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DOODLES

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(Page 49)

HE WAS NEVER LONELY WHEN HE COULD SING

3925

DOODLES

The Sunshine Boy

BY

EMMA C. DOWD

AUTHOR OF

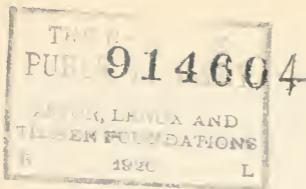
POLLY OF THE HOSPITAL STAFF, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY MARIA L. KIRK



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TO
MY PHYSICIAN AND FRIEND
EDWARD THOMAS BRADSTREET, M.D.

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DOODLES

DOODLES

CHAPTER I

THE BARGAIN

FRAGMENTS of the auctioneer's entreaties floated through the open doorway of the bird shop and, above the rattle and roar of the street, clacked in Blue's ears.

"Ladies and gentlemens . . . beautiful lark . . . emperor of singers . . . not swell to look at, but . . . Only twenty cents! — Twenty-two am I offered? . . . shame, ladies and gentlemens!" And so on, in tones of pleading and mild complaint.

Blue, meanwhile, studied the placarded window, where all manner of feathered stock, "slightly damaged, but every bird a bargain," was announced to be sold to the highest bidder.

"Lovely starling . . . ladies and gentlemen, . . . how much?" the persuasive voice skipped on, but was rudely interrupted by another.

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“Huntin’ fer bargains?” A boy of Blue’s own size nudged him in the back. “Why don’t yer go in ’n’ git one fer Doodles? ’T ’u’d keep him f’m bein’ down ’n’ dumpy. My aunt —”

“‘Down ’n’ dumpy’ — Doodles!” Blue’s rallying laugh drowned the “ladies and gentlemen” drifting through the doorway. “Huh,” he chuckled, “guess yer don’t know Doodles!”

“Ain’t he, now? S’posed all sick folks was. My aunt she —”

“Doodles dumpy!” The boy’s shoulders shook again. “Why, if there was nothin’ left in the whole world but just barbers’ poles, Doodles ’u’d sure make friends with the stripes. And he’d have the best time ever — bet you he would!” Blue’s hard little face grew suddenly tender, as he thought of the brother whose life was all pain and all joy.

The auction was over. The crowd poured out into the noisy street. Here and there a bird-cage told that a lame canary, a blind bobolink, or some other “damaged” fluff of feathers had changed owners.

One of the purchasers, a small, hatless girl, clad in scowls and a lace-collared coat, halted

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when she saw Blue, and began recklessly to swing her cage.

“Here, you Mame Sweeney!” the boy cried, seizing the child’s arm; “don’t yer see you’re scarin’ that bird ’most to death?”

“Le’ go!” she snapped. “’T ain’t yours!” She wrenched herself free, and defiantly thrashed the cage about her knees.

“Stop it!” The girl found her hand gripped in a vise of muscles.

“Le’ me be!” she screamed. “Don’t care if I do scare him! Horrid old thing!”

A little group of newsboys circled about them, eager for a closer view of the cause of the wrangle.

The ragged gray bird, panting on the floor of his prison, did not invite favor. There was a subdued chorus of grunts and ejaculations. Then disapproval burst into bantering speech.

“Ain’t he a dood!” — “Mame, wha’ ’d yer pay fer th’ beaut?” — “Whin ’ll he give a concert?” — “Sure, if he sings like he looks, he ’ll bate th’ show!”

The girl frowned on the teasing lads.

“How could I see him in all that jam!” she pouted. “The man said he was swell, and

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could sing like everything. Anyhow, I got him for seventeen cents!"

"Swell!" Blue let go a whistle. Yet he gazed pityingly at the poor, draggled thing in the cage.

"You could n't to know nothin' 'bout him the while he's got fraids," apologized Joseph Sitnitsky. "He be a awful stylish kind." Joseph's uncle was half-proprietor of the bird shop.

As if encouraged by this friendly comment, the bird tentatively cast an eye upward, and then hopped to his perch. But if he had hoped by this act to win kindlier words, the effort failed. Scorn swept the circle. The Bargain was disgracefully dirty, his left wing hung limp at his side, his bill was nicked, and his tail was reduced to three ragged feathers.

"Aw, he's worsen'n a muddy sparrer! Out him, Mame, an' done with it!"

"You could to have nice feelings over him, und maybe sometime he sings," mildly remonstrated the loyal nephew of Abraham Sitnitsky.

But nobody heeded the plaintive voice, and the girl, chagrined at the loss of her money and exasperated by the jeers of the boys,

THE BARGAIN

seemed about to follow Pete's dismal advice, when Blue Stickney interposed.

"I'll give yer a quarter for him!"

Staying her reckless hand, Mame stared.

"Honest?" she scowled.

The boy was already counting out the sum from his meager handful of small coins, and in a moment the gray bird had again changed owners.

As Blue started up the steep stairs to the top floor of The Flatiron, he wished it had been possible to give his purchase a bath before revealing it to the keen eyes of Doodles; but then the little brother would have had just so much less of happy ministrations for his pet. For, of course, the bird would belong to Doodles. There had never been any other thought of it in Blue's mind.

Down the dim stairway floated a strain of melody, and it told the boy agreeable news, — that his mother had come home and was getting dinner, that things had gone well at the big shop where she worked, and that the little brother was not suffering from the "bad spell" which had threatened in the morning. Mrs. Stickney rarely sang when Doodles was in un-

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usual pain, and if she did it was not in so brisk a voice.

The song grew clearer, the words came distinctly now.

“Je—ru—sa—lem, the gold—en,
With milk and hon—ey blest!
Be—neath thy contempla—tion
Sink heart and voice oppressed:
I know not, oh, I know not,
What holy joys are there,
What ra—dian—cy of glo—ry,
What light beyond compare.

“ They stand, those halls of Zi—on,
All ju—bi—lant— ”

Blue opened the kitchen door, and as he stepped from the dusky hallway to the sunlit room, a sudden mellow trill struck into the song.

This tuneful greeting quite caught away the boy's remembrance of the little speech of presentation with which he had thought to amuse his brother, and Doodles, his eyes big with wonder and delight, stretched out both hands towards the unkempt singer.

“O—h! is he ours?” he cried.

Blue nodded.

“To keep forever?”

THE BARGAIN

Another nod.

“Is n’t he a darling!” breathed the little occupant of the pillowed chair, when the battered cage was placed beside him. He threw one arm around the small prison, and leaned lovingly over it.

The bird cocked an eye upward, and ventured another trill.

“He’s just beautiful!” piped Doodles in ecstasy.

After that who could dare to make unflattering remarks about the singer? Certainly not Doodles’s mother, so with a happy light on her face she continued her work of preparing dinner.

In The Flatiron news flew fast. Even before Mrs. Stickney’s potatoes had fried brown, up the stairs puffed Granny O’Donnell on her rheumatic old legs, bringing the deserted home of her long-mourned-for Canary Dick, who had flown away from Cherry Street six years ago.

With a joyful whiff the Bargain took possession of his roomier quarters, and, despite his drooping wing, pranced about on the perches.

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“See how happy he is!” laughed Doodles, clapping his little thin hands. “He is saying thank-you!”

Then, perhaps because his new master had suggested the returning of thanks, the slim gray bird, with a little captivating prelude, broke into a torrent of melody such as Canary Dick with his limited powers had never dreamed of.

“Shure, an’ he must ‘a’ coome sthraight f’m hiven!” gasped Granny O’Donnell, as the last note dropped into silence.

Blue stood, big-eyed, in the pantry doorway, arrested in his hunt for a suitable bathtub for the singer; the mother quite forgot her scorching potatoes; and Doodles himself, with both arms around the cage, crooned words of endearment in the ears of the little songster.

Granny O’Donnell’s astonishing reports of Blue’s twenty-five-cent purchase spread through the big tenement house, until old and young tripped or hobbled up to the top floor to see the surprising handful of feathers that could “sing loike a blissid a-angil.” A long bath and a still longer toilet in the sun brought the ragged Bargain to something like

THE BARGAIN

sleekness, and he began the promise of making good his little master's first praise. On rainy days, when shut-in neighbors were apt to be neighborly and numerous, the gray bird sometimes sulked on the end of his perch and refused to sing, possibly too strongly reminded of his dismal surroundings in the bird shop. But as soon as the sunshine returned he would promptly forget the past and graciously display his wonderful gift to all that came.

CHAPTER II

CARUSO

A WEIGHTY problem was puzzling the Stickney family. What should be the gray bird's name? Doodles was growing nervous under the reiterated question, "What yer goin' to call him?" Every visitor had a name to offer, but the matter was not of easy disposal.

"I know Mis' Homan thinks I ought to call him Cherry," observed the little owner plaintively; "but how can I! He is n't one. And there's Granny! Do you s'pose she'll feel awful bad if I don't name him Dicky? If 't was n't for Dicky Fyt — but 't is! And his mother callin' and callin' him all day long! How 'd anybody know which she meant?"

"Huh," snorted Blue, "guess we shan't name him after that kid — not much!"

"And now Mis' George," Doodles resumed, "I'm afraid she's mad. She was in here with the baby, this afternoon, and she tried to make me promise to call him Evangeline,

CARUSO

after her. I kep' tellin' her he was n't a girl; but she did n't seem to think that made any difference. I s'pose it's a pretty name; but you would n't want it, would you, for him?" The tone was anxious.

"Gracious, no!" was the emphatic answer. "Name him after that George squaller!" Blue chuckled with the thought.

Doodles laughed a little in sympathy, and surveyed his brother with admiration. Blue was always so satisfying.

At breakfast, next morning, the important question was again taken up.

"Dear me!" complained the mother, "I hope that bird will get a name pretty soon; we can't seem to talk of anything else."

Blue laughed confidently. "He'll have one before night, sure! I'm goin' to think of somethin' fine to-day."

"Goin' — somethin'!" repeated Mrs. Stickney with a patient sigh. "What would your grandfather say to hear that! With him keeping the district school for two years before he was married, I tell you, we children had to stand round! No cutting words short where he was!"

DOODLES

“Glad I was n’t there!” grinned Blue.

“You’d have been a good deal better off than you are now,” his mother asserted. “If I did n’t have to work in the shop, I believe I’d keep you home from school, and teach you myself, till you could talk decently.”

“You ought to hear the other boys,” laughed Blue.

“That’s what’s the trouble. Doodles is catching it from you, and does n’t speak nearly as well as he used to. I wish you had better companions.” She drew a long, regretful breath. “Well, do try, both of you, to remember your i-n-g’s.”

“Oh! what dif’ does it make?” returned Blue easily.

“Child! dif’! — There’s the whistle!”

Correct speech was quite forgotten, as Mrs. Stickney hurried off to the big silver shop, leaving the boys to finish their breakfast in leisure. They did not at once go back to the question they had been discussing; but while the elder brother was washing the dishes Doodles started it again.

“What made you be so sure Birdie ’d have a name by night?” the small boy queried.

CARUSO

“Oh, I do’ know!” Blue smiled, pausing to pour a dipper of hot water over the soapy cups and plates.

“Seems sometimes’s if he never would,” Doodles put in with a wee sigh.

“Oh, I have n’t half tried yet!” resumed the other. “Don’t you worry one mite, old feller! Ther’ ’s lots o’ dandy names, if I could only think of ’em, and I’m goin’ — going to do my honor best to-day, sure!”

Doodles laughed softly, to accompany his brother’s louder chuckle, and rested in the promise, for, as he had reason to know, Blue’s “honor best” was apt to be very good, indeed; and when he was left alone he and the gray bird had a long confidential talk. It was satisfactory, too, for although words were only on one side Doodles would have told you that the bird surely understood all that was said to him. Did n’t he cock his little head, and make soft, musical replies! And when he was assured that he would soon have a name of his very own, “just like other folks,” did n’t he actually dash off a brand-new song that left his hearer gasping with delight!

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Yet it was not Blue that first arrived with the name.

Some of the top-floor lodgers had to pass the door of the Stickney kitchen on their way up and down stairs. Among them was a recent comer to whom Doodles had taken a strong liking, — a young girl, small, red-cheeked, and curly-haired, who had smiled a prompt answer to his first friendly “Hello!” The next day she had stepped inside, to give him a flower from the little bunch she carried, and then had lingered a moment to hear the gray bird sing. The boy had quickly learned her step, because of a slight lameness, and he came to watch for her as soon as the noon whistles blew, and was disappointed when she went elsewhere for dinner. He felt that he had a kind of fellowship with her on account of her defect, and he longed really to know her. To-day he was listening for her halting footfall even before she had had time to reach The Flatiron. He had not learned where she worked; but he conjectured that it must be either at the knitting mill or the box factory. His mother was full ten minutes in walking down from the silver shop, and the girl usually



" I THOUGHT YOU WOULD LIKE IT "

CARUSO

reached home at least five minutes earlier. If she should n't come at all this noon! He wanted to tell her that his pet was really going to have a name, for had n't Blue said so! There she was now! Nearer and nearer drew the uneven steps. Doodles waited excitedly for the first glimpse of her dark blue dress.

"Hello!" he called. "Please, will you —" She was coming, even before the invitation was given!

"What is it, little sweetheart?" Dimples were playing about the ruddy lips.

"I wanted to tell you that my bird is going to have a name — to-day!"

"Of course, he is! I've brought it!"

"You?"

"Yes, I found it right on the street."

"Oh! — how? — what?" Doodles bent forward in his eagerness.

"I saw it on the billboards down by the theater; it's the name of a great singer, — Caruso."

The child brought his little hands together with a soft breath of delight. "Is n't that beautiful! — Caruso! I've been wishin' it would sound like music — and it does!"

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"I thought you'd like it," she nodded.

"It is lovely! Won't Blue be glad! Oh, Birdie dear, you've got a name! you've got a name!" leaning over the cage, which stood always within his reach. "Caruso — Caruso! Do you like it, dear?"

The gray bird stopped pruning his feathers, glanced archly at his little master, and with a few joyous whistles broke into one of his captivating songs.

"He is a wonderful singer," praised the girl. "I've been wishing I could go to hear Caruso; I'll have to come and hear this one instead."

"Yes, do come — any time!" urged Doodles. "But why don't you go and hear the other, if you want to?"

The girl laughed. "It costs money, sweetheart." Her blue eyes grew wistful. "Everything nice costs money." She turned to go.

"I'm ever and ever so much obliged to you for the name," Doodles hastened to say. "I don't know yours," he suggested.

She had come back, and was looking down at him, a half-smile on her pretty lips.

"No, you don't, do you!" she replied gayly.

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“It is Dorothy” — a shadow passed over the bright face — “Rose.”

“What a pretty name!” chirped Doodles.
“I’m so glad you told me.”

“You can call me Dolly, if you like; some folks do. Grandpa always does — did,” she corrected.

“Oh, I’d love to!” began the child; but the girl was already in the hall, and she did not look back.

At the instant Blue dashed up the stairs with a clatter.

“I’ve got the dandiest name for you!” he burst out.

“Oh!” cried Doodles.

“You never could guess!” grinned his brother.

“Caruso!” piped the small boy with sudden intuition.

“How’n the world —” Blue’s face fell in amazement.

Doodles clapped his hands gleefully. “You thought I could n’t guess, and he’s got it already!”

Blue laughed in sheer sympathy with his brother’s joy.

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“But how?” he queried.

“Dolly brought it — she” (pointing towards the girl’s door) — “Dolly Rose.”

Mrs. Stickney came just in time to hear the story of the new name, and the dinner hour was full of unusual chatter and mirth.

CHAPTER III

THE ROBBERY ON THE TOP FLOOR

AFTER his mother had returned to the factory, and his brother to school, Doodles found himself somewhat weary from the small excitement, and shortly he fell asleep.

The kitchen was very still. Stairway and hall were empty; the occupants of the top floor worked outside, and would not be home until six o'clock. Only dull sounds came from the stories below. Even Caruso drowsed on his perch. Moments, hours, were ticked off by the little brown clock on the shelf; yet Doodles did not awake.

At last somebody crept stealthily up the steep stairs. A girl in a lace-collared coat peered round the corner of the doorway, and as she saw the sleeping boy her beady eyes gleamed with triumph. Noiselessly she crossed the room, and reached out a hand to snatch the bird cage; but her quick movement roused the little prisoner, and he began to

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flutter wildly. For an instant the girl hesitated, glancing at Doodles, and the lad came to himself with a sharp cry.

Quickly realizing that his pet was in danger, he grasped the cage as she seized it, clinging to it manfully; but with brutal force she wrested his frail fingers from their hold, and put herself and her booty beyond his reach.

“I’ll learn ye!” she snarled. “It’s my bird — ’t ain’t yours! There’s yer old money!” She flung a quarter on the table. It rolled away, and off to the floor; but she did not stop to pick it up. “Blue Stick’ knew I was only in fun when I let him take it, and he’d oughter brought it right back; everybody says so. Ye kin tell him he need n’t sneak round tryin’ ter git th’ bird again, fer he *can’t have it!*”

She was disappearing in the doorway before the dazed boy burst into speech.

“Come back! come back!” he shrieked. “It’s mine! Bring it back! oh, bring it back!”

But his only answer was a little flouting laugh and the mad whir of wings against the wires.

“Oh, Birdie! Birdie!” piteously called the child, the familiar name coming to his lips in

THE ROBBERY ON THE TOP FLOOR

place of the new one, and as the fleeing footsteps on the stairs were lost he dropped back among his pillows with a great sob. "Dear Birdie!" he moaned, "my precious Birdie!"

In that moment despair seized his soul. If only he could have pursued to save his pet! But, ah! his feet had forgotten how to walk, and all at once realizing his utter helplessness he put his hands to his face and shed the first bitter tears of his joyous life.

Then, with a suddenness that caught away his breath, came the pain, — the ugly pain which for weeks had held itself so far off that he had almost forgotten how cruel it could be, and now he groaned with the torture of it.

So his brother found him, white and sobbing.

"What's up, kiddie?" Blue knelt beside him, and took the cold little hands in his own. "Tell me, old feller! Is't the big pain?"

The child nodded. For a moment he could do no more. Anguish held the words back.

"Birdie's — gone!" he finally sobbed out.

"Gone?" Blue stared around. "Where is he?"

"She took him! — the girl!"

DOODLES

“The girl? That Dolly —”

“No, no! — a little — girl! — She left some money — there!” He pointed feebly in the direction of the coin.

A fierce light flamed in Blue’s puzzled face. “Did she have on a big lace collar?”

“Yes.”

“Mame Sweeney! — confounded little cuss!”

Doodles gazed at him with horrified eyes.

“Don’t care! — she is! — makin’ you feel like this! Tell me about it, kiddie! Or no, I’ll get some medicine first.”

Blue was accustomed to these sudden attacks, and brought a glass of the remedy which was always at hand. Bit by bit he gained the story, and he was swift at a decision.

“I’ll go straight down there, and get the bird!”

“She won’t let you have it!” wailed Doodles. “She said so!”

“Just a bluff, old feller! S’pose I’m goin’ to let Mame Sweeney down me? Not much!”

“If I’d only been — been like you!” mourned the child. “And Caruso won’t know why I did n’t jump up and run after him! I

THE ROBBERY ON THE TOP FLOOR

guess his heart is 'most broke, thinkin' I don't care."

"No, 't ain't," declared Blue. "Anyway you can tell him all about it when he comes —"

Doodles was gasping in another agonizing spasm, and the elder boy sprang to his side with words of courage and cheer.

Presently the pain passed, and the brave little sufferer again smiled.

"That one was pretty hard," he said weakly, as his brother brought a second dose of the soothing medicine.

"Guess this'll squelch it. Don't b'lieve it'll come again." Blue set down the empty glass, and looked at the clock. In ten minutes the evening papers would be due; he ought to go after the bird at once; but how could he leave Doodles? He thought fast.

"Should you mind my going now, kiddie, if Granny will come up and stay with you? I've got to deliver my papers, you know, and I want to make sure of Caruso first."

"You'll bring him home?"

"Sure!"

"All right! I don't mind being alone —

DOODLES

much. I'd rather you'd go get Caruso. I feel better. Granny need n't come."

"Guess I'll ask her," Blue insisted, and bade his brother a cheery good-bye. Yet as he ran down the stairs his face darkened and he shut his lips tight. He was thinking of his errand round the corner.

"Ye don't say!" exclaimed the old Irish-woman, when the boy told her briefly of the robbery and Doodles's consequent illness. "Seem's if I'd 'a' heerd her — bold little sarpint! — go'n' right by me dure with that angil bur-rd! Iv coorse, I'll sthay with th' blissid child!"

Dear Granny O'Donnell! From Christmas Day to Christmas Day she was at her neighbors' disposal with her capable hands, her quick brain, and her rheumatic old legs. Whether it was mumps or pneumonia, an ailing kitten or a new baby, a drunken husband or a dying child, — whatever the need, Granny was always ready. Even now, before Blue was well out on the street she was limping up the stairs to Doodles.

Just below The Flatiron stood Joseph Sitnitsky.

THE ROBBERY ON THE TOP FLOOR

“Hello!” hailed Blue. “You’re the man I want.”

Joseph smiled good-naturedly.

“Say,” Blue went on, in a confidential tone, “I’ve got some business on hand that can’t wait, and it’s ’most time for the paper to be out. Would yer mind runnin’ down to the Courant office an’ gittin’ mine? I’ll give yer the money,” drawing a small handful from his pocket.

“I will go,” agreed Joseph solemnly. “Will I to bring them here?”

“Oh, no!” cried Blue. “Just leave ’em at the office, and say I’ll call for ’em. I’ll be no end obliged.”

“A’ right,” assented the other, and trotted away.

You could always trust Joseph, and Blue at once centered his thoughts on the disagreeable duty at hand. What if they should see him coming and should n’t let him in? What if Mame’s big brother were at home! What if — but, pshaw! there was no need of what-if-ing in this way. It was going to be an easy job; all he had to do was to walk in quietly, grab the bird, and run. Once he had the cage in his hands there’d be nothing to fear, — no

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Sweeney could beat him in a race. And if there should be any real opposition, was n't he in good fighting order? Did n't he whip a fellow of fifteen this very morning for teasing a little clubfooted boy! Recollecting that pleasant affair made him feel equal to any possible contest with Sweeneys big or little.

Up in the hallway of the new brick block he looked around questioningly. Then he risked the first bell at his right. A small girl opened the door.

"Does Mame Sweeney live here?" he asked in a soft tone.

The child pointed directly across the hall, and, thanking her, Blue walked over and pushed the button indicated.

Mame herself answered the summons; but with her first glimpse of the caller she attempted to shut the door. Blue, however, was ready, and throwing himself against it pushed into the room.

The girl, glowering, darted to the opposite side of the apartment.

"That's yer manners, is it?" she jeered. "Yer need n't think ye're goin' ter git that bird ag'in!"

THE ROBBERY ON THE TOP FLOOR

“No, indade!” broke in Mrs. Sweeney. “If ye hain’t th’ cheek! Kapin’ Mame’s bur-rd all this time, an’ thin comin’ afther it! Out with ye! We don’t want ye round!”

The boy threw back his head defiantly, and pulled a quarter from his pocket.

“That’s your money,” he cried, laying it on the table; “but the bird’s mine! I bought it fair’n’ square! Mame was mighty glad to git it off her hands then, an’ now just because you’ve heard that it sings yer want it back —”

“Want it?” sneered Mrs. Sweeney. “Yis, we want it an’ we’ve got it, an’ whin ye see it ag’in, jist pass me th’ wurrud! Now I’ve, will ye!”

“I can have you arrested!” dared Blue, growing furious. “I will, too, if yer don’t bring out that bird! You stole it! I’ll have you arrested sure as —”

“Arristid, is it? That’s a good wan! Arristid!” She laughed shrilly.

The boy’s face darkened with passion. If she had been a man he would have sprung like a tiger — but a woman! He clinched his fists fiercely and held himself straight.

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“Well, arre ye go’n’, ye little —”

“No, not without my bird!” blazed the boy.

A sinister light flashed in the woman’s eyes.

“Mame dear,” she bade in oily tones, “fitch th’ bur-rd! fitch th’ bur’rd!”

The girl stared at her mother an instant, and then started towards a closed door.

Blue turned, and his gaze followed her eagerly.

In a moment it was over. The boy never knew just how it was done. But he had been caught in the back, and, his arms close pinioned, had been lifted and hurled into the hallway. As he sprang to his feet the lock clicked in the door, and there was coarse laughter. Realizing the trick, he set his teeth in helpless fury.

“I’ll make you pay for this!” he shouted. Then he shot down the stairs to the street.

On the sidewalk, passing the entrance, marched a big policeman. Blue’s face lighted in glad recognition.

“Mr. Fitzpatrick!” he called, “oh, Mr. Fitzpatrick!”

The tall man turned, and smiled cordially.

THE ROBBERY ON THE TOP FLOOR

“Hello, Blue! What’s up?” For the boy’s face showed unusual excitement.

The story was jerkily told, but Thomas Fitzpatrick, with the aid of an occasional quiet question, soon had possession of the principal facts.

“Will yer go right up an’ arrest ’em?” The voice was eager.

They were walking slowly in the direction of the City Hall, and the officer glanced up at the clock in the tower.

“Can’t leave my beat now,” he answered. “I shall be off duty in half an hour; then we’ll attend to the case.”

“An’ you’ll arrest ’em, won’t yer?” Blue insisted.

A little smile flickered on Thomas Fitzpatrick’s broad face. “Don’t think ’t will be necessary,” he said in confident tone. “We’ll git the bird.”

“But they won’t let yer have it!” the boy hastened to assure him.

“You wait an’ see!” laughed the officer. “You wait an’ see! How’s the kid comin’ on?”

“This has done him all up. I found him in

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one of his dreadful turns when I came home from school. He thinks that bird is it, for sure!"

The big man grew grave. "A shame!" he muttered, with a slow shake of his head. "Poor little kid! But we'll have him smilin' again before long. You tell him Tom Fitzpatrick will git his bird for him, an' not to worry another mite. I'll meet you here in half an hour, and we'll fix 'em!"

Blue bounded away to the top floor of The Flatiron, and found Doodles deep in Granny's story of her girlhood days in one of old Ireland's famous castles. Nothing short of Caruso himself could have brought the small boy so much joy as the message of his adored Thomas Fitzpatrick; for ever since the afternoon of The Flatiron fire, when Doodles was alone on the fourth floor and the gallant young Irishman — then a fireman — had bounded up the burning stairs through the thick smoke and had carried the helpless child down to fresh air and safety, the name of Fitzpatrick had been an honored one in the Stickney family.

Blue's paper route was raced over. Al-

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though he was late in starting, the last house was reached on time. He was in front of the Tobin Block a whole minute ahead of Fitzpatrick.

The two mounted the stairs in silence. Mrs. Sweeney herself answered the ring. The door was opened a mere crack, and her head appeared beyond it.

“What ye want?” she asked in a surly voice.

The officer touched his cap. “I wish to see Mrs. Sweeney.”

“That’s me name. What ye want?”

“Perhaps we can talk better inside,” he suggested; but the crack was not widened, and with a little tolerant smile he went on. “I have come to get a bird that belongs to this young gentleman’s brother,” with a sidelong nod towards Blue. “I —”

“It’s our bur-rd!” she snapped. “‘T ain’t theirs! He t’ased Mame out iv it be pertindin’ ’t warn’t no good, an’ so she — a little gur-rl — lit him take it. Look ut th’ cheek iv him, whin it’s not his ut all, kapin’ it an’ kapin’ it, till Mame had ter go an’ fitch it home!”

“Madam,” said the officer quietly, “there’s

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no use putt'n' up a bluff. I understand the case from beginnin' to end. Blue Stickney bought the bird of your girl, it was a right up and down sale, and she has no claim on it. If you'll hand it over at once, you'll save yourself trouble."

"I guess not much!" she bristled, — "our own bur-rd! He's lied to ye!"

"Mrs. Sweeney," — a heavy hand was laid on the door, — "I've no time to waste in talk. I will thank you to bring me that bird, or I shall be obliged to take unpleasant measures."

The woman hesitated, muttering. "I guess I may 's well lit ye have it," she at last wavered aloud, "though it's ours, sure! Homely ol' thing!" she went on scornfully. "Mame was a fool fer buyin' it!" She still stood there, behind the crack, sullen, unwilling to yield.

Thomas Fitzpatrick was patient, but his supper hour was going. "I suppose you know the penalty for resisting an officer of the law," he finally insinuated.

She darted away, and the man swung the door wide, stepping to the sill. His big form nearly filled the open space, and Blue shifted about for a view of the apartment beyond.

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When the cage was actually in the boy's hand his heart bounded with joy. His faith in Tom Fitzpatrick had been all but overbalanced by Mrs. Sweeney's determination to keep the bird, and he had doubted ever seeing Caruso again.

Her duty performed, the woman grew bold. "Ye kin take it," she patronized, "if 't will pacify ye; but Sweeney 'll prob'ly bring suit. He ain't wan ter stan' no humbuggin', Sweeney ain't!"

"You can, of course, do as you choose," replied the officer; "but I should advise you to drop the matter. You see, the law's all on our side; there ain't enough your side o' the fence for you to git a big toe on, let alone a whole foot. Good-day, ma'am!"

Down on the sidewalk Fitzpatrick cast a look into the cage. Caruso, huddled up on his lowest perch, was a forlorn bunch of feathers.

"What kind of bird is it?"

"Do' know what he is; nobody seems to know."

"Looks some like a mockin'-bird."

"That's what Dolly Rose said," agreed Blue.

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“What ails his wing? — broke?”

“I do’ know. It’s always been bad; but it hangs down worse ’n ever.” The boy scowled anxiously at it, thinking of Doodles.

“You ought to have it fixed,” counseled the big man, “and I know who can do it for you — that’s Sandy Gillespie. If ther’'s anything ’bout birds ’at he don’t know, ’t ain’t worth knowin’. Why, he’s got a house full of ’em — all kinds! He had more ’n fifty, one time. He could tell you, quick as wink, what this one is. I’d take it up there, if I was you. He lives ’way out on the Temple Hill Road. Know where the old Hayward place is?”

Blue nodded.

“Well, he lives just a little piece beyond there, a big, old-fashioned house, with a piazza on the side.”

“How much ’ll he charge?” ventured the boy.

“Oh, that’ll be all right! You just tell him Tom Fitzpatrick sent you. I declare, wish I could go with you! Sandy Gillespie is a mighty nice man — good ’s they make ’em.”

They had reached The Flatiron, and Blue expressed his thanks in no uncertain way. “I

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was awful afraid she was n't goin' ter let yer have it," he confessed.

The officer laughed. "I was n't, a bit," he said. "I took a little more time than I might have with some folks; but I did n't want a row. It 's better to get along quietly when you can. Now you take that bird up to Sandy to-morrow! And tell the kid I'm coming in to call on him some day. Good-night."

At sight of Caruso Doodles held out both arms, with a little cry. His brother set the cage on his knees, and the bird sprang up to the top perch to cuddle against his master's soft cheek.

Doodles and Caruso went to sleep that night side by side. "I want him right where I can put my hand on the cage when I wake up," said the boy. "Then I shall know his coming back was n't a dream."

CHAPTER IV

DOODLES TURNS MATCHMAKER

IT rained; but no merry, independent little drops tinkled upon the panes. Mother Nature appeared to be housecleaning, and torrents of water were dashed against the windows. Doodles watched the work outside while Caruso plumed his feathers. When the long toilet was completed, the bird and the boy were ready for a chat, — happy, crooning talk on the one side, soft, tuneful notes on the other.

Footfalls were on the stairs. Somebody was coming up, with light, running steps.

“Sounds like Mr. Gaylord,” Doodles told Caruso.

Presently a young man appeared, his trim suit of dark cheviot corresponding with the bright, smiling face which he turned towards the Stickney kitchen.

“Hello, Doodles!” The blithe voice was enough to make one forget such things as cloudy skies and autumn housecleaning.

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“Hello!” the boy responded joyfully. “Take the rocking-chair, Mr. Gaylord, — do!”

“I had a little time before dinner, and thought I’d run up and hear your bird. You know, he’s never sung to me yet.”

“Maybe he won’t now,” returned Doodles anxiously. “He does n’t like rainy days, and then he got so scared yesterday.”

A query brought out an account of the afternoon’s excitement, for the boy was still brimful of it. The visitor was a sympathetic listener, and the story as told by Doodles was worth hearing.

“So you’ve found a name for him!” remarked the young man presently, after they had used up all the praiseful adjectives for Thomas Fitzpatrick.

“Yes, Dolly Rose did it!” cried Doodles gleefully. “That is she thought of it first; then Blue came in with it, too — was n’t that funny? Do you know Dolly Rose?”

“I think not — who is she?”

“Why, she lives right next door to you,” exclaimed Doodles. “She’s just as pretty! She’s got red cheeks and lovely blue eyes — exactly like the sky, and the cunningest lit-

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tle curls in her hair. Haven't you ever seen her?"

"Yes, I guess I have — from the description; but I did n't know her name."

"You'd like her, she's so sweet. She brought me some flowers one day, and a peach another time. And she has the dearest little dimples when she smiles — I always want to kiss them! Don't you like dimples?"

"I guess so," laughed Mr. Gaylord. "They always remind me —"

But his thought was interrupted, for Caruso, with a few bewitching quirks and trills, burst into one of his enchanting songs.

"Bravo!" cried the visitor, as the music ceased. The bird had stopped as suddenly as he had begun, and was now lurching on a bit of cracker. "He is a worthy namesake of the great tenor."

Doodles, bending over the cage, whispered his thanks to the little singer, while the young man surveyed them with tender eyes.

"I am going to hear the other Caruso next Wednesday night," he said presently. "And that makes me think — I ought to be picking out my seat; they went on sale this morning."

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The boy's eyes shone. "To hear him sing! Won't that be splendid! Dolly Rose wants to go awfully — oh! I wonder —" he broke off, gazing at the other in hesitation, yet with the brightness of the new thought in his face. "Have you plenty of money?" he ventured.

"It depends on how much you call plenty," the young man smiled. "I sha'n't be a millionaire this year. But what is it you wish? fruit? or candy? or some toy? Say on! — I'll risk it!"

Doodles stared an instant. Then his delicate face lighted. "Oh, no, nothing for me! I've got all *I* want!"

The visitor looked at him, the hint of a smile on the boyish lips. "You are fortunate," he said.

The child did not notice. "I was only thinking," he went on, "how nice it would be, unless it cost too much, if you — she wants to hear him so bad — if you could take Dolly Rose to the concert with you!"

Mr. Gaylord laughed out, and Doodles clucked in sympathy.

"Will you?" he urged.

The young man shook his head. "I am

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afraid Miss Dolly would n't care to go with a fellow she does n't know well enough to bow to."

"Oh, yes, she would! I know she would! I can introduce you to her — she'll be here now in a little while! Oh, won't it be lovely!" The words tumbled over each other, as Doodles brought his hands together in ecstasy.

Mr. Gaylord, a deeper tinge of red on his sun-browned face, leaned back in Mrs. Stickney's old rocker, while his shoulders shook silently and his gray eyes twinkled.

Doodles beamed on him. "Are n't you glad I thought of it? And won't she be pleased?"

"I'm not certain —" the other began, but was stopped by a "Sh!"

"She's coming!" whispered Doodles.

The two waited, the boy eager, the man amused.

"Oh, Dolly! Please come in! I want to speak to you! Hello!" Doodles was joyfully excited.

Inside the doorway she halted, spying the stranger.

"You need n't be afraid of him!" the boy cried, stretching out his hand to her.

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She stepped forward, and held it close, in both her own.

“It’s Mr. Gaylord,” Doodles hastened to explain. “He’s chauffeur for Mrs. Graham, that rich lady that lives over on Douglas Street. I’ve been tellin’ him about you. This is Miss Dolly Rose, Mr. Gaylord.”

The young man offered his rocker, which the girl gently declined, insisting that she had not time to sit down.

“Just a minute!” pleaded Doodles. “I want to tell you something right away — you’ll be so glad! — Mr. Gaylord is going to hear the real Caruso next week, and he’s going to take you! Is n’t that beautiful?”

Sparks of fun twinkled in the man’s eyes; but they vanished when he glanced at the face opposite. It was flashing with indignation. No dimples played about the clear-cut lips. He anticipated her words.

“Doodles is taking things a little for granted,” he said with gentle deference. “I should certainly consider it a privilege and an honor to be allowed to escort you to the opera house Wednesday evening; but let me say frankly that such a thought could scarcely

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have occurred to me except for our young friend's suggestion, inasmuch as I hardly knew you by sight and had never heard your name."

The girl unbent a bit, as the comicality of the situation pushed itself forward.

"Even then," he went on, "I was not bold enough to expect that Doodles's wish would come true, but now that we have been properly introduced I will say that I should honestly be very glad if you would go with me. It would add a great deal to the pleasure of my evening."

Evidently the girl's inclination and judgment were in struggle, and the latter was getting the other in hand.

"I thank you, Mr. Gaylord," she answered, a little hesitantly, "indeed, I do; but, really, I don't think I can go —"

"Oh! why not?" broke in Doodles. "You said you wanted to!"

The girl trembled on the verge of a smile, and suddenly was in a merry laugh.

"You will go, won't you?" coaxed the boy, delighted at the pleasant turn things had taken.

"Perhaps," she yielded — and then darted away.

CHAPTER V

CARUSO AND DOCTOR SANDY

THE next day being Saturday it was thought best, after a family council, for Blue to take Caruso to the Scotchman of whom Thomas Fitzpatrick had told him.

“You won’t be gone so very long, will you?” asked Doodles anxiously.

“A good part of the afternoon, I’m afraid,” his brother answered. “Do you mind staying alone?”

“Oh, no! only I was thinking I shall miss Caruso.”

Blue heard this with a little dismay, for he thought it not unlikely that he should be obliged to leave the bird for treatment. He wondered whether he ought to prepare Doodles for such a possibility, or wait and let things come as they would. Finally he ventured:—

“Maybe the bird doctor will want to keep him a day or two.”

A shadow fell on the fair little face.

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“Well,” replied the boy slowly, “I can get along if he has to stay. You tell the man to not think about me at all, but just to do what’s best for Caruso — oh, won’t it be nice if he can fix Caruso’s wing all right!” The sorrow of the possible separation was forgotten in the joy of the moment.

It was a long, hard tramp up the Temple Hill Road; but Blue Stickney, with abounding strength in every muscle of his lithe little body, was scarcely conscious of fatigue when he spied the rambling, dilapidated structure known as the Hayward place, and presently he was on the porch of the white house beyond.

A stocky little man opened the door, whom the boy rightly conjectured to be the owner himself. His face was framed in an abundance of wavy reddish-gray hair, and his keen blue eyes looked kindly at his visitor over a pair of silver-bowed spectacles.

Blue briefly told his errand, bringing a smile to the face of the little man when he mentioned the name of Fitzpatrick.

“I dinna ken a better mon,” he observed, with a strong Scotch accent. “I am glad to welcome ony freend o’ his.”

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As they entered the big, sunny room on the left of the wide hall, the boy looked about in plain astonishment, for on every side, high and low, were birds — birds in cages, and birds free to fly wherever they would.

“My, what a lot!” he exclaimed under his breath.

Mr. Gillespie gave him a pleased nod over Caruso’s cage, from which he was carefully removing the newspaper covering.

The bird, contrary to his usual custom with strangers, did not appear to be at all afraid of the Scotchman, but, turning his bright eyes this way and that, surveyed with evident curiosity his attractive surroundings.

The first to give him a musical salutation was a cardinal in the bay window, which began a series of soft, sweet whistles. These notes seemed to rouse the rest of the family, for shortly a concert was in full swing.

The singing strangely excited Caruso. He pranced from end to end of his perches, occasionally standing motionless as if to listen, and then darting off again in a wild dance. At last he could keep silent no longer, and a flood of music poured from his bursting throat which

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all but drowned the other voices. Indeed, in a moment he had the stage quite to himself, and was singing as he had never sung even for his beloved little master.

Blue actually held his breath, as if fearing to miss a note of the marvelous performance; and the old Scotchman, accustomed as he was to all manner of feathered songsters, gazed at the disabled gray bird in surprise and admiration. It was as if the robin, the oriole, the cardinal, the song sparrow, the bluebird, and a host of others, were in that little swelling throat. And this was interspersed with the mewling of cats, the grunting of pigs, the cackling of hens, the call of the Katy-dids, and the myriad sounds of country life. The singer finally ended with the first notes of "Annie Laurie," breaking off suddenly in the middle of a measure to stand with drooping head, as if trying to recollect the rest.

Without hesitation Sandy Gillespie caught up the air where Caruso dropped it, and whistled it through, the bird still motionless upon his perch.

That was enough. Memory gave back to the singer what he had almost lost, and with

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a little prelude of his own he slipped into the old song, stopping only with the last note.

“Weel dune, birdie! weel dune!” praised the Scotchman in a soft voice, while Caruso pirouetted about like a pleased child.

The man smiled, and going to a tiny wall cupboard fetched something which he placed in the bird’s cage.

Caruso watched him narrowly, and the instant he was well away swooped the dainty before Blue could discern what it was.

The boy caught a twinkling glance thrown him from over the spectacles, and he answered it with inquiring eyes.

“Meal worms,” said the Scotchman. “Nae-thing they like better. What d’ye feed him?”

“Oh, ’most anything!” was the indefinite answer.

Mr. Gillespie shook his head. “Na, na, that winna do!” He picked up a small box on the table, and, emptying the bird’s food cup, replaced its contents with a little from the package.

That it was satisfactory to Caruso was apparent from the zest with which he ate it.

“Best thing for mockin’ birdies,” asserted

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the Scotchman, handing Blue the box. "Ye buy it at th' shop."

The boy read the price in dismay, "Fifty Cents." They could never afford such costly food.

"Th' wee wing wi' sune be a' right, I'm thinkin'," Mr. Gillespie was saying. "Ye maun leave th' birdie wi' me, an' when we're gude freends I can find oot th' tribble."

So Blue, feeling that his errand was accomplished, bade the little man good-bye, promising to come up again by the middle of the next week.

CHAPTER VI

GRANDPA MOON COMES TO TOWN

“On—ly an armour-bear—er, proud—ly I stand,
Wait—ing to fol—low at the King’s command;
Marching if ‘onward’ shall the or—der be,
Standing by my Cap—tain, serv—ing faith—ful — ly.

“Hear ye the battle cry! ‘Forward,’ the call!
See! see the faltering ones! back—ward they fall.
Sure—ly the Captain may de—pend on me,
Though but an armour-bear—er I may be.
Sure—ly the Captain may de—pend on me,
Though but an ar—mour-bear—er I may be.”

THE pure, sweet voice of Doodles carried the song on and on without touch of weariness. He was never lonely when he could sing, and now that Caruso was not there he often sung the hours away. The Flatiron was familiar with the singing of Doodles. All up and down the long halls busy mothers and tired toilers would open their doors to the heartening music. They did not stop to ask whether the voice was remarkable or not; it was pleasant to hear, and there was never over-much pleasure in The Flatiron. A few realized that while they were

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listening they forgot the hard life that bound them, and forgetfulness even for a time was worth while.

Bravely rang the last verse.

“On—ly an armour—bear—er, yet may I share
Glo—ry im—mor—tal, and a bright crown wear:
If, in the bat—tle, to my trust I’m true,
Mine shall be the hon—ors in the Grand Re—view.

“Hear ye the battle cry! —”

The boy stopped suddenly, for an old man was in the doorway. He had removed his hat, and stood panting from his climb of the three flights.

“I’m — sorry — to — inter-rupt — your — beau-tiful —”

“Oh, that is n’t any matter!” Doodles broke in. “Come right and sit down! Take the rocking-chair; it’s easiest.”

“Thank you,” bowed the stranger. “I’m not — used — to stairs.”

“These are pretty steep,” attested Doodles. “They make mother dreadfully out of breath; but Blue runs up as fast, and does n’t mind ’em at all.”

Before the old man could talk comfortably

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he let go the query that was impatient on his lips. "Do you know if there's a girl lives in this building called Moon?" The fine face was pathetic in its eagerness.

"I don't remember anybody by that name," answered the boy slowly, thinking hard. Flatiron lodgers were so numerous and so fleeting.

All brightness faded from the wrinkled face, leaving it more weary than before.

"It's my granddaughter," the trembling voice explained. "She — went away — she had to, and I don't blame her a mite! — and she could n't tell me where — I do wish she had! A man from our town said he saw her — or thought it was — coming in here one day; but it could n't 'a' been her!" He sighed. "If Horace had just stopped his team, and spoke to her and found out! But you can't much blame him — she give him the mitten once, and he's never gotten over it. It's no wonder the fellows are after her; she's as pretty as her mother before her. Ye see, she's my son's child. Her mother died when she was a little thing, and her father married again. Sarah's been a good mother to her,

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only for trying to make a match between her and Zenas; but it's natural she should think her boy is the whole earth. And he must needs make love to my girl! As for that matter, there ain't a fellow in town that would n't run his legs off to get one of her smiles. But Zenas Camp! He's the conceitedest, dudish-est numskull I ever set eyes on. Poor child! she could n't stand his love-making. So she had to go. She left me a little note, telling me why she could n't stay. I wish she'd told me where she was going, but she said she was afraid I'd have to let it out if I knew, and if I did n't know I could n't tell. Now Zenas has up and married the richest old maid in town; so he's out o' the way. She could come home well's not, and I don't know where to look for her." He bent his head on his hands.

"I'm sorry," sympathized Doodles, "I'm awfully sorry! I guess you'll find her; I feel's if you would."

"I've got to!" The old frame straightened. "To think of her — innocent little thing! — being in a big city like this, all alone, makes me wild! I must find her! I guess I'm 'bout

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rested enough to go on. I wish you'd sing me just one piece before I go."

"I wonder what you'd like best," Doodles mused.

"That you were singing when I come in is's good as any — something about an armour-bearer, was n't it?"

"Yes, sir, 'Only an Armour-Bearer.' I like that, I s'pose because I'm an only, too."

"An 'only'?" The wrinkled forehead had a puzzled scowl.

"Why, yes, sir; I'm only a little boy that can't walk. I could n't even be an armour-bearer, if they had them now — mother says she guesses they don't. But if they did, I could n't march or anything. I like to play I can, though. It's fine to feel I'm marching with the rest! I can't really do much, you know, except talk and sing. But mother says some folks can't even do that, and it is n't so much what you do as how you do it. I did n't know that till mother told me. It is queer how much mothers know, is n't it? My mother knows 'most everything! She's a great comfort."

"A mother is the best thing in the whole

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world, little one." The faded blue eyes grew a bit misty.

"I think so," agreed Doodles. "And grandfathers are nice, too. Grandfather Blue was a splendid man, mother says. Blue was named for him, but he don't like it much. The boys call him Blue Stick' and Sticky Blue and Sticky Doleful, and sometimes he gets mad. Mother tells him he ought to be proud of such a name, and proud of Stickney, too, even if the boys do turn it into 'sticky.'"

"Ye can't hurt a good name that way," observed the old man. "A name that's got generations of good folks back of it is the kind that puts ye on your mettle to keep it up to the mark."

"Why, you talk just like mother!" cried Doodles, his brown eyes shining. "My father was a lovely man, but I did n't know him. He died when I was a baby. I was named for father and Uncle Jim, Julius James. It's too bad about Uncle Jim! He was mother's only brother, and he ran away because grandfather would n't let him keep his violin. You see, he had been saving up money for ever so long to buy a violin with, and then when he

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got it grandfather made him carry it back to the store — he said it was all nonsense for him to spend his time fiddling. But Uncle Jim was possessed about music — mother says I take after him. I guess grandfather was sorry enough afterwards, for Uncle Jim never came back. Mother has n't any idea where he is."

On the listener's face the lines deepened. The little story had awakened sad possibilities.

"Suppose, dearie, you sing a bit now," he suggested. "I must be getting on."

"Oh, I forgot!" exclaimed Doodles in compunction.

"Only an Armour-Bearer" was succeeded by "Jerusalem, the Golden," which proved to be one of the visitor's favorites.

"Mother likes that," confided Doodles, as he rested from his singing; "it reminds her so of Uncle Jim. Once, when he was a little boy, there was company to stay over night, a minister and his wife named Hall. Before they went to bed they sung some hymns; Grandmother Blue played on the melodeon, and the rest stood around back of her. When they came to that line, 'They stand, those

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halls of Zion,' Jim nudged mother, and pointed to Mr. and Mrs. Hall, and she giggled right out! Nobody noticed it much, they were singing so loud; but she was dreadfully mortified."

Mr. Moon laughed with Doodles, then, after thanking him for his singing, he arose to his unsteady feet.

"If I don't find her to-day, I think I'll have to stay over till to-morrow," he said quaveringly; "seems's if I could n't go back without my little Dolly!"

"Dolly?" repeated Doodles, his eyes round with wonder. "Dolly, did you say?"

"Why, yes, of course, Dolly!" The voice was sharp with pain and something akin to impatience.

"You never said her name was Dolly!" breathed the boy reproachfully, trying to follow out the sudden possible clue. "But *she's* Dolly Rose!" he added, with a little shake of his head.

"Child! child! what are you talking about?"

"Dolly — my Dolly Rose! But she ain't a Moon! She said her name was Rose — Dorothy Rose."

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“Boy! tell me what you’re driving at! Who’s Dorothy Rose?” The man dropped heavily into the chair he had just quitted.

“Why, she’s a girl,” Doodles explained. “That’s her room,” pointing to the opposite side of the hall. “But she ain’t there now,” he added hastily, for the old man was rising, his face set towards the door indicated.

“Oh!” exclaimed Doodles softly, “she said her grandpa called her Dolly! She did! But her name’s Rose,” he insisted sadly.

“Oh, ’t ain’t likely it’s my Dolly!” was the dreary conclusion. Then a light stole into the clouded eyes. “Her name ain’t Rosetta, is it?”

“No, just Rose,” the boy replied slowly.

“And —” he hesitated, reluctant to let go his forlorn hope, “she ain’t lame, is she?”

“Oh, she *is!*” piped Doodles excitedly. “Only a little — not enough to hurt her a bit!” even in that significant moment loyal to his friend.

The withered face flushed and whitened. The faded eyes grew bright. “And has she got curly hair?”

“Yes, lovely! And red cheeks!”

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“Red as roses! And her eyes are blue — blue as —”

“The sky in the morning, when it’s cold!” Doodles helped out.

“Ye’ve got it exactly! And she’s a slim little thing?”

“My, yes, I guess she is!”

They were two excited children, each eager for one more word of evidence that should make the proof sure.

“She has the dearest dimples!” Doodles cried.

The old man nodded smilingly. “Seem’s if it must be Dolly,” he quavered. “Ther’ would n’t be two. Her name’s Dorothy Rosetta, an’ she prob’ly just called it Rose, so Zenas could n’t find her — that’s what! My little Dolly! And to think how near I came to missing her after all!” His voice tottered along the brink of tears, then something glistened on his coat, and Doodles politely looked out of the window.

“It’s a beautiful day,” he remarked presently, not turning his head. “Dolly will be sure to come home this noon; she always does when it’s pleasant.” As there was no response,

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he went on. "She found Caruso his name. Caruso's my bird — my mocking bird, you know. Dolly named him after the real Caruso. And, oh, she went to hear him, with Mr. Gaylord!"

A pleased chuckle made Doodles turn round. "So she's caught a city beau already!" Grandpa Moon was saying. "She'd never be long without one, she's that pretty."

"I guess he's a beau," Doodles responded, "he's lovely anyway. They went to a moving picture show, too. Oh, they looked so nice together! You ought to see 'em! He brought her some beautiful flowers, and she gave me some."

"Just like her! She's a generous little thing. Tell me more about her."

"There is n't much. She works in the knitting mill. She likes Caruso — my Caruso. I wish he was here to sing for you; but he's at the bird doctor's having his wing mended. It hung down dreadfully, and the bird doctor is going to fix it so it'll be as good as new. Blue went up there last week to see how he's getting along, and he's 'most well. He sings 'Annie Laurie' — just think! Seem's if I could n't

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wait to hear him sing that!" Doodles gave a vivid account of the bird's sudden recollection of the tune, drifting into the story of the robbery and Thomas Fitzpatrick's part in the exciting little affair. The first noon whistle brought him to a halt.

"That's five minutes of twelve," he announced. "Our clock is too slow. Dolly'll be here pretty soon now — in about ten minutes, I guess."

Talk flagged after that, although Doodles tried to keep up a show of it. It is doubtful whether the old man heard much of what was said; his thin fingers drummed restlessly on the arms of the rocker, and at every sound he glanced towards the doorway.

"We shall hear her coming up," Doodles told him; "I always do. 'T is n't quite time — most though. Mother does n't —" he stopped, listening, then nodded gleefully. "Hear her? She 's on the first flight."

The old man shook his head; his ears were not keen enough to catch that soft footfall. Quickly, however, his face brightened.

"Won't she be astonished!" the boy whispered.

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The girl smiled a gay answer to Doodles's greeting, and was starting over the threshold when she spied the foot and trousers-leg of a man, and retreated.

"No, no! don't go!" cried Doodles. "Please come in just a minute, Dolly dear!"

As she advanced, the occupant of the rocking-chair turned toward her. She flashed one glance at that wrinkled face, and darted forward with a glad, "Grandpa! grandpa!"

To Doodles's surprise he found his cheeks wet with tears, and the others were wiping their eyes. Why people should cry when they were happy he could not understand.

For a time words flew merrily from lip to lip. "To think that Cynthi' Beadles should marry Zenas Camp!" laughed Dolly. Then she sobered, with a "Poor Cynthi'!"

"You'll go home with me, this afternoon?" Grandpa Moon queried in a taken-for-granted tone.

The answer came promptly enough, "Of course I'll go!" Yet she looked wistfully across at Doodles, and thought of somebody else with a tiny anxious scowl and a faint flush.

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Shortly the two went off, arm in arm, Dolly eager to show her "cosy little den," and to make grandpa a cup of tea. They did not return to say good-bye until after Mrs. Stickney and Blue had come and gone. Then the stay was too brief for the satisfaction of Doodles; but the train must be met, and there were several calls to be made first. So with promises to write, the parting was over.

Just before six o'clock, Mr. Gaylord dropped in, as he often did when he had a moment's leisure. Doodles's news left him grave.

"She wanted me to tell you she was sorry she could n't see you again," the boy ended.

The young man's response was to ask, "Where is her home?"

Doodles stared at him unseeingly. He was searching his memory. At last he dragged out his forlorn answer, "I don't know!"

The other smiled grimly.

"She never told! I'm sure she did n't!" The boy's brown eyes brimmed over. "Now I can't send her a letter!"

"Never mind, little man! She will write to you, and then you'll know." Still as he went across the hall to his room — grown suddenly

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so lonesome — he wondered if the omission could have been intentional. His next thought was to upbraid himself for the doubt.

Yet days multiplied, weeks slipped away, and no word came from Dolly Moon.

CHAPTER VII

A FRIEND FROM GREECE

EVEN the doorknob of Dolly Moon's room looked melancholy. So Doodles felt, and he turned a little in his chair, that it might not face him. Then, more lonely, he looked back, and, while he was looking, a man and a boy came up the stairs. Although less than an hour ago he had wished that somebody else would lodge there, when the two passed the kitchen and steered straight toward Dolly's old room, resentment rose in his loyal heart.

"It's hers!" he muttered. "They have n't any right to go in!"

But go in they did, each with a "queer-shaped, green bundle," he told Blue as soon as he came.

"And the boy is 'bout as big as me," he went on. "Do you s'pose we shall ever get acquainted?"

"Sure," returned his brother. "Why not? You must hello to him."

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Blue's word was to be obeyed, and the first time that the strange boy passed the doorway alone Doodles let go his friendly greeting.

The lad turned quickly, showed two rows of exceedingly white teeth in a pleased smile, and responded with a soft, "'llo!"

"Will you come in and see me?" invited Doodles politely.

The boy halted and again flashed his bright smile. "I come — t'anks!" He stepped over the threshold, and stood hesitant, his mobile face tender with sympathy at sight of the helplessness of the occupant of the pillowed chair.

Before Doodles could speak, Caruso began his musical welcome, and the stranger did not move or shift his gaze from the singer until the little song was ended. Then he turned to Doodles, aglow with appreciation. His slim little hands made quick gestures as he came near. "Nice! nice!" he smiled, hunting through his small stock of English for a better word. "He sing — nice!"

"I think he does," Doodles responded happily. "I wish he'd sing 'Annie Laurie.' — Caruso!"

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The bird answered promptly, and at once Doodles began softly the old song, carrying it through to the end of the verse. Then Caruso with a few trills, struck into the same air.

Doodles watched the visitor's face, as the bird sang; nobody had ever listened to Caruso's singing with that look. It was wonder, admiration, and joy, it was more than that — Doodles could not tell what it was. But he felt that the new boy appreciated his bird's singing, and he was glad.

When the stranger turned, his eyes had a far-away look in them, as if he were still hearing music. Then came that brilliant smile.

“I — love heem!” pointing to Caruso. “I — no talk good. I — learn Eengleesh — I go school one, two, t'ree,” counting on his fingers — he shook his head sadly, and sighed. The word would not come. “One, two, t'ree,” he repeated, and halted again.

“Three years?” prompted Doodles.

The boy shook his head.

“Months?”

He smiled. “Yes, t'anks, t'ree months I go school here — America. I go school — Athens.”

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“Oh! did you live in Athens?” Doodles was interested.

“Yes,” the boy nodded. Then a thought filled his eyes with light. “I play!” He darted off, across the hall, returning with a violin, which he began to finger in a way that roused Doodles’s admiration.

He lifted it to his shoulder, and drew his bow across the strings, holding the instrument caressingly, as if it were a living thing.

Doodles sat entranced through the playing. Never had he heard such music.

The player slipped into the tune of “Annie Laurie,” with a peremptory, “You sing!” And Doodles began, half shyly, but soon he was the chief performer, the violin playing a soft accompaniment.

On the second verse Caruso joined them with his mellow whistle, the effect being startlingly sweet and delightful.

“Where you learn?” asked the young violinist in the first pause.

“I?” repeated Doodles in surprise.

The other gave a smiling nod.

“Why, I guess I never learned. I’ve always sung.”

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The boy looked the admiration he could not speak. "You sing — nice!" he said.

"You play beautifully!" declared Doodles.

The dark little face brightened. "Yes, that! You sing beau-tee-fully! I no get word — you sing beau-tee-fully!"

"Do you think so?" Doodles grew pink with pleasure. "I never heard anybody play the violin so well as you," he went on. "I wish you'd play more."

"I play — you sing." The Greek boy waited expectantly.

After a moment's thought Doodles began one of his favorite hymns, "The Ninety and Nine," the other listening, his violin on his shoulder. He quickly caught the air, and was soon playing a charming accompaniment.

There was another who was not content to be silent. The boys had not counted on the mocking bird, but suddenly he started one of his amusing medleys. Discords increased, and at last, with a chuckle, the violinist dropped his instrument, Doodles doubled over in a laugh, and Caruso was left as star performer.

The new friends talked, the stranger telling, in his meager English, of his home in Athens,

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of the gentle mother whom he could barely remember, and of how she had named him Christarchus Apostus because she wished him to be an apostle of Christ; of the father who thought him better fitted for a musician than a preacher; of their dream of America, and, when money grew scarce and scarcer, of their resolve to seek their fortune across the wide sea. He told of their hopeful departure from the land of flowers and fruit and sunny skies, of the terrifying ocean voyage; and, lastly, of their engagement in the orchestra, where they played the violin every night.

After this recital came more music, Caruso being too busy at his food cup for interruption. The concert was still proceeding when the young visitor's father appeared at the head of the stairs, and "My Old Kentucky Home" came to a sudden end.

"We had a lovely time," Doodles told his mother, and at once launched into the history of his short acquaintance with "the new boy." He had not finished when Mr. Gaylord arrived with delightful news — he had seen Dolly Moon, had actually been at her home in Pebbleton, and she had sent to Doodles a

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quart of cream, a basket of apples, and a jar of clover honey. She had been waiting for a letter, having overlooked the truth — that her Flatiron friends did not know where she lived, and she was very much ashamed of her forgetfulness and of her neglect to write to them. The young man had discovered her by accident. He had been taking his employer, Mrs. Graham, to an adjoining town, and in passing through Pebbleton he had spied the girl at a window. Feeling sure that he could not be mistaken, he had obtained permission, after leaving Mrs. Graham at her friend's, to run back to Pebbleton. The result had justified his hopes, and he was in an unwonted elation of spirits that the Stickney family did not fail to observe.

Doodles ended his supper with honey and cream, and he thought he had never tasted anything half so nice.

“It has been a most wonderful day,” he confided to Caruso when he said good-night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STRIKE

BLUE joined his mother in the little dark bedroom, whither she had stealthily beckoned him.

She closed the door, and pulled him to a farther corner, beyond the keen ears of Doodles.

“You must n’t spend a penny for anything you can get along without!” she whispered. “I’m sorry you bought that orange.”

“Why?” queried the boy, surprised. “Doodles said the other day he’d like one.”

“You asked him.”

“Yes,” admitted Blue. “But it ’s good for him — he don’t eat much anyway.”

“I know,” sighed the mother, and stopped.

“What ’s up?” demanded the boy.

“’Sh!”

“He can’t hear! He’s talkin’ to the bird.”

“Well,” she softened her voice, “I have n’t said anything — and they ’ve kept it pretty

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whist; but we're ordered out on strike tomorrow noon, unless the company come to our terms — and they won't!"

"Whew!"

"I'm awfully sorry. I hoped they'd patch things up." She put her hand to her eyes.

"It's a shame!" cried Blue.

"Sh! I don't want him to know any more than is necessary."

"He is n't goin' to hear! What's the muss anyhow?"

"Oh! it's about those hands that they discharged, and then they've asked for more wages."

"I'll try to git some extry jobs," decided the boy.

"Please don't say git," corrected his mother, "and remember that extra is spelled with an a."

"Oh, I for — get!" laughed Blue.

"You're a good boy anyway," the mother replied with a catch in her voice. "What should I do without you!" She clasped him there in the dark, while he made an impulsive resolve to be more worthy of her love and praise. Nevertheless he laughed.

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“You have n’t got to do without me!” he told her, and ran back into the kitchen.

The next day Mrs. Stickney walked out of the big silver shop with the other workers, inwardly rebelling at the command that forced her to give up the daily wages so needful for the comfort of herself and her family. Only a little money was in the emergency purse. Six dollars a week left not much to spare, and women hands in the silver shop were not allowed to earn more than a dollar a day. If by dint of nerve and skill a toiler in skirts was able to add a few cents to the customary one hundred her work was so arranged that she must keep to her task more closely to compass even her regular pay. Yet Mrs. Stickney never complained; six dollars paid the rent, bought plain food, a slender amount of fuel, and enough clothing for actual need. But now? The mother had pondered the question through all the working hours, she had carried it to bed with her night after night, and it was no nearer the answer than when it had first dismayed her. She must get something to do — anything! But with hundreds of unemployed women ready to pounce upon every

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little odd job would there be any chance for her? On her way home she called at the settlement, not far from The Flatiron, hoping that one of the girls, whom she slightly knew, could direct her to somebody in need of a seamstress. But the friendly answer was disappointing.

“I am sorry I can’t give you any encouragement, Mrs. Stickney. We have more applications than we know what to do with. I will put your name on the waiting list, and there may be something later.”

So she went home to Doodles burdened with forebodings, though resolved that he should not suspect her worry. He was delighted at thought of having her with him all day long, and she fostered his pleasure by filling that first afternoon with song and stories and gay talk.

Just before six o’clock, Granny O’Donnell, shrewd as kind, toiled up the stairs with a little loaf of hot gingerbread — gingerbread such as only Granny knew how to make.

Then Blue came in, late and jubilant. He had earned an extra quarter by delivering some parcels for a paper customer, and more errands were promised.

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Thus the supper hour went blithely, and afterwards the dishes in the pan rattled merrily to the tune of "Edinburgh Town."

The prepared food which Mr. Gillespie had generously sent home with the mocking bird was now nearly gone. Blue looked sadly into the little box every time he filled Caruso's cup. How could they spare half a dollar for more! Yet the Scotchman had said that the bird's health depended on it. Happily, carrots were cheap, and patiently the boy grated them, mixing as much with the other food as he dared, often going beyond the prescribed proportion. He also went hunting through obscure corners of The Flatiron for dead flies and live spiders, making a fortunate find, one rainy Saturday, in a vacant room in the second story. Scores of lifeless flies dotted the floor and window sills, and Blue brushed them up with delighted hands. Treated with boiling water, they would make dainty tidbits for the gray bird. In these ways the dreaded day of famine was postponed.

Meanwhile Christarchus Apostus Geanskakes came to be the daily comrade of Doodles. As the strike continued, and Mrs.

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Stickney obtained employment in a restaurant kitchen, which kept her from home all of the daylight hours, this was especially satisfactory.

“I tell you how play,” the Greek boy had proposed on an early visit, and Doodles was blissfully ready to learn. So the daily lessons went on, the pupil making rare progress, and happy beyond anything he had ever known. Music was his joy, and to be able to cause such wonderful harmonies with — according to Blue — “just some horse hairs and those four fiddle strings” was an unending marvel and delight. If only he could have a violin of his own — a little one! Christarchus said you could get them cheap. But when he had suggested it to his mother she became so strangely grave that he did not speak of it again. Perhaps she was thinking of Uncle Jim. Christarchus urged his own instrument upon him whenever he was not practicing himself, and it was far better than any he could hope to buy. So side by side with the increasing anxiety of his mother and brother his happiness grew. And then, one sunny forenoon, when Doodles supposed him to be at school, Chris-

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tarchus walked slowly in. His face foreboded ill.

"I go," he said drearily. "My fader he go New York — get more pay — I haf go." His big black eyes, usually brimming with sparkles of glee, were shadowy and mournful, as if, at any instant, they might melt into tears.

Doodles was dumb with anguish. He stared mistily. His bliss, which a moment before had seemed so secure, had vanished like a bubble. He clinched his little fists, and sat waiting.

"I go," Christarchus repeated dully, gazing at Doodles with a yearning that would have broken one's heart, if anybody had been there to see. But they were alone, and when the Greek boy became sure of the fact he crossed over and took his comrade's cold little hand in his.

"I — love — ever!" came brokenly from his quivering lips.

Doodles roused at last, and clung to him, still silent and tearless.

The voice of the father was in the hall, and the boy ran to answer. Later he returned with his small suit case.

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Doodles, his grieving brown eyes full of unspeakable things, let go a few words that tried to be brave, whereupon Christarchus caught up his violin and began a sad, sweet melody, ending with a glorious strain of triumph — the good-bye that he could not put into an unfamiliar tongue. It stayed with Doodles, to comfort him, long after the player was gone.

To cap this sorrow came a new trouble. The restaurant man disappeared, leaving little behind him but debts and an unsavory reputation. The bulk of Mrs. Stickney's well-earned wages would never be paid, and the mother was too disheartened even to sing. Caruso shared the family gloom, and moped on his perch. Some days he would eat scarcely anything.

"I'm afraid he misses the violin," Doodles confided to his brother; but the boy wondered, secretly, if he had put too much carrot in his food, and went on a hunt for spiders, which the Scotchman had said were good for the appetite.

It was at this point of time that Blue brought home a beautiful red sweet apple, given him by Joseph Sitnitsky for the "little

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brother with the not-taking sickness, who could n't to never walk."

Doodles clasped the gift smilingly. "What did make him send it?" he questioned. "How did he know there was any me? I never saw him."

"Oh! he's heard me mention you," answered Blue discreetly.

"He must be a very nice boy," Doodles decided. "I should like to know him. You tell him I thank him ever, ever so much. I think I will eat it right away, would n't you?"

Blue agreed that it was a good time.

"A quarter for mother, and a quarter for you, and I guess one for Granny O'Donnell — oh, and one for Caruso! He likes sweet apple! Perhaps it will make him sing."

Blue laughed. "Where's your quarter coming from?" he asked.

"Oh, did I forget me?" smiled Doodles innocently. "Well, you can give me one, too."

"There are n't but four quarters in an apple, old feller — mother, Caruso, Granny, and I would take 'em all." His eyes twinkled.

"That's so! I forgot about the quarters! Well, Caruso won't mind if he does n't have a

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whole one, he's so little; one will do for both of us."

Blue's lips puckered as he cut the fruit in range of the watchful brown eyes; but he saw to it that the owner of the apple received his full share.

To the delight of Doodles, the bird ate with unusual zest what Blue scraped for him, and then danced about, eyeing that outside the cage.

"Oh, he wants some more!" cried his little master, thereupon feeding him from his own piece. And Caruso thanked him with a song — the first in many days.

CHAPTER IX

THOMAS FITZPATRICK'S WHISTLE

THE gravity of the strike situation increased. There was small prospect of immediate yielding on either side. A few turbulent strikers blustered and threatened, secret mass meetings were held, and whispers of ugly times ahead ran through The Flatiron. Mrs. Stickney did not place much faith in these rumors, yet they added to her restlessness, and she redoubled her efforts to find work.

Blue walked the streets out of school hours, searching for a job; but with the throngs of unemployed, many bent on the same business, he stood only a chance with hundreds. His extra earnings grew lighter, and the home purse correspondingly thin. The bird's food box was empty, and insects, dead or alive, were scarce. The mother dealt out rations with a sparing hand, and nobody asked for more. Finally came a day, the day that had been feared, when purse and pantry fell to the

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rank of Caruso's box, and the breakfast table showed only a small bowl of baked bean soup.

The boys waited at their plates, Mrs. Stickney pottering about the stove.

"Better hurry!" urged Blue. "It'll get cold."

"You eat it all; I don't want any breakfast."

"Not much!" declared the boy. "We're going to wait till you come."

"Course we are," Doodles agreed.

"Oh, dear," she fretted, half chuckling, "what children you are!" She sat down and ate what Blue ladled out for her — she did not know whether it was much or little, her mind was too distracted and her eyes too misty. But the boy knew, and felt that he could better go hungry than his mother.

Mrs. Stickney went out early on her forlorn errand, her heart full of prayer for work. If nothing could be obtained to-day, she must try to get a little more credit at the market — enough to bridge over this crisis. After that — well, perhaps the strike would end! And, sighing, she trudged on.

Blue decided daringly to stay away from

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school, and hunt for work. He had not suggested such a thing to his mother, well knowing her sanction would be hard to win. He reasoned, however, that this was an extreme case, and that he must earn some money before night. Five hours of extra time would give him a greater chance, and he resolved to take it.

“Are you very hungry, kiddie?” he queried as he took up his cap.

“Oh, no!” smiled Doodles. “I had a good breakfast; did n’t you?”

“Capital!” lied Blue. “But I’m goin’ to get yer something better to-day — see if I don’t!”

“What you going to get?” coaxed Doodles.

“I d’n’ know yet — depends on how much I earn.” He went off whistling, for the sake of the little brother who must not guess that the pantry was empty.

Along the warehouses, beyond the school district, Blue kept his truant way; but nobody was in need of an errand boy in that quarter, and after nine o’clock he turned back towards the market section. Here he met a man who was looking for somebody to hold his horse.

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“He’s a leetle bit afraid o’ them autos,” the countryman explained, and the boy well earned his five cents in the full quarter of an hour that he spent in quieting the nervous animal.

Blue went home at the usual time. Nothing beyond the five cents had been obtainable, and after a good deal of thought he had finally exchanged it for half a dozen buns, arguing that buns would taste better than bread without butter.

“Oh, I’m so glad you bought buns!” beamed Doodles. “I just love buns with currants in them!”

The meager dinner waited until one o’clock; then, as the mother had not come, the boys ate their share, feeding currants to Caruso and laughing to see him snap them up so joyously.

“Mother must have found work, don’t you think?” Doodles asked a bit anxiously.

“Sure, old feller! Don’t you be worryin’ ’bout that! She’ll come all right pretty soon.”

Blue loitered on a side street until the clanging of the school bell had ceased; then he boldly faced the throngs on the principal

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thoroughfare. He applied at a dozen or more offices for something to do, meeting only curt refusals. Finally a man more observing than the rest asked abruptly: —

“See here, why ain't you in school? You're not fourteen yet?”

“No, sir,” admitted the boy, with a guilty flush. “I stayed out to try to get a job.”

“Huh!” the man snorted. “Bet yer belong to the strikers! Don't yer now?”

“Yes, sir; but my mother had to —”

“Oh! it's yer mother, is it? So much the worse! Well, you c'n tell her from me that if she's such a fool as to give up a good job she need n't send her kids round here expectin' me to support 'em! Now scoot, or I'll have the truant officer after yer!”

The boy's eyes burned angrily, and he was off even before he received his orders; but his ears were sharp, and he missed not a word. A sneering laugh followed him, and pressed the injustice still closer against his heart.

Thoughts of his mother's brave fight for work, and of helpless little Doodles, uncomplaining in his loneliness and privations, sent hot tears to his eyes, and he darted blindly

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round the first corner, as if the very street that held his enemy were not to be trusted.

On and on he ran, unmindful of his way, until he became suddenly conscious of something unusual in the air, and, looking ahead, he saw a crowd of people moving slowly towards him. That it was an excited crowd was evident from the tumult of voices, mingled with shouts and yells, now plain above the noise of the street.

“Must be goin’ to have a meeting — or had one,” he told himself. “The union hall is down there on Blake Avenue.”

“Hello, Rob!” he called to a boy racing by on the opposite side. “What’s up?”

“Oh, somethin’ fierce! Better not go any nearer!” the lad warned. “Dad he said, ‘Git out o’ this on the double-quick, ’less yer want yer head smashed!’ I tell yer, ther’ ’s goin’ to be an awful row! Hope dad won’t git killed — my!”

“Aw, nobody’s goin’ to get killed! What you talking about!” Blue’s face showed scorn.

“Bet yer ther’ will, now! You hain’t been there, an’ I have!”

“I’m goin’!” He started.

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“Oh, don't! Wait! wait a minute!” cried the other, aghast at such recklessness.

Blue halted. “What yer want?”

“Why, I tell yer, ther' 's goin' to be a big fight!”

“A fight! Not much! There's Tom Fitzpatrick down there — ain't it? Looks like him. Guess ther' won't be many shiners where he is!”

“Huh! what can one cop do alone! Ther' ain't another anywheres, an', I tell yer, he's got his hands full!”

“He can bring 'em easy enough with his whistle. He told me how —”

“Aw! he dassent blow it in face o' that mob! Why, they'd knock him down quicker! Bet they'll kill him anyway!—Oh, don't yer!”

But Blue was flying towards the tumult, and Rob, with one glance at the on-coming rabble, fled in the opposite direction.

Tom Fitzpatrick in danger! The thought gave speed to Blue's feet. As he drew nearer, he could hear the rich voice, rising above the rest, but calm and steady, not a bit as if its owner were afraid of those angry men.

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“Don’t you know you must n’t carry that?” he was saying. And thrusting at a red flag, he grabbed and furled it.

With a mad outcry and yells of “Down with him! Down with him!” the crowd surged towards the officer.

At that moment, right in front of the fearless Fitzpatrick, almost under his hands, popped up a small boy.

“Can I help you?”

It was little more than a breath, but Tom caught it, and glanced down with the hint of a smile as he recognized Blue Stickney.

“Sure! Blow my whistle!” was the quick answer, in a tone to match the query. With a deft motion, the little instrument was in the boy’s hand.

Thomas Fitzpatrick’s whistle! Blue could scarcely comprehend the truth. For the joy of this moment he would have braved greater dangers than the present. Only a few days ago — or so it seemed — the kindly officer had explained the uses of his whistle, telling over his various signals. Blue remembered them every one. Three sharp toots, then a

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long, long blast — that was for help, and, freeing himself from the jam, the bit of wood and metal was at his lips.

Above the uproar Fitzpatrick heard the call with inward relief. He had not felt sure that Blue would recollect; but he could scarcely have done better himself.

As for the boy, he repeated it fearlessly, exultingly, once, twice, three times, in swift succession; yet nobody interfered. A small boy with a whistle was not an unusual combination, and the mob had too much else on hand to be interested in boys.

It was not a brutal crowd, but it was excited, defiant, and reckless. If Thomas Fitzpatrick had not known just how to manage it, and if four brass-buttoned men had not come racing to his aid, — there is no telling what might have occurred. But before the body of the throng realized what was happening the leaders of the disturbance were being marched off to the police station.

Blue returned the whistle, and received most hearty thanks, given in his hero's best style. Then he cut across an alley and an open lot, in a crow line for The Flatiron; he must

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unload his big news at home before looking further for work.

He found his mother already there. She was eating a slice of butterless bread, and she looked so weary and discouraged Blue quickly inferred that her day had been unsuccessful and that she had begged further credit at the market. Still even this could not rob his eyes of their happy brightness, and hope leaped in her own. But she dropped back into dejection when she learned the cause, growing only mildly interested in the story of the whistle. Doodles, however, overflowed with enthusiasm and questions.

“Was n’t it just lovely you happened to be there?” he cried, his eyes a-sparkle. “Oh, I wish I could have heard you blow it! Please do tell it over once more!”

So the brother recounted the exciting incident, almost forgetting his mother’s sad face in reliving the part that had thrilled him with such delight.

“How much will your papers come to this week?” Mrs. Stickney sandwiched irrelevantly between sentences.

“Oh! I don’t know,” began Blue. “Yes, I

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guess about ninety cents. You see, the Newtons have moved 'way over west, and Mis' Dempster owes me for two weeks. I do' know whether she's goin' to skip or not."

"Have the Sizars paid yet?"

"Not a cent!"

"Do you ask them for it?"

"Oh, I ring the bell every week — and between times, too! But they're gen'ally out, or if they ain't they won't come to the door if they see it's me —"

"I, Blue — not me!"

"Well, I, — and if they do come they say they have n't got it that day, and so it goes."

"It's too bad," the mother sighed. "I suppose you keep leaving the paper."

"Of course. If I did n't they'd get it of some other feller, and it's my only chance."

"I'd go an' sit on the steps and wait till the man came," put in Doodles. "Maybe he'd pay it. If he did n't, I'd stay there all day long, an' if they said to go away I'd tell 'em I was going to sit there till they paid me. And I'd stay an' stay an' stay. By 'n' by the neighbors would begin to ask what I was there for, and, of course, I'd have to tell 'em, an' then the

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folks would be so 'shamed they'd give me the money right off!" He ended with a chuckle.

Mrs. Stickney's face relaxed into a smile, and Blue ran downstairs laughing.

On the boy's return from his paper delivery he found excitement in the kitchen. His mother was crying, Granny O'Donnell was endeavoring to comfort her, and Doodles met his brother's questioning eyes with a frightened face.

"Now, honey," Granny was crooning, "ther' ain't annything to throuble about — it'll all coome right!"

"What's up?" demanded Blue, striding across the room.

"Sure, th' p'lice ar-re afther ye," began Granny, but broke off abruptly, as Mrs. Stickney sprang to her feet, and squaring her boy's shoulders with her hands gazed steadily into the clear eyes.

"You have n't — have n't —" she faltered, and then hid her face against his rough coat, and ended her query with a sob.

"Of course, I have n't!" he ventured recklessly. "Though I don't know what in the world you're driving at!"

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The mother wiped her eyes, and swallowed hard.

“A policeman — was trying to find you. He did n't come up here, for Granny told him you were n't home. He said you were wanted at the police station ‘right away’! He did n't know what the trouble was, or he would n't tell. You gave back the whistle, did n't you?”

“Sure! Why, mother, don't you worry! I haven't done anything except what Tom Fitzpatrick told me to! It may be the Sweeneys are makin' a fuss about the bird,” he mused; “but if they are Tom'll back me up all right. Now do stop cryin'!”

“You must go right off!”

“Well, I'm goin'! But I wish you would n't act as if I'd stole a bank or shot the President! I tell you, there ain't anything to cry for — you're nervous! Poor little mother!” He kissed her, a most unusual attention for him, and then dashed away and downstairs.

But Mrs. Stickney darted after, calling him back.

He came with reluctance.

“What do you want? You must n't hinder me,” he objected.

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“Tell the truth, Blue!” She picked a thread from his sleeve, and straightened his necktie with motherly care. “Whatever they ask you, tell them the whole truth!”

“Why, of course!” with laughing impatience. “Is that all?”

“Yes. And if they blame you for blowing the whistle — or anything, be sure and refer to Mr. Fitzpatrick. I ought to go with you, but I —”

“Aw, it ain’t necessary! I’m all right. Don’t you worry about me!”

Underneath his assumed bravery the boy had no relish for his errand, and he was somewhat dismayed to find that his friend was not visible at the police station. Still he went where he was bidden, with no show of fear, but holding his head high, as became the blower of Thomas Fitzpatrick’s whistle. For even the events of the last hour had by no means extinguished the glory of his afternoon exploit.

The chief was a burly man, with small, shrewd gray eyes set in a hard-lined face.

“What is your name?” he asked.

“Blue Stickney, sir.”

THOMAS FITZPATRICK'S WHISTLE

"You are the boy, I believe, that summoned aid to Officer Fitzpatrick this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Who is your father?"

"My father died six years ago. He was Julius Stickney."

The chief nodded gravely.

"You have a mother?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"What does she do? Does she work anywhere?"

"She did work at the Big Shop, till she had to go out on strike."

"She was foolish to do it." The sharp eyes looked straight into those of the boy.

Blue's met them almost reproachfully. "She had to, sir! She'd 'a' been glad enough to keep on! She's looked everywhere for work. She was in McCann's restaurant till he skipped — he cheated her out o' 'most three weeks' wages!"

"He's a scamp! She is n't the only one that got left."

"I know that all right!" The boy wagged his head emphatically.

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“So you’ve had a hard time to get along, have you?” The voice held a tender note; but, on inspection, Blue found the eyes to be as sharp as before.

“Pretty hard, sir.” There was no response, and the boy, remembering his mother’s last injunction, went on, with a rueful little laugh, “Breakfast ran short this morning, and I stayed out o’ school to see if I could n’t find a job. Mother’s been lookin’ all day.”

“Find anything?”

Blue told briefly of his morning’s nickel, as well as of his mother’s ill success and her increasing indebtedness at the market.

“Well, we are under great obligations for the service you rendered the city this afternoon, and there’s a little something for your supper,” thrusting a bank bill into his hand. “You can tell your mother that it looks now as if the backbone of the strike was broken. We’ve got the leaders of the trouble locked up, and I guess the silver folks and their other hands will come to terms in a hurry. Tell her, too, that we congratulate her on having a son that’s got a head on his shoulders.”

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Blue, red-faced and embarrassed, with stammering thanks, slipped quickly from the presence of the brusque chief, and dashed towards home.

His mother met him at the top of the stairs.

“All right!” he shouted. “Just see that!” He flourished his reward, his eyes rounding from his sudden discovery. “My, if ’t ain’t a five!”

Granny, who had lingered to give consolation in case it should be needed, came hobbling forward.

“Bluey, me b’y, I knew ye’d niver do annything that wud grave yer mother’s heart, an’ it’s proud I am o’ ye!” Granny’s hard old hand caught Blue’s little wiry one in a grip more emphatic than her words.

Mrs. Stickney listened to her boy’s story with growing joy, until when he repeated the chief’s message she dropped into a chair and hid her face in her hands.

“What in the world’s the matter?” gasped Blue.

“Why, she’s so happy!” piped Doodles, tears trickling down his flushed cheeks.

“And you too!” rallied his brother. “Well,

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if you folks ain't the queerest! Don't catch me cryin' on this!" He swung the bill in uncontrolled glee, stopping abruptly to ask his mother what he should buy for supper.

He came home with parcels that set Doodles excitedly guessing what they could be, and when a grapefruit—his especial delight—was uncovered, the small boy broke into a hurrah that checked on her lips the mother's remonstrance at Blue's extravagant purchase. But with the marketman's receipt in her hand, and the chief's two messages in her heart, thankfulness outweighed all else.

Granny remained for a cup of tea, and the meal was as merry as four happy people and a blithe mocking bird could make it.

CHAPTER X

“COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE”

THE chief of police was right. In less than a week Mrs. Stickney was back at her bench in the Big Shop, and things were going on as before the strike.

Dolly Moon's note came while Doodles was alone. Granny O'Donnell fetched it upstairs. It was not often that there were any letters for the Stickneys, but on occasion Granny was always ready.

“Sweetheart dear,” ran the lines, “I have time for only a word before the mail closes; but I want to tell you that my cousin, Rev. Harrison Savage, is to preach at the Church of the Good Shepherd next Sunday morning. That is so near you — only five blocks away — I am wondering if your mother and Blue would n't like to go and hear him. He is lovely! People call him an unusually talented young man. I know they'd like him. I wish

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you could go too! If there were wings in this workaday world of ours, I'd fly straight down to The Flatiron Sunday morning, and I'd bring a little pair of wings for you — then we'd flap along to church! Would n't we have a good time! I'm coming to see you some day, wings or no wings! Love—a thousand bushels!

YOUR OWN DOLLY."

It would n't do to tell how many times Doodles read the note before Blue came home at noon. Nobody, who had n't been a lonely — a very lonely — boy, and who missed his violin playing and his musical comrade as only a real music lover could miss them, would possibly believe the truth. But, then, it was Doodles's first letter, and the first letter is entitled to a great many more readings than the thousandth one.

Mrs. Stickney shook her head sadly when Blue asked the question that Dolly Moon suggested. She had no dress or coat suitable for appearance in the fashionable church on Bliss Avenue — so she declared, and with such emphasis that neither Blue nor Doodles dared to urge the matter.

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Blue's church-going was limited to attendance at Sunday-school — an attendance more or less regular according to his clothes, and he now decided that he did n't care much about hearing somebody preach that he never saw, even though he was cousin to Dolly Moon.

During the afternoon, however, Mr. Gaylord dropped in, and his proposal set hearts fluttering and tongues flying. He, too, had received word from Dolly about her cousin, and as his employer, Mrs. Graham, had expressed her desire to spend the coming Sabbath at home he had obtained permission to use her car long enough to take the Stickney family to and from church.

The mother still kept to her first determination, and even the inducement of an automobile ride could not coax it away. But Blue was jubilant, and Doodles too joyful to do much more than to beam silently on everybody, with an occasional little burst of delight.

To ride in Mrs. Graham's elegant car! To see the grand Bliss Avenue Church, the pride of the city! To listen to a sermon from Dolly

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Moon's own cousin! And — perhaps best of all — to hear the much-talked-of “Good Shepherd” choir, the fame of whose wonderful singing extended hundreds of miles away! It was unbelievable! These thoughts — and a myriad others — danced in Doodles's brain, while Giles Gaylord and Blue chatted of Dolly Moon and gayly arranged such important matters as hours and minutes.

Doodles's mother looked grave, thinking of the child's best suit. Made from one of his brother's, it was shabby from washings and darns; still words would not freshen it, and they were wisely withheld. So the happy plans went on, untouched by anything so commonplace as clothes.

For the rest of the week there were no more lonely hours for Doodles. Every detail of the coming event was pictured over and over by the imaginative boy. His mother and Blue were called upon for frequent and repeated descriptions of churches and church services, for his knowledge of these things was limited to what he could gain from stories and illustrations.

“Oh, you'll see it all Sunday!” Blue told

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him at last, his patience showing marks of breaking down.

“It is nice to know just how it will look,” Doodles replied innocently. “Seems as if I could n’t wait a whole day longer!” He paused before venturing his next thought. “Do you —” he began, and then changed to the negative, “you don’t s’pose they’d have any flowers — it’s ’most winter, you know — you don’t s’pose they would —?” Face and voice were anxious.

The elder boy’s acquaintance with church customs was not intimate, and it was early December! There were greenhouses, of course, like June gardens; but — Blue was doubtful, more than doubtful. Yet he strengthened his brother’s hope in no uncertain words. There’d be enough else to make up, he argued in self-defense, and to-day it was important that anticipation should be full.

The small boy awoke early. On yesterday’s sunset horizon a bank of cloud had suggested rain, and that was Doodles’s first thought; he hardly dared to look at the tiny patch of sky visible through the kitchen window from where he lay. But when he tremblingly peered

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out from the little dark bedroom his heart gave a leap — the patch was blue! Smiling contentedly, he snuggled down on his pillow. What a beautiful day it was going to be! The next time he opened his eyes, his mother was waiting at the bedside, and the smell of breakfast came pleasantly from the kitchen.

Dressing took longer than usual, because of the unfamiliar garments, and the spirit of excitement that pervaded everything — even the stockings, which would n't pull up straight. But that and breakfast were over, at last, and Doodles resting among his cushions. He was wondering what the choir would sing, and wishing their choice would fall on "Only an Armour-Bearer" or "Jerusalem, the Golden," — to which tune his mother was now putting away her dishes, — when somebody knocked on the door.

A uniformed messenger handed Mrs. Stickney a bit of folded paper.

She opened and read the note, staring at the words with a dismayed face.

"No, — no answer," she replied to the boy's query, but without turning her head. She still stood there, looking down on the

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paper with unseeing eyes, while the messenger's retreating footsteps came faintly from below.

“What is it?” Blue emerged from the bedroom, clad in trousers and a bath towel.

“You can't go!” exclaimed Mrs. Stickney in disheartened tones.

“Why not?”

“Mr. Gaylord says — oh, read it yourself!”

The boy grabbed the sheet, and the mother crossed over to where Doodles sat, big-eyed and sorrowful.

“You poor darling!” She took the little face between her palms, and stooped to kiss him.

“Never mind!” he smiled bravely, but the smile broke, and he hid his face in her dress.

“Dear People,” Blue read aloud, “Mrs. Graham has just taken it into her head that she must start for Windsor at ten o'clock — I feel like turning turtle, car and all! If I were not too big a boy, I'd do the next thing, — have a good — or bad — cry. I'll take you to ride some day, if I have to hire a car for it!

“Tragically yours,

“GILES GAYLORD.”

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“It’s a confounded shame!” He flung the note on the floor.

“Blue Stickney!”

“I don’t care — it is! That woman can go to ride every day of her life, and there’s Doodles —! It’s confounded mean, and I’d like to say it right to her face!” He swung himself back into the little bedroom, and the others could hear him stamping off his wrath.

When he came out, a few minutes later, he was smilingly mysterious.

“Don’t you go to getting tired, old man!” he warned his brother. “We’ll make that church yet, if I can work things right!” He took up his hat.

“Oh, Blue, don’t raise his hopes again! You know you can’t —”

“I don’t know any such thing! We’re goin’, I tell you! Just see if we don’t!”

“You must n’t do anything rash!” The mother looked troubled.

“Aw, you wait! I ain’t a fool!” He ran off laughing.

With the ringing of the church bells Doodles’s hopes began to fade. His trust in Blue did not lessen; but even the best plans do not

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work, and he feared that his brother's scheme, like Mr. Gaylord's, was going to fail.

“Maybe I'd get too tired if I went,” he observed philosophically.

“Perhaps,” his mother assented. “I've been a little afraid of it all along.”

Doodles sat up, and bent forward, listening. The sound of hurrying feet was on the stairs. More than one pair were coming up.

The door swung open, and in dashed Blue, followed by a boy somewhat taller than himself.

“Mother, this is Joseph Sitnitsky. He's goin' to help me carry Doodles to church.”

Mrs. Stickney shook hands with the somewhat bashful Joseph, expressing a gracious welcome. Then Blue hastened him over to the window.

“Oh! you are the one who sent me that apple, are n't you?” smiled Doodles, extending a cordial little hand. “It was a lovely apple! We all had some of it—even Caruso!”

A soft whistle sent Joseph's eyes to the mocking bird, and his face brightened with surprise and pleasure.

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“That him?” he exclaimed.

“Same old feller!” laughed Blue. “Would n’t —”

The tolling bells recalled his thoughts to the urgent business on hand.

“Gracious! but we must hurry!” he cried. “Where’s yer cap, kiddie?”

Mrs. Stickney brought it, with the coat which Blue had outgrown.

“I don’t see how you’re going to manage,” — the mother was tucking a handkerchief about the small boy’s neck, — “I’m afraid he’s too heavy for either of you.” She glanced from one to the other.

“Oh, I could to carry him in mine arms!” declared Joseph valiantly.

“But we’re going to make a lady-chair, and take him that way,” put in Blue.

And so they did, the mother watching, a bit anxious, from the top of the stairs, and Granny O’Donnell, in her door, cheering the little procession.

The walk from The Flatiron to The Church of the Good Shepherd was accomplished without serious mishap. Once Doodles slipped, and, righting him, Blue lost his hat; but a

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stranger returned it to his head, and the trio went on again.

“I could to carry him mineself,” observed Joseph.

“Guess you’d better not,” Blue advised. “I tried it last summer, — tock him down to the Settlement for a concert, — I did n’t dare risk it again. It was an awful tug! Mother carried him out a little way, one night, just to get the air; but she had to ask Mr. Schloss to take him upstairs — she was all in!”

“I could to carry him,” Joseph reiterated, “sooner you gets tired.”

But Blue would not confess to fatigue, and at last the church was gained.

No one was in sight. The hush and emptiness outside were forbidding.

“It’s begun!” announced Blue.

“Won’t they let us in?” Doodles whispered tremulously.

“Sure!” was the brave assertion — out of a dismayed heart.

They halted hesitantly, when up popped — seemingly from nowhere — an automaton, dressed in Sabbath dignity and an unsmiling face.

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The doors swung silently open, and they were inside. Doodles lifted his eyes, and his fingers almost forgot their clasp. It was so different from his pictures! The rich, subdued light; the great auditorium, with its beautifully wrought pillars, peopled from altar to entrance; the sweet, thrilling undertone of the organ; the reverent stillness of the waiting throng; — it stirred his soul to awe.

Directly they were seated, in the second pew from the door, and Doodles was free to gaze about him. The vast strangeness of the place bewildered his little home-kept heart, and he reached out his hand for his brother's.

“Tired?” whispered Blue.

“Not much,” his lips smiled, yet Blue's arm was a grateful support, and he leaned back in content.

Roses and music were born for each other, and it was only fitting that with the first note from the choir the eyes of Doodles should catch the glory of the altar — a bank of ferns and red roses. Thus came the twofold feast, and the rapture of it would never wholly pass away.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,” —

“COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE”

it was breathed in soft soprano; “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,” repeated in sweet contralto; “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people”; one after another caught up the words, until they broke from the full choir, a commanding strain.

The tenor chanted, “I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” It came again, distinct, sweet, thrilling, . . . “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And yet once more, that appealing call.

Silence fell. Even the organ was still. Out of the hush rose an eager voice, “Here am I; send me.” Another, “Here am I; send me.” And another, “Here am I; send me.”

Again the tenor, with the clear charge, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people. . . . Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not. . . . Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.”

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, . . .” Flutelike it rose, as if a skylark heralded the glad news.

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It lingered through the interlude.

Presently from the choir burst the triumphant words:—

“Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains; for the Lord . . . shall comfort . . . his people.”

With a little sigh Doodles saw the organist step down from his seat. It was over! The preacher was at the desk. He had a pleasant, boyish face; but he did not look at all like Dolly Moon.

Doodles's thoughts would run away from the prayer to Dolly Moon. Too bad she could n't be there! How well he remembered the first time she had smiled to him—dear Dolly!

By and by came more music,—beautiful but brief. Doodles wondered how it would feel to be singing with that grand organ.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.”

The small boy came to himself with a start. He must not miss a word of that sermon! Nor did he turn again from the speaker until the end.

Once, so still was he, Blue thought him asleep, and bent over, only to see the earnest

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brown eyes wide open though expressing forgetfulness of time and place.

Joseph looked across, and smiled.

Blue smiled back, and gave his brother a moment's wonder. Then he returned to the amusement of looking about.

There was a good deal to see; the men and women in the choir, who whispered to one another; the sexton, who opened windows and shut them; a little boy who would walk out into the aisle; the diamonds in women's ears, which flashed rainbow colors fascinating and beautiful; and a wee girl who knelt against the back of the seat and made faces to everybody.

Blue had had it in his mind to slip out of church ahead of the crowd; but there seemed no convenient moment for a start, and the postlude found the trio still in the pew.

“We could to go up and see the flowers,” suggested Joseph in a whisper.

“Oh, do!” beamed Doodles.

So they waited and waited, for the aisles were full of people who walked lingeringly while they chatted with their neighbors.

It was no easy trick to get Doodles into

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his hand-chair, but it was at last accomplished, and the little procession made its slow way up the now almost deserted aisle. It was worth the pains to see the small boy's delight when he was halted before the waving ferns set with long-stemmed brilliant roses. He had never seen so many together, and he drew breath after breath of their fragrance while his eyes feasted on the novel and beautiful sight.

"Seen enough, old feller?" Blue queried finally.

"Ye — es, I guess so," was the equivocal answer. He bent nearer the roses for a last whiff of their spicy perfume.

"Here, you kids! let them flowers be!"

The janitor had come up the side aisle, unnoticed by the boys.

"Who's touchin' 'em?" cried Blue. "We ain't!"

"Well, you'd better not!" He cast a suspicious eye over the superb array, but discovered no disorder. "Move on!" he growled. "You've hung round here long enough."

"Come! let's go!" shivered Doodles under his breath.

"You'd better count 'em!" Blue flung back

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scornfully to the man who was still hovering over the blossoms with anxiety.

“He could to be polite,” was Joseph’s mild comment when they had passed out of hearing.

It was a rude finale to the inspiring service. Doodles fought away the tears.

“Just one minute!” he pleaded, as they reached the entrance.

The organist was still playing, and, with quick glances to make sure that no church officer was in sight, Blue and Joseph paused for a last strain of the delicious music.

“That’s enough,” announced Doodles, adding, a bit wearily, “now we’ll go.”

The home march was taken almost in silence. Doodles was very tired.

CHAPTER XI

THE PASSING OF THE DANCER

"BLUE," Doodles began tentatively, "you know that poor sick lady that Granny O'Donnell was telling us about last night."

"M-hm."

"I've thought of her ever since, and I guess she is one of God's people that needs comforting. Don't you think so?"

"What?" scowled Blue in surprise.

Doodles repeated innocently, adding, "It must be pretty dreadful to lie there all day long without anybody to talk to."

Blue nodded, wondering what scheme Doodles was amusing himself with now.

"I'm glad you think just as I do," the small boy went on, "because, of course, you'll have to do most of it for me."

Blue straightened in his chair, and began to listen with more interest.

"At first I did n't see any way I could com-

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fort her, and then I thought of Caruso. It was his singing that made me think — oh, he sung just beautifully!”

“And the door was n’t open, was it?” put in Blue. “Too bad! I shut it, the hall was so cold.”

“Door?” Doodles looked puzzled.

“Why, the hall door! You wanted the sick woman to hear Caruso, did n’t you?”

“Oh!” Doodles brightened understandingly. “I did n’t think about the door. Maybe she could hear if it was open.”

“S’posed that was what you were drivin’ at.”

“No! I meant for you to take him down to her room. You would n’t mind, would you?” The query wore an anxious tone.

Blue’s grimace would not have encouraged a stranger, but Doodles laughed contentedly. He knew his brother.

“Caruso don’t sing much now,” the elder boy argued evasively. “Mr. Gillespie said they did n’t in the winter.”

“I know,” admitted Doodles. “But I guess he would, if I wanted him to. You whistle to him, and see if he won’t.”

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Blue good-humoredly struck up a tune, and to his surprise and disappointment the bird started into song.

"There!" Doodles clapped his hands gleefully.

"Wha' 'd yer stop him for?" laughed Blue, for Caruso was suddenly silent.

"Never mind, he'll do it again!"

He did — to the uneasiness of Blue.

"Do you want to take him now?" asked Doodles trustingly. "And tell her, please, that I'd have come myself if I could."

"I don't b'lieve she'd care anything about hearin' him," began Blue, feeling after an excuse.

"Seem's if anybody would, 'specially if they were sick," replied Caruso's master plaintively. "I don't see how I can comfort folks any other way."

Blue looked curiously at his brother.

"You seem to be fierce to comfort somebody all of a sudden," he laughed.

"Of course, I am! Are n't you?"

"I d' n' know — why?"

The clear eyes of Doodles met his brother's squarely. "You remember what the minister

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said last Sunday?" A touch of surprise was in the query.

Blue's cheeks turned a deeper red. "Guess I was n't payin' much 'tention," he admitted honestly.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," Doodles repeated in a soft voice.

"Oh, I know that! The choir sung it."

"Yes, that's what the Lord told his messengers to do, and the minister said we all ought to be God's messengers and carry comfort to people. So I want to comfort that sick lady. You see, I can't do much comforting, but I thought I could send Caruso, if you'd take him. Of course, it won't be as if I really went myself; but do you think God will mind? He knows —"

"I guess it's you doin' it, all right," Blue hastened to assure him. He picked up the cage. "Come along, old feller, you an' I'll go comfortin'!"

Doodles delightedly waved them out of sight, and then leaned back with a smile.

Shortly Blue reappeared, but alone.

"Oh! what did she say? Would n't he sing?"

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“I did n’t try him. She wants you. She says she’s heard you singin’ hymns up here, and nothin’ would do but I must come right up after you. Want to go? I’ll take you pick-aback.”

“You can’t — so far!”

“Yes, I can! I never thought of it before. Come on!”

It was the way Doodles often rode to bed, and he was soon on the stairs — regretting in a whisper that he had not stopped to brush his hair.

“Your hair’s all right, kiddie,” Blue declared; but the small boy continued silent misgivings realizing that smooth locks were not always looked upon by his brother as essential.

It was a dusky little room which they entered, in chilling contrast to the sunny kitchen they had just left. Caruso sat ruffled on his perch, the picture of gloom.

“Oh, I’m so glad you’ve come!” cried the sick woman. “I’ve wished and wished I could hear that again — ‘Jerusalem, the Golden,’ you know.”

She lay quite still through the singing, now

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gazing at Doodles, now closing her eyes as if weary.

“Thanks,” she said at the end. “It carries me back! Jim liked it so much!” She turned suddenly to Blue, who was sitting on a small trunk, Doodles having been put into the only chair. “Do you know what a beautiful voice your brother has?”

“Has he?” smiled Blue. “I like to hear him sing.”

“Oh, but it’s a wonderful voice! Never taken lessons, has he?”

“No,” Blue told her.

“He ought to. But there’s time enough, time enough. Sing something else!”

So Doodles sang again, one hymn after another, in response to her repeated demands.

“I wish Jim could ‘a’ heard that,” she sighed, as the last notes of “The Ninety and Nine” dropped into silence. “Poor Jim — all alone!” With half-shut eyes she rambled on reminiscently. “Why did n’t I go when he wrote he was first violin in the orchestra! If I only had! But I never dreamed — I never dreamed anything would happen! I wanted to stay and earn a little more, just a little

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more — for the baby's stone. She'll have it now — she and Jim together. Carbury said there was enough — glad I got it! Carbury'll see it's done right — he said he would — always does as he says. Wish I could be there too! I do want to lie side o' Jim and the baby! Never mind! I shall see them! 'T won't be long! Seem's if I could n't wait! I'll tell him how sorry I am I did n't go — he was always good to me! If I'd only been there! I wish —" A fit of coughing interrupted her broken talk, and when it was over she lay exhausted on her rumped pillow.

Blue fidgeted about on the trunk, and looked undecidedly over at Doodles; but the little brother sat motionless, gazing at the sick woman with sad, anxious eyes.

She was a girlish slip of a creature, with a face that might have been beautiful but for its lines of suffering. Presently she roused.

"Oh, it's you!" she smiled. "I thought it was Somerby — I hate Somerby! Please sing some more — I guess you sung me to sleep. I feel quite rested."

Only a moment Doodles paused; then he

THE PASSING OF THE DANCER

began the old, old hymn, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul."

The woman lay with close-shut eyes, and once the singer halted, thinking she might be drowsing; but she looked up quickly, with a "Go on! Don't stop!" and he sang it through to the end.

"Lamb of God" and "Pass Me Not" left her still begging for more, and Doodles kept on until he knew by her breathing that she was really asleep.

Shortly, however, she awoke, and surprised him by asking abruptly, "Should you like a fiddle?"

"Oh, would n't I!" exclaimed Doodles. "Christarchus let me use his as long as he stayed; but he's gone, and I can't play any more," he ended plaintively.

"You shall have Jim's!" she cried passionately. "Now I know why I did n't burn it up!"

The brown eyes of Doodles grew big with horror. "Burn it up?" he breathed.

"Yes," she replied wearily, "I did n't want anybody to have it — I was afraid Somerby'd get hold of it. Don't you ever let Somerby have it!" she burst out fiercely. "No matter

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what he says, don't you let him have it! Promise me that, promise me that!"

"No, I won't let anybody have it — ever!" Doodles said earnestly.

She seemed satisfied, and went on. "It's a comfort to think that's settled. It's worried me about Jim's fiddle. I'm glad you're going to have it — you'll love it! I wanted to give you something for singing to me so beautifully. It is good of you to come. There's nothing else in the trunk of any value, but you can have all there is. It is a nice fiddle — I don't know how much it cost, but a lot of money — my, how Jim idolized it!"

"I had an Uncle Jim once," said Doodles; but she did not heed.

"You'd better take the trunk right upstairs now," she went on hurriedly. "Nobody'll need it — there's money enough under my pillow. I've saved plenty — oh, if I could only have kept on a little longer, I'd have had enough to take me home — I did want to lie side o' Jim and the baby!"

The cough seized her again, and the paroxysm was so violent that Blue took fright and ran up to see if his mother had come home.

THE PASSING OF THE DANCER

But the kitchen was empty, and Granny, too, was nowhere to be found.

When he returned, the woman was talking — a strange medley of words which the boys could not piece together to make anything understandable.

Suddenly she burst into a gay little song, for a moment her voice rising full and strong, and then dropping into weak huskiness. Spent with the effort, she lay quiet for a little, but was soon singing again, sacred strains and rag-time ditties running in and out of one another in startling confusion.

The words grew indistinct, the notes halting; they gave place to low mutterings, and finally all was still. Blue watched the gentle rise and fall of the coverlet, and at last tip-toed over to his brother.

The woman opened her eyes, and, gazing earnestly at Doodles, uttered with apparent effort the one word, "Sing!"

So promptly did he respond, Blue breathed an ejaculation as he whirled himself back to the edge of the trunk.

"A — bide with me! Fast falls the ev — en — tide,
The darkness deepens — Lord, with me a — bide!

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When oth — er help — ers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, a — bide with me!"

Softly, distinctly fell the words, while over the face of the sick woman stole a look of peace.

Blue found himself following the hymn with unwonted interest. Never had he heard Doodles sing like that. "It's better 'n church!" he whispered under his breath.

"Hold Thou thy cross be — fore my clos — ing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heaven's morn — ing breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee!
In life, in death, O Lord, a — bide with me!"

The room was silent. The little singer leaned back in weariness. Blue, with a glance toward Doodles, bent nearer the cot. The woman lay as if sleeping, though not a flicker stirred the covers. Blue's face took on a look of awe, and noiselessly he stepped to his brother's side.

"We'd better go upstairs now, you're getting tired."

"She may want me to sing again," he objected.

"No, she won't. She's fast asleep."

Doodles looked across at her.

THE PASSING OF THE DANCER

“Well,” he yielded, putting his arms around his brother’s neck.

Mrs. Stickney had not returned, the sun was low, and the kitchen was growing shadowy; but the warmth felt grateful after the chill of the room downstairs.

“I’ll get somebody to help me bring up that trunk,” Blue decided, “and then for my papers — it’s almost time.”

“Don’t forget Caruso!”

“I declare! I had!” He dashed away, returning at once with the bird.

“Is she still asleep?” queried Doodles.

“Sure!” Blue nodded, and darted off again.

With the trunk actually in the kitchen, Doodles felt the violin to be less mythical. How wonderful it would be to have one of his very own! He was glad Blue did not urge the boy to stay, he was in haste to have the trunk opened. But the lock appeared to be an intricate kind, which Blue could not work, and he finally had to run off for his papers, leaving the trunk still closed.

Doodles was not slow to acquaint his mother with the happenings of the afternoon.

“That dancer!” she exclaimed, before he

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had scarcely begun his story. "Have you and Blue been down in that dancer's room? What possessed you? I should never have let you go if I had been home."

"I guess I comforted her," replied Doodles in excuse. "She seemed to like my singing."

"Well, I'd rather you would n't go down again," said Mrs. Stickney. "Nobody knows who or what she is, except that she sings and dances in some cheap theater. What was it about her fiddle?"

Doodles told, and his mother listened; but before he had finished, Granny O'Donnell called her away.

She was gone a long time. Blue was with her when she came back, and both were strangely grave. After tea Mrs. Stickney tried to unlock the trunk, but did not succeed, and Doodles went to bed without seeing his violin.

CHAPTER XII

THE HEART OF THE FLATIRON

IT was Mrs. Jimmy George that found the road to the heart of The Flatiron.

“Gracious me! what if ’t was my Jim—and my baby!” she wailed, twisting her little hard-worked hands over Blue’s story of the dancer and her passionately-expressed longing to lie “side o’ Jim and the baby.” “Why,” mourned she, her blue eyes tearful, “I’d ’a’ carried her some o’ my strawb’ry jell, if I’d only known! Gracious me, ther’ ’s sights o’ things we’d do, but we don’t have no chance! I’m awful sorry! You say she’d saved up to pay her fun’ral expenses? Would n’t ther’ be ’nough to take her out home?”

Blue shook a prompt negative. “Mother says ther’ ain’t, and Giles Gaylord says ther’ ain’t. Wish ther’ was!”

Mrs. Jimmy George picked up her whimpering Evangeline, while her forehead puckered into two little hard lines above her nose.

“Say,” she burst out excitedly, “it’s a roarin’

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shame to let that poor thing be buried in th' town lot, 'way off f'm her own folks! Gracious, what if 't was me! Say, you just tell Gaylord not to make no 'rangements till I see him!"

Blue stared. Had Mis' George suddenly gone crazy? "Maybe he's started," he said slowly. "He was goin' —"

"Well, run tell him! Quick!" she urged, skipping across the hall and disappearing behind a neighbor's door.

Mrs. Jimmy George was neither a beauty nor a scholar; but — as her still worshipful husband often averred — she was "game clear through."

During the next hour the peevish Evangeline was pacified only on the fly, and for the first time in her short life she began to realize that her mother was not always hers to command.

At the end of that hour Mrs. George astonished Mr. Gaylord by putting into his hand a teacupful of small coin gathered from those residents of The Flatiron whom she had been able to reach.

"An' you just wait till th' men folks come home to dinner," she exulted; "if they don't

THE HEART OF THE FLATIRON

fork over enough to carry that poor little thing out to her Jim, I ain't no guesser!"

Giles Gaylord waited, and again the cracked teacup surprised him. How many sacrifices those half dollars and quarters and dimes and nickels and pennies stood for nobody knew, for they kept their secrets well. Some were guessed about. There was little Tillie Shook, the dressmaker apprentice, who had been planning to buy some "real" lace to trim the neck of her best frock; she finally purchased "imitation Val." which was, she said, just as good for her. Then, John Braunersreuther, who supported his wife and seven children by driving a pair of fat horses for the brewery, gave up his cherished Sunday newspaper for two whole months — and the paper boy wondered why. Leona Montgomery and Frederica Schine suddenly stopped patronizing the "movies," and their fellow-workers in the box shop rallied them about it without discovering the reason. Mrs. Jimmy George herself never bought the blue messaline girdle she had been scrimping and saving for, not even when it was marked down, in the department store window, to sixty-nine cents,

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and The Flatiron respected her reticence on the subject. But there was no longer any doubt that the little dancer was going home to lie "side o' Jim and the baby."

On a cold December afternoon Granny O'Donnell opened her hospitable door, and The Flatiron streamed in, to honor the loyal woman whom in life many of the tenants had never seen. They came by two's, by three's, by whole families; they filled the room, they overflowed into the hallway, they even dropped down upon the stairs, and everywhere was gentleness, courtesy, and reverence. The Curate of St. Mark's read the service for the dead, and Doodles sang "Rock of Ages." Leona Montgomery, in her clear soprano voice, started "Crossing the Bar"; but sobs soon choked the song, and a girl from the theater went on with it to the end.

"It was a lovely fun'ral anyway!" declared Mrs. Homan, wiping her eyes, as the crowd trooped up The Flatiron stairs, after having followed the dancer to the very door of the baggage car. "'T was a fun'ral that would satisfy any earthly mortal, livin' or dead!" And no one disagreed with her.

CHAPTER XIII

“JIM’S FIDDLE”

AFTER the dancer had started on her long journey to “Jim and the baby,” Giles Gaylord dropped into the Stickney kitchen.

“Lucky the theater folks knew her home address, or we’d have been in a fix. Kitty Blue — how strange that she should have the same —”

“What!” interrupted Mrs. Stickney, “her name Blue?”

“Yes. Did n’t I tell you?”

She shook her head absently. “Blue! — Jim Blue!” she murmured. Then she darted across to the trunk in the corner. “This has got to come open!” she exclaimed decidedly, stooping once again to try the key. “Blue, bring me the oil bottle, will you? I’ll put on a little more.”

Footsteps in the hall were followed by a knock. Mr. Gaylord opened the door. As

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Mrs. Stickney was inquired for, he passed out at once.

“I am Mr. Somerby, Edgar Somerby of the People’s Theater,” was the suave introduction, and Blue’s mother found herself facing a well-dressed, smooth-mannered stranger, whose glittering eyes ranged the room even while he was speaking.

“I have called to thank you for your kindness to our late comrade,” he began effusively. “We all appreciate it more than I can express. Unfortunately I was out of town while Mrs. Blue was ill, and so did not know when she — er — passed away. I just heard of it, not an hour ago, coming in on the train.” He had taken the chair offered him, and was leaning back comfortably. “This is a very sad affair. We all feel Mrs. Blue’s death deeply. I was shocked at the news. We were great chums, Kit and I. In fact,” he lowered his voice confidentially, “I fully expected to marry her some day — it has broken me all up! She was a wonderful dancer! Ever see her pirouette? No? Too bad! She was bound to be famous if she’d ’a’ lived. She’d been at it since she was eight years old. Her mother was a baller-

“JIM’S FIDDLE”

ina of some little reputation, I believe. Too bad Kit had to die! Her toe-dancing was simply marvelous! And to think I shall see it no more!” He sat for a moment regarding the diamond on his finger. Then, with a sigh, he asked languidly, “Did she leave any effects — er — anything in the way of musical instruments, do you know?”

“I have seen none,” was the quiet answer.

The man scowled. “She told me not long ago,” he resumed, “about a fiddle she had — I think it belonged to her husband. She said it was n’t — er — valuable at all, but in case — er — anything happened to her, she wanted me to have it, simply as a memento. So you don’t know what became of it when her room was cleaned out?” His sharp little eyes seemed endeavoring to pierce those which faced him placidly.

Doodles held his breath in terror. Must his treasure be wrested from him before he had even looked upon it?

“I never spoke to the woman in my life,” was the easy answer, “and I did not go into her room until after she died. If there was any fiddle there, I did n’t see it.”

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“Did you look about much?” he questioned.

“Oh, yes! We wanted to learn her name, and thought there might be letters.”

“And you found nothing?” eagerly.

“Only a few little articles of no value. The money for her burial expenses here was in a purse under her pillow.”

“So they told me — and how you made up enough to send her home. It was extremely kind of you. But I’m sorry about that fiddle,” he mused. “I had set my heart on having it — for Kit’s sake. Of course, you’ve heard nothing of her giving it to anybody?” he suddenly probed.

Doodles went white. What would his mother —? But she was already speaking — in that soft, even voice of hers.

“If she was so anxious for you to have it,” she smiled, “she would not have been likely to give it to anybody else, would she?” She met his eyes fearlessly.

“Well, no, — er — she would n’t,” he admitted, with a queer laugh. “But in her dying condition she might have been forced into almost anything, you see.”

“JIM’S FIDDLE”

“We are all of us poor people,” said Mrs. Stickney quietly; “but I don’t know of any one in this house mean enough to compel a dying woman to give up anything against her will. Besides, if the instrument was good for nothing, what should a stranger want of it?”

Mr. Somerby shrugged his shoulders. “They might imagine it was valuable. Some folks are so fierce to get the earth they’ll grab any — er — old thing that floats their way. Then you think there is no use in my questioning the other residents?” He awaited her answer with sharp, half-shut eyes.

“It would hardly seem so; but, of course, you can do as you please.”

“Guess it would be a — er — waste of time, though I hate to give it up. It is possible Kit disposed of it. I’ve heard she was hard-pushed sometimes—too bad! I’d have helped her in a minute if she’d ’a’ let me; but she was a — er — proud little minx — always so — er — independent. I should like one little memento of Kit,” he mused. “I can’t realize I shall never see her toe it again.”

He rose, and with a lingering hand-shake repeated his thanks to Mrs. Stickney and

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The Flatiron, after which he said his good-byes.

When the feet of Mr. Somerby were actually upon the stairs, the three looked at one another. Blue threw up his arm and whirled a silent cheer. Doodles grinned delightedly.

"It is well that lock bothered," said their mother, dropping beside the trunk again. "I'm sorry he came. I hated to quibble in that way, but I could n't see what else to do. We must honor the woman's wishes, at all events. I would n't let him have it now anyway," she ended under her breath.

"Why, Doodles promised straight that he would n't give it to him or anybody else — say," Blue suddenly burst out, "I bet he lied about the fiddle, don't you?"

"Looks a little like it," she answered, still working at the lock, "but we can't tell."

"We sha'n't dare let anybody know about it, shall we?" queried Blue.

"They'll have to if I play on it!" Doodles's voice held dismay.

"We won't decide what to do till we get it," Mrs. Stickney smiled. "It does n't look as if that would be very soon. I never saw such a

“JIM’S FIDDLE”

stubborn thing as — ah!” At last the key turned, the lock clicked!

She threw back the cover, disclosing a wavy mass of pink.

“My!” cried Blue, “guess that’s her dancin’ dress.” He held up the fluffy short-skirted frock.

“Is it there?” Doodles bent forward excitedly.

His mother was lifting out more dresses, blue and yellow and white. Then came a long, green-covered something which sent the color into Doodles’s face and then drove it away.

“Lock the door!” ordered Mrs. Stickney in an undertone. Which Blue did.

She laid the instrument across the small knees, and the boy’s breath came fast and fluttering as he lifted it from its case. A look of awe stole into his eyes — his violin! his own! He clasped it to his heart, and bent his head reverently.

“Why don’t you —” began Blue, and then stopped. Doodles was giving thanks.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LETTER

THE boys were still examining the violin when they were arrested by a little broken wail. They turned to see their mother crying over an open letter.

With a bound Blue was at her side. "What is it? What is the matter?" he demanded.

"He was — your Uncle Jim!" She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and began to sob.

"Uncle Jim? — her husband?" Blue's astonished voice sounded strangely unnatural.

The mother assented. "I knew his handwriting — the minute I saw the envelope. I was afraid of it when Mr. Gaylord told me the name — oh, if I'd only known! Now it's too late!" She dropped her head to the cruel edge of the trunk, and wept aloud. "It serves me right! I held myself above her — just because she danced in a theater! O God, forgive me! I've got my pay for being so high and mighty! There I could have found out all about my

THE LETTER

dear brother if I'd treated her like a Christian! And I left her to die alone — my own sister-in-law!"

Mrs. Stickney's remorse was pitiful to see. Blue did not know what to say, but stood there, silent and uneasy.

"Don't cry, mother dear!" pleaded Doodles. "You did n't know, and I guess I comforted her — so that's just the same."

"No, no, it is n't, you blessed child! I'm a wicked woman; but I'm glad as can be that you went to see her, and sung to her. That's my only consolation. And I should n't have let you go if I'd had my way! Oh, what did make me so heathenish!"

Later, when the violence of her grief had subsided, she read to the boys what was doubtless their uncle's last letter to his wife.

D——, M——, Dec. 2, 19—.

KITTY DEAREST, —

Throw up your hat, and give three cheers for Teuffel! Then think of me — first violin in the orchestra! Teuffel has at last waked up to the merits of the humble. I won't tell you what he is going to pay me — good news has

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been known to work havoc, and I must dole it out to you in small spoonfuls, for fear —! But there's the cutest little cottage waiting for my word — waiting for us — right on Prescott Street, too! What do you think of that? Yes, I can afford it! You need n't worry! Don't stop to finish up your engagement! They'll let you off — they've got to! It seems as if I could n't wait to have you in my arms again! I know you will want to work till you have enough for the baby's stone; but just let me attend to that! I'll save every spare cent till we have it. At last I've come to the place where you can stop work and rely on me. Only Heaven and I know how I have looked forward to this day — it has been long in coming! But I won't think about the past. Now you can rest! How I have rebelled at being obliged to let you go on the stage again! We'll hope that is all over. Don't wait for anything, but take the first train west!

I met Nora and Louis this morning. They had heard of my good luck, and were full of congratulations, and, of course, wild to see you. It is almost time for rehearsal, and I

THE LETTER

must say good-bye. Come just as soon as you can pack up, Kitty darling! Send a card ahead if there's time — anyway I'll meet the next train.

Good-bye — wish you were right here where I should n't have to say it! How could I ever have let you go! Your own

JIM.

Mrs. Stickney sighed as she folded the sheet. "It sounds just like Jim," she declared. "He had n't changed a mite. If I could only have seen him once more — or even heard about him! I shall never get over it!"

Later, after a little talk, it was decided to say nothing concerning the trunk or its contents. The family shrank from the wonderment of their neighbors and the inevitable questions that would follow the disclosure. So The Flatiron never knew what a tidbit of gossip had been missed.

For a while Doodles could not be coaxed to try his precious fiddle. He felt that the man with the ferret eyes had ears to match, and who knew how near he might be lurking? But as the days passed, and he was seen no more,

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the small boy gained courage, until finally his desire conquered his fear, and, one stormy evening, he began to play.

Mrs. Stickney, not having heard the assurance of the giver, and her opinion being unconsciously colored by Mr. Somerby's comments, was not prepared for the exceeding richness of the tones that Doodles brought from the instrument.

Blue at once voiced his thought. "That man was a big liar!"

"Look out!" reproved his mother.

"You know he was!" he insisted. "He wanted to get hold of that fiddle, so's to sell it — I bet he did!"

Doodles paid no attention to the talk. He was in another world — the world of music and rapture.

"He ought to take lessons," Blue told himself over and over, and even tried to save up his spare nickels for a possible teacher. Once he appealed to his mother, but she shook her head with such sad finality that he ventured no more.

If Doodles ever longed for knowledge beyond his own rare gifts and the little that

THE LETTER

Christarchus had taught him, the wish never left his heart; and Blue declared that he played "better and better every day."

The Flatiron took the violin as thoughtlessly as it took many other things, and few comments were made concerning the acquisition of the instrument. That the playing was enjoyed by all within hearing was manifest by open doors up and down the corridors, as well as from the homely bits of approval that came by diverse ways to the Stickney kitchen. These short, dark days were Caruso's silent season. Thus the violin became Doodles's work, play, comrade, and comforter, during the long hours while his mother and Blue were away.

CHAPTER XV

HOSPITAL DAYS

IT was on a cold April morning that Mrs. Stickney awoke feeling very ill. The exertion of dressing increased her distress, and after rousing Blue she lay down again.

He kindled the fire, filled the teakettle, and dressed Doodles.

“I don’t see why I should be sick,” she worried. “I was well enough last night when I went to bed. I cannot go to the shop if this pain does n’t let up.”

“You’ll feel better when you’ve had some breakfast,” Blue told her cheerfully; but her reply was a sudden wince, and only with a mighty effort did she keep from groaning aloud.

The boy had so often assisted about the meals that he worked without awkwardness or delay, and presently he had a slice of toast delicately browned and the tea simmering fragrantly. Yet Mrs. Stickney could not eat;

HOSPITAL DAYS

she leaned back in her rocker, white with suffering.

Remedy after remedy was of no avail, and finally Blue ran down to ask Granny O'Donnell what should be done.

Granny limped upstairs at once, and soon coaxed the sick woman to sip a steaming herb drink, one of her favorite cure-alls.

"It seems as if I did feel a little easier," was the verdict at school time; so Blue went whistling down the street in the belief that his mother would speedily recover.

At noon, however, he opened the kitchen door on a sorrowful group, Granny, Mrs. Jimmy George, and Doodles. Granny was anxiously endeavoring to be calm, but the other two were weeping openly. Evangeline, in her mother's arms, unnoticed in the strain of the moment, was blissfully engaged in the forbidden delight of pulling down her mother's hair.

Blue turned to Granny, a woeful question in his eyes.

"I'm awful sorry for yer!" began Mrs. Jimmy — "Goodness gracious, Evangeline George, what are you doin'!" She gathered

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together her falling tresses, administering a tiny slap to the pouting culprit. "If that kid ain't a terror! I'm wonderin' all day long what she'll be up to next!"

"She's in th' bidroom," nodded Granny to Blue, across the now wailing Evangeline. "Don't ye go to worryin', me dear! 'T ain't goin' to be mooch, likely!"

He waited for no more, but darted to the half-shut door, pushed it wide, and went in.

His mother held out her hand. "My poor boy!" she said tremulously.

"What is it?" he managed to ask.

"I've got to go to the hospital and have an operation! I sent for the doctor — I grew so much worse — Granny said I must — so she asked Donovan to telephone. He said right away I'd got to go — oh, it seems's if I could n't! What will you do — you and Doodles?"

"When you goin'?"

"At half-past one."

"Not to-day?" with alarmed emphasis.

"Yes. The doctor said it was my only chance." Her voice broke and then steadied

HOSPITAL DAYS

again. "I am not afraid; but you —" she halted for composure.

"Don't mind me!" Blue spoke out bravely. "Doodles and I will be all right. You won't have to be gone long."

"He says a week or ten days even if all goes well." She fingered her shawl fringe nervously. "Sit down here a minute," pulling gently at his sleeve.

He dropped to the edge of the bed, while she went on hesitantly.

"I wanted to say, if I — if anything should happen, you'll take care of Doodles and keep him with you — as long as you live?"

"Of course, I will, mother! But there is n't goin' to anything happen!"

"You can never tell! The doctor admitted there is danger. And — if I should n't come back, I want you always to do right and grow up to be just as good a man as you know how to be. Go to Sunday school, and to church, too, when you can! I wish now I'd have gone myself, and not thought of clothes or being tired — well, if God gives me another chance I'll try to do better." She sighed. "I guess I have n't set you a very good example —"

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“You have too!” Blue burst out. “You’re all right!”

The mother put his hand to her lips, and held it there.

“You’re a good boy now,” she resumed, “and I want you to keep so. Don’t ever drink or swear! Read your Bible every day, and never forget your prayers night and morning!”

“Don’t you worry!” Blue said huskily. “I’ll do all you want me to.”

“I’m sure you’ll do your best, but if I’m not here to help,” she shook her head slowly, “I don’t see how you’re going to get along. The town may want to send you both to the asylum, and I’m afraid Doodles would n’t be happy there — oh, I ought not to worry! God will take care of you, but I can’t help feeling anxious. At any rate, keep Doodles with you! You will, won’t you?”

“I’d like to see anybody try to get him away from me!” scouted Blue. “He’d wish he was out o’ the tussle before he was many minutes older!”

The mother smiled faintly. “All right!” she agreed. “I’m glad you feel that way.

HOSPITAL DAYS

I've always tried to make it as easy for Doodles as I could, and I know you do."

They sat in silence for a long moment. Then she resumed, "There's four dollars in my purse; that'll last you a while. The rent is paid for nearly a month more, and all you'll want is food. Don't spend for anything unnecessary, but buy what you need to keep well and strong."

"I guess I shall do it all up straight," Blue reassured her. "Say, how you going to get over to the hospital? It's a good way, and you ain't able to walk —"

"The doctor said he'd send somebody with a car — another doctor, I believe. He thought it would be easier than the ambulance. He told me to be very careful going downstairs, and to keep still till I went."

"Ye'd better be takin' a bite before long — it's all riddy," broke in Granny's gentle voice.

Mrs. Stickney could eat nothing, but Blue went as bidden, and tried to keep up a brave show, for the sake of Doodles.

The afternoon was dreary. Blue would not go to school, but stayed with his brother

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except for the short time that he raced over his paper route. It had been arranged for him to go to the hospital at six o'clock, to learn how his mother had borne her operation and, possibly, to see her for a moment. But an entirely unprecedented accident delayed him. At half-past five the clock stopped, and it was not discovered until long after six. Then Blue caught up his cap, and started on a hard run.

It was a hot and breathless boy that at last halted on the hospital steps and pushed the bell button.

"It is too late," the attendant answered. "You cannot be admitted to-night."

"But I want to know how my mother is, — Mrs. Stickney," faltered Blue.

At the moment a girl was crossing the hall, and turned towards the other with the quick query, "How is she?"

"On the verge of collapse!" was the low reply. "Dr. Grace says she'll never come out of it; she can't last till morning!"

A gust of wind swept through the long hall, swinging the door together. It shut with a snap, and Blue, stunned by what he had heard, walked slowly down to the big gate.

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How could he go home to Doodles with such news! The nurse must have meant his mother, yet would they have been so cruel as to refuse him admittance and then coolly let him know that she would die before morning? It was too horrible! He walked on and on and on, his mind in a tumult. When, finally, he took notice of his surroundings, he could not tell where he was. A policeman set him right, and with a sick heart he turned towards home. Home! The name mocked him! It would never be home if his mother did not come back. One faint ray of light pierced the blackness of his soul, — the woman might, possibly, have referred to somebody else! If he could only know! But there was no way of finding out before morning, and a night of such suspense might kill Doodles. His feet lagged as they neared the home corner. He felt that he could not face his brother with the uncertain story. What should he do? He turned, and began to walk back the way he had come. Suddenly there came to his mind the name of Dr. Hudson, the physician his mother had called — he would know! Of course, he would! His office was in the bank block, not

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three squares away! He struck into a run, and did not stop until he stood at the entrance of the building. He searched for the number of the office, and was carried up in the elevator.

The door was locked. A card bore the information, "Gone to dinner. Back at 8.00."

Blue read it disconsolately. Should he wait?

"If I knew where he lived," he muttered, "I'd go to his house." His next thought was to find out, and in a moment he was consulting a directory in one of the shops below. Presently he was on his long way to 1062 Garden Street; but when he reached the place he was again disappointed.

The Polish maid who answered his ring told him, with hesitation and many gestures, "Doctor not home — dinner — he go!"

"What shall I do?" involuntarily passed the boy's lips.

"What is it, Mary?" A lady was coming downstairs.

"I wanted to see the doctor, and find out how my mother is!" Blue cried eagerly.

"Dr. Hudson will be back in a short time, I think. Will you come in and wait?"

The sympathetic voice and manner were

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winning, and Blue was soon seated in the physician's office, answering the lady's questions and telling his story.

"We need not wait for Doctor," Mrs. Hudson decided. "I think we can find out now."

She crossed to the telephone, and Blue sat tense, his heart quickening, as she called the hospital number and gave her inquiry. What would be the answer?

A happy "She's all right!" was flung in his direction; then the telephoning continued.

Before the boy had recovered his poise, the doctor's wife was at his side.

"What you overheard must have referred to some one else. They say that your mother's operation was a success, and that she has come out of the anæsthetic better than they expected. I am so glad for you! Now you will have good news for the little brother at home!"

She had thoughtfully arranged for him to be admitted to the hospital ward early the next morning, and he left the house with the touch of her motherly hand still upon his shoulder and the sound of her cheering voice still in his ears.

Mrs. Stickney did not return home in a

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week, as the boys had hoped, and Doodles longed for his mother with a craving that Blue, who visited her regularly, every day, could scarcely comprehend.

“She’ll be here in a week or so, old feller — don’t you worry!” the elder brother would laugh, and then drop it from his mind.

But Giles Gaylord understood. His mother’s life had gone out in a hospital, and his heart yearned for the lonely little lad. Accordingly he laid plans, and on a sunny afternoon he astonished Doodles by running in briskly and asking if he would like a ride.

“Now?” cried the boy, his face alight with dawning joy.

“Right now!” was the gay answer. “Car’s at the door!”

Doodles did not guess of their destination until they stopped at the great white building, and only then when he saw the words over the door, “St. Luke’s Hospital.”

Barriers had a pleasant way of falling before Giles Gaylord’s smile; so now, although it was not a visiting hour, he walked in at the big door, with Doodles in his arms, up the broad stairway, and down the ward straight

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to the window where Mrs. Stickney sat reading.

“Mother!” It was scarcely more than a murmur, but to the young man all the terror and joy and longing of the last ten days were blended in the one word.

The call had to be short; but it was full of happiness, and presently Doodles was in the car again, gliding out into the greening country where blossoms of gold starred the fields and roadsides.

They did not talk much. The radiant little face beside him was enough for the driver, who had always a spare hand to tuck in the robe whenever it fell away from the slight form. Once or twice he called the boy's attention to some rare bit of landscape; but for the most part the way was silent.

At a tiny house on a green knoll the car stopped.

“Where are we going now?” queried Doodles. But Mr. Gaylord only laughed mysteriously as he lifted him out.

In a moment the little lad was seated in a quaint, old-fashioned room with a sanded floor and queer little tables and straight-backed

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chairs. The tables were laid with dainty white china and shining old silver, and right in the middle of each was a glass boat filled with dandelions. A young girl in white cap and apron brought in a pitcher of milk and some odd-shaped biscuits, with a dish of cookies and buns. Then he suddenly remembered that he was very hungry. Did anything ever taste so good! Weariness flew away on wings of magic. Tongues grew merry, and soft laughter became so infectious that the pretty serving-maid smiled happily to herself just beyond the door. It was a wonderful little feast. And the ride back to town — well, there was never such a ride, Doodles thought.

They found Blue at home and hunting, with a vague fear, for his missing brother.

“I wish you could see how many thank-you’s I feel,” Doodles said, as Mr. Gaylord set him carefully among his cushions; “but you could n’t hold them all — they’d spill over. I think you must be one of God’s comforters.”

CHAPTER XVI

CARUSO SINGS IN PUBLIC

CARUSO was in fullest song now that spring was in town, and he did all that he could to cheer his best friends. His task was hard, and, whether he perceived its difficulties or not, he sang from dawn to dark, and did not even stop at night whenever the moon gave him light to sing by. Yet, much as they loved the songster and his music, the Stickney family could not be won over to forgetfulness of the real trouble that shadowed them.

The mother gained but slowly, the third week at home found her still unable to work, and the question that constantly confronted her was, "What will become of us?"

Granny O'Donnell, whose income was ample for her slender needs, had been an actual fairy godmother to the boys during those lonely hospital days, and now she was continually cooking more food than she could eat, and bringing the surplus up to the Stick-

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ney kitchen. Frequently, too, small bills would be discovered hiding under a plate of doughnuts, a pan of rice, or a pot of beans. Mrs. Stickney felt that this must not be allowed too long, and if she could not work — what then? The worry was kept from Doodles as much as possible, yet his mother saw with a heartache that he was graver than usual, and, in consequence, she sang when it would have been easier to cry, hoping night after night that the next morning would see the return of her old strength.

After a little she did gain sufficiently to permit her to resume her place in the shop; but she found it impossible to work at her former speed, and her weekly envelope sometimes held less than half her usual pay.

“Say, mother!” Blue burst in with, on a May afternoon, “Miss Holcomb wants to know if Doodles and Caruso can come up to the settlement to-night. They’re going to have a concert, and they want Doodles to play and Caruso to sing — yes, and Doodles to sing, too!”

“Why, I — don’t know,” Mrs. Stickney began, glancing uncertainly towards the

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cushioned chair. But the boy's face decided it, radiant as it was with the sudden prospect. "I guess it won't hurt him," she finished.

They started at seven o'clock, Blue and Joseph Sitnitsky with Doodles between them, and Mrs. Stickney carrying Caruso and the violin. Fears that strange surroundings and the somewhat noisy crowd might frighten the little gray singer into silence were presently forgotten, for as soon as the lights went low and the cage was placed in the bright rays of the full moon the slim bird began his wonderful song.

The audience, having been warned against demonstrations, was almost mouselike in quietness, and the singer went on and on as carelessly merry as if he were caroling in the home kitchen. A few of his hearers knew what to expect from him, but to the majority his marvelous singing was as novel as it was entertaining. When, at last, he broke off suddenly to scold at a tiny girl who had strayed from her mother and too near his cage, the assembly burst into such applause as was unusual even at the concerts of the Cherry Street Settlement.

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After that Doodles sang "Old Folks at Home," and was encored so heartily and so long that he gave "Edinboro Town," one of his mother's favorites when she was in a gay mood. Further along on the programme he played several simple melodies on his violin, and as he slipped into "Annie Laurie" he glanced towards Caruso, whose cage had been set back into the shadow. Quite as if awaiting a signal, the bird struck into tune, and away they soared together, the mocker and the violin, to the uncontrolled delight of the audience.

After the entertainment Caruso held an impromptu reception, for everybody wanted a closer view of the slim gray bird with the astonishing powers of song. Many questions were asked for Doodles to answer, and the small boy reached home too excited to do anything but talk. It was long after midnight before he could sleep.

"I ought to have known better than to let him go," regretted the mother; but Blue argued, "It won't hurt him! Will it, old feller?" And Doodles, his eyes shining out of his weariness, declared in favor of his brother.

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But in the early morning he awoke in unusual pain, and it was only after his mother had dosed him again and again with a soothing remedy that he fell into slumber. Yet he insisted on being dressed in time to eat breakfast with the others, especially that he might better enjoy the corn cake which Granny had brought up to them.

"This will fix you out all right," Blue told him, his mouth full of the dainty.

Doodles nodded, with a brave, wan little smile. "It was nice for Granny to give it to us," he said.

"Granny's the girl for me!" declared Blue, swimming his own and Doodles's piece in the maple syrup which had accompanied the cake.

"She's the best friend we have," his mother agreed. "Don't pour on so much, Blue! We must be careful —"

Blue understood the unfinished sentence. Yet he said, "Doodles and I like 'much,' don't we, kiddie?" Then he set the pitcher aside, and ate his second helping without replenishment of the sweet.

Doodles dozed away an hour or two of

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the long forenoon, and was beginning to feel quite rested when a knock announced a caller.

To his cheery "Come in!" the door opened upon a woman, — a stocky, youngish woman, with pale blue eyes, heavy cheeks, and a double chin. She swept across to the cushioned chair.

"How d' ye do! I thought I'd find you at home," with strong emphasis. "I was at the concert last night," she went on, seating herself somewhat laboriously in the offered chair; "perhaps you remember me."

Doodles gave a smiling assent. He could hardly have forgotten that plumed hat with its gorgeous pins, the shimmering green satin gown, and, — when she had drawn off one of her long white gloves, — those stubby red fingers, sparkling to the knuckles with diamonds.

She abruptly introduced her errand.

"I have come to talk about your bird. I took a fancy to him last night, and I want to know what you'll sell him for."

"Oh!" It was a frightened, pitiful little cry, and, all in an instant, Doodles's face matched

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it. "I — don't want to sell him — I would n't sell him for anything!"

The woman laughed, a cold, hateful laugh that flashed fear through the boy's heart.

"I guess you will," — she winked coaxingly, — "when you know what I'll pay for him. I'll give you twenty dollars! Just think, tw-en-ty bright silver dollars!"

She smiled quite as if the matter were settled, but there was no response on the scared white face opposite. Doodles looked straight past her to the cluster of faded red roses on the wall paper back of her chair.

"Tw-en-ty beautiful bright silver dollars!" she reiterated in a wheedling tone.

"I don't want to sell him!" Doodles insisted firmly, his eyes still on the roses.

"Well, now," she resumed, "I know you're a sensible little boy, and you listen while I tell you how it looks to me. I understand that your mother is in rather straitened circumstances, being just out of the hospital, and not very well, and all. So, you see, twenty dollars would help her wonderfully. Of course, you love her dearly, better than anything else in the whole world, don't you?"

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Doodles bowed his head miserably.

“I knew you did. And if you could give her a lift with twenty dollars — now, when she needs it most, how beautiful it would be! You know you are not able to work as your brother does; but you can do this, and then your dear mother will stop worrying and grow strong and well again. I am sure you are not a selfish boy, to want to keep all the good things to yourself.”

She paused, noting with almost a start the effect of her cruel words.

The drawn little face had grown whiter and stiller with every fling, until she feared he was going to faint. But as he sat rigidly in his chair she went on.

“You’ll let me have the bird, won’t you?” she coaxed. “And those twenty silver dollars will make your mother so happy! I can imagine how she will kiss you and call you her darling, blessed little boy!”

Suddenly Doodles fixed his big brown eyes on the woman’s own, and involuntarily she recoiled. Their misery and reproach stabbed her soul. She dropped her glove, and stooped to pick it up, fumbling with its buttons. When

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she looked again, Doodles had turned away, and her composure came back.

“You want those bright silver dollars, I know, so I’ll count them over for you.”

She opened her bag, and tore apart a paper roll. Out poured the coins in a shining heap.

“See!” she cried. “Are n’t they pretty? And they’re all yours!” She began counting, — “One, two, three, four, five,” — they dropped one by one into the boy’s passive hand.

“I don’t want them!” he choked, and threw them passionately back into her lap. Then, with an overpowering sob, he turned from her and hid his face in his pillows.

“Why, now, you must n’t do that!” she exclaimed. “I thought you wanted to help your mother and keep her well, so she would n’t have to go back to the hospital —”

He looked up in terror.

“Will she have to go again, if —”

“Why, of course,” she broke in glibly, “if she worries and don’t get strong, her trouble may come on —”

“P’raps I’ll — let you have him to-mor-

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row," he said hurriedly. "Blue will know what is best."

"Oh, I would n't say anything to your brother about it!" she hastily advised. "He might say you'd better keep the bird, without realizing how much good the money would do your mother; because he would wish to please you on account of your — your lameness, you know. Oh, if you really want to help your mother, as I'm sure you do, you'll let it come as a surprise to her and Blue — that will be the very best way."

She glanced at the clock. It was almost noon. She had no wish to meet that shrewd-eyed brother of Doodles, in fact she was frantically anxious to avoid him, and she quickly pulled on her glove.

"You'd better let me take the bird along," she smiled, "and then you can give the money to your mother when she comes home to dinner. Won't that be nice?" She arose, and poured the coins on the table.

"No! Oh, no!" cried Doodles wretchedly. "I can't — now! I want to think! You wait — wait till to-morrow! Then — maybe —" he began to sob again.

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The town clocks started to strike. Blue might be in at any minute!

“Well, well!” she said soothingly, “stop crying, and I’ll come again to-morrow. I must be going now. Remember not to say anything about this, if you really wish to help your mother! I know you’ll want those twenty dollars to give her to-morrow! My, how happy they’ll make her! Good-bye, darling!” She threw him a kiss from the doorway, which he did not see. His eyes were too full of tears.

At dinner he was unusually quiet, and he ate but little.

“You’d better begin on that tonic again,” his mother decided, and after the meal she fetched a bottle from the cupboard and prepared him a dose. Poor Doodles! What tonic could reach this new and startling trouble! But he swallowed it meekly, and did not know whether it were bitter or sweet.

Next morning he was pale and haggard, and confessed, on being questioned, that he had lain awake a long time in the night.

Mrs. Stickney shook her head gravely, and reproached herself again for having allowed

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him to go to the settlement concert. "I ought to have known better!" she said over and over.

After she had gone to the shop, and while Blue was washing the breakfast dishes, Caruso began to sing. The accompanying rattle of the knives and plates seemed to spur him on, for he put in all his usual notes and many others, and sang "Annie Laurie" twice through without stopping.

"Don't he go it, this morning!" exclaimed Blue, as the bird stopped suddenly, and hopped down to his water cup, to refresh his throat.

There was no response from Doodles, and the elder boy turned to see his brother with head towards the window.

"That was a dandy performance, was n't it, kiddie?" Blue persisted.

No answer.

"What's the matter, old man? Feel worse?"

A soft, suspicious-sounding "No" sent Blue over to the window, hands dripping.

With a little protesting gesture Doodles turned to the doubtful comfort of his pillows, and began to sob.

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“Why, kiddie!” Blue drew him into his arms. “Is the pain so bad?”

The fair head shook decidedly.

“What in the world is it then?”

The sobbing increased.

“If you won’t tell me, how can I do anything for you?” Blue gave a soft laugh. “Shall I get some medicine?”

“N—no.”

Caruso started to sing again, and Doodles pressed his head close against his brother, as if striving to shut out the sounds.

“Does his singing hurt you?” Blue asked in some surprise.

“N—no — yes — o—h!”

“Here, then, shut up, you!” commanded Blue, flinging a hand in the direction of the cage.

There was instant silence.

“Oh, don’t stop him! Let him sing! Dear, dear birdie!”

“Why, I thought the noise made you feel bad!”

“No, — oh, no!”

“Well, what does ail you?” cried Blue, almost with impatience. Then he patted the

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small shoulder tenderly. "Can't you tell brother?"

Doodles still shook his head, but he reached for Blue's hand, and stroked it.

"Whew! 'most school time! I must finish those dishes in a jiffy!"

Left to himself, Doodles lay limply against the cushions, now and then giving way to a long, heavy sigh.

"Wish you'd tell me before I go," urged Blue, halting beside the little brother's chair, cap in hand. "I've only a minute — speak quick!" he prodded playfully.

"Oh, don't go! don't! don't!" pleaded Doodles with sudden passion, holding to Blue's coat with gripping fingers.

The boy tossed his cap on the table.

"'Course I'll stay, if you want me to; but if I do, you've got to tell me what ails you! And you might's well soon as late."

"I — can't!"

"Yes, you can! Why not?"

"She said —"

"Who said?"

"The woman — she —"

"What woman?"

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“I do’ know — oh, she said I must n’t tell you!”

“Well, you must! Where was she?”

“Here.”

“When?”

“Yesterday forenoon.”

“What’d she come for?”

“She wants — Caruso!”

“Does she! Well, she can’t have him! You do’ know who ’t was?”

“No. She was at the concert.”

“Oh! Then’t was n’t Mis’ Sweeney!”

“Why, you saw her! That fat one with diamonds all over her fingers.”

“Aw!” Blue’s expression told the rest. “So she come sneakin’ round to try to get that bird!”

“She said ’t would help mother.”

“Help mother?” Blue was mystified.

“The money,” Doodles explained. “She’ll give twenty dollars for him!”

“Twenty dollars!” scorned Blue. “Not much! Why, Sandy Gillespie said he was worth two hundred!”

Doodles sat up straight, his eyes big with wonder.

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“Two hundred! You never told that before!”

Blue laughed. “Did n’t mean to now. I thought it was safer not to.”

“Two hundred dollars!” repeated Doodles under his breath. He looked across at the mocking bird with incredulous eyes.

“Wha’ ’d you say to her?” Blue queried.

Doodles repeated as much of the talk as he could recollect.

“And she’s comin’ again this morning?”

“I s’pose so — oh, don’t leave me alone, don’t!”

“‘Course I won’t, kiddie! Wha’ d’ ye think I’m made of? I’ll like the fun o’ tendin’ to her! I ain’t afraid!”

Doodles drew a sigh of relief. Then his eyes grew anxious.

“You don’t think we ought to sell him — to help mother?”

“Naw! We’re gett’n’ along all right.”

Doodles settled back against his cushions and Blue’s assertion. How comforting it was to have a brother equal to emergencies!

Ten o’clock came before the be-plumed caller appeared. According to agreement,

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Blue was not in sight until she was seated. Then he sauntered in from the bedroom. That the woman was greatly disconcerted by his sudden entrance was plain, and Blue inwardly chuckled.

"I supposed you were in school," she began indiscreetly.

"No, I thought I'd stay out and see you," grinned Blue.

"Ah? Then your brother has spoken of me?"

"Oh, yes! He and I are great chums."

"That's very nice — just as all brothers should be," she purred sweetly. "And then, of course, you agree with him about selling me the mocking bird," she added tentatively, with a fluttering smile.

"Sure!" beamed Blue.

"Oh, I'm so glad! I do like to see boys ready to help their mother, and those twenty silver dollars will do her no end of good."

"Ye — es," drawled the boy, "I s'pose she or anybody'd like twenty dollars well enough; but I guess they'd like two hundred better, would n't they?" His eyes sparkled.

"Two — hundred?" she repeated, frowning. "What do you mean?"

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“I mean,” and Blue’s eyes met her own squarely, “that we shan’t sell Caruso for less than two hundred dollars.”

The woman gathered herself together. “Absurd!” she cried. “You’ll never get it, never!”

“All right!” smiled Blue. “We’re satisfied.”

“But — but have n’t you any regard for your mother?” she exclaimed, still clinging to her original tactics. “Think what that twenty dollars would buy! And she slaving herself for you! It’s an extravagance for you to keep such a bird!”

“That’s our business!” returned the boy quietly.

“Well,” she flung out with rising anger, “I hope you’re saucy enough! I might have expected it from anybody that lived in The Flatiron!” She rose hurriedly. “You’ll see the day that you’ll regret this!”

A retort was upon Blue’s lips, but the face of his brother, white and troubled, held it back, and the woman swept from the room in silence.

CHAPTER XVII

A THUNDERBOLT

IT was hot in The Flatiron. The July sun rose early and blazed over the tin roof, until by nine o'clock the rooms underneath began to feel like ovens. Doodles had never drooped as he drooped this summer. Yet he sang and made melody on his violin whenever he was able, and forgot the tenement and the hard things of life.

Across the sea of roofs, from the kitchen window, was a small opening through which one with clear eyes might discern a bit of velvety green and a fleck of brilliant color.

"See!" piped Doodles joyously. "Seems's if ther' was more red than ther' was yesterday. It's lovely!" he breathed. "It looks like — heaven!"

"Heaven!" sniffed Blue. "I should think't 'u'd look more like h—the other place!"

"Blue Stickney!" His mother's voice was horrified.

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“Well, I should!” the boy insisted defiantly. “Him sitt’n’ here day in ’n’ day out, roastin’, and never goin’ any nearer the park ’n’ that! It’s he’ — awful! — that’s what it is — I don’t care if I do say it!”

The door slammed its appreciation of Blue’s honesty, and Mrs. Stickney gazed across at Doodles with a sigh.

Plainly the small boy had paid no attention to his brother’s words. The heavenly morsel of landscape was absorbing all his thoughts.

But after dinner, when the city flags hung limp on their staffs, and the sun flamed fiercely round the corner of the kitchen window, even the bit of beauty in the distant park looked glaringly hot. Doodles dropped back on his pillows, and shut his eyes.

“Whew, if this is n’t a roaster!” fumed Blue, jerking off his blouse. “That thing don’t go on again till it’s cooler!”

“You’ll have to wear it when you deliver your papers,” said Doodles mildly, opening his eyes.

“I won’t,” declared Blue savagely. “I’m not goin’ to swelter for fashion! Mother’s got the best of it this afternoon in the shop.

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They'll git a breeze there if ther' is any. Don't you want to lie down and take a nap?"

"Is it cooler in the bedroom?" queried Doodles. "If 't is, I'll go."

Blue skipped away to investigate.

"Seems's if 't was — some," he reported.

But Doodles, breathing the stuffy air of the little room, wished he was back at his window.

"Now p'raps you can go to sleep," Blue told him.

"Maybe," he replied patiently.

Blue sat down in the rocker, and fanned himself furiously with a newspaper. Then, tossing it to the floor, he went over to the window. The sun was like a furnace. "Goodness!" he ejaculated, and roved into the hall. Reminders of various dinners stole up the stairs. Still it seemed a little less stifling, and he dropped to the upper step. He sat there, allowing his thoughts wide range till they came back to Doodles. He jumped up, and tiptoed into the bedroom.

His brother spoke weakly. "P'raps I'd better go out to the window — I can't breathe good in here."

"Should n't think you could!" Blue lifted

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him gently. "'T is n't so bad in the hall," he said. "Let's try that — I've been sitting there."

Putting Doodles on the floor, he ran back for some cushions and arranged them as a sort of couch, on which he made the small boy as comfortable as he could.

"Wish you'd tell me about the picnic," said Doodles wearily. "Will it be out in that beautiful country where Mr. Gaylord took me?"

"I guess it's in another direction — Highland Grove. I don't just know. But they say it's fine — the fellers that have been."

"Seems 's if I could n't wait! Is it Wednesday?"

"Yes, only a week from to-morrow."

"You're sure you can get the tickets?"
The voice was anxious.

"Sure, kiddie! Don't you be worryin' 'bout that!"

"No, but once in a while I think, what if I could n't! When'll you get them?"

"I do' know — next week prob'ly."

"And you think there'll be ice cream?"
The question quivered with eagerness.

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“ ’Course! ’T would n’t be a picnic without! Oh, the Salvation Army folks do things up fine!”

“How does ice cream taste? Please tell me again.”

“Oh, it’s cold — cold as Blixen! ’N’ it tastes like — let me see — I guess like candy ’n’ cake all in one. It’s harder ’n’ ’most anything, an’ it squ’shes all up and melts to nothin’ right in your mouth.”

“Does it taste like Granny’s gingerbread?”

Blue’s head shook decidedly.

“No — why, you remember that big round cake Mis’ Jimmy George gave you — all soft inside?”

“Yes.”

“It’s more like that — only better —”

“Better? I don’t see how it could be!”

“Oh, you just wait! Ice cream ’s a million times better ’n that! It’s so cold ’n’ sweet, it feels jolly good goin’ down — wish I had some right here this minute — um-m-m!”

“It must be beautiful!” sighed Doodles.

“Shame you’ve never had any!”

“It’s nice I’ll have some next week,”

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Doodles smiled. But it was a tired little smile. Next week seemed very far away.

“Wh-ew!” Blue blew out the word in a long breath. “It’s hotter ’n Hannah! I don’t b’lieve I was ever so hot in my life! Hope it’ll cool off before five.”

“Do you s’pose it’s any better by the window?” sighed Doodles.

“Worse!” scowled Blue. The sun’s scorching, an’ ther’ is n’t a speck of breeze. Feel bad, old feller?”

Doodles’s white little face seemed to grow whiter all at once.

“I can’t — breathe good,” was the faltering answer.

“It’s the heat — that’s all, kiddie. Cheer up! It’ll be night before long, and then, maybe, we’ll have a breeze.”

“Do you mind — getting me a drink?” came weakly.

“Sure I will!” Blue ran to the hall sink with a glass, and fetched it back brimming.

Doodles took a few swallows, and Blue finished it.

“Ugh!” ejaculated the elder boy, “that’s worse’n the weather!”

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Setting the glass in a safe corner, he dropped beside his brother, but as he glanced down, terror clutched him. He had never seen Doodles look like that. He took one of the small hands in his own. It was damp and cold! He dashed into the kitchen for a fan. None was in sight, and he came back with a newspaper, which he began to wave frantically over Doodles.

“No — please don’t!” begged the child. “It tires me!”

Blue’s hand dropped. “Thought ’t would make you cooler,” he said in dismay.

“B’ys!”

It was Granny’s voice, and Blue turned to see the quaint little figure at the foot of the stairs.

“Coom down, th’ both o’ ye! It’s shure too br’ilin’ f’r ye up undher th’ roof.”

“It is!” Blue ejaculated. “We ’ll be down in a jiffy — and thank you!”

He grasped Doodles with, “Put your arms round my neck, kiddie!”

There was a weak movement as if to obey; then the little figure was a limp burden.

Overwhelmed with dread, Blue staggered

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into Granny's room with his unconscious load.

"He's dead! he's dead!" he choked.

Scores of emergencies had made Granny mistress of many, and in a moment Blue had the 'inexpressible joy of seeing Doodles open his eyes with a fluttering little smile.

"Th' h'at made ye a bit faint, darlin'," Granny explained. "Ye'll be betther down here. Lie sthill an' go to shlape, if ye like."

He shut his eyes, but soon opened them again.

"It's beginning to be cooler," he said cheerfully.

Granny turned from the window where she had been scanning the sky.

"We'll be gitt'n' a shower befure long," she exulted. "Seems like I never did see such a hot day!" She wiped her face with the under side of her apron.

"My, how black it is in the north!" cried Blue.

He leaned his arms on the window-sill, and looked at the gathering clouds. They had already hidden the sun, and hung, dark and jagged, over the city. The air was gloomy. In

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the street below people hurried along, every now and then glancing upward at the threatening sky. Little whiffs of wind whirled the dust in the roadway, and thunder growled in the distance.

“Bet some folks ’ll git wet!” prophesied the boy, as he turned back to the room. He was surprised at the dim light. He could scarcely see Doodles, over on the couch. Doodles was timid in a thunder storm, and Blue crossed the floor to his side.

“Prob’ly the heft of it ’ll go round, as usual,” he said; “but ’t will be cooler. We shall like that, old feller, shan’t we?”

Doodles smiled weakly. “Let’s talk about the picnic,” he proposed, putting his hand in his brother’s.

But a mighty gust of wind and a sudden dash of big drops sent Blue upstairs to shut the windows, while Granny bustled about, closing blinds and putting things out of the possible way of rain. Before he returned, the street was a river, and crash after crash was sounding overhead.

Granny, to whom fear was unknown, watched the storm from the window, and Blue

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would have liked to join her; but the little clinging hand of Doodles was enough to hold him to the couch.

“I’m glad this did n’t come on the picnic day,” piped the small boy above the continuous roar.

“Lucky —” began Blue, but never finished.

A blinding blaze and a simultaneous crash, as if the house were being split in two, brought him to his feet.

Granny, too, started up.

“That was pretty near!” breathed Blue in a voice of awe.

“I hope it did n’t hur-rt anny wan,” responded Granny sympathetically.

Doodles lay very still, gripping his brother’s hand.

“Scared, old feller?” queried Blue, dropping back into his chair.

“A — little,” confessed Doodles. “It’s farther off now, is n’t it?”

“Oh, yes! prob’ly that was the worst.”

The storm passed as quickly as it had come, and presently Blue ran upstairs to make ready for his trip down street. They heard him re-

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turning almost at once, clattering down with such speed that Granny hurried to meet him.

"It struck our kitchen!" he burst out. "The stove's all over the room!"

"Ye don't mane it! Th' blissid saints be praised 't th' both o' ye was n't there!" And Granny hobbled upstairs to see the lightning's work.

Plainly the bolt had entered by way of the chimney, and, after demolishing the stove, and scattering and overturning various articles, had departed through the floor at the southwest corner of the room. Nothing but the stove appeared to be injured. That was unmendable.

"I must go and tell Doodles!" cried Blue, and he dashed downstairs to find his brother in a panic of suspense, having heard just enough to cause him to imagine things worse than they really were.

"Caruso?" was his first questioning word, as he caught sight of Blue.

"Oh, he's all right! Eatin' as cool as anything!"

"An' my violin?"

"Not a scratch on it!" Blue reassured him,

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and hastened to picture the disorder of the kitchen.

“I’m never going to be afraid again!” decided Doodles, when the story was told. “God did n’t let the lightning hurt us or Caruso or the violin, and now I know He won’t ever. Is n’t it nice!”

Blue laughed softly. “Guess you won’t think it’s so nice not to have a stove when you want your breakfast!”

“Oh, Granny’ll let us use hers!” was the contented reply.

CHAPTER XVIII

“THE TRUE-BLUEST BOY”

RUMORS of the thunderbolt in The Flat-iron met Mrs. Stickney on her way home, and her thankfulness for the safety of her boys routed all worry over the loss of the stove. But after a day or two the need of a fire began to press heavily. Granny's little stove was at her constant disposal, but the stairs between made its use inconvenient. To buy one now, with wages low and work scarcely more than two thirds of the time, was not to be thought of. The new problem promised to be a mighty one.

“Did Mr. Gillespie tell you that mocking birds like Caruso actually sell for two hundred dollars?” the mother inquired of Blue, after the small boy was asleep.

“That's what he said.”

“It does n't seem possible, and I did n't know but Doodles had made a mistake. Two hundred dollars is a great deal of money to

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keep in a bird," she went on. "We can't afford it — we must n't! Think what that would buy! Of course, it would grieve Doodles to sell him, but —"

"He ain't going to be sold!" interrupted Blue stoutly, closing his book and giving it a savage little push across the table.

"I know, dear! It will be hard. But I'm sure Doodles will be reasonable about it. We need the money now more than we need a bird."

"Heshan't be sold!" cried the boy defiantly. "Why, it would kill Doodles! He loves him as well as — you do me!"

"No, no, dear! You —"

"He does! You did n't see him when that woman came — I did! I know! I'll — I'll sell myself first! Caruso shan't go, anyway!" He jumped up, fidgeted about for a while, and then disappeared in the darkness of the unlighted bedroom.

The mother sighed heavily. They were running behind, and had been for several weeks. Work might not pick up before October — how were they to live? She sat thinking, thinking, until the clock struck twelve.

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The possible selling of Caruso was almost lost sight of in the excitement of the coming picnic. There were trousers and blouses and neckties for Mrs. Stickney to wash and iron. Since papers must be delivered on time, Blue must find a boy that was not going to the picnic. This was a long task, for nearly every one of Blue's acquaintance had given his name to the Salvation Army Sergeant, and the few not on the list had early been engaged as substitutes. But a free lad was finally discovered, and Blue, who had been tormented by spasms of fear lest he might have to remain to serve his customers himself, ran home on nimble feet to tell the good news. He carried joy, also, in the shape of two magic slips of pink cardboard, — passports to the wonderful automobile rides, eight hours in the enchanting country, and a dinner of dainties topped with ice cream.

Doodles had enough to think of that afternoon, for the little pink card seemed to suggest all kinds of rosy delights. He was so wrapped in his own happy anticipations that at tea time he did not notice the shadow which had fallen on his brother.

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Blue's bliss, with a careless twirl of his hand, had suddenly changed to dismay and sorrow. Standing on the curb, he had been idly fingering his new ticket, when it had slipped from his loose grasp. A strong north wind was blowing, and swept down the street as the bit of cardboard left his hand. Away it flew, with Blue in pursuit; but an inquisitive terrier, spying the curious slip of pink, had started too. The terrier grabbed it first, speeding off with it in his mouth, and although Blue chased the dog out of sight and himself out of breath, he was finally forced to turn back without another glimpse of his precious ticket.

What should be done? Blue said nothing to anybody, but he decided the matter before going to bed. One thing, Doodles must not know. He would directly insist on his brother's using the remaining ticket. Blue well knew that. So he planned to have Joseph Sitnitsky care for Doodles, and he himself would walk to the grove.

There was no use in asking to have his loss made good. Had not Sergeant Connor expressly warned the children not to lose their tickets, saying that they could not be replaced!

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No, it was walk or stay at home. Blue had no idea of the distance to Highland Grove; but he felt equal to any number of miles. So without taking Joseph wholly into his confidence he arranged for him to sit beside Doodles in the car, leaving him to conjecture as he might concerning the reason. Joseph never asked questions.

With all his planning, however, Blue did not feel sure of the success of the scheme until he had seen his brother safe and happy in the automobile, waving a merry good-bye to him. He had been afraid there might be inquiries that he could not easily answer; but Doodles, on this morning of unusual happenings, had taken everything without remark, and when Blue had observed, in as careless a tone as he could command, that he was not going to ride in the car with him, had apparently given the matter no further thought.

It was easy to hide himself in the big crowd, and he pressed on ahead, albeit with a little sigh for the pleasure he had missed. He did not hasten; he fell into his usual pace, and kept it. Those sixty automobiles, he argued, would not get started in a hurry, and he should

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be well towards the end of his tramp before they came up. Billy Frick had told him it was not very far.

Business blocks grew scattering and were interspersed with dwellings. Shops were smaller and less frequent. Bungalows appeared, with tiny gardens attached. The city was falling behind. Along the way were groups of women and children, waiting to see the picnickers pass. Blue heard them talking about it as he went by. Presently he caught the sound of shouts.

“They’re coming!” cried a girl.

He turned in dismay. A big car, gay with flags, was whizzing round the broad curve he had just passed, and a long line followed. Quickly he screened himself with a fat woman, to avoid the possible eyes of Doodles. Then he peeped out — there was Joseph! He dodged behind the broad back, and so missed the sight of his brother. In a moment they were gone.

As the merry train vanished, as the last flag fluttered its farewell through the cloud of dust, he felt all at once abandoned and forlorn. He started to run, but soon realized that he could never overtake those swift cars, and

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he dropped back into his former pace. After all, there was nothing to worry about; he had simply to follow.

A little further on occasional green fields gave courage to the tired boy, and after a while he reached the open country, finally coming to a fork in the road. He halted in perplexity, wishing that he had not contented himself with such indefinite directions. Billy had said, “You go right straight along, ’ithout turnin’ a single once,” and Blue had rested in that. Not a person was in sight, and the only house was a considerable distance back. At last, he decided on the way that seemed nearest in line with the one he had come, and so trudged on.

The sun was almost overhead. Could he have been walking for three hours? The day was sultry, and Blue looked down with dismay at the blouse on which his mother had expended so much care — it was limp with perspiration!

“Well, I can’t help it!” he muttered. “Guess the other fellers ’ll sweat, too!”

If only he knew how far ahead those “other fellers” were! The sound of wheels

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came from behind, and soon a milkman's team drew near. Blue voiced the one question in his mind.

"The Salvation Army's picnic? Oh, you're off the track! They're over in Highland Grove. Let's see — reckon your best way is to cut 'cross lots. Jump in, and I'll set you down a piece farther on."

The boy was grateful for the little rest. His feet ached with the long miles he had come, and it was a relief to feel that he was going forward without their help. But the ride was brief as pleasant, and shortly he was on the meadow side of a wire fence, with the instruction to "go right across there, and you'll find 'em."

Blue, — making a path through the tall Timothy, grasshoppers flocking ahead, bees and butterflies winging past, birds calling from an adjoining wood, — had suddenly entered a new world. A swift little brook crossed his way, and, as he sprang over, a green slope under a big oak urged him to a seat. Forgetful for the moment of his destination and the brother awaiting him, he threw himself on the grass with a tired sigh. The buzz-

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ing of the bees on the hot, drowsy air was like a lullaby. He closed his eyes. Then, with a rush, came remembrance — he jumped to his feet, and started on.

It would have been easy to stray from the right direction, and some good angel must have guided his reckless steps, for only with the crossing of a few fields he came upon a straggling party of girls, and his long journey was nearly at an end.

When he reached the grove he was distressed at sight of Doodles sobbing in Joseph's arms. The tears stopped flowing the instant Blue appeared, although an explanation had to be given before the small boy would be satisfied.

It was not quite finished when the children were bidden to file up to the distributors and exchange their blue buttons for luncheon. Then Blue suddenly realized the dreadful fact that he was buttonless. It was at once Doodles's turn to play the heroic part, and promptly he acted. But he did not count on his brother's resistance, and it was not easy to pin a button on the blouse of a boy who fought it off with all the strength he dared

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use. The little excitement finally brought Captain Bligh himself to the spot, and as the whole story was poured into the ears of the kindly Captain it did not lose any of its interest through Doodles's eager telling.

Presently the two boys were sitting placidly side by side, too much engaged in the joys of chicken sandwiches, cakes, ice cream, and lemonade to utter more than an occasional expletive of rapture.

The last dish was finally empty, and Doodles looked up with a seraphic smile.

"When I'm a man," he said, "I'm going to save my money and give ice cream every day to all the folks that can't have any!"

"Like it?" queried Blue, with a mischievous lift of his eyebrows.

"It's the best thing to eat in the whole world! Why," he went on solemnly, "I would n't have missed mine for—fifty cents!" The afternoon's delights were many and marvelous. Doodles had a sail in the enchanting swan boat, and then, to his utter astonishment, Sergeant Connor put him into a wonderful wheel chair, and he was rolled away through the grove to a place that was

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all red and gold with wild flowers. He came back with his lap full of the beautiful blossoms, and his eyes brimming with happiness.

At four o'clock the procession started for home, and, as the crowning joy of the day, Blue and Doodles rode in the leading car beside Captain Bligh himself. The Captain led Doodles into a spirited talk, and Blue gazed at his brother in pride and admiration as he conversed so easily and well with the officer of whom he stood a bit in awe. Suddenly, to his discomfiture, the topic was himself!

“Your brother has a very unusual name,” the Captain remarked, “and I am glad to know he is true-Blue.”

“Oh,” cried Doodles earnestly, “he’s the true-bluest boy you ever saw!”

The “true-bluest boy” tried to nudge his small brother into silence; but Doodles was afloat on his favorite stream of talk, and he only laughed innocently — and went on.

The Captain laughed, too, quite as if he were enjoying Doodles and Doodles’s brother. But the chat presently became less personal, and Blue was unconsciously drawn into it,

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discovering that the Captain, after all, was not a man to be feared.

The route, although far longer than that of the morning, came at last to its end; but Captain Bligh gave the boys a new subject to wonder and talk about when he told them that he should come to see them very soon.

CHAPTER XIX

JOSEPH SITNITSKY PROVES HIS VALOR

“Do you think God would have any objections to my asking Him to send us a stove?”

Blue was living with “Little Lord Fauntleroy,” and at the moment was so eager to know whether the young Lord lost his estate and his title that he absently queried, “H—m?”

It was only after the question had been patiently repeated that he came out of the story long enough to say, rather doubtfully, “N—no, I guess not.”

“Because we need one so bad,” Doodles went on, “and seeing it was his lightning that spoiled the old one, you know — of course, it was all right,” he hurried to add. “Maybe,” he continued thoughtfully, “He did it so He could have the chance to give us a new stove — if we asked for it. You know, He says He will give us anything that’s best for us, and I think that must be best for us, don’t you?”

Blue nodded smilingly, but returned at once

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to his book, and Doodles, with a wee breath of disappointment, gave up the one-sided talk. He craved a stronger assurance from his brother that a stove was a proper subject for prayer; but he could wait until the story was finished, and meanwhile he would venture to pray.

It happened that Doodles was alone when Captain Bligh fulfilled his promise, and he had much to tell his mother and Blue of what the genial Captain had said. But one thing he kept to himself. He was anxious to have the gift from Heaven come as a surprise to his mother. Thinking that the Captain was a suitable person to pass judgment on such a matter, he had referred to him his weighty question, and had received so prompt and hearty an approval of praying for what he wanted that no longer was he troubled with doubts.

“Jesus says, ‘Whatsoever ye ask, that will I do.’ Take the Lord at his word, my boy, and you will never go far wrong.”

That had been the Captain’s answer, and it comforted Doodles and strengthened his faith in such measure that his face was radiant

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and his soul went singing all the rest of the day.

“Mother need n’t worry any more,” he told himself. “God will surely send a stove before autumn.” And the prayer was constantly in his heart.

For a while Mrs. Stickney’s fears for Doodles lessened. The cooler weather after the big storm had revived his strength and the day in the country had seemed to add fresh power to his frail body. But as the heat increased again, he began to droop as before, and the mother wondered with a sickening dread how he was to endure the debilitating weeks of August that were close at hand. Must he stay in these oven-like rooms to die? Why should he be denied a breath of the great outdoors? She resolved to carry him downstairs that very evening and give him a taste of the open air, defiantly pushing aside her remembrance of the doctor’s warning, “You must be careful, very careful about lifting.” Then came the surprise.

About eleven o’clock in the forenoon a man slowly climbed the steep stairs, thumping something ahead of him. Doodles heard him

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plodding up, up, up, long before he reached the top flight. On he mounted, step by step. The listener grew eager. Was it the stove? Yet one man could not bring up a stove, unless it were a very little one. Perhaps it was not for them; it might be for the Frenchman that lodged in the front room on the other side, he had an express package the other day. For an instant Doodles began to lose interest. Then his eyes brightened again — the man was almost up! He grew breathless — a reddish yellow something popped into sight! It had wheels! It could n't be — but it *was*! It *was* a wheel chair! The man had stopped, puffing and smiling.

“Stickney?” he queried, “Master Julius Stickney,” reading from a card tied to one of the arms.

“Oh,” cried Doodles, “that’s me!”

The driver grinned, and rolled the chair inside.

“Want to try it?” he asked.

The next minute Doodles was in, almost too overpowered by delight to say his thanks; but he recollected just as the man was going.

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Who could have sent it? He caught up the card and turned it over.

“With the gladdest wishes of the Salvation Army.”

“Captain Bligh! dear Captain Bligh!” he murmured, and gazed lovingly at the gift.

That it was not brand-new, Doodles never guessed, and he would not have cared if he had known. It was *his* wheel chair! In those first moments of ecstasy the boy longed for his mother and Blue to help him bear his bliss.

The wheels were tempting. He rolled himself back and forth, he ventured across the room, he went around the table both ways! How easy it was! Presently he was in the dim bedroom, exploring every corner as if he had never seen it before. He was brought to a sudden stand between the bed and the bureau, but finally managed to back out of the narrow place without harm. After that he was more careful; it would never do for Blue to catch him in such a predicament.

As soon as the brother's footstep was heard, Doodles wheeled himself in front of the doorway, and sat motionless, pale with excitement.

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“Where’d yer get it?” Blue had stopped on the upper step, and stood staring.

“Guess!” laughed the other.

“Captain Bligh.”

“Oh, you’re a splendid guesser!” admired Doodles, and promptly plunged into an account of the last hour.

Nobody knew what a burden was lifted from the mother’s heart by the kindness of the Captain and his associates; but the boys realized that she was uncommonly gay, and their own merriment increased. At the dinner table not a thought was given to the brief bill of fare, and the potatoes disappeared in unheard-of numbers. Doodles had a wheel chair! Doodles was going outdoors!

With the aid of the ready Joseph the chair was carried safely to the sidewalk and the small boy seated comfortably among his cushions. Then what a ride! Over to the park which Doodles had seen but from his window; around and around among its gorgeous beds of multicolored flowers; beside the pretty lake with its sparkling fountain and the darting gold fish; down to the bathing-pools where jolly youngsters were splashing about in the

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cool water; and finally through long avenues of arching elms, with tricky little sunbeams playing tag all along the grassy plats that lined the sidewalks. Doodles was in a world of delight from the moment of starting until he turned the home corner. Then, for one short moment, sorrow seized him; but he suddenly remembered that to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow — through endless to-morrows — he could explore again the wonderland of outdoors, which was so brimming with beauty.

That night Doodles slept well, and at breakfast he looked brighter than usual, notwithstanding the fulfilled promise of increasing sultriness. By noon the heat had grown fierce, and Blue looked anxiously at his brother.

“I wonder,” he began, and then rushed off to find Joseph.

The result was that when the boys started down street they left Doodles waving his hand to them from the sidewalk in the shadow of The Flatiron.

“It is ever so much cooler here than it is upstairs,” he had chuckled delightedly, “and there’ll be so many folks to see!”

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“We could to carry him down any time,” remarked Joseph, as they passed beyond sight of the happy little face.

For a few hours each day Blue was helping at the public library, and this afternoon he was asked to remain longer than usual, to assist one of the girls in arranging some new volumes. It need have detained him only a half-hour or so; but his mind was divided between books and Doodles, and he worked with frantic haste; in consequence he made mistakes and had to run back and forth to rectify matters.

“You are very careless to-day,” observed the young woman. “I thought I could rely on you.”

With flushed face and uneven breath the boy went on with his task. He worked slowly this time, realizing that hurry would doubtless bring only more blunders. At last he was released; but it was half-past four! He sped from the building like a frightened hare. Doodles must be very tired, sitting there on the sidewalk all these hours. What would he think? He was probably worrying his little heart out. Blue bounded recklessly along, nearly overturning a small girl who was in

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his way. With a hurried word of apology he dashed on.

His first glimpse of the spot where he had last seen his brother showed him that it was vacant. The sidewalk was swarming with boys and girls — a glance told him that they were not of the immediate neighborhood. Had anything — oh! had anything happened? There was the wheel chair, — but Doodles was not in it! Who —? It was Sim Sweeney! And Doodles, big-eyed with terror, was sitting on the lowest step of the market!

Blue's feet barely touched the ground. Some of the children saw him coming, and fled. Sim Sweeney, trying to wheel through the screaming troop that blocked his way, knew naught of the flying figure with the blazing eyes until he was suddenly shoved from his seat by one frantic thrust. But before Blue could obtain possession of the chair Sim's cronies were upon him, and the fiercest fight followed that The Flatiron had ever seen.

Blue struck out boldly, here, there, on every side; but five against one makes too ill balanced a combat, and the victim's part became still more hazardous by Mame Sweeney's

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joining the assault. Blue would not knowingly hit a girl, and when Sim's sister added her fiery little fists to those of the others, the boy was in a desperate strait.

"A—a—h!" It was a long-drawn battle cry, right in the ears of the attacking party. But the few that heard gave it small notice. In any event its source would have brought it only derision. Joseph Sitnitsky had never been known to lift an arm against anybody, and not a boy among them but would have scorned the question of being worsted by him in a fight — not a boy except Blue, and he was too much engaged in returning blows with interest even to know that Joseph was near.

For weeks afterward it was marveled over, — how "that little tiger of a Jew," employing all the arts of hand-to-hand conflict, which had been so rigidly taught him, felled those five bullies to the ground and chased Sim's sister and Sim himself as far as the corner, before stopping to see if his friend were injured or to comfort Doodles.

Blue declared that he was able to help carry his brother upstairs, where Granny

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O'Donnell promptly mingled sympathy and lamentations with soap and water and healing salve. By the time Mrs. Stickney arrived, things were plodding along about as usual. Even Doodles, in admiration of his brother's pluck and Joseph's prowess, forgot his fright and was eager to talk of what ever afterwards was referred to as The Flatiron fight.

CHAPTER XX

DOODLES AND BLUE, DETECTIVES

“WHAT a sweet, sweet singer!”

Doodles turned quickly from Caruso, to see a child on the threshold. He had not heard a footfall.

She was an odd little creature, straight and slender, with a mop of jet-black curls, skin dusky as a gypsy's, and eyes like the bluest sky. Her coarse dress of red cotton stuff reached nearly to her ankles, and a curious beaded bodice of dark green scalloped with gold added a foreign, fantastic touch to her appearance.

“How soon will he sing again?” The question was anxiously put, with a swift backward glance.

Doodles started “Annie Laurie,” and at once the bird took up the tune, the listener in the doorway clasping her tiny hands in delight.

“Here, you kid you! what yer doin' out

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there? Did n't I tell yer to keep where yer b'long!"

A woman, in dingy yellow and black, strode across the hall, and with a jerk of her bony arm the little one was snatched away. Dolly Moon's door slammed, and Doodles suddenly felt lonesome.

"She might have let her stay and hear Caruso," he lamented. "Don't see what hurt she was doing."

As soon as his brother came home he told him about it.

"That's the crowd I heard coming in last night," Blue decided. "Guess you'd gone to sleep. 'T was ten or eleven. I knew 't must be some new ones. They had a lot of traps, by the clatter. Bet they've got Gaylord's room, too. The door was ajar when I went for some water this morning, and two men were in there."

"I wish Mr. Gaylord was here now," sighed Doodles.

"Oh, don't you worry!" returned his brother. "He'll be back again. You always have to go with the folks that hire you, and he had to. Mrs. Graham'll get tired o' spin-

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nin' round in an auto soon as it's cold — by September prob'ly. That'll be here before you can say, —

“Whimwham, rock or wiggle!
Whimwham, whoa!
Whimwham, mock or giggle!
Whimwham, go!”

“Oh!” cried Doodles gleefully.

“Whimwham, rock a wiggle!
Whimwham, whoa!
Whimwham, mock a wiggle — no, giggle!
Whimwham, go!”

“There, I did! And it has n't come! I'm afraid Mr. Gaylord won't too.” His voice dropped into sadness.

“You did n't say it right,” laughed Blue.

“Why not?”

“Nobody does till they catch on.”

“Say it again, please!”

The bit of nonsense was repeated with a dash that made Doodles gasp in admiration. But his second trial showed no improvement.

“I don't care!” he cried disgustedly. “It would n't bring Mr. Gaylord any quicker if I said it right a million times! He's a lovely man — I wish he was here this minute! And now they've got his room!”

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“Huh! this crowd won’t stay long,” declared Blue. “They ain’t the kind. Oh, say! I forgot! Joe’s comin’ round at ten o’clock, and we’re going up on Seip’s Hill.”

“I, too?”

“Well, what do you take me for? Prob’ly we shall leave you here in the rocking chair, and Joe’ll wheel me all the way!”

Doodles chuckled.

“Where’s your brush?” called Blue from the bedroom. “S’pose you’d have a fit if your hair was n’t fixed up! If mine was curly like yours, catch me fussin’ to brush it every other minute! — There’s Joseph now!” as a foot was heard upon the stairs. And he ran to welcome him.

On the following day Dolly Moon’s door was again ajar. It had long had a habit of unlatching with the least puff of air. Coming up from the street Blue spied it, and he turned that way. The picturesque little stranger was in range of the slit of light.

“Hello, kiddie!”

It was a cheerful, friendly greeting; but the only answer was the prompt banging of the door. The boy retreated, surprised and angry.

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“They need n’t put on airs!” he muttered indignantly. “They are n’t any better than other folks. Granny O’Donnell would n’t do that, nor anybody else in this house.”

Little was seen by the Stickneys of their new neighbors. Occasionally the woman or one of the men appeared in the corridor; but the child was not in sight. Late one afternoon, however, Blue discovered the door again unlatched. Cautiously he stole across the passage. In a farther corner of the room was a bed, and above the coverlet the boy discerned the little one’s face.

“That’s why I have n’t seen her,” he thought. “Measles, prob’ly — they’re all round.”

The rustling sounds back of the door were broken by a moan. Then, in a man’s voice, was observed: —

“Bet she’s goin’ to die!”

“Just our luck!” responded another beyond Blue’s vision.

“All the same —”

The speaker approached the door, but when a slam announced its shutting the nimble listener was out of sight.

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It was barely half an hour afterwards when a man stepped out of the room and beckoned Blue into the corridor.

"Say," he began in a hushed voice, "my kid's sick. Can you go for the doctor? I'll pay you," he added, as the boy hesitated.

"How much?"

"A quarter."

"What doctor you want?" came with an indifference that Blue did not feel. Quarters were not picked up every day right in The Flatiron.

"Dr. Alford, up on Boniface Street," returned the man with a wary glint in his narrow eyes.

"Boniface Street! Why, that's a mile, sure! There's a doctor round the corner —"

"It's Dr. Alford or none!" interrupted the man defiantly.

"It's awful hot to tramp 'way over there," argued Blue, seeing in the sparkling scarf pin a possible increase of fee, although only the day before he had walked double the distance simply to save Granny O'Donnell's rheumatic legs and to hear her hearty, "God bless ye, me b'y!" But he remembered his recent rebuff.

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“Well, call it half a dollar, then. Will you go, or not?”

“Oh, I s’pose I’ll have to, seeing you’re a neighbor!” returned the lad, his heart skipping merrily at prospect of the big silver piece.

The physician delighted Blue by bringing him back in his car; but he shut his patron’s door with such precision that it stayed latched, and the boy scowled disappointedly.

Then, the doctor’s voice coming to his ears, he bent to the keyhole.

“Please fetch me a glass of water —”

Not an instant to spare! When the door opened, Blue was safe in the dust closet opposite. It was a handy retreat, and — to admit the truth — this was not the very first time it had had an occupant.

Presently, when all was again quiet, the boy emerged, sprinkled with the sweepings of the top floor of The Flatiron. He was gleeful at finding the door ajar.

The doctor was holding a glass to the lips of his little patient, who — it looked to the peeper — clutched it so frantically with her teeth that it was removed only with force.

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“We did n’t dare give her a drop,” remarked the woman, standing by.

“It is what she needs. Another glass, please.”

“Oh, no! not so much!” she objected.

“Do as the doc’ says!” commanded one of the men.

Blue, absorbed in the talk, had delayed too long — the dust closet was out of the question. So the woman met him sauntering towards his own door, as if he, too, had been on an errand to the public faucet.

When the eavesdropper returned, the physician was saying: —

“She would not have lived more than four hours. She was dying for lack of water. When she wakes give her more if she wants it, and, unless she sleeps quietly, keep up the medicine through the night. I will see her again in the morning. It is a plain case of measles, and I shall report it to the health officials.”

Blue’s admiration of the man who could keep one from dying by simply administering water was sufficient to hold him on the sidewalk an hour and a half awaiting the doctor’s second visit. He spied the runabout

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when it was still far up the street, and he was at the curb when the car stopped.

“How is your little friend?” the physician asked.

“She is n’t my friend,” the boy answered. “Huh! they would n’t let me say hello to her. But,” lowering his voice confidentially, “I should think they were all dead in there. Have n’t heard a sound this morning.”

“They are sleeping late.” Dr. Alford was mounting the stairs.

Blue followed. Curiosity made him bolder than usual.

A knock brought no response. Another rap, more authoritative than the first, and yet another and another left the two still listening for the sound that did not come. Finally the doctor grasped the knob and slowly opened the door. Blue had drawn back, ready for flight; but he peeped around the corner — the room was vacant! The small adjoining apartment was also empty of life.

“Bet they could n’t pay their rent!” ventured the boy. “Lucky I got my fifty cents last night. He gave me that for going after you.”

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“You are fortunate. It does n’t look as if I should get rich on the case, does it?”

“Did n’t they pay you?”

The physician shook his head.

The lad suddenly grew grave. His hand closed over the silver piece in his pocket.

“You can have this.” He thrust his half-dollar into the doctor’s palm.

“No, no! Keep your money —”

“But you earned it more’n I did!” protested Blue. “You saved the kid’s life, and you ought to have it.”

Dr. Alford said his thanks with an odd little smile; but he dropped the coin back into the boy’s pocket.

“Queer,” Blue told Doodles, “how that crowd could get out, traps and all, and we not hear ’em! They made noise enough comin’ up. There was the Muldoons,” he mused, “their duds bumped along all the way downstairs. I should think Granny would have heard ’em — and maybe she did!” Off he dashed, bursting into the room at the foot of the flight.

The old Irish woman was paring potatoes. She looked up with a happy, “Good-mornin’ to ye!”

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“Good-morning!” responded the boy. “Feel first-rate?”

“Oh, as good as annybody cud, an’ not shleep more’n two winks all th’ night!”

“What kept you awake, Granny?”

“Sure, me poor old achin’ legs!”

“I did n’t know but ’t was folks goin’ up and down past your door,” replied Blue with artful innocence.

“No, they wa’ n’t manny of ’em. Mary Ottatoc, I heerd her come up ’long ’bout nine, an’ McCabe was just afther. Th’ Frinchman with th’ sthrange name — I do be always f’rgitt’n ut — he sthayed up there all th’ avenin’. An’ th’ new folks acrost f’m ye on’y go out now an’ thin f’r a bite or a drink. ’Long toward mornin’ I heerd ’em stheppin’ round soft somewheres — goin’ to th’ sink, prob’ly. But they wa’ n’t noise enough all night to kape a dog awake.”

The boy was puzzled. It was clear to him that the crowd did not take their goods down by way of the staircase unless Granny dozed more than she realized. One thing was certain, — they were gone! But how did they get out?

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“Blue, me dear,” Granny was saying, “if ye be down to Mis’ Flaherty’s before dinner, will ye fetch me a loaf? Ye’ll find a nickel in th’ cup on th’ shilf there. Ye’re a good b’y, Blue — none knows ut betther ’n mesilf, with ye always runnin’ here an’ there an’ savin’ me old legs!”

Mrs. Flaherty, proprietor of the little corner bakery, tore a piece from an old “Morning News” that lay on the counter, and wrapped the bread in it.

On the end of the package the boy spied a picture. He did not care for pictures, but Doodles did. He was always carrying home gay cards, hand-bills, and stray sheets from illustrated papers that blew his way. So he begged the wrapper from Granny, and carried it upstairs to his brother. Then he sauntered along the corridor to the recently vacated apartment, and lingered searchingly over the litter that was there, vaguely hoping to find an answer to his puzzle. But the bits of paper and the empty boxes, the broken plates and fragments of cloth told no secrets, and he finally closed the door softly and went back to Doodles.

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“Oh, come here quick!” cried his brother. “I thought you’d gone away. Just look at that!” He held out the newspaper which had wrapped Granny’s bread, and pointed to a picture.

“Yes, it’s pretty,” Blue responded indifferently.

“No, no!” protested Doodles, his eyes big with excitement, “don’t you see?”

“Why, no, I don’t see anything very wonderful — nothing but a kid’s picture.”

“Oh!” the voice dropped to an eager breath, “it’s the little girl in there! — that was!” He nodded towards Dolly Moon’s door.

“Wh—what?” It was Blue’s turn, as with astonishment he scanned the picture. “I b’lieve it *is!*” he ejaculated softly. “But how —”

“I knew her in a minute!” Doodles broke in. “Only her hair is light there and she’s dressed so different.”

“But what is it anyhow?” Blue turned to the headlines — “Oh! kidnaped! — The crowd *stole* her!” The words died in a startled breath.

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“Read it all!” prodded Doodles, as if his brother were not as hungry as he for every item of the article.

““Marshall Fleming’s youngest child . . . Daphne, six years old . . . beautiful suburban home . . . playing on the grounds,”” muttered Blue along the paragraphs, “. . . missed her at three o’clock . . . police . . . detectives . . . no clue . . . mother nearly crazed with grief.””

“Is n’t it dreadful?” sorrowed Doodles. “I could cry! Such a pretty little girl — and her poor mother!”

“If we’d only known it before!” lamented Blue. He flung off his cap with a gesture of disgust. Yesterday rescue would have been easy — but now!

Doodles picked up the paper and gazed regretfully at the picture.

“Le’ ’s see it again!” Blue put out his hand. “Maybe ’t is n’t she after all; but it does look like her. Why, this paper’s three weeks old! I should think the doctor’d ’a’ known her.”

“You did n’t,” smiled Doodles.

“I ain’t sure now,” laughed the other.

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"I am," Doodles declared. "Look at her chin, with that cunning little dimple! And her eyes — just exactly like 'em! That mite of a curl over there, and the funny little pucker in her forehead — I noticed 'em both while she was listening to Caruso."

"You'd see what nobody else would," laughed Blue. "Yes, I guess it's her fast enough." He shook his head sadly. "Wish I knew where they've gone. I don't see how they could lug all those chairs and things —"

"Say! you don't s'pose they could get 'em into the triangle, do you?" Doodles's soft voice lowered hesitantly.

"Naw!" scouted Blue. "Why, ther' would n't be room for half their duds, let alone themselves. Besides, they could n't get in — door's always locked — and they could n't stay in if they did!"

"I know," Doodles agreed, "it's little and stuffy."

"Stuffy! I guess it is now! When that old tramp made such a row over it, 't was n't such awful hot weather, but he could n't stand it only one night. He said it was n't fit to put a dog in, if you wanted any more

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of the dog. Ther' 's just one little mite of a skylight — why, the kid could n't live there a minute! — no, the crowd ain't in that hole!"

"I s'pose not," replied Doodles sadly. "I only thought —"

Blue did not heed the unfinished sentence. With all his arguments to the contrary, he was wondering if it were possible for them to — but, no, of course, it could n't be!

Beyond the sink the passageway narrowed, and led to a closet where by means of a rough ladder one might climb to the roof. At the foot of these steps Blue presently stood, telling himself that he was a fool for taking any pains to prove such an absurd idea. Yet he mounted the ladder, and gained a view of the broad expanse of shabby tin that covered The Flatiron, and the big, crumbling chimneys, — that was all. The tiny skylight, which was what he had come to inspect, was behind a chimney, only a bit of the framework being visible.

"Of course, it is n't open," he muttered; "it never is! A week ago, when Winkle was in there, it was shut tight as a drum. And he locked that door all right, too, — I heard

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him!" He started down the steps, and then halted. "I'll find out!" he decided, and turned again.

At the top, he threw a foot from the opening; but the rusty tin cracked warningly. "Bother!" he ejaculated, and drew back.

The next building was somewhat lower than The Flatiron, but beyond rose a new block that overtopped its surroundings.

"If I were in one of those rooms," he mused, "I could tell quick enough."

At the foot of the ladder he hesitated, ears alert; then he tiptoed to the door at the end of the passage, his bare feet noiseless as a cat's.

Not a breath from within!

"Of course they could n't be there," he argued disgustedly. Nevertheless he told Doodles that he was going down on the street, and when he reached the sidewalk he sauntered towards the Empire Building. At the entrance he accosted a boy with the New York papers.

"Say, Tom, let me have a couple of those to sell!"

"What for?"

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“For fun.” Blue drew forth the proper number of coins.

With the papers under his arm he went boldly up the stairs. On the fifth floor several doors stood invitingly open. He chose an office where a man sat writing near a farther window. As soon as he was well in the room, however, he was arrested by a bluff “No!” and he walked meekly away.

Three times his efforts were baffled; but the fourth attempt found him not only making a sale but put in possession of a fact that whirled his brain — the small roof window in the three-cornered room at the top of The Flatiron was atilt!

“It could n’t have been left open all this time! It would have rained in. Besides, when old Winkle was there lookin’ round, it was shut — I know that! They must be — but how could they, with the door locked?”

Fragments like these chased one another through his perplexed mind. He and Doodles consulted long and earnestly over the situation.

“This afternoon I’ll find out for sure!” declared Blue.

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“How?”

“I’ll watch in the dust closet!” he whispered. “Some of the crowd’ll be comin’ to the sink, and they’ll take the time when they think everybody’s out.”

“Splendid!” beamed Doodles softly. “I’ll keep just as still, and they’ll suppose I’ve gone to ride.”

“Oh, I forgot your ride!” Blue looked dismayed. “And you will roast in here with the door shut!”

“No, I shan’t!” asserted Doodles pluckily. “It’s the only way — and think of that poor little girl’s mother!”

After much discussion it was agreed to say nothing of the matter to any one while it was in so uncertain a stage.

“Mother worries over everything nowadays,” reasoned Blue, “and this would only be an extra trouble. But if we should nab ’em — oh, would n’t she be glad!”

The dinner hour never seemed so long. Two or three times the big secret almost burst from its keeping. At last, however, Mrs. Stickney was off, the top-floor lodgers that came home at noon had disappeared down

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the stairway, the one o'clock whistles had shrieked their final summons, and Blue was free to begin his eager lookout from the dust closet.

At first time passed swiftly. If they should come — oh, if only they would! — then he could get that pretty kid away from those horrid people. How glad her mother would be to have her back again! But could the little thing live, sick as she was, in that roasting oven! All at once Blue doubted more than ever that the crowd was there. Probably no one was in the room after all, and he was staying here just for nothing! Would n't folks laugh if they should hear of it! But, then, how came that skylight open? Of course, Winkle might have come in and opened it, to air the place. The more he thought of that, the more probable it seemed. He could have gone by their door a dozen times when they did not see him, — perhaps the day before while he was taking Doodles out to ride. But could those folks have got down the stairs without Granny's hearing them? Oh, if they were coming to the sink, he wished they'd hurry up! How hot it was!

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The closet suddenly became suffocatingly close. He opened the door wider and drew a long, deep breath. He had half a mind to give it up and go and give Doodles a spin. It must be three or half-past!

The bell in a nearby tower struck the hour.

"Only two o'clock!" Blue complained scowlingly.

The moments dragged. He did n't believe the crowd was there, he told himself. He would n't stay and be such a fool! Cautiously opening the door, he put one foot beyond the sill — a thought came to him of that little girl's mother. He hesitated, and a picture of Doodles arose in his mind — Doodles waiting patiently for news from the lookout. With a determined toss of his head he stepped softly back and began again his watch from the narrow peephole.

"I'll stick it out if I have to stay here all night!" he vowed grimly.

It was very quiet on the top floor. Not a sound reached the boy's ears save the far-away buzz of a sewing machine and the more distant clatter of the street. He leaned against the door frame, and closed his eyes. Presently

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his head slipped past its support, and he awoke with a start. He was about to move, when he realized where he was and stood motionless — somebody was at the sink! It was the man who had sent him for the doctor!

With furtive glances down the hall, the pitcher was filled. Then without a sound the figure glided out of sight.

Blue waited long enough to be sure of a safe passage, and then sped noiselessly back to Doodles. An exultant gesture told of success, and with a few quick words he was away.

First he must find Thomas Fitzpatrick; that was his plan. He knew where he would be likely to catch him at this hour, and down to Tremont Street he ran. Soon the policeman was spied far ahead. Blue's feet made short the intervening distance, and he grabbed the officer's sleeve just as he was turning Gates House Corner.

Fitzpatrick smiled his, "Hello!"

"Say," began the boy in an eager undertone, "d' you want a dandy job?"

"What's up? Bird swiped again?"

"No! He's all right. R'member the Fleming kid 't was stole two or three weeks ago?"

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The officer nodded.

“I know where she is! In five minutes you can get her an’ the whole crowd!”

“Oh, go ’long! I’m too old a boy to swallow such flummery!” The policeman laughed good-humoredly.

“Honest, I ain’t foolin’! But I can’t do it alone, an’ I thought you’d like the job. You’d better hurry though — they might skip! Don’t b’lieve they will before dark, but they might if they got scared.”

Fitzpatrick scanned Blue’s face, but found no hint of a hoax.

“Where are they?”

The boy cast a quick glance behind. There was nobody near.

“Flatiron! But you’d never guess whereabouts to look for ’em!”

“Come in here!” The man led the way to a telephone booth. “Now shoot out yer story!”

Blue did, the officer repeating it briefly to his chief.

It was all managed so quickly that the little party of four was soon under way, Fitzpatrick and Blue ahead, and two big policemen following.

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It was the most exciting hour of Blue's life when he guided the uniformed trio to the little triangular room at the top of The Flat-iron. There were silent hand greetings to Doodles as they passed the kitchen door, but nobody ever guessed how the helpless little lad longed to be one of the party.

Blue pointed to the door at the end of the corridor, and each man grasped his revolver. Fitzpatrick motioned the boy back, and he allowed the others to go by; yet he kept close behind, losing sight of danger in his determination to see the affair to its finish.

Without warning the door was burst open, there were quick commands, mingled with oaths and pistol shots, followed by a fierce scuffle. Then the law-breakers were powerless in the hands of their captors, and Fitzpatrick turned to the little one on the floor, who in her fright had cuddled close under her ragged coverings.

"Hello, kiddie!" came a cheery voice from behind the tall officer, and as the child was tenderly lifted from her wretched bed she gave a quivering smile to Blue in return for

his assurance that she was "going right home to mother."

"Bring her into our room," said the boy; "it's much cooler there. Yes, we've had measles, Doodles and I, both of us," in answer to the question.

"I want to hear the bird sing!" demanded the child, as she spied Caruso, and in response to her implied praise the mocker caroled a welcome.

The officer threw him a glance and word of approval. "He can do it, can't he!"

"Huh!" laughed Blue, "that ain't anything. Make him sing, Doodles!"

As the lad began to whistle, the bird did not seem to notice. He continued to eat and drink, quite as if music had no interest for him. Then, suddenly, without a preliminary note, he burst into "Annie Laurie," and sang it to its end, delighting the small girl, and astonishing Fitzpatrick.

"I would n't have believed it of him! Sure, I would n't!" The man eyed the slim bird incredulously.

"Is n't he beautiful?" beamed Doodles.

"He is that!" agreed the officer.

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Whereupon Blue was for showing his further accomplishments; but the man smilingly shook his head, and bade a hasty good-bye, coupled with a promise to come again when he had no kidnapers on hand.

As he went down, Granny O'Donnell came up. Granny was never so happy as when nursing a sick child, and by the time Dr. Alford arrived she and little Daphne Fleming were the best of friends.

Since they had not succeeded in hearing direct from her parents, the doctor took his patient to the hospital, and they were scarcely away before the neighbors began to flock in, rumors of the affair having flown to all parts of The Flatiron.

Blue started to recount the exciting story, but remembering his undelivered papers he was obliged to leave it to the telling of Granny and Doodles.

CHAPTER XXI

SURPRISING NEWS

BLUE had not proceeded far on his way to the Courant office before he discovered that all at once he had become of unusual interest to his companions.

"How'd you hear anything about it?" he queried, as Billy Frick ran alongside, eagerly begging for particulars of the arrest.

"Huh! where d' ye s'pose I keep myself? My, but ain't you th' lucky one!"

"Oh, it was n't such a great! Kind o' fun to see 'em caught. Doodles thought of the triangle; I never should have."

"Then'll he git th' money?"

"What money?"

"Aw, how innercent we be!"

"I don't know what you're drivin' at," protested Blue.

Billy caught his arm.

"See here, Blue Stick'! just you look me straight, an' say that again!"

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“Sure, I don’t!” Blue laughed.

Three boys came running across the street, and Billy turned to them.

“Say, fellers! he’s pertendin’ he ain’t on to that three thousand’t Old Flemin’ —”

“Ho! what a good one!” — “By ter-morrer he’ll be so swell he won’t know us!” — “Say, whin they goin’ ter pay ut?”

“I wish you’d say plain out what you mean, an’ stop talkin’ blind!” Blue was becoming irritated.

“Honest, don’t ye know ther’s three thousand dollars comin’ to ye —”

“No, I don’t!” snapped Blue. “And you might as well stop right now tryin’ to stuff me! I ain’t a kid!”

“Hear him!” shouted Billy, doubling over with glee. “Come on in, an’ I’ll show yer whether we’re stuffin’ or not!”

Blue was pulled towards a grocery, and in a moment he and Billy were foremost of a group facing the proprietor of the shop.

“Say, Mr. Grumley, how much’d they offer for that Flemin’ kid?”

“Three thousand dollars. But you’re too late, Bill! They’ve just found the child an’

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the hull of 'em up in The Flatiron, an' the reward's goin' to a boy 't lives there."

"A—h! wha' do ye say to that?" shrieked Billy delightedly. Then, to the grocer, "He's the feller! An' he would have it we was tryin' to fool him! Do ye b'lieve it now?" with a sharp slap on Blue's back.

The boy nodded dazedly, and then fled, the others close at his heels.

Three thousand dollars! It spun through his brain, it thumped in his breast, it shouted itself in his ears until he felt that everybody must hear it, — "Three thousand dollars! Three thousand dollars!" What would Doodles say? And his mother? Pshaw, it could n't be true! The money — if there really were any — would go to the police. He was a fool for harboring the hope of it — he, a peniless nobody who only showed the way!

Yet, notwithstanding all this, with his last paper delivered he was speeding back to The Flatiron, excitedly longing to see how astonished Doodles would be. But one glance at his brother's face told him that the news was already there.

Doodles was sitting motionless, his big

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eyes round and radiant, yet with a hint of awe in them which reminded Blue of the time when he first clasped his violin.

Granny O'Donnell and Mrs. Homan were still discussing the affair, the younger woman with eager gestures, Granny placid as usual.

"Wal," exclaimed Mrs. Homan, as the boy dashed in, "I s'pose yer'll be such a big bug now 't yer won't think of 'sociatin' with th' rest of us!" Her little shrill laugh rang through the room.

Granny rose to her feet, and grasped Blue's hand before he had time to answer.

"It's glad I be f'r ye, glad as if ye was me own b'y!"

"Then it's really true?" he queried.

"My, yes, true as sundown!" giggled Mrs. Homan. "I don't wonder yer can't b'lieve it. It's just like things happen in books. 'Land! I says, the minute I heard of it, 'won't that be s'lendid for the Stickneys! To think of havin' a Rockefeller right here in The Flat-iron!"

Blue gave a bit of a chuckle, and went over to Doodles.

"Feelin' all right, old man?"

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A smiling, comprehensive nod contented him, and throwing a leg across the corner of the table he sat and answered Mrs. Homan's questions, while he swept occasional glances round the room, glances which included the clock, and wished that the hour would hurry his curious visitor home.

It did at last, and Granny also; but he and Doodles had scarcely more than begun to exchange wonderings about what was foremost in their minds when Mrs. Homan ran up the stairs with a little apple pie.

"I says when I was makin' it, I did n' know what in th' world I sh'd do with 't, for Jud ain't on speakin' terms 'ith apple pie, an' they's on'y me 'n pa to 'nihilate 'em. But there was th' crust, so I flung it together, 'n' when I see 't just now I says, 'That's who I made it for — th' Stickneys! They's 'nough f'r their supper, 'n' 't'll jibe right in 'ith th' fun. I'll trot it straight up to 'em.' No, land, don't oust it off th' plate now! I got 'nough dishes. Bye-bye again!"

"Is n't that lovely of her!" smiled Doodles, as his brother, with a guilty pang, set the pie on the table.

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"Guess she would n't have brought it if she'd known how I'd been achin' to have her get up and go," was the soft-toned answer.

"Yes," responded Doodles with an understanding sigh, "she does generally stay a good while. But I s'pose she means all right, and if folks' hearts are good it does n't make so much difference about the rest of 'em, does it?"

Blue started to make a laughing reply, when the mother's step was heard on the stairs, and he ran to open the door for her.

"Well!" she began.

"Heard about it?" he grinned.

"It's on the bulletin board, but I could n't believe it!"

"We nabbed 'em all right!" Blue nodded emphatically. "I do' know anything 'bout the reward 'cept what I hear."

"The bulletin says it's —" she hesitated to speak the figures which yet seemed so unwarrantably linked with her boy's name.

"Three thousand dollars," finished Blue glibly. It had been in his ears too much that afternoon for him to be shy in voicing it himself. "They say ther''s been lots about it in

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the papers, but I never see the papers — that is, read 'em. My, but I wish we could have it!”

“Wish! — oh!” The mother's voice quivered as she dropped into the rocker and put her hands to her face.

“For goodness' sake, don't cry! We have n't got it yet!” Blue walked off towards the table, whistling softly. “Oh, say!” he burst out, “Mrs. Homan brought you this.” He held up the pie.

“How good everybody is!” Mrs. Stickney wiped her eyes, and pulled off her gloves. “Come and sit down, Blue, and tell me all about it! What made you think they were in the triangle?”

“I did n't; 't was Doodles. He wondered if they could be there, and I scouted the idea — did n't I, old feller? Oh, if anything comes, it's for Doodles, sure!”

Of course, the small boy protested; but Blue only laughed, while he proceeded with his account of the afternoon's excitement.

For a full half hour the apple pie waited. Then Doodles suggested supper. Pies did not occur every day on the Stickney table.

CHAPTER XXII

THE COMFORTING OF EUDORA FLEMING

"You can't guess where I've been to-day." Tillie Shook began, unfolding the towel that held her knitting, and arranging the pile of wool in her lap.

"Oh, what a pretty pink!" cried Doodles, wheeling himself nearer.

"I think so," she smiled, carefully picking up a dropped stitch. "It's my mother's Christmas present. I knew if I did n't start it early 't would n't be done. I thought you would n't mind my bringing it along this evening," she apologized. "I can talk better when I'm knitting, except when I have to count, and that ain't often. Mother's been wanting a shawl for ever so long — it's so cold in the country. 'T don't look much yet." She held up the narrow strip. "The stitch is pretty," showing the intricate pattern.

"But this ain't my news," she laughed; "you did n't guess where I've been! Sakes!

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you never would, so I'll have to tell." — She paused to emphasize her words. — "Out to the Flemings'!"

"Not Daphne Fleming's?" Blue caught at the name excitedly.

"Yes! I knew you'd want to hear about it; that's why I came up so early. I could n't hardly wait to eat my supper.

"You see, Miss Wallace — she's head fitter — sometimes she goes out to fit a special customer, and Miss Fleming's special. Now she's got nervous prostration, and could n't come to be fitted. They say — that is, Louise Petrie does — it's a love affair. I don't know whether her father would n't let her marry him, or what; but, anyway, he's abroad somewhere, writing music and playing on the piano, and all that, and she's just gone to pieces. Louise says she's a musician, too, and they used to play and sing together at lots of parties and charity entertainments and church affairs, and so they got awfully well acquainted. Too bad! she's a lovely girl. She had to lie down between gowns — she could n't have 'em all fitted right along. Oh, I wish you could see 'em! — such beautiful

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colors! I got a little snip of the blue silk one — why, I thought I put it under this wool! Oh, here 't is! Ain't that sweet? But you can't imagine how it looks on. That pale blue, all embroidered in silver, is just the thing for her — makes her seem a regular princess! She is light, with almost golden hair, and such darling blue eyes! They say Daphne was just so before those rascals stained her skin. It has n't come off yet. And they dyed her hair, too. I don't see how you ever knew her by that picture. She was n't round much — bobbed in once or twice. Her mother won't hardly let her go out of her sight since she's got her back. They all worship her!

“It's so funny! I'd been planning to walk over past there — some Sunday afternoon I thought — ever since you found her; but I never had. And to think I should go right inside and see it all, and see them! I can't hardly believe it! The house is just lovely, kind o' like a palace, I guess. I said to myself as I was going up those stairs, I did n't see how heaven could be any nicer — and I don't! But I s'pose it will — sakes! don't you get to wondering, sometimes, how it will look? Well,

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I ain't hankering to find out. It's pretty good here when you have work, and things come along as they have to-day. Oh, I am so glad Miss Wallace took me! She has to have somebody, you know, to baste and such. Gen'ally she takes Marie Étienne, but Marie 's sick — lucky for me! That sounds nice, don't it? Of course, I do' want anybody sick; but I do love to go into pretty houses! I never did much."

Tillie Shock made good her statement that she could talk while she was knitting, for her tongue ran nimbly from the Flemings round among other patrons of Miss Meagher's; but with rare delicacy of selection not once did it touch a bit of scandal or a disagreeable item. When the clock reached nine, she promptly rolled up her work.

"No late hours for me," she laughed, declining Blue's appeal to stay longer. "I do' want to feel sleepy to-morrow morning when it's breakfast time, do you, little man?" She laid her hand caressingly on Doodles's head. "Oh, I'm so glad you got all that money!" she went on, with a comprehensive glance towards the others. "I wanted to come right

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up and tell you so; but, sakes! I've had to work 'most every evening since, and this is the first chance I've caught. I see you've got a new stove, and that looks as if you were going to stay on. I was so 'fraid you would n't. I don't see much of you, but I know you're up here, and it's a comfort."

"We have decided not to move at present," Mrs. Stickney told her. "Winter in The Flatiron is better than summer."

"Yes, 't is," Miss Tillie agreed, "and I think you are sensible not to hustle to spend your money all at once. Why, one woman said to me, 'Mrs. Stickney won't have to do another stitch of work as long as she lives, with that thirty hundred dollars of theirs!' I did n't contradict her, but I kind o' guessed you knew better. I've noticed money melts away pretty fast, if you don't keep putting something on top of the pile."

In two days came Saturday, and Doodles asked Blue how far it was out to the Flemings'.

"Oh! I do' know, maybe a couple o' miles. Thinkin' of making 'em a call?" Blue's merry eyes met the serious ones of Doodles.

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The small boy shook his head with a gravity that made the brother feel his little joke to be ill-timed.

"I am very sorry for Miss Fleming," Doodles said, "and I've been wondering what I could do to comfort her."

"You?" broke out Blue, scenting difficulties ahead.

"Yes, and I think the best way is to let Caruso do it. If he'd sing for her as he did for me this morning, while you were gone, I am sure she would feel happier. And then it would be very nice for you to go there and see the beautiful house," he went on artlessly. "You'd like that, would n't you?"

Blue shivered inside. "Oh, I don't believe he'd sing!" he cried irrelevantly.

"I think he will, for I've told him all about it, and I'm sure he understands."

"Well, sometime, maybe," yielded Blue.

"Won't this afternoon be a good time?" asked Doodles wistfully.

"Cracky!" ejaculated the elder boy in dismay.

Doodles laughed. "Did n't you s'pose I meant to-day?"

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“No, I did n’t,” was the dry answer.

“But you’d like to go, would n’t you?” persisted the other.

Blue groaned silently. “What you want me to do?” he parried.

Doodles bent forward in his eagerness. “Why, just take Caruso, and let him sing for Miss Fleming — that’s all!”

All! Blue hunted desperately for a solid objection.

“Why, kiddie,” he began in haste, “don’t you worry about her! She’s rich, rich as *Cæsar* —” he broke off abruptly at sight of his brother’s hurt face. “You know,” he started again gently, “she could have a dozen birds to sing for her if she wanted ’em.”

“Yes, but she could n’t have Caruso unless I sent him!” chuckled the small boy. “And, besides,” he went on gravely, “I want to do something for God, to show Him I appreciate the stove and the money He sent. I think He would like me to comfort Miss Fleming, don’t you?”

Poor Blue! he nestled uneasily in the old rocker, and muttered, “I guess so.”

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Then, suddenly, a fresh argument came in sight. It looked plausible.

“I don’t see the sense of her bein’ sick anyway, with all she’s got, — a dandy house to live in, and new clothes, and an automobile, and nothin’ to do, and — everything! I guess if all that can’t cure her, you can’t!”

But Doodles smiled, undaunted.

“Caruso is better than anything she has! She can’t help loving Caruso!”

“Well, —” Blue got up. If he must, the sooner it was over with, the better. He disappeared in the bedroom, to make ready for the dreaded errand.

Doodles listened with a smile that soon lost itself in anxious lines. Blue was making a good deal of noise — a good deal even for him.

“Oh, wait a minute!” cried the small brother, as Blue dashed out and caught up the cage without a word.

He halted.

“You — want to go, don’t you?”

“Sure!” was the grinning answer. “As if I did n’t always enjoy callin’ on young ladies!”

There were merry good-byes, yet after the footsteps on the stairs were lost in other

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sounds, Doodles wondered if Blue had really disliked to go.

“I’d love it,” he whispered softly — “if I only could!” He closed his eyes, but the tears pressed through. “O God,” he murmured, “do let me walk sometime — do! — do! But if I can’t — ever,” he added tremulously, “oh, help me to bear it so nobody will guess how much I care!”

Caruso found it hard to keep on his perch, Blue strode along at so swift a pace. Finally the boy discovered how it was with the little singer, and he slackened his steps.

A dozen times during that long walk he told himself he was a fool for going. Once he actually started back; but the remembrance of his brother’s face, beautiful, eager, appealing, rose before him and seemed to block his way. Resolutely he turned again and went forward. If they would not let him in, why, he should then be able to meet Doodles with clear eyes, — he would have done all that he could.

He kept on with more heart. Why should he be afraid? Probably “that Fleming girl” had never in all her life heard so good a singer

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as Caruso, and maybe, just maybe, the songs would do her good, as Doodles hoped.

Near the house he hesitated. Should he go to the front door, or to the side, or should he go round to the back? He boldly decided on the front. A maid answered his ring.

"I should like to see Miss Fleming," he said politely.

"She can see no one to-day."

The door was beginning to close.

"Oh, well, then Miss Daphne!" cried Blue in desperate haste.

"Miss Daphne is out."

The great door came together promptly, with a soft little thud.

So it was over — all need of worrying about what he should say to the rich girl who looked like a princess! — all Doodles's bright anticipations! At the moment Blue felt equal to an interview with anybody — anybody but the small boy waiting happily in the wheel chair — for this! How could he bear to see the light fade out of the fair little face!

"Huh," he muttered, "she'd 'a' let me in fast enough if I'd been dressed up stylish! I know 'em! They're all alike!"

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With a heavy sigh he went slowly down the stone steps.

A soft south breeze ruffled the bird's feathers, and he let go a gay trill.

"Shut up!" snapped the boy. "Don't give 'em a note! They ain't worth it!"

He took the road towards home with long strides.

Up the hill rolled an open motor car. A woman and a little girl were on the back seat. As they whirled by, Blue recognized Daphne Fleming; but he made no sign.

"Oh, there is Blue Stickney!" exclaimed the child in sudden excitement. "And he has the sweet bird!" She rose to look back. "Simon, Simon! stop! quick!"

But by the time the order had been obeyed the boy was far behind.

"We will go back!" was the authoritative decision, and accordingly, a moment after, Blue was surprised to see the big car draw up to the sidewalk just ahead.

He lifted his cap in response to Daphne's smile.

"How do you do?" asked the little one. "And how is the beautiful Caruso? I wish

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you would go home with me, and let him sing for my mother and sister. Will you?"

"That's what I came for," Blue admitted. "I thought — that is, Doodles thought — p'rhaps she'd like to hear him; but the girl said she could n't see anybody, and you were out, and so — I did n't stay," he ended lamely.

"Then you will come?" She opened the door.

For an instant he hesitated.

"He can sit with Simon," suggested the attendant.

"There is plenty of room here," asserted Daphne, moving aside with a cordial smile.

The boy stepped lightly in, and Simon reached back and shut the door.

Presently the ride was at an end, and Blue was following his young hostess into the wide hall, and passing the maid with head held high. Then he was seated in a small, luxurious room where parti-colored shadows played over the floor. The flickering lights seemed to inspire Caruso to a song, for he broke the stillness with a few startling notes. The boy hushed him at once, whereupon he retreated

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to the farther end of his perch, mopish as a reproved child.

Light feet came running along the hall, and Daphne appeared.

“Will you come upstairs? Mother is not at home, but Eudora would like to hear the bird. Was n't he singing a minute ago?”

“Yes,” nodded Blue. “I shut him up as quick as I could,” he added apologetically.

“Why did you?” was the surprised query. The boy only gave a soft laugh.

The room into which Blue was ushered the little dressmaker might well have called “heavenly”; but he did not bestow upon it a second glance. The “princess” sister held his eyes — and his heart.

She was all and more, far more than Tillie Shook had pictured her, and he found himself wondering how “any feller could go off to Europe” and leave so beautiful a girl languishing for his love.

“Will he sing best in the sunshine?” Daphne's question brought Blue back to the errand in hand.

“I do' know. He don't sing so much now as he did. — Caruso!”

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The boy whistled softly the opening strain of "Annie Laurie," but the bird continued to preen a ruffled feather or two. The air ended, yet Caruso was still silent.

"It takes my brother to set him going," Blue explained, somewhat nettled at the bird's indifference.

Livelier tunes were tried, and then, just as the boy was beginning to wonder if, after all, Caruso were going to disappoint them, he burst into a torrent of song, ending, as often, with the beloved "Annie Laurie."

Blue was so interested in the way the mocker was "showing off," that he did not at first notice the very evident excitement of Miss Fleming. But as soon as the singing ceased, she darted across to the cage with a murmured word which the boy did not catch. Then she turned to him, questioning almost sharply:—

"Where did you get this bird?"

"I bought him of a girl who bid him off at an auction."

"The very one!" she cried in soft, joyful tones. "I know! I know!" bending closer to scrutinize the singer.

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“What is it, Eudora?” Daphne ran over to her sister.

The girl hesitated, while a pretty color flushed her cheeks.

“I think,” she began, “it must be the mocker that — that a friend of mine lost a year — no, a year and a half ago.” She turned to the boy whose heart had suddenly gone sick. “How long have you had him?”

“About a year,” was the automatic answer.

She nodded musingly.

“I think there is no doubt of it,” she went on. “Mr. Selden used to say that he should know Jacky anywhere by the nick in his bill. And he sang ‘Annie Laurie’ just as this bird does. There! perhaps he will remember his name — Jacky! Jacky!” she coaxed.

Caruso cocked his pretty head, and returned a soft, sweet whistle.

“It is Jacky!” she exclaimed delightedly, “and he has not forgotten!”

“Mr. Selden?” questioned Daphne. “The one that used to sing and play when he came to see —”

“Yes, yes!” her sister hurriedly answered,

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adding something in a half whisper, the most of which Blue did not hear.

The child at once left the room, though with reluctance in her face.

The boy wondered why she had been sent away.

Miss Fleming came and took a chair near. Her face was very white, but red spots burned on her cheeks. Her dark blue eyes shone softly.

"My friend, Mr. Selden, is abroad," she said in a low voice; "but he ought to know about Jacky at once. He will be glad — oh, so glad! — that he is safe. He loves Jacky!"

"But it's my brother's bird," Blue broke out in blunt defiance. "It would kill Doodles to give up Caruso!"

"Oh, I did not mean that! No, no! Mr. Selden never would take him from your brother. He is the best man in the world — and the most sympathetic. But it would please him greatly to know that his pet is in kind hands."

For a moment she was silent, while the red in her cheeks stole up to her fluffy yellow hair.

"I wonder," she resumed, "if you would

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be willing to write and tell him about it. I will give you his address and paper and stamps and all, if you will be so good," she added eagerly.

"Why, I suppose I can," answered Blue, somewhat abashed by the unexpected request; "but I don't write very well —"

"That makes no difference whatever! He will not care how the letter is written. He is not critical."

"It seems as if you would be the best one to do it," Blue boldly suggested.

"Oh, no!" with a deepening blush. "You will write," she nodded coaxingly.

The boy gave a rather backward assent. He did not feel sure that Mr. Selden would not want his bird again, and what could he say to ward off such a catastrophe? Before he had recovered from the realization that he had actually agreed to write the letter, a maid entered with a tray, and Daphne came dancing after.

"I stayed to see Johanna fill the tarts," she chuckled. "They are red raspberry jam ones! You will like them!" she told Blue, over her shoulder.

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That was a luncheon like none the boy had ever seen: tiny buttered rolls; slips of cold chicken; raspberry tarts; and coffee in beautiful china cups, with whipped cream floating on top.

"What may Caruso eat?" asked Daphne, pausing for Blue's answer before offering the bird any of the dainties.

"Just a mite of roll," he said.

"No, a tart!" she begged.

The lad shook his head smilingly.

"You might run and fetch a lettuce leaf," suggested her sister. "That will not hurt him."

The child was off and back again in a trice, and they all laughed to see the bird catch bit after bit from her fingers. Even the tarts had no further interest for Daphne until the last piece of green was in Caruso's bill.

When Blue reached home there was much to tell, so much, indeed, that the writing of the message to Mr. Selden was put off till evening and Doodles was in bed. Mrs. Stickney was the boy's ready reference on spelling; but the rest of the letter, except for a few periods and commas, was his own, and it cost him two hours of hard work. He copied and



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recopied, until the supply of paper that Miss Fleming had given him came to an end, and he was obliged to use a sheet from his mother's meager stock, which, of course, did not match his dainty envelope. So the question arose whether it would not be better to wait until Monday, when he could buy what was needed. But Blue repeated what Miss Fleming had said about the importance of Mr. Selden's hearing of the matter at once, and it was finally decided that so small a thing as the dissimilarity of paper and envelope would not be regarded by a man who was "not critical," and, at last, the boy went to bed with the consciousness that he had done his best.

Ten days later, when Morton Selden read the superscription in the stiff, untrained hand, there was puzzlement in his eyes; but the post-mark of his home town hastened his hand, and he cut open the letter. He read it carefully, stopping now and then to reread a phrase before going on.

DEAR MR. SELDEN: —

I bought a mocking-bird a year ago for twenty-five cents, because a girl who had bid

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it off at an auction was scaring it to death and did n't want it. Now Miss Eudora Fleming says it is your bird. I bought it for my brother who can't walk. He loves the bird something fierce. It would sure kill Doodles to have to let it go. Miss Fleming says you will not take it away from him, because she says you are the best man in the world. So I hope you won't. I took Caruso out to her house this afternoon for Doodles, because he thought Caruso would comfort her. He sings fine. She has got nervous prostration, though she does not look sick. She is the prettiest girl I ever saw. I tried to have her write to you, for she said Caruso was sure your Jacky, and you ought to know right away. But she would n't, and I had to. I hope you will excuse my bad writing. She could do it a great deal better, but she said, oh, no, she could n't, and made me promise I would. She was glad as if it was her bird, and said you loved Jacky and would be so glad to know he was safe. I wish you could have seen her when she was talking about it, she did look something beautiful. Her eyes shone so it most took my breath away. I guess she's a

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princess all right, just as Tillie Shook says she looks like. She said she knew you would n't take it from Doodles, because you are so sympathetic. Please let him keep it.

Hoping you are well, I am

Yours very truly,

BLUE STICKNEY.

In less than a fortnight Blue received the following: —

MY DEAR FRIEND: —

Your letter brought me more pleasure than had come to me since I left America. I congratulate you on knowing how to interest a correspondent.

As for Caruso — which name, by the way, is a vast improvement on Jacky — I am mighty glad that he has fallen into such kind hands, and you can assure your brother, from me, that he may keep the little fellow as long as he wants him, provided he will let me come to see him once in a while when I am at home again.

This mail will carry a letter to Miss Fleming

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also, still you may give her my thanks and my regards when you see her.

With best wishes for you and Doodles and Caruso,

Most cordially yours,

MORTON K. SELDEN.

CHAPTER XXIII

“THE MIRACLE VOICE”

THE vision in the doorway arrested the word of welcome on Doodles's lips. As soon as he could command his tongue he smiled a cordial “How do you do? Will you walk in?”

And the vision in brown cloth and creamy lace and fluffy feathers came straight across the room and took one of his hands between her soft gloves, saying, in the sweetest of voices, “My dear Doodles! Do you know me?”

“I think you must be Miss Fleming,” the boy answered, “because —” he hesitated.

“Because Daphne and I look alike?” she questioned.

Doodles shook his head. “Because you are so beautiful,” he replied bravely.

The girl laughed her remonstrance, yet she did not appear to be displeased, and Doodles smiled shyly up at her.

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“I have come to thank you for sending your bird to me,” she began.

“Oh! did Caruso comfort you?” cried Doodles.

Her delicate face grew pinker — and even prettier, the boy thought.

“I enjoyed his singing very much,” she said. “Indeed, his coming has led to such pleasant things, life seems to have been made all over for me.”

“I am just as glad, glad!” he rejoiced. “Caruso is a dear comforter—why, he comforts me all the time!”

The girl’s eyes suddenly grew soft and glistening, and she gave no response.

Caruso, with his usual courtesy, flung a little carol into the pause, and that brought about the visitor’s asking Doodles to sing for her.

The child’s selection chanced to be Nevin’s “Little Boy Blue,” which Leona Montgomery had taught him one rainy holiday. As always, he threw his heart into the simple words, and they became words of life. At the end his listener surprised him by taking both his hands in hers.

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“Doodles dear, has anybody ever told you that you have a wonderful voice?”

“Nobody but a lady who lived downstairs,” he replied modestly. “I sang to her before she died. She said I ought to take lessons.”

“You shall,” declared Miss Fleming. “And my teacher in New York must certainly hear you sing. I will try to manage it.”

After another song the visitor said good-bye, leaving a message for Mrs. Stickney, which when it was given her threw the little woman into a panic.

“Coming to see me?” she exclaimed. “For what? I shan’t know a thing to say to her! I wish folks would n’t — such folks!”

But Eudora Fleming always kept her word, and her next call was in the evening, when the mother was apt to be at home.

At first Mrs. Stickney was not quite at ease and inclined to be silent; but the girl’s errand was of such an exciting nature that the embarrassed tongue was soon set at liberty, and talk was free.

For Doodles to be invited to go to New York with Miss Fleming and her sister; to think of his singing before the celebrated

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Italian who had taught Miss Fleming herself; to have it suggested that he even be examined by the great surgeon whose fees sometimes mounted into the thousands, — all this was enough to bring quick self-forgetfulness to the mother. It was late that night before the little apartment at the top of The Flatiron was dark and still.

Within four days Doodles started for the big city of which he had heard so much and which he longed to see. He was surprised and delighted to find that the trip was to be made in a limousine instead of by train, and when the mother saw how all had been arranged for his comfort she let him go without a fear. The little lad's long rides in his wheel chair had so increased his strength that he had no misgivings at thought of the many miles to be traveled, especially when the cushions were piled around him until he felt never a jolt, and an extra seat was waiting, where he could lie down for a nap if he became weary. But he bore the journey even better than Miss Fleming had expected, and that first night he slept soundly in his little bed in the great hotel.

The next morning the ride around the city

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was an unparalleled delight. It came to an early end, for in the afternoon he was to sing for the famous maestro with the strange-sounding name, of whom he thought he should stand a bit in awe, but whom Miss Fleming said he need not fear at all. So before luncheon he had a long nap, and awoke as fresh as if he had never been tired.

When at last he was in the actual presence of Signor Castelvetro, he found himself looking into very gentle eyes and listening to a soft, musical voice that bade him a pleasant welcome.

To the surprise of Doodles he heard Miss Fleming talking with the Signore in his native tongue as fluently as if she were speaking English; but soon she turned to him, asking him to sing “Little Boy Blue” as he had sung it for her the week before.

Without the least hesitation Doodles sang, and the song sounded even better — so Miss Fleming thought — than in the little kitchen up in The Flatiron.

Signor Castelvetro gave him a quick word of thanks, and with many gestures, went on talking rapidly in mingled English and

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Italian, not much of which the boy could understand. Several times he caught the phrase, "the miracle voice," and he wondered if it might refer to his own, and then felt himself blushing at so foolish a conjecture.

Presently he was singing again, — "Robin Adair," "Nae Room for Twa," "Lead, Kindly Light," and others. He sang and sang, conscious only of the music and a sympathetic audience, sometimes forgetting his audience altogether.

The Signore's praise was hearty and profuse, but given as it was in a mixture of languages Doodles knew little of what was said. Still he was sure that the great man liked his singing, and that made him glad indeed.

"My pupeels haf a musicale to-morrow efening," Signor Castelvetro was saying. "I s'all be verra happee if you will sing for us." He waited, smiling down on Doodles.

The lad glanced questioningly at Miss Fleming.

"You would like to sing?" she queried. "You would not be afraid?"

"I always like to sing," was his simple answer. "No, I shall not be afraid. There is

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nothing to be afraid of, is there?” He turned trustful eyes to the Signore.

“No, no, you of the miracle voice haf not’ing to fear!” The smile was tender as a mother’s.

So it was true — what he had not dared to believe! Could it be like one of the beautiful Bible miracles — his voice? He was wondering about it through all the arrangement of details, and he bade the Signore good-bye still in a whirl of thought.

“Did n’t he sing beautifully?” exclaimed Daphne, as the little party settled itself in the limousine. “I am so glad you are going to sing at the musicale!” She gave Doodles a loving little squeeze.

“Are you tired, dear?” inquired Miss Fleming anxiously.

“Not a bit,” was the happy answer. “I have n’t had anything to make me tired.”

“Except the singing.”

“Oh, it never tires me to sing!” smiled Doodles.

So as the little face showed no sign of weariness Miss Fleming gave Barrow the order, “To the park,” instead of returning directly

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to the hotel. There Doodles saw so many novel and interesting things that for the time he forgot the chief of his thoughts, — when should he go to the great surgeon whose word was to bring him joy or sorrow? But after luncheon he said to himself, “It is coming now — in an hour or two!” Yet Miss Fleming went out by herself, and stayed away all the afternoon, leaving Daphne and Doodles to the care of Laure, her maid. They had a happy time with some new books and photographs; but through it all buzzed the questions, “When will it be? What will the doctor say?”

On the following morning, by appointment, the party started early for the Signore’s, where Doodles’s part of the evening’s programme was to be rehearsed.

As they entered the room and the maestro came forward to greet them, Doodles chanced to look beyond the broad shoulders of the Signore to a boy at a farther window. He was fingering a violin. One glance at the dark face was enough, and he gave a glad little cry. The boy looked up, dropped his instrument, and dashed across the floor, embracing

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Doodles in the arms of the astonished Barrow, and kissing him on lip and cheek.

Miss Fleming and Signor Castelvetro stopped speaking to gaze, while Daphne so far forgot herself as to push between the two in her eagerness to see what was going on.

It was the privilege of Doodles to introduce Christarchus to his friends, and he was pleased to see that the gentle Greek lad was received with favor by Miss Fleming.

The Signore smiled delightedly upon everybody, assuring them that this was “a verra bleesful acceedent,” inasmuch as it promised perfect sympathy between singer and accompanist.

The rehearsal went off merrily. When “Annie Laurie” was mentioned, Christarchus showed his white teeth in a brilliant smile.

“I t’ink we try eet once, and Caruso —!” his slim hands ended the sentence in a way that sent Doodles into a gleeful little laugh.

“Caruso?” queried the Signore with a puzzled scowl.

“My mocking bird,” explained Doodles. “He sings ‘Annie Laurie’ very nicely, but

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that time he sang one of his queer medleys and broke us all up."

The boys laughed again at the amusing remembrance before they could settle down to the song; but the Signore smiled indulgently, the intimate friendship of the lads seeming to please him.

When they separated, Doodles was delighted to hear Miss Fleming invite Christarchus to lunch with them the next day, and he said good-bye feeling that only one thing more was needed to make his cup of happiness very full indeed.

The musicale was an undoubted success, and that part in which Doodles and Christarchus were naturally most interested was not the least applauded of the programme. Doodles was given sufficient praise to turn the head of a less modest performer; but he received it all with his usual artless courtesy and open pleasure, charming those who took the pains to speak with him.

Signor Castelvetro assured him that he could easily obtain a good choir position if he would come to New York, adding as an inducement that he should be glad to give him

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lessons free of charge. But Miss Fleming, on behalf of Doodles, while she thanked the Signore for his kindness, smiled a firm refusal.

Although the day following was their last in the city, the talked-of call upon the surgeon was not mentioned. Doodles dared not ask, and thus even the visit of Christarchus lost some of its anticipated joy.

Late in the afternoon, when Daphne had gone out with Laure for a little last shopping, and Doodles and Miss Fleming were left alone, he ventured a wistful question.

“Are n’t we going to see that doctor before we go home?”

The girl laid down the book she was reading, and came over to his chair.

“Dear boy,” she said, “I saw him on Wednesday. Have you been thinking about it all this time?”

Doodles bowed his answer — words would not come.

“I ought to have told you,” she regretted, “but I was afraid of spoiling the rest of your visit. The doctor thought,” she went on slowly, “it was not necessary to see you. He said he was unusually busy, and that the

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examination would only cause pain and be of no use. He thinks —” her voice faltered.

“That I can’t ever walk,” Doodles concluded softly.

The girl caught him in her arms with a sob.

“Oh, dear boy!” she cried, “I wish you could!”

CHAPTER XXIV

DOODLES KEEPS ON

THE first days of Doodles's home-coming were full of a mild excitement. Besides there being so much to talk about when the little family was alone, almost everybody in The Flatiron was eager to give a personal welcome to the small traveler, as well as to hear about his visit to the great city. But after all the tenants had come and gone, and the boy was left to himself for the most of the long day, his disappointment returned to haunt and torture him. There were times when even his violin had no power to drive away the bitter thoughts.

Blue perceived that something was wrong. His brother's merry laugh had dropped to a wan smile, and occasionally there was the sound of a wee sigh. The matter came to a climax, one day, when school was closed at an unexpected hour, and Doodles was caught crying.

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At first the little lad refused to give any reason for his tears; but Blue would not let him off, and the direct cause of his sorrow was finally disclosed.

“I don’t know — what to do!” he sobbed. A gush of tears halted his speech, but he went on quickly. “It does n’t do any good! I thought ’t was going to — in New York — and now it has n’t! But it seems so mean not to keep on!”

“Keep on what?” Blue burst out.

“Why, asking God to let me walk!” Doodles answered. “You know I’ve been asking and asking for so long.”

“Yes,” Blue assented. “But if I were you I would n’t bother any more —”

He was sorry it was out, for a look came over his brother’s face that he had never seen there before, — horror and anguish blended in one.

“No, I guess I’d keep on!” Blue quickly amended.

“Oh! would you?” It was like sunshine bursting from a storm cloud. “I want to — oh, how I want to! But I did n’t know. God says if we ask for *anything* He will give it to

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us, and why do you s'pose He does n't let me walk?"

"I do' know," sighed Blue. His knowledge did not extend to such deep problems.

"It seems awfully mean to give right up," Doodles went on, "but," his voice dropped mournfully, "I s'pose that doctor knows. Still, God could cure me if all the doctors in the world should say I could n't ever walk, could n't He?"

"I guess so," answered Blue gloomily.

"And I can't see why He does n't when I want to so much."

Blue was silent. His thoughts just then would scarcely have helped matters.

"What do you think?"

"I do' know noth'n' 'bout it. Why don't you ask mother?"

"I did begin one day; but she feels so bad about what the New York doctor said — no, I can't ask her!"

"Try Miss Fleming, when she comes to give you your lesson," shirked Blue.

"Oh, I don't think she knows! I'd rather you'd tell me."

"Tell you what?" parried the elder boy.

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"If God wants me to keep on. Seems as if I could n't stop! I've been stopping, and it's 'most killed me!"

"Well, for pity's sake, keep on then!" Blue advised.

"Would you really? And you don't think it'll be wicked?"

"Wicked! no!"

"And He must answer me sometime, if I keep right on, and don't give up a single bit, must n't He? 'Cause the Bible says 'anything,' you know, and that must mean *walking*. If it said 'except to walk,' of course I could n't; but there is n't a single 'except' anywhere, is there?"

"I never saw one," admitted the other.

"So you do b'lieve He will let me sometime?" insisted Doodles.

"Sure!" nodded Blue recklessly, and the next minute called himself a fool, seeing the joy leap in his brother's face.

On his way downtown he went over the talk bitterly.

"Now he'll think he's goin' to walk!" he muttered. "And he can't, — ever, ever, ever!" hammering out the words with pas-

DOODLES KEEPS ON

sionate force. "O God, why?" The old, old question clamored in his heart.

On one end of the Courant Building advertisements were posted. For a week, almost on the very corner, had stood the picture of a man, a tall, handsome man in gallant uniform of blue and red and gold. Every day the boy had seen it, but seen it indifferently; his eyes had never gone further. Now, suddenly, they took in the words that accompanied the figure. They were in big, bold type.

THE LAME WALK!

THE DEAF HEAR!

THE BLIND SEE!

That was what Blue read, and involuntarily stopped to read more.

The announcement stated that Doctor Emmanuel de Vendôme, the celebrated healer, recently a famous surgeon in the French army, would be at Hotel Royal for a few weeks, where he would give examinations absolutely free to all.

"I wonder —" began Blue, and thereby

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started a train of thought which raced through his mind for the next busy hour. How he succeeded in delivering his papers on the proper doorsteps is surprising, considering what air castles he builded during that time. But he was free at last to rush home to Doodles, whom in a few minutes he managed to work up to an excitement far exceeding his own.

It was decided, long before Mrs. Stickney came, that Doodles should go for a free examination, and although the mother could not feel as sanguine of success as the boys did, still she gave a ready permission, Blue arguing that it was not going to cost "a lonesome cent."

The next day Blue hastened home from the afternoon session, bringing Joseph with him, and the trio started without delay. At the hotel, however, they found a crowd ahead of them, and they were forced to wait until nearly six o'clock before being admitted to the imposing presence of the uniformed physician.

To their surprise the examination was slight, consisting only of a few questions and

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a superficial fingering of the lad's back. It was over so quickly that the boys left the room in rather a dazed whirl, realizing only that the epauleted stranger had asserted that Doodles could be helped and probably cured, and that he was to have his first treatment on the morrow at a charge of five dollars.

The mother looked grave over the doctor's fee; but she finally yielded to Blue's urging, and Doodles went to bed to dream of marching, actually marching, in line with gayly-uniformed soldiers. Thomas Fitzpatrick and Joseph, and Christarchus were there, with epaulets upon their shoulders, — and then, just as he was screwing his head round to see his own shoulders, came the order, "Forward!" and he awoke.

The following afternoon, in the hour before school-closing, just as the small boy was feeling the slow progress of the moments before it would be time for Blue, who should knock at the door but Thomas Fitzpatrick! Presently Doodles was talking of the hopes that were thronging his heart.

"Would n't it be beautiful if I could walk

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again?" Doodles went on enthusiastically, his fair face pink with excitement, and his brown eyes luminous with hope.

The policeman's lips parted — and came together. Then he said quietly: —

"It would, sure!"

"I guess I shall," Doodles smiled. "The doctor thinks so. It is going to cost a good deal, five dollars a time; but mother says she does n't begrudge the money, if he can do me a bit of good. Oh, I've wondered and wondered what it would feel like to jump right up and run across the room, as Blue does — and to think I shall *know!*" His voice dropped almost to a whisper, as if the thought were too precious to speak.

The officer pulled out his watch with a hand that trembled.

"I must be going, little man," he said. "I had an hour off duty, so I thought I'd just drop in and say, 'How d' ye do?' and, 'Good-bye!'"

He held the small hand in a tight squeeze, and then, for Thomas Fitzpatrick, he did a most remarkable thing, he bent over and kissed the uplifted face.

DOODLES KEEPS ON

“Good-bye!” called Doodles, as the tall man strode towards the door.

And from out the depths of a husky throat came the answering, “Good-bye!”

Once more the policeman’s watch told him that it still lacked fifteen minutes of school-closing. The intervening time was spent in street chats with acquaintances, and some of them appeared to be absorbing; but promptly on the appointed moment Fitzpatrick was in front of the Franklin School, his keen eye on the lookout for Blue.

In the center of a troupe of jostling, shouting boys the officer spied him, and presently the lad was caught on the run by a strong arm.

“Oh!” he laughed, “it’s you! I was goin’ to give it to whoever was grabbin’ me that style!”

“Come over here! I’ve got something to tell you.”

“Won’t it keep?” objected Blue. “I’ve important business on hand and can’t stop—”

“Yes, you can! Come on!” He started across the street, away from the crowd of grinning boys.

“What is it? You see, I’m due at Hotel

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Royal at quarter past four, and — Hold on there, Joseph! I'll be back in a jiffy!"

"You'll have time for anything when I'm through with ye," said the officer grimly.

"What do you mean?" cried Blue, startled by Fitzpatrick's manner. "Is Doodles —?"

"He's all right, poor little kid!" The officer shook his head sadly. "I've just been up to see him."

"Oh! then he told you —"

"He did! And it broke me all up! Blue Stickney, you've got to take my word for it, without any explanation! Don't ye waste a cent on that *doctor* up at the hotel!"

"Wh— what?" Blue stammered.

"I mean what I say! Give him a wide berth, and keep whist! Tom Fitzpatrick knows what he's talking about! I started to tell the kid, but it was too much for me — I could n't do it!"

"Why, I'm — was going to take him up there this afternoon for the first treatment!"

"I know! It's a shame! But it's lucky you have n't thrown away any five dollars!"

"Are you sure he ain't all right?" Blue

DOODLES KEEPS ON

scowled. "Why he was in the French army, and he wears epaulets!"

The policeman gave a short laugh.

"I'm not saying he is n't all right, am I? I'm telling you to let him alone, and not to breathe a syllable outside — that's all!"

"It's too bad!" Blue's forehead puckered into deep lines and ridges.

"It is that!" agreed the officer, shaking his head sorrowfully, thinking of Doodles.

The boy went home in a frenzy. What should he tell his brother? How would he take it?

"Blue Stickney! where *have* you been? What makes you so late? Did you have to stay after school? Where's Joseph?" The eager questions popped out in a breath.

"We ain't goin'!" Blue threw his cap on the floor, and himself into the rocker.

"*Why not?*"

"Tom Fitzpatrick told me not to — and that's all I know!" The words came with a fierce snap.

"But he's been here — he did n't say anything! Why —?"

"I tell you, I don't know! He said to keep

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away from that doctor, and not to blab. I s'pose he's a crook, and the police have got on to it."

He had been talking to the floor; now he glanced up.

The little white face, all the eager joy gone out of it; the big, startled eyes that looked past his brother, into the long, helpless years ahead;— it overpowered Blue's self-command. He put his hands to his face and broke into sobs.

"Why, Blue, don't! Don't cry!" pleaded Doodles. "See! I'm not crying! If that doctor is n't a nice man, God would n't have let him cure me anyway, so it is better to know it before I began. Don't cry, please don't! I'm not going to give up! I am going to *keep on!*"

CHAPTER XXV

IN FAIR HARBOR

THE morning newspapers announced the arrest of Emmanuel de Vendôme, alias Henry Cochin, who was wanted by another state to answer various charges, and the policeman's warning against the epauleted stranger was at once made clear. The Stickneys' thankfulness lessened the sting of disappointment, and their gratitude to Thomas Fitzpatrick grew great.

Blue and his mother came home at noon to find Doodles in overflowing good spirits.

"Guess what I've got!" he cried. "But you could n't — ever! Some wedding cards! Whose do you s'pose?"

"Dolly Mocrn's!" shouted Blue.

"Oh, you've guessed right the first time!" laughed Doodles. "But who to? — that's what!"

"I do' know — how should I?"

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“Is it Mr. Gaylord?” ventured Mrs. Stickney.

“Aw! why did n’t I think o’ him!” cried Blue, catching the truth from his brother’s face.

The announcement was read and reread, fingered and talked about.

“They ought to have invited us,” commented Blue.

“I presume they did n’t have much of a wedding,” returned the mother.

“Queer ’t they’re going to be ‘at home’ in Fair Harbor,” went on Blue. “He must have got something to do there — I wonder what. That’s only twenty miles or so from here; I think they might come up and see us.”

“Perhaps they will!” beamed Doodles. “Is n’t it nice they directed it to me? You don’t care, do you?” He cast an anxious look towards the others.

“Not a bit,” Blue assured him, while Mrs. Stickney hurried the dinner along to the accompaniment of merry talk and many surmises concerning the newly married pair.

On the succeeding noon Doodles was still more excited.

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“Well, who’s married this time?” laughed Blue, as his brother waved a white envelope for greeting.

“Nobody else,” chuckled the small boy; “but just you read it!”

Blue pulled out the sheet, and read aloud:—

SWEETHEART DEAR: —

Did you get the announcement yesterday — which would never have been but for you?

We had the tiniest wedding that ever was, with only grandpa and Aunt Sarah for guests, and here we are at Giles’s Aunt Ruth’s! She is a dear little woman who has n’t been outdoors on her feet for twenty-five years. We shall stay only a few days, and then are going to begin housekeeping in our little nest at Fair Harbor. It is the cosiest place, all furnished and ready for us, even to a hod of coal and basket of kindlings by the stove! I can hardly wait for you to see it. Just as soon as we are settled we are coming up to carry you home with us for over Sunday. Giles has engaged with the Valentia Company, to sell their cars, and will have one to use. So we shall spin up to see you often. I think we

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shall keep you, sweetheart, for a fortnight or so, as you have neither silverware nor school books to make demands upon you. So get your suitcase packed. Don't you dare say no! We shall come soon, but I will write ahead. Giles sends love to you all, as do I. Grandpa wanted me to be sure and give you his. He says he shall never forget the songs you sang to him.

Always yours,

DOROTHY MOON GAYLORD.

"Is n't that just jolly!" cried Blue, beginning a double shuffle, which his mother hushed. "Won't we have a dandy time!"

"You'll go, won't you?" anxiously inquired Doodles.

"I don't see why not," she smiled. "I'd be glad to get away for a day or two."

Thus it was decided, and Mrs. Stickney washed and ironed and mended and purchased, until at the end of two weeks, when the anticipations came true, all was in readiness for the unwonted trip.

For the first few minutes Doodles did not feel quite acquainted with the young woman

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in her smart new tailored suit, whom Mr. Gaylord called Dorothy; but the stranger was soon lost in his dear "Dolly Moon," and the party was stowed away in the roomy car and off on the smooth road to Fair Harbor.

It had at first been planned to leave Caruso with Granny O'Donnell; but as the time of separation drew near, Doodles had felt so troubled for fear some mishap might befall his pet, that the bird was wrapped up and taken along with them. Blue had to peep into the cage now and then, to satisfy Doodles that things were going well with his treasure; but the report was always good, and the mocker reached the end of his first automobile ride happy and ready to give thanks in a little carol.

The new "nest" was the second floor of a pleasant house in the suburbs, and Mrs. Stickney looked with almost envying eyes on the beautiful surroundings, wishing it were possible for her to give her children such a healthful and well-located home. But longings were soon pushed out of sight by the joyful inspection of the bride's little domain, and the hearing about the courtship and its result-

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ing happiness, for all of which the two most concerned felt that they owed a lasting debt to Doodles.

On Saturday Lilith Brooks, a girl who lived on the first floor, came upstairs to call on Blue and Doodles. She at once fell in love with Caruso, who volunteered to do his share of the entertaining, and she delighted Doodles by the praises she showered upon the songster.

Midway in the afternoon she appeared again, bringing with her a schoolmate, whom she introduced as Polly Dudley.

“May your bird sing for Polly?” Lilith asked. “I do so want her to hear him!”

“If he will,” answered Doodles, throwing shy glances towards the pretty stranger.

But the mocker was not in an obliging mood, and had to be coaxed and coaxed before he would even give a note.

Finally Blue began whistling “Annie Laurie,” and after it had been many times repeated the bird joined in, to the unbounded delight of the girls. Once started, he kept on, putting the young visitors into raptures with his marvelous powers.

“Now you had better ask Doodles to

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sing," called Mrs. Gaylord from the dining-room.

"Oh, do!" the girls begged.

Without hesitation the boy commenced a favorite hymn, and at least one of his audience was so surprised and captivated by his performance as to sit motionless until the song was ended.

Then, while Lilith ran into exclamations of praise, Polly caught one of Doodles's hands, saying in her soft voice: —

"Does it tire you very much?"

"Oh, no! it never tires me to sing," he smiled.

"Please sing something else, then! I love it!"

So the sweet, magnetic voice rose again, — this time in the haunting little "Nae Room for Twa," and afterwards Lilith pleaded for "more" and still "more," until Dorothy interposed out of sheer pity for Doodles.

"What a lovely, lovely boy!" cried Polly, when she had gone downstairs with her friend.

"I think he's awfully pretty," Lilith returned.

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“Yes, but not only that, — he has such a sweet way. And I never heard such singing! I thought David Collins could sing better than any other boy. But Doodles! Why, when he sat there singing that Christmas carol, all I could think of was an angel!”

“Oh!” exclaimed Lilith rapturously, “with those dear little curls all over his head, and his big brown eyes, would n’t he make a beautiful angel for a tableau?”

“He is angel enough without the tableau,” Polly laughed. Then her face saddened. “It is too bad he can’t walk! Has n’t he ever?”

“Oh, yes! Mrs. Gaylord says he did until he was about four; then he had a terrible fall, and he has n’t taken a step since.”

“I wonder if father could n’t cure him,” mused Polly.

“You think your father can cure everybody,” laughed Lilith.

“Well, he can — almost everybody!” maintained Polly. “I wish they’d let father see him.”

“I guess they’ve tried a lot of doctors. Mrs. Gaylord told mamma that a famous

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New York surgeon has just said he won't ever be any better — is n't it awful?"

"I wish father could see him!" Polly insisted longingly.

"Do you think your father knows more than that big New York doctor?" asked Lilith with a rallying laugh.

"Of course, he does! He has cured lots of children that those great surgeons said could n't ever be!"

"You can ask your father to come and see him," suggested Lilith.

"Oh, no, he never would!" Polly shook her head decidedly. "Unless they asked him to," she amended. "Say," she broke out hurriedly, "is n't that Mr. Gaylord?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to see him!" Polly rushed into the hall as the car stopped and a gray-coated man came up the steps.

"How nice to have two girlies to open the door for me! But this is a new one," smiling to Polly. "Miss Lilith, please present me!"

"Why, I s'posed Polly knew you, the way she jumped up and out here!" Lilith laughed.

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“This is Polly Dudley, Dr. Dudley’s daughter, don’t you know?”

“I have heard of her. Indeed, I am glad to have the privilege of meeting the lassie of hospital fame. How do you do, Miss Polly of the Hospital Staff?” He bowed low over Polly’s hand.

The girls laughed, and then Polly began abruptly: —

“Mr. Gaylord, I want to talk to you about that lovely little lame boy — Doodles. I wish they’d let father see him! I think he could cure him!”

Giles Gaylord drew a deep breath, and shook his head gravely.

“I’m afraid even your father could n’t help him,” he replied. “I know Dr. Dudley does wonderful things, but this is an extreme case.”

“He has just cured a little girl who had n’t walked for two or three years. Her father and mother had tried everybody, even had taken her abroad to some famous surgeons over there — and father operated on her, and now she is all right!”

“I am afraid his mother would never con-

IN FAIR HARBOR

sent to an operation on such uncertainties as must be."

"Well, you might ask father what he thinks," urged Polly. "I know he would n't charge anything for an examination."

"I will suggest it, Miss Polly, and thank you! Even his mother could hardly be gladder than I to see Doodles walk. I'll talk it over with them."

The talk bore such good fruits that an examination was arranged for on the following Monday, and Doodles spent Sunday in a state of bliss. God was surely answering his prayers — He was going to let him walk! Next morning he bade his mother and Blue an early good-bye, his face radiant with joy.

The hour appointed was three in the afternoon, and Dorothy and Doodles were waiting at a front window when Mr. Gaylord drove up. On the way the boy wondered for the hundredth time how Dr. Dudley would look, if he would wear epaulets, like the doctor at Hotel Royal, and whether he would hurt him very, very much, or simply pass his hand up and down his back, as the other doctor did.

"They are building a new hospital, or rather

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Mrs. Gresham is," Dorothy told him; "it is to be exclusively for children. In the meantime Dr. Dudley is receiving patients in the house where he lives, but he cannot accommodate many. I am glad you could get in so soon. You will like the Doctor; everybody does."

Doodles wondered if he were as nice as Polly. And then, before he had time to ask, they whirled through a gateway and up to a door.

To the surprise of the little lad Dr. Dudley was a young man, and instead of a gay uniform he wore a short white coat — without epaulets. But Doodles liked him, just as Dorothy had said — his voice, his manner, his smile. In fact, as soon as the Doctor took his hand his faith rose to the joy point. He could not be thankful enough that he had "kept on."

The examination was very different from the one at Hotel Royal. Several times the physician's gentle fingers caused sharp pain; but the lad shut his teeth hard, and did not flinch.

"Have you never had any treatment?"

IN FAIR HARBOR

Dr. Dudley asked, — “massage, rubbing, or the like?”

“Only what mother does,” Doodles answered. “She always rubs me every night, and in the morning when she has time.”

“I thought so,” he nodded. “Your legs are in better condition than legs generally are when they have not been used for so long.”

“She has done it ever since I can remember,” volunteered Doodles.

“Good!” was the hearty response.

Presently the Doctor took up a curious three-part instrument, and putting an end in each ear laid the other on the boy’s bare chest, — now here, now there, until Doodles wondered if he were going all over in that way. But no, it was only within a certain space.

“Absolutely sound!” Dr. Dudley turned to Mrs. Gaylord with a radiant smile.

“Is n’t that fine!” she returned with a smile equally bright.

Doodles wondered why they were so delighted, but he did not like to ask.

In a few moments he was waiting on the couch in the reception room, while Dr. Dudley and the Gaylords conversed with one

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another in the adjoining office. A draught had drawn the door almost together, and only fragments of the talk could be heard; but the boy patched them together to make a startling whole.

“Good fighting chance . . . always danger . . . soon as possible . . . Wednesday morning . . . walking in a month or two.”

By this time the eager listener was so excited that he failed to hear anything further, and his eyes were unusually brilliant when the Doctor said good-bye.

Dorothy Gaylord put her arm around Doodles, and drew him close, as they spun along the smooth pavement.

“Did you hear what Dr. Dudley said?”

“A little,” he answered.

“Oh, sweetheart, he thinks you have such a good chance! He advises an operation right away.”

The word sent instant terror to the brave little heart. This had not been included in his wonderful bill of items.

“I am sure your mother will consent,” Dorothy went on, “everything looks so favorable. Giles is going up to Foxford for her

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and Blue as soon as he has taken us home, and they will stay all night. Your mother can see the Doctor this evening, and arrange things with him. Dearest! won't it be beautiful if you can walk? She squeezed the little form ever so lightly.

"Beautiful!" was the soft echo — out of a trembling heart. Operation! What were they planning to do to him? He had heard of operations — oh, yes, he had heard of little else while his mother was sick! Everybody in The Flatiron talked about them then. Why, Mrs. Corrigan said — it was too horrible to think of! The boy tried to put it away, but it would come back!

Mr. Gaylord had slight trouble in persuading Mrs. Stickney to permit Doodles to go to the hospital. Had she not recently passed through a successful operation herself? The probable chance of his being able to walk was worth a little risk. When she saw Dr. Dudley she was ready to agree to his wishes without an objection. The voice of Doodles was not asked for, and the little lad kept silent.

Blue, with his keen perception, guessed something of his brother's fears.

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“Don’t you be worryin’ about the operation, old feller! They’ll give you something so you won’t feel it a bit!”

Give him something! The words were a knife! Doodles scarcely heard the rest of what Blue was saying.

“Just think how jolly it’ll be when you and I play football together!”

The “football” did catch his ear. It made him smile. Yes, he would try to think about football, as Blue bade him. What if they should cut him in pieces! They would put him together again! If only Mrs. Corrigan had n’t said — never mind, others had borne it and he could!

The parting between Doodles and his mother threatened to be tearful on both sides; but it was arrested by Blue’s shout that the car was there, and in a moment the small boy was at the window waving his good-byes.

CHAPTER XXVI

“DR. POLLY”

AT ten o'clock Doodles was taken to the hospital and carried directly to his little white room. Everything was novel and pretty to the boy's eyes, but prettiest of all was the white-capped, smiling nurse who received him. He was undressed at once and put into a soft bed, where he had two little pillows at his head. He watched the nurse as she hung some of his clothes in the white wardrobe and folded others and laid them away in the little white bureau. How strange it seemed to go to bed right in the middle of the day while the sun was shining!

Presently the nurse brought writing materials, and began to ask him questions, — where he lived, where he was born, his age, his mother's maiden name, her native town, and many others. Finally she inquired: —

“What doctor sent you here?”

“No doctor. Polly Dudley told Mr. Gay-

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lord that she thought her father could make me walk, and so he wanted mother to let me go to see him, and that's how it came about."

"Then I shall have to put it down 'Dr. Polly,' shan't I?"

Doodles chuckled.

"It is n't the first time she has sent us a patient," the young woman went on. "Polly is her father's right-hand man."

"I think she is lovely," returned Doodles.

"She is," was the emphatic assent.

At the moment another nurse brought a small tray and a cup of broth. She swung the top of a table directly over the bed, and set the tray upon it, to the delight of the little patient who had never seen a table of that sort.

The broth was hot and good, and Doodles sat, propped up with pillows, and sipped and sipped until it was every drop gone. Then, as he was alone, he fell to admiring the cup. It was of delicate white china, with a handle on each side, and a wreath of pansies around it. He wondered if the pansies made the broth taste better.

From the cup his eyes roved round the

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room. How dainty it was! And light! So different from the dim bedroom at home! The one large window at the end was hung with three curtains, — a very dark shade, a light shade, and drapery of white muslin looped at either side. Through the clear glass he could see a wide sweep of blue sky, and a few trees in their autumn dress. How beautiful it was! He was still gazing, when he heard a soft “Hullo!” He turned quickly, to see Polly Dudley in the doorway.

“How do you do?” she smiled. “I am so glad you have come! I should have been dreadfully disappointed if you had n’t!”

“You would?” returned Doodles in surprised tone.

“Of course,” laughed Polly. “Because I want you to walk and run as I can.”

“Oh, if I only could!” Doodles replied. “But,” a bit wistfully, “your father is n’t sure.”

“Almost, I guess,” nodded Polly. “If he had n’t been he would n’t have urged you to come. My, I know what it is not to walk!”

Doodles looked at her in amazement. “You?” he cried.

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“Yes. I was hurt, and could n’t walk for ever so long. I know!” Her curls waved emphatically.

“Did you have an operation?”

“Oh, yes! That is n’t anything to mind, — you don’t know it!”

“No,” Doodles smiled — and shivered under the bedclothes.

They talked of many things, — Caruso, Lilith Brooks, Polly’s school, and the new hospital which was building.

Polly stayed until the nurse came, the one with dark hair and eyes, whom they called Miss Eden. Doodles liked her very much, her smile was so quick and so cheering.

After a while she brought him another cup of broth. It looked the same, she laughed, but tasted different. Doodles found it just as good as the first. He wondered why they did not give him something to eat with it, yet he asked no questions.

One nurse or another came often, but some of the time the small patient was alone. Once he went to sleep, and awoke to see Polly at his side, a big yellow chrysanthemum in her hand.

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“How beautiful!” he smiled.

“I hoped you would like it. It is almost as good as the sun,” she laughed. “That will be gone before long, but this will stay.” She put it into his hand.

“Is it for me?” he asked in surprise.

“Certainly. A girl gave it to me at school, and I said, ‘Now I have something to carry to Doodles!’”

“I don’t see why you should think of me,” he said musingly.

“Because lie-abed folks need to be thought of more than run-about folks, and besides — I like you!” She laughed, and skipped away.

At the tea hour came a cup of bouillon — that was all. Suddenly Doodles understood. He remembered hearing a woman tell Granny, while his mother was at the hospital, that when she had her operation they gave her nothing to eat for a whole day beforehand, — nothing but beef tea and mutton broth. Yes, that was it! It made the morrow seem nearer. Then he began again to think of what the other woman, Mrs. Corrigan, had said, the dreadful thing that had haunted him ever since. He could not finish his supper.

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The room grew dusky. Even the golden chrysanthemum could not brighten the blackness. He thought of the kitchen at home and wished he were there. Of course, he wanted to walk; but, oh, if Mrs. Corrigan had n't said it! He closed his eyes, and repeated his evening prayer, trying to trust everything to the One who he now felt sure was answering his petitions; but — he could see the woman, just as she had stood against the dim hallway, hands on her hips; he could see the horror in her face, the uprolled eyes, as she told about it! He turned his face to the pillow, yet he could not shut her out.

Presently a new nurse appeared, and put a little thermometer under his tongue and timed his pulse by her watch. When she went away she told him to go to sleep.

He endeavored to do as she bade him; but sleep would not come, — only the picture of that woman, her hands upon her hips. Her words beat through his brain! They would not stop! He was still wide awake when the nurse came softly in. She opened the window a little wider and put up a screen to shield him from the wind, for the night was chilly. She laid her

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cool hand on his forehead, and asked if he felt lonely.

“Oh, no!” he answered.

She bent over and kissed him, and then went out.

The speaking-tube in the hall was beyond his sight. Otherwise he would have seen Mrs. Fairfax go there and push the bell button, and if he had been near enough he would have heard her say: —

“Is Polly there? May she come up for a little while, please?”

When Polly reached the head of the stairs the nurse was waiting for her.

“Doodles seems troubled about something. His pulse is away up, and he looks as if he would never go to sleep. Find out what it is, if you can, and tell him there is nothing for him to be afraid of. Perhaps he is homesick; but you will do better than I. He is not acquainted with me.”

Doodles smiled a welcome when Polly turned on the light.

“The flower could n’t keep away the dark, could it?” she laughed.

The boy returned a plaintive little no.

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“Did they give you a good supper?”

“Yes, it looked nice. I was n’t hungry.”

“You ought to have been. I was!”

Doodles smiled. Polly was so bright, as if no gloom could ever touch her. Even Mrs. Corrigan would not be able to frighten *her*. He wished he were as brave. If only she had n’t said that — that awful thing! Could it be true? Doodles shut his teeth hard — through Polly’s chatter the words rang and rang!

“They won’t let you have anything to eat to-morrow,” Polly was saying, “or to drink either; but you won’t care. I didn’t a bit. You don’t worry about to-morrow, do you? You must n’t, because there is n’t anything to dread, not a single thing! Dr. Keith will examine your heart, just as father did. But you did n’t mind that, did you? And he may take your blood-pressure — that is n’t anything! It makes your arm feel funny for a minute — that’s all!”

“Who is Dr. Keith?”

“Perhaps you have n’t seen him. He’s ever so nice. He is the one that gives the anæsthetic.”

“Oh!” said Doodles weakly. “Is that the

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— the ether?” It was out — the terrible word! He had meant not to speak it.

“I don’t think they’ll give you ether —”

“*Not give me ether!*” Doodles’s voice was an amazed whisper.

“I don’t think so — or not much. Anyway you won’t know it! Dr. Keith will give you gas first.”

“Gas?” repeated Doodles with a puzzled pucker of his forehead.

“Yes, laughing gas, — a new kind, I guess. It is n’t bad to take. It makes your head feel whirly inside, that’s all. I don’t know how ether feels, but they say it is — *stuffy* — *stuffyating*.” Polly still stumbled over an occasional long word.

“Oh, yes, that’s what Mrs. Corrigan said!”

“Who?”

“A woman I heard telling about it. She said she’d never, never take it again, she’d rather *die in purgatory seventeen times!*”

Polly giggled. “That’s a good many! I guess she did n’t go to an up-to-date hospital. Father makes everything so easy for people. Has that worried you — what she said?”

“A little,” Doodles nodded.

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“Well, you need n’t worry any more, for you won’t mind the gas. You can breathe just as easy as you can now.”

“I’m so glad!” murmured Doodles. A mountain weight slid away from him.

“I must go, or you won’t have any chance to sleep,” Polly laughed.

“Thank you for coming! Thank you so much!” He caught her hand and squeezed it.

“Good-night!” she said gayly, and threw him a kiss as she turned off the light.

“Poor little fellow!” crooned Mrs. Fairfax, when Polly told what she had learned. “That’s why he left his supper. I’ll get him something now; he will sleep better for it.”

When she brought the steaming cup, Doodles sipped it eagerly, every drop, and in five minutes he was fast asleep.

It was morning when he awoke, and the first thing he saw was a tall glass vase of magnificent pink roses. Where did they come from?

“Those are your breakfast,” Mrs. Fairfax smiled, appearing with a bowl of water and some towels.

“Did Polly give them to me?”

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“No, a lady brought them late last evening.” She handed him a card.

“Oh, Miss Fleming! That’s exactly like her! How sweet they are!”

“She said she had just heard that you were here, and so came down last night that you might have them early this morning.”

Nothing could have taken Doodles’s mind so completely from the ordeal ahead as the beautiful flowers and the thought of Miss Fleming’s coming to Fair Harbor, at that hour, expressly to give him pleasure.

Polly ran in to bring a bright good-morning, and was given a bunch of the long-stemmed beauties.

“Are there any other children here?” Doodles asked, just as she was going.

“Yes, nine; three girls and six boys. One of the girls has her operation at ten.”

“This morning?”

“Yes.”

“Oh! please will you carry her some of my roses?”

Polly hesitated. “You won’t have many left, if you keep giving them away,” she demurred. “She can have some of mine.”

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“No, no! Take these! I’ll have enough.”

So three more buds were chosen from the vase, and Doodles happily watched them go.

The lad’s idea of the operating room had been gained from Mrs. Corrigan’s description, — “A horrud place down in th’ base-mint — ugh! ut sure gives me th’ crapes ivery time I think iv ut!” So he was totally unprepared for the large, beautiful room on the same floor, finished all in white, with sunshine streaming in at the windows; and its glass-topped tables, their jars and bowls of shimmering crystal filled with liquids of bewitching colors — oh, it was so different from what he had imagined! And he discovered, too, that the dreaded table itself was more like a high couch, where he had a little pillow for his head and was made very comfortable indeed. The smiling man in spotless white, who gave him a cordial greeting — Doodles was sure it must be Dr. Keith, who Polly had said was “nice.”

Things went along much as Polly had told him, and presently a little frilled white cap was put over his hair, and every tiny ringlet tucked in. Meantime he was surprised and

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amused at the appearance of others in the room. The head nurse, Miss Price, — he was certain it must be she, — was all in white from top to toe, only her dark, happy eyes being left uncovered. The younger nurse was in white, too; but her face was not hidden, and she smiled out at him from the curious white “sunbonnet” on her head. He wondered why they dressed in such a queer fashion — it was like the masquerade parties that Leona had told him about.

While he was wondering, a damp cloth was laid over his eyes, — “To keep them from smarting,” the pleasant voice of the Doctor said.

“Now I am going to give you some laughing gas,” Dr. Keith went on, “so you won’t know anything about it. Breathe easily — that is all!”

He did as he was bidden, and found it to be just as Polly had declared; whatever it was over his nose and mouth was not uncomfortable, and he could breathe as well as ever. Something began to whirl in his head.

“Feel a little bit sleepy?” asked the Doctor.

“Not sleepy, only whirly,” was the answer.

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The whirl went a little higher, almost to the edge of his hair — then there was a rustle at his side. “They can’t put me to sleep, after all!” Doodles thought, and opened his eyes. He saw an electric light fixture — it looked like the one in his little white room! Somebody said — it sounded like Miss Eden: —

“Do you know me?”

He looked. It *was* Miss Eden! He was in his own little white bed!

Could — could IT be over? He voiced his thought at once.

“Certainly it is,” she smiled.

He drew a long, happy breath. “It does n’t seem a minute!” he said.

“More than an hour,” was the reply.

She pulled down the dark shade, and he had a short nap. When he awoke he felt so glad, glad, glad! He wondered if he were going to walk. Then he slept again.

The next time he opened his eyes Dr. Dudley was there. He took his hand, and told him that everything looked very favorable. Doodles knew that meant that the Doctor thought he would walk. His responsive smile was joyful.

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On Thursday Polly came in for a minute.

“It was n’t bad, was it?” she laughed.

“Not a bit,” he answered merrily. “There was n’t a thing to dread, not a single thing! It was beautiful.”

In the afternoon his mother and Dorothy came to see him. His mother’s eyes were full of tears when she kissed him. He did not see why, for he was getting well fast. He did not feel like crying, he wanted to laugh.

At the end of the week Miss Fleming surprised him with a flying call and a box of red roses and ferns. He did not keep many of the flowers for himself; he persuaded Polly to carry them to the other patients. And then he picked out the very prettiest buds that were left in his vase and coaxed her to take them downstairs.

Those were happy days for Doodles. Everybody was so kind. Polly spent many an hour at his side, talking, telling stories, or singing. His mother and Blue came once a week, and the Gaylords and the Flemings frequently. And at the bedtime hour, if Polly were not there, Miss Eden would tell him wonderful fairy tales, often repeating his favorite one,

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of which he never tired, — about “King Inge-wall’s daughter” who ferried the river on the backs of her “little grey geese,” and who finally came to the end of her troubles, as every good princess should.

One tiny fear, however, would sometimes creep in to spoil his joy, — what if, after all, he should never walk! Thus far he had been lifted from bed to chair, and back again, much as before the operation, and he wondered when he was to try his feet.

One morning he was terrified to see Dr. Dudley with a pair of crutches. Were these to be the end of his hopes?

“Only for a while, little man,” explained the Doctor, answering the pitiful question in the boy’s eyes. “They will try your strength, and at the same time keep you from strain. Suppose we see how they go!”

To the surprise of Doodles, he found that he could use the crutches very well, and he went across the room and back, breathlessly joyful.

“May I go down the hall?” he cried.

“Certainly. I want you to walk about.” And with a word of caution to the nurse, he waved the lad a gay good-bye.

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That day held only pleasure for Doodles. Polly ran in several times. Dorothy was there in the afternoon, and before she went came Miss Fleming with Daphne and Blue.

“Hurrah, old feller! I knew you’d go it!” exclaimed Blue, swinging his cap in a cheer that threatened to be louder than his brother thought proper, and which his alarmed face brought to a sudden hush.

The merry party shortly went away, leaving only Daphne’s chrysanthemums and Dorothy’s nut cakes and Blue’s card to tell of the visit. The card pictured a pussy with a spring tail that kept wagging whenever the card was touched. The nurses all laughed when they saw it, and Doodles had it beside him while he ate a nut cake, the pink chrysanthemums helping to make it a gala feast.

The lad grew strong and stronger. Several times he stood upon his feet unaided. Still nothing was said about his walking, and there were hours when he grew sick with fear, lest he should never leave his crutches. Even this was better than anything he had ever known; but it seemed only the mockery of walking.

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Polly was the first to notice that his blitheness was fading.

Dr. Dudley came, one noon, as he sat by the window.

“Want to try it to-day?” he asked smilingly.

At first Doodles did not understand. Then he whitened.

“You mean?” he faltered.

“Yes, now is a good time!”

The boy arose, trembling.

“Don’t be afraid! You can do it!”

Still Doodles hesitated. What if he should fail! His heart — the Doctor’s heart would break with disappointment! He looked beyond Dr. Dudley to where Miss Eden stood smiling him courage. His eyes passed along to the doorway — Polly was peeping round the corner! He put a foot forward — wavered — then the other!

“He’s walking! he’s walking!” piped Polly.

While Doodles reached the Doctor’s arms, and breathed ecstatically: —

“*God has answered!*”

CHAPTER XXVII

“AULD LANG SYNE”

ON the Saturday before New Year's Day Doodles went home. Giles Gaylord and his wife came for him, and he wore his Christmas presents from Miss Fleming, a long fur coat and a cap to match. The nurses pressed about him with happy words, Dr. Dudley walked beside him to the door, while Miss Eden and Polly went as far as the car and then scampered back to linger at the window for a last good-bye.

The air was keen, but Doodles, snug beneath the robes, was warm as need be.

Giles drove fast. In a little while they passed the postoffice in Carleton, then the granite church at Berryville, and not long afterwards the outskirts of Foxford came in sight.

Doodles grew eager as familiar objects were whizzed by. When the car turned into Cherry Street he sat motionless, looking ahead where The Flatiron showed in the distance.

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“I wonder if Granny will be at the window — yes, there she is! And Mrs. Jimmy George!” Doodles waved his hand high and joyously. Granny was waving both of hers!

The car had slowed, but it was going past! Oh, they would turn round — that was it! But no! They were leaving The Flatiron behind! He looked inquiringly at Dorothy.

“We are going for a little longer drive,” she smiled.

That was queer. Doodles felt a bit disappointed. It was nice to ride farther, but he was in a hurry to see his mother and Blue. Never mind, he would be back before long. But on and on they went.

“This is the road to the Flemings’, is n’t it?” Doodles asked at length.

Dorothy assented. She put her arm around him. “Are you tired?”

“Not a mite,” he told her.

And at that minute they neared the house on the knoll, and turned in at the great stone gateway. Were they going for a call, Doodles asked himself. No, they whizzed directly by the door. Truly this was a most mysterious ride!

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On a branch driveway was a little bungalow. Doodles had once noticed how pretty it was. Straight towards the tiny house sped the car. Why, there was Blue out in front! And his mother, with a shawl over her head! She ran down from the veranda. As the car stopped she was ready to take Doodles in her arms.

“I can’t go up and down steps very well yet,” he said.

There was no need. Eager hands were about him.

“How do you like it?” cried Blue.

“What?”

“Our new home,” Blue answered, and laughed to see his brother’s widening eyes. “We’ve moved out here!” he announced.

“And not going back to The Flatiron?” queried Doodles.

“Never!” was the prompt reply.

“Is n’t that beautiful!” exclaimed the lad.

“To think of your walking along just like anybody!” marveled Mrs. Stickney. “I can’t believe it yet!” she continued to Dorothy, as they hurried inside.

Doodles had to tell how he wondered and

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wondered when they did not stop at The Flat-iron, and whom he saw at the windows, before his brother would be satisfied.

After the Gaylords were gone Blue must show the newcomer all over the little bungalow, the happy mother following them and putting an arm around each boy every time they stopped to admire a new piece of furniture or the view from a window.

“The house was intended for the gardener,” Blue explained; “but he went back to Scotland before it was done, and so it was empty, and Mrs. Fleming and mother fixed it up together that we’d come here to live. I’m going in to school every day on the trolley, and next spring you are to go!”

“O—h!” breathed Doodles delightedly.

“And I shall take my dinner, and be gone all day! S’pose you’ll be lonesome?”

“Now, Blue!” interposed his mother.

“You just wait!” giggled Blue. “Shall you, Doodles?”

“Why, I shall miss you and mother, of course; but I shan’t mind being alone—I can walk, you know! Will mother carry her dinner, too?”

“AULD LANG SYNE”

This was what Blue had been waiting for. “No!” he chuckled. “She is n’t going on the trolley either!”

“Don’t tease him, Blue! Tell him all about it!” laughed Mrs. Stickney. “I must go down and see to my muffins.”

“What is it?” begged Doodles. “I can’t wait a minute longer!”

“Mother has given up working in the shop!”

“Oh, how lovely!”

“She’s going to do mending for Mrs. Fleming, and make some dresses for Daphne, and sew for the rest of ’em, — I do’ know what, — and help out any time. And they don’t charge us a cent more here than we paid at The Flatiron, and the steam is brought right down in pipes from their house! The wires come from there, too! Did you see we’ve got electricity?”

No, Doodles had not noticed, and he must be shown how each fixture worked.

“Is n’t it nice that you found Daphne?” reflected the small boy happily.

“Nicer that you made me carry Caruso out to Miss Fleming,” Blue put in, wag-

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ging his head slowly. "My, did n't I hate to go!"

"I almost thought you did n't like it," smiled Doodles.

Blue laughed. "Glad I went! What if I had n't!"

"I suppose God could have made some other way," Doodles pondered. "But it is great as it is! And I'm glad you told me to keep on!"

Blue smiled reminiscently. "Things have come out mighty good! Say, let's go downstairs where we can sit easier! I want to tell you about Miss Fleming."

"What about her?"

"Oh, you wait! My, but you can go down all right, can't you!" admired Blue, to his brother's delight.

"There! now we can talk!" The boy settled himself in a big rocker, after seeing Doodles comfortable in its mate opposite.

"Tell me quick!" begged the little lad, eager for every scrap of home news.

"Well, you know Mr. Selden that Caruso belonged to? Mrs. Fleming told mother all about him and Eudora —"

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“Oh! was that the one Miss Shook said?”

“I guess so. Now you keep still and let me talk!

“You see, it was this way, she and Mr. Selden were dead in love with each other, and would n't either of 'em show it a mite. Miss Fleming thought he did n't care anything about her when he went off without saying a word; and all the while he did n't dare let on how he felt, because she is so rich and he is poor and has got his way to make. So that's what was the matter with her — Mrs. Fleming said she just went all to pieces. Then when I carried the bird, and wrote him what I did, it made him think perhaps she did like him. And he wrote to her, and she wrote to him, and they kept on writing, and they both found out how it was, and he proposed, and now they're engaged and going to be married!”

“O—h!” beamed Doodles.

“I do' know when, but he's comin' home next spring. Miss Fleming don't care a rap if he is poor, and any of 'em don't; they say he'll make piles o' money pretty soon, because he

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plays so beautifully. And they are all so glad she's got well, and it's come out so fine, it seems as if they could n't do enough for us — 'specially for you.'

"What have I done?"

Blue laughed. "You sent me out there with Caruso — that's what!"

"You carried him and wrote the letter anyhow!" declared Doodles. "But, say, when is he coming home? I do want to see him! Was he real sick, the reason you took him over to Mr. Gillespie's?"

"No, only mopish. When I telephoned to him, he said he guessed he missed you, and I'd better bring him there where he'd have all his birds for company till you got back. He said to wrap him up and fetch him right along. I put some newspapers round the cage, and made some little holes for breathing places, as he told me, and he's been there ever since. He's comin' in Monday anyway, and he's goin' to bring him then."

"Supper's ready!" called Mrs. Stickney.

"This does n't look much like the old Flat-iron kitchen, does it?" exulted Blue.

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Doodles shook his head smilingly, his mouth full of egg salad.

“Bet this came from the Flemings’, did n’t it?” queried Blue.

“I knew it,” he went on, after his mother’s assent. “They’re always sending down something or other. You ought to have seen the basket that came the day we moved! About everything in it! I tell you, they’re the folks for me!”

“Me too!” chimed in Doodles. “But I think there could n’t have been anything in that basket better than these muffins,” he added, with a loving glance across to his mother.

“Nobody can rout her on cooking,” declared Blue.

“What children!” beamed the happy mother, as she went to fetch a fresh supply of the cakes.

The back door-bell rang, and the boys heard a hearty thank-you.

The door shut, and Blue ran out to the kitchen.

“Ice cream and oranges!” he shouted. “My, what will they bring next!”

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The Fleming sisters came for a brief visit in the evening; but they were soon away, and lights were out early in the bungalow.

Sunday morning it was snowing fast. There was a private telephone connected with the house on the knoll, and after breakfast Mrs. Fleming rang to ask if anything were needed. Later Daphne chatted with Blue. Otherwise there was no word from outside all day; but it was a happy household, there was enough to talk about and to be glad over to keep anybody from being lonesome.

The next sunrise promised a rare New Year's Day, — white underfoot, blue overhead, and just cold enough for the season. An air of mystery pervaded the little house on the side drive. Doodles had felt it vaguely the day before, and it suddenly grew into something more defined when Blue awoke him with a "Happy New Year, old feller! Got to start early *this* morning!"

"To-day is a holiday," observed the younger lad a little later.

"Bet you it is!" shouted Blue, wagging

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his head in the way Doodles knew — it always meant a secret that ached to be let out!

What could it be! He asked no questions, but kept his eyes wide open. What fun to feel a lovely secret ahead! There were messengers from the big house all the forenoon, but Doodles could only guess at their errands. Nothing wonderful happened. Daphne brought down a book for him, a beautiful book of verses and pictures, and one for Blue about some gallant knights. But Blue did not stop long to look at books. He cleaned all the paths about the house, and then surprised his brother by saying that he was going into town.

“For what?” cried Doodles, curiosity suddenly thwarting his determination to appear blind to all mysterious doings. But he gained nothing.

“Oh, a little business, kiddie!” Blue answered in what was meant to be a careless tone, but which went wide of its aim and only mystified Doodles to a high degree.

When he returned home, his mother had an immediate errand in the kitchen, where he at

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once joined her, leaving the small boy to speculate on the possible import of the trip.

Afterwards Blue had several telephone messages, which he answered only by pleased phrases, which meant nothing to the listener.

It was a tantalizing, bewitching forenoon, full of the wildest anticipations and the joyfulest hopes.

Soon after dinner Mrs. Stickney suggested that Doodles go upstairs and have a nap; so, although he was not a bit sleepy, he went without a word, guessing that they wished him out of the way. He had made up his mind that the Flemings were going to have a party in the evening, to which they were invited; yet why so much mystery about it? He was no sooner established on his little bed than he heard doors opening and shutting downstairs, and the sound of men's feet and men's voices. He was sure, too, that Eudora Fleming was there. All this pushed away his conjecture about the party. He gave up trying to guess.

After a while there was less bustle below, and Doodles shut his eyes. It was quite dusky when he opened them. Blue was there.

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“Hello, kiddie!”

“Hello!” laughed Doodles. “I went to sleep after all. I thought I should n’t.”

“Good thing! You’ll feel livelier this evening.”

So it was going to be this evening! Then he should know in a little while! He longed to go downstairs and see what was or had been going on; but Blue sat as if he expected to stay. So Doodles settled himself comfortably for a chat.

“What do you s’pose Daphne told me this morning?”

“Give it up! What?”

“She says she’s going to marry you when she is twenty!”

“Crackety!” exploded Blue.

“You don’t mind, do you?” Doodles’s tone was anxious.

“Mind what?”

“Why, that! You’d just as lief marry her, would n’t you?”

Blue’s face was bright with fun. “Maybe I would, and maybe I would n’t. It’s too soon to decide.”

“Well, she wants to, because you found her

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and took her away from those dreadful folks. She thinks you are the nicest boy that ever was!”

“Perhaps she won’t when she’s twenty.”

“Yes, she will! She’s true-blue, just like you!”

Blue began to whistle. Then his eyes twinkled, and the whistling was cut short.

“Doodles, I think you’d be a better match for Daphne, — you are nearer her age.”

“Oh, no!” cried Doodles. “I’d rather marry Polly — Polly Dudley!”

“Cracketywhack! You’ve got ahead o’ me! Picked out a wife already!” Blue laughed himself almost out of his chair.

Doodles laughed a little in sympathy, yet he said: —

“I don’t see anything very funny about that! If I like Polly and Polly likes me, why can’t we marry each other when we get old?”

“How do you know she likes you?”

“She said she did.”

Blue went off in another spasm. “Did you ask her?” he gurgled.

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“No, she just said so!”

“She’s a good deal older ’n you,” Blue objected.

“What difference does that make?”

“I do’ know, but the boys are older than the girls — ’most always.”

“I don’t care anything about age,” returned Doodles comfortably, “and I don’t think Polly will.”

“Come to supper, boys!”

They sprang to their feet. Polly and Daphne were instantly forgotten! Doodles was eager to see downstairs.

He stopped when he reached the foot of the flight — vines and flowers seemed everywhere!

“How do you like it, old man?” Blue could not wait.

“Beautiful! It’s just like fairyland — or heaven!” he said softly.

“I knew you would!”

“Who did it?”

“The Flemings! Trimmed up for New Year’s! That’s why we tucked you off upstairs,” laughed Blue.

“I thought so!” chuckled Doodles. So this

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was it! What a lovely New Year's surprise!

Blue had to show Doodles all through the rooms, and point out the most elaborate decorations, before he would let him sit down to supper. Then both boys were too excited and full of talk to eat. It was a plain meal, just bread and milk and apple sauce; but Doodles ate happily without question, and he and Blue were soon off again to see the flowers.

"Now we'd better go and fix up a little," Blue suggested presently. "Somebody might come for a New Year's call, you know."

So up the stairs they climbed, and returned in their Sunday suits. Maybe the Flemings were to be there, Doodles thought.

"Say," broke out Blue, "did I tell you that Eudora wants you to sing in the choir at St. Bartholomew's?"

The small boy widened his eyes with a surprised "No."

"Well, that's the programme! Just as soon as you get a little stronger, she says. The soprano boy that sings solos is going out of town, and you can have his place."

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“Oh, I’d love it!” The brown eyes grew luminous. “To sing for God! To give his messages to the people! I am so glad!”

Blue gazed admiringly at his brother. “I did n’t know as you’d dare — I believe you would n’t be afraid to sing at the Church of the Good Shepherd itself!”

“Of course not! Why should I?”

Blue laughed. “I do’ know! I should! — There’s an auto! Come on!”

Blue dashed to the front door, Doodles following closely. Who could be coming in a car except —

Blue had the door wide open. The lights shone out brilliantly. Dorothy was on the steps, but who —? why, Grandpa Moon was with her! Behind them was Tillie Shook, and then Giles Gaylord and — it was! it was Granny O’Donnell!

Doodles let go Grandpa Moon’s hand to be clasped in Granny’s arms.

“Me blissid b’y! I niver thought me old eyes wud see ye on th’ dear little two feets o’ yees, as sthrong as annybody! Thanks be to th’ good God!”

Through the talk sounded a motor horn.

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Another car was coming up the driveway. It stopped. Blue opened the door. Doodles looked beyond Granny — there were the Jimmy Georges, and others whom he well knew!

“To think o’ your walkin’!” wondered Mrs. Homan. “Let’s see you do it! Land! I never ’d ’a’ b’lieved it! When I heard —”

New arrivals cut short the sentence, and Thomas Fitzpatrick and Joseph Sitnitsky came up to shake hands with Doodles.

Right in the midst of the chatter the small boy spied somebody in the hall, somebody carrying a covered cage, and Sandy Gillespie and Caruso were receiving a glad welcome when Blue reached them.

“Th’ wee birdie is a’ right noo,” the old Scotchman smiled in answer to Doodles’s question. “An’ he’ll sing for ye sune, he’ll be sae fu’ o’ joy to see his bonnie laddie again.”

The boy’s fear that Caruso would not know him quickly faded, for with a delighted whirr the mocker flew to his top perch, eager for the accustomed caress from his master’s cheek. It was a pretty thing to see, and the others

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crowded round, everybody talking to everybody else, while Doodles and his pet, regarding none but each other, exchanged their soft greetings.

The lad had but just returned from placing the bird in a quiet corner, when the Fleming car, which had been to the station and had stopped at The Flatiron to complete its load, deposited its passengers at the entrance.

“Why—y —ee! Christarchus!” piped the astonished Doodles; and after that he would scarcely have been surprised if the President had appeared at the door to wish him a Happy New Year.

It was a very informal party, but merriment and joy were there in full measure, and Doodles had to walk across the room a great many times to satisfy some of the still incredulous guests.

“It’s the wonderfulest thing I ever heard of!” declared Mrs. Jimmy George. “I s’posed — Evangeline, don’t you go into that dinin’-room! Yes, you may peek! — Don’t it look just beautiful!”

Doodles turned. He had been so engaged

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with his friends that he had had no time for anything beside. It was "just beautiful," as Mrs. George had said, — the table loaded with dainties, the green garlands, the brilliant blossoms, the dazzling lights overhead! Surely the house on the knoll had given of its best for the little bungalow feast.

"I wonder who thought of all this first," said Doodles.

Blue was passing, and heard.

"Ask her!" he laughed, waving an arm towards the blushing Mrs. Jimmy.

"Pshaw, I did n't do nothin'!" denied that lady. "I happened to think't would be nice if we could, and I asked 'em to come, as soon's I found out 't would be agreeable to your mother — that's all I did! I was for havin' us bring the refreshments; but Miss Flemin' she said no, she'd 'tend to that, an' she did — my, I sh'd think she did!

"You see," — lowering her voice, — "the truth is, a lady (I won't mention no names) but she said to me, one day, 'I s'pose now the Stickneys have got so much money and live in such a swell house, they won't have no use for their old friends.' And I just up an' 'out with,

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‘They will too! They ain’t no such folks as to turn their backs on tried-an’-true neighbors!’ That was what started me t’ thinkin’ o’ this, and I told Jimmy ’t I’d put it through if only to prove things to her. So here we be, an’ I guess she’s satisfied all right! I invited every blessed one, and they’d all been mighty glad to come, but some could n’t.”

After luncheon, when everybody was in full content, Giles Gaylord called for silence.

“My dear friends,” he began, “this honor ought to be upon the shoulders of the one to whom we are indebted for the pleasure of the evening; but as she would n’t take it, and I did n’t succeed in sneaking out of it, here I am! I think I should have run away during luncheon, as has sometimes been done in the face of a dreaded speech; but one can’t leave his friends in the lurch, and we are certainly warm friends — warmer, perhaps, because we are *Flatiron* friends. If I am not mistaken, all of us, with two exceptions, have, at one time or another, dwelt beneath its hospitable roof. So now, in behalf of The Flatiron, I present to Master Doodles this new home for Caruso.”

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He lifted the cloth which had hidden from sight a large, handsome mocking-bird cage.

Everybody turned to Doodles, who stood transfixed with astonishment and delight.

“Speech! speech!” was the call.

The boy looked at his brother with pleading eyes. “You!” he whispered.

Blue smilingly shook his head.

“I am so surprised and happy,” Doodles began, “I don’t know what to say! But I thank you ever and ever so much, and I know Caruso will. It is just like you to do it! You have always done such nice things for us. You can’t imagine what a comfort you have been to me! I guess there are lots of people that need comforting, or God would n’t have told us to do it. I’ve never done much. Blue and Caruso have had to do mine for me. But now I can walk, and Caruso has got such a beautiful home he’ll sing more than ever, and we shall comfort all the folks we can just as long as we live.”

This was followed by such applause that Doodles wanted to hide his head; but he only blushed and smiled to everybody.

“Darlin’!” whispered Mrs. Homan, wiping

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her eyes. — “He’s a blissid little angil!” breathed Granny O’Donnell.

Mr. Gillespie brought the bird, and deftly put him into his new cage.

With a quick, comprehensive glance, Caruso flirted his wings in joy, and let go a little carol.

At its close, softly, very softly, the old Scotchman began to whistle “Auld Lang Syne.”

The bird stood motionless, with cocked head, and then joined in the air, which almost at once he was carrying on by himself.

The room was breathless to its close, when such a storm of praise broke forth as would have frightened a shy singer. But not Caruso! He calmly descended to his new food cup and pounced upon the tidbit which was always his reward after a successful performance.

Truly Sandy Gillespie had been a faithful teacher in the short time that the mocker had been with him! It was his New Year’s present to Doodles.

As soon as the clapping ceased, somebody — Blue thought afterwards it was Leona

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Montgomery — started the song again, and a score of voices caught it up with a burst of melody.

“ Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And days of auld lang syne?
For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne,
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.”

THE END

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