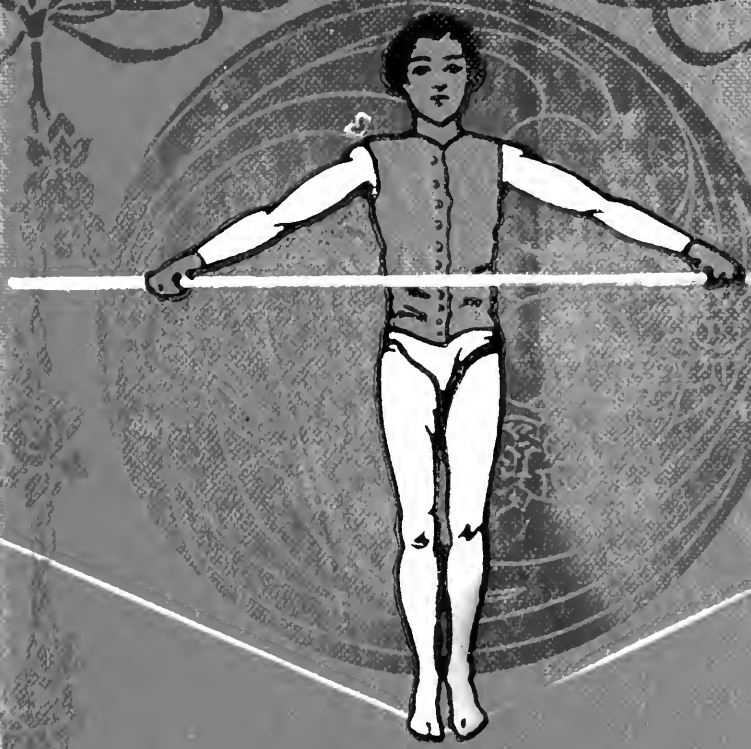
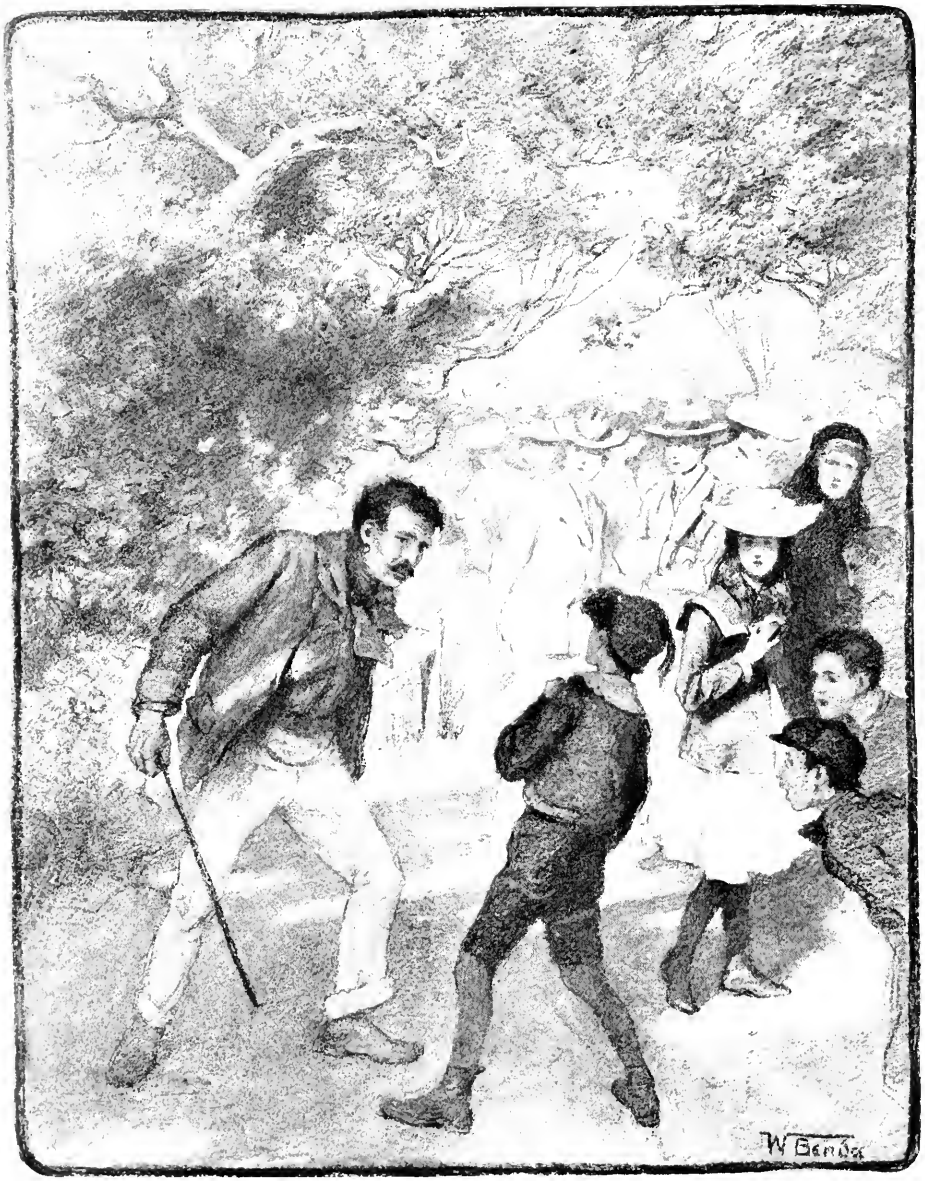


THISTLE-DOWN

Mrs. C. V. Jamison

THISTLEDOWN



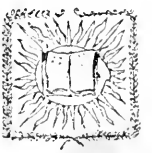
"The old man dealt him a sounding blow."

THISTLEDOWN

BY

MRS. C. V. JAMISON

AUTHOR OF "LADY JANE," "TOINETTE'S PHILIP," ETC.



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I

THE WEST END

PERHAPS there is no gayer pleasure resort in any city of the South than the West End of New Orleans. During the season and on a popular night all sorts and conditions of men, women, and children are to be found there. The rich and fashionable, the middle class, and the working people mingle together in amiable proximity, while nearly every nation and language is represented. Within the radius of a few feet one can hear English and French, the soft Creole patois, the sonorous dialects of Spain, Italy, and Sicily, as well as the harsh gutturals of Germany and other Northern nations. Chattering and laughing groups wander among the winding paths that border the lake, or

sit in the pretty pavilions looking out on the shimmering water, while others gather around the band to listen to a favorite air with the rapt silence of the genuine lover of good music. In another part of the garden the seats of an open-air theater are filled to overflowing by occupants who intently follow the scenes of a lively farce or, it may be, a clever comedy. The little side-shows are crowded with the curious and light-hearted, who gaze, comment, laugh, and pass on to make room for others. On the broad balconies of the cafés brilliant groups sup at tables laden with flowers and fruit and sparkling with crystal and silver; or more discreet family parties sit apart from the crowd and the glare of electric lights. Mothers in evening gowns and jewels, and the little ones in muslin and ribbons, listen with becoming decorum to the charming strains of stringed instruments while they sip their sherbet and ices.

On such an evening two of the audience, Madam Aubert and her little granddaughter Mignon, sat in a quiet corner listening to a celebrated cornet soloist. Madam Aubert was a slender, white-haired woman of sixty or more. Her face was refined and intellectual, and her dark eyes were softened by sorrow. Her mourning dress was extremely plain, and the narrow edge of a widow's cap was visible under the black veil that covered her bonnet. There was a touch of patience and resignation in her glance and voice as she tried to divide her attention between the music and the child at her side. She wished not to lose a strain; she knew every note of it: it was like the voice of an old friend speaking to her heart. Yet she felt that the happy, excited child had a claim on her consideration.

"Yes, yes, my dear; yes, my child. I see, I hear; but wait one moment — wait until the end of this measure. Oh, how delicious! Not a word, not a sound, Mignon"; and she patted the little hand lying in hers gently and softly to the time of the music.

"But, Tantine, look; they are hurrying to the theater. I know there is something splendid there. Can't we go, too?"

"In a moment, dear, in a moment."

"Oh! there is Paula Lang with her father. They are eating ices. I wish I could have an ice."

"Hush, my dear. You remember what you promised me."

"Yes, Tantine, I remember; but it is so im — *impossible* not to want things."

Madam Aubert smiled at the unusual word. "I know, dear, I know; but you said you would be satisfied with the music and the people."

"Oh, I did n't know there were so many other things. Now I want them all. I can't help it; I want everything."

"Mignon!" said Madam Aubert, with a grave look of rebuke.

The child's long lashes fell over her beautiful eyes and her lips trembled slightly, but she made an effort to speak cheerfully. "Don't look cross, Tantine, and I won't tease. I know it' s wrong. I 'll turn my head and not watch Paula. Oh, now she has sherbet and *petits fours*."

Madam Aubert did not notice the last remark. She was listening to the melodious finale of the solo. When the last strain had died into silence, she turned to her little companion. "Now, Mignon, we will go to the theater."

But at that moment the child's eyes were riveted on a party in a neighboring balcony. "Look, Tantine," she cried with animation. "There is Aunt Gabrielle, with Denise and Silvain, and little Aimée, too. Is n't Aunt Gabrielle handsome! All silk and lace. And Denise looks like a down puff; there must be a thousand little frills on her frock. But dear little Aimée is the sweetest of all. She looks like Paula Lang's French doll, with her yellow hair and big blue eyes. How happy they are! They are having supper.

See how the waiter is heaping things on the table— *biscuit glacé*, cake, grapes, and a big dish of nougat. How nice to be rich!"

Madam Aubert's eyes followed Mignon's for a moment; then she looked down and sighed. "Come, child, we will walk about and look at the shows." Rising with a gentle smile, she took Mignon's hand. "And if you are hungry, you shall have something to eat."

"Dearest, you know I 'm not hungry," returned the child, caressingly. "I don't want their nice things; I only want to look at them. It 's so long since I saw them. What a tall boy Cousin Silvain has grown! Is n't he handsome in his uniform?"

"Yes, my dear, it is very becoming to him"; and Madam Aubert's gaze lingered tenderly on the boy's bright face. "Since he attended the military school he is taller and straighter; drilling has improved his figure — he looks like a little soldier. But come away. I should n't like your aunt to know that we are watching them."

"They can't see us, Tantine; they are too far above us," returned the child, with unconscious sarcasm.

"That may be, but I don't want my little girl to look at them until her heart aches with envy. Come, let us join the crowd, where we may see less to admire and less to covet." There was a touch of bitterness in Madam Aubert's gentle voice as she took the child's hand and turned to another part of the garden.

II

A LITTLE ACROBAT

NOT far from the seat that Madam Aubert had just vacated stood an old man and a boy. The man was short and stout and ill-looking. His skin was coarse and swarthy, and a heavy shock of grizzled hair fell to his bushy eyebrows, under which gloomed a pair of intensely black eyes. He wore loose trousers of faded jean, a dusty black corduroy jacket, and a slouched hat. A red kerchief was carelessly knotted around his neck, and a pair of large gold hoops in the form of coiled snakes swung from the lobes of his thick ears. He looked like a sailor, but an empty jacket sleeve suggested a maimed soldier. His left arm was gone near the shoulder and he walked with a decided limp. Behind him sullenly lagged the boy, about twelve years old. He was rather tall for that age and extremely slender; his skin was as dark as the man's, but of a clear, clean olive. His features were delicate and straight, his eyes large and of a luminous brown, while this firmly closed lips had an expression of defiance and scorn rarely seen in one so young. The boy's fine face and lithe, graceful figure would have attracted attention had his garments been less conspicuous. As they were, he looked like a little mountebank. Long scarlet stockings covered his thin legs; a rusty black velvet blouse, trimmed with tarnished gilt lace, was confined at the waist by a frayed and faded red scarf; and a cap of the same color, from which dangled a long tassel, covered his dark curling hair.

In his hand he carried a slender pole of light wood, which he

balanced and turned with much skill, while his wide, clear eyes roamed from one group to another as though he were seeking for a friendly face. At last his tricks with the pole attracted the attention of the children, who began to follow him and question him with much curiosity and persistence. This seemed to annoy the old man, who turned suddenly, and snatching the pole from the boy, dealt him a sounding blow across his thin shoulders, while he muttered angrily in Italian, his eyes flashing with suppressed fury, and the serpents in his ears shaking and writhing as though they, too, were in a violent rage.

The boy shrugged his smarting shoulders, smiling scornfully as he said in a low voice: "Take care, Costanzo, or you 'll lame me; then I can't earn money for you."

"I 'd like to break every bone in your body, you evil one," muttered the man, passionately. "Come away from these children. How dare you do your tricks before them? You little imp, you like to make yourself common. Can't you wait until you get on the rope, where every one will see you and applaud you when you do well?"

"I don't care for their noise," returned the boy, sullenly. "I 'd rather fall and break my neck."

"You will some night," said the old man, clenching the thin little arm viciously. "If there were n't so many people looking on I 'd beat you for saying that. Come here and sit down until it's time to begin, and if you fail and disgrace me to-night you 'll wish you had plunged from the highest rope you ever danced on"; and as he spoke he jerked the boy into the seat Madam Aubert and Mignon had just vacated.

A small black shawl lay on the floor. It had fallen from Madam Aubert's shoulders, and she had been so absorbed in the music that she had not missed it.

The boy stooped and picked it up. The old man rudely pulled it from his hand. "Give it to me. It belongs to me."

"It does n't," answered the child, fearlessly. "I saw it fall off the lady who was sitting here with a little girl, and I 'm going to find her and give it to her."

"You mind your own business and stay where you are, or I 'll beat you when I get you home!" exclaimed the old man, brutally, and as he spoke he folded the shawl and laid it beside him.

The child said nothing, but a defiant glance shot from his eyes as he impertinently turned his back on the speaker.

The man seemed to be looking intently for some one among the passers. The boy was watching him, and when he saw that the right moment had come, he seized the shawl and darted out of his seat into the thickest of the crowd.

Madam Aubert and Mignon were standing before a booth looking at some young men who were trying to throw a ring over a cane, in the hope of winning the cane, at the cost of a dime for each throw, when a gentle touch on Madam Aubert's arm caused her to look around.

"Is this yours, madam? I found it under the chair where you were sitting"; and the boy in the strange costume held out the shawl, with a friendly smile.

"Thank you. Yes, it is mine," said Madam Aubert, gently, and as she took her property from the extended hand of the little fellow she looked at him with much interest; but before she could frame another sentence he darted away and disappeared among the passers.

"What an odd-looking boy, and what a beautiful face he has!" said Madam Aubert, thoughtfully. "I am sure I never saw him before, and yet his features seem familiar."

"His clothes are queer," said Mignon, with a scornful smile;

" he is dressed like the monkey of the organ-grinder who plays at our corner."

" His costume *is* rather fantastic," returned Madam Aubert, " but, my dear, you must not be too severe in your criticism; his clothes are probably selected by some one older than he, and he is not to blame for their bad taste. Poor child! there is something very touching in his expression."

" Tantine, listen to this," said Mignon, presently. She was reading from a program she had just picked up. " 'At nine o'clock there will be a remarkable performance on the tight-rope by the child acrobat Thistledown, who will surprise his audience by a number of astonishing feats with balls, poles, and hoops, such as never have been done by any acrobat in the world.' The 'child acrobat,' Tantine, is the boy who found your shawl. I thought he could not be just a common boy — his dress is so odd."

" I think you are right, Mignon," said Madam Aubert, sadly. " It is no wonder his face has such an anxious expression if he is obliged to risk his life walking a tight-rope."

" Why, there is the rope," exclaimed Mignon, looking up. " It is almost over our heads, and so high! Oh, Tantine, would n't it be awful if he should fall!"

In the center of a great platform, stretched from one tall electric pole to another, a slender white line was visible. It was so far above the crowd that it looked scarcely thicker than a thread. Under it hung a net, which swayed slightly in the soft wind, while dangling from the pole near where Madam Aubert and Mignon sat hung several strands of rope, one of which terminated in a couple of loops twisted firmly together.

While Mignon was examining these with great curiosity, wondering for what use they could be intended, the crowd parted suddenly, and a shout of applause followed the appearance of a little white

figure balancing a rod on the tip of his finger as he ran. He was closely followed by the dark old man, who, breathless and flushed, was trying to keep up with the flying feet of the child.

"Not so fast, evil one," he panted, his eyes flashing angrily, while the gold hoops in his ears swung and sparkled in the glare of the light. "You little imp, you will be out of breath and you will make a fiasco of your exhibition."

Madam Aubert and Mignon were gazing wide-eyed at the fleet little figure coming toward them, when abruptly he stopped at the pole where hung the dangling ropes, and, poising his rod on his finger-tip, he smiled scornfully at the old man, who limped to his side with muttered threats of violence.

"You see, I was right, Tantine," said Mignon, eagerly. "Look at his face; he is the same boy."

"Yes, dear, he is the same," returned Madam Aubert, "but he has changed his clothes as well as his manners. When he spoke to us he was gentle and respectful; now he is acting a part — his boldness is all bravado! Poor child! I suspect that, in spite of his brave exterior, his little heart is trembling with fear. I can see it in his eyes. They have the expression of a hunted animal suddenly brought to bay by his pursuer."

While Madam Aubert was speaking, Mignon was studying every detail of the boy's costume. Instead of his scarlet stockings, he wore soiled white tights which covered him from head to feet, while a scarlet silk sleeveless jacket outlined his slender shoulders and waist; his head was bare, and the close-cropped brown curls clustered around his forehead. As he stood poised on one foot and leaned forward, balancing the rod on the tip of his finger, he looked like the statue of the Winged Mercury.

"I don't think he 's the least afraid," said Mignon, admiringly. "I wonder what he 'll do next."

The old man with his one hand was testing the strength of the ropes and examining the twisted loops carefully; from time to time he nodded his head and grinned at the audience as though quite satisfied with the arrangement. Presently another man appeared on the scene. He was a workman in blue jeans and white canvas cap. Pushing the old man aside, he seized the ropes and strained them with all his might. The white line above tautened perceptibly, and the net stopped swaying in the wind. The boy paused in his tricks with the rod, and he and the old man watched the slight preparations with interest. When all was ready, the little acrobat sprang forward as light as a feather, and, clinging to the rope with one hand, the rod poised in the other, he thrust his slender feet through the loops and stood upright, bowing and smiling to the spectators until he disappeared far above their heads.

Had it not been for the workman pulling at the rope, and the slight creaking of the pulley, one might have thought that the graceful figure floated in the air.

"Oh, oh!" whispered Mignon, breathlessly. "If he should fall!"

Madam Aubert's face grew tense and anxious as she followed every movement of the child, who stepped boldly on the rope amid shouts of applause. For a moment he hesitated; then he went bravely forth, his eyes shining and his small face as white and calm as carved marble.

III

SILVAIN IS INTERESTED

SO intent were Madam Aubert and Mignon on the movements of the little acrobat that they did not notice a tall, fine-looking boy approaching; and it was not until he stood before them, his cap in one hand and the other cordially extended, that they were aware of his presence.

"How are you, Aunt Josephe? How are you, Cousin Mignon?"

"Why, Silvain, dear boy, is it you?" said Madam Aubert, taking the hand of the newcomer, her gaze still fixed on the slender figure so far above her. "Excuse me, dear, but I can't take my eyes from that poor little fellow."

"Nor I, either," said Mignon, with a smile of welcome. "I am so afraid he will fall if I look away for a moment."

"Don't try to talk to me while your attention is divided. I can wait. You can talk to me any time, but you can't see an exhibition like this every night," returned Silvain, good-naturedly. "He 's just splendid. I could n't get a good view where we sat, so I came around here, and had the luck to stumble on you."

"We saw you—I saw you first," said Mignon. "We were watching you, and—and—"

"And what?" asked Silvain, with some curiosity.

"Oh, nothing. Tantine thought it rude for me to stare at you. I could n't help it. You were so elegant and gay. But look—

look! see what the boy is doing!" and her eyes flew back to the little acrobat.

He was standing, poised on one foot, in the center of the rope, while he performed his wonderful feat with the rod, balancing it on the point of one finger, now on another, or changing it with lightning-like rapidity from his fingers to the tip of his chin, swaying backward and forward, and from side to side, like a white feather fluttering in the wind. So slight was his hold with one slender foot that it seemed as though he might plunge to destruction at any moment.

The suspense was painful. Madame Aubert sighed audibly, and Mignon covered her eyes with her hand, while Silvain shouted "Bravo, bravo! He is n't afraid, and he is as light as a ball of thistledown. I should n't be surprised to see him float off and disappear among the clouds. Oh! then he nearly lost his balance! Now he comes up; now he is all right!"

Mignon peeped through her fingers. Again he had taken the pose of the Winged Mercury, and stood as if ready for flight.

It was a wonderful exhibition for a child, and again the spectators burst into a storm of applause as the brave little fellow disappeared behind a screen at the far end of the rope.

"Oh, I 'm so glad it 's over!" said Mignon, with a sigh of relief. "I 've been afraid to breathe. It seems as though a breath might blow him away."

"But it 's not over," returned Silvain, glancing at his program. "There 's a second part; he 's only resting: he still has some tricks to do with a hoop and balls."

"My dear, if it is too painful to watch him, I think we had better go," said Madam Aubert, taking the hand of the excited child. "For my part, I must confess that it is a great strain on my nerves. I feel very tired."

"Why, Aunt Josephe, do you?" exclaimed Silvain, in surprise.

"I find it no end of fun. I like to follow every motion of the little chap. It 's awfully interesting. But don't go. While the boy rests we 'll talk. It 's an age since I have seen you, and I have lots to say."

"Yes; it 's been a long time. I thought you had forgotten us," returned Madam Aubert, a little sadly.

"And you knew I had n't had a glimpse of you in your new uniform," complained Mignon.

"Sweet Mignonette, that is too bad. Well, look at me now." And Silvain drew himself up with a proud gesture. "Do I please you?"

"Yes; I like you, and Tantine likes you. But dear Uncle Anatole has n't seen you. Oh, Silvain, why don't you come to see him? He talks about you all the time."

"Yes, dear; and he thinks about you," added Madam Aubert, gently. "You are young; he is old. You must be good to him while you have him."

"I want to be, Aunt Josephe. I mean to come. I care a lot for the colonel; he must n't think I don't. It 's not my fault. Poor mama can't get over the old trouble. She can't forgive him, and it makes her nervous when I speak of going."

"Yes, yes; I know, Silvain," interrupted Madam Aubert, hastily. "Don't worry your mother; she is ill. Come when you can."

A shade passed over Mignon's bright face. She had heard the "old trouble" mentioned before, and she did not know what it meant, nor how any one could be so cruel as not to *forgive* dear Uncle Anatole. It was no use for her to ask for an explanation. She was not allowed to be curious, so she only knit her pretty brows and said thoughtfully: "You all seemed so happy at supper, and Aunt Gabrielle does n't look ill at all. Is she really ill, Silvain?"

"I suppose so," replied the boy, with a doubtful shrug. "Mama says she is very ill. Sometimes she stays in her room for days together, and won't see us; not any of us — not even dear little Aimée. I can tell you, Mignon, we don't always have a gay time. I often want to invite my chums to dinner, but mama says she is too nervous and can't bear the noise."

"Oh, there's the boy again!" interrupted Madam Aubert. "Look, he has the hoop and ball." In an instant all conversation ceased and every eye was fixed on the little acrobat.

"How white he looks!" said Silvain. "And he does n't seem so sure of himself."

The boy stepped forth cautiously; his motion was wavering and uncertain. In one hand he carried a hoop, in the other a ball. Just beneath him stood the old man, glaring at him with intent eyes, watching every motion as though his life depended on the child.

It seemed very difficult for the little fellow to balance himself without the aid of the pole, and as he neared the center of the rope he wavered and swayed to and fro in such a perilous manner that the spectators were breathless and awe-stricken.

"Oh, oh!" gasped Mignon. "If he falls will the net save him?"

"If he does n't bounce out; he 's so light he can't break through," replied Silvain, encouragingly. "There, he 's all right now; he 's all nerve again. Ah! he has lots of sand, that little fellow. I wish I could do what he 's doing."

"No, no, Silvain," cried Mignon, reproachfully. "It would be cruel to frighten us so."

Now the little acrobat, upright and fearless, was holding the hoop at arm's-length above his head, while with the other hand he sent the ball through the circle and caught it as it descended. It was a remarkable feat to perform, standing as he did on that slender swaying rope, and as the ball flew from his hand and returned

with rhythmic precision to be thrown back swiftly and lightly, it seemed as though some unseen force held the boy suspended in mid-air, his slender figure clearly outlined against the blue-black sky.

The audience watched him breathlessly; the silence was oppressive. The element of danger lent fascination to the scene. Suddenly, without any apparent cause, the ball swerved from its rhythmic circle, missed the hoop, and waveringly fell downward. It struck the net, bounded over the edge and continued its aërial descent until it landed on the bald head of an aged man, who was gazing upward in wild-eyed wonder.

When the ball fell every eye followed its downward flight, and when the people looked up again the boy had reached the end of the rope and was about descending.

"He will come down here," said Mignon, "and we can have a good look at him. I wish we might speak to him."

"There is that dreadful old man waiting for him"; and Madam Aubert worked her way to the inside rim of the crowd. "I hope he won't punish the poor child for dropping the ball."

Swiftly the slender figure slipped downward, and when within a few feet of the platform sprang forward almost into Madam Aubert's arms. He was pale and trembling, and his eyes were pitifully appealing. Throwing out his arms with a gesture of entreaty, he tried to find some avenue of escape from the crowd that surrounded him; but, instead of opening a passage for him, they drew closer together, and fairly thrust him within reach of the arm of his master, who clutched him savagely by the shoulder, hissing fearful threats as he tried to draw him away from the curious spectators:

"Evil one, you have ruined me! Little imp of Satan, you dropped that ball on purpose. I'll break every bone in your sinful body when I get you home! Come on; come away from these staring,

gaping rogues. They 're glad you failed; they 're glad of my disgrace. I 'll make you suffer for your wickedness."

"Costanzo, let go of me. You hurt me!" cried the boy, his eyes flashing defiance and scorn; and with a sudden desperate wrench he freed himself and stood at bay, pale and gasping for breath. At that moment he met Madam Aubert's pitying look, and he tried to smile his recognition. A ghastly pallor passed over his face; he stretched out his arms toward her, tottered, and fell at her feet in a dead faint.

A dozen willing hands were ready to lift the limp little form, but Madam Aubert and Silvain were the first to reach him, and raising him tenderly, they laid him on the nearest seat. Mignon fanned him, while Madam Aubert rubbed his cold hands, and Silvain ran to the nearest café for whatever restorative he could procure.

"Stand back and give him air, I beg of you," cried Madam Aubert, imploringly; "and keep that cruel old man away from him until he recovers."

Instantly the crowd formed a ring around the seat where the child lay, while Costanzo, struggling to reach him, alternately raved and wept. "Oh, my child, my treasure! Is he dying? Let me go to him. Let me touch him. Let me whisper to him, and he will recover. It is only fatigue, fright, nervousness. He will not die if I can speak to him; he will not disgrace and rob me."

"Stand back, you brute, stand back!" muttered the crowd, ominously, while dozens of strong hands thrust him aside as fast as he tried to break through the line of protection.

At that moment Silvain appeared with the restoratives, and shortly after the child opened his eyes and attempted to sit up. Madam Aubert put her arm around him and drew his drooping head to her shoulder. "Sip a little wine," she whispered, while she held the glass to his lips. "He is better," she said, looking at

"They laid him on the nearest seat."

Mignon's troubled face. "His color is coming back, and he is quite conscious."

There was a sudden commotion in the crowd. "Oh, oh, they are beating the old man!" cried Silvain, with flashing eyes. "The cowards — he is a cripple! I must help him. Stop that. He is old and lame. It is n't fair: he can't defend himself"; and the brave boy forced his way to the terrified old creature, who was struggling wildly with his assailants.

The people were not cruel nor vindictive, but they were full of pity for the little acrobat, and the only way they could express it was to jostle and cuff the brutal old tyrant. When Silvain reached him, he was almost sinking from exhaustion and fear, and he was glad to cling to the sturdy arm of his young protector, whose appeal to the better feeling of the crowd was not in vain. One by one, the excited men withdrew, until the principal actors in the little drama were almost alone.

While Silvain was wiping the old man's bruised face with his own handkerchief, Madam Aubert was questioning the little acrobat, who had recovered and was apparently enjoying Costanzo's punishment.

"Who is this man, my child?" she asked gently.

"He is Costanzo, from Isle de Chène. He says he is my grandfather, but people there say he is not."

"Do you live at Isle de Chène with him?"

"Yes, madam, when I 'm not somewhere doing tricks."

"Is he very cruel to you?"

"Not so very," the boy returned indifferently. "Sometimes I can master him. He can't beat me much, he 's so lame; but he threatens a lot."

"Poor child!" said Madam Aubert, with deep feeling. "I am sorry for you. Now go with him quietly, and to-morrow come to

the little music-shop on St. Philip's Street. I want to see you again. I want to talk to you. Will you come?"

"Oh, yes, madam, I 'll come," replied the boy, his fine eyes beaming with gratitude.

"Very well; I shall expect you. Now let us get away from these people. I want to see you safely out before I leave you." Madam Aubert took the boy's hand, and Mignon slipped around to the other side and held firmly to his arm, while Silvain followed, supporting the old man, who was trembling and muttering to himself. The crowd parted and allowed them to pass almost in silence. Then some one said: "What a brave fellow! Bravo, bravo!" and as they went out of a side entrance into the night, the shouts of the good-natured spectators followed them.

IV

UNCLE ANATOLE

THE morning after Madam Aubert's visit to the West End she sat at the table in her cheerful breakfast-room, waiting for the appearance of Uncle Anatole and Mignon. The room opened on a broad, shady gallery on the west side of the court, and the morning sunshine filtered through a rose-vine and stole in tremulous rays across the white table-cover and over the old-fashioned silver coffee-service. A large pink cup and saucer of delicate china, a French roll folded in a dainty napkin, and a little pat of fresh butter, with a sprig of cress on the edge of the pink plate, were arranged with great care and neatness in front of a high-backed chair, richly carved and covered with rusty leather. It was Uncle Anatole's throne, and no one else ever sat on it. On his left lay his morning paper, and on his right a bunch of fresh violets filled the room with delicious fragrance.

Presently a door opened on the opposite side of the court and Uncle Anatole appeared. Tall, slender, and very straight, and carefully clad in military undress, he looked every inch a soldier. Although he carried himself with an air of mid-age, yet he was far beyond that, and, in fact, was rather feeble and tremulous. As he crossed the court, leaning on a stout gold-headed cane, he lingered beside a basin of aquatic plants. The basin had once been a fountain, but was now dilapidated and moss-grown. The plaster Triton in the center had long ago lost both nose and arms. Now the slender

trickling stream ran from a hole in his shoulder instead of through a shell that he had once held in his hand. Uncle Anatole did not notice these signs of age and decay. He only stooped to caress the large leaf of a plant glowing with color and sparkling with moisture. Again he lingered to admire the fine tints of a rose, and to bury his face in a yellow jasmine, inhaling its perfume with a sigh of satisfaction. Then he entered the breakfast-room with a courtly good morning to Madam Aubert, and sitting in his big chair, he spread his napkin across his knees and unfolded his journal. While he slowly proceeded with these little preliminaries, he glanced at a Dresden mug and plate placed between him and Madam Aubert, and said in a tone of surprise: "Why, Josephe, where is Mignon? She is always waiting for me."

Madam Aubert smiled an excuse. "She was very tired and excited last night, and we were rather late — later than I intended to be; so I let her sleep."

At that moment Mignon entered, her rosy face still damp from her hasty bath, and her long, abundant hair carelessly put back under a comb.

"My child, how disorderly you look!" exclaimed Madam Aubert.

"Oh, please, Tantine, don't scold me; I did n't wake before. Oh, Uncle Anatole, I 've so much to tell you!" And rushing to the tall chair, she sprang on the arm, and clasping the fine old face in two pink palms, she kissed his heavy white mustache over and over, almost smothering him with caresses.

Uncle Anatole pushed her away gently, and, wiping his face, he said with affected severity: "You 're rather damp, sweet Mignonette. I wish you 'd dry your cheeks and hair before you embrace me. I don't like wet kisses."

"Oh, yes, you do," returned Mignon, with the air of a spoiled child, as she took her seat before the Dresden mug.

At that moment a tall, thin negro boy, as black as the proverbial ace of spades, entered with the coffee and steaming milk, which he placed before Madam Aubert with a melancholy bow.

"Bring me the colonel's cup, Helios."

"Yes, madam."

With much ceremony he placed Uncle Anatole's cup before him; then, with another formal bow, he attended to Mignon; after which he left the room with the slow, solemn step of a funeral march.

Mignon tittered as the door closed. "Oh, Tantine, did you notice Helios' collar? I 'm afraid it will cut his ears off."

Madam Aubert smiled and Uncle Anatole laughed outright.

"When Luna came to help me dress *she* looked serious too," continued Mignon, trying to suppress her laughter while she sipped her coffee. "She told me that Helios *preached* last night, and Deacon Jones said he was *inspirated*."

"Oh, Mignon! you must not gossip with Luna. She does n't know what she is talking about," returned Madam Aubert, gravely.

"Well, I won't, dearest; but I can gossip with Uncle Anatole. Can't I?" The old gentleman had put on his spectacles and was absorbed in his journal. Mignon, leaning forward, patted his cheek with one hand, while she gently drew the paper away with the other. "Listen, dearest dear; I want to tell you about last night."

Uncle Anatole let the paper slip from his fingers, and leaned back in his chair with an air of amused resignation. "Go on, Magpie; tell me all about it."

Then, in breathless haste, she recounted their adventure with the little acrobat, dwelling particularly on Silvain's brave defense of the old man.

"I wish you could have seen him, my friend," said Madam Aubert, admiringly; "he looked so strong and handsome, he reminded me of you when you were younger."

"Dear Josephe, you flatter me"; and Uncle Anatole bowed with mock gravity. "I am glad he showed courage and kindness. It was really fine of him. You say he has grown tall and straight. I hope Gabrielle will send him to West Point. She can easily arrange it with her brother the senator. I should like him to belong to the army or navy. A young man's life in either branch of the service is all laid out for him, and he is spared the disappointments and temptations of a business career"; and Uncle Anatole sighed and looked at Madam Aubert with sad significance.

"Oh, please don't talk so — so serious!" cried Mignon. "I want to tell what Silvain said about Aunt Gabrielle."

"Hush, my dear; hush! don't repeat what Silvain said. Your Aunt Gabrielle is really ill — at times."

"She does n't look ill," insisted Mignon; "and she won't let Silvain's friends — "

"Mignon, I will not allow you to repeat what you hear," said Madam Aubert, severely. "Silvain was very indiscreet."

"Tantine dear, you must not blame Silvain. Aunt Gabrielle *is* very cross, and he said she did not like him to come to see Uncle Anatole — that she could n't forgive him — "

Madame Aubert looked at the child with a sort of terror in her face; she was pale and very resolute as she said: "Not another word, Mignon, or I shall punish you. Don't mind her, my friend; she did n't understand Silvain."

Mignon sprang from her seat and flew to Uncle Anatole. "I did! I did, dearest!" she cried, clinging to him desperately. "I know just what he said, and I am very angry with Aunt Gabrielle."

"*Enfante terrible!*" And the old gentleman smiled grimly as he loosened the clinging arms. "And so that is the reason Silvain does n't come to see me. Gabrielle is turning the boy against me."

"Don't listen to the child; don't think of it, my friend," said Madam Aubert, earnestly. "Silvain is coming soon. He shall do you justice: I will see to it"; and she laid her hand tenderly on the colonel's shoulder.

Mignon glanced uneasily at Madam Aubert's troubled face, then at Uncle Anatole, who sat folding his paper, pale and grim. She vaguely understood that she had stirred up a smoldering fire; but her curiosity predominated, and going close to the colonel, she whispered softly: "And, dearest, tell me, please; what did Silvain mean about the 'old trouble'?"

"Is it possible that she can have misrepresented me to the boy?" exclaimed the colonel, turning still paler and looking anxiously at Madam Aubert.

"No, no, my friend; she can't have done that. Wait until you see Silvain. Come, Mignon, you have annoyed your uncle with your chatter," said Madam Aubert, severely. "Come with me and leave him to read his paper in peace."

Mignon pouted a little and looked appealingly at the colonel, who did not invite her to remain. Suddenly he seemed to be lost in gloomy reflection and quite oblivious to her presence. So, with a lingering backward glance, she followed her grandmother from the room.

V

EXPLANATORY

WHEN Anatole Chapelle, or La Chapelle, as the name was written more than a hundred years ago, was graduated from West Point, his country did not need his military services; therefore he turned his attention to the study of law. After he received his diploma from Harvard University, where his only brother, René, was a student, he returned to his native city and opened an office for the practice of his profession; but as he was rich and in no hurry for clients, he devoted himself to literature and society. He loved books, and he loved his fellowmen, but the strongest passion of his heart was his love for his brother René, his only near kin. They had been orphans from childhood, and had no sisters; but the pretty daughter of a neighboring planter had filled the place of a sister almost from their infancy, and as they grew up it was whispered among their friends that the charming Estelle was destined to become the wife of Anatole. But instead it was René whom she loved, and so Anatole locked his secret deep in his own heart, and with divine self-abnegation saw the girl he worshiped become the wife of his brother.

Anatole never married, but in René's home and with his children he enjoyed all of domestic happiness his heart required. René's two eldest boys were named Honoré and Maurice, and from the day of their birth their uncle was a second father to them.

For several years the domestic horizon was unclouded for all

the Chapelle family. Then came a dreadful calamity — a calamity that darkened all Anatole's after life. During the August of 1859, he, his brother and family, with their servants, were spending the hot months at Last Island, then a fashionable summer resort not far from New Orleans.

An important business engagement required Anatole's presence in the city, and he left his loved ones on a Saturday morning, expecting to return to them the next day. That night a wind of death swept over the doomed island, and scarcely a survivor remained to tell the tale of horror. René Chapelle, his wife, and two children, a little girl and a baby boy, with his faithful nurse, perished in that tidal wave that swept away nearly every trace of humanity, as well as the island itself.

The next day a searching-party from the mainland found floating on the blue waters of the Gulf the remains of a raft with two small boys lashed to it. They were René's two eldest sons, Honoré and Maurice, and, strange to say, they were alive and uninjured.

Had it not been for these two children, Anatole Chapelle could scarcely have survived this crushing blow. As it was, the little orphans needed his immediate care, and with an entire forgetfulness of self he became both father and mother to them. Four years later another call for self-sacrifice sounded in his ears. It was loud and strenuous. It was a bugle-call. His State needed him.

The children had twined the tendrils of their love around his heartstrings. How could he tear himself away from them? Who could be trusted to take his place during his absence?

About that time he had formed a strong friendship for a young client of his, a Monsieur Aubert. He was a talented composer as well as an engraver and publisher of music, and his gentle and accomplished wife was of such noble maturity of character that when she offered to take the little boys into her home during his

absence, Uncle Anatole gladly accepted her kind proposal, and she proved to be as devoted as a mother to them.

When he returned from the long conflict, bruised and battered, it is true, but promoted to be colonel of his regiment, with a fine record for bravery and ability, he found the children healthy and happy, and of more than ordinary beauty and intelligence.

During the colonel's absence a little girl had come to Madam Aubert, to take a share of the love hitherto bestowed upon the orphan boys. Had it not been for this little daughter, Céleste, she would have been most unhappy over her separation from the children; for Uncle Anatole had decided to have a home of his own. Therefore he established himself in a fine old house near the Auberts, with several family servants, and a young English tutor for the boys.

The happy years of their childhood and early youth passed uneventfully. When Honoré was twenty and Maurice eighteen, Uncle Anatole took them abroad to finish their education in a foreign university. They were absent for five years, and when they returned, full of energy and ambition, the colonel began to look for some opportunity to settle them in business, as the Civil War had made serious inroads on their fortunes.

While he was thinking anxiously about the future of his boys, they were enjoying life hugely, and before he was aware of it they had taken their destinies into their own hands. Honoré was the accepted suitor of the daughter of a wealthy cotton merchant, and Maurice had placed his eternal devotion at the feet of Céleste Aubert, who, during their absence, had shot up into a tall, gracious beauty. And Uncle Anatole had nothing to say against either alliance. For Gabrielle Kenyon was a brilliant match for Honoré; and who could be more welcome to Anatole, as a wife for Maurice, than the daughter of his dearest friends, the Auberts?

About that time an unexpected offer came to the colonel. He was selected to be president of a large banking-house. Seeing in that an opening for one of the boys, he accepted the offer; and Honoré, with the approval of the directors, was placed in a responsible position.

When Honoré and Gabrielle Kenyon were married, the haughty beauty immediately wrote her name La Chapelle, and had engraved on her visiting-cards and writing-paper the coronet of the old French family. Her father presented her with a handsome house luxuriously furnished, and the gay young couple began to live a fashionable and extravagant social life.

For some time Uncle Anatole looked on indulgently; then he gravely advised his nephew to keep within the limits of his income, reminding him that the property inherited from his father had greatly depreciated in value, and that none of them was as rich as people thought.

As for Maurice and Céleste, their marriage was delayed for some time by the death of Céleste's father, who had been ailing for several months, and this sad event changed all the colonel's plans. It had been his intention to establish the young couple in his own home, but now it was impossible for Céleste to leave her mother alone in her sorrow. Therefore after a suitable time they were quietly united, and Maurice returned to the home of his childhood, where he was more than welcome to the widowed Madam Aubert, who had always been like a mother to him.

When Uncle Anatole found himself deserted, the great house seemed singularly silent and dreary, and he began to think of an apartment on the south side of Madam Aubert's court, where he thought he, too, might be very comfortable and happy as a member of that peaceful household. The subject was mentioned to Madam Aubert, and she immediately began to renovate the rooms and pre-

pare them for his reception, and when at last he was comfortably installed he felt that he really had a home.

For more than a year the days passed in peace and tranquillity, and when the little Mignon came to gladden the hearts of Maurice and Céleste their happiness was complete. But, alas! before the child was three months old a heavy cloud darkened the sunshine of their home. Among the first victims of one of those terrible epidemics of fever that so often visited the unfortunate city were Maurice and Céleste, and so the little Mignon had only Madam Aubert and Uncle Anatole for mother and father.

After that, for a time, fate seemed to relent toward Colonel Anatole Chapelle, and again his domestic horizon was calm and blue. The love that he had bestowed so freely on Maurice and Céleste was transferred to their child, while Madam Aubert supplied him with intellectual companionship.

From the time of Maurice's marriage, however, a certain coldness had existed between the colonel and his eldest nephew, Honoré. Gabrielle, Honoré's fashionable wife, had not approved of Maurice's choice of a bride. In her opinion, Céleste Aubert was not a suitable match for her brother-in-law, and she took no pains to conceal her contempt for their simple style of living and their indifference to fashionable society. Though it never came to her ears, her own luxury and foolish extravagance were often unfavorably commented on, even by those who accepted her lavish hospitality.

The colonel had said nothing to Honoré since his first advice, which his nephew had somewhat resented, and they had gone their own way, insolently secure in their prosperity.

One morning, when Mignon was about four years old, Uncle Anatole received a letter while he was at the breakfast-table. He opened it in his deliberate way, after asking Madam Aubert's permission, and read it slowly, with knitted brows; and while he

read his face suddenly became old and haggard. Again and again he read it, with a strange, puzzled expression and an awful pallor. The mocking-bird sang joyously in the rose-vine, and Mignon's sweet baby voice prattled merrily, while Madam Aubert watched him with the deepest anxiety; for she knew that he had received another cruel blow. For some time he sat silent, the letter fluttering in his tremulous fingers. Then without comment he handed it to Madam Aubert, and while she read he stroked Mignon's hair tenderly, whispering to himself.

Madam Aubert was as pale as the colonel, and, she too looked years older when she handed the letter back; but she only said in an awe-stricken voice: "*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* the unhappy boy."

Then the colonel straightened himself resolutely, and the old look came into his eyes — the look that his soldiers had seen there before a battle.

"Josephe, this must always remain a secret between us."

Madam Aubert bowed her head, as if it were a sacred compact.

"The wretched boy has taken money from the bank and gone, he says, never to return. He has told Gabrielle a plausible story; she knows nothing of his guilt, and she must never know — no one must know. For the sake of Silvain, his son, for the honor of the name, *I* must restore what he has taken. I placed him in a responsible position; I trusted him as I trusted myself. I did not think that he *could* be tempted."

"It is a great deal," said Madam Aubert, tentatively.

"Yes; it will impoverish me: and every dollar I have will not replace what he has lost in mad speculation."

"Thank God that I can help you," returned Madam Aubert, earnestly; "and there is Mignon's inheritance — you must use that. All — all must go to save the honor of the name — your name."

"How can I rob you and the child? Oh, no, Josephe"; and the colonel wiped the sweat of agony from his forehead. "I can't — I can't!"

"You must, my friend; you must. You cannot hesitate a moment. We will make it up to Mignon," said Madam Aubert, firmly. "You have no time to lose. Go at once to the bank and make the necessary transfer before the deficiency is discovered. Go, my friend, go!" And Madam Aubert smiled encouragingly through her tears and pallor.

A few days after the touching scene in the breakfast-room, society was surprised and greatly puzzled by the report that Honoré Chapelle had been ordered abroad for his health, which was said to be in a very critical condition; and that his uncle, the colonel, had resigned his position as president of the Second National Bank.

For a little while the subject was freely discussed. It was so sudden, so strange. The Chapelles had been so gay and prosperous, and Honoré had never seemed to be ill, although his intimates did remark that lately they had thought he looked pale and care-worn. However, it was no more than a nine days' wonder. After that Gabrielle Chapelle lived a more retired life, but that was quite proper while her husband was absent on account of ill health.

Again, outwardly, tranquillity was restored to the little home on St. Philip's Street. Mignon grew and flourished like a budding rose, while the colonel practised his profession assiduously, and Madam Aubert opened the music-shop, which had been closed since her husband's death. But, for some hidden reason, from the time of Honoré's sudden departure the relations between the two families became colder and more formal than before, and there were mysterious and confidential hints from Gabrielle that the colonel was in some way responsible for her husband's losses, as well as for his continued absence.

These reports were never confirmed or contradicted. In the meantime Gabrielle had inherited a handsome fortune from her father, and talked of going abroad to join her husband. These events bring us to the time of the opening of our story.

VI

AN INTERESTING OCCUPATION

WHEN Madam Aubert and Mignon left the colonel to read his paper in the quiet breakfast-room, they went directly to the music-shop on the opposite side of the court, where they expected to find the little acrobat waiting for them.

The shop could be entered from the street, but the dwelling could be approached only by crossing the court. A heavily spiked green door with a dangling bell-cord gave admittance to Madam Aubert's friends as well as to Uncle Anatole's clients; for a neat brass plate in the center bore the inscription, "Anatole Chapelle, Counselor at Law." The apartment that the colonel occupied had been used in other days for work-rooms and was entirely separated from the house. The large front room opening on the street was neatly fitted up for the exhibition and sale of music, books, and other articles pertaining to the profession. Across the back of the shop stood a tall screen, and behind that screen, near two large windows, was a long table, which fairly glittered with plaques of bright metal and numerous little tools of steel and brass, while sheets of manuscript music lay at intervals along the center, fastened to the boards with thumb-tacks.

When Madam Aubert and Mignon entered, Helios was carefully dusting the small tools and arranging them in orderly rows. He was dressed in a well-worn black suit much too large for him, his coarse shoes wore a brilliant polish, and his broad expanse of shirt-

front and high collar were of dazzling whiteness. As his mistress approached and lingered a moment to glance over the work-table, he acknowledged her presence by a solemn bow and a mournful rolling of his eyes in Mignon's direction. The child looked at him and bowed with the utmost gravity, imitating his manner exactly, while she indicated the width of his shirt-bosom and the height of collar in charming pantomime.

Madam Aubert smiled in spite of herself, but the boy's grave features never relaxed. Without a word, he drew a high stool in front of the table, and Mignon, with a polite bow and "Thank you, Mr. Preacher," seated herself, and drawing a plaque of the metal before her, she began with trained and clever little fingers to manipulate the small tools near her.

When Monsieur Aubert was a youth in Paris he had learned the art of engraving music, and when he opened the modest establishment on St. Philip's Street he made that one of the important branches of his business; and his young wife, in order to assist him in his efforts to gain a little competency, learned the fascinating and artistic work. Her delicate and nimble fingers were well adapted to handling the dainty instruments of her pleasant labor, and very soon she acquired great proficiency and was regarded as an expert by her husband. When they were firmly established and success crowned their efforts, she did not relinquish her pleasant occupation. She loved it, and while working from the manuscripts of the great composers she learned to appreciate the best in the music which her husband interpreted so beautifully. This mutual taste made them closer companions, and when she lost him she had no desire to continue the work that he had shared with her. There was no further need for labor: she was independent. Therefore the little shop was closed, and the old table and small tools gathered mold and rust in silence and darkness.

But suddenly a pressing need had come upon them. She had insisted at the time of their dire distress on appropriating Mignon's inheritance, and it must be replaced. Therefore the shop was opened and the work-table was brought from the lumber-room, cleaned and varnished, and the rusty tools polished to their former brightness.

The very first day that Madam Aubert sat down to her work-table, Mignon climbed into a high chair beside her and watched her with great interest. The child was fascinated with the small tools and bright plaques, and before one was well aware of it she was beginning to understand the ledger-lines, the ties, the clefs, and the rests, while Madam Aubert encouraged her to study seriously a short time each day, and her progress was astonishing. At the time of the opening of our story she was quite expert and of great assistance to her grandmother.

Had Mignon not loved her work she would scarcely have begun so soon after the excitement of the morning. For some time she hammered and scraped industriously; then she pushed the plaque away impatiently, and resting her elbows on the table, she dropped her chin in her palms and fell to studying her work seriously.

"It's bad," she said to herself. "I don't like it; I can't do it right this morning. I'm thinking all the time of last night, of Silvain and that boy Thistledown. He said he'd come this morning, and it's time for him to be here. I wonder why Tantine wanted him to come. I wonder what Silvain meant by 'the old trouble.' I wish I knew; but Tantine and Uncle Anatole think I'm a baby and never tell *me* anything, and I'm nine years, going on ten, and old enough to know."

She heard her grandmother moving about in the front shop. She felt no inclination to join her, but sat silently studying her work.

Presently she turned toward Helios, who stood near her arranging

some sheets of music that had just been brought from the printers, and said severely: "Listen to me, Helios. Did you make a fool of yourself last night? Luna said you *preached*. Did you?"

"Luna better stop tellin' things about me," grumbled Helios, his thick lips closing sullenly, while he wrinkled his brows in an ugly frown.

"Well, did you? Now tell me the truth, or— or —"

"Deacon Jones tol' me to," interrupted Helios, hastily, as though anxious to change the subject.

"And so you *did* make a fool of yourself. What did you *preach* about? Tell me all you said."

"Well, Miss Mignon, I disremember jes what I said"; and Helios fumbled over his work nervously, looking as sheepish as though he had been caught purloining one of Aunt Myra's cookies.

"Oh, nonsense! If you try you can remember," insisted Mignon. "Now go on; tell me this very minute."

"I 'll try, Miss Mignon. It was this-a-way"; and Helios straightened up and began in a solemn, droning tone: "Dear bruders an' sisters, I is inspirated to speak to you to-night erbout — er — erbout Elijah crossin' der Red Sea —"

Mignon tittered. "It was n't Elijah that crossed the Red Sea. Elijah went up in a fiery chariot."

"Yes, yes; you 's right, Miss Mignon," continued Helios, hastily. "Yes; I done tol' 'em erbout 'Swing low, sweet chariot.' I done tol' 'em how dey mus' try to cotch on to dat chariot."

"Helios, you 're not telling the truth. You don't know what you 're talking about," said Mignon, indignantly. "I 'll tell Aunt Myra not to let you *preach* again"; and she walked off with a smile of scornful superiority.

Madam Aubert was looking over some sheets of manuscript music. It was a new Mexican song. They wanted a thousand

copies, and she was estimating the cost, when Mignon rushed in, exclaiming: "Oh, Tantine, I wish you could hear Helios trying to tell the truth."

"Never mind Helios, my dear; I 'm busy now," said Madam Aubert, gently.

Mignon looked disappointed, for she dearly loved to discuss Helios and his peculiarities. She stood irresolute for a moment; then she went to the door and looked up and down the street. "I don't believe Thistledown is coming," she said dejectedly. "I 'm very disappointed. I want to see him again. Oh, there he is!" For at that moment a red cap bobbed around a corner, and she ran excitedly to meet and welcome the little acrobat.

VII

MIGNON ENTERTAINS THISTLEDOWN

WHEN Mignon entered the shop triumphantly leading Thistledown, Madam Aubert laid down her sheets of music and came forward to meet them. Taking the boy's thin hand in both of hers and looking anxiously into his face, which was very pale, with dark rings around the eyes, she said gently: "I am glad to see you; I was afraid you had forgotten your promise."

"Oh, no; I never forget when I promise," returned the boy, proudly. "I had to wait for a chance to run away from Costanzo."

"Why, would n't he allow you to come?" exclaimed Mignon, excitedly.

"No, indeed," replied the boy, with a careless smile. "He never lets me go anywhere alone; he 's afraid I 'll do my tricks and won't give him the money, or perhaps he 's afraid some one will steal me. Anyway, he always watches me. But I got the best of him this morning. He was asleep, and I locked him in the room and ran away."

"Oh, my child!" said Madam Aubert, in a shocked tone. "That was very wrong."

"Not so very," returned the boy, with an air of conviction. "I don't mind being mean to Costanzo; he 's so mean to me."

"But, my poor child, have you no friend, no mother to take care of you?"

"No, madam, no one to take care of me," laughed Thistledown. "I don't need any one; I can take care of myself. See what I did this morning"; and thrusting his hand into his jacket pocket, he drew forth a collection of small coin. "I went into a café and did some tricks, and the men gave me money; then I had a fine breakfast all by myself"; and Thistledown smacked his lips with satisfaction.

"Don't you have your breakfast every morning?" asked Mignon, anxiously.

"Nothing but dry bread and coffee," returned the little acrobat, indifferently.

"And you're not strong, my poor child," said Madam Aubert, looking at him, her kind eyes full of pity. "You are very thin and pale."

"Oh, training does that. Costanzo keeps me all the time on the jump, and just starves me to make me light."

"Is it possible? Why, that is too cruel! I wonder what we can do to help you. I am very sorry for you. Let me think it over, and I will talk with the colonel. I am sure we can do something"; and Madam Aubert patted the boy's thin shoulder and smiled encouragingly.

"Have you any other name besides Thistledown?" asked Mignon, her curiosity getting the better of her politeness.

"Thistledown — that's only my stage-name. They call me Beppo at Isle de Chène."

"That's a pretty name! Tantine, may I call him Beppo?" asked Mignon, eagerly.

"Certainly, my dear; and if Uncle Anatole is not engaged, you may take Beppo to visit him while I finish with these papers."

Mignon was delighted. Nothing gave her greater pleasure than a chat with the colonel.

"Come, Beppo, come with me"; and she held out her hand invitingly.

Thistledown smiled a willing assent, while his bright eyes took in every object with undisguised admiration. The pretty, sunny court, the flowers, the old fountain — all came in for a share of his attention.

When Mignon knocked at the colonel's door and rushed in, as she was in the habit of doing, without waiting for an answer, she found the old gentleman sitting at his desk, his head on his hand, in a very dejected attitude, while he seemed quite oblivious to his surroundings. The noise of the opening door startled him from his reverie, and when he saw the little stranger following Mignon, he straightened himself and looked at him in cold surprise.

"Why, who is this?" he asked rather severely, for he did not like to betray his trouble to any one.

The boy drew back timidly; something in the grave face chilled and silenced him. But Mignon led him forward, saying excitedly: "It 's Thistledown, the little acrobat we saw last night. His name is Beppo, and he lives with Costanzo at Isle de Chène."

Uncle Anatole looked at the boy steadily for a moment, and the lines of his face softened. The lad's slender figure and white, delicate features touched him with a sudden pang. "Are you ill, my child?" he asked kindly, as he held out his hand.

"Oh, no, monsieur; I 'm all right, I 'm well," he replied in a brave, cheerful voice, as he drew near with a pretty bow and a friendly smile. "I look awful bad because I practise all the time. I can't do my tricks unless I 'm thin and light. I have to walk and dance on ropes, and swing—and jump like this"; and suiting the action to the words, he sprang nearly to the ceiling in a series of bounds and summersaults.

"Oh, don't; you frighten me," exclaimed Mignon, while Uncle Anatole sprang to his feet and watched him in breathless surprise.

"Really, it is wonderful," he said, as the child landed on the floor as naturally and quietly as though he had just stepped across the room.

"I understand now what you mean by 'training,' and why you are so light. Come here"; and the colonel drew a chair close beside his. "Sit down; I want to talk to you."

The boy complied readily, and Mignon perched herself on the the corner of the desk to listen to the conversation, with all her heart in her great brown eyes.

"Now tell me all you can remember about yourself."

The boy looked thoughtful and hesitated.

"Go on, my child," said Uncle Anatole, encouragingly. "Have you always lived with Costanzo?"

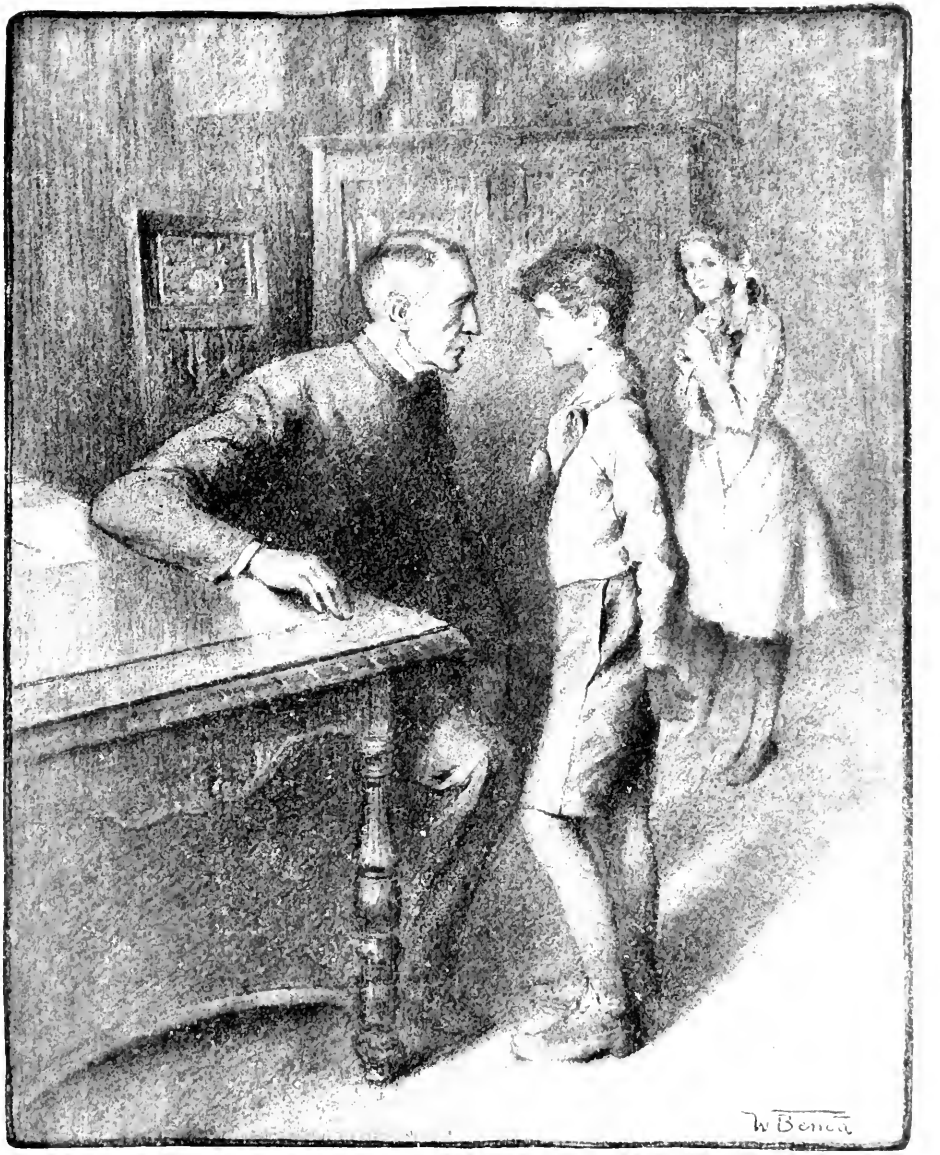
"Yes, monsieur; I guess so. It 's always been just the same. I was a little kid when I first began to do tricks here in the streets. He brought me here to get money for him. I don't mind that—I like it. I 'd walk on my hands all day if he 'd give me enough to eat and would n't pull and pinch me so. Look at my arm"; and the child pushed his sleeve up and showed the purple marks on his white, delicate skin.

Uncle Anatole looked away and sighed, while Mignon wiped her eyes.

There was a moment's silence, then Uncle Anatole resumed his questions.

"Do you come often to the city?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur; when the gardens are open; sometimes I do my tricks in the cafés, and sometimes on the banquettes. You ought to see the people when I 'm on the streets"; and he smiled



"Uncle Anatole looked at the boy steadily."

proudly. "They shout themselves hoarse, and crowd and crowd; and Costanzo just rakes in the money."

"Do you live alone with Costanzo?"

"Yes, monsieur; I live in his house—I mean I sleep there. When the old man is off fishing, I study my lessons with Père Bonneval, and Tessa's mother gives me my dinner."

"Who is Tessa?" exclaimed Mignon, with sudden interest.

"Tessa? She 's my little friend," replied the boy, with a tender smile. "We study our lessons together with Père Bonneval."

"Is Père Bonneval the curé?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, monsieur, he is the curé; and Mam'selle Bonneval is his sister. She teaches us our catechism Sundays, and she teaches the girls to sew week-days."

The colonel drew a sheet of paper before him and made a few rapid notes on it. Then he said with some severity: "Does Père Bonneval know how cruel Costanzo is to you?"

"No, he does n't; I don't tell on him at Isle de Chène. The fishermen might beat him if they knew, and I don't want the old man hurt. I used to be afraid of him, but now I 'm bigger and I 'll soon be able to master him. I 'll pay him back one of these days"; and he rubbed the thin little arm as though the bruises hurt him, while his eyes sparkled vindictively.

The colonel looked out of the window and sighed; then, with his pencil in his fingers, he asked: "Where does Costanzo stay when he is here?"

"He stays at the 'Gray Cat,' on Tréme Street. I wonder if he 's locked in his room yet"; and at the thought Thistledown burst into a merry laugh.

Mignon fairly shuddered.

"Oh, oh! I 'm afraid he 'll beat you when you go home."

"No, he won't; Mère Picheloup won't let him. She keeps the

house, and she 's good to me; she gives me cream-cheese and cake and lots of good things, and Costanzo never knows it."

The children chattered on, exchanging confidences at a rapid rate, while Uncle Anatole seemed to be thinking deeply. Presently he turned to Mignon and said in an absent-minded voice: "Mignon, go to Myra with your little friend, and tell her to give him something good to eat, the best she has in the house"; and drawing the boy to his knee, he pushed back the thick curls and looked long and searchingly in his face, while his thoughts traveled swiftly backward; for he seemed to be looking into another pair of brown eyes that had been closed for many a year. "Poor little lad!" he said tenderly. "Go, now, and I will try to make your life easier and happier."

A strange light came into the boy's face; his grateful soul struggled to express itself, but he could find no words. Impulsively he caught between his palms the kind old hand that had stroked his hair so tenderly, and kissed it over and over. Then with a bound, silently and without a backward glance, he darted through the door, and was on the opposite side of the court before Mignon could say *au revoir* to Uncle Anatole.

Aunt Myra was standing in the kitchen door, fat and sleek, and brimming over with good humor. She was watching her chickens devour the crumbs she had scattered for them, and chuckling over the greed that so often defeated itself. "Now, ol' Dominicker, you done los' dat fine crus' 'cause yer want ter get dat corn from Miss Leghorn. Now run all roun' like yer head 's off, tryin' ter grab ebery morsel yer sees. Yer ain't got a speck o' sense er yer 'd wait in one place an' pick an' pick. Why, who is dis yere a-comin' with Miss Mignon — a boy dressed like a monkey? Dear, dear! what dat li'l' gal want now?" And raising her voice to a fat gurgle, she called: "Now, Miss Mignon, I knows yer after somefin jes by yer looks."

"Yes, Aunt Myra, I am," returned Mignon, decidedly. "The colonel says to give Beppo — this boy — the best you have to eat. Bring a plate *full* out on the gallery, with some milk and cookies and all the good things you can find. Stop laughing, and do as I tell you," added Mignon, with pretty authority.

"Please, I'm not hungry now; I don't want anything. I must go and let Costanzo out," said the boy, nervously. "That old woman is laughing at me"; and a sudden anger flashed from his eyes. "Oh, I hate to be laughed at!"

Myra had settled down on the door-step, the better to scrutinize the little acrobat's queer clothes, while she called: "Luna—oh, you Luna, bring some ob dem cookies I jes done took outen der pan, an' a glass ob milk, an' some—." But she did not finish the sentence.

A demon of mischief sparkled in the boy's angry eyes. "See me frighten her," he whispered; and, before Mignon could lay a detaining hand on him, he had vaulted through the door clean over Aunt Myra on to the kitchen table, where he whirled and turned in a succession of hand-springs which were really astonishing. Then, without a word, he bounded back over the old woman's head, and stood beside Mignon as quietly as though nothing had happened. At that moment Luna, a little black ball of a girl, was bringing the refreshments for Thistledown; and when she saw the queer figure fly through the door and light on the table, she dropped both plate and glass, and, throwing up her hands, cried out in real terror: "Oh, ma — oh! It 's ol' Mars' Satan hisself yere on yer table! Come quick an' put der charm on him er he 'll conjer us shore nuff."

But Aunt Myra did not heed the frantic cry. She saw the flying figure and heard Mignon shriek with laughter; then she threw her arms up and fell over in a spasm, from which she could only be

revived by copious showers of water administered by Helios, who arrived on the scene at the most exciting moment.

When Mignon recovered from her excessive mirth she looked around for Thistledown; but the little acrobat had disappeared, floated away unseen and unheard, without a word of farewell to Madam Aubert or his new friend. How had he gone? Mignon glanced at the high fence behind the kitchen, and Helios followed her glance. "He done gone dat-a-way, Miss Mignon. I saw him er-flyin' over der fence jes as I run ter my ma."

VIII

SILVAIN AND HIS MOTHER

MADAM LA CHAPELLE had just finished her breakfast and was languidly reclining on a sofa in her pretty morning-room. Everything about her denoted wealth, as well as a love of luxury. The furnishing of her room was in white enamel and pale green brocade, curtains of rich silk and lace softened the rays of sunlight that quivered here and there through the vines and flowers shading her windows. She wore a white negligée of dainty muslin tied with pink ribbons. On a table by her side stood a bowl of great yellow roses, and near it a basket of choice fruit, while numberless beautiful and costly ornaments lay carelessly among the latest magazines, fashionable journals, and French novels, many with the pages still uncut. She was looking over her morning letters, mostly invitations or cards for some fashionable function, and they did not interest her in the least. As she threw them aside one after another, she clasped her hands passionately and said to herself in a tone of deep dejection:

"*Mon Dieu!* I am dying of *ennui*, and not one of these amuse me for a moment. I am losing my interest in everything, even my children. Aimée's last frocks were spoiled because I was too negligent to look after Agnes when she was making them, and Denise accuses me of lack of interest in her studies and amusements. If I made his home more attractive Silvain would not be so taken up with his new school, new uniforms, and new friends. I could n't

keep him with me last night; he was away most of the time with that detestable old woman and her pert, underbred granddaughter. Dear me! those people have marred my whole life; they seem harmless and inoffensive, and yet they torment me."

At that moment some one knocked at the door, and she said, "Entrez," in a peevish, impatient tone.

"It's I, mama; can I come in?" and Silvain stood, cap in hand, timid and hesitating.

"Come in, certainly, my son; don't behave as though you were afraid of your mother."

Silvain laughed good-naturedly. "I 'm not afraid, mama. You look too nice and pretty to be afraid of"; and he glanced at his mother admiringly.

This innocent flattery softened her at once. He was so like his father, so winning and handsome; but for some reason there seemed to be a wall between them. She knew that she had never had her son's entire confidence and love, and perhaps she felt it keenly for the first time. However, she said in a gentler tone: "Sit down, my dear, and tell me what you want. Is it a new uniform?"

"No, mama; I only came to ask your permission to do something," he replied with some embarrassment.

"Well, what is it?" Suddenly every trace of softness vanished from his mother's face, and her voice was cold and formal.

"I should like to call on Uncle Anatole after school, if you have no objection," he replied.

"If *I* have no objection. Why do you say that? You know I object. You know I detest him; he has made trouble enough for me. You should resent his — his duplicity. Your father would be here, happy and prosperous, were it not for something connected with the colonel and that unfortunate business."

"Mama, will you tell me what you mean?" and Silvain, drawing

nearer to his mother, urged in a low, entreating voice: "Tell me, mama, what did Uncle Anatole do?"

"Oh, I can't tell; don't question me. You know I dislike being questioned."

"But, mama, I must know. I 'm old enough to know. I 'm fifteen, and I 'm old enough to resent any injustice to you or papa. You have always hinted that there was some 'old trouble.' Can't you explain what you meant? Can't you tell me now? I saw Aunt Josephe and Cousin Mignon last evening, and they both reproached me for not going to see Uncle Anatole, and I promised to go. I 've always loved Uncle Anatole, but if there is any reason why I should not, I shall tell him honestly, and I shall never want to see him. Now, mama dearest, tell me all about it," added Silvain, persuasively. "You see, I must know now."

"I can't tell you anything. I don't know anything about the facts of that old trouble. I only know that the colonel sent your father away, and that *he* has made me live a lie for six years," she exclaimed passionately and bitterly.

"Can't you ask papa when you write to him? Tell him I must know everything."

"My son, I never write to your father. I never hear from him. I don't know where he is now. Three years ago he was in Algiers. I only learned that accidentally. Since then I have heard nothing from him"; and Madam Chapelle wiped her eyes angrily.

Silvain was deeply moved; he had never seen his mother weep. He leaned over her caressingly and kissed her jeweled fingers. "Don't cry, mama dear; please don't cry."

"I 'm not crying, Silvain. I am too angry to cry, and you are too young to understand what a cruel position I am placed in. I 'm obliged to answer questions about your father's health, to make excuses for his long absence, to say where he is, to deceive, to

tell falsehoods, to conceal that he has deserted us. It is too dreadful!"

Silvain looked surprised and alarmed. "Why, mama, is it as bad as that? I did n't know. I did n't think papa was never coming home. Yes; I *do* understand now. I can see how dreadful it is for all of us. But how is Uncle Anatole to blame for his going away?"

"I have told you already, Silvain, that I don't know how or why. I only know that he is at the bottom of it."

"But did n't papa explain before he went away?"

"No, my son; he made no explanations. He was ill, and went to New York in great haste to consult a specialist; from there he wrote that he had been ordered to Paris for further treatment, and since then I have had no direct communication with him."

Silvain was silent when his mother paused suddenly, as though she had said too much. The boy was in deep thought; his face was grave and his brows knitted anxiously, like one trying to solve a difficult problem. At length he asked, in a serious voice that sounded very mature and businesslike: "Is that all you have to tell me, mama?"

Madam Chapelle flushed angrily. "*All* I have to tell you, Silvain! I think I have told you enough."

"You have not told me," he continued slowly and thoughtfully, "about papa's money. What became of papa's money?"

"Ah, there 's the mystery!" exclaimed his mother, excitedly. "There is where your Uncle Anatole is to blame. He never could account for it. My lawyer could get no satisfaction from him. Your father had gradually disposed of his real estate in order to put his capital in that banking-house. What became of the money? And why did the colonel send your father away, and then, as soon as he had gone, resign his lucrative position as president of the

bank? Is n't that conclusive that something was wrong?" And Madam Chapelle looked at her son as though she expected him to agree with her that she had the best of reasons for laying the burden of blame on the colonel.

But Silvain was not convinced. In his boyish heart he felt that the argument was not sound. It was all very mysterious, and he determined then and there to see Uncle Anatole and ask an explanation for his father's sake. Resentment against some one whom he scarcely knew rankled in his sore heart. He felt that a great wrong had been done, and that it was his duty to discover who had been the guilty one.

While he silently communed with himself his mother was watching him, and he fancied she looked a little sorry and a little guilty, as though she were conscious of having been unjust toward an innocent person. "Well," she said at length, "are you satisfied that I have cause to detest that hypocritical old man?"

Silvain frowned slightly but said nothing, and his mother went on hastily: "I think, after all, I 've been indiscreet to talk to you so freely. I forget that you are still a boy. Yet I can trust you not to repeat a word of what I have said to the colonel. Go and see him if you wish, but don't mention him to me, nor any of that beggarly set. I never want to see them nor speak to them," she added vehemently.

Silvain rose hastily and glanced at his watch. "I must go, mama. It is school-time. I 'm afraid I 've worried you. We won't speak of this again, and you know you can trust me." He lingered a moment, looking at his mother for some word of approval; but she only said fretfully.

"I hate these scenes. You have given me a headache. Go to your school, and don't forget what I 've said to you."

He stooped and kissed her coldly. His heart was full of bitter-

ness. "*Au revoir*, mama. I shall remember everything you have said."

As he opened the door to leave the room he ran against a little girl who was entering. "Oh, Aimée," he cried, "I nearly knocked you over!" And, stooping, he kissed her fondly.

She was about six years old, a charming little creature with the face of a saint and eyes filled with holy awe. She had never spoken, never heard, but she was the most adorable child that ever looked into a mother's face.

Madam Chapelle saw her, and, holding out her arms, she said passionately: "Come, darling, come to me. I need you this very moment."

The child closed the door on Silvain, and, running to her mother, threw herself into her arms with an abandon and confidence really touching.

"Little angel, blessed darling, you are the only one that can drive the evil spirit out of my heart — the only one that can make me human!" cried Madam Chapelle, passionately. "Oh, my love, my gentle lamb, if your father had known you he would never have deserted us. My precious baby, only a few weeks old when he left us, and he never knew of your affliction. I have had to bear my burden alone and in silence, to hide my agony from every eye, to act a part, to seem happy and gay when my heart was bleeding. But for you, blessed little saint, I never could have lived." And leaning her face on the child's golden hair, she wept convulsively.

IX

SILVAIN VISITS UNCLE ANATOLE

ON the same afternoon that Thistledown disappeared in such a dramatic way, the colonel sat at the same desk in the same dejected attitude, thinking deeply, as he had done the greater part of the day. For the first time in many months he had neglected his business; for the first time he had denied himself to his clients; and even Mignon, when she sought him, eager and excited, to recount the little acrobat's last trick, was refused admittance.

Was he ill? Madam Aubert had inquired anxiously, and he had said, "No, no," a little impatiently. Something was wrong with the colonel, for he was never impatient with his friend; but he had added more gently: "I am thinking, Josephe. I have much to think of, and would rather not be disturbed."

Later, when, to his surprise, Silvain asked to see him, he gave a reluctant consent, and the boy thought that his hitherto genial and cordial uncle had certainly changed toward him.

"It is because I have neglected him lately"; and when he began to seek for excuses, the colonel smiled rather grimly and said: "Never mind, my dear boy; I have not complained. Do you know the old proverb, 'He who excuses himself accuses himself'?" While he spoke he was looking earnestly at Silvain. There was something in the boy's face that he had never seen there before — an expression of strength and maturity which showed plainly that

he had begun to think for himself, to assume the burden of responsibility that comes to all sooner or later. His conversation with his mother revealed a situation that he had never dreamed of. He had always accepted what had been told him: that his father was traveling for his health, and might return at any moment, or they might go to him; his mother had often spoken of it as a matter of course. Now he felt that there was some grave reason for his father's absence and his mother's deception that only Uncle Anatole could explain, but for some reason he feared to approach the subject.

For a few moments neither spoke. Silvain drew his chair near the colonel, who sat grave and upright, evidently waiting for the boy to make some remark. At length he said hesitatingly: "Uncle Anatole, I hope you won't think me curious or presuming if I ask you to explain something to me. I want to know why papa went away and why he has never returned."

The colonel winced and turned suddenly pale, but he recovered himself immediately, and replied coldly and calmly: "I have always understood that he went because his doctor ordered him to go."

"But — but," stammered Silvain, in dire confusion, for the colonel's manner frightened him, "why has he stayed away all this long time? Why has he deserted mama and his children?"

"Ah, my dear boy, I can't tell you that; I know nothing about it; I am not in your father's confidence. I can tell you nothing, and I beg you not to question me. The subject is distasteful to me"; and Uncle Anatole looked very stern and forbidding.

"I have been thinking so much about it lately," urged Silvain. "I thought you might be able to explain"; and the boy looked imploringly at the colonel.

"There is nothing that I can explain," he returned briefly. Then

he added coldly and decidedly: "Now we will change the subject. Tell me about your new school and your military exercises."

For a moment Silvain could not speak; a lump in his throat seemed to choke him, and angry tears started to his eyes. He had been so sure of Uncle Anatole's interest and sympathy, now to have this serious matter dismissed so coldly and indifferently was more than he could endure. He longed to tell of his conversation with his mother, of her mysterious hints and passionate accusations; but she had forbidden him to speak of that interview to the colonel, and he could not disobey her.

He felt very helpless and discouraged, and perhaps the colonel saw the keen disappointment in the boy's worried, anxious face, for he said in a softer tone, as he laid his hand on Silvain's shoulder: "My dear child, don't make yourself miserable over what you can't understand. For the present try to be good and happy. Work hard, and aim to reach a high standard of excellence in your studies. You may be the last Chapelle, and I want you to be worthy of the name. Above all, at any cost, at any sacrifice, shield the name from dishonor. Be truthful, brave, and honest, and some day everything that seems mysterious now may be made clear to you. Now tell me about yourself and what your plans are for the future."

Uncle Anatole was deeply moved; his voice was tremulous with emotion. Silvain's eyes were full of tears, but he tried to smile and speak cheerfully as he recounted the incidents of his new duties and exercises. "I like the drilling and all that. I want to be a soldier. I want to go to West Point when I finish this course. Uncle Kenyon can get me in, and mama is willing, so I think it is about settled that I can go."

"I approve of that," returned the colonel, heartily. "It is what I wish for, and some day I expect to be very proud of you. Now go to Aunt Josephe and Mignon, and don't talk or think of anything

unpleasant." Then, with a hearty clasp of the hand and a kind *au revoir*, Silvain felt himself dismissed without having accomplished his object and no wiser than he was before. But he had no time to think of his disappointment. Mignon saw him and ran to meet him, brimming with pleasure and excitement.

Aunt Josephe was in the work-room, and thither Mignon hurried her visitor. She was bending over a nearly finished plate, examining it with great care. This work was always interesting to Silvain, so he drew a chair to the table and watched the skilful corrections with close attention, while Mignon told him of the amusing visit of the little acrobat.

"You should have seen Thistledown, Silvain; you should have seen him surprise us. He jumped almost to the ceiling, and turned a summersault right over Uncle Anatole's head, and I was so frightened? But he came down on his feet as softly as a rubber ball."

"I am surprised," said Silvain, laughing heartily, "that the little chap dared to take such a liberty with Uncle Anatole. What did Uncle Anatole say?"

"Oh, nothing but 'wonderful, wonderful,' then he laughed; but I can tell you he was startled when he saw Thistledown over his head in the air, turning like a wheel." Then she went on to tell of his tricks with Myra, Luna's wild-eyed terror, the crashing dishes, and the old cook's spasm, until the room rang with shouts of laughter.

"I don't know what to make of the boy," said Madam Aubert, thoughtfully, as she laid down her tools and pushed the plaque aside. "He seems a strange combination of good and evil. He is so fascinating, and so grateful for any kindness, and yet he seems possessed with a spirit of mischief. He entered to-day like a refined little gentleman, and he went away abruptly and rudely, without even saying good-by."

"Oh, Aunt Josephe, you must remember that he is a little *far-*

ceur," said Silvain. "It is his business; he has been trained to surprise and shock his audience."

"I wonder if he will come back?" asked Mignon, anxiously.

"Yes," returned Silvain; "some day he will appear unexpectedly bounding through the door or window and turning handsprings all over the floor."

"Your Uncle Anatole is greatly interested in him; he intends to write to the curé at Isle de Chène for some information about him," said Madam Aubert. "And, if possible, he is going to find the old man Costanzo. He hopes he may be able to have the boy placed in some institution where he can learn something useful."

"I am glad Uncle Anatole was kind to the little fellow," said Silvain, frowning slightly as he thought of his own cold reception. "I am afraid he thinks that I have neglected him, for at first he was very cold and formal; but after a while he thawed a little and gave me some very good advice. However, he would n't tell me what I wanted to know. Oh, Aunt Josephe, I 'm very much worried; I 'm very anxious about—"

Madam Aubert glanced uneasily at Mignon, and changed the subject suddenly. "Look at this, Silvain; it is an original manuscript by Felician David, and here are others quite as interesting. I found them among my first inscriptions"; and she spread out some faded yellow sheets covered with characters quite unintelligible to the boy.

He was too polite not to appear to be interested, and when Mignon ran to the door at the sound of some excitement in the street, Madam Aubert said softly: "My dear Silvain, please don't say anything about family affairs before Mignon, and don't think the colonel lacking in interest. I beg of you not to misjudge him. He is one of the best, one of the noblest— I can't tell you, I can't explain, but I beg of you never to allow any one—remember, I say *any one*—

to prejudice you against him; he is worthy of your deepest love, your veneration."

In a moment Mignon came dancing back, and Madam Aubert stopped abruptly. Again Silvain was thwarted in his effort to fathom the mystery that his mother had hinted at. In spite of Uncle Anatole's advice and Madam Aubert's kind words, he was not satisfied. There was a reason other than ill health that made his father an exile from his family, a wanderer in strange lands; and as he walked slowly homeward he resolved to devote himself to discovering the truth, and, if there was a wrong, the perpetrator of that wrong, even if he had to search for his father over the whole world.

X

TESSA

NOT far from the mouth of the Mississippi, on the Gulf coast of Louisiana, are several groups of islands and bayous that once were famous in song and history. But now the days of romance are over. Lafitte, the pirate of the Gulf, no longer runs his low rakish craft into Barataria Bay. The Spanish governor, Don Ulloa, no longer waits in his rude tent for the ship that brings his bride from Spain. Evangeline no longer wanders over the singing sands of Pascagoula. Gabriel no longer floats in his skiff down the sunny Teche. Still nature, beautiful nature, is the same, the same opalescent sea, the same shimmering bayous, the same moss-covered oaks, the same floating prairies and wind-swept grass, and the same singing sands; but another people, the children of many lands, a race of strong, sturdy "toilers of the sea," have built their little homes almost on the bosom of the Gulf. Small villages have sprung up where once there was no sign of human habitation. Brown thatched cottages cluster around a small church, and bright-sailed luggers flit to and fro from island to peninsula, sometimes filled with human freight, again with fruit, vegetables, or fish. Usually there is a rude wooden landing where the boats discharge their cargoes, and where the fishermen meet together to exchange their small items of news, to "welcome the coming or speed the parting guest," or to wait patiently the arrival of Jean Grima's boat, which comes once a week from New Orleans, more

than half a hundred miles away, bringing, besides passengers, ice, and the various stores needed by the busy fishermen.

On a particularly bright morning in early autumn, when the land and the sea were full of song and sunshine, when the soft wind waved the grass and rippled the blue water that lapped the shore, when the singers of the air floated on idle wings, and the pink-and-white flamingos waded in the shallow pools, a group of brown-faced men, women, and children were gathered together on the landing at Isle de Chène, awaiting the arrival of the *Merry Child*, Jean Grima's lugger. It was already in sight; the red-and-yellow sails were filled out by the gentle breeze as it came bravely along the shore of the blue and dancing Gulf.

Foremost in the group, and on the very edge of the landing, stood a little olive-skinned girl, with eyes as black as sloes, and lips like twin cherries, which showed a row of pearls when she smiled. She wore a faded pink frock, and a white sunbonnet hung around her neck by the strings; her feet and slender legs were bare, and brown from wind and sun. From time to time she leaned eagerly forward to look at the approaching boat, her lovely little face full of happy expectation.

Some one spoke her name, and looking up quickly, she saw Père Bonneval, the village curé, by her side. "Why, little Tessa, what are you doing here?" he asked pleasantly.

"I 'm waiting for the lugger, mon père," she replied in a clear, sweet voice. "Beppo is coming home to-day."

"How do you know, my Tessa?" inquired the priest, with a kind smile.

"Jean Grima told me the last time he came. He said Beppo would be on the boat to-day. He 's been gone so long that I can't count the time. Oh, I 'm so glad — so glad!" And the sparkling, eager eyes flew back to the approaching boat.

Now the *Merry Child* was very near, and figures and faces could be easily distinguished. There, standing on the very tip of the bow, was Thistledown, waving his red cap wildly, and shouting his greetings in a loud, shrill voice.

The lumbering old boat turned her nose toward the landing, while the heavy sails came down with a rattle and a crash; and when she was still some feet from the shore, the little acrobat measured the distance with a keen glance, and, bounding forward, landed at the feet of Père Bonneval, who embraced him heartily, while the crowd shouted its welcome.

In a moment he had Tessa by the hand, and was leading her away without noticing those who eagerly came forward to congratulate him on his success in the city.

"We heard all about it from Jean Grima," cried Bruno, a young fisherman, laying his hand affectionately on the boy's shoulder.

"Well, I can't stop to talk to you now," he said, twisting himself free from the detaining hand. "I 've got to go to mam'selle and la mádre. Costanzo will tell you all about it. It was grand. We made lots of money. I 've got my pockets full." And he slapped his blouse with one hand, while he held fast to Tessa with the other.

Costanzo was limping on behind, an ugly frown on his face. "Friends," he said gruffly, "don't believe that little imp of Satan; he does n't tell the truth. We did n't bring back money. We did n't have success. He did n't do his tricks well; he failed and disgraced me when he should have done his best."

"Oh, go on, Costanzo! We all know you," laughed the young fisherman. "Beppo just hauls in the money. If we had a net that would catch fish like this boy catches money for you, we 'd be rich and could lie all day in the sun like the alligators. Go on — go on, old man! Beppo, tell us, how much did you bring back?"

The little acrobat laughed merrily, and slapped his bulging pocket, from which sounded a metallic jingle. "It 's there: money — money!" and, pulling Tessa after him, he broke through the merry, noisy crowd, and the two ran swiftly in the direction of the church.

When they were out of hearing, they fell into a walk, and Beppo said, with a soft laugh: "Did n't I fool them! It is n't money at all. It 's a silver chain for mam'selle, and beads, and things for you."

"Oh, Beppo!" gasped Tessa, her eyes wide with surprise and delight. "Let us hurry and find mam'selle."

They opened a little gate, and ran swiftly along a narrow path to the door of a cottage that was snuggled up against the church on one side, while on the other was a stunted oak draped with moss, a clump of bananas, their great glossy leaves clearly outlined against the blue of the sea and the blue of the sky, while a pink crape-myrtle and a yellow jasmine added color and perfume to the idyllic scene.

Under the shade of the oak was a rude seat built of a piece of driftwood of faded green, the flotsam of a wreck that had strewn the shore. Sitting there peacefully, with a basket of coarse linen beside her, and busily plying her needle, was Mam'selle Bonneval, the curé's sister, a placid, gentle little figure dressed in black like a nun, with a white kerchief folded over her bosom and a simple cap resting lightly on her brown hair. A pair of lovely eyes looked out from under her straight brows, and the tint of youth and health was on her cheeks.

When she saw the children running to her, both small faces full of eager delight, she laid down her work and held out her hands in welcome. "Beppo, my dear boy, how glad I am! Little Tessa, you are happy, are you not?"

"Oh, yes, mam'selle; but let us see what he has brought."

The little acrobat was busy emptying his pockets into mam'selle's lap. "This is for you, mam'selle"; and he held up a silver chain. "See how it fastens. It is for your keys and things, and you must wear it so"; and suiting the action to the word, he stood on tiptoe and hung it around her neck.

"My Beppo! how good to think of me! But where did you get the money to buy these fine things?"

"I ran away from the old man and did tricks in the cafés, and Mère Picheloup kept the money for me until I got enough."

"You look very pale and ill. Has Costanzo overworked you and underfed you?" asked mam'selle, anxiously.

"No, no; I'm all right. The old man has n't been very mean to me. Look at these; these are all for Tessa"; and he pushed aside a pile of bright-colored beads, some gay little ribbons, and a small, rosy doll dressed in a fanciful costume.

At the sight of the doll Tessa almost screamed with delight. It was her first real doll, and her joy was boundless.

"My good, generous Beppo," said mam'selle, caressing his thick curls, "how happy you have made little Tessa!"

"Is n't the doll a beauty? and these are necklaces," he said proudly, festooning the gaudy beads around Tessa's neck and over her faded frock. "But wait, I 've something for la mádre"; and he ransacked in his other pocket and drew forth a gilt comb decorated with brilliant colored glass ornaments. "Don't it sparkle?" and he held it up, admiring it with a satisfied smile. "It 'll look lovely in her black hair; she must wear it at the next *festa*. And this is for mon père." Glancing rather timidly at mam'selle, he produced a snuff-box of huge dimensions, the cover gaily ornamented with an agile dancing-girl, and laid it on the seat beside her with a shy smile. "I bought it in a shop on Royal

Street. It 's big, it 'll hold a lot, and it has a pretty picture on it. Don't you think mon père will like it?"

Mam'selle put her fingers to her lips to hide a smile. "I am sure he will, my Beppo. When he comes in I shall give it to him with your dutiful love."

"Yes, that is it; that sounds right"; and Beppo nodded approvingly. "Now, mam'selle, we must go to la mádre to give her the comb, and by and by I 'll come back and tell you what happened while I was in the city."

"La mádre told me to bring you to your dinner," said Tessa, scarcely able to take her eyes from her treasures, "and you 'll have *court bouillon*," she added impressively.

"Let us go, then," returned Beppo, glancing proudly at the chain around mam'selle's neck and the snuff-box by her side.

La mádre, with her sleeves rolled up from her brown arms and her skirt kilted above her ankles, was busily engaged spreading and turning a quantity of shrimp that were drying in the sun on the south side of the little cottage. She was a strong, handsome young woman, with eyes like Tessa's, straight, fine features, and a charming smile. Her husband, Giovan, was a "shrimper," according to the parlance of Isle de Chène, and was absent during the day with his boat and nets, while la mádre remained at home drying and preparing the fish her husband caught, in order to sell them to Ling Chu, the rich Chinese merchant, who bought them to ship to the far Orient.

"Ah, here is la mádre," cried Beppo, joyously, and with one bound he was at her side.

She took him in her arms and embraced him fondly as she looked into his face, now flushed and beaming. "Beppo mio, how bright, how happy you look, but so thin, so worn! My poor boy, that old wretch has starved you"; and her eyes flashed with anger.

"Putting an arm about each of the children, she drew them toward her."

"No, no, mádre mia. I am well and happy, and so glad to be home!"

"See what Beppo brought me!" cried Tessa, crowding between the boy and her mother to show her treasures.

La mádre was sitting on a bench beside the table where she was working, and putting an arm about each of the children, she drew them to her with a gesture of love, an expression of adoration such as one sees on the early pictures of the Madonna enthroned.

"Look at my sweet, dear *bambino*, mádre, and my beads; see how they sparkle in the sun!" And she sifted the gorgeous strands through her slender fingers, watching the change of color and play of light, her pretty head thrown back, her lips parted, and all her little pearls of teeth showing in a broad smile.

La mádre looked from one to the other with deepening tenderness. "Tessa mia, thou art an angel," she said softly, hiding her happy face on her child's head.

It was then that Beppo brought forth his treasure of a comb, and deftly placed it, like a coronet, in la mádre's beautiful hair. "Don't move, mádre mia; don't put your hand up," he cried, in an ecstasy of joy. "Wait a moment!" and with a bound he entered the cottage and was back again, holding a small looking-glass before her. "Now you may see yourself. Are n't you lovely?"

La mádre raised her head and glanced at her charming reflection, while an ingenuous smile of admiration beamed over her face and lighted up her dark eyes. "Ah, my Beppo, it is beautiful, too beautiful for me! What will my Giovan say when he sees it? I will wear it at the next *festa* because of thee, and then I will offer it to the dear Mother and ask Père Bonneval to say a prayer for us when my Giovan is at sea. And when the winds shriek and the waves dash over his boat, she will save him."

Tessa bowed her head reverently and counted a few beads as

they slipped through her fingers, and Beppo silently made the sign of the cross.

After a few moments of pious meditation, la mádre and the children entered the porch of the little cottage, where, under the shade of a riotous gourd that climbed to the roof, a table was laid for a simple meal.

"My Beppo, thou art hungry, and to-day thou shalt eat thy fill," she said heartily, as she placed the savory court boullion and steaming rice before him.

"Here are corn-cakes I saved from my breakfast"; and Tessa, holding a dish in both little hands, set it by his side.

It was only when the little acrobat took his meals with la mádre that he was allowed to eat freely and unmolested, for old Costanzo was in the habit of doling out the most diminutive morsels, leaving the boy as hungry when he arose from his meals as when he sat down. Now his plate was piled generously, and la mádre and Tessa watched him with evident delight. Ah, it was a happy day! He was no longer Thistledown the child acrobat, but Beppo the island boy, for the moment as free and joyous as the singing-birds that floated in the air above him.

XI

PÈRE BONNEVAL

WHEN Père Bonneval returned from his morning walk he found his sister still sitting under the oak, apparently occupied with her needle; but one could see at a glance that her busy fingers were not following the direction of her thoughts, for at times she smiled to herself and her eyes turned toward the ornate snuff-box that lay beside her, or rested on the silver chain that hung about her neck. She was thinking of the little acrobat. The clever, fascinating child had crept into her heart; his winning ways, his innocent mischief, his generosity and gratitude, were all very dear to her.

As her brother approached she laid one hand over the snuff-box, while she pushed her work aside to make room for him. "Sit down and rest, mon frère. You look tired," she said anxiously. "It 's something of a walk to the landing. Did any strangers come in Jean Grima's boat?"

"No strangers," replied the priest, wiping his hot face; "no one but old Costanzo and Beppo."

"Ah, I knew *they* came. Beppo has been here with little Tessa. See what the dear, generous boy brought me"; and she held up the silver chain.

"*Bon! bon!*" And Père Bonneval leaned forward to examine it. "It is really very fine. But how did he get the money from Costanzo to buy it?"

"Oh, he ran away from the old man and did some of his tricks in the cafés. He always picks up money in that way."

"Yes, I understand, ma sœur. But it is wrong. It is bad for him. It teaches him to be deceptive, to misrepresent."

"Oh, *attendez;* don't be too severe with my Beppo. See what he brought for you." And, with a shy smile, she handed the snuff-box to her brother. "This to you, with his dutiful love."

Père Bonneval looked at it for a moment; then, laughing heartily, he dropped it into the deep pocket of his old soutane. "Droll little innocent! It is charming." And again he laughed. "Ah, he has a beautiful nature. But did he tell you that he had made new friends during his absence?"

"He hinted at something," replied mam'selle, a new interest in her voice, "but he was in such haste to go to la mádre that he could not stop to tell me."

"Well, I have had a letter this morning asking about him."

"*Vraiment?*" And mam'selle looked inquiringly at her brother, her eyes bright with expectation. "And from whom, may I ask?"

"It is from the Colonel Anatole Chapelle. He has seen Beppo, and he tells me that the child interests him greatly. He has a strange idea: he does not believe the little acrobat is the grandson of Costanzo. From some remark the boy made, and a real, or fancied, family resemblance, he thinks that Beppo's father may have been the son of René Chapelle, his brother, who, with part of his family, was lost in that terrible disaster at Last Island. A negro nurse and a baby boy were among the missing, and he is possessed with the impression that they may have been washed ashore and saved by some of the wreckers or fishermen. As I was not here at that time, I can give him no information from personal knowledge; but I have heard from old people that several children *were* saved,

and never claimed because there was no clue to their identity. And you have heard, as well as I, that Costanzo, when younger, had a very unsavory reputation. It seems, as far as I have been able to discover, that when he was a youth in Italy he was trained for an acrobat, but a fall maimed him for life, and he was obliged to give up his profession. I suppose he drifted here with other unfortunate and impoverished emigrants. I am told that he was very cruel to Beppo's father, whom he called his son, and no one here knows to the contrary. They only surmise what they hint at because the youth was totally unlike the old man. He was very delicate and refined, and never a favorite with the rough, coarse fishermen. Some years ago he married the daughter of an old Spaniard who they say was a gentleman in his own country. Be that as it may, when Beppo was a few months old, one bright morning, the young couple, leaving Beppo with Costanzo, sailed away to visit some friends on Grand Isle. A sudden storm came up soon after their departure, and they never reached their destination, nor were they ever heard of. Alas! the treacherous waters of the Gulf swallowed them, as it has so many." And Père Bonneval paused and looked at his sister as though he waited for her to speak.

He was in the habit of asking her advice and assistance in every important matter, and she never failed to help him. For a few moments she was thinking deeply; then she said in a tone of conviction: "I am not surprised at what you tell me, mon frère, for I have always felt that our Beppo was no kin to that horrible old man. But how to prove it now? I fear it is too late. However, no one can throw any light on the subject but Costanzo himself. Could you not induce him to confess all to you?" and she looked earnestly at her brother.

"If he had any conscience, any religion, any respect for the truth, I might persuade him, but being what he is, it is a hopeless task.

The boy is a gold-mine to him. He will keep his secrets, for to betray them would be to rob himself."

"Yes, I see the difficulties," said mam'selle, "but you must not let him know that you have any suspicion. You must get him to talk when he is in a garrulous mood, and question him carefully, very carefully, about his past, and perhaps, inadvertently, he may betray his secret."

"That is not like Costanzo; he is as deep as the sea, and as secretive. I have tested him in other matters. He will tell nothing. Do you remember, when Jean Grima caught him ill-treating Beppo and came to me about it, how fawning and hypocritical the old man was, and how he denied everything, and even that poor loyal child would not complain? He wept in my arms and begged me to protect Costanzo; he feared the angry fishermen would harm him: and even then his thin little back was black and blue from his cruel blows."

"Oh, mon frère, what a blessed mission you have before you!" And mam'selle clasped her hands fervently. "To save our Beppo from the clutch of that cruel, grasping old man—to restore him to his own. What a beautiful future for our boy! He is so bright, so talented; he learns everything so quickly, so easily. Think of it; at his age, to speak three languages, French, Italian, and English."

"And all very badly," interrupted the priest, dryly. "He has much to learn, and I fear he lacks application."

"He lacks nothing, mon frère, nothing. He is wonderful," returned mam'selle, indignantly. "I wonder that his mind has developed as it has, when his poor little body has been so tortured and overworked."

"True, true. Everything has been against the child," returned Père Bonneval, rising. "Well, we will see what we can do. I must

attend to my duties first, and after I will find Costanzo and try to learn something from him before I answer the colonel's letter."

While Beppo was talking and laughing with la mádre and Tessa, and while Père Bonneval and his sister were discussing his future, old Costanzo was sitting on his door-step alone, muttering and complaining because the little acrobat had not appeared. A pile of nets lay by his side; he wished to overhaul them, and he needed the boy's assistance. He looked a pitifully neglected old creature as he sat there by himself, in the silence and solitude of his ill-kept surroundings. His cottage had but one ill-lighted, untidy room. A rough fireplace and chimney built of clay and sticks, a rude bed, a table, and some benches were the only signs of human habitation. The walls were covered with old nets, odd shells, strings of garlic and onions, bunches of half-ripe bananas, dried red peppers, and an indescribable collection of odds and ends picked up from the many wrecks that had strewn the shore.

Looking at the dreary, dingy place, it seemed impossible that such a light, airy creature as Thistledown could have existed in that depressing atmosphere. However, the boy had not passed much of his life within those four rude walls. He was a child of the sun and wind; from morn till eve he lived out of doors with the old man, fishing, digging, and picking up driftwood, while his recreation, as Costanzo considered it to be, was the most severe physical training.

Near the cottage were two rather tall trees, and fastened to these were ropes, swings, bars, a trapeze, and, in short, a rude but complete outfit for gymnastic exercises. There the boy passed many hours each day, under the severe tuition of the old man, who cursed, raved, wept, and even resorted to blows if the little acrobat failed to follow his instructions. The only happy hours in the child's dreary life were those he spent at the little presbytère, or

with la mádre and Tessa. With them he forgot misery, torture, and hunger; for all that he lacked in his wretched home they supplied. Therefore it was not strange that at every opportunity he fled from his drudgery and squalid surroundings to a brighter and purer atmosphere.

As soon as Père Bonneval had performed the duties he had referred to, he went directly to Costanzo's cottage. The old man was sitting in his door, an ugly frown on his sullen face. Looking up, he saw the priest approaching in a leisurely way, as though he were sauntering abroad with no particular aim or intention. However, as he was passing, Père Bonneval said kindly: "*Bon soir, mon ami.* I see you are resting after your day's labor."

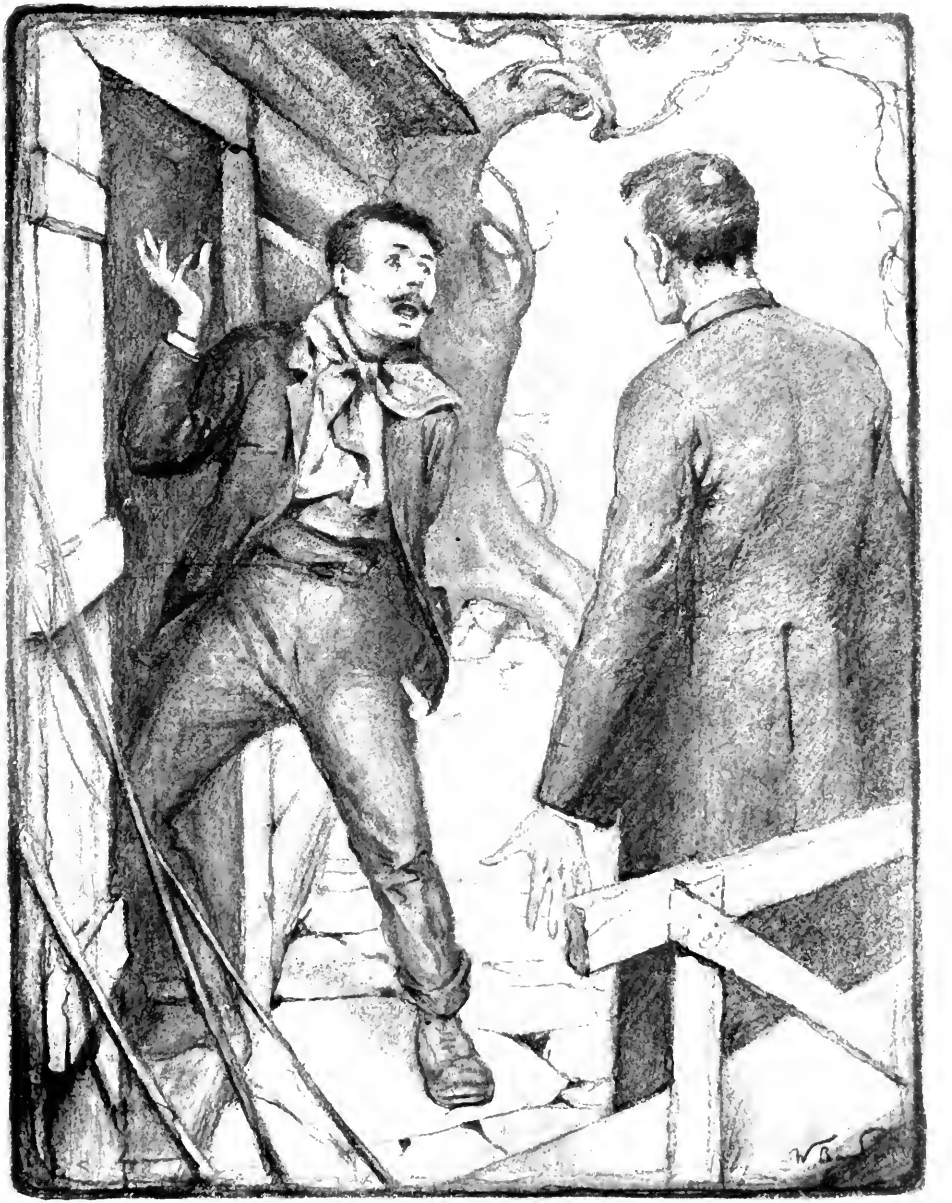
The old man stood up and made a reluctant reverence. The priest lingered, and looked around for a seat. Costanzo pushed a rude bench toward him, and then sat down on his door-step with a very inhospitable air.

Père Bonneval took the bench, and, drawing it near to the old man, he removed his hat and wiped his forehead slowly; then he leaned forward and said in a casual tone: "My friend, you look tired. How old are you?"

Costanzo raised his eyes and looked at the priest suspiciously. "Why do you want to know my age?" he asked gruffly. "I don't know; I don't remember. I only know that I am too old to work as I do."

"Yes; you work very hard, my poor friend," returned Père Bonneval, blandly; "but now that you are so successful with Beppo, you will be able to take your ease. Is it not so?"

"No, no; it is not so!" he returned angrily. "I am not successful. That little miserable disgraces me. He fails when he should do his best. And I am poor — very poor," he added in a whining tone.



"'You 've come here to rob me.'"

"But Beppo is growing up. Soon he will be old enough to take care of you."

"He will never take care of me! He is bad; he is ungrateful!" cried the old man, excitedly. "I work and starve to feed and clothe him, and now he steals what he earns, and runs away to spend it in folly."

"Would you be willing to have Beppo leave you altogether? I think I could place him where he would be educated and cared for, and — "

But Père Bonneval did not finish his sentence, for Costanzo sprang at him like an enraged tiger. "I see what you want: you 've come here to rob me — to steal all I have!"

"Gently, gently, my friend," interposed the priest.

He paid no attention to the mild injunction, but went on savagely: "I 've worked like a galley-slave for that boy. I 've taught him all he knows; and now, when he is old enough to earn money, you want to take him away. Never! never! I 'll — I 'll — " and he shook his clenched fist threateningly.

"Sit down, my friend," said the priest, firmly but gently. "Calm yourself, and listen to me; and as you hope for eternal salvation, speak the truth, and nothing but the truth. Was Beppo's father your son?"

For a moment the brutal old face quivered with emotion; then he cried in piercing tones: "Yes; my son, my only one! my son, my son!"

Père Bonneval fixed him with his calm eyes. "Remember, Costanzo, the truth, the truth, as you hope for salvation."

"I tell the truth. I care not for the church. I fear not. Why are you here to question me, to threaten me, to rob me of my son's child? Go, go!" And, quite overcome with rage, he threw himself face downward on the ground, fairly writhing in his fury.

The priest looked at him a moment with an expression of mingled pity and contempt. Then he turned away toward home, thinking to himself: "It 's no use to question him. If what he said is false, he will never tell the truth while the boy brings him money. I must answer the colonel's letter, and I can tell him nothing, nothing."

XII

A DISAPPOINTMENT

WHEN Père Bonneval returned, he found Beppo and Tessa with his sister. The boy was telling in glowing terms of his adventures in the city, while Tessa sat beside him, listening in wide-eyed delight. "Oh, mam'selle, it was all so beautiful — the gardens, the lights, the music, and the people! I love it all. When they shout I feel like flying through the air; and when they cry, 'Bravo, bravo, Thistledown!' I think I am floating among the stars. It is lovely, lovely!" And he clasped his hands in an ecstasy of joy.

Père Bonneval and mam'selle looked at him in silent wonder, and Tessa's little face suddenly clouded as she said in a voice full of tears: "He loves them all so much that he will go away and leave us."

"Never, never, my Tessa!" he replied passionately. "I love you all. I love the island. It is my home. I will go away sometimes to get money, but I will come back, and we 'll be happy together."

"My Beppo, would you like to go away from Costanzo and live with those who would never starve or hurt you?" asked mam'selle, drawing him very close to her.

He thought a moment, his eyes anxious and wistful. Then he said resolutely: "No; I would n't leave Costanzo. He 's old and lame, and sometimes he 's good to me. When I have fever he sits up and gives me water, and when I fall and hurt myself he does n't always beat me. And once, when I was fishing, I fell overboard,

and he jumped in the water and got me back in the boat. And he has only one arm."

"Is n't he angelic?" murmured mam'selle to her brother.

Then he continued a little anxiously: "I 'm 'most afraid to go home. I have n't been there since the *Merry Child* landed, and perhaps he 'll beat me to-night."

"No, he sha'n't," said Tessa, indignantly. "La mâdre and I will go with you. Costanzo always listens to la mâdre."

"Well, then, I must go; but I 'll be here to-morrow to say my lessons, if Costanzo will let me come. Good-by, mon père. Good-by, mam'selle." And taking Tessa's hand, they ran away, looking back, laughing and nodding, until they were out of sight.

When they were alone, mam'selle looked at her brother inquiringly. "Well, mon frère, did you find out anything?"

"Nothing, nothing, and I am greatly disappointed," returned Père Bonneval, dejectedly. "At the first question he suspected me, and he flew into a fearful rage; he was disrespectful to me and irreverent to the church. It is no use; whatever he may know he will keep to himself. I felt that he was deceiving me, but I was helpless before his insane rage. Now I must answer the colonel's letter, and I am sorry that I have nothing to tell him, for I think he will be as much disappointed as I have been"; and Père Bonneval went away thoughtfully to write his letter.

After the priest left him, Costanzo lay for a time on the ground, writhing and foaming like a wild animal. He hated the good father; he had always hated him, and he had used all his authority to keep the boy away from the priest and the influence of the church. He was jealous of every one who was at all interested in the child, and, to him, their kindness was only a plot to wrong and defraud him. His greatest passion was to hoard and hide his ill-gotten gains, and the clever boy was his source of wealth. Every day he was be-

coming more skilful and attracting more attention, and soon he expected to reap a rich harvest from his remarkable performances. Now he felt that the boy was growing away from him; he had become so fearless, so agile, so elusive, that at times it was very difficult to put his cruel hand on him. When the demon of mischief sparkled in Beppo's eyes the old man feared him; he never knew just what he would do in his teasing moods. At times, when he was about to grasp him, the little sprite would bound up in the air or spring aside, to laugh at the old man clutching at nothing in his helpless fury.

These tricks merely enraged him for the moment; but the thought of others gaining an influence over the boy, and perhaps luring him away, was more than Costanzo could endure, and if all his malignant wishes, his horrible maledictions, had been visited on the good priest, he would have been beyond human aid.

"They never shall have him," he muttered, stumbling to his feet. "I 'll get him away from la mádre and that meddlesome priest." Then he went into the cottage, looking around cautiously to see if any one was near. After closing and bolting the door, he crept in behind the chimney, and removing some rubbish that concealed a hole, he drew out a strong box, brass-bound and fastened with a heavy lock. Years before he had found it among the débris of wreckage on the shore, and none besides himself ever knew what it contained. Opening it with a key that hung on a cord around his neck, cautiously, with many nervous glances, he drew a small bag of coin and a roll of notes from the pocket of his old jacket, and, with a look of satisfaction, deposited them with his other treasures. They were Thistledown's hard-won earnings. Then, carefully concealing the hole with the rubbish, he opened the door and went back to his place on the step, and sat moodily looking out on the opalescent waters of the Gulf.

It was evening, and an intense calm brooded over nature. The level rays of the declining sun streamed in violet, pink, and yellow folds across the deep blue of the sea. Little ripples broke on the shore, running up and receding like happy children at play. The birds softly sang their night songs before they dropped into their nests. The leaves whispered together, and the flowers shook out their fragrance on the soft air.

All this peace and beauty of nature was lost on the wretched old man, who sat brooding and muttering evil things to himself. Presently the sound of laughter and the merry voices of children broke the silence. Looking up, he saw la mádre coming toward him, holding Beppo with one hand and Tessa with the other. Straight, calm. and gently defiant, she approached, fearless of his angry eyes and voice.

"Here is your Beppo, Costanzo mio. I brought him home because he was afraid you would be angry with him for staying away so long; but you will not scold him, you will not punish him," she said persuasively, with her loveliest smile. "My good Costanzo, remember it is always a holiday when Jean Grima comes, and our Beppo has been from home so long!"

The old man did not speak. Silently he glared at the boy, and if baleful looks could have annihilated him, then and there Thistledown would have disappeared from off the face of the earth.

The boy was very happy at that moment; therefore his heart was full of love, and there was something in Costanzo's haggard old face that touched him. In an instant he was at his side, his slender arm about his neck and his gentle face pressed to the rough gray head. This mute caress seemed to infuriate the old man; for, without a word and with a cruel blow, he pushed the child against the frame of the door and held him there in his vise-like grasp.

It was all so sudden, so unexpected, that the little acrobat had no

chance to escape by one of his cunning tricks. La mádre turned pale and Tessa began to cry aloud. Beppo winced as the cruel fingers pressed into his flesh, but made no complaint. For a few moments the terrible old tyrant held the child at arm's-length and glared at him; then he shook him so violently that the red cap fell off and all his thick curls flew about his face.

La mádre could bear no more. With flashing eyes she sprang at the brutal old man and tore his fingers from the boy's quivering flesh; then she took him to the shelter of her arms, while Tessa clung to him, sobbing: "My Beppo! my Beppo!"

In the meantime the wretched old creature, cowering with shame and fear, sought to excuse himself in a flood of angry tears. He knew that he had gone too far in the presence of la mádre, who might tell Giovan, and he feared the wrath of the hot-blooded young fisherman. Already stories of his cruelty to the boy had gone abroad and he had been threatened with punishment. Like all creatures of his character, he was a coward, and his fawning humility filled la mádre with scorn and loathing.

"Listen to me, my friend," she cried, towering over him. "If ever you lay your brutal hand on this child again, my Giovan shall wipe the earth with you until there is not enough left of you for the wind to blow away."

At this awful threat Costanzo raised his haggard face and trembling hand, and said in a broken voice: "I swear by our Blessed Lady never to strike my Beppo again. Ah, madonna mia, forgive me, pardon me for going into a rage. I am so old, so lame; and the boy tries me so! Sometimes he is an imp of Satan. He makes me wait for him; he runs away and squanders my money. He disgraces me when I boast of him, and when I get a fine engagement for him he fails on purpose to make me lose my money. But, Beppo mio," and he turned appealingly to the boy, "tell la mádre

that I did n't hurt you — that I 'm good to you, that I feed you well and buy fine clothes for you. Is it not so, my Beppo?"

The little acrobat smiled scornfully. "I have n't complained, Costanzo. I sha'n't tell on you, and la mádre won't."

"My Beppo, my good Beppo!" he cried triumphantly. "La mádre hears you, and she will say nothing to Giovan."

"That 's all right," said Beppo, and turning to Tessa he kissed her tear-wet cheeks. "Little sister, don't cry. I 'm like a rubber ball: Costanzo's pinches don't hurt long."

"But they make black marks," sobbed Tessa.

"Never mind; they 're only on the outside—I 'm all right inside; and he 's so old and lame."

La mádre stood patiently surveying the group. The old man's frenzied appeals had softened her, and she said in a gentler tone: "Very well, my friend; I will go to my home. I will leave Beppo with you, but I shall watch you. Remember what I said — I shall know if you are cruel to the child."

"Never, never; I will never get angry again. I will never rave and curse. I will be kind and patient; you can trust me. To-morrow you will see. He will have his good supper, he will go to his bed and sleep all the night, and to-morrow you will see that you can trust Costanzo."

Again la mádre took Beppo in her arms and kissed him fondly. "I will watch over you," she said softly. "If he is angry, run to me. Now be good, *caro mio.* Try to please him, try to satisfy him, and don't tease and provoke him."

"I will come early in the morning to see if Costanzo is cross," whispered Tessa, as she said good night.

Beppo watched them until they were out of sight; then he went into the dreary room without a word to Costanzo. The old man had turned his back on him and was busy folding an old sail.

"I will go out to fish at dawn," he muttered, "and that little devil will go with me. La mádre and Tessa won't see him to-morrow, and he won't say his lessons with that meddlesome priest and his sister."

On the corner of the rough table lay some coarse bread, a piece of dry cheese, and a bunch of bananas. The little acrobat was not hungry: la mádre had given him such a good dinner, and Tessa had pulled him a bunch of mandarins from her own tree; he had feasted royally, and the coarse food had no attraction for him. However, he broke off a piece of bread and ate it; then he took a copious draught of water from a gourd that hung on the small cistern, and, without a good night to the old man, he laid aside his holiday attire, threw himself on the rough cot, and was soon in the land of dreams.

The next morning, when the sun came up like a huge red rose out of the bosom of the Gulf, little Tessa ran, bareheaded and barefooted, through the dewy grass to Costanzo's cottage. When she reached the threshold she stood in wide-eyed amazement. The door was closed and tightly barred. The wooden shutter of the one window was drawn in and fastened securely. There were no sounds nor signs of life. Costanzo was gone; Beppo was gone; and everything denoted preparation for a long absence.

With a throbbing heart and wet eyes, little Tessa flew to the beach. The boat was not there, and there was a groove in the wet sand where it had been dragged out with the ebbing tide. At a short distance a young fisherman who had just come in from his nets was pulling his boat ashore, and Tessa ran to him, eager and excited.

"Bruno, where has the old man gone, and Beppo, too? Where have they gone?" and she burst into a flood of tears.

"Don't cry, my little Tessa," said the rough, good-natured fellow;

"they have gone to the island. Just at dawn I saw the old man and the boy pulling in the direction of Grand Isle. You be here at set of sun and you will see them come back."

Tessa came at sunset, but they did not return; and for many a sunset after the little maid sat on the sand watching for the boat and Beppo.

XIII

LE CHAT GRIS

UNCLE ANATOLE and Madam Aubert were alone in the little work-room, talking together in low, serious tones, while Mignon was in the shop assisting Helios in sorting and arranging some new music just brought from the printers.

Uncle Anatole had a letter in his hand which he had been reading aloud. It was from Père Bonneval, in answer to the one he had written to the curé, and, as we know, contained no positive information concerning the parentage of the little acrobat. But there was a postscript which interested them greatly. Père Bonneval had added it just before the *Merry Child* left the island on her return trip to New Orleans. In it he briefly told them of Costanzo's unexpected departure with Beppo, and that their destination was unknown; but he intimated that possibly he had returned to New Orleans, where he could better conceal the boy from those who were interested in him. And the curé added that if the colonel could discover the favorite haunts of Costanzo he might learn something of his whereabouts.

After Uncle Anatole finished reading the postscript to Madam Aubert, they both remained in deep thought for some moments, then he said in a discouraged voice: "I fear it is useless to try to discover any clue, and yet I am more than ever convinced that the

old man is guilty. If he were sure of his position he would not disappear in that sudden and secret manner."

"I agree with you, my friend," returned Madam Aubert; "but we must not give up the quest without another effort."

"There is Le Chat Gris — I had almost forgotten," said the colonel, with sudden animation. "The boy told me that Costanzo lived at Le Chat Gris while in the city. I know where it is. It is on Tréme Street, a rough, common place, a resort of sailors and fishermen. He may be there now, Josephe. I will go at once; I cannot rest until I do all that is possible to discover whether my suspicions are correct. The child spoke of the woman who keeps the house, one Mère Picheloup; he said she had been kind to him."

"She may have a reason: she may know something. Go, my friend; go at once," cried Madam Aubert, in an urgent tone. "Like you, I feel that there is no time to be lost."

Mère Picheloup sat at her desk in one corner of a large, poorly lighted room. The walls, that once had been frescoed in gay tints, were now faded and discolored by time and smoke. The windows were small, the panes of glass cracked and patched; but they were clean, and the white muslin curtains drawn across the lower half were spotless. The floor looked well scrubbed, and was freshly sanded. The tables, of plain wood, were as clean and white as soap and water could make them. Mère Picheloup was a large, vigorous old woman. Her black hair, streaked with gray, was neatly parted and twisted in a knot at the back of her head. She wore a black skirt and a fresh white sack, and a string of large gold beads hung around her neck. On the desk at her side sat an immense gray cat, and near it a pot of scarlet geraniums, their vivid color lighting up the dingy corner. Around the walls were shelves, some filled with bottles and flasks of French and Italian wines, and others with coarse earthenware and pewter platters and covers.

At the farther end of the long room was a large open door, and through it one could see all the cooking apparatus of the establishment, as well as a tidy colored cook, who passed to and fro, her hands full of ladles and spoons. From the sizzling pots and pans came the pungent odor of garlic and grease, so appetizing to the habitués of Le Chat Gris.

Mère Picheloup felt that something uncommon was about to happen when she glanced up and saw a tall, distinguished-looking stranger entering. Such elegant visitors were not often seen at Le Chat Gris. And when he advanced and removed his hat with the same courtesy he would have shown to the first lady in the land, she was fairly astonished. However, she had sufficient presence of mind to hasten from behind her desk and draw up the most comfortable chair, with a polite request that monsieur would please to be seated.

The colonel dropped into the chair with a pleasant "Thank you, madam," which won Mère Picheloup's heart at once. He was not lacking in *finesse;* and before beginning to talk on the subject nearest his heart, he complimented the old woman on her neat and cheerful surroundings, and even went so far as to sniff at the geranium, although he well knew it was scentless; and when the gray cat jumped familiarly on to his knee, he did not repulse it, but patted it gently.

Mère Picheloup stood respectfully with folded hands, waiting for her visitor to speak first; but, seeing that he was in no hurry, she said in an insinuating voice: "How can I serve monsieur?"

The colonel put the cat down, brushed a few gray hairs from his knee, and said admiringly: "A fine animal, a beautiful creature; and so suitable for Le Chat Gris!"

Mère Picheloup smiled proudly. Her cat was her idol, and again the kindly old gentleman had touched her heart.

When the colonel thought he had well paved the way to her good graces, he said in a casual tone: "I came to inquire if one Costanzo of Isle de Chène is your guest at present."

In an instant the old woman was on the alert. In the visit of the stranger she saw a possible engagement for Thistledown. "Oh, monsieur, I regret to say that he has been gone since more than a week."

"And the little acrobat? Did he go with him?"

"He did, monsieur. Costanzo never leaves the boy behind. But has monsieur seen that wonderful child?"

"Yes; I have seen him. His performances are remarkable, and he is so unlike the old man," ventured the colonel, while he eyed Mère Picheloup closely.

Suddenly the old woman's expression changed to one of vivid curiosity. "Has monsieur noticed that?"

"One could not fail to notice it"; and the colonel hesitated slightly. Then he added, his keen eyes still on the old woman's face: "I have heard it said that there were doubts about the boy's kinship to the old man."

"And I have heard the same," returned Mère Picheloup, eagerly.

"How long have you known Costanzo?"

"Oh, for many a year, monsieur. He used to come here when Thistledown's father was a mere boy."

"Ah, then you have seen the father!" and the colonel's heart gave a sudden bound. "Is the little acrobat like him?"

"As like as two peas, monsieur; only the father was quiet and slow. Old Costanzo tried to make an acrobat of him, but he had no talent for it. He could n't succeed, and I think the old man treated him very cruelly at times; for he seemed crushed and cowed and afraid of his father."

"Do *you* think he was Costanzo's son?" asked the colonel, earnestly.

"No, monsieur; never! If the boy had been of his own flesh and blood he could n't have been so cruel to him."

"Did the child never speak of his mother?"

"Not that I remember, monsieur; and Costanzo was always a silent man."

"How old was the little acrobat's father when you first saw him?"

"About twelve, I should say," replied Mère Picheloup, after thinking a moment. "I remember him well. I was a young woman then; my husband had just established himself here. One evening Costanzo came with some fishermen, and I noticed him because of the boy. He tried to make him do some sleight-of-hand tricks, but the child failed; he could n't — his heart was not in it: and his father treated him so roughly that my good man interfered. I remember it all perfectly. After that he came from time to time until the boy was perhaps sixteen; then he disappeared for some years. I used often to think of the lad, and wonder if he had lived to grow to manhood — he was so frail and delicate-looking. Well, monsieur, when I had about given up expecting Costanzo, one evening he appeared with some fishermen from the islands. I did n't remember how long he had been away, and I was surprised to see that he was an old man; and instead of his son his grandson was with him — a child of five years or so. He told me that his son had grown up and married, and that both he and his wife had been lost in a storm on the Gulf, and had left the little fellow, then a baby, for him to take care of; and he complained and grumbled, as he always does, about the expense and trouble the child had been. But, monsieur, that little Beppo was even then a wonder. He was as quick and cunning as a monkey, and did such

smart tricks with his hoops and balls, and jumped so high that he seemed to be flying. An English showman used to come in here to watch him, and he named him Thistledown. Now he gets him engagements at the gardens, and the child is a gold-mine to old Costanzo."

Mère Picheloup paused, breathless from her long narrative, but still full of interest in her *protégé*.

"How often does the old man come?" asked the colonel, in rather a discouraged voice.

"Oh, every little while; and he stays until Thistledown is tired and worn out. While he is performing he is very severe with him, and half starves him to keep him thin and light; but, monsieur, I take the liberty of feeding him and caring for him unbeknown to Costanzo, for I love the child, and I pity him from the bottom of my heart; and the only comfort I have in thinking of him is that the old man won't go too far. The boy, like his father, is so frail and delicate that at times he has to spare him all fatigue and excitement; then he takes him back to Isle de Chène to rest, for, as we say, he does n't want to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

"Yes, I understand," replied the colonel, gravely. "I don't like to think that the helpless child is in that old monster's power."

"Perhaps monsieur would like to engage Thistledown for some performances?" said Mère Picheloup, in an insinuating tone. "If so, I can arrange to let you know when Costanzo returns."

"Thank you, madam; thank you," returned the colonel, rising. "I have been much interested in what you have told me, and I shall see you soon again." Then, with a grave bow, he opened the door and walked away slowly and thoughtfully.

"*Par exemple!*" exclaimed Mère Picheloup, looking after him curiously. "That monsieur is very cool and very polite. He made

me talk all the time, and I got nothing out of him. I wonder what he was after, and I wonder if he will come back."

Week after week and month after month passed away, and Mère Picheloup looked in vain for Costanzo and Thistledown. The fishermen who came from the island reported that the old man's cottage was still closed and his boat still lay drawn up on the sand at Grand Isle. Little Tessa and la mádre were disconsolate. Père Bonneval had made every effort to discover Costanzo's whereabouts, but vainly. The cruel old tyrant, with Thistledown, seemed to have vanished from off the face of the earth. Madam Aubert and Uncle Anatole had frequent serious discussions as to ways and means of learning something about the child. And Mignon was always looking for his return. Any day she expected that he might come, as Silvain had predicted, bounding through the door or window, his eyes bright and merry, and his little face beaming with joy and excitement.

Without mentioning it to any one, Uncle Anatole had made several visits to Le Chat Gris, but always to receive the same answer: "Alas, monsieur, I have heard nothing."

XIV

ACCIDENTAL MEETINGS

THE winter passed away without any news of Thistledown, and spring had come again.

"Now," said Mignon, "the gardens will be open and Beppo will be here."

"That may be," returned Madam Aubert, encouragingly, "and Silvain will let us know as soon as he comes."

Silvain came often to see them, and he and Uncle Anatole were on more intimate terms. The boy, in a quiet, respectful way, was trying to win the confidence of the old gentleman, as well as to discover the family secret. He was very observing, and he had noticed a great many things in the little menage on St. Philip's Street that puzzled him sorely. His mother had told him that Uncle Anatole was very well off. If so, why did he attend so closely to his office, and why did he practise so many pitiful little economies? And Aunt Josephe, why had she opened the music-shop again? Why did she work so industriously and dress so plainly, while she denied herself and Mignon every luxury? And he had heard his mother blame the dear old lady for working, when, as she said, Madam Aubert had a competency, and that Mignon had inherited a little fortune from her father. How could he explain these contradictions? At times he felt very unhappy and dissatisfied. However, he felt that he must bide his time quietly and patiently, while he used all his influence with his mother to

establish pleasanter relations between the two families; and his efforts had not been in vain. Madam Chapelle had sent Aimée several times, with her nurse, to visit Madam Aubert and Mignon, and Denise had spoken in a very friendly way to them one Sunday as they were leaving the cathedral together. Aimée adored Mignon. The afflicted child had learned the sign language, and through that medium conversed with the members of her family. In order to talk with her little cousin, Mignon had also learned it, and there was the deepest affection and sympathy between the two children.

One lovely evening in early spring Uncle Anatole and Mignon were sitting on one of the benches in Jackson Square, watching the happy children at play, when unexpectedly, from one of the winding paths, Madam Chapelle and Denise appeared, followed by Silvain and Aimée. For a moment the older members of the party seemed slightly embarrassed. The colonel had not seen Madam Chapelle for some time; he stood up, removed his hat, and waited for her to advance. But the instant that Aimée saw Mignon, she ran to her and threw her arms around her. In this way the ice was broken, and there was some cordiality in Madam Chapelle's greeting; and even the haughty Denise gave her hand to Uncle Anatole with a friendly smile. Then she sat beside Mignon and Aimée and chatted quite intimately, while Madam Chapelle, Uncle Anatole, and Silvain walked slowly back and forth, talking pleasantly.

Silvain was very happy. What he had longed for had come about accidentally and without any effort on his part; and when they separated, after a half-hour's friendly conversation, he felt that a better feeling existed between his mother and Uncle Anatole.

Mignon could scarcely restrain her impatience until they were out of hearing; then she exclaimed eagerly: "Come, dearest, let us run to Tantine; I want to tell her all about it."

"Gently, gently, my child. Remember that I am obliged to

make haste slowly. You see that I can no longer run, and you must be content to walk with me."

"But I am in such a hurry to tell Tantine. Oh, was n't Aunt Gabrielle lovely? And Denise called me *cousin* for the first time. What beautiful clothes they wear! And Aimée is a little angel. Oh, dearest, I am so happy!"

The colonel looked at the child indulgently. "Don't talk so fast, sweet Mignonette; I can't follow you. Now tell me, which did you care most for, their kindly greeting or their fine clothes?"

"Oh, for both alike, uncle! I love pretty frocks and hats, but I love my cousins more than either. Oh, how nice to be rich and have beautiful things! Why is it, dearest, that we are not rich like Aunt Gabrielle?"

"Oh, my child, that is a question I can't answer," returned the colonel, bitterly. "Some are born to be poor, and some rich, my Mignon, and we must all be contented with our lot."

"Oh, I am contented, dearest! I would n't change you and Tantine for all Aunt Gabrielle's money; but I would like to see Aimée often, and I would like just once to have a frock and hat like Denise's."

"Well, well, my Mignon, just wait awhile and you shall have all you wish," said the colonel, cheerfully, though his voice was tremulous and his lips quivered with some hidden emotion.

When they reached home he went directly to his office, and left Mignon to tell her grandmother of all that had happened during their absence. He felt a need of being alone. The child's innocent remarks had touched a sore spot in his heart, and, perhaps for the first time, he reproached himself for what he had done.

Afterward, when he talked it over with Madam Aubert, she said gently and firmly: "My friend, never reproach yourself. You did what was best; you saved a family from ruin and disgrace. Thank

God that you were able to do it, and never regret it. Our Mignon must be happy without fine clothes. I am glad that Gabrielle is showing a friendlier spirit toward us, and I want our child to know and love her cousins; but she must not be envious or covetous of their wealth and luxury."

"Ah, Josephe, you are my good angel!" And the colonel left her with a lighter heart.

One evening, not long after the accidental meeting, Madam Aubert was alone in her shop, busily engaged with her books. Mignon was in the work-room occupied with her lessons. The gas had just been lighted in the shop-window, and shone brightly over the books and sheets of music, while outside it was dark and quiet. It was raining slowly and steadily, the drops pattering on the pavement with a gently persistent sound. There seemed to be few passers. Now and then a dripping umbrella would slip by, catching the rays of light from the window, but no one paused to glance in or to enter at the door.

Presently a slight noise attracted Madam Aubert's attention, and, looking up, she saw a small white face with dark-ringed eyes, and the edge of a red cap, pressed against the glass. It was Thistledown, but thinner and paler and more worn than before.

With a cry of joy Madam Aubert hastened to the door, but when she looked out into the darkness there was not a living being in sight.

Mignon had heard her grandmother's exclamation, and in an instant was at her side, peering into the night. "What was it? Who was it?" cried the child, excitedly.

"It was Thistledown," returned Madam Aubert, still looking anxiously up and down the street.

"Oh, Tantine, are you sure?"

"Yes, my dear, I am sure; but where could he have gone so quickly? He must have run around the next corner."

"Let me cail Helios to go and look for him"; and Mignon darted out into the court, calling at the top of her voice: "Helios, oh, Helios!"

Before Helios arrived, walking slowly and solemnly, the colonel, who had heard Mignon call, was on the spot. As soon as Madam Aubert briefly explained what had happened, regardless of the rain and his bare gray head, he rushed to the nearest corner, while Helios deliberately shambled in the other direction. But there was no slender flying figure to be seen, no thin white face peering from some dark corner: he had vanished as suddenly as he had appeared.

Uncle Anatole came back, shaking the raindrops from his hair. "Josephe, are you sure you saw the boy? How could he get out of sight in an instant?"

"Yes, I saw him, my friend; I could not be mistaken. He looked at me steadily for a moment, then he turned and ran as though some one were after him."

"Could it have been the old man who was following him?" asked the colonel, who drew a chair near the door and sat down. "I shall wait here; I think he will come back."

Mignon leaned against Uncle Anatole and watched the window closely. It was very dark without, but within the radius of the light one could see distinctly. Presently there was a sound of shuffling, irregular steps advancing slowly, and a haggard, evil old face appeared before the window.

"It is Costanzo!" cried Madam Aubert. Yes, it was he: the slouched hat, the red kerchief about his neck, and the great glittering ear-rings.

In an instant the colonel threw the door open and laid a detaining hand on his shoulder. "My friend, stop a moment. I want to speak to you; step in here out of the rain."

Costanzo tried to disengage himself with a rude gesture. "Don't put your hand on me, monsieur. What do you want to stop me for? Can't a man walk along the street without being held up?"

The colonel was old, but he still had a strong grasp, and gently, but firmly, he pulled the halting old creature into the shop, where he stood like a culprit, sullen and silent. Then he closed the door deliberately, and turned toward Costanzo; but suddenly, with a mingled expression of astonishment and dismay, he pointed a trembling finger to the ear-rings, and said in a broken voice: "I have seen those before. Where did you get them?"

"I bought them," returned the old man, gruffly and laconically.

"From whom did you buy them?"

"From a fisherman."

"When — tell me, when?"

"Oh, long ago," replied Costanzo, with an indifferent shrug. "I was a young man then, and liked finery." As he spoke something like a grin distorted his face.

"Where did you buy them?"

"Down there, on the coast"; and he waved his hand toward the Gulf.

"My friend, listen to me," said Uncle Anatole, in a stern, solemn voice, "and tell me the truth. Do you know when, where, and how the fisherman got possession of these ornaments?"

"I know nothing, monsieur," returned the old man, stolidly. "He had them for sale; I had the money, and I bought them. I know nothing of their history. I've worn them for nearly forty years, and no one has ever disputed my right to them"; and he frowned angrily. "I've nothing more to say to you. Let me go about my business," he cried, looking anxiously toward the door.

"A moment, my friend, a moment. I still have some questions to ask you. Where is the man from whom you bought them?"

"He 's in the little cemetery at Isle de Chène; he 's been there for more than twenty years"; and again he grinned maliciously.

"What is it, my friend? Why are you so agitated?" Madam Aubert could no longer conceal her anxiety. "Where have you seen these ornaments before?"

"A moment, Josephe, and I will explain." Then, turning again to Costanzo, he said almost entreatingly: "And so you can tell me nothing more?" At the same time he leaned forward to examine the coiled serpents closely and carefully. "Yes, the same, the very same; I can't be mistaken," he added in a low, choked voice.

While Uncle Anatole was scrutinizing the ear-rings, Mignon had sidled up to the old man, and was asking in a half-frightened voice about Thistledown.

"He was here a few minutes ago," said Costanzo, fiercely. "I saw him looking in the window; I was after him, but he gave me the slip before I could put my hand on him."

"Where could he have gone?" asked Mignon, anxiously.

"Oh, he is a sly, cunning imp; he is full of tricks. He can run away and hide from me whenever he likes; he can go where I can't follow him, because I 'm so old and lame"; and unconsciously he dropped into his whining tone. "But if monsieur will please let me go. I am wet and tired, and I must find my boy."

"My good Costanzo, you may go; but let me ask you first if you will sell me those ear-rings."

"Sell them, monsieur?" For a moment the old man stared at the colonel in silence, and a look of contrition passed over his haggard face. Slowly and thoughtfully he detached the showy baubles from his ears. "Take them," he said in a tremulous voice. "I will give them to you"; and he laid them in Uncle Anatole's hand. Without another word, and before any one could detain him, he went out and closed the door behind him.

XV

THE STORY OF THE EAR-RINGS

FOR some moments after Costanzo's departure the little group of three stood silently looking at each other. Madam Aubert was the first to speak. "What a strange man! Why did he *give* you the ear-rings, my friend?"

Uncle Anatole was still looking at the coiled serpents with a sadly puzzled expression. "I don't know, unless remorse impelled him."

"Now, dearest," cried Mignon, standing on tiptoe to examine the rings, "tell us why you wanted them. I 'm just crazy to know."

"And I am as curious as Mignon," said Madam Aubert, with a quiet smile.

"My dear Josephe, you little think how valuable these baubles are to me, nor how important their discovery," returned Uncle Anatole, sadly. "More than forty years ago I bought these ear-rings to give to dear old Aunt Virgie; she was our mammy, the only mother we ever knew. I hung them in her ears with my own fingers, and she was the proudest, happiest creature that lived. She always wore them and considered them her greatest treasures. When my brother married she nursed his children. She was the nurse who, with the baby boy, disappeared in that awful calamity at Last Island. Now, my friend, what do you think of my impression?" and he looked significantly at Madam Aubert.

"Mignon, it is your bedtime," said the old lady, quietly. "Go to Luna, and I will come to you later."

"Oh, Tantine, I want to hear more about the ear-rings. Can't I stay a little longer?" urged the child. "Perhaps Beppo will come back."

"My dear, you must obey me," said Madam Aubert, firmly. "There is nothing more at present for you to hear about the ear-rings, and to-morrow we will try to find Thistledown."

Mignon obeyed reluctantly, kissed Uncle Anatole and her grandmother, and went away with many backward, wistful glances.

As soon as she was out of hearing the colonel resumed the conversation. "Are not these," and he looked at the ear-rings sadly, "a positive proof that Virgie was found after the storm? Whether alive we know not, nor ever may know. But let us suppose a case: let us say that she was washed ashore with the babe in her arms; she was dead, or died soon after; the boy lived; he was Beppo's father. Was it Costanzo who found the nurse and child?"

Madam Aubert thought deeply for a moment, then she said with conviction, "Beyond a doubt it was Costanzo."

"Beyond a doubt," repeated the colonel. "To me these rings are convincing; and yet it will be impossible to prove that he did not buy them, as he says. Living, he will never give up the boy who is his source of gain; dead, in all probability the secret will die with him. I am sorely perplexed. What can I do? Can I do anything?" and he looked appealingly at Madam Aubert.

The mental processes of the dear old lady were rather slow, so after some deliberation she said quietly: "My friend, you can do nothing to-night. To-morrow try to find Costanzo. It seems to me that his better nature has begun to assert itself. His parting with the ear-rings is an indication. Promise him that you will not punish him, and that you will make up to him what-

ever he may lose by renouncing the child, and possibly he may confess all."

"Ah, Josephe, your advice is good. I will think it over. I would give what little I have saved to get possession of the boy, but all I have belongs to Mignon. I can't rob her again. If I had the money I once had I would buy the old rogue off, but as it is I fear it is impossible"; and the colonel sighed heavily.

Early the next morning Uncle Anatole made another visit to Le Chat Gris, his mind full of Madam Aubert's suggestion. The more he thought of it, the more feasible it seemed. If money was what was needed, he would sacrifice a great deal to get the child away from the evil old man.

Mère Picheloup was in her usual seat at the desk, and the moment her eyes fell on her visitor she exclaimed regretfully: "Oh, monsieur, if you had only come yesterday! Costanzo and Thistledown were here."

"And are they not here now?" he asked.

"No, monsieur; they are gone. *Imaginez vous*, they arrived yesterday morning, and the boy had an engagement to-night; but for some reason the old man left last night in a great hurry."

The colonel sat down and wiped his forehead nervously, and his voice was very tremulous when he asked Mère Picheloup if she knew where they had gone.

"I know nothing, monsieur. That old man tells no one his business. Sometimes I find out a little from the boy; but, poor child, he seldom knows what that old villain intends doing."

"Can you tell me where they have been these last six months?" asked the colonel, with the air of one who has been thwarted and baffled.

"Thistledown said they had been all over the country giving exhibitions, and that Costanzo had made a great deal of money.

Think of it, monsieur, and that child so tired and thin! He 's only a shadow, and he can't live long at such a pace. Oh, monsieur, can't something be done to save the dear boy from that old monster?" And Mère Picheloup looked at the colonel appealingly.

"I hoped to see Costanzo to-day. I came for the purpose of trying to get him to give up the boy. I meant to make it worth his while. I am convinced that it is greed, and not natural affection, that makes him so determined to keep the child."

"Natural affection! Monsieur, I sometimes think that the old man hates Thistledown; he is so cruel to him, and delights to torment him. My Prince here," and she laid her hand lovingly on the gray cat, "has more soul than that old tyrant. It 's pitiful to see the poor little lad try to get away from him. Costanzo watches him so closely that he has to use all sorts of tricks to deceive him."

"How dreadful!" groaned the colonel. "What fearful experiences for one of his age!"

"Last evening," continued the old woman, "he escaped: he slipped out while Costanzo was eating, and I saw him running away as swift as the wind. In a few minutes he was missed, and the old man left the table and went after him as fast as he could hobble. He did not get back for some time. Then he came dragging Thistledown by one arm. And, monsieur, the boy was as limp as a rag. He could n't stand. I had to give him cognac to revive him"; and Mère Picheloup stopped to wipe her eyes.

The colonel was as pale as death, and his eyes had a dangerous light in them. "I wish I had been here," he said briefly.

"Oh, monsieur, one can do nothing with Costanzo. Last night I begged him to let me put the poor little lad to bed and nurse him. He was wet to the skin, and shivering with a chill."

"And he would not listen to you?" groaned the colonel.

"Oh, no, monsieur. He was very strange. He would say no-

thing. He picked up his things, paid his bill, and dragged the child out in the dark and rain."

"Did the boy resist? Did he complain?"

"Never, monsieur. Thistledown never whines. But remember what I say: there 'll come a time when, if he is n't an angel, he 'll pay that old tyrant back, with interest."

"Oh, madam, I can hear no more. The thought of the child's cruel fate unnerves me. I am greatly interested in him, and yet I am powerless to help him. However, I shall not abandon him. If the old man returns, or if you hear anything from the fishermen, will you kindly let me know?"

"Certainly, monsieur, certainly." And as the colonel went away dejectedly, Mère Picheloup looked after him and said to herself: "It 's very strange, that monsieur's interest in Thistledown. One would think the child belonged to him, he takes it so to heart. Or it may be, perhaps, that he is an officer of one of those societies that protect children. If so, he will do something for Thistledown, for I am told that they save many little ones from cruelty and suffering."

XVI

THE FIRST INVITATION

IT was an important event for Mignon when she received her first invitation. It was brought by a stylish servant in livery, and was addressed to Mademoiselle Mignon Chapelle; and it was sealed with a tiny blue seal stamped with a crest.

"Oh, Tantine, look, look! It is for me!" cried Mignon, excitedly. "Aunt Gabrielle's Émile brought it. Open it; please open it!"

"Open it yourself, my dear: it is for you"; and Madam Aubert glanced at it with a smile.

Mignon broke the seal, and, as she read the contents, her eyes grew wide with surprise, and she exclaimed: "Tantine dearest, it is an invitation from Denise to her birthday-party. Oh, how glad I am! It is the first time Denise has ever invited me!"

This note was the result of a discussion which took place the evening before in Madam Chapelle's library. Denise sat at the desk, a sheet of paper before her and a pencil in her fingers, carefully writing the names of her intended guests, as her mother dictated them to her; while Silvain sat near with Aimée on his knee, listening with much interest as each name was repeated.

"There are the Langs; I suppose we ought to invite them," said Madam Chapelle.

"I don't know Paula Lang very well," returned Denise, biting

the end of her pencil petulantly. "Why need we ask them? Her father is in business, and they don't belong to our set."

"Oh, Denise, don't be a cad!" exclaimed Silvain, impatiently.

"Hush, my son," interrupted Madam Chapelle; "you must not be rude to your sister."

"I don't mean to be, mama; but Denise provokes me. She knows that Hubert Lang is my best friend, and that Paula is very fond of Cousin Mignon."

"Very well, Silvain. But don't get angry. It is very bad form," said Denise, coldly. "Shall I put them down, mama?"

"Certainly, Denise; Madam Lang and I were very intimate when we were girls at Madam Leroy's school. I see no reason why they should not be invited. Their father is very rich, and they go everywhere."

"I have n't heard you mention Cousin Mignon," said Silvain, after a moment's silence.

Denise looked at her mother inquiringly. "Must we invite her, mama?"

"'Must we?'" echoed Silvain. "Denise, I am ashamed of you!" and his eyes flashed angrily.

"What ails you, brother? Why are you cross?" asked Aimée, with swift little fingers. She read every expression of the face; she knew when one was glad or sorry, kind or unkind: and she saw that Silvain was greatly troubled.

"I am not cross, *chérie*," he answered in her sign language. "I 'm only vexed because Denise tries to annoy me. I want Cousin Mignon invited to the party. You would like her to come, would n't you?"

Her little face flushed with pleasure, and her eyes were wistful as she turned to her mother and asked swiftly: "Can't Mignon come, mama?"

"Yes, my darling; if you wish it," returned Madam Chapelle, nodding and smiling. "Anything to make you happy."

Denise wrote the name rather reluctantly. Then she said: "Mama dear, when I have finished my list I will write Cousin Mignon's invitation and send it in the morning by Émile, so that Madam Aubert will have time to get her a suitable frock."

Silvain looked a little disgusted, and he thought to himself: "How silly Denise is! She thinks of nothing but chiffons." However, with Aimée's help, he had gained his point, and he had nothing more to say.

When Mignon read the note she could scarcely restrain her joy. First she must run with it to Uncle Anatole, who seemed greatly pleased; then Myra and Luna must see it and admire it; and even the gloomy Helios must be told of the great event.

"What shall I wear, Tantine?" was the first eager question.

"We will attend to that as soon as I have time, my Mignon," said Madam Aubert, quietly.

"But when, Tantine — when? I wish we could go right away to buy my frock. Can't we, dearest?"

"No, my child; there is no hurry. We have more than a week to prepare your costume."

"Oh, Tantine, I can't wait!" cried Mignon, impatiently. "I want to see what I am to have, and Clairette will need a lot of time to make it. I want it covered with little frills, just like the one Denise wore that night at the West End."

"My Mignon, you must learn to wait," said Madam Aubert, gravely. "It is a hard lesson, but we all have to learn it; and I don't want my little girl to consider her frock of the first importance. I want her to be patient, and thoughtful of other things."

"But, Tantine, I must have a new frock, and I can't help thinking about it."

"Leave it to me, my Mignon, and you shall be suitably dressed," said Madam Aubert, gently.

Later in the day Mignon went with her grandmother to a store-room in the upper part of the house, where stood a large wardrobe which was always locked. Mignon had never seen it open, and she had always wondered what it contained.

Madam Aubert looked very sad as she threw the doors back, and, turning to Mignon, said in a broken voice: "My child, these are your mother's things. I have kept them for you."

The shelves were full of smoothly folded linen, and from the hooks hung a number of garments carefully folded in white cloths. Mignon drew near with a look of awe as her grandmother removed the covers. "Did dear mama wear these?" she asked softly.

"Yes, my child; this was her wedding dress"; and Madam Aubert pointed to a slender satin gown covered with gossamer lace. "And this," she continued, unfolding a simple muslin frock and veil, "was made for her first communion; and you will wear it when the time comes."

Then she folded the covers over the festal garments with tear-dimmed eyes, and afterward she selected from one of the shelves a dainty frock of India mull, so delicate and fine that it seemed a fairy web.

"My Mignon, your mother wore this to her first party, and you shall wear it to yours. Clairette will do it over beautifully, and, you see, it has all the little frills you can wish for."

Mignon looked at it admiringly. "It is lovely, Tantine, and I shall like it because mama wore it."

Madam Aubert smiled through her tears as she closed and locked the door. She did not wish to sadden the child by showing her the sorrow of her heart. "Now," she said cheerfully, "we will send

for Clairette, and in a few days you shall have a costume fit for a little princess."

Therefore, on the eventful evening, when Madam Chapelle and Denise inspected their little guest, they found no reason to disapprove of her. Aunt Myra, who had been pressed into service, acted the part of *bonne* to perfection. She put on the little satin shoes, arranged the soft white sash and fluffy skirt, and smoothed down the rebellious curls until Mignon looked as trim and dainty as a fairy.

Silvain was delighted with her pretty ways, and Aimée clung to her caressingly. Mignon had never been so happy. It was a new world to her. The luxurious house, the flowers, the lights, and the music were all enchanting, and her only regret was that Uncle Anatole and Tantine were not there to enjoy it with her. She danced like a little fairy. She loved and understood music, and every motion was perfect harmony and grace.

Silvain danced the german with her, and she was covered with the pretty favors so lavishly supplied. Her first party was a great triumph; and when Madam Chapelle compared the simple, dainty costume with the silks and embroideries of the overdressed little maids, she could not help admiring Madam Aubert's refined and superior taste.

During the evening, while Silvain and his mother were looking at the little dancers, Madam Chapelle exclaimed: "She is a charming child, Silvain!"

"Who, mama?" he asked, with a mischievous smile.

"Why, your little cousin, of course. Her manners are very pretty; she is natural and graceful, and her costume is simply perfection. I am glad, my son, that you insisted on her being invited."

Silvain looked at his mother with a grateful smile. "I knew you would love her if you knew her," he said with conviction.

Myra had been instructed to bring her little mistress home at ten o'clock. "It is late enough for a child's party," said Madam Aubert, decidedly, when Mignon protested that it was too early. "Obey me, my child, and don't keep Myra waiting." So when the old woman captured her, after a rapid waltz with Paula Lang, she made no objection, but went with charming docility to say good night to Aunt Gabrielle and her cousins, a rumpled, tired, but very happy little girl.

Mignon's first party is not a very important event to chronicle, but it goes to show the good results of Silvain's efforts in behalf of justice and truth.

XVII

WHAT THE SEA BROUGHT

IT was summer on Isle de Chène, and many long months after Beppo's departure, and scarcely an evening had passed that la mádre and Tessa had not watched for Costanzo's returning boat. "The sea took him away, and it will bring him back. When he comes the old man's barchetta will bring him," said little Tessa, as she strained her gaze toward Grand Isle. As usual, they were sitting on the sand, side by side, watching a tiny sail on the distant blue. There was very little wind, and the small boat came on slowly and languidly, the white canvas only half filled by the wavering breeze.

Presently la mádre, who had been gazing intently across the silver ripples, cried out excitedly as she sprang to her feet and waved her hand toward the oncoming boat.

"My Tessa, it is Costanzo's barchetta! When the sail flutters back and forth I can see the red crescent on it."

"Oh, mádre, can you? Are you sure?" and Tessa's little face took on a strained, anxious look, while she twisted her brown fingers nervously.

"A moment, *cara mia;* now the wind rises and the sail fills. There, she comes on faster and faster; soon, soon we shall see our Beppo."

"Oh, mádre, mádre, yes, it is the old man's boat!" cried Tessa, joyfully. Then, after looking for a moment longer, she said in a

frightened voice: "But I see only one. It is Costanzo. Where is Beppo? Oh, where is Beppo?"

"Wait, my Tessa, until the barchetta is nearer; she dances so that one can't see clearly." Then they stood silently watching while the light little boat flew toward the shore. "I can see now," cried la mâdre; "yes, it is the old man, and I can see no one else."

"No one else," echoed Tessa, hopelessly. "Oh, where is Beppo?" and throwing herself on the sand, she began to cry passionately.

La mâdre rushed to the very edge of the water, and as the sail rattled down and the boat swung landward, she saw a pitiful sight. There, on a heap of old sails, lay Beppo, either sleeping or dead. So ghastly white was his face, so dark were the rings around his closed eyes, so helplessly inert the slender figure, that all life seemed to have departed.

With a cry of distress, la mâdre seized the gunwale in her strong hands, and, with the help of an incoming wave, drew the boat high on the sand.

Old Costanzo dropped the tiller and sat dumbly, his bloodshot eyes fixed on the boy.

Tessa heard her mother's cry and flew to her side. "Oh, mâdre, is our Beppo dead?" In an instant she was in the boat and on her knees beside him, while her mother stooped and raised him tenderly.

"Hush, my Tessa, hush! he breathes, he lives; we will save him."

Costanzo stumbled to his feet and drew near. With an imperative gesture la mâdre waved him away. "Don't touch him," she said hoarsely, while her white teeth gleamed like an angry animal's. "Stand aside; you have killed him!"

"He is n't dead; he 's only sleeping," muttered the old man, sullenly. "He has had fever. He is weak and tired. Now he is home, I will nurse him and cure him."

La mádre stood up with the light, emaciated form clasped tightly in her arms. "Help me, my Tessa"; and, together, mother and child lifted the unconscious boy over the side of the boat and laid him on the warm, soft sand. After a moment la mádre took him again in her arms, and saying briefly to Tessa, "We will take him to Père Bonneval," she walked rapidly toward the curé's house.

Old Costanzo shambled after her, but she waved him back with a dangerous look in her eyes, while Tessa ran swiftly, crying as she went: "Mon père, mam'selle, our Beppo has come."

The curé and his sister, sitting under the oak, heard the child's cry, and looking along the shore, they saw la mádre with her burden hastening toward them. In a moment Père Bonneval and mam'selle were beside her; but when they attempted to take the boy from her, she cried passionately: "No, no! I can carry him; he is as light as a bundle of dried grass. Oh, my Beppo, my poor Beppo!" And striding on with rapid steps, she did not pause until she entered the cottage and laid him on mam'selle's soft white bed.

Père Bonneval, who could minister to the sick body as well as to the sick soul, brought out his box of drugs, and feeling the boy's pulse, he said: "He is very weak, almost in a state of collapse. Hurry, my sister, and try to force a little cognac between his teeth."

Mam'selle and la mádre worked over the child with a will; at last, when he had swallowed a little brandy and water, moaned, and moved slightly, showing some signs of returning strength, they removed his soiled clothes and bathed him tenderly. And after they had wrapped him in clean linen, Père Bonneval administered an antidote for the fever that was consuming him. Then they waited patiently, watching for some sign of recognition.

And all the while Costanzo limped back and forth before the gate, muttering angrily to himself. After some time, Père Bonneval went to him to try to induce him to go away to his cottage. When

he saw the curé he cried fiercely: "I want to see my child! Let me go to my child."

"No, no, Costanzo"; and Père Bonneval laid his hand kindly but firmly on the old man's shoulder. "Beppo is very ill; his life hangs by a thread. He must not be disturbed. We will care for him. We will nurse him and cure him, if possible. Now go quietly home. Make no trouble, no scenes. La mâdre is angry and excited, and you know Giovan's temper."

"I must see my boy," he insisted stubbornly. "What right have you to take my boy from me? I won't leave him. I will go to him"; and he attempted to push the priest aside as the latter barred his way to the gate.

La mâdre heard the old man's angry voice, and, before Père Bonneval could prevent her, she had her strong hands on his shoulders and was pushing him violently away. "Go, go, or I will call my Giovan; he is yonder on the shore with his boat, and, as I live, he will treat you worse than you have treated that dying boy!"

The old man cowered before her wrath, but he muttered between his clenched teeth and his eyes flashed ominously. He dared not resist la mâdre; she was dangerous in her fury, and he did not care to provoke Giovan's anger: so slowly and sullenly he turned toward home, looking back, his eyes full of fear and despair. In a moment she relented, and called after him: "When Beppo is better I will send Tessa to tell you, but, as you value your life, keep away from here now."

Without another word, the miserable old man limped away, and la mâdre watched him until the darkness hid him from her sight; then she went back to the room where mam'selle and Tessa were watching the sick boy, while Père Bonneval knelt before the little shrine in silent prayer; and when he arose the light of heaven shone from his face. "Ma sœur, with the help of God we will save

him," he said softly. "Already his pulse is stronger, and the fever is abating."

The night passed away in anxious watching. Mam'selle and la mádre never closed their tired eyes; but little Tessa fell asleep with her head on Beppo's pillow, and Giovan carried her away and laid her in her own cot.

At dawn Beppo opened his eyes, and seeing mam'selle and la mádre bending over him, he smiled weakly; then the heavy lids fell again, and he drifted away into a sleep that seemed like death.

"I think he knew us," whispered mam'selle to la mádre, who was fanning him gently.

"Oh, I am sure he did; he looked so contented, so peaceful."

For several weeks Beppo hovered between life and death, while mam'selle, la mádre, and Tessa watched over him constantly; and when Père Bonneval had exhausted his limited knowledge of medicine, Giovan sailed over to Grand Isle and brought back a skilful doctor, who had run down from the city for a brief holiday. After he had examined the feeble, emaciated little invalid, he declared that the child's vitality was exhausted by violent exercise and insufficient nourishment; that all he needed was rest and plenty of strengthening food: with these, and the pure sea air, he would soon be well and strong. But he added decidedly that if the child continued the life that he had been leading, in a year or two he would be beyond human aid.

"He never shall go back to that old monster," said la mádre, savagely. "I will work for him and care for him myself."

"But, my good friend," returned mam'selle, gently, "we can't take Beppo away from his natural guardian. He is willing to leave him with us now, seeing he is too ill to work; but as soon as he is strong again, we shall not be able to keep him"; and mam'selle sighed sadly.

"I will find a way, with Giovan's help," said la mâdre, significantly. "Our Beppo can't be left in that old tyrant's power."

Père Bonneval heard the conversation between the sister and la mâdre, and he wondered what could be done. "Costanzo has the law on his side; we can't prove that the boy is not his grandson. Colonel Chapelle is a lawyer; I will write to him and ask his opinion. In the meanwhile we must do all we can to get him well and strong, and leave the future to One greater than ourselves."

At last there came a day when Beppo knew them all and was able to put his weak arms around the neck of la mâdre and lean his tired head on her motherly bosom. It was a joyful hour for little Tessa when Beppo kissed her and called her by name. Mam'selle's eyes were dim with tears, and Père Bonneval slipped silently into the little church to give thanks before the altar.

XVIII

THE VOICES OF THE SEA

EVERY day after Beppo's recovery was assured, Costanzo came and looked at him silently with a gloomy, introspective gaze; and his haggard face grew more wrinkled and care-worn as time went by. Some terrible struggle was going on within the old man's soul. For hours at a time he would sit on the sand and listen to the voices of the sea. What they said to him no one knew, but the gloom of his countenance and his dreary mutterings showed that remorse was gnawing at his heart, and what little good there was in his nature was in violent conflict with his evil instincts.

"I can't! I can't!" he would cry aloud to the desolate waste of waters. "I must watch him; I must watch myself. Something within me says that I must give him up; but I never will. No, no! I would rather let him die." Alone and wretched, he raved and muttered to the sea and the wind, for he well knew that they would never betray his secrets.

About that time, when, one evening, Père Bonneval entered the church for vespers, he saw a dark figure almost prone before the altar, and heard broken, disconnected words, now pleading, now defiant — the utterance of a soul in great trouble.

Startled and astonished, the curé stepped behind the confessional while he tried to discover who the penitent could be. He did not wish to intrude upon the privacy of the unhappy soul who had

come, alone in its sorrow, to the silent twilit sanctuary of the church.

For a moment Père Bonneval stood, undecided whether to advance or retreat, when suddenly the penitent rose to his feet. Then the priest saw that he was Costanzo, who limped slowly down the narrow aisle, wiping his eyes furtively, and glancing around in the dim light to see if any other worshipers had entered.

It was an awful moment for both when Père Bonneval confronted the old man. In an instant the troubled expression of the emotional old creature changed to one of fierce rage, and his eyes, still wet with tears, flashed angrily.

"So you have been spying on me!" he cried excitedly. "Even in the holy church there is no refuge for me! Why do you follow me to meddle in my affairs? Can't I be alone with my Creator, free from your intrusion? Let me pass, let me go where I can be alone!" And pushing the curé rudely aside, he rushed through the door and away from the church.

Père Bonneval did not offer to detain him. He was so overcome with astonishment that he could not collect his thoughts. A few tardy worshipers entering recalled him to his duties, and slowly and thoughtfully he went to the little robing-room to put on his surplice.

That evening, when he told mam'selle of the incident, he said hopefully: "I think Costanzo will confess soon; he is in the throes of a great struggle. As for myself, since the colonel wrote to me about the discovery of the ear-rings I have never had a doubt of the old man's guilt; but if he would acknowledge the truth and give the boy up peaceably, it would be so much better for all concerned."

"Unhappy old man! Let us pray for him, mon frère," returned mam'selle, clasping her hands devoutly.

It was a joyful day for Beppo and his friends when for the first time he was carried out and laid on the green bench under the oak. Mam'selle folded and arranged the rugs; Tessa brought the pillows; and la mâdre brought the invalid, who was thinner and lighter than when she carried him from Costanzo's boat. Although he was very weak and helpless, with hollow cheeks and sunken eyes, still the tide of life ebbed and flowed through his veins fresh and strong with returning health.

It was a midsummer morning. The sky and sea were of heavenly blue. The wind that danced over the rippling water, rustling the leaves and waving the long grass, was as pure and sweet as the air of paradise. Beppo, lying there with half-closed eyes, thought the birds had never sung so joyously, and the wavelets breaking on the sand never before had so gentle and soothing a sound.

When la mâdre had arranged everything for his comfort, she left him with mam'selle and Tessa and went away to her work. For a long while the boy lay silently gazing up at the summer sky through the network of boughs and swaying moss, while mam'selle plied her needle and Tessa studied her morning lessons. At length he said in a low, dreamy voice, his eyes still fixed on the distant blue: "One night, when I lay in Costanzo's boat, I thought I was going up to the sky among the stars, and I was glad, because I was so tired. I wanted to go where I could rest forever. I tried to fly, but I only fell down and down, until a great black wave swept me back and forth, and I shook and shivered like Costanzo's boat when a storm strikes it, and I knew I was drowning. I called for help. I called for la mâdre. I called for every one. But no one heard me. Then I saw another big wave rushing toward me. I held out my hands, but it went over me, and carried me down and down. Oh, it was dreadful!" And he turned his great hollow eyes toward mam'selle with a terrified look.

"My Beppo, you were dreaming," said mam'selle, soothingly. "You must not think of sad things this bright morning. You are better. You will soon be well. And you will stay with us, won't you?"

"I want to live. I want to get strong," he returned wistfully. "But I can't stay always with you."

"Oh, Beppo, don't go away again!" cried Tessa. "You won't have any one to take care of you, and you 'll never come back."

"Yes, my Tessa, I will always come back; but when I am well I must go to Nashville again."

"Nashville!" exclaimed mam'selle. "Were you there while you were away?"

"Yes, we were there. We had a grand time there," he replied, with something of his old spirit, "and it was no tight-rope business — no hoop and balls and poles."

"Why, did n't you give exhibitions?" asked Tessa, in a surprised voice.

"No, no"; and he shook his head mysteriously.

"What did you do, my Beppo?" And mam'selle looked up from her work with some curiosity.

"I rode, mam'selle — I rode at the races. I 'm not going to be an acrobat any longer. I 'm going to be a jockey," he replied proudly.

"A jockey!" repeated Tessa. "What is a jockey?"

"A jockey is a light-weight who rides race-horses."

"Does Costanzo approve of that?" asked mam'selle, in a shocked voice.

"Oh, yes; he has been helping train me. It pays better than the tight-rope, and it 's not so dangerous; but it 's hard work, all the same. You have to practise and starve, and you get lots of falls at first. I was all covered with bruises."

"I saw them," said Tessa, sharply. "I thought Costanzo had pinched you."

"No; he does n't pinch me so often now, because I do just what he wants. I love horses, and I am not afraid, and there is nothing so fine as a race," he said excitedly, his hollow eyes sparkling with pleasure.

Mam'selle sighed heavily. She saw another obstacle in the way of removing the boy from Costanzo's influence. But she only asked gently: "If you liked it so much, why did you come back to the island?"

"Oh, the races were over for the season, and I was tired. I broke down and got sick, and Costanzo brought me back to get me well for the next season, and I must hurry and get strong by that time. And I guess I 'll be thin enough," he added, looking critically at his slender length of limbs with a satisfied smile.

Mam'selle was in despair, and Tessa was ready to cry with disappointment. Seeing Beppo so ill and weak, she had thought that he would remain with them always.

A little excitement exhausted him, and he lay back silent, with a happy smile on his face.

Mam'selle looked at him for some moments very sadly. She was thinking of what the doctor had said. "My Beppo, you must not go away for some time. You need a long rest. Now could n't you be contented to give up being an acrobat or a jockey, and live here quietly with us? You are very delicate, and the hard life will kill you. The doctor from the city said so. Stay here with us, and mon frère will make a scholar of you, and you can teach these poor ignorant people. They need a teacher, and you can be so useful and happy."

Thistledown smiled a little scornfully. The recollection of his triumphs came back with his returning health. "Oh, no! How

could I? I want to be rich and famous. And you don't know how beautiful it all is. It is finer than the gardens and the tight-rope. A trainer told me that I would be known all over the world — that kings would send for me to ride their fine horses, and that I would have gold and jewels and everything"; and he paused breathless, while he looked at his little audience with a smile of satisfaction.

"Now you are tired, my Beppo. You must not excite yourself. You must rest and sleep after you have taken your milk"; and mam'selle fanned him gently, while Tessa ran for the milk.

Then he closed his eyes drowsily, and as he drifted away to dreamland he murmured: "But I will come back. I will come back!"

When Père Bonneval encountered Costanzo after their strange meeting in the church, there was not a trace of softness or emotion in his face. He had put on his mask of insolent defiance, and appeared the same hardened tyrant as before. When he saw how rapidly Beppo was improving under the care of his friends, he began to talk boastingly of what he had done, and of what he intended to do. Without going into details of his plans for the future, he surprised the curé greatly by telling him that he would like to sell his cottage, his boat, and, in fact, all of his belongings, for he had decided to leave Isle de Chène as soon as Beppo was well and strong.

"And where do you intend to go, my friend?" asked the curé, anxiously.

"Oh, everywhere!" returned the old man, laconically.

"Then you mean that Beppo shall follow the profession of an acrobat?"

"We shall see; we shall see. I don't tell my business to all the world"; and the old man looked at the curé with an evasive expression.

"You remember that I told you what the city doctor said about the boy. If you follow up that cruel training you will kill him," said Père Bonneval, indignantly.

"Well, he 's mine, and I shall do what I please with him."

"But the law may interfere. It will be murder to overtask the child in his present condition. Let me advise you not to go too far."

Costanzo's eyes flashed with anger as he snapped his thumb and finger in the priest's face. "That for your advice, and that for the law. You can't frighten me. I 'll go when I please, and take my boy where I please." And turning, he limped away, muttering insolent threats; while Père Bonneval stood looking after him, his kind face full of sorrowful indignation.

One evening, after Tessa had gone to bed, Giovan told la mâdre that Costanzo had offered to sell him his boat and nets for a small sum. "He is certainly going away for good. He means never to return."

"*Dio mio!*" groaned la mâdre. "And he will take our Beppo. He will starve him, he will kill him, and we shall never see him again!"

"It looks that way," replied Giovan, gloomily; "and no one has any right to interfere. I would like to punish the old man, but it would do the boy no good. Well, don't fret, *cara mia*. We must pray to our Lady of Good Help to protect him," added Giovan, piously.

As the time for Beppo's departure drew near, he, with la mâdre and Tessa, passed many hours sitting on the sand. A cloud seemed to have fallen over the beautiful face of the woman; and little Tessa had a grieved look, as though her tears lay very near the surface: but Beppo was brimming over with the joy of returning health, and eager to experience the glorious future which had been painted to him in such brilliant colors.

La mádre watched the boy as he came bounding toward her, his eyes bright and his face beaming with happiness. As he threw himself on the sand at her feet, he looked into her face, and saw it sadder than he had ever seen it before.

"What are you thinking of, mádre mia?" he asked softly.

"Of many things, my Beppo. The sea is full of voices, and they are sad and complaining. They seem to say that thou wilt go and never return. My Tessa and I will sit here watching for thee in vain, and the days will be sad — very sad."

"And thou wilt forget us in the great city," murmured Tessa, tearfully.

"Never, never, mádre mia, little Tessa! I will never forget thee. I will come back to thee. I will come back."

The sea was rising; a great restless wave broke at their feet, and as it receded it seemed to echo: "I will come back! I will come back!"

XIX

ROSES EVERYWHERE

THE time for Costanzo's departure was drawing near. Beppo was well again and had gone back to the old man, who was constantly occupied with his own affairs. He had not succeeded in finding a purchaser for his property, and he was evidently greatly disappointed. Moody and silent, he avoided all intercourse with his neighbors. Wandering around with a preoccupied air, or sitting alone on the shore muttering mysteriously to himself, he seldom noticed Beppo, who was only too glad to escape from his persecution.

Although the boy had nominally gone back to his grandfather, actually he spent all his time at the presbytère, or with la mádre and Tessa. At this time la mádre was much interested in the approaching marriage of her sister, a pretty girl of eighteen, who lived with her parents in a small village a few miles away.

She was to marry Bruno, Giovan's friend, the handsomest, thriftiest young fisherman on the island. For nearly a year the honest fellow had been preparing a home for his bride. He had built a neat cottage, and planted a little garden with her favorite flowers, and la mádre had assisted him in arranging the interior, so that it was a convenient and attractive home.

On a Saturday, the day before the wedding, la mádre, Tessa, and Beppo were very busy decorating the rooms with green branches, festoons of trailing vines, and roses heaped in every available article

that could hold water. Mam'selle stripped her little garden to decorate the church, and every woman in the village contributed her choicest and best, until it seemed that there were roses everywhere.

The children ran to and fro, almost buried under their fragrant burdens. The church, the cottage, and even the boats that were to accompany the bridal party must all have a festal appearance. And the preparations must be finished on that day, for at sunrise the next morning Bruno, with Giovan, la mádre, and the children, escorted by the wedding guests, were to sail away to the little fishing village to bring the bride to Isle de Chène, her future home.

So excited and happy was Beppo at the thought of the pleasure before him that he almost forgot his past troubles, as well as his brilliant prospects for the future. He and Tessa were to walk in the bridal procession side by side, and Père Bonneval was to give the marriage benediction in the little church at Isle de Chène.

When the last decorations had been completed, the last green branch, the last garland of roses, and the last little flag had been fastened to Bruno's boat, Beppo ran to mam'selle to tell her of all that had happened during the busy day.

"Everything is lovely," he cried joyously. "There are roses everywhere. You should see Bruno's barchetta. It is as gay as the grand stand at the races. We fastened a hundred little flags to the mast and sail, and around the bow there is a wreath of flowers and a green bank for Marietta to sit on. And there will be a procession from the boats to the church, and Tessa and I will walk behind the bride. I shall wear my white tights and red silk jacket. Costanzo did n't want me to have them, but la mádre coaxed him, and she got them. La mádre can do anything with the old man"; and Beppo looked at mam'selle with a satisfied smile.

"And what will Tessa wear?" asked mam'selle, interested and amused at the boy's glowing description.

"Oh, Tessa will wear a new white frock, red shoes, a wreath of roses on her head, and the beads I gave her."

"How sweet she will look!" and mam'selle smiled at the pretty picture the boy drew with a few deft touches.

"And la mádre," he went on rapidly, "will wear white too, and with my comb in her black hair she will look like a queen. But you will see her—you will see us all in the procession; and we shall all be so gay and happy!"

"And Costanzo—will he go with you?" asked mam'selle.

"Oh, no; he won't go. He 's got the dumps. He says there 's a storm brewing, that he knows the signs, and all sorts of gloomy things. But I don't think he can tell what will happen to-morrow. *I* want the sun to shine, the birds to sing, and the sky and the sea to be as blue as they have been to-day, and just enough wind to make the barchetta fly over the water and throw up a little spray as she skips along; and she will lead all the others, for Giovan says that Bruno's boat is the best and fastest on the island. Now *au revoir*, mam'selle; I must say good night to la mâdre and Tessa, and then go to my bed, so that I may wake bright and early in the morning."

"Happy Beppo!" thought mam'selle, looking after him with loving eyes as he ran away swiftly in the twilight.

Among the survivors of the dire disaster at Isle de Chène there are none who will ever forget Sunday, October 1, 1893. On that morning the sun rose in a cloudless sky out of a sea of opal and blue. The light breeze that Beppo had wished for just rippled the water and fluttered the sails of the boats, while there was a ceaseless under-swell that lapped the sand softly and gently, rocking the gayly decked little fleet until it was reflected over and over on the glassy surface. The tender monotone of the sea mingled with the jubilant songs of birds as they flitted among the branches or

"But the prettiest, most gracious picture of all was Beppo and little Tessa."

soared away toward the distant blue. The cloudless sky, the unruffled sea, were as calm and peaceful as the soul of a saint about to wing its way heavenward.

As Père Bonneval paced back and forth on the landing, waiting for the wedding party to appear, the peace and beauty of the scene filled his heart with gentle melancholy. Walking along the shore he had noticed that every house had a festal appearance, and every person he met looked gay and happy in their holiday attire. Yet, for some reason that he could not explain, he was oppressed with strange forebodings.

Presently the sound of music broke into the silence and calm that surrounded him. It was the harmonious strain of a violin and an accordion, rendering with much beauty of expression the inspiring air of "Santa Lucia." Then he saw a picturesque procession approaching. First came blind Pierre, the village fiddler, carried on a flower-bedecked chair by two sturdy young fishermen. After him came Dédé Lafort, who drew wonderful strains from his accordion as he stepped along jauntily. Then followed handsome Bruno in a brand-new suit of white duck, a gaily striped kerchief knotted around his brown throat, and a large posy in the buttonhole of his jacket. But the prettiest, most gracious picture of all was Beppo and little Tessa—the boy in his gay mountebank dress, with the red cap and gilt tassel, the girl in a fresh white frock, with strings of bright-colored beads hanging around her neck and over her slender shoulders, while a wreath of dewy roses rested on her dark curls.

Behind the children walked Giovan and la mádre — la mádre in white, a huge bunch of roses pinned to the bosom of her gown, while Beppo's wonderful comb in her black braids sparkled and glittered in the sunlight. She did, indeed, look a queen! Her proud, happy face was radiant, but withal there was a touch of pensive gravity in her smile.

Then followed the nearest of kin, and after them the friends who were bidden to the wedding supper, and who were to fill the prettily decorated boats which were to take part in the festivities.

As the picturesque procession drew near, Père Bonneval advanced toward it, and holding out his hands, he gave them all the blessing of the church in clear, calm tones, which could be distinctly heard above the gentle sobbing of the sea and the melodious songs of the birds.

The little fleet of flower-bedecked boats lay along the shore, rocking gently, while they waited for their passengers. Bruno's barchetta was the first to leave. In the bow sat la mâdre, with the children beside her, her beautiful face full of tender sadness. Again she looked like an enthroned Madonna as Tessa leaned on her knee and looked into her face with adoring love.

Bruno sat at the tiller, his handsome face radiant with happiness, while Giovan hoisted the sail. The gay little flags fluttered, the canvas filled in the breeze, and the barchetta slipped away from the shore, followed by the merry strains of the violin and the good-natured laughter and bantering voices of the wedding guests.

Then, one after another, they all embarked and followed in Bruno's wake, until quite a fleet of flower-bedecked boats was reflected in all the gorgeous colors of the rainbow on the placid surface of the Gulf. Though the barchetta went steadily on, followed by her escort, toward the little hamlet nestled on the shore a few miles away, so light was the breeze and so smooth and calm was the blue Gulf that she scarcely seemed to move, and Père Bonneval, as he looked after her, thought that she seemed "a painted ship upon a painted sea."

During all the preparations for departure old Costanzo had hovered around the outskirts of the merry crowd, silent and gloomy, like an ill-omened bird of prey. Standing alone on the shore, he

watched the receding boats until all blended together in a haze of color that seemed to float between the sky and the sea, and muttered angrily to himself: "You're young and happy. Go, go! Laugh and sing together, and leave the old man — the sinner, the outcast — alone, behind. But soon, soon we'll all go the same way. There's trouble brewing: I know the signs; I've heard the voices before. There's nothing on earth so treacherous and cruel as this calm, sunny blue Gulf. To-night there will be terrible music. Strange songs will be sung, and the wind and the sea will sing them."

XX

GATHERING CLOUDS

IT was long past midday when the boats returned. The light breeze of the morning had died down to an intense calm. The barchetta came back with lowered sail, like a wingless bird, propelled by the strong hands of Bruno and Giovan; and while they rowed they sang the melodious songs of the Neapolitan fishermen, which were repeated by the occupants of the other boats, and were echoed and reëchoed in the mournfully suggestive monotone of the sea.

Now soft clouds veiled the sun and the blue had changed to silvery gray. It lacked the sparkle and color of the morning, but it was no less beautiful. The pretty bride, nestled among the flowers, her veiled head resting on la mádre's shoulder, was too happy to talk, and the children knelt before her in silent but profound admiration.

As the barchetta approached the shore, Bruno said proudly: "This is a great day, marietta mia; our wedding *festa* will always be remembered. See how many there are on the shore; all the people on the island are here to welcome us."

The bride blushed prettily as Bruno helped her to the landing, where she was immediately surrounded by her friends. Then the procession formed in the same order as that of the morning. Blind Pierre was hoisted into his chair. Dédé Lafort drew out his accordion until it screamed the first bars of a lively wedding march.

The little bride clung to tall Bruno's arm with bowed head and modest mien. Beppo and Tessa, with beaming faces, tripped after, glancing back now and then at la mâdre and Giovan, who walked sedately behind them. Then followed the nearest of kin and the wedding guests, all in holiday attire, each carrying green branches and garlands of flowers.

As the little procession moved along the shore to the church, suddenly dense clouds darkened the sky. Sea-birds skimmed across the water with plaintive cries, the shadows grew black, and the moss-draped branches of the trees murmured ominously. The old fishermen whispered to each other that a terrible storm was brewing, and mothers gathered their children to the shelter of their homes; but the bridal party went merrily on its way, the music and laughter rising above the mournful sobbing of the sea.

Père Bonneval met them at the door of the church and conducted them up the aisle with simple dignity and reverence. On the little altar burned six tall candles in front of a screen of glossy latania and fleurs-de-lis, gathered that dewy morning among the tall swamp-grasses; while across the railing of the chancel was twined a garland of white roses which had bloomed in mam'selle's little garden.

Bruno and Marietta knelt reverently before the altar, and Beppo and Tessa bent their heads devoutly, while Père Bonneval pronounced the marriage benediction. And those who heard and lived never forgot the tender, gentle words of the good curé. How often he spoke of them as his dear children, the lambs of his fold, his precious flock, and how fervently he prayed that during the coming storm the wind might be tempered to the shorn lambs! And outside the sea sobbed and the spirits of the air moaned fitfully.

There was a premonition of approaching danger, for the wedding party left the church with slow, subdued steps and serious faces. Bruno and Marietta, followed by their guests, walked thoughtfully

to their new home, buffeted and beaten by sudden gusts of wind that seemed to come from every corner of the globe; and yet the sea was smooth and silvery on the surface: but underneath was that threatening monotone of danger and disaster.

Following the bridal procession, and lingering near the door of the church, was old Costanzo, pale, haggard, and gloomy. When all the guests had entered the cottage, la mádre saw him standing without, pathetically alone in the gathering storm.

At that moment Beppo came to her and, putting his arm around her neck, whispered: "Ask Bruno to let the old man come in. They say a hurricane is coming, and it might blow him away."

La mádre went out to him, and, laying her hand kindly on his shoulder, she said persuasively: "Come in, Costanzo mio. Bruno and Marietta bid you enter and sit at the table with the wedding guests."

"No, no," he replied in a wavering tone; "this is no time to eat, drink, and be merry. There will be a gale to-night; the sea will rise and sweep over us. I know the signs. I saw it once before. The happy people sang and danced yonder on Last Island. There was music and feasting, for they did not know that death was near. Then the sea rose mountains high and swept over the land, and afterward there was an awful silence. And so it will be to-night."

La mâdre turned pale and trembled visibly, but she spoke reassuringly: "Hush, my friend; you croak like a raven. You will frighten the wedding guests. There will be a storm, but it will pass over and leave us unharmed, as hundreds of others have done. Come in and be happy with our friends"; and she gently drew him toward the door. As they entered a cold blast entered with them. Costanzo stood looking on the happy group around the table with a gloomy frown.

"Here, old man, sit down and eat and drink with us," cried Bruno, good-naturedly, as he poured a glass of wine and set it before him. "Now give us a toast. Wish us long life and happiness."

Costanzo, lifting his glass and looking slowly from one to the other, said in a calm, prophetic voice: "My friends, I 'll drink to your health and prosperity for the first and last time: for to-night I shall go away never to come back, and many others will go with me; and there will be weeping and wailing from one end of this island to the other."

The expression of his face and his solemn words checked the smiles that had come at his expected toast, and a death-like silence fell on all. For a moment there were no sounds save the soughing of the wind and the sobbing of the sea.

Then Bruno's hearty, hopeful voice was heard above the complaining elements: "Friends, the old man is crazy. Don't listen to him. Eat and drink and be happy. A storm is gathering, but it won't harm us. My house is new and solidly built. Let the wind blow and the sea rise. It will weather the storm." And even as he spoke a sudden furious gust struck the sturdy little cottage, and every joint and board creaked and trembled, while it rocked like a boat at sea.

The wedding guests looked at each other in sudden consternation. "That was a hard knock," cried Bruno, triumphantly, "and, you see, we did n't go down. Don't be frightened, friends; you 're safe under my roof. Strike up a tune, Pierre,— something bright and jolly,— and let us forget the old man's croaking."

"The wind is increasing; I must go," cried Costanzo, looking around wildly. "I must go and protect my property. The island is low there at the point. My boat, my cabin, are in danger. I must try to save them."

There was a lull in the storm, and the old man hurried away without a farewell word. When he went out a black cloud seemed to float out with him.

"I must go too," whispered Beppo to Tessa. "Costanzo can't handle the boat alone. I must help him. I 'll be back in a few minutes"; and before any one was aware of his intention, the boy slipped out after the old man.

The wedding supper was over. Blind Pierre sat in the corner, playing frantically, "If you want to hear the music give the fiddler a dram," while Dédé Lafort made his accordion almost speak in his frenzy to keep up with his leader.

The pretty little bride laughed and chatted with her guests, while the young men lighted their pipes for a friendly smoke. They all seemed to have forgotten Costanzo's gloomy predictions, with the exception of la mâdre, who sat apart, her arm around Tessa, pale and preoccupied. The continued lull in the storm, the lights, the flowers, the warmth and comfort, gave them a feeling of security, and they nodded and smiled as they whispered to each other, "The worst is over and we are safe."

But suddenly a sound like the boom of a cannon, followed by a deafening roar, caused every one to spring up with pallid faces and wild eyes.

"It is the sea breaking on the shore!" said la mâdre, in a low, tense voice.

"Oh, where is Beppo?" cried Tessa, clinging to her mother. Scarcely had she uttered the words when the door flew open, and the boy seemed to be swept in on an angry gust of wind. He was pale and trembling, and his holiday attire was drenched and tattered.

"The sea! The sea!" he cried. "It is coming mountains high. The point is already covered with the waves. They are racing like

wild horses along the shore. Costanzo's cabin, all but the chimney, is washed away. We clung to the chimney until the wave went back. It took everything — the boat, the roof, the walls. I tried to drag the old man away, but he would not come. I left him clinging to the chimney, and when the lull came I ran here to warn you before another wave breaks over us. Run, Bruno! Run, Giovan! The boats! The boats!" And almost breathless from exhaustion, he dashed out into the darkness, followed by the wedding guests.

One glance was enough to confirm Beppo's report. As far as the eye could reach, the treacherous water rose like mountains crested with snow. By the flashes of vivid lightning they saw the awful tidal wave sweeping down upon them like a demon of destruction.

In an instant there was the wildest confusion. Some ran toward their homes, others toward the shore, and still others away from it. In that supreme moment no one knew where to take refuge. Bruno and Giovan ran to the little cove where their boats were beached, and swiftly launched the frail craft.

La mádre was holding Tessa and Beppo in a close, death-like clasp. "Courage, my children! We will go together," she whispered, her face full of divine resignation.

There was a lull in the fury of the wind, but only for an instant, and the silence was ominous; the powers of earth and air seemed to be gathering new strength for another awful onslaught. La mádre and the children, and as many others as could fill the boat, waited for Giovan to push off. For a moment a flash of lightning showed Bruno and Marietta in their frail little craft, tossing like an egg-shell on a receding wave.

Then there was an awful crash of many waters, followed by the shrieking of the wind, and the wailing of human voices imploring

aid in their last struggle with the demon of the storm. Again there was a momentary lull as the great wave rolled sullenly back, taking with it its helpless prey.

At a little distance from the shore tossed Giovan's boat, bottom up, and clinging to it were Beppo and Tessa. On the wide waste of water there were no other signs of life.

XXI

DESOLATION

PÈRE BONNEVAL sat in his study reading, and mam'selle sat near him, busy with her needle. It had been a rather exciting day, and both were tired, therefore the restful quiet of their little home was very agreeable. Earlier in the evening they had discussed the pleasant events of the day. The beauty of the morning, the escort of boats, the bridal procession, Bruno and Marietta, and last but not least, Beppo and Tessa, all passed in review like a panorama of charming pictures.

Returning from the church, they noticed and remarked upon the rising wind and gathering clouds; but sudden storms were not unusual on Isle de Chène, and if they thought of danger, it was only in connection with the fishermen or sailors who might be at sea.

The presbytère was more solidly built and of greater height than any other house in the village, and for many years it had withstood the assaults of wind and tide. However, as the evening wore on and the wind increased, Père Bonneval went to the door more than once, and looked out anxiously. The sea of inky blackness was apparently calm on the surface, but that awful monotone of distress, the pitiful sobbing and moaning, told that its bosom was full of unrest.

The good curé shook his head sadly as he glanced at the sky. Across the south was drawn a black veil of impenetrable darkness, but above it, shining in the clear blue, was a crescent moon, convoyed by a solitary star.

Père Bonneval smiled confidently. "It is a sign of promise," he said to himself. The lights shone brightly in Bruno's cottage, and with the soughing of the wind and the complaining of the sea he heard the light strains of the violin. "It is not as bad as I thought," he said hopefully, as he closed the door and returned to his book.

The church and presbytère were situated on the least exposed part of the island. The house was protected on one side by the church, and a sudden curve in the shore broke the force of the waves on the other. Therefore the quiet occupants of the little room did not feel the full strength of the storm. And it was not until mam'selle, looking up from her work, saw a stream of black water creeping under the door that she knew the gravity of the situation.

"*Mon Dieu!* Look, my brother!" she cried. "The sea is rising, the island is covered, or the water could not enter at our door."

Pale and trembling, Père Bonneval looked out. "You are right, ma sœur; there is water as far as I can see." And even as he spoke there came the boom, boom of the awful tidal wave, and mingled with it the cries and moans of despair, the splitting of timber, the crashing of trees, and, above all, the demoniacal shrieks of the wind.

Closing the door with an effort, for the water was rushing in with frightful velocity, he cried: "Ma sœur, quick, quick—a lantern! We must go to the floor above or we shall be drowned like rats in a cage."

When Père Bonneval threw open the upper window and leaned out, he saw nothing above but a black, starless sky, and nothing below but a vast expanse of turbid water, covered with the wreckage of the storm, which was rising higher and higher every moment.

Then he hung out his lantern as a beacon-light to perishing souls, and its slender rays streamed across the desolate scene; and as mam'selle's terrified, white face peered out beside his,

they saw a mournful procession sweep by on the receding waves: mothers, with their children clinging to their necks and arms, fighting the cruel water with their last remnant of strength; fathers struggling to hold their little ones on some frail support; brothers and sisters clutching each other, their faces full of fear and despair. Now and then a skiff would appear, rowed by sturdy men and filled with women and children, rescued from the greedy waves, only to be buffeted and overturned before it could reach a place of safety.

Père Bonneval and mam'selle leaned far out of the window in a frantic effort to save some of the perishing souls, only to see them drift beyond their reach, across the rays of light, out toward the insatiable sea.

Seeing that he was unable to save the helpless from destruction, he raised his trembling hands above the waste of waters and prayed fervently to the Father of all, imploring him to be merciful to his children, who were passing into eternity in such a sudden and awful manner. Then, with tears streaming down his face, and in a voice that could be heard above the tempest, he gave them, one and all, the final absolution of the church.

As his solemn voice died into silence, there was a moment of intense calm; then there came again another awful boom, a shriek, and a crash, and the little church collapsed like a house of cards; and, timber by timber, board by board, floated off toward the Gulf, the little altar decked with flowers, and the chancel-railing still entwined with a garland of white roses.

Père Bonneval looked into his sister's terrified face, and neither spoke; they felt that the last moment had come, and silently they commended their souls to their Creator.

But no; the presbytère was to stand, with its beacon-light; and the good priest, aided by his sister, was enabled to begin the work of

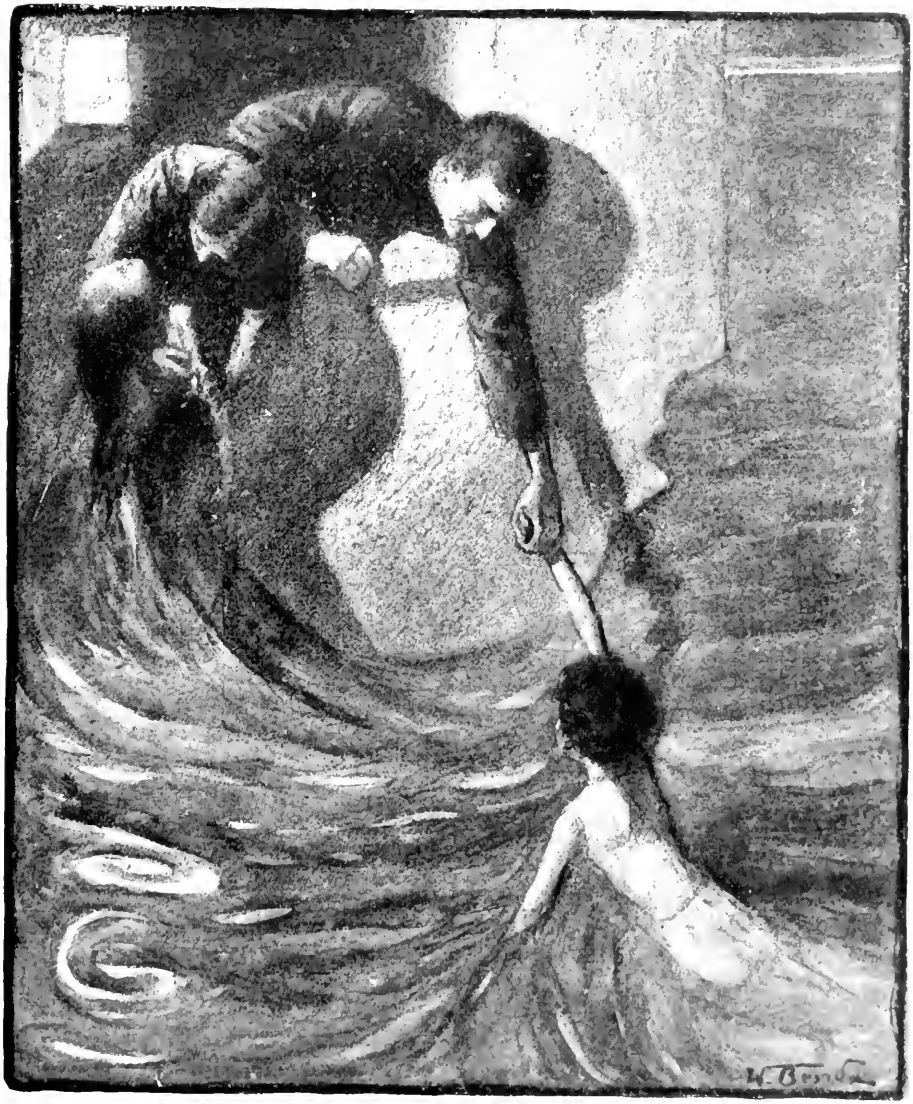
rescue. Now the water had risen to such a height that those who drifted near enough were within reach, and many exhausted women and children were dragged through the open window to the shelter and safety of the upper room.

Presently they saw, across the rays of light, a gleam of color. It was coming directly and swiftly toward them. A boy's head, a pale, courageous face, gleamed in the light as it rose and fell with the motion of the waves; and, with a cry of joy, they recognized Beppo. He was swimming sturdily with one arm, while with the other he held fast to Tessa. The child's eyes were closed; her upturned face was as white as a lily, and her long dark hair trailed behind her like a cloud. One little hand lay on her breast, and in it was clutched a wreath of the flowers that had decorated Giovan's boat.

Père Bonneval and mam'selle leaned far out of the window, in an agony of hope and fear. Four willing hands were outstretched to save them; but would the swift current take them beyond their reach? It was a moment of awful suspense. They saw that the boy's strength was nearly exhausted, and that little Tessa was quite unconscious. With frantic desperation, mam'selle clutched at the long hair, and Père Bonneval seized Beppo by the arm, and together they dragged the two children from the very jaws of death.

But where were la mádre and Giovan? Where were Bruno and his young bride? And where were the merry wedding guests? Ask the sullen, moaning sea. It will not answer; it will keep its secret.

At dawn the storm abated, and the satiated sea withdrew from the desolate land. Then Père Bonneval and mam'selle, with the little group that they had saved, knelt down and devoutly thanked the All-merciful for their deliverance from the awful perils of the night. They had invoked his aid in their hour of danger, and to him they owed their salvation.



"Together they dragged the two children from the very jaws of death."

Little Tessa lay sleeping from exhaustion on the floor of the upper room, and Beppo sat beside her, overcome by grief. The last he had seen of Giovan and la mádre, they were trying to reach the overturned boat where he was clinging with Tessa. When the second wave struck them they were washed from their support, and what happened after he could never clearly remember. However, with the instinct of self-preservation, he managed to keep afloat until something swept against him in the darkness. He put out his hand and grasped a garland of flowers. Then Tessa's hair drifted across his face, and he knew that his little friend was alone and helpless on that awful waste of waters. Clasping her with one arm and striking out with the other, he swam toward a ray of light that suddenly appeared out of the obscurity. It was Père Bonneval's lantern, and through it they were saved.

It was nearly midday before the water subsided sufficiently to enable them to descend in safety. Beppo was the first to reach the sodden ground. "I must go and search for the old man," he said anxiously. "Perhaps he is still clinging to the chimney. If he is n't there, I must try to find him."

When the little group of survivors left the upper room of the presbytère to learn the extent of the disaster, Père Bonneval looked at mam'selle with tearful eyes. In the bright sunlight the ruin and desolation were appalling. Scarcely a house, a tree, a boat were visible. All had been swept away by the devastating waves. As they went on wading through water and wet, clinging sand, they looked at each other in agonized questioning. Were there any left to succor? Were all the inhabitants of the happy, prosperous little island swallowed up by the treacherous sea that now lay calm and smooth under the rays of the noonday sun? Here and there in isolated places were the remains of a house, or a wind-swept tree that had withstood the fury of the gale and the cruel strength of the

waves, and had been the only refuge for those who survived that awful night.

As Père Bonneval and mam'selle struggled on through water and wreckage, they found scattered along the shore groups of wretched men, women, and children, bruised and buffeted by the wind, drenched and half naked, and too exhausted to understand the awful extent of the disaster. These were the remnants of families who did not know whether fathers or mothers, husbands or children, were among the saved. Hopeless and forlorn, they gathered around the sites of their former happy homes, and waited in dumb misery for the help they prayed God to send them.

Père Bonneval and mam'selle could only weep with them, comfort and encourage them; for they had nothing to give: they were as destitute as the poorest. Everything in the way of food and clothing had been swept out of the lower rooms of the prestytère through broken windows and doors. There was no food, no water, for the cisterns had been dashed to pieces or washed away, and hunger and thirst stared them in the face.

Beppo and Tessa, hand in hand, wandered along the shore, vainly searching for la mâdre, Giovan, and old Costanzo. The point on which the old man's cottage stood was still covered with water, and nothing marked the site of it save a skeleton tree and Beppo's trapeze dangling from it.

At length, exhausted from their search, the children crouched on the sand and silently watched for a sail. Surely some one would come to their relief before the set of sun! As night drew near and hope was almost extinct, Beppo suddenly sprang to his feet and shouted in a loud, clear voice:

"Yonder is a sail! It is Jean Grima's boat. Jean Grima's boat is coming!" and the cry went from group to group along the desolate shore: "The *Merry Child* is coming — Jean Grima's boat! Jean Grima's boat!"

XXII

WHAT THE SEA LEFT

JEAN GRIMA'S boat, on its way from the city to Isle de Chène, had passed the night in one of the narrow landlocked bayous, where it had not felt the full force of the storm; therefore the *Merry Child* was uninjured, and the kind-hearted owner knew nothing of the terrible disaster at the island. That there had been a gale on the Gulf he well knew from the ground-swell, the long, low, rolling waves, and the wreckage strewn over the surface of the water; but of the fearful extent of the calamity he never dreamed.

As the lugger approached the little island Jean rubbed his eyes in bewilderment. How strange everything appeared! Had Isle de Chène sunk into the sea? Where once was a flourishing little village there now seemed to be but a narrow stretch of desolate sand. All of the old landmarks had disappeared. Where was the church? Where was the landing? Where was the little fleet of boats that always lay drawn up on the sand when the day's labor was over? Alas! all he could distinguish were a few ruins here and there, or a wind-swept skeleton tree stripped of its verdure, piles of wreckage and pools of water, where once had been happy homes and smiling gardens; and not a vestige of green — ruin and desolation everywhere!

Then the awful truth dawned upon Jean Grima: the island had been devastated by the storm; and it was not until he drew near

enough to distinguish the groups of suffering humanity crouched on the sand that he knew of the safety of any of the inhabitants.

Père Bonneval and Beppo were among the first to meet him, and his first tremulous words were: "Where are my wife and babies?"

The priest pointed silently toward the sea, and then turned away. He could not look at him in his misery.

Jean said not a word, nor did a tear dim his eyes. He only closed his lips tightly and clenched his hands as he leaned against the mast for support.

"My poor Jean, my poor friend, there are many to mourn with you," said Père Bonneval, in a voice choked with grief. "Forget your own troubles. You will have time to weep after you have helped these suffering survivors."

Silently the brave fellow choked down his dry sobs and turned resolutely to his work of mercy; but his face was of deadly pallor, and he shook like one with ague.

Even the arrival of the *Merry Child* did not arouse some of the unfortunate from their apathy. Many were suffering from wounds and bruises; others, with broken limbs, lay helpless where the priest and mam'selle had placed them, after ministering to them as far as they were able; and all were exhausted from hunger and thirst.

Fortunately the lugger was loaded with ice for the use of the fishermen, but they did not need it. No nets had been drawn; no boats had arrived with a "catch": so the ice was melted and the water distributed among the famished people, and all that had made a part of the lugger's cargo was appropriated for their use. When everything had been done to render the unfortunates all possible aid, Jean and his mate carried the wounded and helpless on board the *Merry Child*, the sails were set, a favorable breeze filled them, and the boat fairly flew on its way back to the city to carry the sad tidings and to obtain help for the suffering.

Jean Grima and his mate had used every known argument to induce Père Bonneval and mam'selle to take shelter on the lugger; but the good curé refused almost indignantly. "Never, never, Jean! I must stay with my unhappy children. They need me. We have work to do, my sister and I!" he cried, waving them away resolutely. "To-morrow we will have the dead to bury and the living to care for. Go, my friend, and as soon as possible bring us back food, water, and clothing, and we will stay here and do our duty."

When darkness descended over the desolate island, Père Bonneval gathered the remnant of his little flock to the most sheltered points along the shore; and, overcome by weariness and sleeplessness, he and mam'selle lay down on the wet sand with the exhausted survivors, and, calmly commending all to the care of their Creator, they slept the sleep of the just until day dawned on the dreary scene; and near them nestled Tessa, with Beppo beside her. The boy had thrown his arm protectingly around the child, and both smiled in their dreams.

During the night the sullen receding waves left many a victim strewn along the shore, and the few who were not exhausted by the long and terrible struggle for life began to lay them away in their shallow beds, with only the sand for their winding-sheet and the moaning of the sea for their funeral requiem.

At dawn Beppo and Tessa started again on their search. "I must find la mâdre," said the child, pathetically; and Beppo looked at her with eyes full of pity. "Yes, little Tessa; we must find them to-day. They may be in the boat," he said encouragingly, "and they 'll come back now the storm is over. But I 'm afraid we 'll never find Costanzo. The water was so deep, and he could not cling long with only one arm. I tried to save him, but he would n't be saved: he would not stir from the chimney; and when it went it took him with it, for there 's no sign of a chimney now."

As they went along, searching each mound of sand, each pile of wreckage, as far as they were able, Tessa wrung her hands and wept, for the sea had left sad signs of its havoc, and Beppo grew pale and hastened his steps away from some inanimate form half buried in the sand.

They were in the little cove where Giovan and Bruno beached their boats. "Bruno's house stood there," said Beppo, pointing to an upright post that had supported the porch. "Tessa, do you see that branch of myrtle? I nailed it there that morning, and now everything but that is gone"; and the boy swallowed a sob.

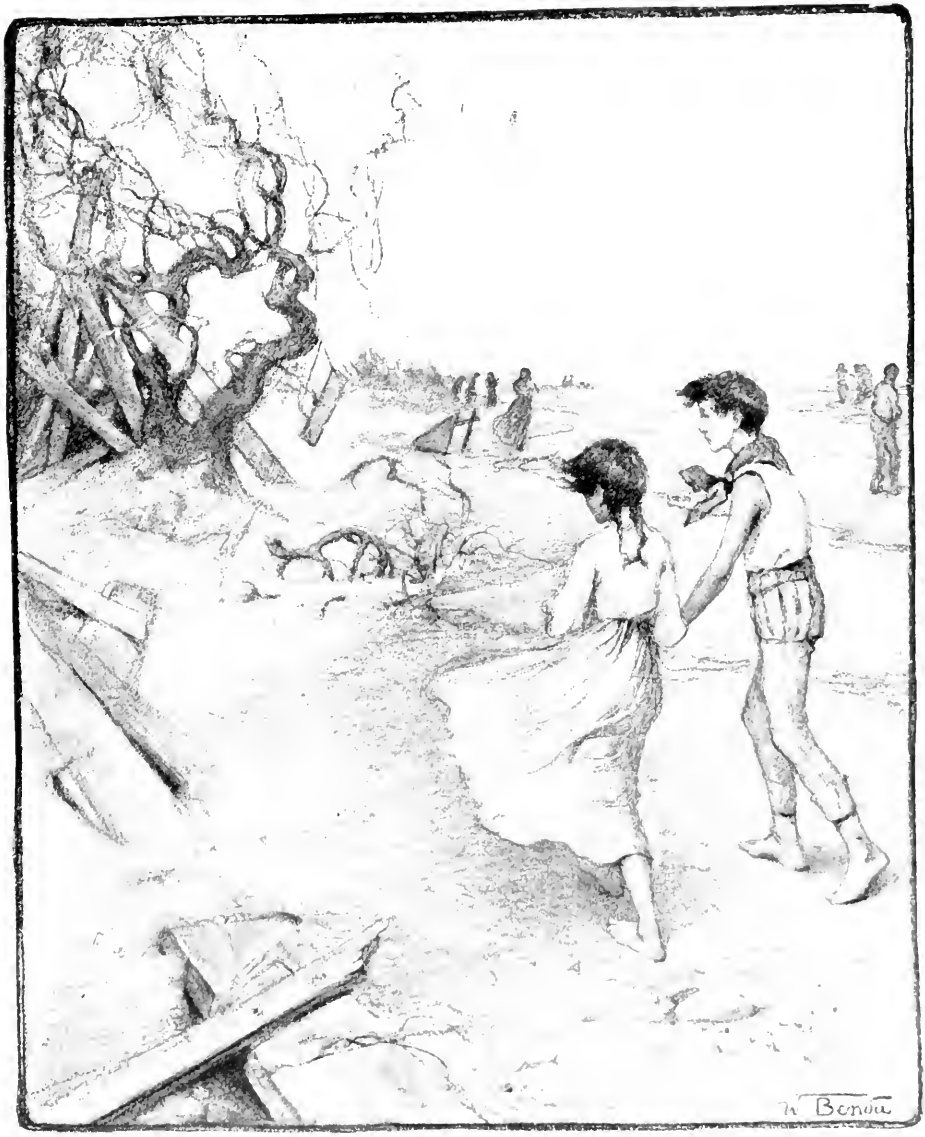
Where la mádre had dried her shrimp on the sunny south side of her cottage was a pile of debris, broken boards, twisted branches, nets, and sodden fragments of bedding and wearing apparel, all matted together in an inextricable mass; and among them, crushed and soiled with sand and ooze, were some of the flowers that had decked the supper-table at the wedding feast.

The desolation and silence were appalling, and Tessa began to cry. "Come away from here, Beppo," she whispered. "It is so still that I 'm afraid. Let us sit on the sand and watch for the barchetta."

For a long time the children sat there and watched for the boat that never came; at length, tired and discouraged, they started again on their search. Something glittered in the sand just where Giovan had launched his boat. Beppo stooped, and picking it up looked at it in astonishment. It was the comb, his gift, that la mádre had worn so proudly in her dark hair. With a passionate cry, he pressed it to his lips, and Tessa, clinging to him, wept bitterly. "Oh, where is mádre mia?" she sobbed.

"Hush, little Tessa; don't cry," he pleaded. "The wind blew the comb away when they were pushing off the boat. They are somewhere on the Gulf. Don't cry and they will come back."

Later in the day Beppo reached the point where Costanzo's cot-



"At dawn Beppo and Tessa started again on their search."

tage once stood. He was alone; for poor little Tessa, overcome by sorrow and weariness, had fallen asleep on the sand. The water had receded, the earth was uncovered, but there was nothing to show where the chimney had stood save a small mound of sodden clay with a few sticks embedded in it. There was no sign of the old man. He had clung desperately to his only support, but the waves had been too strong for him, and, with so many others, he had been swept out on the broad waters of the Gulf.

Beppo had a tender heart, and, in spite of old Costanzo's cruelty to him, he did not like to think that he had perished there helpless and alone. For some time he searched among the debris of the chimney, hoping to find something of value. He had an impression that the old man had concealed some treasure there, for often at night he had made mysterious visits behind the chimney, which the boy, whom he thought sleeping, had noticed and remembered; and the frenzied desperation with which he clung to the spot when the water was rising confirmed Beppo in his suspicion.

Unwilling to give up his search, he found among the wreckage an old stave that had formed part of the cistern, and with that he dug into the clay and ooze until he struck against a hard object. Presently, after working excitedly, he uncovered a box, which with some effort he lifted out of the hole and examined in the light of day. It was covered with mud, wet and battered; but he saw that it was made of heavy wood, bound with wide bands of brass, and fastened securely with a strong lock. It was about a foot square, and quite heavy for Beppo, who was weak from fasting. However, he made an effort to carry it, although he bent beneath its weight.

"The sea has left this," he said to himself. "It is the money the old man has saved. I thought he had it hidden somewhere. I earned it, and now it is mine; and I mean to give it all to Père Bonneval, mam'selle, and Tessa."

With this generous resolution he hurried to find the curé, who, with mam'selle, had just returned to the ruins of the presbytère, which they were trying to make habitable.

"See what the waves left me, mon père"; and he pointed to the box. "And this, too!" he cried in a broken voice, as he drew the precious comb from the bosom of his tattered blouse. "La mâdre wore it at the wedding. We found it in the sand"; and he repeated Tessa's desolate cry: "Oh, where is la mâdre?"

"Gone, gone, with the others," replied the priest, solemnly. "But, wherever she is, God has her in his care, for a purer, nobler soul never lived"; and as he spoke he wiped his tearful eyes, while Beppo sobbed audibly.

"And this, my child—where did you get this?" asked Père Bonneval, looking at the box with much curiosity.

Beppo wiped his eyes on his ragged sleeve, and struggled to compose himself. "This was Costanzo's," he said. "I found it buried under the chimney. I thought he had something hidden there, and I dug until I reached it."

In an instant Père Bonneval's face brightened, and he spoke with some excitement: "How fortunate that the waves left it! It doubtless contains the old man's secret. My child, it may be of the greatest value to you."

"I am sure it is full of money"; and Beppo's face beamed with expectation. "And if the old man never comes back, it 's mine, because I made it giving exhibitions; and it 's all for you, mam'selle, and Tessa."

"Good, generous boy!" said the priest, laying his hand tenderly on Beppo's tangled hair; "but you can't give it away until we know what the box contains. And we can't open it at present. I will put it in a safe place in the upper room, and when the time comes we will find out what the sea has left you."

XXIII

THE SECRET OF THE BOX

IT was Silvain who told Uncle Anatole the sad news of the disaster at Isle de Chène. He had happened to be on the levee when the *Merry Child* arrived with the injured survivors, and the excitement there had been intense. As soon as Jean Grima stepped on the landing he was surrounded by a crowd of people who had relatives and friends on the ill-fated island, and to their eager questions he replied grimly, with an assumed air of indifference: "I don't know who was lost or who was saved. I only know that I am the last one left of my family. Wife, children, father, mother, brothers, and sisters, seven in all, and not one left."

Before the news of the calamity had spread over the city, relief parties were being formed, steamers and tugs being chartered and loaded with everything necessary for the comfort of the survivors.

Uncle Anatole turned very pale while he listened to Silvain's hurried account of the disaster. He was visibly excited and anxious, for he paced the floor restlessly while he debated with himself. Then he said, in a tone that could not be mistaken: "I *must* go on the first relief boat. I must go and look after that child. Silvain, will you find out when the first steamer leaves?"

"Yes, uncle; I will inquire at once, and let you know."

As Silvain hurried away, Madam Aubert followed him to the door. She was pale and agitated. "Silvain, dear boy, go with the

colonel. He has not seemed strong lately, and it will be a rough trip for him."

"Why, certainly, Aunt Josephe. I wanted to offer, but I was afraid I might be in the way. I will go and tell mama, and at the same time I will get some of my outgrown clothes for Thistledown. They say they have no clothes nor food, and are perishing for water."

Mignon was listening, her eyes full of pity. "Can't I send some of my clothes to little Tessa?" she asked.

"Yes, my dear. I shall see what I can find while Silvain is gone."

Madam Aubert and Mignon employed the short time to such good purpose that, when Silvain returned, they had bundles of clothing and baskets of food enough for the immediate needs of many of the destitute survivors.

Silvain was glowing with enthusiasm. "It makes me happy," he exclaimed, "to see such kindness and generosity. Why, there are steamers and tugs being loaded with supplies enough to furnish a small army. There will be no hungry people on Isle de Chène to-morrow. And mama has sent so much to the curé and his sister, and no end of children's clothes. Why, she even made Milly pack up the dinner she had ready to serve, so that they should have cooked food at once. Now, Uncle Anatole, we must hurry to the levee. The steamer that is loaded first will leave first, and all are trying to get the lead. We must be there to step on board the moment they have the last box and barrel on the deck."

"And be sure and bring Beppo back with you!" cried Mignon, clinging to Uncle Anatole and kissing him fervently.

When the colonel and Silvain drove off in a cab they were scarcely visible behind the boxes, bundles, and baskets that Helios piled in beside them.

Mignon looked after them anxiously, her little heart full of misgiving. "Oh, Tantine," she cried with sudden tears, "suppose Uncle Anatole and Silvain never find Thistledown! Suppose he is drowned and carried out to sea!"

"Don't cry, darling," said Madam Aubert, soothingly. "I feel sure that Beppo is safe. I know he can swim like a fish, and from long practice he has great endurance and courage. Take heart, my Mignon; we shall know soon. In the meantime let us hope for the best"; and Madam Aubert sat down to her work-table, calm and confident, though saddened and oppressed by the evil tidings.

It was Wednesday morning when the first relief steamer reached the island. The wretched survivors, famished and exhausted, had thrown themselves on the bare sand to await the rescue they hardly dared hoped for, or the death, from hunger and thirst, that now stared them in the face.

Père Bonneval and mam'selle, although nearly spent with weariness, went like ministering angels from one group to another with encouraging, hopeful words; they implored them to be patient, and commended them to the Father of all, and the Lady of good help. And when at early dawn the first relief boat appeared on the horizon they gave expression to their joy and gratitude in tears, and songs of thanksgiving.

The colonel and Silvain were among the first to land, and Beppo recognized them at once. The boy was a pitiful object to behold: dirty and tattered, his lips black and parched from thirst, for he had shared his small portion of melted ice with Tessa, and his eyes wild with hunger.

As Uncle Anatole approached, Beppo tottered forward to meet him; but his strength failed, and, sinking on his knees, he held out his hands entreatingly.

At the first glance the colonel could not believe that the forlorn

little figure was once the gay and gracious Thistledown; but when he looked into the boy's eyes he saw the resemblance that he had seen before, and, overcome by emotion, he took him in his arms, saying in broken but fervent tones: "Thank God that you are safe, my child—my poor suffering child!"

In a few moments they were joined by Père Bonneval, mam'selle, and Tessa, and it was only the work of a few moments for Silvain to bring the baskets of food from the boat, and mam'selle and the children, sitting on the sand, were fed first. Père Bonneval only waited to take a draught of Myra's delicious coffee and to eat a sandwich that Silvain urged upon him, then with the relief party he went among the famished people, distributing food and water until their hunger and thirst were satisfied.

It was a time for thanksgiving when the relief steamer was unloaded. There was everything for their immediate needs: an abundance of food, water, and clothes, tents to shelter them, and lumber to repair what few houses were standing.

The first one to be made habitable was the presbytère. Strong, willing hands soon cleared the rooms of the wreckage and sand that filled them, and made such repairs as were necessary, so that the good priest and his sister could return to its shelter.

Uncle Anatole and Silvain took Beppo to their room on the relief steamer, and dressed him in a suit that Silvain had outgrown, while Madam Aubert's bundle contained everything in the way of clothing that mam'selle and Tessa needed.

In a very few hours the most pressing needs of the unhappy survivors were relieved, and hope took the place of despair in their sad hearts, for there were many who believed that their beloved ones had escaped the fury of the storm either in boats or on rafts, and that they would be found and restored to them again. Mercifully this expectation softened the full force of the blow, and they took

courage, and one by one began to reconstruct a new home on the ruins of the old.

As soon as the colonel could get a few moments' conversation with Père Bonneval, he inquired about Costanzo.

"There is no doubt whatever that the unfortunate old man perished," said the priest, decidedly. "He evidently lost his life in the beginning of the storm, while trying to save a box that was hidden under his chimney."

"And the box?" asked the colonel, anxiously.

"Beppo found it, and brought it to me."

"Do you know what it contains?"

"No; I have not opened it. I wished to consult with you before I did so." And Père Bonneval added: "I have a strong impression that you may discover the old man's secret concealed there."

Later in the day the priest and Uncle Anatole went quite secretly to the upper room, and, with the aid of a strong hammer, they wrenched the lock off the box and opened it. At the first glance it seemed to contain nothing but money — small bags of coin of all denominations, and rolls of bank-notes, the pitiful hoarding of years.

Uncle Anatole smiled sadly. "It is not a great amount, but it will help to educate the boy. However, let us see if there is anything besides money."

After he had removed the little bags and the rolls of notes, examining each carefully, he found at the very bottom of the box, under some worthless trumpery, a package of soiled, stained papers fastened together with a coarse twine, which he untied with trembling fingers; and the curé saw him turn pale, for he recognized the writing. "My brother's," he said in a choked voice, glancing over a letter — "legal papers, deeds, contracts." And as he unfolded them he uttered exclamations of surprise.

When he had looked them all over, while Père Bonneval sat

silently watching him, he said in a bewildered voice: "How could old Costanzo have got possession of these? They may be of great value to me. They relate to an extensive property which was contested after my brother's death, and I was unable to prove my claim because these very papers were missing. How mysterious are the ways of Providence, that after all these years they should have fallen into my hands!"

"And is it not another proof in favor of Beppo?" asked the curé, with intense interest. "They show that the old man must have been in this vicinity, and doubtless saved them from the wreckage after the Last Island disaster."

"Ah! What is this?" exclaimed the colonel, excitedly, as he turned a sheet of foolscap. On it was scrawled in Italian, in coarse, illiterate characters, what appeared to be a series of answers to certain questions, and read as follows:

Costanzo wrote this.

No; Beppo's father was not my son.

I don't know who he was; there was no name on him.

The black nurse was washed ashore at Grand Terre; the baby was alive in her arms.

It was the morning after the destruction of Last Island.

I took the ear-rings from the nurse's ears and put them in mine.

I buried her on the shore.

I took the child and came to Isle de Chène.

I was good to him, and gave him plenty to eat.

I won't give up Beppo while he can make money for me.

This is all I will say.

XXIV

"I WILL COME BACK"

WHEN the colonel had read the paper found in Costanzo's box he silently handed it to Père Bonneval. The good curé read it and re-read it, folded and unfolded it, and looked it over carefully, as though he hoped to find something that would explain the singular document.

At length he said in a puzzled voice: "What a curious confession! It must have been made to his own conscience; he must have questioned himself, and then answered his own questions."

"It is more than I expected," returned the colonel, with a nervous smile. "I don't know what a court of law would make of it, but to me it is conclusive. I am fully confirmed in my belief that Beppo's father was my nephew. Finding the ear-rings in the old man's possession was a strong proof, but there was just a loophole for a doubt; but now that he has confessed to having found poor Virgie with the child in her arms, everything is settled clearly in my mind. Virgie could have had no other than René's child in her arms."

"It is a wonderful chain of circumstances. Let us thank God that he has made the truth known to us," said Père Bonneval, devoutly.

After that there was a long conference in which mam'selle and Silvain were included. Mam'selle was delighted to know that her clever little protégé would be provided for, educated, and brought up in a proper manner. And Silvain, to whom the whole story

was a revelation, at once espoused Beppo's cause, and then and there determined to befriend him, and to assist Uncle Anatole in establishing him as one of the family.

When Beppo was told of the contents of the box, and Costanzo's curious confession was explained to him, he did not seem greatly surprised nor at all elated at his changed circumstances. And when the colonel told him that he intended to take him home with him, he said very decidedly: "Yes, I will go; but I will come back. Mon père, mam'selle, and Tessa will be here, and I shall come back to see them."

"Certainly, my child, you shall come back," replied the colonel, indulgently. "I should not wish you to neglect the friends who have been so kind to you."

"I 'll do everything you wish," he continued with charming docility; "but when I am rich I must come back to Isle de Chène and build new houses and buy new boats for the poor people; and I must take care of Tessa, now la mâdre is gone."

"My Beppo, you need not be anxious about Tessa. She will live with us"; and mam'selle's eyes filled with tears. "Mon frère and I will take care of her; she will be our child. Is it not so, mon frère?" and she looked at her brother for approval.

"Yes, yes; little Tessa will be our child and Beppo's sister. God tempered the wind to the gentle lamb, and for his own wise purposes enabled Beppo to save her, and with his divine aid we will try to make her as noble and lovely as her mother was."

While Père Bonneval was speaking Beppo stood apart in deep thought. There was silence for a few moments, then the boy went rather timidly to Uncle Anatole and asked in a low voice: "Was there much money in Costanzo's box?"

The old gentleman smiled, and said pleasantly: "My dear boy, everything in this world goes by comparison. Old Costanzo, no

doubt, thought it a great deal; others would think it very little. We have not counted it; but, as far as I can judge from glancing over it, I should say there were only a few hundred dollars."

Beppo opened his eyes wide in amazement. It seemed a great deal to him. He did not understand the colonel's nice distinction, and he thought it enough to restore the ruined island to its former condition. The thought of what he might do for the place and people he loved filled his generous heart with happiness.

"Is it mine?" he asked with a beaming face.

Uncle Anatole nodded an affirmative.

"Then may I give it to mon père for these poor people? I want to give it all, every dollar, to build the church and the houses, and to buy boats."

The colonel thought of his own narrow means, and hesitated.

"Oh, uncle, please let him give it away! We don't want the old man's money," said Silvain, with a sudden impulse of pride.

"It was n't his," returned Beppo, stoutly. "I made it doing tricks ever since I can remember; and I want to give this away because I can make lots more."

The colonel looked at Père Bonneval with a significant glance, and said cheerfully: "My child, you are right. I like your spirit of generosity. I will take the papers; they may be of great value. But you may do as you please with the money."

Beppo, with a beaming face, lifted the battered old box that had come from no one knew where, and put it in the curé's hands. "Take it, mon père, to build a new church and to give to the poor people, and by and by I will come back with lots more for mam'selle and Tessa."

"My Beppo, I dare not refuse your gift," said Père Bonneval, gratefully. "It is for the church and the poor. May God's blessing ever rest on you, the giver, as well as on the gift."

When Tessa was told that Beppo was going away on the relief boat with the colonel and Silvain, she wept bitterly and refused to be comforted until mam'selle took her in her arms and wiped her tear-wet face as tenderly as la mâdre would have done, and promised that she should see her little friend again soon. Then she stifled her sobs and tried to smile. Her pretty little face was very pathetic. She was pale and thin from her terrible suffering and grief at the continued absence of her parents; for, poor child, she still thought they had drifted out to sea in their boat, and that some day they would drift back to her and their island home.

Before Beppo went away mam'selle had a serious talk with him alone, and she was surprised, and pleased as well, to find how loyal the boy was to his friends and home.

"I will go with monsieur and Silvain, because monsieur is my uncle and Silvain is my cousin. I don't know how it can be, but I know Costanzo was n't my grandfather. Old Dominique told me so before he died. But that makes no difference. The island is my home, and Tessa is my sister, and mon père and you, dear mam'selle, are the best friends I have, now la mâdre is gone, so I shall be sure to come back."

"But, my Beppo, you will begin a new life with your relatives. Think seriously of it. You must be educated and prepared to take a different position when you are a man. You can't be an acrobat nor a jockey."

"Oh, but I must be a jockey," interrupted Beppo, decidedly. "I like it, and I don't mean to give it up. I have n't forgotten what the trainer told me. I want to be rich and famous."

"Listen, my child. I beg of you to listen to me," said mam'selle, in an imploring tone. "You must give up *your* plans for the future. You must obey your uncle, and learn to please your new friends

and relatives. I know you mean to do as they wish. In that way you will make us all happy."

Beppo was silent for a moment; then he looked straight at mam'selle, with his beautiful, honest eyes full of resolution. "I want to do right, and make you all happy; but I *can't* promise not to be a jockey."

Mam'selle sighed and looked discouraged. She felt that this vein of stubbornness would be a stumbling-block in the way of his future success; but she replied gently: "Well, my Beppo, don't promise if you think you can't do as I wish — as we all wish. I can only hope that the change in your life and your new associations will cause you to dislike what you now like, and that you will grow up to be a good, useful man. Try to be obedient and studious, and we shall see later that you will like your books better than the races, and will prefer to be a scholar rather than a jockey."

Beppo shook his head doubtfully. "It does n't matter what I shall be, if only mon père, you, and Tessa love me always."

"That we shall, my Beppo," returned mam'selle, heartily. "And if you find that your new life is *impossible*, and you are very, very unhappy, come to us and we will do all we can for you."

On the third evening the relief boat went back to the city, leaving the storm-stricken island and the few survivors in a more prosperous condition. Everything possible had been done for their comfort, and other boats were constantly arriving with new supplies, for help flowed to them from every quarter.

Beppo stood on the deck of the steamer, between the colonel and Silvain, watching the little group on the shore with tearful eyes. Père Bonneval, mam'selle, and Tessa looked after him lovingly, and waved their farewells as long as they could discern his slender figure in the gathering twilight.

It was a sad parting, but Beppo's last words, reiterated over and

over, "I will come back," comforted them greatly, and made little Tessa smile through her tears.

Later that evening, when mam'selle entered the study of the presbytère, she saw a sparkling object lying at the feet of the Virgin on the little shrine that the storm had spared. When she looked at it her overburdened heart gave a great throb of sorrow and regret. It was la mádre's comb, Beppo's gift, cleansed from sand and ooze, and as bright and beautiful as when she had worn it in her lovely hair at the wedding festival.

XXV

BEPPO'S NEW HOME

MADAM AUBERT and Mignon were very busy putting the finishing touches to a small room that was being prepared for Beppo, for they were quite confident that he would return with the colonel and Silvain. The little white bed was neatly arranged, a fresh muslin curtain hung at the window over which a rose-bush climbed, a table covered with a white cloth held a few illustrated books, and a glass vase of violets filled the room with perfume.

Mignon stood at the door and looked it over approvingly. "It 's very pretty, Tantine; I 'm sure Beppo will like it."

"I hope he will be able to appreciate it," said Madam Aubert, a little doubtfully. "We must remember that he is a child of nature and unaccustomed to the refinements of life; for that reason I wish everything to be correct from the first, so that he will understand that there *is* a difference between his old life and his new."

"Why, do you think he did n't have a pretty room at Isle de Chène, Tantine?" asked Mignon, with some curiosity.

"I am afraid not, my dear. The poor child has been sadly neglected, and no doubt he will shock us at first; but, my Mignon, we must be very gentle and patient with him, and we must try to spare Uncle Anatole every annoyance."

"I 'll be good to him, Tantine. I 'll teach him everything I know. I 'll teach him to engrave music, and I won't laugh at him nor tease him when he makes mistakes."

"Thank you, dear; that 's very sweet of you," said Madam Aubert, approvingly. "No doubt at first the routine of a properly conducted household will be irksome to him, so we must be prepared to overlook little faults, to be indulgent and very considerate until he is accustomed to the change."

Mignon looked at her grandmother with loving, appreciative eyes. "Dear Tantine, how sweet you are! You are so good yourself that you make us all better when we are with you. Sometimes I feel very naughty. Myra and Luna provoke me and I get into a terrible temper; but when you look at me *so*," and Mignon turned her lovely eyes on her grandmother with a gently searching expression, "my heart melts, and all my anger goes away, and I want to be good. I want to do all I can to please you, dearest, and that will be the way with Beppo. Just *look* at him, Tantine, as you do at me, and he will be good at once."

Madam Aubert smiled and kissed the bright face. "I understand you perfectly, my darling. If gentleness and kindness can win the boy, if he can be governed by a *look*, it will not be difficult to manage him. And it is you and I who must teach him to be refined and well-bred, so that Uncle Anatole will not be annoyed by his mistakes."

Later in the day, when the colonel and Silvain appeared with Beppo, Madam Aubert and Mignon were delighted; but at the same time they were surprised and shocked at the change a few months had wrought. He was not Thistledown, the little acrobat in his mountebank dress of scarlet and tarnished gilt, but a pale, thin boy, with great dark-rimmed, wistful eyes looking out from a sad, troubled face, and dressed simply and correctly in one of Silvain's plain suits.

At the first glance Mignon did not like the change. He did not seem the same merry, gracious child who had charmed her with his

careless, winning ways. But Madam Aubert was greatly gratified by his correct appearance. Now he seemed to belong to their world, to be one of them, and his resemblance to Silvain was really startling.

For a while Mignon was a little shy and distant. The new cousin seemed a stranger who had suddenly appeared upon the scene. However, she was prepared to do her duty. After Silvain left them, and while Madam Aubert and Uncle Anatole were holding a private conversation, she conducted Beppo to his room, and pointed out all its comforts and beauties.

"You can look out on the court," she said gaily, "and see the flowers and birds, and Uncle Anatole, and all of us, when we pass back and forth; and you won't feel alone and lonesome when you are here."

For some reason Mignon was disappointed. Beppo seemed very indifferent. He scarcely noticed the books and flowers, and only said in a half-hearted tone: "It 's pleasant and nice. I never had a room before. I always slept with Costanzo. And I never stay indoors. I don't like it. I shall be out all day somewhere."

Mignon looked surprised, but she said lightly: "Oh, you 'll have to study your lessons. I have to just so long every day. I have to go to *my* room and lock the door, so that Luna can't come in, and then I put my nose in the book until the time is up, and when Uncle Anatole is ready I go to him to recite. I take a piano lesson twice a week, and I practise two hours a day. I suppose, if you want to be educated, you 'll have to do the same."

"Then I don't want to be educated," said Beppo, decidedly.

"Can you read and write?" asked Mignon, somewhat shocked at the boy's avowal.

"Yes; I can read French and Italian pretty well, and I can write better than Tessa, and I 've got as far as subtraction in figures.

I 've studied geography some, and I know the catechism and the creed," returned Beppo, proudly.

"Why, you know more than I!" said Mignon, with generous appreciation. "Who taught you all these things?"

"Père Bonneval and mam'selle. When Costanzo would let me off, Tessa and I studied under the oak when it was fine, and when it rained we got under the porch. I don't like to stay shut up in the house"; and Beppo looked around restlessly.

"Well, if you don't like it, you need n't. I 'll ask Tantine to let us study in the court, or on the gallery where the roses are. And won't you like to study with me as well as with Tessa?" she asked a little jealously.

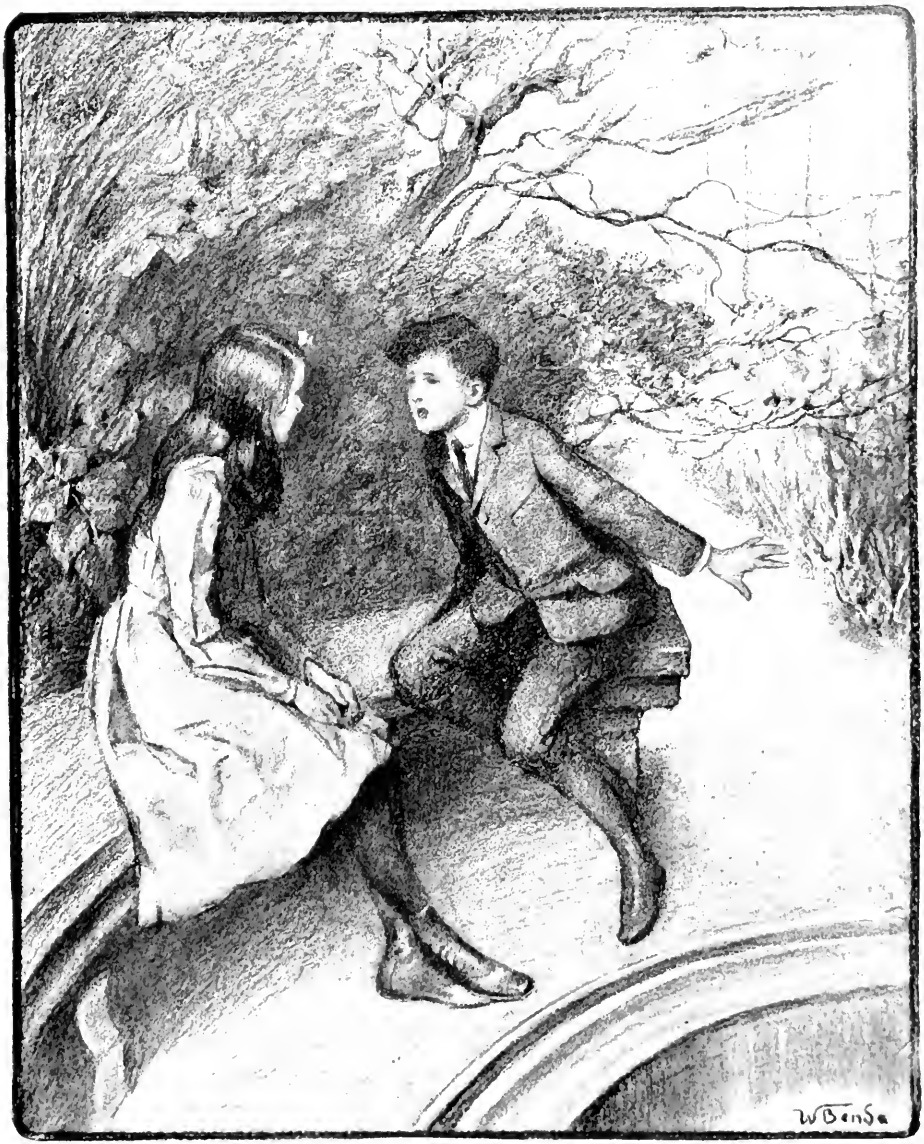
Beppo looked at her sadly and did not reply.

Then Mignon's voice was slightly impatient when she said: "I 'm afraid you 'll be homesick here; but you must try to get used to it for dear Uncle Anatole's sake. Now let 's go down to the court, and I 'll ask Myra if lunch is ready. Are n't you hungry?"

"No; not now," he replied carelessly. "I was hungry after the storm, and so was every one; but when the relief boat came I got plenty to eat, and I have n't been hungry since."

"Won't you tell me all about the storm?" asked Mignon, with sudden interest. "Let us sit on the bench by the fountain while you tell me what happened."

Beppo readily agreed to this request, for his thoughts were centered on the unfortunate island and the terrible scenes through which he had passed. And while Mignon listened with awe-stricken face to the boy's graphic description of the disaster, the colonel and Madam Aubert were talking earnestly in low, serious tones. He had told her of the certainty of Costanzo's death, and of the discovery of the box containing the old man's curious confession and the missing papers, to all of which Madam Aubert listened with breathless attention.



"Mignon listened with awe-stricken face."

"And you are entirely satisfied as to Beppo's parentage?" she asked when he paused.

"Entirely, Josephe. *I* have no doubts. But still I shall have his identity established by the courts, and his father's name legally conferred upon him. This will come later; but now we have a serious problem to confront. At this present moment what is best?" asked Uncle Anatole, gravely.

"Ah, that is a question difficult to answer. We must let time and circumstances work out the solution," replied Madam Aubert, with an encouraging smile.

"A transplanted flower, unless it is carefully tended, is likely to die," continued the colonel, in a perplexed voice. "The boy is very frail and extremely sensitive. We must move slowly and cautiously in our efforts at reconstruction."

"I agree with you, my friend. I have thought it all out," returned Madam Aubert, earnestly. "At first we must not confine him too closely. We must give him a certain liberty of action. In a way he has been wild and free all of his life, and the restraints and routine of our home may be irksome."

"Yes; it may be wise to allow him to follow his own inclinations for the present, and not to exact much in the way of study."

"We think exactly alike, my friend," said Madam Aubert, with an approving smile. "But will you allow me to introduce Beppo to his new life? Will you disembarrass yourself of all anxiety until I teach him to love us and to be happy in his new home? You can trust me to be judicious in my management of him, can you not?"

"Certainly, Josephe; certainly. Of all things, I should like to leave him to you!" exclaimed the colonel, fervently. "You are so patient, so tender, so receptive; he will understand you, while I should be an enigma to him."

"Very well, my friend. I will do my best; and, if I fail, you can try for better success."

It was delightful to see how easily Madam Aubert smoothed away all difficulties. None of the servants recognized Thistledown in the strange boy. The worn, sad face and languid figure, dressed like others of his age, bore no resemblance to the little acrobat.

Madam Aubert briefly explained that Beppo was an orphan nephew of the colonel, who had come to live with them; and Mignon was instructed to keep a still tongue in a wise little head, and not to gossip with Luna and Myra.

At the lunch-table Beppo was sad and silent, and ate very little. Mignon went to the piano to practise her exercises, and Madam Aubert took the boy to the work-room, and tried to amuse him by showing him the different tools and allowing him to try to use them as she was doing. For some time this interested him; then Uncle Anatole came to take him to the tailor, the shoemaker, and the hatter, where he was supplied with everything suitable for his position. But the colonel was somewhat disconcerted as well as amused when the boy timidly requested him to buy a suit of exhibition clothes, so that he could perform in the streets as he used to do.

Toward evening Silvain came, and he, with Mignon and Beppo, went to walk in Jackson Square. There the boy was entirely at home. Times without number he had performed his sleight-of-hand tricks under the exacting eye of old Costanzo, surrounded by a gaping crowd.

Something of the old spirit took possession of him, and he became very animated and talkative. "By and by," he said excitedly, "when I get my clothes, I 'll come here and give an exhibition, and you 'll see what a crowd 'll gather around me."

Silvain said nothing, but the thought of a Chapelle making a mountebank of himself in a public square made his face flush and a dampness gather on his forehead.

XXVI

THISTLEDOWN APPEARS

THE morning after the return of the relief boat Mère Picheloup was sitting behind her desk, deeply interested in reading in her journal of the disaster at Isle de Chène. The paper was full of it, and she devoured all the details with avidity. She had learned from Jean Grima's mate of the loss of old Costanzo and the almost miraculous escape of Thistledown. Her interest in the boy was really very great, and she found herself wondering what would become of him now that the old man was gone. "I wish he would come to me," she said to Jean Grima's mate. "I 'll take care of him and make a man of him. I 've no one in the world but Prince"; and she looked tenderly at the gray cat. "And I 'd treat him like my own child if I had one."

"I 'll tell the kid what you say when I go back," replied the mate; "but that boy can take care of himself, and make money besides."

"I know; I know. But I don't want him to make money. I 'd let him rest and get strong. He should give up all those tiresome tricks, and by and by he might succeed me in this business."

"Did you ever see a white blackbird, Mère Picheloup?" asked the mate, with a grin. "Thistledown can't change his nature. He 's been up to the stars, and you can't tie him down to the ground. He 'll always want to fly, and clipping his wings won't do any good. But I 'll tell him what you say, and if he wants to come we 'll bring him next time."

"That 's right," said Mère Picheloup, heartily. "Then I shall be looking for him in a few days."

And now, while she read of the ruin and loss on the ill-fated island, she felt more sure than ever that Beppo would be glad to get away from such depressing scenes. "Thistledown won't want to stay there now," she was saying to herself, when the door flew open, and a slender, well-dressed boy rushed toward her with exclamations of delight.

Mère Picheloup's face was a study of mingled surprise and admiration. At first she took him to her heart and gave him a vigorous hug; then she held him at arm's length and scrutinized him closely. "*Bien, bien!* what little gentleman is this? What fine clothes! What a change! But it *is* Thistledown, is n't it?" Then she hugged him again, and fell to weeping over him. "Why, to think that you are safe and sound and here with me, when I thought you were among those unhappy people on the island! Now tell me all about it, and tell me how you got here, my Beppo."

Thistledown glanced around uneasily; then he said, with some diffidence: "Do you mind if I take off my jacket and shoes before I begin to tell you? You see, I 'm not used to wearing shoes all the time. They hurt me, and the jacket 's tight."

"Why, bless your heart, no, my dear child. Of course I don't mind. Make yourself comfortable"; and in a trice Mère Picheloup divested him of the objectionable garments.

Then Beppo took the cat in his arms, and, nestling cozily against the old woman, he told her of the wonderful things that had happened to him, while she interrupted him from time to time with exclamations of surprise and delight.

"*Vraiment, vraiment!* Oh, I knew it would all come out sometime! I knew that old man was no kin to you—the old, miserable—But now he is gone, God rest his soul, and we will say nothing evil

of him. And your uncle — is he a fine, tall man, straight like a soldier?"

"He *is* a soldier; he is a colonel," interrupted Beppo, proudly.

"Ah, now I know; he is the very monsieur who has been here so often to ask about you."

"Tall and straight, with white hair, his coat buttoned up to his chin, and with a cane and gloves?" inquired Beppo, eagerly.

"The same, the very same. Ah, what a lucky boy to have such a fine gentleman for an uncle! And he went to the island and brought you back with him? Now that the old man is out of the way, you 'll live with him always. Is it not so?"

"I don't know," said Beppo, doubtfully. "I suppose I shall live with him sometimes, for Cousin Mignon says I 've got to be educated. You know what that is, don't you? All about books, and music, and pictures, and such things. But I shall go back to the island, and I shall go to the races when the season opens."

"*Mais, mon enfant*, you can't be Thistledown now. You 'll have to give up your performances and all that. Fine people don't like that sort of thing. They think it 's common and vulgar."

"I can't help it; I can't give it up," said Beppo, decidedly. "I want to begin right away, to get some money for mam'selle and little Tessa. They lost everything, and they are very poor, and I *must* take care of Tessa, now la mádre is gone."

Mère Picheloup wiped her eyes furtively. "True, true, poor things. Yes, I see; yes, you must help them, and I 'll do all *I* can."

"But I have n't any exhibition clothes. I can't do my tricks in these tight things, and no one 'll notice me or stop on the street if I 'm dressed like every other boy"; and Beppo looked anxiously at Mère Picheloup.

"There I can help you, *mon cher*. The old man left things here

from time to time, and when you want to give an exhibition come to me and I can fit you out."

The boy's eyes sparkled. "Oh, can you? How glad I am! Well, I 'll come here soon, some evening when there are plenty of people, and do my tricks."

"That 's right. Thistledown 'll always be welcome here. I 'll get a good crowd together, so there 'll be plenty of money"; and Mère Picheloup smiled benevolently.

"Thank you, thank you," he cried gratefully. "Now I must go to my uncle"; and he scrambled hastily into his discarded jacket and shoes, and with another vigorous hug he darted away, looking back and smiling as he went.

When he was out of sight Mère Picheloup's face suddenly changed; she became very grave and thoughtful, and muttered to herself: "Poor Thistledown, poor boy! I ought to be glad that he 's had such good luck, but I 'm afraid he won't be happy. I hope his fine relations won't be too hard on him just at first. If that monsieur who came here is his uncle, I am sure he has a good heart; but he 's proud, awful proud, and he won't allow his nephew to come to Le Chat Gris to do tricks and pick up money."

Although Madam Aubert did not like to acknowledge it to herself, and for worlds would not hint such a thing to Uncle Anatole, she was beginning to feel that Beppo's presence in the house sadly interfered with the routine of her life. The boy was gentle and docile, very affectionate, and responsive to their kindness; but he was ill at ease, restless, and uncertain—at times dull and depressed, or again excited and feverishly gay. The restraints of a higher civilization were irksome to him, and he took no pains to conceal it.

Madam Aubert was very considerate, and even indulgent, trying with the greatest patience to interest him in his studies and in his surroundings; but he did not like to remain long in one place,

nor to be alone and quiet; he craved excitement and constant action. When he was in a crowd or on the street, he brightened visibly and became interested in the movement and life around him. He loved to go on the levees among the ships and sailors, and was always seeking news from Isle de Chène or waiting for Jean Grima's boat.

Silvain was Madam Aubert's only confidant. To him she spoke freely of her present disappointments and future fears.

"My dear Silvain, what can I do with the boy?" she would ask, almost despairingly. "He can't adapt himself to our way of living. He 's not fond of study; he learns easily and rapidly, it is true, but not thoroughly. When he is within there is no peace, and Mignon is as restless as he is; all rules and routines are set aside, and together they fly from one thing to another without system or application. And all my domestic affairs are interfered with by his mischievous tricks. Think of that"; and Madam Aubert smiled ruefully. "He has made friends with Myra and Luna, and the kitchen is his favorite resort. The only one who is not completely under his influence is Helios, and I think he is afraid of Beppo, for one day he surprised me by saying in a tone of strong disapproval: "I wish Mars' Beppo 'd keep away from my ma. I 's afraid he 'll conjur' her, 'cause sometimes he acts jes like dat little Mars' Satan what danced on der kitchen table." You see, Helios is not so stupid, after all, and I don't wish the servants to know that Beppo and Thistledown are the same."

"Poor little chap," Silvain would say, laughing good-naturedly. "He can't change all at once. Aunt Josephe, let 's give him a chance, and I 'll help you when I can."

And Silvain was as good as his word, for most of his spare time was spent in trying to amuse and interest the boy. One day he took him to visit his mother, and Madam Chapelle was fascinated

with his beauty and winsome ways, while little Aimée showed her pleasure in her sweet face and beaming eyes.

There were times when Beppo would appear to be deeply interested in his studies, and Madam Aubert would leave him for a while, only to return to find that he had disappeared without asking permission or leaving any word as to where he was going. Then she would be very anxious and miserable, for in a way she felt responsible to Uncle Anatole for the boy's safety. And her fears were not groundless, for often his adventures were not without an element of danger. Could she have followed him, perhaps she would have found him in some disreputable resort, surrounded by a rude, quarrelsome crowd, performing his amusing tricks with all of his former coolness and dexterity, while some little street-gamin gathered nickels in his dirty cap for the benefit of the little *farceur*. Or it might be that he was on the deck of a lugger, entertaining the rough fishermen and eagerly gathering up the small coin bestowed upon him.

When he returned, Madam Aubert always knew from his excited air and conscious face that he had been doing something of which she could not approve. However, she never questioned him, for she knew that he would tell her the truth, and she did not wish to place any severe restraint upon his liberty.

One evening at dinner he seemed unusually excited and restless, and Uncle Anatole watched him furtively. Scarcely had he left the table when he disappeared, and Mignon began to wonder where he had gone. After some time, as he did not return, the colonel took his hat and went out. "I think I will find him at Le Chat Gris," he thought as he closed the door softly. "I hope Josephe won't miss me. I don't want her to know that I am anxious about the boy." When he reached Tréme Street he crossed to the opposite side and stood in the shadow of a doorway, quietly observing the

unusual activity at The Gray Cat. The lights shone brightly through the open windows. The room seemed crowded with guests who were eating, drinking, and smoking, while Mère Picheloup sat behind her desk, smiling with satisfaction.

Presently a large table in the center of the room was cleared, a rear door was thrown open, and Thistledown appeared with all his old *éclat*, and the colonel was surprised to see that he wore his mountebank dress and looked just as he did the first time he saw him.

When the little acrobat vaulted on to the table with his hoops and balls, and began his exhibition with energy and good-will, the audience applauded loudly, and the passers paused to look through the windows, curious to know what was going on in the center of the noisy crowd. The colonel lingered, fascinated, watching every dexterous movement, every smile of satisfaction, every glance of his sparkling eyes, as, full of life and animation, the boy went through his performance with great skill and grace of motion.

It was an innocent, harmless amusement, and it was only when one of the crowd began to collect the small coin that the colonel turned away in disgust. "Oh, there must be an end to this!" he said to himself, angrily. To think that a Chapelle could take money collected in a dirty cap from a crowd of poor fishermen and sailors was more than his pride could endure. At first he was undecided what to do. Should he enter and snatch the child away from his degrading surroundings? Or should he go quietly home and say nothing of his discovery? He finally decided on the latter, and, with a heavy heart and an air of deep discouragement, he silently retraced his steps.

XXVII

SILVAIN IS ANNOYED

THE morning after Thistledown's exhibition at Le Chat Gris the colonel sent for him to come to his study. When the boy entered he looked pale and tired and a little frightened, for Uncle Anatole was very grave and stern; but he walked bravely up to the desk and stood respectfully waiting.

The old gentleman folded the paper that he had been reading, and laid it down. Then he put his arm around Beppo very gently, and, drawing him to his side, he raised his face and looked earnestly into his clear brown eyes. "My child, where were you last evening?" he asked quietly.

"I was at Le Chat Gris, monsieur," replied the boy, promptly.

"My dear, call me uncle."

"I was at Le Chat Gris, uncle," he repeated.

"What were you doing there?"

"I was giving an exhibition."

"Why were you giving an exhibition?"

"To get some money for little Tessa and the poor people on the island. And see how much they collected for me"; and he drew a handful of small coin from his pocket, which he showed with great satisfaction. "Is n't there a lot? Oh, I 'm so glad! But I must get more. I must give more exhibitions before I can go back to Isle de Chène."

"And your only reason for going to Le Chat Gris was to get money to give away?"

For a moment Beppo hesitated; then he raised his beautiful, honest eyes, and said decidedly: "No, uncle; that was n't my only reason. That was my *best* reason. But it 's like this: I love Mère Picheloup. She 's always been good to me. And I like the people who go there; they 're all my old friends. And I want to do my tricks because it pleases them. Besides, I don't want them to think I 'm proud now I 've found my relations."

Uncle Anatole felt his eyes grow dim, and his arm tightened around the slender figure as he continued to question him.

"Do you want to please me and make me very happy, my child?"

"Yes, uncle, if I can"; and the boy nestled closer, and slipped an arm affectionately around the old gentleman's neck.

"Now listen, Beppo, to what I have to say, and think seriously about it. I don't like you to give public exhibitions. You will have other and more suitable things to fill your time. I want you to give that up, for your sake as well as my own. Will you?"

Instantly the boy's face changed. He closed his lips firmly, and a stubborn, defiant look came into his eyes. "I can't, uncle; I can't," he replied resolutely. "I must earn some money for Tessa."

"Suppose *I* should give you as much as you can earn to help your little friend. Would n't that be the same thing?"

"No, uncle; that would be your money. I want to give her mine."

"Then you can't promise me to keep away from Le Chat Gris and try to forget your old life, to study something useful and to make us all happy?" and Uncle Anatole's voice was tremulous and broken.

Beppo looked at him wistfully; tears started to his eyes, and, with

a sob, he threw both arms around the old gentleman's neck. "Oh, please, uncle, don't ask me to give it up all at once!" he cried passionately. "I can't be a new boy all at once. I can't promise not to give exhibitions; not to go to Le Chat Gris; not to earn money for Tessa, now that Giovan and la mâdre have n't come back. She 's my little sister, and I must take care of her."

"There, there, my dear boy," said Uncle Anatole, soothingly. "Don't get excited. Don't make yourself miserable. And don't promise if you think you can't keep your promise. But you will *try* to do as I wish. You will try; that is all I 'll ask now."

"Yes, uncle, I 'll try. I 'll promise to try"; and Beppo swallowed his sobs and wiped away his tears. His heart was lighter and he was happier now that he was free from the restraint of a promise which he feared he could not keep.

For some time after his intimate conversation with Uncle Anatole the boy was very docile and obedient, and much more attentive to his studies. He was very anxious to learn to write well enough to answer mam'selle's letters, which came every week on Jean Grima's boat. The day that the *Merry Child* arrived was always a fête. There were the letters and innumerable messages from Tessa, and the news from the unfortunate island. The church was being rebuilt, the presbytère was as good as new, and already mam'selle had planted roses and vines around the porch. The grass was growing green on the new-made graves in the little cemetery, and the fishermen had brought oaks that they dug up on the mainland and planted them where others had stood before the storm; and the finest of all was in the place of the old one that shaded the green bench where Beppo lay that lovely summer morning when he was recovering from his long illness.

All these little items of news delighted the boy, and he would sit on the deck, under the striped sail, his hand clasped in Jean's rough

palm, listening eagerly to every word that fell from his lips. One day the sailor surprised Beppo by telling him that twenty-five new families had moved on the island from Grand Terre, because, they said, Isle de Chène would never have another such disaster, as lightning did not strike twice in the same place; and that some rich men were building a canning factory, and new cottages were going up all along the shore, and the gardens were planted, and corn was a foot high.

"It 's like another place," said Jean, drawing his sleeve across his eyes, "so many new people coming in, and nearly all the old ones gone." And again he wiped his eyes and sighed heavily. Already time had softened his sorrow to tears.

The colonel had never told Madam Aubert of his discovery at Le Chat Gris, nor of his conversation with Beppo. And as time went on and the boy seemed to be adapting himself to his surroundings, she felt more secure and hopeful, when, one day, Silvain rushed in, flushed and excited, and evidently greatly annoyed.

"Oh, Aunt Josephe, I am so angry at Beppo!" he cried before he had fairly closed the door. "It is disgraceful the way he is behaving!"

"Why, what has he been doing?" asked Madam Aubert, with sudden pallor, for she saw by Silvain's troubled face that it was something serious.

"What has he *been* doing?" repeated Silvain, hotly. "You ought to see what he *is* doing now, this very moment. I was just crossing Jackson Square with Hubert Lang and some more of my chums, when we saw a great crowd around the statue — men, women, and children waving and shouting like mad. We ran as fast as we could to see what was the cause of the excitement, and there was Beppo up on the statue, dressed in that ridiculous mountebank rig, cutting monkey-shines for all he was worth, and the people

acting as though they had never seen a show before, screaming and yelling like cannibals. At first I could n't believe my own eyes, and before I knew it I was pushed right in front of him. The moment he saw me he stopped making a monkey of himself and leaned forward, beckoning, and shouting at the very top of his voice: 'Silvain, oh, Cousin Silvain!' Oh, I was so annoyed! I tried to slink away outside of the crowd; but the rough brutes grabbed me, and hustled and pushed me to the front, calling out: 'Don't sneak the collection. Your money for Thistledown!' 'Your money, you dude!' 'Your money, major!' 'Your money, general!' and all such chaff, until I was furious. Just then a greasy old cap was poked under my nose, and as I had nothing smaller than a dollar, I had to put it in. Think of my paying that little imp a dollar for disgracing me!" and Silvain laughed in spite of his indignation.

"Oh, Silvain, don't laugh," implored Madam Aubert. "It is too dreadful. It would kill your uncle if he knew it. Don't speak of it before him or Mignon. We must keep it to ourselves and see what can be done. Silvain, can't you talk to him? He is very fond of you and he may listen to you. Can't you make him see how common and vulgar such an exhibition is? Can't you shame him into behaving properly?"

"Shame him! Why, dear Aunt Josephe, he takes himself too seriously. He is as proud of his performances as a king on his throne. He knows he can do what others can't, and he does n't think it a disgrace to show off his accomplishments."

"Dear, dear! what can be done?" said Madam Aubert, hopelessly. "He may be in the streets at any time, and your uncle may come across him. And what a shock and surprise it would be just now, when he thinks the boy is doing so well! And I 'm sorry for you, Silvain. It was very annoying when you were with your friends."

"Annoying! I should say it was"; and again Silvain laughed. Then he added indulgently: "Little beggar! he is so clever and fascinating one can't be angry with him long. Perhaps it 's better for you to say nothing about this now, and I 'll see if I can't coax him off. People are beginning to know him, and we shall be the talk of the town when they discover that he is a Chapelle. It 's no use; he can't be allowed to run wild. If he does I shall go away and hide myself."

XXVIII

A FÊTE CHAMPÉTRE

MIGNON was sitting at the table in the work-room, hammering at a plaque with angry energy. Her face was flushed and her eyes were stained with tears, and altogether she looked very ill-tempered and unhappy. She was alone, for Madam Aubert was in her room with a severe headache. Uncle Anatole had gone to court, and Beppo had disappeared directly after breakfast. Mignon had spent the day before with Denise, and after such a visit she was apt to be dissatisfied and fretful. Helios was in the shop, dusting and arranging the music, while he droned a melancholy tune in a low singsong that was irritating beyond endurance. Twice already Mignon had reproved him sharply, but he still went on: "I 's on my way to glory. I 's on my way — "

"Helios, stop that noise this minute! You know you should n't sing when I 'm here," she called again in a peevish voice.

"Yes, yes, Miss Mignon, I 'll stop; but I ain't a-doin' no harm. I 's jes a-learnin' a new hymn what dey sung las' night at Zion Church, an' shorely dat ain't no harm."

"Yes, it is. It makes me nervous, and my work is all wrong. Go away. I don't want you there. Go out and clean the banquette, and if any one comes open the door."

When she was alone Mignon threw down her hammer and pushed away her plaque impatiently; then she bent her face in her hands and allowed her tears to fall freely.

Suddenly the door was thrown open, and a cheerful young voice called: "Are you there, Mignon? Helios said I could come in." And before Mignon could utter a word or wipe away her tears Silvain came behind the screen. For a moment he hesitated, looking anxiously at the child; then he came forward, and, taking her flushed, tear-stained face between his palms, he said in a troubled voice: "Why, sweet Mignonette, what are you crying for?"

Mignon jerked away pettishly, and tried to turn her back while she fumbled for her handkerchief.

"Oh, you have n't one; girls never have. Here, let me use mine"; and Silvain drew out his dainty cambric and wiped her hot face and wet eyes very tenderly. Then he pushed back her hair and kissed her heartily, while he patted her on the little shoulders that were shaking with suppressed sobs. "There, there! Now don't cry, Mignon. Come, tell me all about it, and perhaps I can help you," he urged.

Another burst of tears, another tremulous sob, and Mignon cried penitently: "Oh, Silvain, I am ashamed to tell you how wicked I have been this morning! I have made darling Tantine so unhappy that I have given her one of her bad headaches, and I have sent Uncle Anatole to court with a face as long as that"; and she stretched her two plump hands as far apart as she could. "And I was cross to Beppo. He teased me, and I slapped him. And I would n't let Helios sing a hymn. And — oh, oh, I have been in such a temper and so wicked ever since I got up!" And again Mignon covered her face with her hands, flushing with shame and contrition.

"Well, well, or, I should say, bad, bad!" laughed Silvain. "What a confession for the sweetest Mignonette to make! I 'm shocked and horrified. I thought I should find you so happy after such a pleasant day yesterday."

"I know," said Mignon, penitently. "I did have a lovely visit, and that makes me sorry to be so bad to-day."

"Well, now tell me what the trouble is, for I can't help you unless I know"; and Silvain drew up a chair and settled himself in a listening attitude.

Mignon hesitated for a moment; then she said resolutely: "It is all my fault, and I don't mind telling you, Silvain. I know I can trust you not to repeat it to Denise or any one. I don't think Tantine would want others to know what she told me. But I must begin at the beginning. Yesterday at your house, when we were talking of Paula Lang's fête champétre, Denise told me that I could not go unless I had a new frock and hat; and she said Tantine would be very mean if she did n't get me a pretty costume."

"Oh, Mignon," interrupted Silvain, in an annoyed tone, "chiffons again. Why do you listen to Denise? She is foolish about clothes."

"But she said I could n't go unless I had *everything* new, and I want to go awfully. So this morning I asked Tantine—you know the party is next week, and I was in a hurry and impatient; and she was tired and ill: but she was kind and sweet, only she told me in her firm, quiet way, you know Tantine's way, Silvain?"

"Yes, I know her way," nodded Silvain; "but go on."

"Well, she told me, and I knew she meant it, that I could n't have *anything* new to wear to Paula's party. Then I got very angry and ran to Uncle Anatole. And that was what hurt dear Tantine. She does n't like to have him worried."

"Well, what did he say?" asked Silvain, with some curiosity.

"He did n't say much, but he looked, oh, he *looked* so sad—almost as though he wanted to cry; and he took me in his arms and smoothed my hair and kissed me, and said that it broke his heart to have to refuse me anything, but he could not interfere with Tantine—that she knew what was best for me, and that I must do just as she

wished. Then I cried, and I told him I would n't go to Paula's party if I had to wear old things. All at once he put me down and went to the breakfast-room to talk with Tantine, and I waited in his study, and — and — "

"And what?" asked Silvain.

"And — I was in such a bad temper that I cried out loud, and tore my handkerchief, and pulled my hair — "

"Oh, Mignon, is it possible?" said Silvain, reproachfully; "and I thought you such a *sweet* Mignonette."

"I told you I had been very wicked, but it is my temper," returned Mignon, in an apologetic tone. "Sometimes I can't help it when I don't get what I want. But when Uncle Anatole came back I was sorry, and I told him so; then he hugged me again and sent me to Tantine. She was in her room, and looked so pale and worried that I was sorry again, and I cried when she talked to me. Tantine was n't angry. She was only *grieved* because I complained to uncle, and she told me things I never knew before."

"Ah, what did she tell you?" asked Silvain, with sudden interest.

"She told me that we were *poor;* that we had no money, only what she earned, and that she could not afford to give me new things whenever I wanted them."

"Oh, that can't be," cried Silvain, flushing painfully. "You did not quite understand Aunt Josephe."

"Yes, I did, Silvain; and now I know it 's true, because Myra was grumbling. She said Tantine had cut down her market money, and that she could n't do good marketing. But *she* did n't say Tantine was poor; she said she was *stingy*, and that people were always stingy when they got old."

"Nonsense, Mignon; Myra knows nothing about it. People are not always poor when they say they can't *afford* things. Mama says that, too, but she gets them all the same."

Silvain spoke lightly, yet he looked thoughtful and troubled. "Now tell me how it ended."

"Well, Tantine was very pale and trembled all over. Her eyes were full of tears, and she said a lot more to me that almost broke my heart. I could n't see dear Tantine cry. My temper went away, and I put my arms around her and begged her to forgive me, and I promised her that I would be good and wear what she wished at Paula's garden party. Then she wiped my face, and smoothed me, and kissed me, and sent me down here to work on this plaque, which has to be finished to-day. I have been trying hard to work; but I am so sorry when I think how unhappy I have made Tantine that the tears *will* come."

"There, there! Don't cry, Mignon!" said Silvain, encouragingly. "Aunt Josephe has forgiven you, and she won't be unhappy any more. And, no matter what you wear, you will be the prettiest and best-dressed little girl at the fête, as you were at Denise's party."

This gentle flattery comforted Mignon, and she turned resolutely to her work.

Presently Silvain saw Madam Aubert crossing the court, and he went out to meet her. She did indeed look very pale and ill, and the boy felt that the burden of living was pressing heavily upon her. With a glance of affection, he put his strong young arm around her and led her to the seat beside the fountain.

"Please sit here a few moments, Aunt Josephe. I want to tell you about my interview with Beppo. I met him on my way here, and I had a serious talk with him."

Madam Aubert looked up, and her heavy eyes brightened. "How good of you, dear! Did he promise to keep out of the streets?"

"I can't say that he did. He would n't go as far as that. But

he did promise to keep away from the square; and I am thankful, as it is a favorite resort of Uncle Anatole, and he might be annoyed at any time."

"Yes; that is true. But I don't like him to be driven from a respectable locality to some disreputable haunt. It is really very discouraging"; and Madam Aubert sighed wearily.

"Oh, don't give up the battle!" said Silvain, hopefully. "It is true that he is a stubborn little beggar, but he is so truthful and generous, so grateful and affectionate, that he will come out all right if we can only have patience."

"I trust so," returned Madam Aubert, with a dim smile. "This is one of my bad days, when I see everything through smoked glasses. But I fear more for your uncle than I do for myself. It seems to me that he is failing. I wish his last days could be happy and free from care. He has had so much trouble nearly all his life!"

"Well, I mean to do all I can to help him, and I am young and strong," said Silvain, rising to his full height. "I came to tell him that I have passed my examinations and shall be graduated next week."

"Then it means West Point"; and again Madam Aubert sighed. "I don't like to think of your going so far away. Lately I have learned to depend on you."

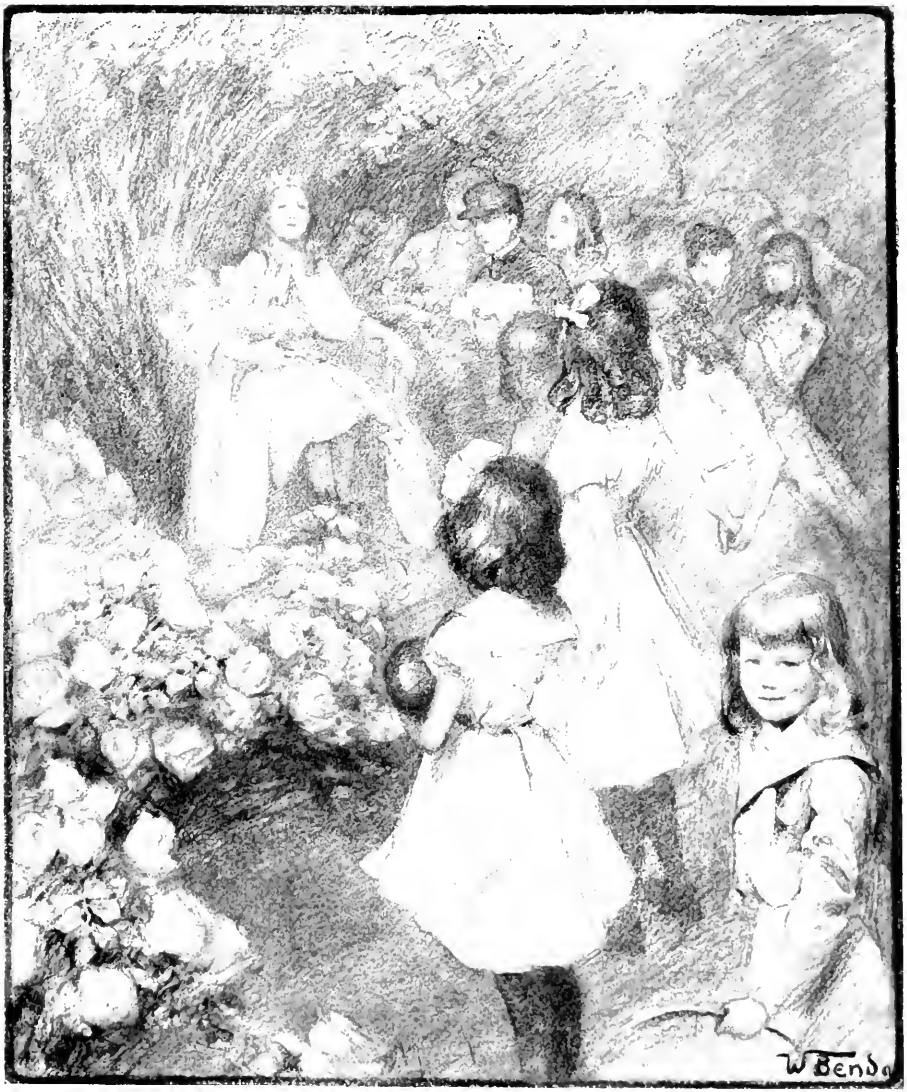
"And you may always. I won't disappoint you. Besides, I have not quite decided. I want to talk it all over with the colonel and Uncle Kenyon. Uncle Kenyon will be home from Washington in a few days, and then it will be settled whether I shall go or not."

Madam Chapelle, with Denise and Aimée, called in her carriage to take Mignon to Paula's fête champétre, and it is needless to say that neither her aunt nor her fastidious cousin had any cause to complain of the little maid's appearance. She was all in dainty

white, and as fresh and sweet as a lily. And there never was a more successful fête champétre than Paula Lang's. Everything that wealth and love could provide was used to render it attractive. The May day was beautiful, and the spacious grounds were tastefully decorated. There were gaily striped tents, innumerable flags, and brilliant lanterns hung in every available place; a dancing-platform under an arbor of green, twined with festoons of flowers; an orchestra concealed behind a screen of palms; and tables spread with a tempting display of ices, cakes, and fruit. But more amusing than all the other attractions was a small open-air theater, in which the children played a charming little comedy written especially for them.

Almost at the very last rehearsal a boy who was to take an important character fell ill, and Beppo was selected to fill his part; and so well did the little *farceur* acquit himself that his audience was enchanted. He was the same Thistledown, only with a different environment, and the change was astonishing. Silvain was delighted with his success, and Denise called him cousin and introduced him to her friends. Neither did Mignon lack attention. Before the dancing began a little queen was selected, and Hubert Lang, who was the king, led Mignon to the miniature throne, where the small maids of honor fastened a dainty blue satin mantle over her white frock and placed a tiny sparkling crown on her pretty head, while Silvain, who was for the time a king's chamberlain, gave her the scepter and a huge bunch of roses, as many as she could grasp in her small hands. It was like fairy-land. She had read and dreamed of such enchanting scenes, but she had never before taken part in them. For the time she felt like a real little queen, and her natural dignity and gracious manners charmed every one.

There was only one thing to mar her enjoyment, and that was the thought of the sorrow she had caused her grandmother by



"For the time she felt like a real little queen."

selfishly wishing for what she did not need. How often some trivial incident is a foundation for good resolves and great results! For Mignon never again rebelled against the wise restraints of those in authority, and her little ovation at Paula Lang's fête champétre proved to her that it is not always wealth and fine garments that win admiration and success.

XXIX

SILVAIN'S NEW RESOLVE

SILVAIN'S conversation with Mignon in regard to her grandmother's financial affairs confirmed many of his suspicions. For some time he had been watching the transactions of the little household closely, and every day he became more convinced that poverty was drawing its cruel meshes closer around it, and Mignon's careless words had awakened a new train of thought. Was it true that Madam Aubert had only what she earned? and that she was trying to keep her true condition from the colonel? The more he brooded over it the more he wondered what could have reduced her to such poverty as to be obliged to refuse Mignon a new frock, and, worse still, to cut down the market money. Suddenly a new responsibility seemed thrust upon him. The colonel was old and feeble, and Madam Aubert could not engrave music always; and there were Mignon and Beppo to be provided for; and he was the eldest and would be the head of the family after his uncle was gone: therefore he must order his future so that he would be able to care for those who might be dependent upon him.

Senator Kenyon was sitting in his private office in the large cotton house of Kenyon & Gray. He had just returned from Washington, and was very much engaged in looking into the details of his extensive business, when some one knocked, and, in reply to his brusque "Come in," Silvain entered.

The senator greeted his nephew heartily, for he was very fond of

him, and bade him sit near him. "I 'm glad to see you, my dear boy," he said in a loud, cheerful voice. "I missed you last evening when I called on your mother, and I have n't much time to give you to-day. You can see by this pile of papers that I am extremely busy. I wish I had a son to relieve me of some of this care. I am told that you are graduated from your military school and are ready for West Point. Well, everything is arranged, and if you can pass your examinations you can enter in the autumn."

"Thank you, uncle; you are very kind. I 've made up my mind not to go to West Point," replied Silvain, firmly. "I 've not told mama yet; I wanted to see you first. But I 've decided not to go."

The senator looked puzzled. "Why, I thought it was your dearest wish."

"It was once, but I 've changed my mind. I want to go to work. I want to make money. I want to get rich."

The senator laughed. "Why, Silvain, you are more of a Kenyon and less of a Chapelle than I thought. Well, my fine fellow, what do you want to do?"

"I want to begin in your office and learn the cotton business, if you approve."

"I do approve of it, my dear boy. I think it 's the best thing for you. I 've thought of it often. I 've thought of offering you a place here. But I 've always understood that the colonel and your mother were keenly set on your going to West Point."

"So they were, or, rather, so they are. But it is on Uncle Anatole's account that I am giving it up."

"Why, how is that? I don't quite understand."

"He is getting old and feeble,"— here Silvain lowered his voice, —"and I am afraid that he has no money."

The senator looked steadily at Silvain for a moment, and his florid face lost some of its color.

"What reason have you for thinking so?"

"Oh, many reasons. I 've thought it for a long while, although mama told me that both he and Madam Aubert were well off, and that Cousin Mignon had money of her own."

"It ought to be so. The colonel had money when he went into that banking business. And Mignon's father and your father shared alike. The child ought to have a nice little sum saved up for her."

"But I am sure she has n't," said Silvain, decidedly. "Madam Aubert works very hard, and Mignon almost blisters her poor little fingers engraving plates of music, and Uncle Anatole is always in his office or in court. I know he takes every case he gets, and is anxious for more."

"It *does* look as though they were straitened for money," returned the senator, thoughtfully. "But what is this I hear about a new Chapelle being discovered — a wild boy from some of the islands below? Has the colonel any proof, or is it one of his queer fancies?"

"I think Uncle Anatole has the best of proof," replied Silvain, with decision.

"Well, it *might* be. There were a number of children saved from that Last Island disaster whose whereabouts were not discovered for months after, and in some cases years. If this boy is your cousin, then his father should have had the same share as your father and Mignon's father, and the money will have to be accounted for."

"But, uncle, there seems to be no money," said Silvain, tentatively.

"True, true!" and the senator knit his brows in perplexed thought. "The Chapelles were supposed to be rich. Well, they certainly had an excellent faculty for getting rid of their fortunes. At least, your father had"; and an angry flush crossed the senator's brow. "Had it not been for your Grandfather Kenyon's money, your mother would have nothing — absolutely nothing!"

Suddenly a new expression came into Silvain's eyes, and he asked in an eager voice: "How did papa lose his money? And why did he go away?"

"There, my dear boy, you are asking me more than I can tell you. I was in Europe when it happened. It was a very mysterious affair; but let me advise you," and he laid his hand kindly on Silvain's shoulder, "not to inquire into it. The less you know the better. It is a subject I never discuss. But allow me to say this: if the colonel is poor, he sacrificed his fortune for your father, for your name; and it is your sacred duty to be a son to him, and to restore, as far as you can, what he has lost."

It was an awful moment for Silvain when some of the truth dawned upon him. "Oh, uncle," he groaned, "I am afraid to understand!" and he covered his burning face with his hands. "God bless Uncle Anatole! He is a martyr, a saint. From this moment I shall devote my life to him."

"That is right, my dear boy. Let the dead past bury its dead," said the senator, with some emotion. "You have the living present, and all the possibilities of the glorious future before you. I want a son to take my interest in the business when I retire, as I shall do before long. You shall be that son. But you will have to begin at the very foot of the ladder, and if you are honest and industrious you will soon reach the top. You can make yourself a rich man if you will."

"Thank you, uncle, thank you. When can I begin?"

"To-morrow, if you wish"; and the senator looked at his watch. "Time 's up, my boy; you must go."

"Good-by, uncle. I shall be here to-morrow"; and a new resolve beamed from Silvain's clear eyes as he hurried away with a manly, energetic step.

The colonel had had a tiresome day. He had been going over

the papers found in Costanzo's box. They were mostly abstracts and deeds of a Spanish grant to his grandfather, whose descendants had been unaware of their possessions until he, as he now remembered, had discovered it in looking over some old registers. At first his memory was very dim concerning the facts. It was so long ago when he first opened his law office! At that time he had been greatly interested in investigating obscure titles, and he had worked on it with all the ardor of a young lawyer engaged on his first important case. His claim had been granted in the lower courts, and when the Last Island disaster occurred it was before the Supreme Court of the State. For some time after the calamity he had no heart to continue the case. And when at last he took it up again, to his surprise all the important papers were missing. Now he vaguely remembered that he himself had taken them to Last Island to look over some disputed point at his leisure, and by one of those fortuitous freaks of fate they had fallen into Costanzo's hands.

While he was sitting dejectedly thinking over the frustration of so many of his hopes, Silvain entered, fresh from his interview with the senator. "Are you very busy, uncle? Can you talk with me a few minutes?"

"Certainly, Silvain. I have finished my work for to-day"; and he pushed aside his papers and settled himself to listen.

"First, uncle, I want to tell you that I have decided not to go to West Point, and that I am going into business."

The colonel winced. Another disappointment! But he asked quietly: "Why have you changed your plans?"

"Because I think it best to go to work. I have thought it all over, and it seems right that I should give it up"; and Silvain hesitated—he scarcely knew what to say in explanation.

The colonel looked at him keenly. "Does your mother approve of this sudden determination?"

"I have not told mama yet, but I have talked it over with Uncle Kenyon. I have just left him; and he not only approves, but he has offered me a position in his office, which I accepted," replied Silvain, with manly decision.

"And if your mother objects?"

"Oh, I can talk mama into seeing it as I do. She is much more reasonable lately, and she is beginning to understand that I am not a child. Besides, she has great confidence in Uncle Kenyon's business ability, and when she knows that he will take an interest in my future she will consent. You are the one, dear uncle, whose good will I want most. I should n't like to undertake anything without your hearty approval."

Silvan had spoken seriously, and the colonel felt that he was very much in earnest. "I want to do everything to please you. I want to put myself at your disposal," he continued fervently, "to try to make your last days comfortable and happy; and I want to begin at once."

"My dear, dear boy, you make me happier than I ever thought to be!" and the colonel laid his tremulous hand on Silvain's. "I do approve; I will approve: for I know that your decision is prompted by a noble, generous heart. But have you considered the self-denial, the confinement, the drudgery of such a life? A business career is full of trials and temptations; and constant vigilance, constant labor, are necessary to succeed. Are you prepared to give up a life of ease and pleasure, all ambitions, all hopes of future fame, which at times inspire the youthful heart, to settle down to a dull, humdrum existence, the daily routine of office work; to be, for some years at least, at the beck and call of your superiors; to be patient and obedient, and, in fact, but little better than a servant? Have you thought of all these things, my dear boy?"

"Yes, uncle; I have thought of them. I have been thinking of

them for some time. And I am determined to try," replied Silvain, resolutely.

"Well, my dear Silvain, since you are resolved, I will say, God-speed! and my best wishes and best hopes will go with you. Talk it over with Aunt Josephe. Her opinion is of value. And tell your mother at once. I hope she will make it easy for you"; and the colonel held out his hand.

Silvain took it in his strong young grasp. "Thank you, uncle. I 'll try not to disappoint you." And as he went away he thought that, although the colonel looked feeble and tired, he had a brighter and more hopeful expression.

Silvain's interview with Madam Aubert was quite satisfactory. She heartily approved of his decision, and her kind, sensible advice and ready sympathy made him very happy. But Mignon, when she was told of her cousin's new resolve, pouted, and said pettishly to her grandmother: "I thought he was going to West Point, and that some day he would be a colonel, and look as you say Uncle Anatole did when he was young; but if he works in an office and sells cotton, he will be all bent over and dried up like Paula Lang's father."

Madam Chapelle received the news of her son's resolve in something of the same spirit as Mignon. She was very proud of her tall, handsome son, and was in the habit of thinking of him as a future colonel, or possibly a general, in a brilliant uniform, at the head of his regiment in grand processions and official functions. However, her father and her brother had made their fortunes in cotton, and perhaps it was better for Silvain to get rich than to be obliged to practise economy all his life, and end his days on a retired officer's half-pay. Therefore she said lightly, and Silvain thought a little indifferently: "I am glad to leave your future to your Uncle Kenyon. He is a sensible, practical man, and has made a success

of his life, while your Uncle Anatole is a visionary dreamer and has failed in everything."

Silvain said nothing, but he felt a sharp pang at his heart, and his face flushed as he thought: "Oh, if mama only knew the truth, how sorry she would be because of her injustice to dear Uncle Anatole!"

XXX

THE BLARE OF A BRASS BAND

"HELLO, Thistledown!" "Bravo, Thistledown!" "Bravo, bravo!" Such were the noisy exclamations that disturbed the drowsy quiet of a June evening, as the colonel and Silvain were returning from the railway station where they had been to say good-by to Madam Chapelle, Denise, and Aimée, who, with two servants, numerous baskets and bags, and an immense pile of boxes, were leaving for a fashionable summer resort.

Silvain, who a few weeks before had entered on his new duties was obliged to remain behind for the first time, and when he thought of all the summers he had passed in idleness and pleasure, of traveling and sight-seeing, he felt rather depressed and was paying little attention to his surroundings, when the noise of a tramping crowd, the shouts and bravos and the discordant music, startled him from his reverie, and looking up, he saw the motley escort that usually accompanies a negro band. Street-gamin, wharf-rats, boot-blacks, newsboys, and women and children of all ages and colors, and in their midst several shabby negroes blowing and banging with all their might on a variety of dilapidated instruments. Then a languid, bony old white horse appeared, decked in all sorts of trumpery, and led by a negro in a shabby red domino; and, to his horror, Silvain saw Beppo in a red-and-white costume, dancing on the bare back of the old horse, bowing and smiling, doing his hoop-and-ball

tricks, turning sumersaults and handsprings, until he looked like a red-and-white wheel revolving with great rapidity.

Uncle Anatole was rather near-sighted, therefore he did not notice Thistledown until they were obliged to take refuge in a doorway; but from there the center of attraction was plainly visible. It was Beppo, and he was giving a public exhibition in a very public place, and was really attracting a great deal of attention by his clever performance.

When the colonel took in the whole disreputable scene, he turned quite pale and leaned heavily on Silvain for support. The boy put his arm around him and said cheerfully: "Don't mind, uncle; no one here knows who he is, and in a moment he will be out of sight."

The colonel shook off his weakness and drew himself up with a proud, stern look. "I know him; that is enough. Silvain, this is unbearable. I have been too lenient with the boy. Now I must do something to put an end to this publicity; he *must* be kept off the streets. I can't be tormented in this way."

"It is too bad; but he is only a child full of mischievous pranks," said Silvain, apologetically. "Please don't take it too seriously, uncle; he will get tired of it by and by."

"By and by! Oh, I fear it is hopeless. For nearly a year he has been with us, and his tastes have not changed in the least. Silvain, I am sorry to have to confess it, but I am afraid he likes low associates and enjoys this vulgar popularity."

The crowd pressed forward. Thistledown's slender, graceful figure, dancing on the white horse, swept by. The last blare of the ill-assorted instruments and the hoarse shouts of the mob died away in the distance. The colonel, leaning on Silvain, turned homeward with a slow, unsteady step and a pale, dejected face.

For the first time, Silvain was really disgusted and out of patience

with Beppo, and when he told Madam Aubert of the boy's latest *faux pas* he was not sparing in his censure. "It seems that we brought him here only to disgrace us!" he said bitterly.

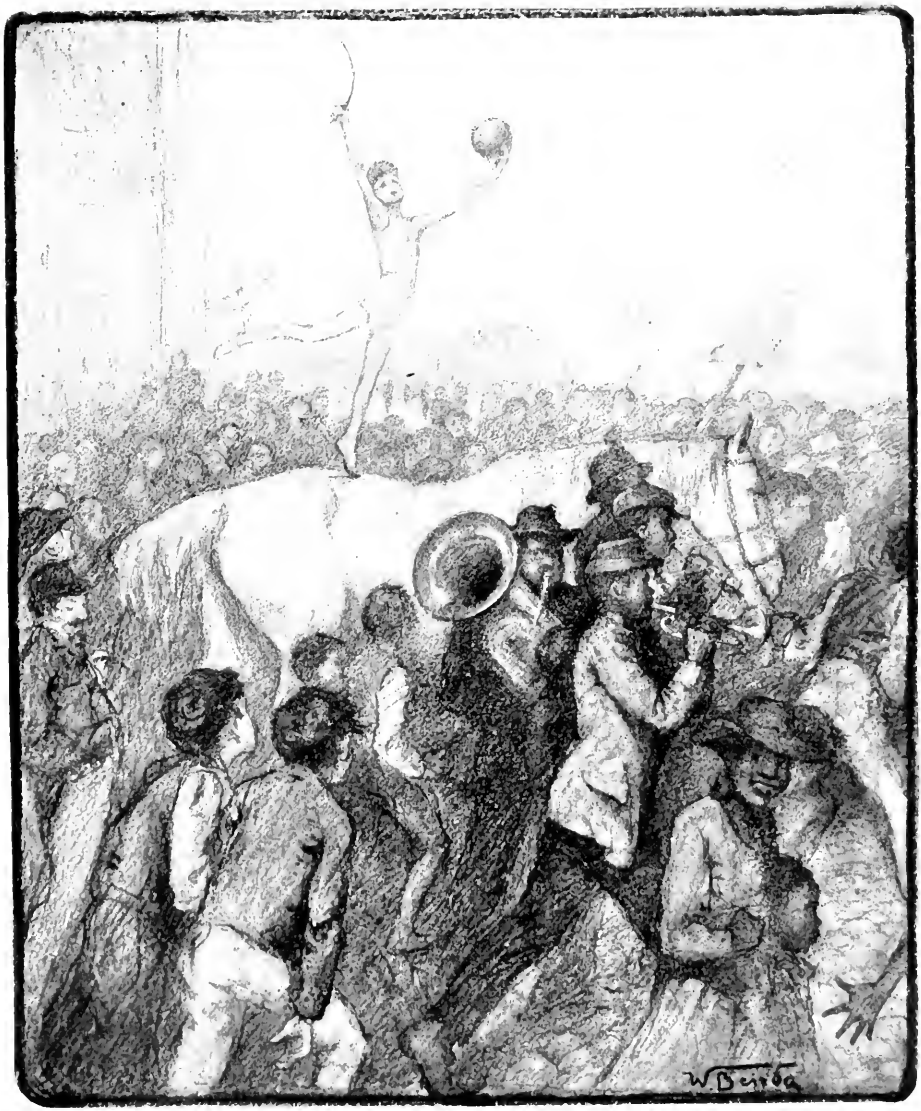
"It seems so"; and Madam Aubert turned a pale, troubled face on the boy. "It is dreadful for your uncle. I hoped he would not meet him on the streets; but you see how impossible it will be to prevent it. The only way out of this trouble, as far as I can see, is to send the boy to some school where he will be cut off from his old associates."

"But, Aunt Josephe, he would not stay where there is any restraint. He would run away, and we should lose all influence over him. I think it will be better to have him where we can watch him. I will talk with him again, and perhaps I can persuade him to keep off the streets, and after a while he may give it up of his own accord. Ask Uncle Anatole not to do anything until I have had another chance to get his promise"; and Silvain went to hunt Beppo up, full of hope and courage.

While Madam Aubert and Silvain were talking in the work-room, Mignon was in the shop, and Helios entered from the street. He had been to the printer, and on his way had encountered the noisy crowd, and had recognized Thistledown at the first glance. "Look-a here, Miss Mignon," he said in a low tone and very mysteriously. "I jes seed a sight: a whole passel of colored folks a-tearin' down Rue Royal after a brass ban', an' dat li'l' Mars' Satan what frightened my ma, a-dancin' an' a-cuttin' up on a ole bare-back horse."

"Nonsense, Helios! I don't believe you!" cried Mignon, excitedly.

"Yes, yes! Shore 't was the same one — red cap, red legs, an' all!" And here he rolled his eyes toward the work-room, and in a whisper of awe and solemnity added: "I don' want ole madam to know it, but dat li'l' Satan was Mars' Beppo, as shore as I live."



"Dancing on the bare back of the old horse."

Mignon flushed, and her eyes fell guiltily; but she said in a sharp, angry tone: "Helios, how dare you say such a thing? How do you know it was Beppo?"

"'Cause he looked at me an' laughed, an' called out, 'Helios, oh, Helios!' Yes, it was Mars' Beppo, shore; an' I was 'fraid, an' run home as fas' as I could."

"Yes; I dare say you were afraid. You 're afraid of a shadow," said Mignon, scornfully. "And you 'd better keep quiet about what you *think* you saw. Of course you were mistaken. And the colonel and Tantine won't like it if you spread such a story. So you had better keep quiet."

"If you say so, Miss Mignon, I won't tell my ma. But I *is* 'fraid o' dat boy. I don' want him in der kitchen roun' my ma. I 's 'fraid he 's done conjur' her now, 'cause she 's got pains in her fingers an' toes."

Mignon fairly blazed with indignation. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she said severely. "Don't you dare say such a thing to any one else. If you do, the colonel will send you to jail right away!"

Helios said no more, but his mind was in a terrible state of confusion. Had he, or had he not, seen the boy on the old white horse? And were Thistledown and Beppo one and the same? He was so puzzled and frightened that he was uncertain whether his eyes had deceived him or not.

It was quite late when at last Silvain traced Beppo to Le Chat Gris, where he found him in the midst of a very spirited exhibition. In spite of the afternoon performance, he seemed as fresh and energetic as ever, and was doing his best to charm an appreciative audience. Silvain sat down outside the door and waited, indignant and amused at the same time.

When Beppo had finished his *répertoire*, he sprang off the table,

happy and excited, while the coin rattled in Jean Grima's cap. When all present had contributed and Mère Picheloup had added a bright silver dollar, Beppo, with a merry "Thank you" and a series of graceful bows, ran off to change his clothes.

He had caught a glimpse of Silvain, and knew that his cousin was waiting for him; therefore he was not long in discarding his finery and in saying brief good nights to Mère Picheloup and his audience. He seemed very happy, like one who, after a long struggle, has reached his goal; and he hardly waited to turn his face homeward before he began to recount his triumphs: "Oh, I 've had a great day, Silvain! I had a fine exhibition this afternoon. Jean Grima's mate helped me to get up a horse show. We had a brass band and a big crowd, and I made lots of money. A friend of mine, a stable-man, lent me a horse, and the band played all the afternoon for six bits each; and we went through every street down-town, and the people threw us nickels from the galleries and windows, and waved and shouted. Oh, it was fine! It was grand! I wish you had seen me, cousin."

"I did," returned Silvain, quietly; "and Uncle Anatole saw you, too."

"Did he?" asked Beppo, brightly. "Was he pleased?"

"No; I should say he was very sorry to see you making such an exhibition of yourself."

Beppo looked up, his clear eyes full of surprise. "Why, did n't I do my tricks well?"

"Yes; you did them well. But uncle does n't like such a show in public. Now see here!" and Silvain laid his hand firmly on the boy's shoulder. "You 've got to give it up. Uncle nearly fainted when he saw you dancing on that old bag-of-bones."

Beppo looked puzzled, and hung his head thoughtfully; then he said defiantly: "I was n't doing any harm, and I sha'n't give it up!"

"But you *must*," persisted Silvain, "or you will be sent away to a strange school, where you won't see any of your chums, and where you 'll be shut up if you don't obey."

Beppo jerked away angrily and his eyes flashed. "I 'd like to see any one shut me up!" Then he laughed scornfully. "I 'd get out and run away. No one can keep Thistledown shut up. I 'd show them!" and he shook his small fist threateningly.

He was getting excited and defiant, and Silvain changed his tactics. "Come now, Beppo, be a good little kid, just to please Uncle Anatole. I came after you to get you to promise me one thing."

"I won't promise! I can't!" he returned sullenly.

"Yes, you can," persisted Silvain. "You can promise me not to give shows on the streets. Say you won't, and I 'll fix it all up with Uncle Anatole."

Beppo was silent for a moment. He feared to offend the colonel, he hated to have Madam Aubert look at him reproachfully, and he wanted Mignon and Silvain to be his friends. "If I give up my shows on the streets you won't try to keep me away from the luggers and Le Chat Gris, will you?" he asked cautiously.

"No, my fine fellow," laughed Silvain. "Just say you 'll keep off the streets and I 'll be satisfied."

"Well, cousin, I 'll promise *that*, but I won't promise anything else," returned Beppo, decidedly.

"All right! now we 'll be friends forever"; and Silvain shook the boy's hand heartily as he left him.

When Beppo reached the music-shop it was late, and Helios was putting out the lights in front; but Madam Aubert was in the work-room, her tired, patient face bent over her engraving. She did not see the boy until he stood beside her and said in a low, penitent voice: "I 'm sorry, Tantine, that I made Uncle Anatole

cross. I did n't mean to do any harm. Won't you please tell him that I 'm sorry, and that I 've *promised* Silvain not to give exhibitions on the streets? He need n't send me away to be shut up. I 'll keep my promise, and he won't be ashamed of me any more." Then his voice broke, and he burst into violent weeping.

"My child, my dear child!" and Madam Aubert caught the penitent little sinner to her heart, "I 'm so glad, so thankful, that you will try to please us. Now everything will be easier and we shall be happy. It is late and you look very tired. Go to your bed, my dear, and I will tell the colonel of your promise and your good resolutions." Then she wiped Beppo's eyes and kissed him tenderly; and he went away less triumphant but perhaps happier than when the applause of the crowd was ringing in his ears.

XXXI

THE RETURN

SOME time passed and Beppo kept his promise faithfully. He was seen no more on the streets; but, nevertheless, he was absent a great part of each day, and when he returned his mind seemed occupied with matters outside of his home. He did not care to study nor to assist Madam Aubert in the work-room. When he was in the house he was possessed by a spirit of mischief, or he was idle and listless, at times feverishly gay and again silent and depressed. Madam Aubert watched him closely. She felt sure that he was keeping a secret from them. "I am certain," she said one day to Silvain, "that Beppo is engaged in some new enterprise. At times he has the air of one engrossed in important business. Some days he is absent all day, and, try as I will, I can't induce him to tell where he has been, nor what he has been doing. I wish you would try to discover where and how he spends most of his time."

Silvain promised to try, but his efforts were fruitless. He could learn nothing of the boy's pursuits when he was absent from St. Philip's Street. Whatever he was about, he was very secretive, and certainly managed to cover his tracks completely. However, as Uncle Anatole was not subjected to any active annoyance, and as Beppo was quiet and docile, matters were allowed to take their course.

One evening the colonel received a note laboriously scrawled

on a sheet of coarse paper exhaling a pungent odor of grease and garlic. It was brought by a waiter from Le Chat Gris, and was from Beppo, written in his latest and best English, and read as follows:

DEER UNKEL KURNEL, Im goin to the islan with Jean Grima to take my munny to mamselle an Tessa. I didnt ast you an Tantine cause I was afraid youd say NO. Ive got most fifty dolars all doin tricks but I aint broke my promus an I never will. Im so glad Ill see mon pere mamselle, an Tessa. An Ill come back on the Mary Chile nex trip. BEPPO.

The colonel read it and handed it to his friend with a smile.

"Poor boy, he has been homesick!" said Madam Aubert, always ready with an excuse. "That accounts for his strange ways lately."

"Perhaps," returned the colonel, doubtfully; "but I should like him to be more frank and open in his dealings with us. I don't approve of his reticent, secretive ways."

"But, my friend, remember his early training, or, I should say, lack of training — his life of constant deception with that cruel old man. With the child it was the law of self-preservation: he was obliged to resort to stratagem in order to save himself."

"But now, when there is no need, he still continues," returned the colonel, bitterly. "However, his plan is very ingenious; he does not mean to give us a chance to oppose him."

"Well, never mind, my friend," said Madam Aubert, cheerfully. "Let him enjoy his holiday. It is quite natural that he should wish to return to the island, especially when he has something to take to his friends. Beyond all he has a loyal, generous heart."

"Yes, he certainly has," returned the colonel. "He has a great many charming qualities — but so many faults."

"We all have faults, my friend," returned Madam Aubert, with gentle rebuke.

"True, true, Josephe; you are always just"; and the colonel went away better satisfied with Beppo.

The *Merry Child* was flying toward Isle de Chène before a smart breeze. Jean Grima stood at the tiller, erect and grave, and Beppo leaned over the bow, his eyes fixed on the island, eager, expectant, and happy. What a change, what wonders a year had wrought! He had left ruin and desolation behind, and now he saw instead a green, sunny stretch of land, with new white cottages and a larger, finer church; and on the point where Costanzo's cabin had stood quite an imposing structure turned its many-windowed face toward the sparkling water of the Gulf. It was the new factory; and at the landing in front of it, and in every cove along the shore, were schooners, luggers, and boats unloading their "catches" and spreading their nets and sails to dry in the sun. It was a busy, yet a peaceful and pastoral scene.

There was the same opalescent sea, the same blue, fathomless sky, the same shimmering lights on the tall swamp-grasses, and the same pink flamingos wading in the shallows. The face of the little island had changed, but nature, beautiful nature, was still the same.

Beppo's heart gave a sudden bound, and a lump rose in his throat and dissolved in tears, as the *Merry Child* approached the landing and he saw Père Bonneval, mam'selle, and Tessa waiting to receive him; for Jean Grima had told them that he should bring the boy back with him.

It is impossible to describe Beppo's joy when his feet once more touched his native island, when he found himself clasped in Père Bonneval's hearty embrace, when mam'selle held him to her heart, and Tessa clung to him, laughing and crying in the same breath.

It is true many familiar faces were missing, and at first his old home seemed strange and new. The presbytère had been changed while repairing it. It was larger and more commodious, a wide gallery had taken the place of the old porch, and roses, wistaria, and jasmine ran riotously to the very roof. In place of the gnarled, wind-swept old oak, a sturdy young tree spread its branches, and great clusters of bananas, palms, and yuccas threw their shade over the bench where the curé and his sister loved to sit. And there the happy little group, reunited after what seemed a long parting, passed the day in telling of all that had happened during their separation; and there Beppo brought out his little gifts and laid them in mam'selle's lap, as he had done once before. Mère Piche-loup had changed the coin he had collected into bank-notes and put them in an envelope; and when he handed it to mam'selle he said proudly: "I made it all giving exhibitions. There are fifty dollars for you and Tessa, and by and by I shall have lots more."

Mam'selle was deeply touched. "My Beppo, my dear, generous boy, you must not bring your money to us. We are not in need now, and I am sure you have not earned this with your uncle's approval. Really, dear child, we ought not to take it"; and mam'-selle looked at her brother hesitating and undecided.

In an instant Beppo's face changed. All the light died out of it, and his eyes had a disappointed, hopeless look. "You must! You must take it!" he said earnestly. "I got it for you and Tessa. I could n't keep it for myself. I said it was for you and Tessa"; and his voice had a tone of poignant distress. "Take it; please take it. Tell mam'selle to take it, mon père!" he cried entreatingly.

The good curé shared his sister's compunction. He appreciated the boy's generosity, but he could not encourage him in disobeying his guardians. "I can't hurt the dear child's feelings," he thought. "I can't subvert his noble impulses. Tessa shall have this." So

he said cheerfully: "We will take it for little Tessa. It is our intention to send her to the School of the Sacred Heart for a while, and we will put it aside for that purpose. Will that suit you, my dear Beppo?"

"Yes, mon père; yes. Only take it. It will make me so glad, so happy!" and his face beamed with satisfaction.

The few days that Beppo spent on the island flew by like a happy dream, he had so much to see and so much to do. At dawn he was out with the fishermen, and during the day he and Tessa wandered over the island. They visited the little cove where Giovan had beached his boat. On the spot where the cottages stood the manager of the factory had built a fine new house. The garden was flourishing, and the corn was ready to harvest.

They stood silently thinking of the changes that time had wrought. Then Tessa, looking wistfully out on the blue sea, said in a low voice: "Beppo, they never came back. I watched every day, but the boat never came back."

"I know, little Tessa; I know. But sometime we shall see them again, perhaps; sometime!" and Beppo wiped away a tear as he took Tessa's hand and went sadly down the shore.

"Let us sit here on the sand," he said seriously. "I want to tell you something. I have a great secret to tell you."

Tessa's eyes brightened, and, still holding his hand, she knelt beside him and looked in his face with charming curiosity. "Tell me, Beppo! Tell me!" and she turned her small pink ear close to his lips.

"Oh, there 's no need of whispering!" he laughed. "There 's nothing to hear but the birds and the bees, and they won't tell. But you, little Tessa, can you keep a secret?"

She nodded an affirmative.

"Can you promise not to tell mon père nor mam'selle? Because,

if they know what I intend doing, they will try to stop me. They will write to Uncle Anatole. Then Tantine, Silvain, and Mignon will know, and I shall have trouble with them."

"I won't tell. I 'll never tell. You can trust me, Beppo"; and Tessa's eyes looked large and serious.

"Well, this is it: I 'm training for the fall races"; and Beppo drew back and looked at Tessa steadily and gravely.

She did not seem as much surprised as he thought she ought to be, and only said carelessly: "Then you 're going to be a jockey, after all?"

"Yes; I 'm riding Lightfoot every day. Oh, she 's a beauty! She 's a two-year-old filly, and as fast as the wind."

Tessa nodded and smiled, though she did not quite understand.

"And no one outside the stable knows anything about it."

"Does n't your uncle know?"

Beppo shook his head mysteriously. "I would n't have him know for the world. If he knew he would forbid my riding."

"But won't he be cross if he finds out?" asked Tessa, anxiously.

"He won't find out. Murphy, the trainer, does n't know that I 'm a Chapelle, and I sha'n't tell him. I 've stopped giving exhibitions on the streets to please Uncle Anatole; but I don't mean to give up jockeying."

"Why does n't your uncle want you to go on the streets, when the people like you and give you money?" asked Tessa, with wide-eyed surprise.

"Silvain says it 's because he 's proud, and it makes him ashamed to have me do my tricks in public."

Tessa looked hurt and puzzled. "Don't go back to the city. Stay here with us, Beppo. We won't be ashamed of you."

"Oh, my Tessa, I *must* go back! I must ride Lightfoot when the season opens. I 've promised, and I can't break my word.

And when we win they won't be ashamed. They 'll all be proud of me. Just wait, and you 'll see all about it in the papers. Lightfoot and Thistledown! Lightfoot is the fastest two-year-old in the country, and Thistledown is the youngest jockey. Oh, there 'll be fun! They 'll bring strange horses from everywhere, and we 've got the winner right there in Murphy's stable. We mean to spring it on them, and enter her at the last. And won't the strange racing-men feel mean when we come in best? Now you see, Tessa, why you must keep it a secret. It would spoil everything if it got out. You understand, don't you?" and Beppo looked at her anxiously.

"I won't tell, Beppo; I won't tell," she replied with decision.

"That 's right, Tessa mia"; and Beppo, springing up, whirled lightly on one foot, and then went through a series of antics which were quite bewildering.

Tessa looked on enchanted, all her little pearls showing in a broad smile.

"Oh, I am so happy," he cried as he landed on his feet, "I feel like flying!" and he spread his arms and poised himself as if about to float upward.

"Oh, don't, Beppo; don't!" cried Tessa, laying a detaining hand on him. He looked so light and ethereal that she feared he might soar out of sight like a swift-winged bird.

But, instead, he took her by the hand and said gaily: "No; I won't fly away until to-morrow, and Jean's sails will be my wings. Now let us go to mam'selle. She will be waiting to take us to vespers." And swiftly and joyously they ran along the shining sand to the church, where they found mam'selle kneeling in silent prayer.

The next morning, when they were together on the landing waiting for the departure of the *Merry Child*, Beppo whispered to Tessa, impressively: "Remember the secret. And I 'll be back right after the races."

"Will it be long before you come?" asked Tessa, in a tremulous voice.

"Not so long, Tessa mia. But you can wait, now you know what I shall be doing and how happy I shall be when I come back."

As the *Merry Child* slipped from the landing, Beppo stood bare-headed in the bow, tall, slender, and straight, the wind tossing his brown curls, and the light of youth and health on his beaming face.

Mam'selle's eyes were following him with tender solicitude. She was wondering what his future would be, and whether he would return the same happy, light-hearted boy.

The curé's gaze followed hers. He read his own thoughts in his sister's face. "When and how will Beppo come back?" he said gravely.

"I know," whispered Tessa, with her finger on her lip.

XXXII

GOOD NEWS

THE colonel was wondering whether Beppo would come back on the return trip of the *Merry Child*, as he had promised to do in his letter, when, rather to his surprise as well as his satisfaction, promptly at the time the boy appeared, bright, sunny, alert, and brimming over with triumphant joy. He was so perfectly satisfied with himself and his success, so light-hearted and merry, and had so many pleasant things to tell them of his visit, that Madam Aubert and Mignon listened fascinated; and the kind old lady, who had intended to reprove him, seeing him so happy, had no heart to refer to his sudden and secret departure.

When he entered the colonel's study, and as soon as the first greetings were over, he drew a chair close to the desk, and leaning on his elbow, smiling and complaisant, he looked into Uncle Anatole's face and said with great satisfaction: "I guess you liked my letter, did n't you? It 's the first English letter I ever wrote. Were you glad to get it, uncle?"

"Yes, Beppo; I was glad to get it," replied the colonel, gravely. "But I would rather you had asked my permission. Why did n't you come to me instead of writing?"

"Because I was afraid you would n't be willing for me to go, and I wanted to take the money to mam'selle and Tessa," he returned frankly.

"But, my dear boy, you must not feel that I shall always say *no*.

I wish you to come to me with confidence and ask me for what you want. I am disposed to be very indulgent, and I will not refuse you anything that will make you happier and better."

"Then you 're not cross with me?" said Beppo, in a winning tone.

"No, my child; I am not cross. I am only sorry that you treat me with so little confidence. I think it most natural and proper that you should want to go back to your former home and friends, and I should have freely consented. I wish, when you are in doubt, that you would come to me or Aunt Josephe, and allow us to decide for you."

"But I 'm afraid you won't be pleased, and that you 'll decide against me," returned Beppo, in some confusion.

"My dear boy, can't you trust us to do what is *best* for you? Now that you have seen your friends and taken them your gift, won't you settle down and try to please *us?* Won't you spend more of your time with us and your books? Or would you rather go to school?"

"No, no!" interrupted Beppo, earnestly. "Don't send me to school — please don't, uncle! And I will study better. I 'll try to please you. I could n't stay in school. I could n't be shut up. I should die! I should smother!" he cried, with a passionate gesture.

The colonel looked discouraged. "But, my dear boy, you can't grow up in ignorance. In book knowledge you are a long way behind others of your age, and every day makes the difference greater. You will be ashamed when you are older that you know so little, and I shall regret my indulgence. You can't go on in this idle, irregular way. You *must* settle down to something. Can't you understand that I don't want to be severe with you?" and Uncle Anatole's face softened almost to tears.

Beppo looked deeply puzzled and distressed. After a moment he said entreatingly: "Please don't send me to school just yet. I 'll try to do better. I 'll try to study my lessons. And I 'll stay with you more if you want me."

"Can't you give me your confidence now, and tell me where you spend so much of your time?" asked the colonel, persuasively.

Beppo looked away. His eyes had a worried, evasive expression, but his lips took on the firm, stubborn line, and he replied in a very businesslike tone: "I 'm doing something that 's a secret, and I can't tell you. It 's no harm, and you won't be ashamed of me. By and by, when you know all about it, you 'll be pleased and proud. I 'm not a bad boy, uncle. I won't lie nor steal. And I always keep my word," he added proudly. "I learned that on the island. Mon père, mam'selle, and la mádre trusted me, and I wish you and Aunt Josephe would, and let me go my way and do the best I can."

The colonel saw that Beppo was very much in earnest, and also very determined, and he felt that it was useless to begin a struggle in which he would be defeated. For a moment he studied the supple, slender figure, the fine, pale face, the clear, honest eyes, and the firm line of lips and chin, and, in spite of the boy's faults, he saw in him the best of himself, and perhaps the best of a long line of ancestors, thwarted and perverted by an unfortunate environment; and he felt discouraged and helpless before the boy's strong will and dauntless spirit.

"It is of no use," he thought dejectedly; "for the present we must let him take his own way. As well attempt to control a wild eaglet. It is true we might capture and chain him, but would his better nature develop under such restraint?"

So he said gently, as Beppo seemed anxious to leave him: "You may go, my child, and I 'll trust you to do the best you can."

"Thank you, uncle"; and the boy's face softened to its most win-

ning expression as he seized Uncle Anatole's hand and kissed it heartily. Then he hastened away, eager to return to his favorite haunts.

For some time after Beppo's conversation with the colonel his conduct was admirable. He was very helpful to Madam Aubert, quiet and dignified with the servants, and a charming companion for Mignon, while he delighted Uncle Anatole by taking a real interest in his lessons. He studied diligently and his recitations were excellent, and at times he spoke of his future intentions in most encouraging terms. Yet Uncle Anatole and Madam Aubert were not deceived; they felt that he had, as he said, a secret, that away from them he was leading another and a different life. At times, when he returned after several hours' absence, he would appear to be greatly exhausted, his hands and face would be dusty and grimy, his hair damp and disorderly, and his clothes filled with an odor that was not the grease and garlic of Le Chat Gris, but the unmistakable and offensive exhalations of a stable.

Madam Aubert and Silvain discussed this new feature privately. "What can he be doing?" they said anxiously. But all their efforts to discover were fruitless.

About that time the colonel was very busy in the Supreme Court. He expected his land case to come up on any day, and he was extremely anxious. It meant a great deal to him. If he won it, it would free him from a terrible responsibility and make his last days peaceful and happy. For years both he and Madam Aubert had been toiling and struggling to save enough to replace Mignon's inheritance. They were growing old and failing in health, and they had not entirely accomplished their purpose. As the child's guardian he had used her money, and he felt that he could not rest easy in his grave if death overtook him before he had restored it. It was a secret sorrow. A feeling of remorse was preying upon

him. He knew that he had done wrong in appropriating what was not his in order to save himself from disgrace. And yet, at the time, in his terrible extremity he thought he was acting for the best and that it would be an easy matter to make the amount good; but he had not succeeded in his profession, he had not the faculty for money-making, and to his profound sense of failure was added the morbid sensitiveness of old age and physical weakness. But now a new hope had taken possession of him. The recovery of the missing papers had put another possibility within his reach, and his anxiety and suspense were almost more than he could endure.

One afternoon Madam Aubert sat alone, bending patiently over her engraving. Mignon was spending the day with her cousins, who, with their mother, had just returned home, and Beppo had been absent most of the day. The silence depressed her. Lately she did not like to be alone with her own thoughts. New cares and anxieties were gathering around her. Her expenses were increasing, her work was bringing her little profit. There was more or less rivalry, and perhaps she was slow and old-fashioned. Work as diligently as she could, she found it difficult to make both ends meet. And as to saving under present conditions, that was simply impossible, and there was a debt to Mignon. Of her own losses she thought little; but the child must not be wronged. She had insisted on using the money, and she felt the responsibility of making it good. Mignon was growing up, and soon she would need her small income. When the time came, how could she account for it or excuse herself?

She was thinking very sadly of all these things, when a firm, alert step crossing the court aroused her from her reverie. The door was thrown open quickly, and the colonel entered. It was an unusual hour for a visit, and Madam Aubert looked at him surprised.

Suddenly he appeared years younger. There was such an expression of satisfaction, such an air of success, that the light of youth seemed to beam from his face. "What is it, my friend?" she asked, rising to meet him.

"Oh, Josephe, at last I have good news to tell you. I have won my suit—the land is mine. Think of it! It is mine." And his voice had its old happy, buoyant tone. "After so many failures, so many defeats, I have gained this long-contested claim."

Madam Aubert bowed her head and clasped her hands. "Let us thank God," she said devoutly.

There was silence for a few moments; then the colonel spoke, but his voice was tremulous with emotion: "Yes; I am thankful. I am grateful to the merciful Father who in his mysterious providence has restored to my old age what I lost in my youth—who has given me back peace of mind, cessation from torture; for the greatest suffering I have endured has been the feeling that I did a wrong to Mignon."

"Hush, hush, my friend! Never accuse yourself. *We* did it. We did what was best. If there *was* a wrong, I was the guilty one."

"No, no, Josephe! You were an angel of unselfishness. You saved me—you saved us all—from ruin and disgrace. But we will say no more of that. As far as I can learn, this uncultivated waste of land is not of great value now, but it will be enough to restore what I owe to you and Mignon, and it will give me back my self-respect and make my few remaining years peaceful and happy."

They still sat there quietly talking over the strange happenings that had brought about such good results, when Mignon returned from her visit, flushed and excited and brimming over with news.

"Oh, uncle!—oh, Tantine!—I have so much to tell you!" she

cried, pulling off her gloves impatiently and throwing her hat aside. "I 've heard lots of news to-day. This very day, just while I was there, Aunt Gabrielle decided to go abroad. A friend came to visit her who has just returned from Europe, and she told of a school in Germany where little deaf-mutes are taught to speak and hear, and right away Aunt Gabrielle said she would go and put Aimée in that school."

"I am glad to hear that," said Madame Aubert, looking at the colonel. "If anything can be done for the lovely little creature, it should be tried at once."

"Yes; it certainly should," replied he. "But what about Denise and Silvain? Do they go too?"

"Denise goes; she is crazy to go. But Silvain says he can't leave his work. Silvain is such a good boy!" added Mignon, admiringly. "He told his mother that Senator Kenyon was in New York, and that he would sail next week for Liverpool; and Aunt Gabrielle asked him to wire right away to his uncle to take passage for herself, Denise, Aimée, and two maids. And I have n't told you all yet. Aimée cried and said she could n't leave *me* — that I must go too. And Aunt Gabrielle told me that she would take me if you were willing. Oh, Tantine, *can* I go?" and she threw her arms around her grandmother's neck and looked at her entreatingly.

"My sweet Mignonette, do you want to go? Do you want to leave us?" asked the colonel, as he looked at Madam Aubert significantly.

"Do you, my child?" she insisted, pale and trembling.

"Oh, Tantine! — oh, dearest! — may I go? May I?"

"Yes, Mignon, if you wish to," nodded Madam Aubert, slowly. "We will leave it to you. If you wish to, you may go."

Mignon looked from one to the other in surprise. She did not

expect such ready consent. But their sadly yearning faces filled her with awful compunction, and, flinging herself into her grandmother's arms, she cried frantically: "No, no! I won't go! I don't want to leave you! I did n't mean it, Tantine! I *did n't* want to go!" Then, flying to the colonel, she almost strangled him with caresses, while she rained tears on his face and hair. "You know, dearest, that I did n't mean it. You know I would n't leave you. You know I would n't go!"

"There, there, little whirlwind!" and Uncle Anatole held her off and wiped her wet face tenderly. "If you did n't want to go, why did you ask us if you could?"

"Because at first I did n't think. Denise said it would be lovely in Paris, and we should have such pretty things, and the shops were so fine, and dear little Aimée cried and begged me, and Aunt Gabrielle was so sweet and kind, that I thought I wanted to go. But now I *know* I did n't. I would n't leave you—I never will leave you. I love you and Tantine better than Aimée or any one in the world!" she repeated over and over.

Uncle Anatole looked at Madam Aubert and smiled. "I believe you, sweet Mignonette. Well, some day *we* will take you to Paris. Some day you shall see Paris."

XXXIII

LIGHTFOOT WINS

ON the appointed day Madam Chapelle, with her children and maids, left for New York to join her brother. So quickly had everything been settled that Silvain scarcely realized what had happened until he found himself alone in the great silent house, where he was to remain during his mother's absence, cared for by a faithful old servant.

This arrangement left him free to pass the greater part of his time out of office hours with the family on St. Philip's Street. Uncle Anatole and he had become the closest of friends and companions, and Madam Aubert had learned to depend upon him to share all her perplexing cares.

Beppo was still a source of great anxiety. As the summer passed and autumn approached he grew more erratic and uncertain. Now his books were sadly neglected; and his long absences, his tired, worn appearance, his spells of feverish gaiety or of irritable depression, filled her with uneasiness, and Silvain shared her solicitude. Vainly he tried to win the boy's confidence; to discover his favorite haunts without actually spying upon him; to find out what new occupation had taken possession of him. But he was as secretive and silent about his affairs as an image of stone.

In his numerous excursions after some clue Silvain had visited Le Chat Gris and interviewed Mère Picheloup several times, and he was convinced that she knew no more about Beppo's where-

abouts than did he. In fact, the old woman spoke in an aggrieved tone of his desertion, and declared that the fishermen and sailors seldom saw him, and that he never visited the schooners or luggers, with the exception of the *Merry Child*. On Jean's arrival he always appeared, eager to learn of all that had happened on the island, and to receive the messages of love from mam'selle and Tessa.

He gave no more exhibitions at Le Chat Gris, and now seemed as indifferent about money as he had been eager and greedy before. Mère Picheloup wondered and conjectured, hinted and questioned, but to no purpose. The expansive, receptive, light-hearted Thistledown seemed to have vanished, and in his place came a serious, reserved, keen-faced lad, who kept his own council and safeguarded his own secrets.

Silvain was annoyed and piqued at being defeated and outwitted by the boy, but none the less determined to solve the mystery, never dreaming how soon and how rudely he would be enlightened. Neither he nor Madam Aubert mentioned their misgivings to the colonel, who, since he had won his suit, seemed so serene and happy that they disliked to disturb him.

Silvain, who in most respects was reasonable and well-balanced, had one weakness: he loved fine horses and he adored the races. And it required courage and self-denial to overcome and subjugate a taste that had been somewhat encouraged by his Uncle Kenyon, who owned fine horses and occasionally indulged in his favorite sport.

Before the senator went away he had frequently spoken of Lightfoot, a beautiful filly who gave great promise of remarkable speed and endurance. He had been persuaded to place this beautiful young creature in the hands of an accomplished trainer to be prepared and entered for the fall races, providing he could find an honest and efficient light-weight to ride her.

"So much depends on the jockey!" he had said to Silvain, during one of his moments of confidence. "I don't want the delicate, sensitive beauty ruined by some rough brute. Murphy, the trainer, tells me that he has found the right boy — a wonder, a marvel; and he has had him in training for some time. He says he is absolutely incorruptible, as honest as the day, one of nature's little noblemen, and all that — as high-strung as the filly, with nerves of steel and the courage of a young lion. It is amusing to hear the old fellow rave over his jockey. He won't tell me anything about him — his name, who he is, nor where he came from. They say he rode last year in Nashville. By Jove! I should like to be here this season, but it is impossible. When the races begin, watch the papers, and if you see anything that will interest me cable to our house in Liverpool. Use the cipher, as it is all a great secret. If the filly wins I shall be proud to own her. If not, she will be quietly withdrawn, and no one will be the wiser. I don't like to have my name connected with anything that is a failure"; and the senator laughed good-naturedly.

When the racing season opened Silvain would like to have been at the course, where he could see for himself and hear all the turf gossip among the racing men; but his work was of the first importance, and nothing would induce him to leave his post of duty during his uncle's absence. When he resolved to go into business he also resolved to renounce his idle, luxurious habits, to sacrifice his preferences, and to deny himself his accustomed pleasures. He had refused several invitations from Hubert Lang to visit the track; therefore the only way he could learn what he wished to know was to read the journals carefully.

One morning he unfolded the paper, and the first thing that caught his eye was: "The following are the entries and weights for to-day's races. Second race for 2-year-olds, 3½ furlongs. Light-

foot, 92." "I must go. I must be there," he said to himself; and suddenly the old interest, the old desire, took possession of him, and, with as good a grace as he could command, he asked his superior for permission to be absent during the racing hours. His request was readily granted, and, calling a cab, he stopped at the Langs' to pick up Hubert, who was a young gentleman of elegant leisure, and together they started for the race-course.

"Why are you so keen about the two-year-olds?" asked Hubert, as Silvain looked at his watch and urged the driver to hurry.

"Because I 'm interested in a filly that 's entered."

"You? Oh, nonsense! There 's nothing among the two-years that 's any good, although I did hear a scrap of conversation yesterday between two sports. There 's a rumor that old Murphy is backing something fine — a new filly and a new jockey."

"Yes," said Silvain, indifferently. "I had a hint, too; but I don't take much stock in it. However, we shall soon know all about it."

When they reached the course they remarked upon the signs of unusual animation. The day was perfect and the track in excellent condition. A brilliant, excited crowd filled the grand stand, the judges were in their seats, and the book-makers were very busy. Evidently it was an occasion of uncommon interest.

"I 'm going in the ring," said Hubert, who was perfectly at home. "I 'll come back in a moment and let you know what 's up."

He disappeared, and presently Silvain caught a glimpse of Murphy, the trainer. He looked smiling and satisfied, and perfectly cool and self-possessed. Silvain waited for a chance to speak to him, for he was surrounded by an excited, noisy crowd. In a few moments he saw his chance, and, drawing the trainer a little aside, he asked in a low tone: "What colors will Lightfoot carry?"

"Blue and white," replied Murphy. He knew Silvain was the senator's nephew, and he wondered how much he had learned.

"See here, my boy," he said in a jocular tone; "if you want to make your pile, put your money on Lightfoot."

"I 'm not betting," replied Silvain. "But tell us: who is your jock?"

Murphy shook his head, and rushed away laughing.

Silvain found a seat in front near the judges' stand, where he was joined by Hubert.

"Look here!" cried the excited lad. "Are n't you interested?"

"In which?" asked Silvain, carelessly.

"Why, in Lightfoot, to be sure. Every one is talking about her. Put a tenner on her. The filly carries my money."

"No, no! I don't bet," said Silvain, decidedly. "But sit down. I can't see through you. They are about starting"; and he jerked Hubert into his seat.

A bell clanged loudly. There was a shuffling of feet, a pushing and jostling, and a shout of: "They 're off! They 're off!"

Silvain strained forward for a better view. At first he saw only a patch of confused color. Then, one after another, they separated and spread out in different hues, like the tail of a comet or a gorgeous banner blown by the wind; and at the very end of the luminous line he caught a glimpse of blue and white, the colors that Lightfoot carried.

Now it was red and black, scarlet and yellow, purple and gold, one moment ahead, one moment behind; but Lightfoot was steadily gaining. On she came like a bird, her dainty feet scorning the earth, her beautiful head thrown upward, her pink nostrils distended, her great liquid eyes as clear and bright as stars. And such a slender, airy jockey astride of her, so light and gracious, so gay and debonair, and yet withal seeming a part of the lovely creature he guided and controlled! His blue-and-white silk glinted in the sunlight; the vizor of his cap was pushed back from his brown curls;

and his fine, delicate features were radiant with joy and triumph. Both horse and rider looked as though they were created to win, there was such perfect harmony of motion, such sympathy of touch, such a marvelous understanding between the graceful flying creature and the brilliant little rider.

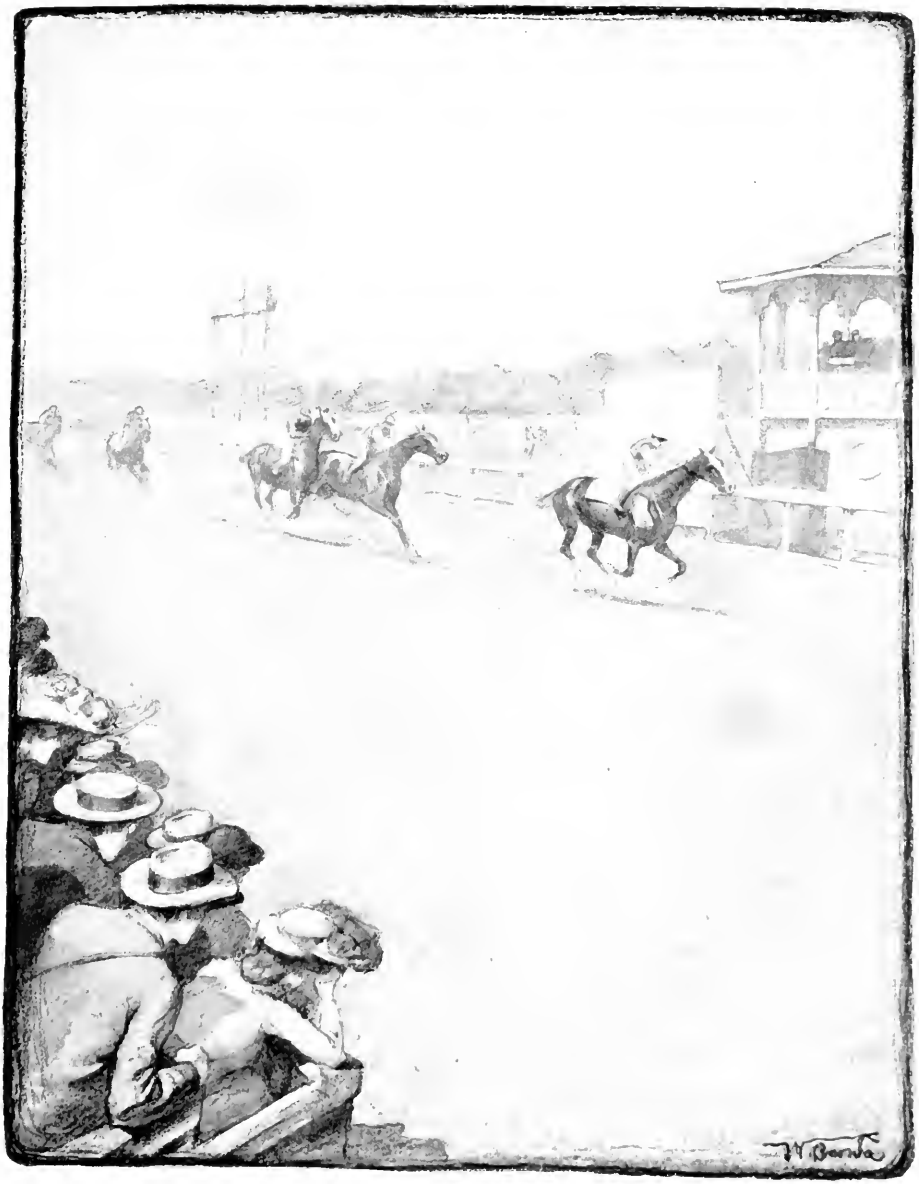
Silvain could scarcely control himself. The very air was filled with suppressed excitement. There was something unusual in the wind. So far the horses had seemed to be pretty evenly matched as to speed,—for some paces they had gone on nearly neck to neck, —when suddenly Lightfoot shot ahead like an arrow from a tense bow, and wild shouts rent the breathless air. "Blue and white wins! Lightfoot wins!" was heard above the tempest of voices, and was taken up and repeated over and over all along the line.

Some one in the crowd recognized the rider, and with the shouts of "Blue and white! Lightfoot! Lightfoot!" was mingled "Bravo, Thistledown!" "Thistledown wins!" "Bravo, bravo, Thistledown!" "On, on, Lightfoot! On, on!" "Bravo, bravo!" "Blue and white wins!"

The crowd surged forward. The din and roar of voices near and far along the line, the shouts and cries of exultation, were deafening as Lightfoot drew near the goal several lengths ahead of her rivals. The boy's face was pale and tense, his eyes burned like blue lights, and his small hands seemed to have a grasp of steel, as he threw himself back and shouted with the others: "Lightfoot wins! Lightfoot wins! Blue and white wins!"

"Good heavens! It *is* Thistledown!" cried Silvain, leaning over the railing and waving his hat wildly as Lightfoot daintily crossed the line, shaking her beautiful head exultantly.

Then there happened instantly what no one could quite understand. In the joyous abandon of his triumph Thistledown had checked the nervous, spirited creature too suddenly. Her quivering



"'Lightfoot wins!'"

limbs seemed to tangle together; she lost her balance and went over backward, throwing her rider some distance away, his face and brown curls crushed in the sand, and his slender arms extended in the form of a cross.

In an instant a hundred hands were outstretched to help the filly to her feet. She was uninjured. The boy lay silent and inert, like a wilted flower tossed on the rough ground.

Suddenly the shouts of triumph were changed to cries of distress. The occupants of the grand stand poured down pell-mell. The judges, the bookmen, the handicappers, the starters, the trainers, rushed to the spot. The great, blustering Murphy, pale and trembling, crushed through the ring and lifted the limp figure tenderly. Hubert Lang ran for a doctor, and Silvain took the boy in his arms. His eyes were wide open; his lips still smiled triumphantly: but his soft brown curls were damp and sodden with sand, and his blue-and-white silk no longer glinted in the sunlight; it was rumpled and crushed, and seemed like the lifeless petals of a bruised flower.

XXXIV

GOOD-BY, THISTLEDOWN

THE little music-shop on St. Philip's Street is closed again, and has been since the day when Silvain and the doctor brought Thistledown home as helpless and inert as a flower broken from the stem. At the first examination the doctors — for there was a consultation of the best medical talent — hoped that the injury was nothing more serious than a slight concussion of the brain. However, as the boy recovered consciousness very soon, but not the use of his lower limbs, they decided that the spine was involved. "It is not a hopeless case," they agreed. "He is young, and, with care and proper treatment, may recover very soon."

When it was known that Beppo was likely to be a helpless invalid for some time, Madam Aubert, at the suggestion of the colonel, decided to give up her business and close the shop permanently.

"Now that I have won my suit," he said firmly, "there is no necessity of your working, Josephe. The unfortunate boy will need all our care and attention. We must do everything to make it easy for you and comfortable for him. In the first place, he must be on the ground floor, where we can go back and forth without the fatigue of climbing stairs, and where he can be wheeled into the court or on the gallery for fresh air."

"And the shop and work-room will be just what we need for him," said Madam Aubert, with ready compliance.

Therefore, in a few days, a transformation took place. The music and all that appertained to it was sent to a dealer, and a dainty

white curtain hung at the window. The door on the street was closed, and the only entrance was from the sunny court. The screen was carried away; the work-table and all the little implements disappeared; and Madam Aubert's pleasant occupation was gone forever. If she regretted it, she made no complaint. Active, energetic, and cheerful, she took up her new burden as though it were a new pleasure.

A few days after the accident Beppo was brought down from his little room and installed in his new quarters. Silvain had scarcely left him since the time when Murphy laid the crushed, rumpled Thistledown in his arms. His heart was full of pity and sympathy for the unfortunate boy, struck down at the very moment of his triumph. Every fault was forgotten; his disobedience and stubborn resistance were wiped out; and all that love and tenderness could do were freely bestowed upon him.

Although he was a very pathetic little figure in his infantile helplessness, he was beautiful in his patience and courage. He never complained of pain and weariness, but lay with a triumphant smile on his lips and his clear eyes beaming with his old dauntless spirit.

When Mignon, hovering around him, pitying and condoling, would suggest that the accident had been brought about by some unfairness, he would smile and say with touching sweetness:

"Don't blame any one or any thing, Cousin Mignon. It was my own fault. Lightfoot was n't to blame. I jerked her up too suddenly. I was so glad and proud when she crossed the line that I did n't think. I threw myself back to shout with the others, and pulled her up, and she went over. I don't mind being hurt a little, as long as the filly was n't. She 's such a beauty, and so kind, and she won. Lightfoot *won!*"

When Silvain told him that the filly belonged to Senator Kenyon, his satisfaction was boundless. "And I won for him!" he cried

joyously. "She was n't hurt. She 's the finest two-year-old in the country. Why, Silvain, she 's a fortune! She 'll win every time. Write to the senator and ask him to enter her for the fall season, and if I 'm well I 'll ride her."

Silvain shook his head sadly. "I wish you had never seen her," he said with regret. "Perhaps she 's lamed you for life."

"Nonsense," he said scornfully. "I 've had many a fall from a tight-rope. I 'd be numb for a while, Costanzo would shake me, and I 'd get over it; and I will *now*. I 'll get well. I 'm bound to get well," he insisted with a confident smile. "Why, I am better to-day. I can almost move, and my arms are awful strong. See how I can throw them up. I could do my hoop-and-ball tricks as well as ever"; and he laughed merrily.

Silvain turned away to hide his tears. "Beppo does n't know how badly off he is," he said afterward to Madam Aubert. "And his courage makes me feel that I 'm a born coward. Poor little chap! Already he 's talking about riding the filly again."

"Don't, my dear, don't. It hurts me to think of all the suffering and disappointment before him. No; he does n't understand yet. When he does I pity him. However, it 's best to encourage him to think that he will get well soon. There is nothing like hope to keep one up. When that is gone we fail utterly"; and Madam Aubert looked at Silvain with sorrowful eyes.

"If courage and patience will pull him through, he will win the battle," returned Silvain. He is determined to win. I see it in his face, just as I saw it that day before he crossed the line. He was beautiful, he was grand, and then — and then —" Silvain sighed sadly and looked away.

"I wish we could change his thoughts, his ambitions," said Madam Aubert, earnestly. "I wish we could awaken a desire for knowledge. If he recovers, Dr. Daunis says, he will always be

delicate, that he will never be able to live an active life; but there is nothing to hinder him from becoming a scholar. He has a very bright mind and a remarkable memory, and he would succeed if once we could interest him in books. Talk to him, Silvain. You have a great deal of influence with him. Try to direct his ambitions into another channel."

"I will, Aunt Josephe. I 'll talk books to him; but he does n't seem to care much for them," replied Silvain, in a rather discouraged tone.

Senator Kenyon received a cablegram from Silvain on the evening of Lightfoot's victory, telling him of all that had happened; and scarcely had the first despatch been deciphered and read when it was followed by another from Murphy, going more into details about the accident, and adding some additional information about time and winnings.

For some moments the senator sat in deep thought, an expression of half-triumph, half-regret on his face. "I knew there was grit in the filly. I thought she would win. I 'm glad for myself, but I 'm sorry for the boy and the poor old colonel," he mused. "How strange that Murphy's wonder should be that boy! A Chapelle jockeying my filly! Times have changed since I was young. Well, I must do something for the boy." And drawing his portfolio to him he wrote hastily for a few minutes. Then he inclosed the letter, sealed and addressed it with an air of great satisfaction.

The senator's epistle was to the colonel, and, when it reached its destination, caused no little surprise. It was brief but to the point:

D'R COL.: In rec'pt of cables from S. and M. Sorry to hear of nephew's accident. Hope it will not prove to be serious. Wish to share Lightfoot's purse with rider. Check inclosed. Hope for favorable news soon.

Regards, etc.,

KENYON.

After the colonel read the letter he looked at the check. It was for ten thousand dollars. He could scarcely believe his eyes. What should he do with it? Should he keep it or should he return it? If he refused the senator's generous gift it might offend him seriously. And would it be right to deprive Beppo of a wealthy, influential friend? If the boy lived and remained a helpless invalid, he would need just such kindness as the senator was able to offer him.

In the midst of his dilemma Madam Aubert and Silvain appeared, and the colonel laid the case before them.

"By all means," said Silvain, earnestly, "accept Uncle Kenyon's present. He is rich and generous, and he will be a good friend to Beppo. Aunt Josephe, don't *you* think that we ought to allow him to do this?" and Silvain looked appealingly from one to the other.

"I think we have no right to refuse. I don't see how we can, my friend"; and Madam Aubert turned to the colonel. "It will make Beppo happier if he knows he has something of his own. I think we must allow the senator to carry out his generous intention. And you shall be the one to tell Beppo. It will please him so much that you will not regret our decision."

When the colonel went to Beppo's room, he found him lying on his *chaise-longue*, looking listlessly into the quiet sunlit court. He was watching a bird that had been to drink at the fountain, and as it spread its wings and floated away to the infinite blue the boy's eyes followed it with unutterable longing; but his gentle lips smiled, and his face had all of its patient sweetness.

Helios sat at the door drowsing, within call, and for a wonder Beppo was alone. When he saw Uncle Anatole he held out both hands and drew him close to his side with a strong grasp.

"Push my lame legs aside, and sit here on the chair near me. I want to hold on you," he said entreatingly. His clear eyes were

raised, and a tiny tear trembled on the under lid, but still he smiled brightly.

With some difficulty Uncle Anatole placed himself in the desired position, and Beppo nestled against him with a sigh of satisfaction.

"And how are you this morning, my child?" asked the colonel, looking at him closely while he stroked the clinging hands, his eyes full of tenderness and love.

"Oh, I 'm better, thank you, uncle. I 'm nearly well," he replied cheerfully. "If I could walk, I 'd be all right. Does Dr. Daunis say how long it will be before I can walk?" and he looked searchingly into Uncle Anatole's kind eyes.

"My dear child, he does n't say, he does n't know, just how long; but he hopes that it will be very soon, when you are stronger. But don't worry about that just now. I have something to show you, something pleasant to tell you"; and he handed the senator's letter and check to Beppo.

The boy was almost beside himself with surprise and delight. "And all that money is for me, mine to use as I please? How good, how kind, of the senator to give it all to me! Now I can do everything; and Lightfoot won it—Lightfoot and I! Oh, uncle, is n't it a great deal of money?" and he looked at the check again with an awed smile.

"Yes, my dear boy. It is a great deal for you. It will help you to get well. It will give you many comforts, many pleasures."

"And I can have some to give away? I want Tantine, and Mignon, and every one, to have some; and mam'selle and Tessa—can I send some to them?"

"Yes; if your friends on the island need it. It is yours; you can do with it as you please."

Beppo smiled gratefully. "Will you send some to mam'selle for Tessa? Jean Grima will take it."

"Jean Grima shall come to see you, and you shall send it yourself. I have had a letter from the curé, and when you are stronger he and his sister will bring your little friend to see you."

Beppo, leaning his cheek on the colonel's hand, caressed it gently, while he murmured to himself: "I 'm so glad to be rich. I 'm so happy. I don't mind being hurt, every one is so good to me."

For some moments he seemed to be thinking deeply. Then he looked up and said very seriously: "Uncle, I want to promise you that I 'll never again have a secret from you. I 'll never ride, nor do my tricks, without asking you and Tantine. And Thistledown is gone; there 'll be no more Thistledown—he 's gone forever. Good-by, Thistledown"; and his eyes followed a slender white cloud slipping across the distant blue, toward which he waved his hand and repeated softly, "Good-by, Thistledown."

XXXV

HAPPY DAYS

"I WOULD like to ride Lightfoot again," said Beppo to Uncle Anatole, who was delivering a kindly message from Murphy; "but, even if I was well, I would n't if you and Tantine said *no*. I mean to do just what you wish. I know I was wrong to have secrets; perhaps I would n't have been hurt if I 'd told you what I was doing. I 'm awful sorry I was so stubborn, but I wanted to earn money. Now I 'm rich I need n't have secrets, nor do tricks, and I won't make you ashamed of me." While he spoke he was holding fast to the colonel's hands, his clear, honest eyes fixed earnestly on his face. "I want you to believe me and trust me, and I 'll never deceive you again." Then he added wistfully, "But when I am well I should like to ride Lightfoot."

"Wait, dear child; wait until you are better. Wait and we 'll see, we 'll see"; and Uncle Anatole turned his head, a tear rolled down his face, and he could not free his hands from the loving clasp to wipe it away. It was a moment of perfect satisfaction. The little penitent had opened his heart freely; now they understood each other, soul to soul. There could be no more doubts or fears. From that moment there could be only love and confidence between them.

One morning Beppo was delighted as well as surprised. There was a clacking and stamping on the paving of the court, and a rough voice subdued to gentleness said coaxingly: "There, there,

so, so"; and Murphy appeared, leading Lightfoot, who was dancing and tossing her pretty head restlessly, while her great liquid eyes turned nervously from side to side as she regarded her strange surroundings with charming coyness.

With uncommon alacrity Helios wheeled Beppo's chair out to the court, and Murphy, excited and overjoyed at the sight of the invalid, led the beautiful creature close to him.

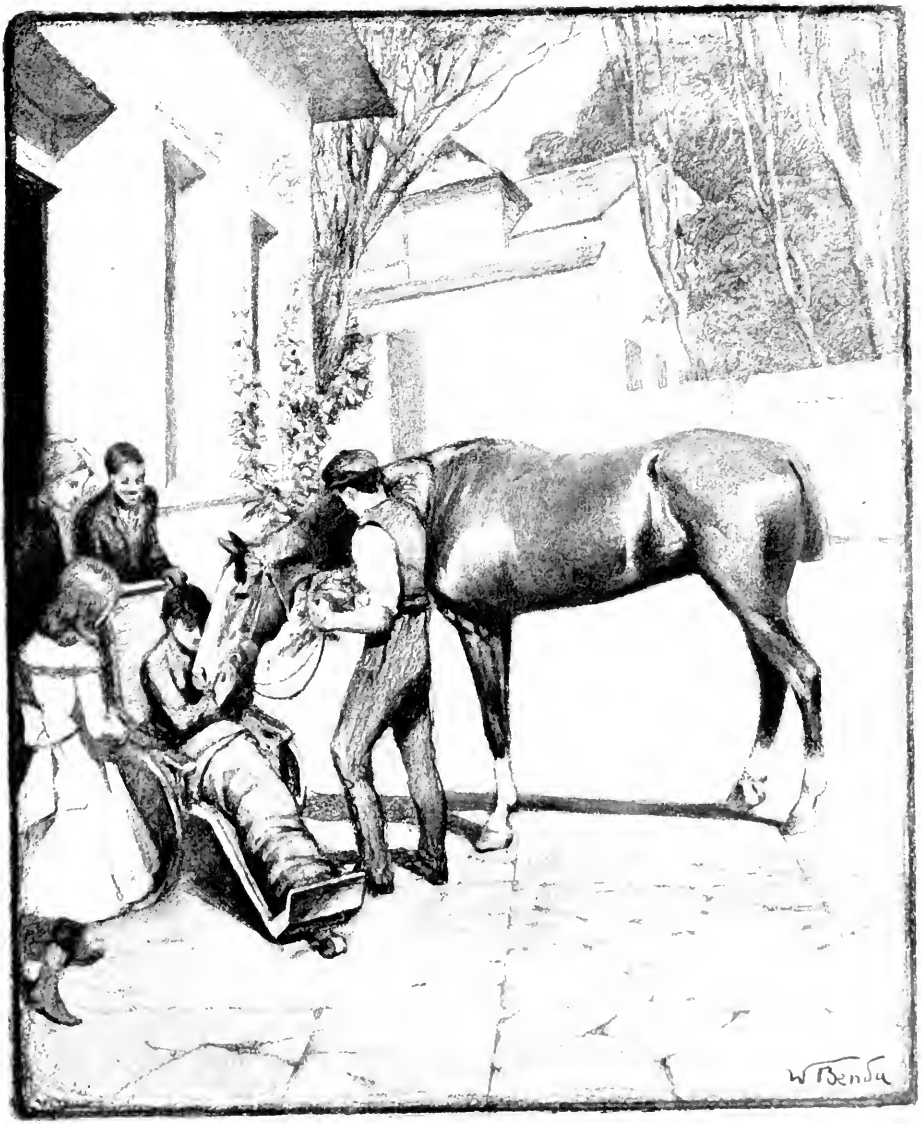
"Oh, oh, Lightfoot!" cried Beppo, in a gay, animated voice; and in an instant the filly recognized him. Bending her slender neck, she nosed his curls and pale face, and caressed him as tenderly as a mother would her babe, while Beppo rubbed her pink velvet nostrils and soft ears. It was a pretty picture: the proud, graceful creature showed such intelligent affection, and the boy responded so eagerly.

The colonel, Aunt Josephe, and Mignon all looked on admiringly, and Murphy was more than gratified. "She remembers Thistledown!" he cried heartily. "She would n't nose any one else that way. She 's so haughty that she won't allow the stable-boys to touch her without putting on lots of airs. Lord! Thistledown, she wants to go on her knees to you! I can hardly hold her up. I wonder if she wants to show that she 's sorry she hurt you."

"She need n't be sorry!" cried Beppo, clinging fondly to her neck. "She was n't to blame. It was my fault. I was too proud. I was always that way. Old Costanzo used to say that I *always* made a fiasco just at the end."

"But you did n't, Thistledown; you did n't. It was a splendid victory. That little accident might happen any time. The filly did n't mind it, and you won't when you are riding her again."

"Oh, Murphy, I 'm afraid I 'll never ride her again. I 've given up jockeying forever," returned the boy, a little sadly. "And if I do I sha'n't be Thistledown. I 'll be only myself. There 'll be no



"Caressed him as tenderly as a mother would her babe."

more secrets"; and he looked at Uncle Anatole with a smile that showed the pleasant understanding between them.

"Well, it does n't matter what you call yourself, but nobody else will race her. The senator cabled me to hold her up, and not to put another light-weight on her for the present. Well, I must take her home. You see, she 's getting restless. She 's so high-strung I can scarcely control her. She 's ready for a race now. You have put her in mind of it. Good-by, Thistledown. I 'll bring her around soon again. Good-by!" cried Murphy, as the filly danced away, almost lifting the trainer from his feet. Outside the gate two grooms were waiting to lead her to her stable.

There never was a more cheerful and attractive invalid's room than Beppo's. In the evening the family gathered there. Silvain and Hubert Lang were constant visitors, and often Paula, who was an accomplished musician for her age, joined them in their impromptu musicales. Mignon's piano was moved there, and Silvain had developed quite a pretty taste for the violin, while Hubert Lang piped agreeably on the flute.

Uncle Anatole and Aunt Josephe sat in the large easy-chairs on each side of the invalid, who always lay on his *chaise-longue*, the very center and life of the happy little party. He loved music, and had a sweet, pure voice, and often they sang the songs of the fishermen and sailors, when he would join in the choruses as joyously and heartily as he had done in the old days while playing with Tessa on the sands at Isle de Chène. At other times he would amuse and interest them with his clever sleight-of-hand tricks. His rods and hoops and balls were all used with the same dexterity and skill that had made him so popular with the habitués of Le Chat Gris.

From the first day of Beppo's accident Helios had been his devoted attendant. Now that the boy was helpless, he inspired no fear. He could not surprise or startle him with feats of agility or

mysteriously uncanny tricks. Like a bird with a broken wing, the invalid was obliged to remain quietly in one position. If he left him, he knew he would find him in the same place when he returned, always gentle, uncomplaining, and cheerful.

Besides being useful, Helios was very amusing at times. His slow, solemn movements, his dog-like watchfulness, his formal and fussy attentions, and, above all, his quaint and original ideas of what pertained to the unknown, were very diverting to Beppo, who often started a conversation while he was being dressed in the morning.

"Helios, what would you do if you were as helpless as I am?"

"I 'd do jes as you does, Mars' Beppo. I 'd lay still and wait."

"But you 'd fuss a lot, would n't you?"

"I'd blame ol' Mars' Satan a lot. He 's to blame fer dis yere. You know I done tol' yer ef yer made frien's wid der wicked ol' evil one, you 'd shore git inter trouble. Ef yer had n't tried to act like Mars' Satan a-doin' them conjurin' tricks, yer would n't 'a' been in dis yere fix. I al'ays knowed yer 'd come to harm a-kitin' round, an' a-dancin' on bareback hosses, an' all sich trash."

"Oh, Helios, how funny you are!" laughed Beppo, merrily. "That had nothing to do with it. I was n't doing any harm when I got hurt, and old Satan has n't any grudge against me."

"I knows he has, Mars' Beppo. Deacon Jones say how we must n't meddle wid de black art, 'cause der devil 's mighty kinky an' ugly, an' 'll do yer bad ebery time"; and Helios rolled his eyes lugubriously and looked at Beppo with a woe-begone expression as he added: "An' yer won't neber get well till yer gib up all yer badness, an' stop cuttin' up wid dem balls an' hoops."

"Oh, Helios, what a stupid goose you are! Hurry up and brush my hair, and don't study so much about Satan. I want you to wheel me around the court before breakfast."

When Uncle Anatole appeared, and Mignon came down as fresh

and sweet as a rose drenched with dew, Madam Aubert had Beppo's chair placed near hers, and, smiling and happy, she served the coffee, while the children chattered and the birds sang in the rose-vines.

The colonel was a model of contentment and peace of mind as he sipped his coffee and looked over his journal, reading from time to time the interesting items aloud to Aunt Josephe. "Listen to this, Beppo," he said, glancing at the boy, who was talking to Mignon:

"Senator Kenyon arrived in New York yesterday on the *Ville de Paris*. From there he will go to Washington for some weeks; then he is expected in this city, where, it is said, he will enter his beautiful filly Lightfoot for the fall races."

Beppo winced and turned pale. "That is n't true, uncle. He won't risk Lightfoot with any other jockey than me, and he knows I can't ride now. I 'm sorry, sorry! I should like to ride again. But I don't mean to fret about it." Then the momentary sadness vanished from his face, and he went on cheerfully: "I 'll tell you what I 've been thinking about — what I want to do now while I 'm getting well"; and he leaned forward and looked at each one earnestly. "Listen, uncle. Listen, Tantine. Listen, Mignon. I 'm going to surprise you! I 've decided to be a lawyer."

There was a general exclamation of astonishment, which was very gratifying to Beppo, and he continued with an air of satisfaction:

"I want to begin right away — I want to begin to study; and I mean to work hard. Hubert Lang and Silvain were talking with me last evening, and they said I ought to have a tutor. May I, uncle?"

"Why, certainly, my dear boy," replied the colonel, heartily. "Your wish suits me exactly. In fact, it gives me great pleasure. I have often thought of it. Of all things, I should like you to have a profession."

"Well, I mean to, uncle. You know Hubert enters Tulane this fall. He wants to be a doctor; but he intends to take the university course first, and that 's what I want to do. You see, Tantine," and he turned eagerly toward Madam Aubert, who was listening, flushed with pleasure, "I 've been a very foolish boy. I know it now, and I want to try to make up the time I 've lost. If I have a tutor I can work hard, and when I 'm well I shall be prepared to enter college. Don't you all think I can?" and he looked with anxious inquiry from one to the other.

"Certainly; yes, yes!" was the simultaneous answer. And Madam Aubert added, with a glance at the colonel: "The idea of a tutor is excellent, my friend. We must set about finding one at once."

"And can't I study with Beppo?" cried Mignon, eagerly. "Then I won't have to go to the convent. And we 'll both work very hard. I want to catch up with Paula. She has a governess."

"But a tutor will be better," said Madam Aubert, entering at once into the spirit of the matter. "If we can find the right man,—one who will be able to control and interest our two feather-brains," and she looked fondly into the animated faces before her,—"all will go well, and they will improve rapidly."

And in this way it was settled, much to the satisfaction of all concerned. The services of a young college graduate were secured. He had been seeking for some occupation to help him through his law course at the university, and the colonel's liberal compensation was of great assistance to him. For four hours every day the children studied diligently under the direction of the scholarly tutor.

These were happy, peaceful days for all. Everything seemed to have adjusted itself to the entire satisfaction of the colonel and Madam Aubert. The only thing possible for Beppo, if he recovered,

was a profession. And Mignon, besides her serious studies with the tutor, had other masters, and seemed likely to become an accomplished little lady.

Beppo's convalescence was long and tedious, but not without encouragement. One morning Madam Aubert made her usual early visit to the invalid. He was alone. Helios had gone for his hot water, and he was lying patiently waiting to be dressed. As soon as he saw his visitor he held out his arms and cried: "Oh, Tantine, come here!" And drawing her placid face down to his flushed cheek, he whispered joyously: "Dear Tantine, I am so happy! I am getting well. I am sure I can move my lame legs a little. The feeling is coming back. They prickle like when they used to be asleep and woke up. Now look, dearest"; and pressing his lips firmly together, with a desperate effort he drew his slender limbs a few inches upward.

Yes, he actually moved them. Life was returning, the sluggish nerves were beginning to act. It was as the doctor had hoped. Madam Aubert was so pleased that, after congratulating and embracing the boy, she hastened to tell the colonel the good news. And Helios was straightway despatched for Dr. Daunis, who, when he came, pronounced the improvement very encouraging.

"A little more rest, good nursing, and plenty of stimulating, nourishing food, and we shall have our brave little patient on his legs again," said the doctor, cheerfully. "But no jockeying, no nonsense, my boy"; and he shook his finger threateningly. "No more tight-rope performances, no more agile antics. You must look for popularity from some other source."

"I know, doctor," interrupted Beppo, eagerly. "I 've given that all up. I 'm going to be a lawyer and have my office with Uncle Anatole. I 'm preparing for college with a tutor, so that when I am well I shall be able to pass my examinations."

"Good, good, my fine fellow. You 're a genuine Chapelle. You 've got the colonel's courage and endurance, and you 'll come out all right. In a few weeks you will be moving around a little. But gently, gently at first! Make haste slowly, be very prudent, and in a little while you will be as good as new."

There was a great deal of suppressed emotion about the invalid's bed. No one liked to cry for joy, although they could scarcely refrain. Beppo smiled happily, but his lips quivered and his eyes were dim with tears; while Mignon flew to Uncle Anatole's arms and hid her face on his shoulder.

From that day the months of Beppo's convalescence seemed a series of happy events. One fine morning the senator appeared with the filly hitched to a light buggy, and Beppo was carried out carefully and placed on the soft cushions, Murphy proudly assisting at the ceremony, while Lightfoot, hearing the boy's voice, shook her pretty head and nickered approvingly. The senator jumped in beside Beppo, and taking the lines from Murphy, away they flew like the wind.

These delightful drives were often repeated, and each time the invalid seemed to gain new strength and courage. The senator was very amusing and good-natured, and he really admired Beppo's brave, uncomplaining spirit, and was anxious to do something to show his interest. Once he said in confidence to Silvain: "I mean to be a friend to that gritty little chap. He sha'n't need anything while I live. If he wants help through college, I 'll help him, and I 'll give him a lift when he starts out for himself. By Jove! Silvain, if he 's as smart as I think he is, and can take care of our law business, we 'll give it to him when he begins to practise."

XXXVI

IN PLEASANT PLACES

AFTER Beppo's first drive with the senator another interesting event happened. Père Bonneval, mam'selle, and Tessa came to visit him, and again there was a touching scene. The curé was deeply moved, and mam'selle lost control of herself for a few moments, while Tessa hung back and looked at him with sorrowful timidity. But the boy's happy face, his calm, contented smile, and his cheerful surroundings reassured them.

Very soon Tessa and Mignon were leaning over Beppo's chair chattering intimately, while Madam Aubert told the curé and his sister of all that had happened. It was very gratifying to them to hear of the boy's resolve in regard to his future. It had been their dearest wish to have him educated, and now all that they desired was sure to come about. Tessa had a great many things to tell concerning the island; but the most interesting event related to herself and her entrance into the school of the Sacred Heart. Mam'selle's only sister was one of the teachers, and she had promised to bring her pupil to St. Philip's Street. Therefore the little friends were likely to meet often.

During these happy days Silvain was very busy, and perfectly satisfied with his position. At the beginning of the business year he was promised promotion, and after that it would be plain sailing toward ease and wealth. And he had good news from Germany.

His mother was in excellent health, and wrote bright, cheerful letters. Denise was charmed with foreign life, and little Aimée was progressing rapidly under the excellent system of instruction.

About that time Aunt Josephe noticed that the colonel was very much occupied with business. Strange, rough-looking men came and went constantly; there were long conferences behind closed doors; and with all an air of excitement and eager expectation. But, as Uncle Anatole seemed very cheerful and self-satisfied, it could not be a matter of ill import; for he went about with an elastic step and a quiet, preoccupied smile, as though he were secretly brooding over some very pleasant subject.

One day he sent for Madam Aubert to come to his study. He needed her signature to some papers that related to Mignon, as she was the child's joint guardian with him. When she entered he was sitting at his desk, arranging his papers with trembling hands. She looked at him with surprise and solicitude. He was evidently laboring under strongly repressed excitement, yet he looked very happy. "What is it, my friend?" she asked quietly, although her heart gave a sudden throb.

"Sit down, Josephe," he said in a tremulous voice, as he drew a chair near him. "I have good news to tell you about that land. I did n't want to speak to you until everything was settled — until I was sure. Now I can tell you that I have just closed a bargain that will make us rich. I have sold the whole tract to the Sterling Oil Company for a sum that seems fabulous. They have discovered oil on it. The transaction is a secret at present; but the fact is, we are rich. The children will be independent. The Chapelles are no longer poor. Oh, Josephe, Josephe!" And, to Madam Aubert's astonishment, the colonel buried his face in his hands and burst into tears.

"My friend, my friend," she said soothingly, "take the blessings

our Father sends us thankfully and cheerfully. At last your noble self-sacrifice is rewarded — "

"But I owe it to you, Josephe," interrupted the colonel, as he drew himself up and wiped his wet eyes. "Had it not been for your kindness to that unfortunate child, I should never have found these papers, and this good fortune would not have come to us."

"'God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform,'" returned Madam Aubert, reverently. "Let us thank him, and try to make others happier and better with what he has so abundantly given to us."

And she went out as quietly as she had entered, leaving the colonel alone to regain his composure.

It is three years since René Chapelle, or Beppo, as he will always be called by those who love him, first began to study with a tutor. He has just passed his examinations with great success, and will enter college the next term. He is a tall, slender lad of rather delicate appearance; but he has entirely recovered from his accident, and what he lacks in physical vigor and sturdiness is more than redeemed hy his gracious bearing and beautiful face. A lovely soul looks through his clear, honest eyes, and he has a smile so gentle and tender that it wins the love and sympathy of all who come in contact with him. Silvain and he are inseparable; they are like devoted brothers, and the colonel always speaks of them as his boys. In the beautiful promise of their young lives he is enjoying a green old age. He has renewed his youth, and the incorrigible Mignon declares that she is ashamed of him, he is such a boy.

And Aunt Josephe seems years younger. Happiness is a wonderful rejuvenator and beautifier, for there is not in the whole city a more contented or prosperous home than the one behind the green gate on St. Philip's Street.

Beppo no longer needs the room on the ground floor, and Madam Aubert has transformed it into a charming salon where the young people meet for music and now and then an informal dance.

Mignon is growing to be a very pretty, graceful girl, sensible as well as accomplished; and, strange to say, now that she can have all the frocks and hats she desires, she does not care for them as she did in the days when Tantine could not afford them. Her dearest friend next to Paula Lang is Tessa, who cannot be called "little" any longer, for she is shooting up into a tall, rare beauty. She is still at the convent school. There is an understanding that the colonel will provide for her; but the curé and his sister are her nominal guardians.

Often mam'selle's sister takes her for a visit to the island, and sometimes Beppo goes with them. These are happy occasions, when they can wander together on the shore, or sit on the sand and listen to the music of the sea.

Already Beppo has done a great deal for the island, and the colonel encourages and assists him in the good work. He has built a commodious school-house, and established a free school for the children, and evening classes for the men who wish to study after their day's labor is over. There is one place that he and Tessa often visit with reverent steps and sad, thoughtful faces. It is the little church, where a beautiful enthroned Madonna sits with a child in her arms. It is a noble figure of purest marble, and the angelic face has the tender, brooding look of maternity. On the base, in raised letters, is the simple inscription, "La Mádre." It is Beppo's gift in memory of the dear and faithful friend who loved and cared for him in his neglected childhood.

One of the most admirable traits in Beppo's character is his loyalty and gratitude to his friends. Even now he loves to visit Le Chat Gris for a little gossip with Mère Picheloup and the old

habitués. They all adore him and look at him with pride and satisfaction, much as though his present prosperity were due to their early patronage and friendship.

"Unto every one that hath shall be given," seems more than verified in Beppo's experience: for Senator Kenyon has presented Lightfoot to him, and almost any day one can see him driving in the parks, with the colonel or Silvain by his side, or speeding her along the course, the proudest, happiest boy in the country. No one has ridden the beauty since Thistledown won the race, and Murphy declares that no other light-weight could manage her now, or bring her in first. "But later, later, if we can find some one"; and he nods his wily old head sagaciously and looks unutterable horse wisdom.

"Silvain, would n't you like a holiday?" asked the senator, one morning, as Silvain sat at his desk, busy over his foreign correspondence.

"Well, I don't know, uncle"; and Silvain looked up with a contented smile. "I have n't complained of being overworked, have I?"

"No, my boy; you have been as steady as a brick. You 've done well, and I think you 've earned a rest. It just occurred to me that you might like to run over to Paris and see the Exposition this summer, and you can bring your mother and sisters back in October."

Silvain's face brightened. "Why, I should like it of all things, if I can be spared."

"You can be; that is settled. You 've shown that you have business ability, and that you can stick to one thing. I 'm satisfied with you. Are *you* satisfied with your career?"

"I am, uncle," replied Silvain, with decision.

"No regrets about West Point, eh?"

"No, uncle, no regrets. When I decided to go into business I renounced everything else for good."

"Well, you 're a sensible, reliable fellow," returned the senator, warmly. "Now get ready for your trip. And, by the way, would n't it be a fine idea to take Beppo along? It would set him up for his college work in the winter. And remember, this is my treat to both of you. Now go and talk it over with the colonel, and decide at once. I want you to get off as soon as you can."

When Silvain, glowing with pleasurable excitement, told Uncle Anatole of the senator's proposal, he assented heartily. And after a moment's thought he said with sudden interest: "I don't see why we can't all go. I should like it myself, if I am not too old. And Aunt Josephe will like to see Paris again. And Mignon will be delighted. Why, I promised to take her some day, and now is the very time."

"Let us see Tantine and settle it right away. The sooner we go the better," cried Silvain, alert and animated at the charming prospect.

Madam Aubert immediately entered into the plan with all her heart, made every arrangement, smoothed away every obstacle, and declared cheerfully that they could be ready in a few days.

The only one who did not seem enthusiastic over the proposition was Beppo, and he surprised them by declaring stoutly that he did not wish to go. Madam Aubert, with her ready sympathy, suspected a reason, and questioned him gently, when he confessed that he could not leave Tessa — that he must stay and look out for her.

"But, my Beppo, she will go with us. Is she not a daughter of the family? Then why should we leave her behind?" said Aunt Josephe, with her kindest smile.

"Certainly she will go. I will send a message to the curé and

his sister at once"; and the colonel spoke and looked as though the question was permanently settled.

"Now everything is *just* as I wish it to be!" cried Mignon, impetuously throwing herself on Uncle Anatole's neck with her most fervent caresses. "I should n't enjoy going without Tessa and Beppo, and Beppo *would n't* go without Tessa. Oh, dearest, dearest, I did n't think, when you promised to take me to Paris, that we should go so soon."

"Nor I, either, my sweet Mignonette. Strange things have happened. Good fortune has come when I least expected it. Let us take our prosperity calmly and thankfully"; and as the colonel spoke his voice was grave and reverent. "My darling child, let us not forget in our happiness to be grateful to the One who has caused our lines to fall in such pleasant places."