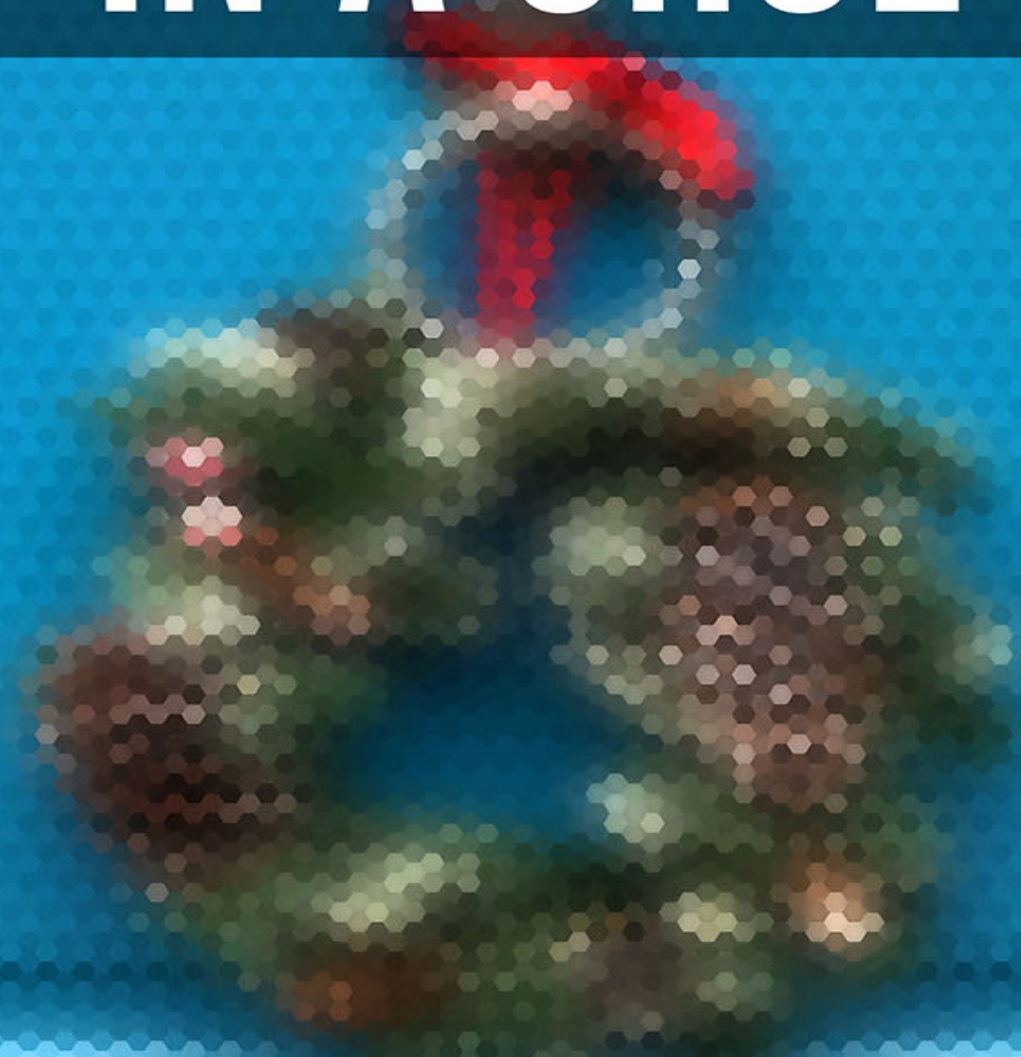


AMANDA M. DOUGLAS

THE OLD WOMAN WHO LIVED IN A SHOE



MUSAICUM CHRISTMAS SPECIALS

Amanda M. Douglas

The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe (Musaicum Christmas Specials)

Christmas Classic: There's No Place Like Home

Published by

MUSAICUM

Books

- Advanced Digital Solutions & High-Quality eBook
Formatting -

musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info

2020 OK Publishing

EAN 4064066385330

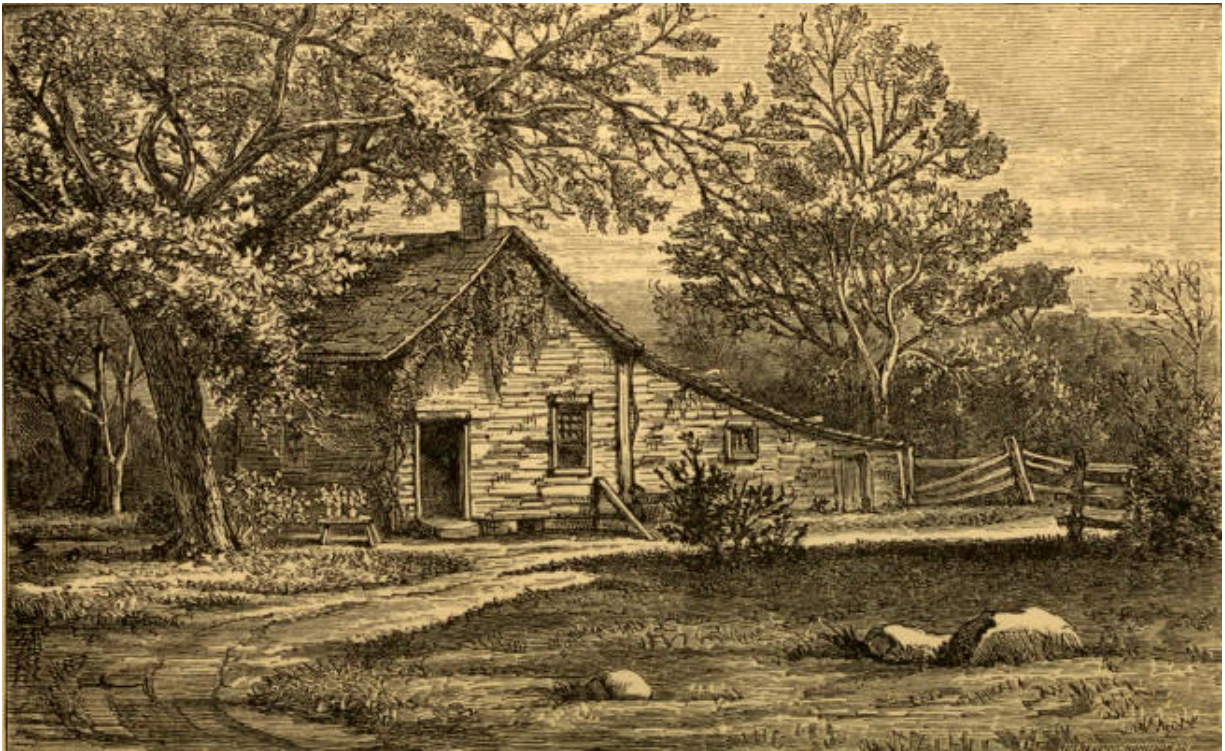


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In Remembrance

OF

MANY PLEASANT HOURS SPENT AT WOODSIDE,

This Story

OF LOVE AND FAITH, OF WORK AND WAITING, AND THE
GENTLE

VIRTUES THAT ARE NONE THE LESS HEROIC FOR
BLOOMING IN THE CENTRE OF THE HOME CIRCLE,

IS DEDICATED TO THE HAPPY HOUSEHOLD

OF

MR. and MRS. A. C. NEUMANN.

Chapter I.

Joe's Grand Discovery

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Hal sat trotting Dot on his knee,—poor little weazen-faced Dot, who was just getting over the dregs of the measles, and cross accordingly. By way of accompaniment he sang all the Mother Goose melodies that he could remember. At last he came to,—

"There was an old woman who lived in a shoe:
She had so many children she didn't know what to
do;
To some she gave broth without any bread,"—

and Harry stopped to catch his breath, for the trotting was of the vigorous order.

"And a thrashing all round, and sent them to bed!"

finished Joe, thrusting his shaggy head in at the window after the fashion of a great Newfoundland dog.

Dot answered with a piteous cry,—a sort of prolonged wail, heart-rending indeed.

"Serve you right," said Joe, going through an imaginary performance with remarkably forcible gestures.

"For shame, Joe! You were little once yourself, and I dare say cried when you were sick. I always thought it very cruel, that, after being deprived of their supper, they should be"—

"Thrashed! Give us good strong Saxon for once, Flossy!"

Flossy was of the ambitious, correct, and sentimental order. She had lovely light curls, and soft white hands when she did not have to work too hard, which she never did of her own free will. She thought it dreadful to be so poor, and aspired to a rather aristocratic ladyhood.

"I am sorry you were not among them," she replied indignantly. "You're a hard-hearted, cruel boy!"

"When the thrashings went round? You're a c-r-u-e-l girl!" with a prodigious length of accent. "Why, I get plenty of 'em at school."

"'Trot, trot, trot. There was an old woman'—what are you laughing at, Joe?" and Hal turned red in the face.

"I've just made a brilliant discovery. O my poor buttons! remember Flossy's hard labor and many troubles, and do not *bust*! Why, we're the very children!"

At this, Joe gave a sudden lurch: you saw his head, and then you saw his heels, and the patch on the knee of his trousers, ripped partly off by an unlucky nail, flapped in the breeze; and he was seated on the window-sill right side up with care, drumming both bare heels into the broken wall. He gave a prolonged whistle of satisfaction, made big eyes at Dot, and then said again,—

"Yes, we are the *very* children!"

"What children? Joe, you are the noisiest boy in Christendom!"

"Flossy, the old woman who lived in a shoe is Granny, and no mistake! I can prove it logically. Look at this old tumble-down rookery: it is just the shape of a huge shoe, sloping gradually to the toe, which is the shed-end here. It's brown and rusty and cracked and patched: it wants heeling

and toeing, and to be half-soled, greased to keep the water out, and blacked to make it shine. It was a famous seven-leaguer in its day; but, when it had lost its virtue, the giant who used to wear it kicked it off by the roadside, little dreaming that it would be transformed into a cabin for the aforesaid old woman. And here we all are sure enough! Sometimes we get broth, and sometimes we don't."

Dot looked up in amazement at this harangue, and thrust her thumbs in her mouth. Hal laughed out-right,—a soft little sound like the rippling of falling water.

"Yes, a grand discovery! Ladies and gentlemen of the nineteenth century, I rise to get up, to speak what I am about to say; and I hope you will treasure the words of priceless wisdom that fall from my lips. I'm not backward about coming forward"—

Joe was balancing himself very nicely, and making tremendous flourishes, when two brown, dimpled hands scrubbed up the shock of curly hair, and the sudden onslaught destroyed his equilibrium, as Flossy would have said, and down he went on the floor in crab fashion, looking as if he were all arms and legs.

"Charlie, you midget! just wait till I catch you. I haven't the broth, but the other thing will do as well."

But Charlie was on the outside; and her little brown, bare feet were as fleet as a deer's. Joe saw her skimming over the meadow; but the afternoon was very warm, and a dozen yards satisfied him for a race, so he turned about.

"Joe, you might take Dot a little while, I think," said Hal beseechingly, as Joe braced himself against the door-post. "I've held her all the afternoon."

"She won't come—will you, Dot?"

But Dot signified her gratification by stretching out her hands. Joe was a good-natured fellow; and, though he might have refused Hal easily, he couldn't resist Dot's tender appeal, so he took her on his shoulder and began trotting off to Danbury Cross. Dot laughed out of her sleepy eyes, highly delighted at this change in the programme.

"Oh, dear!" and Hal rubbed his tired arms. "I shouldn't think grandmother would know what to do, sure enough! What a host of us there are,—six children!"

"I'm sure I do my best," said Flossy with a pathetic little sniff. "But it's very hard to be an orphan and poor."

"And when there are six of us, and we are all orphans, and all poor, it must be six times as hard," put in Joe with a sly twinkle.

Then he changed Dot from her triumphal position on his shoulder to a kind of cradle in his arms. Her eyelids drooped, and she began to croon a very sleepy tune.

Hal looked out of the window, over to the woods, where the westward sun was making a wonderful land of gold and crimson. Sometimes he had beautiful dreams of that softened splendor, but now they were mercenary. If one could only coin it all into money! There was poor grandmother slaving away, over at Mrs. Kinsey's,—she should come home, and be a princess, to say the very least.

"I guess I'll clear up a bit!" said Hal, coming down from the clouds, and glancing round at the disorderly room. "Granny will be most tired to death when her day's work is done. Flossy, if you wouldn't mind going in the other room."

Flossy gathered up her skirts and her crocheting, and did not take the invitation at all amiss.

Then Hal found the stubby broom, and swept the floor; dusted the mantle, after removing an armful of "trash;" went at the wooden chairs, that had once been painted a gorgeous yellow with green bars; and cleared a motley accumulation of every thing off of the table, hanging up two or three articles, and tucking the rest into a catch-all closet. A quaint old pitcher, that had lost both spout and handle, was emptied of some faded flowers, and a fresh lot cut,—nothing very choice; but the honeysuckle scented the room, and the coxcombs gave their crimson glow to the top of the pyramid.

"Why, Mrs. Betty," said Joe, "you've made quite a palace out of your end of the shoe, and this miserable little Dot has gone to sleep at last. Shall I put her in the cradle, or drop her down the well?"

Hal smiled a little, and opened the door. It was the best room, quite large, uncarpeted, but clean; and though the bed was covered with a homemade spread, it was as white as it could be. The cradle was not quite as snowy; for the soiled hands that tumbled Dot in and out left some traces.

To get her safely down was a masterpiece of strategy. Joe bumped her head; and Hal took her in his arms, hushing her in a low, motherly fashion, and pressing his brown cheek to hers, which looked the color of milk that had been skimmed, and then split in two, and skimmed again. She made a dive in Hal's hair with her little bird's claw of a hand, but presently dropped asleep again.

"I guess she'll take a good long nap," whispered Hal, quite relieved.

"I'm sure she ought," sighed Florence.

Hal went back to his housekeeping. He was as handy as a girl, any day. He pulled some radishes, and put them in a bowl of cold water, and chopped some lettuce and onions together, the children were all so fond of it. Then he gleaned the raspberries, and filled the saucer with currants that were not salable.

Joe, in the meanwhile, had gone after Mrs. Green's cows. She gave them a quart of milk daily for driving the cows to and from the pasture, and doing odd chores.

"If you see the children, send them home," had been Hal's parting injunction. "Grandmother will soon be here."

She came before Joe returned. The oddest looking little old woman that you ever saw. Florence, at fourteen, was half a head taller. Thin and wrinkled and sunburned; her flaxen hair turning to silver, and yet obstinately full of little curls; her blue eyes pale and washed out, and hosts of "crows'-feet" at the corners; and her voice cracked and tremulous.

Poor Grandmother Kenneth! She had worked hard enough in her day, and was still forced to keep it up, now that it was growing twilight with her. But I don't believe there was another as merry a houseful of children in all Madison.

Joe's discovery was not far out of the way. The old woman, whose biography and family troubles were so graphically given by Mother Goose, died long before our childhood; but I think Granny Kenneth must have looked like

her, though I fancy she was better natured. As for the children, many and many a time she had not known what to do with them,—when they were hungry, when they were bad, when their clothes were worn out and she had nothing to make new ones with, when they had no shoes; and yet she loved the whole six, and toiled for them without a word of complaint.

Her only son, Joe, had left them to her,—a troublesome legacy indeed; but at that time they had a mother and a very small sum of money. Mrs. Joe was a pretty, helpless, inefficient body, who continually fretted because Joe did not get rich. When the poor fellow lay on his death-bed, his disease aggravated by working when he was not able, he twined his arms around his mother's neck, and cried with a great gasp,—

"You'll be kind to them, mother, and look after them a little. God will help you, I know. I should like to live for their sakes."

A month or two after this, Dot was born. Now that her dear Joe was dead, there was no comfort in the world; so the frail, pretty little thing grieved herself away, and went to sleep beside him in the churchyard.

The neighbors made a great outcry when Grandmother Kenneth took the children to her own little cottage.

"What could she do with them? Why, they will all starve in a bunch," said one.

"Florence and Joe might be bound out," proposed another.

A third was for sending them to the almshouse, or putting them in some orphan asylum; but five years had

come and gone, and they had not starved yet, though once or twice granny's heart had quaked for fear.

Every one thought it would be such a blessing if Dot would only die. She had been a sight of trouble during the five years of her life. First, she had the whooping cough, which lasted three times as long as with any ordinary child. Then she fell out of the window, and broke her collar-bone; and when she was just over that, it was the water-pox. The others had the mumps, and Dot's share was the worst of all. Kit had the measles in the lightest possible form, and actually had to be tied in bed to make him stay there; while it nearly killed poor Dot, who had been suffering from March to midsummer, and was still poor as a crow, and cross as a whole string of comparisons.

But Granny was patient with it all. The very sweetest old woman in the world, and the children loved her in their fashion; but they seldom realized all that she was doing for them. And though some of her neighbors appreciated the toil and sacrifice, the greater part of them thought it very foolish for her to be slaving herself to death for a host of beggarly grandchildren.

"Well, Hal!" she exclaimed in her rather shrill but cheery voice, "how's the day gone?"

"Pretty well: but you're tired to death. I suppose Mrs. Kinsey's company came, and there was a grand feast?"

"Grand! I guess it was. Such loads of pies and puddings and kettles of berries and tubs of cream"—

Granny paused, out of breath from not having put in any commas.

"Ice-cream, you mean? Freezers, they call 'em."

"You do know every thing, Hal!" And granny laughed. "I can't get all the new-fangled names and notions in my head. There was Grandmother Kinsey, neat as a new pin, and children and grandchildren, and aunts and cousins. But it was nice, Hal."

The boy smiled, thinking of them all.

"Half of the goodies'll spile, I know. Mrs. Kinsey packed me a great basket full; and, Hal, here's two dollars. I'm clean tuckered out."

"Then you just sit still, and let me 'tend to you. Dot's asleep; and if I haven't worried with her this afternoon! That child ought to grow up a wonder, she's been so much trouble to us all. Joe's gone after the cows, and Florence is busy as a bee. Oh, what a splendid basket full! Why, we shall feast like kings!"

With that Hal began to unpack,—a plate full of cut cake, biscuits by the dozen, cold chicken, delicious slices of ham, and various other delicacies.

"We'll only have a few to-night," said Hal economically. "'Tisn't every day that we have such a windfall. I'll put these out of the children's sight; for there they come."

The "children" were Charlie and Kit, with barely a year between; Kit being seven, and Charlie—her real name was Charlotte, but she was such a tomboy that they gave her the nickname—was about eight. Hal was ten, and Joe twelve.

"Children," said Hal, "don't come in till you've washed yourselves. Be quiet, for Dot is asleep."

Thus admonished, Charlie did nothing worse than pour a basin of water over Kit, who sputtered and scolded and

kicked until Hal rushed out to settle them.

"If you're not quiet, you shall not have a mouthful of supper; and we've lots of goodies."

Kit began to wash the variegated streaks from his face. Charlie soused her head in a pail of water, and shook it like a dog, then ran her fingers through her hair. It was not as light or silken as that of Florence, and was cropped close to her head. Kit's was almost as black as a coal; and one refractory lock stood up. Joe called it his "scalp-lock waving in the breeze."

"Now, Charlie, pump another pail of water. There comes Joe, and we'll have supper."

Charlie eyed Joe distrustfully, and hurried into the house. Hal hung up Granny's sun-bonnet, and placed the chairs around.

"Come, Florence," he said, opening the door softly.

"My eyes!" ejaculated Joe in amaze. "Grandmother, you're a trump."

"Joe!" exclaimed Hal reproachfully.

Joe made amends by kissing Granny in the most rapturous fashion. Then he escorted her to the table in great state.

"Have you been good children to-day?" she asked, as they assembled round the table.

"I've run a splinter in my toe; and, oh! my trousers are torn!" announced Kit dolefully.

"If you ever had a whole pair of trousers at one time the world would come to an end," declared Joe sententiously.

"Would it?" And Kit puzzled his small brain over the connection.

"And Charlie preserves a discreet silence. Charlie, my dear, I advise you to keep out of the way of the ragmen, or you will find yourself on the road to the nearest paper-mill."

Florence couldn't help laughing at the suggestion.

"Children!" said their grandmother.

Full of fun and frolic as they were, the little heads bowed reverently as Granny asked her simple blessing. She would as soon have gone without eating as to omit that.

"I really don't want any thing," she declared. "I've been tasting all day,—a bit here and a bit there, and such loads of things!"

"Tell us all about it," begged Joe. "And who was there,—the grand Panjandrum with a button on the top. Children's children unto the third and fourth generation."

"O Joe! if you only wouldn't," began Granny imploringly.

"No, I won't, Granny;" and Joe made a face as long as your arm, or a piece of string.

"Of course I didn't see 'em all, nor half; but men and women and children and babies! And Grandmother Kinsey's ninety-five years old!"

"I hope I'll live to be that old, and have lots of people to give me a golden wedding," said Charlie, with her mouth so full that the words were pretty badly squeezed.

"This isn't a golden wedding," said Florence with an air of dignity: "it's a birthday party."

"Ho!" and Joe laughed. "You'll be,—

'Ugly, ill-natured, and wrinkled and thin,
Worn by your troubles to bone and to skin.'"

"She's never been much else," rejoined Flossy, looking admiringly at her own white arm.

"I'm not as old as you!" And Charlie flared up to scarlet heat.

"Oh! you needn't get so vexed. I was only thinking of the skin and bone," said Florence in a more conciliatory manner.

"Well, I don't want to be a 'Mother Bunch.'"

"No fear of you, Charlie. You look like the people who live on some shore,—I've forgotten the name of the place,—and, eat so many fish that the bones work through."

Charlie felt of her elbows. They were pretty sharp, to be sure. She was very tall of her age, and ran so much that it was quite impossible to keep any flesh on her bones.

"Hush, children!" said grandmother. "I was going to tell you about the party. Hal, give me a little of your salad, first."

The Kinseys had invited all their relations to a grand family gathering. Granny told over the pleasant and comical incidents that had come under her notice,—the mishaps in cooking, the babies that had fallen down stairs, and various entertaining matters.

By that time supper was ended. Florence set out to take some lace that she had been making to a neighbor; Hal washed the dishes, and Charlie wiped them; Joe fed the chickens, and then perched himself astride the gate-post, whistling all the tunes he could remember; Kit and Charlie went to bed presently; and Hal and his grandmother had a good talk until Dot woke up, strange to say quite good-natured.

"Granny," said Hal, preparing a bowl of bread and milk for his little sister, "some day we'll all be grown, and you

won't have to work so hard."

"Six men and women! How odd it will be!" returned Granny with a smile shining over her tired face.

"Yes. We'll keep you like a lady. You shall have a pretty house to live in, and Dot shall wait upon you. Won't you, Dot?"

Dot shook her head sagely at Granny.

And in the gathering twilight Hal smiled, remembering Joe's conceit. Granny looked happy in spite of her weariness. She, foolish body, was thinking how nice it was to have them all, even to poor little Dot.

Chapter II.

Planning in the Twilight

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It was a rainy August day, and the children were having a glorious time up in the old garret. Over the house-part there were two rooms; but this above the kitchen was kept for rubbish. A big wheel, on which Granny used to spin in her younger days, now answered for almost any purpose, from a coach and four, to a menagerie: they could make it into an elephant, a camel, or a hyena, by a skilful arrangement of drapery.

There were several other pieces of dilapidated furniture, old hats, old boots, a barrel or two of papers; in fact, a lot of useless traps and a few trophies that Joe had brought home; to say nothing of Charlie's endless heaps of trash, for she had a wonderful faculty of accumulation; herbs of every kind, bundles of calamus, stacks of "cat-tails," the fuzz of which flew in every direction with the least whiff of wind.

The "children" had been raising bedlam generally. Joe was dressed in an old scuttle-shaped Leghorn bonnet and a gay plaid cloak, a strait kind of skirt plaited on a yoke. Granny had offered it to Florence for a dress, but it had been loftily declined. Kit was attired as an Indian, his "scalp-lock" bound up with rooster feathers; and he strutted up and down, jabbering a most uncouth dialect, though of what tribe it would be difficult to say. Charlie appeared in a new costume about every half-hour, and improvised caves in every corner; though it must be confessed Joe rather

extinguished her with his style. He could draw in his lips until he looked as if he hadn't a tooth in his head, and talk like nearly every old lady in town.

Such whoops and yells and shouts as had rung through the old garret would have astonished delicate nerves. In one of the bedrooms Granny was weaving rag-carpet on a rickety loom, for she did a little of every thing to lengthen out her scanty income; but the noise of that was as a whiff of wind in comparison.

At last they had tried nearly every kind of transformation, and were beginning to grow tired. It was still very cloudy, and quite twilight in their den, when Florence came up stairs, and found them huddled around the window listening to a wonderful story that Joe made up as he went along. Such fortunes and adventures could only belong to the Munchausen period.

"Dear!" exclaimed Florence, "I thought the chief of the Mohawks had declared war upon the Narragansetts, and everybody had been scalped, you subsided so suddenly. You've made racket enough to take off the roof of the house!"

"It's on yet," was Joe's solemn assurance.

"O Joe!" begged Charlie: "tell us another story,—something about a sailor who was wrecked, and lived in a cave, and found bags and bags of money!"

"That's the kind, Charlie. Flo, come on and take a seat."

"Where's Dot?"

"Here in my arms," replied Hal; "as good as a kitten; aren't you, Dot?"

Dot answered with a contented grunt.

"Oh, let's all tell what we'd like to do!" said Charlie, veering round on a new tack. "Flo'll want to be Cinderella at the king's ball."

Florence tumbled over the pile of legs, and found a seat beside Hal.

"Well, I'll lead off," began Joe with a flourish. "First, I'm going to be a sailor. I mean to ship with a captain bound for China; and hurra! we'll go out with a flowing sea or some other tip-top thing! Well, I guess we'll go to China,—this is all suppos'n, you know; and while I'm there I'll get such lots of things!—crape-shawls and silks for you, Flossy; and cedarwood chests to keep out moths, and fans and beautiful boxes, and a chest of tea, for Granny. On the way home we shall be wrecked. You'll hear the news, and think that I'm dead, sure enough."

"But how will Flo get her shawls?" asked Charlie.

"Oh, you'll hear presently! That's way in the end. I shall be wrecked on an island where there's a fierce native chief; and first he and his men think they'll kill me." Joe always delighted in harrowing up the feelings of his audience. "So I offer him the elegant shawls and some money"—

"But I thought you lost them all in the wreck!" interposed quick-brained Charlie.

"Oh, no! There's always something floats ashore, you must remember. Well, he concluded not to kill me, though they have a great festival dance in honor of their idols; and I only escape by promising to be his obedient slave. I find some others who have been cast on that desolate shore, and been treated in the same manner. The chief beats us, and makes us work, and treats us dreadfully. Then we

mutiny, and have a great battle, for a good many of the natives join us. In the scrimmage the old fellow is killed; and there's a tremendous rejoicing, I can tell you, for they all hate him. We divide his treasure, and it's immense, and go to live in his palace. Well, no boat ever comes along; so we build one for ourselves, and row to the nearest port and tell them the chief is dead. They are very glad, for he was a cruel old fellow. Then we buy a ship, and go back for the rest of our treasures. We take a great many of the beautiful things out of the palace, and then we start for home, double-quick. It's been a good many years; and, when I come back, Granny is old, and walking with a cane, Florence married to a rich gentleman, and Dot here grown into a handsome girl. But won't I build a stunning house! There'll be a scattering out of this old shoe, I tell you."

"Oh, won't it be splendid!" exclaimed Charlie, with a long-drawn breath. "It's just like a story."

"Now, Hal, it's your turn."

Hal sighed softly, and squeezed Dot a little.

"I shall not go off and be a sailor"—

"Or a jolly young oysterman," said Joe, by way of assistance.

"No. What I'd like most of all"—and Hal made a long pause.

"Even if it's murder, we'll forgive you and love you," went on tormenting Joe.

"O Joe, don't!" besought Florence. "I want to hear what Hal will choose, for I know just what I'd like to have happen to me."

"So do I," announced Charlie confidently.

"I don't know that I can have it," said Hal slowly; "for it costs a good deal, though I might make a small beginning. It's raising lovely fruit and flowers, and having a great hot-house, with roses and lilies and dear white blossoms in the middle of the winter. I should love them so much! They always seem like little children to me, with God for their father, and we who take care of them for a stepmother; though stepmothers are not always good, and the poor wicked ones would be those who did not love flowers. Why, it would be like fairy-land,—a great long hot-house, with glass overhead, and all the air sweet with roses and heliotrope and mignonette. And it would be so soft and still in there, and so very, very beautiful! It seems to me as if heaven must be full of flowers."

"Could you sell 'em if you were poor?" asked Charlie, in a low voice.

"Not the flowers in heaven! Charlie, you're a heathen."

"I didn't mean that! Don't you suppose I know about heaven!" retorted Charlie warmly.

"Yes," admitted Joe with a laugh: "he could sell them, and make lots of money. And there are ever so many things: why, Mr. Green paid six cents apiece for some choice tomato-plants."

"When I'm a man, I think I'll do that. I mean to try next summer in my garden."

"May I tell now?" asked Charlie, who was near exploding with her secret.

"Yes. Great things," said Joe.

"I'm going to run away!" And Charlie gave her head an exultant toss, that, owing to the darkness, was lost to her

audience.

Joe laughed to his utmost capacity, which was not small. The old garret fairly rang again.

Florence uttered a horrified exclamation; and Kit said,—
"I'll go with you!"

"Girls don't run away," remarked Hal gravely.

"But I mean to, and it'll be royal fun," was the confident reply.

"Where will you go? and will you beg from door to door?" asked Joe quizzically.

"No: I'm going out in the woods," was the undaunted rejoinder. "I mean to find a nice cave; and I'll bring in a lot of good dry leaves and some straw, and make a bed. Then I'll gather berries; and I know how to catch fish, and I can make a fire and fry them. I'll have a gay time going off to the river and rambling round, and there'll be no lessons to plague a body to death. It will be just splendid."

"Suppose a bear comes along and eats you up?" suggested Joe.

"As if there were any bears around here!" Charlie returned with immense disdain.

"Well, a snake, or a wild-cat!"

"I'm not afraid of snakes."

"But you'd want a little bread."

"Oh! I'd manage about that. I do mean to run away some time, just for fun."

"You'll be glad to run back again!"

"You see, now!" was the decisive reply.

"Florentina, it is your turn now. We have had age before beauty."

Florence tossed her soft curls, and went through with a few pretty airs.

"I shouldn't run away," she said slowly; "but I'd like to *go*, for all that. Sometimes, as I sit by the window sewing, and see an elegant carriage pass by, I think, what if there should be an old gentleman in it, who had lost his wife and all his children, and that one of his little girls looked like—like me? And if he should stop and ask me for a drink, I'd go to the well and draw a fresh, cool bucketful"—

"From the north side—that's the coldest," interrupted Joe.

"Hush, Joe! No one laughed at you!"

"Laugh! Why, I am sober as an owl."

"Then I'd give him a drink. I wish we could have some goblets: tumblers look so dreadfully old-fashioned. I mean to buy *one*, at least, some time. He would ask me about myself; and I'd tell him that we were all orphans, and had been very unfortunate, and that our grandmother was old"—

"Four score and ten of us, poor old maids,—
Four score and ten of us,
Without a penny in our *puss*,
Poor old maids,"

sang Joe pathetically, cutting short the *purse* on account of the rhyme.

"O Joe, you are too bad! I won't tell any more."

"Yes, do!" entreated Hal. "And so he liked you on account of the resemblance, and wanted to adopt you."

"Exactly! Hal, how could you guess it?" returned Florence, much mollified. "And so he would take me to a

beautiful house, where there were plenty of servants, and get me lovely clothes to wear; and there would be lots of china and silver and elegant furniture and a piano. I'd go to school, and study music and drawing, and never have to sew or do any kind of work. Then I'd send you nice presents home; and, when you were fixed up a little, you should come and see me. And maybe, Hal, as you grew older, he would help you about getting a hot-house. I think when I became a woman, I would take Dot to educate."

"I've heard of fairy godmothers before, but this seems to be a godfather. Here's luck to your old covey, Florrie, drunk in imaginary champagne."

"Joe, I wish you wouldn't use slang phrases, nor be so disrespectful."

"I'm afraid I'll have to keep clear of the palace."

"Oh, if it only could be!" sighed Hal. "I think Flo was meant for a lady."

Florence smiled inwardly at hearing this. It was her opinion also.

"Here, Kit, are you asleep?" And Joe pulled him out of the pile by one leg. "Wake up, and give us your heart's desire."

Kit indulged in a vigorous kick, which Joe dodged.

"It'll be splendid," began Kit, "especially the piano. I've had my hands over my eyes, making stars; and I was thinking"—

"That's just what we want, Chief of the Mohawk Valley. Don't keep us in suspense."

"I'm going to save up my money, like some one Hal was reading about the other day, and buy a fiddle."

A shout of laughter greeted this announcement, it sounded so comical.

Kit rubbed his eyes in amazement, and failed to see any thing amusing. Then he said indignantly,—

"You needn't make such a row!"

"But what will you do with a fiddle? You might tie a string to Charlie, and take her along for a monkey; or you might both go round singing in a squeaky voice,—

'Two orphan boys of Switzerland.'"

"You're real mean, Joe," said Kit, with his voice full of tears.

"Kit, I'll give you the violin myself when I get rich," Florence exclaimed in a comforting tone, her soft hand smoothing down the refractory scalp-lock; "but I would say violin, it sounds so much nicer. And then you'll play."

"Play!" enunciated Kit in a tone that I cannot describe, as if that were a weak word for the anticipated performance. "I'd make her talk! They'd sit there and listen,—a whole houseful of people it would be, you know; and when I first came out with my fiddle,—violin. I mean,—they would look at me as if they thought I couldn't do much. I'd begin with a slow sound, like the wind wailing on a winter night,—I guess I'd have it a storm, and a little lost child, for you can make almost any thing with a violin; and the cries should grow fainter and fainter, for she would be chilled and worn out; and presently it should drop down into the snow, and there'd be the softest, strangest music you ever heard. The crowd would listen and listen, and hold their breath; and when the storm cleared away, and the angels came down for the child, it would be so, so sad"—and there was an

ominous falter in Kit's voice, "they couldn't help crying. There'd be an angel's song up in heaven; and in the sweetest part of it all, I'd go quietly away, for I wouldn't want any applause."

"But you'd have it," said Hal softly, reaching out for the small fingers that were to evoke such wonderful melody. "It almost makes me cry myself to think of it! and the poor little girl lost in the snow, not bigger than Dot here!"

"Children!" called Granny from the foot of the stairs, "ain't you going to come down and have any supper? I've made a great pot full of mush."

There was a general scrambling. Hal carried Dot in his arms, for she was fast asleep. Two or three times in the short journey he stopped to kiss the soft face, thinking of Kit's vision.

"Oh, we've been having such a splendid time!" announced Charlie. "All of us telling what we'd like to do; and, Granny, Joe's going to build you an *elegant* house!" with a great emphasis on the word, as Charlie was not much given to style, greatly to the sorrow and chagrin of Florence.

Granny gave a cheerful but cracked treble laugh, and asked,—

"What'll he build it of, my dear,—corn-cobs?"

"Oh, a *real* house! He's going to make lots of money, Joe is, and get shipwrecked."

Granny shook her head, which made the little white curls bob around oddly enough.

"How you do mix up things, Charlie," said Joe, giving her a poke with his elbow. "You're a perfect harum-scarum! I

don't wonder you want to live in the woods. Go look at your head: it stands out nine ways for Sunday!"

Charlie ran her fingers through her hair, her usual manner of arranging it.

"Granny, here's this little lamb fast asleep. She's grown to be one of the best babies in the world;" and Hal kissed her again.

He had such a tender, girlish heart, that any thing weak or helpless always appealed to him. Their sleek, shining Tabby had been a poor, forlorn, broken-legged kitten when he found her; and there was no end to the birds and chickens that he nursed through accidents.

But for a fortnight Dot had been improving, it must be confessed, being exempt from disease and broken bones.

"Poor childie! Just lay her in the bed, Hal."

There was a huge steaming dish of mush in the middle of the table; and the hungry children went at it in a vigorous manner. Some had milk, and some had molasses; and they improvised a dessert by using a little butter, sugar, and nutmeg. They spiced their meal by recounting their imaginary adventures; but Granny was observed to wipe away a few tears over the shipwreck.

"It was all make believe," said Joe sturdily. "Lots of people go to sea, and don't get wrecked."

"But I don't want you to go," Granny returned in a broken tone of voice.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Joe, with immense disdain. "Don't people meet with accidents on the land? Wasn't Steve Holder killed in the mill. And if I was on the cars in a smash-up, I couldn't swim out of that!"

Joe took a long breath, fancying that he had established his point beyond a cavil.

"But sailors never make fortunes," went on Granny hesitatingly.

"Captains do, though; and it's a jolly life. Besides, we couldn't all stay in this little shanty, unless we made nests in the chimney like the swallows; and I don't know which would tumble down first,—we or the chimney."

Charlie laughed at the idea.

"I shall stay with you always, Granny," said Hal tenderly. "And Dot, you know, will be growing into a big girl and be company for us. We'll get along nicely, never fear."

Some tears dropped unwittingly into Granny's plate, and she didn't want any more supper. It was foolish, of course. She ought to be thankful to have them all out of the way and doing for themselves. Here she was, over fifty, and had worked hard from girlhood. Some day she would be worn out.

But, in spite of all their poverty and hardship, she had been very happy with them; and theirs were by no means a forlorn-looking set of faces. Each one had a little beauty of its own; and, though they were far from being pattern children, she loved them dearly in spite of their faults and roughnesses. And in their way they loved her, though sometimes they were great torments.

And so at bed-time they all crowded round to kiss the wrinkled face, unconsciously softened by the thought of the parting that was to come somewhere along their lives. But no one guessed how Granny held little Dot in her arms that night, and prayed in her quaint, fervent fashion that she