here till daylight?" cried Peter, breaking in on her troubled thoughts. "There will be a fine air at the cottage when the Miss Lorimers wake up and want their breakfast," he added craftily.

At this Mattie sprang to her feet and stretched across to grasp the anchor rope, but he held her off. Then he snatched her with her powerlessness.

She confided to me, long afterward, that she knew the sort of despairing rage that captures a being in extremity to take the life of another.

Peter drove her back to the seat she had quitted. Then she shipped the oars into the rowlocks and strove with all her might to drag the boat from its moorings; but it was useless.

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"Come, Mattie, be a sensible woman for once, and give in. It beats me to know what you make such a to-do for."

Mattie's answer was a cry of despair. It was that I heard as I was returning to the coastguard station after my night's round of inspection.

Mattie's despair was not unfounded. What was the use of telling this man the true facts of the case—that the poor old ladies had nobody to look to but her? He would only sneer. She need not throw herself upon his generosity; he had none. He was hard as flint. He would keep his word in spite of all she could say or do.

Daylight would find her here if she did not promise. Could she promise—for their sakes? But would it be best for them in the end? That question saved Mattie. She saw so clearly that the wife of Peter Small would have little power to minister to others.

"You can stay here till doomsday, Peter, but you'll never get me to say I'll marry you. That idea is gone, once and for all. I've changed my opinion of you this night as I—as I never thought to—"

Her words ended in a sob. Peter's anger rose. He began to threaten and to bully her, thinking probably that her tears betokened a weakness that demanded such treatment. But he was struck dumb of a sudden by the sound of approaching oars.

"Aho, there!" Mattie cried out, her voice full of joyful relief.

It suffices to tell that I rescued Mattie by cutting the cobbie adrift from her moorings when the surly fellow at the bow still refused to haul up the anchor, for I am merely the chronicler of a page in Mattie's life which proves her to have a heart as brave, generous and faithful as that of any heroine of fiction.

A number of years later Mattie stood in the old-fashioned garden. Two young girls were chasing each other round the flower beds. Mattie's eyes were unusually dreamy. Coming up behind her unobserved, I said:

"I can tell you who you are thinking of."

"I dare say. The dear old ladies! I miss them sometimes even now. You see, since the babies grew up there are none of you quite helpless enough," she replied, with a whimsical smile.

"I'll soon be an old, decrepit man," I remarked, cheerfully.

She looked a loving reproach.

"Priscilla! Miriam!" she called to the youngsters, "come to dinner. Father is home."

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ESTABLISHED 1889.

The Review,

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