The Thankful Spicers

AGNES MARY BROWNELL


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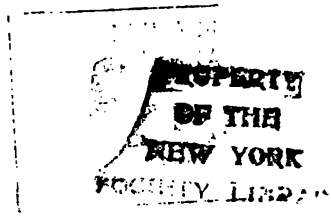
THE THANKFUL SPICERS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"All poetry don't have to rime, neither does this kind. It's blank verse"

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THE THANKFUL SPICERS

BY

AGNES MARY BROWNELL

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THE THANKFUL SPICERS

I

FANNY'S TYPEWRITER

The young Spicers crowded round with lively interest, but Mrs. Spicer's heart sank.

"What is it this time, Leander?" she asked anxiously of her husband.

The last time it had been a huge black onyx clock of portentous silence, and before that the sewing machine that would not run, and the washer that leaked.

"I give you three guesses," said Mr. Spicer jauntily, as he set his burden, covered carefully as if it had been sculptor's clay, down upon the kitchen table.

"Will it go off?" inquired Evalina.

"It'll go all right!" responded her father.

"That's more than the clock did, or the sewing machine, or the washer," commented Jed Spicer, with his habitual acumen.

"Take off the cover, Fanny," commanded Mr. Spicer. "You can keep still when there's nothing to say."

Thus adjured, Fanny approached the centre of interest, and withdrew the dingy, enveloping sack.

"A typewriter!" Jed cried. "It looks as if it had been made in '76!"

"I think—" said his mother, slightly dashed at the receipt of this new possession, and wondering where on earth to store it.

"What are we going to do with it?" inquired Evalina.

"You write stories and poems on it and sell 'em to the magazines," Mr. Spicer informed his daughter easily. "There is money in it—easy money."

"You write one," suggested Jed.

"Wait till I get the hang of it," Mr. Spicer said modestly. "You've got to use a special kind of paper."

"And a special kind of brains," added the precocious Jed.

"How much d'ye give for it?" inquired Fanny, the practical.

"Dollar-fifty," admitted her father, with a slight show of uneasiness.

"Well, that's what we got to get out of it," Fanny declared.

"I don't feel like I could afford to give you lessons on it, Fanny," remarked Mrs. Spicer; "what with your music, too."

"I'll quit the music," said Fanny, with an inspiration. " 'Tain't music, anyway—just old scales and exercises. To-morrow I'll go down to the Business College and engage typewriter lessons."

"Well," said her mother uncertainly.

"And when you've wrote a few stories and poems, you can take music again."

"We'll get a piano, and sell the organ," decided Fanny.

"Let's get a auto, instead," advised the truculent Jed.

"Get me a wheel first, Fanny, like Nettie Devore's—with red rims!" begged Evalina.

"Oh, let's get supper first," suggested Mr. Spicer.

"One thing I *am* thankful for," said Mrs. Spicer, with a sigh; "I don't have to do any of my work with it!"

The next morning Fanny Spicer, in her freshly ironed, last summer's dress, embarked on her literary career. Fanny's avowed purpose in taking lessons in typewriting was unique in the annals of the Business College. However, no word of discouragement was opposed to her frank statement of her ultimate ambition; and Fanny

subscribed with the utmost good humor to the requirements laid down for the course. The family typewriter occupied a place of state upon the parlor table, which had been cleared of the onyx clock and other ornaments. It is true that Fanny, in the early stages of her progress, complained of this humble member of the family of typewriters, for at the Business College she met only the most up-to-date of their kind; but Mrs. Spicer speedily silenced these reflections.

"Remember what I said about the organ, Fanny. When you'd took a few lessons off of Miss Tracy's piano, you turned your nose up at our old organ. Learn both, I said then, and when some one asks you to play the organ in church you can do it. What I said then I say now. Learn all you can on all you can," concluded Mrs. Spicer in a manner of expounding an article of faith.

Fanny was right. The poor relation of the typewriters at the Business College soon ceased to hamper her. Her shrewdness, the suppleness of her fingers, above all her practicality and attention to detail, speedily put her in the very forefront of her fellow students at the school. Mrs. Spicer was content to shoulder some of Fanny's rightful tasks, so long as she could hear the busy *clack! clack!* in the parlor. Fanny herself had oiled and screwed and cleaned the poor typewriter relation, and furnished it with a new ribbon. Mrs. Spicer had laundered the dingy greenish-black cotton cover. The humble little instrument now had an air at once subdued and grateful and, although its bell rang a little prematurely, and certain of its capitals stood up above the line, responded with an eager willingness to Fanny's flying fingers.

The warm afternoons found Fanny

Spicer, in faded flowered lawn, with her reddish hair drawn up off her pink, moist neck, seated before the ancient machine, click-clacking away, while her mother finished some bit of sewing or ironing that had been left over from Fanny's stint.

"What about the organ?" inquired Mrs. Hovey, the Spicer's neighbor, fixing an envious gaze upon Fanny at her machine.

"Nothing about the organ!" rejoined Mrs. Spicer briskly. "We expect both the girls to have music and art, but just now Fanny's devoting herself to liter'ture."

"So's Nettie," said Mrs. Hovey, with a sigh. Nettie was her daughter by a former marriage. "She reads a book a day, and she has such fine instinc's—the instinc's of a born lady, if I do say it. Why, Nettie won't read a book that ain't got lords and ladies in it. It's pretty hard on Nettie, moving

as you might say in the very highest circles, to come down to real livin'——"

"Why don't she read about her own kind of folks, then?" inquired Jed, who had just come in from the creamery, where he worked.

"She says they're not interesting," explained Mrs. Hovey. "Nettie started in music and learnt a real pretty piece; and she took art and painted a plaque. But that's as far as it went. Nettie's delicate."

A subdued snort from the direction of the kitchen sink was the only response to that.

"One thing I *am* thankful for," confided Jed to his mother, when the visitor had departed, "and that is that you and the girls ain't ladies."

That evening Mrs. Spicer, picking up for the first time the household magazine that the postman had left earlier in the day, came to a sudden resolve.

"Now, Fanny, I want you to read this—ever' story and poem in it—and then I want you to sit down and compose one of your own."

"I've already read it," said Fanny uneasily.

"Which would you rather begin on?" asked Mrs. Spicer anxiously.

Fanny considered: the prose looked very close and crowded. She decided to essay a poem.

"What will I write about?" she inquired, seating herself before the humble little collaborator.

"Write a poem about Wienie," suggested Evalina, referring to Jed's dog, a small, pathetic water spaniel.

Fanny began; her fingers twinkled; in a moment she had lifted the carrier—the poor relation was very old-fashioned.

" 'I had a little dog,' " read Evalina.

"He's mine!" objected Jed.

"Be still, Jed; it don't have to be true to be poetry," his mother admonished him. "Go on, Fanny."

Fanny looked and wrote, wrote and looked.

" 'His name was Wienie,' " read Evalina glibly.

The next line went more slowly.

" 'He plays and gambols,' " recited Evalina.

The last line went the slowest of all. Finally Evalina intoned:

"I had a little dog,
His name was Wienie.
He plays and gambols
In the yard."

"Huh!" exploded Jed. "Don't call that poetry, do you?"

"What's the matter with it?" inquired Fanny jealously.

"It don't rime," objected Jed; "Wienie ought to rime."

"Well, you rime him, then," challenged Fanny.

". . . name was Wienie.
Chawed off the head
Of a red verbeny,"

Jed recited.

"What sense is there to that?" cried Fanny scornfully.

"Don't have to be any sense to poetry," declared Jed.

"Now, now," said Mr. Spicer placidly; he had approached the table and stood regarding the author and her effort with distinct approval.

"That's poetry, all right," he decided; "all poetry don't have to rime, neither does this kind. It's blank verse, like Milton wrote."

"Blank is *right!*" cried Jed.

"There's one thing I *am* thankful for," declared Fanny fervently; "and that is, that Evalina here ain't the office boy waiting to take my copy to the printer!"

Notwithstanding her father's encouragement, her failure to produce the rime troubled Fanny more than she cared to say. On her way to the Business College the next morning she encountered Charlie Folsom, junior member of the Folsom & Son Investment Company. Charlie Folsom was Fanny's prototype for Prince Charming. He was several years older than she; in fact, Fanny Spicer seemed only a little girl to the prince. Fanny and Jed had been used in an earlier day to carry home the Folsom family washing.

"How's the literary market?" queried Charlie, who had long known of the advent of the typewriter and of the part that it was to play in the fortunes of the Spicers.

Fanny related the episode of the luckless poem.

"Well," said Charlie gravely at its conclusion, "it is poetry—of a sort."

"What sort?" asked Fanny.

"Doggerel—" hazarded Charlie.

Fanny laughed suddenly, and her face cleared. She gave him a shrewd look. "Do you know, Mr. Charlie, I've just about decided to chuck my literary career?"

"No—really?" said Charlie, smiling.

"In favor of plain business," resumed Fanny. "I hate to disappoint the folks, but I know I'm not literary or musical or artistic. I'd never get anywhere in those things if I pegged away forever. I might as well be Nettie Devore and fancy myself a lady in a book. I've known it quite a while, and I'm taking shorthand now, too, and business practise. I can pay for it when I get a position."

"Good enough!" commended Charlie. "And if a poem or a story did occur to you, you could nail it in shorthand before it got away."

"They won't come so fast but what I can take them down in writing," said Fanny wryly. "I guess Evalina will have to be the poet."

The Spicers accepted Fanny's decision philosophically. "One thing I *am* thankful for," said Mrs. Spicer, "we don't have to fix up a den for Fanny. Literary folks always has dens."

The humble typewriter had made its initial appearance in the Spicer household early in April. By August, Fanny's progress at the Business College had become a thing of note; and when the Folsom & Son Investment Company applied at the school for a capable substitute for the term of their stenographer's vacation, Miss Fanny Spicer

was unhesitatingly recommended. The great news struck the Spicers just at dinner time, on Fanny's return from the morning session. Mrs. Spicer was for the moment speechless, but Mr. Spicer openly exulted.

"One thing I *am* thankful for," he proclaimed, delicately staying a forkful of mashed potato halfway to his mouth, "and that is that I took the typewriter 'stead of the accordeen. I could 'a' got the accordeen for fifty cents more—but I didn't have it."

"Did you say ten a week?" inquired Jed in hoarse amazement.

"Ten—round—plunks!" reiterated Fanny, the invincible.

"Pays better than poetry," observed Mr. Spicer.

"When do you go to work?" asked her mother.

"Monday, at eight," replied Fanny glibly.

Mrs. Spicer considered. "This here is Wednesday—time enough. Fanny, I want you to go down to Rutter's and get three plain white waists—that's one on, one off, and one in the tub. Them old fady, flowerdy lawns'll do for evenings; but you got to go clothed for your station. It ain't every girl that gets ten dollars a week for wiggling her fingers!"

"Fanny, when will you learn me on the typewriter?" begged Evalina, dripping interest and blackberry juice.

"Now don't you go to crowding Fanny," admonished Mrs. Spicer. "You shall learn it all in time—music and typewriting and poetry and art—but just now we got to consider fixing Fanny. One thing I *am* thankful for," said Mrs. Spicer, turning a flushed and triumphant face upon her family; "and that is there's time for washing, ironing and general sweeping before Fanny takes the

position. I would feel better to have ever'-thing done up by then—it's like a celebration."

On a hot August afternoon of a following week, Mrs. Hovey, happening in as was her wont, found her neighbor flushed and dripping at the ironing board.

"Ain't that one of Fanny's waists?" inquired Mrs. Hovey nippingly, as she looked at it.

"Sure it is," responded Mrs. Spicer, neatly rounding off the collar. "Fanny expects to do her ironing after supper, but I ain't another earthly thing to do. How'd I feel, stretched out with a magazine, and Leander haulin' and Jed in the creamery and Fanny in the Investment—all working their blessed hands off this minute? One thing I *am* thankful for," cried Mrs. Spicer, "and that is that I'm spared to do for 'em—the best folks on God's earth, if I do say it!"

"You've begun full early to be thankful," observed Mrs. Hovey, "seeing this here's only August."

Mrs. Spicer selected a fresh iron and unrolled a damp and glistening garment. "I don't feel any call," she observed then, "to do my thanksgiving up once a year like a chore; we have extra fixin's and go to church and read the proclamation on the appointed day, but our Thanksgivings we take easy like ever' day, in installments."

"What's to be thankful for," inquired Mrs. Hovey maliciously, "in August, sweatin' over a ironing board?"

For answer, Mrs. Spicer gave her neighbor a pitying look. Then, carefully grounding her iron, she drew a towel over the damp expanse of the half-finished garment, and went over to her kitchen safe. From its seclusion on a self she withdrew a nicked and ancient bit of china and, removing the

lid, produced its contents for Mrs. Hovey's inspection. There were bills there, and silver. In fact, it was a little treasure-heap.

"Ever' dollar in there," declared Mrs. Spicer proudly, "was earned by Jed and Fanny. On his first Saturday night at the creamery, here come Jed and put in three dollars—and him starting on only six—and saying, 'Now, mother, here's the start of a new silk dress'; and last Saturday come Fanny, and she put in three, just like Jed, and she says, 'That's for your silk dress, mother,' and that leaves her seven, and what does she do with it? She takes a dollar out, for a girl has to have things, you know, Mrs. Hovey, and the rest she pays on her tuition at the Business College; for she says she can't rest till she's all squared up——"

"How soon'll you get the silk dress?" inquired Mrs. Hovey, eying the hoard, fascinated.

"Truth to tell, I could got it 'fore this. But there's little drains—all housekeepers knows"—Mrs. Spicer paused delicately.

"Nettie says there's no opportunity for a girl like her in this town," complained Mrs. Hovey. "She wants us to send her to Circle City. Nettie has a hankering for money and position."

"Let her get a position and work for her money," commented Mrs. Spicer dryly. "One thing I *am* thankful for—livin' expenses is high enough, but folks don't need to pay travelin' expenses to get anywhere. Look at Fanny and Jed! And speaking of Thanksgiving, Mrs. Hovey, Evalina's learnt her poetry book more than half through by heart, and Leander's traded off the sewing machine for a mower——"

"Will it run?" inquired Mrs. Hovey, with faint interest and a touch of skepticism.

"No more it will; but it's in the shed, and not under my feet. One thing I *am* thankful for—and that's plenty of room, with little furniture to clutter. Now, I ask you, would I wait till November to be thankful for them things?" demanded Mrs. Spicer reasonably.

II

THE SPICERS' CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS

"What size?" inquired the clerk at the hosiery counter.

"Medium—a good medium," said Mr. Spicer after a moment of consideration.

"These are a good seller," said the clerk, presenting an open box for Mr. Spicer's inspection. "Thirty-nine cents."

Mr. Spicer waved the box away with an affluent gesture. "Show me something fussy," he demanded; "they're for a Chris'-mus gift."

"What color do you want?" asked the clerk.

"Pink," answered Mr. Spicer promptly; he had given due consideration to the matter of color before setting out.

The clerk displayed a gleaming length, and ran a practised hand down the delicate mesh. "This would make a lovely gift," she said encouragingly. "Ninety-eight cents."

"I'll take it!" said Mr. Spicer.

"Is there anything else?"

"I got three more to get."

"Three more?"

"Presents," explained Mr. Spicer.

"Had you thought of anything in particular?"

"I can't say that I had," Mr. Spicer admitted.

"Ladies?" asked the clerk briskly, putting her wares in order.

"Not ladies!" interposed Mr. Spicer, slightly shocked. "Just folks—my fam'ly." He said the last words somewhat proudly, as if he were presenting Mrs. Spicer and the children.

"Hosiery is very nice," said the clerk insinuatingly. "Why not hose all round?"

"I never thought of that," admitted Mr. Spicer, struck with the neatness of the idea. "Let's see what more you got."

"What size?" asked the clerk patiently.

"Fifteen."

"Fifteen!" exclaimed the clerk.

"Fanny's fifteen," explained Mr. Spicer.

"Oh!" said the clerk. She brought out a pair of a delicate mauve. "How are these?"

"They look fadey," declared Mr. Spicer. "I want my purples purple!"

"Would these suit any better?" inquired the clerk, making a hasty substitution.

"That's more like," admitted the gratified Mr. Spicer. "Just like mother used to make —red 'n' white'n stripes round. Now show us something for Jed."

"Size?" asked the clerk.

"Sixteen 'n' a half. Jed and Fanny's close together."

"This is the newest thing in socks!" declared the clerk, displaying a zebra-like pattern in black and gold.

"I can see Jed in 'em now!" cried Mr. Spicer exultantly, for the vision pleased him. "Now give me something for Evalina —she's eight."

"Here's just the thing for a little girl of eight!" said the clerk, displaying a "baby blue" pair.

"There we are!" said Mr. Spicer elated.

"There you are!" agreed the clerk. "Two at ninety-eight, one at fifty and one at thirty-nine—two eighty-five, and thank you!"

"Thank *you!*" said Mr. Spicer gallantly.

"What you got?" asked Evalina, meeting her father midway of their block.

"Never you mind what I got!" said Mr. Spicer mysteriously.

"Is it for me?"

"Now I wonder!" remarked her father.

Going ostentatiously into the bedroom, he opened and shut drawers.

"He's been and done his Chris'mus shopping!" said Mrs. Spicer fearfully. "One thing I *am* thankful for—by the heft of it, it can't take up much room. I shouldn't be surprised if it was a lunch cloth; it would be just like Leander to get a lunch cloth if he didn't run on to a second-handed morris chair first!"

Mr. Spicer had scarcely turned from the hosiery counter when his place was taken by a slight and angular young girl with transparent red hair that framed a thin, eager face.

"I'll see some stockings, please," she requested briskly.

"Color?" queried the clerk.

"Let's see," pondered Fanny—for it was

no other than Mr. Spicer's elder daughter—"show me the very prettiest you have; they're for a Christmas present."

"And a mighty nice gift they make," said the clerk. "I had one customer—he's just left—bought hosiery all round for his family."

"That's an idea!" exclaimed Fanny. "I might do the same, if I got suited. Show me something for a man."

"How do you like this ruby shade?" asked the clerk. "Bright, but not gaudy—a good, conservative color."

"Paw likes red, too," observed Fanny. "I shouldn't wonder but those would just strike him. How much? I can't go above fifty cents."

"They're fifty,' said the clerk.

"They're it then!" said Fanny, with businesslike promptness. "Now, something for a young man."

"Brother?" inquired the clerk, with sly meaning.

"My brother Jed," said Fanny prosaically.

"Has he a favorite color?" asked the clerk.

"He hasn't, but I have," said the shopper; "I'll take lavender."

When the clerk had laid the lavender and ruby hose neatly at one side, Fanny selected for her mother a pair of delicate gray stockings with a pink clock up the side. "I'd thought of a manicure set for maw," she admitted half regretfully, "but she's never worn any but old greenish-black cotton stockings. I'll take one more pair—lacy blue ones for Evalina."

The clerk did up the variegated hosiery with businesslike dispatch, and Fanny departed with her purchases, which she cautiously stored away in a drawer of her desk

in the Folsom Investment Company's building before going home.

By the most unforeseen of exigencies, Jed got off that night at five o'clock. As he passed through the office of the creamery, Miss Pet Meacham, the stenographer, hailed him in a spirit of comradery, "What'll you do with your hour, Jed? Christmas shop?"

Nothing had been further from Jed's thoughts; now he approached the desk uneasily.

"Say, Miss Meacham, what's something for a girl?"

"Something for a girl?" repeated Miss Meacham.

"A present."

"Oh, for Fanny, I presume?" asked Miss Meacham, with a wise look.

The stenographer considered; she had been invited to a Christmas dance, and she

was going in cowslip yellow—yellow gown, yellow slippers, yellow hose——

"How about silk stockings?" suggested Miss Meacham.

"Sure they're all right?" asked Jed.

"I should remark!" declared Miss Meacham convincingly. But she cautioned him. "Be sure you get the right size."

"What is the right size?" asked Jed.

"A size too small. That always flatters a girl."

"Who wants to flatter her?" said Jed. "Why not be open and aboveboard?"

Miss Meacham looked at him pityingly.

Jed washed and dressed himself before supper, and immediately thereafter proceeded to his task. The stores were open in the evening because it was holiday week, and Jed followed the crowd.

From the time he entered the door he demanded silk stockings, and was finally

conducted by a severe individual in a frock coat to an advantageous position in front of the hosiery department.

"Stockings?" asked a weary voice.

"Silk," said Jed.

"Size?"

"Average."

"Any special color?" asked the voice that had been asking that question since eight in the morning.

"They're pretty!" suddenly exclaimed Jed, gazing unblinkingly upon a pair of translucent green.

"Very pretty!" said the voice. "Shall I do them up for you?"

"They look short," objected Jed. "Short in the feet. Are they average?"

"They're nine's."

"Are nine's average?"

"Can give you nine and a half," said the voice wearily.

"I'll take nine and a half," said Jed.

"Anything else?"

"I want 'em in a box—a holly one. 'And I want it delivered. 'Miss Nettie Devore, care of Mrs. Hovey, 119 Maple Avenue.' "

"Have you a card?" asked the voice, with a faint show of interest.

"No card!" said Jed. "Just say—'From a Friend.'

"Now," he continued with relief in his tones, "show me something pretty and cheap —han'kerchiefs or collars."

"Handkerchiefs — front — second aisle east," said the voice.

Black, unreasoning fear took hold on Jed. The aisles yawned like cañons before his unwary feet. He was a traveler in a weary land, a sojourner among strange peoples; so he stayed in front of the hosiery counter, on which his hands had taken hold, and recklessly duplicated the green hose for

Fanny. He selected for Mr. Spicer a cheerful plaid in a Rob-Roy effect and for his mother an elaborate clocked design. Evalina's were blue with candy stripes.

To his amazement it was only a little after nine o'clock when he got home. Fanny had run in to Nettie Devore's with a bit of Christmas cross-stitch, and Evalina was curled up on the lounge learning a "piece"; Evalina was to "speak" at the church entertainment. Mr. Spicer had been reading—a litter of papers screened his chair; and Mrs. Spicer, as usual, sat bent a little toward the light, darning stockings.

"This is the last time," meditated Mrs. Spicer, "for this batch!" A brilliant and daring thought struck her. Why not—why not combine sentiment with utility and make Jed's and Leander's presents good, serviceable hose? "To-morrow afternoon," thought Mrs. Spicer, "is as good a time as any. I'll

just go down and get my Chris'mus shopping off!"

"Maw!" spoke out Evalina. "I want my fifty cents to-morrow. I want to buy my Chris'mus presents. I'm going to get my presents at the ten-cent store, and I'm going to pay ten cents apiece."

"You mean, you want forty cents!" corrected Jed. "You're not going to get your own self a present, are you?"

"Maw promised me fifty cents!" declared Evalina. "I did the dishes and swep' the steps and dusted and did ever so many things—now, then, Jed Spicer!"

"Yes, yes," said her mother soothingly; "and so you shall have your fifty cents. And you can go with me to-morrow."

"I'm going to choose my presents all by myself!" Evalina said. "I earnt it! It's mine. But maw's keeping it for me in the sugar bowl."

"That's your silk-dress money!" expostulated Jed.

"Oh, I'll put it back!" said Mrs. Spicer hastily. "I thought I'd ruther get the silk dress come spring, so's I could wear it without a coat. Come, Evalina, you and me want to get a good start to-morrow on our Chris'mus shopping, so we better go right off to bed!"

The next day Evalina, proudly arrayed in her best, and Mrs. Spicer, presenting also an unwonted holiday air, started valiantly forth. At the door of Wernert's Five and Ten Cent Store, Evalina took leave of her mother, and they went their separate ways.

"Something, little girl?" asked an affable clerk.

Evalina swelled importantly. "I want four ten-cent presents!" she announced. The clerk directed Evalina's attention to a display of rings and brooches and many pre-

cious stones, but Evalina was wise in her day and generation. She knew from sad experience how soon the glitter wore off and the stones fell out. She proceeded up and down counters and in and out of them and round and round them, and time wore on, and still she had not found even one of the four.

But presently she spied something that she wished some one of her family might buy for her present. It was a pair of pink hose, long, ribbed and rosy. And ever the wish grew, and ever her doubt increased. A square placard pinned to the stockings announced in black and staring print—10c.

"These are pretty," coaxed the clerk. "Just the thing for a little girl. Did you want a present for a little girl?"

Evalina did; so she nodded.

"How big a little girl?" inquired the clerk.

"A little girl about my size," said Evalina.

"Then these are just right!" declared the clerk. "Shall I wrap them up for you?" And before she knew it, Evalina had bought a present for herself. Evalina tucked it away in her arm and said, "Now I want four more."

"Four more pairs?" asked the clerk, amazed.

"Four more presents," said Evalina.

"Whom do you want the rest for?" asked the clerk, proceeding in the well-known deductive manner.

"My fam'ly!" announced Evalina.

"I see," said the clerk wisely; "a papa and a mamma and a big brother and sister. Is that right?"

Evalina nodded.

"Why not get them some pretty hose? These nice tan ones would be just the thing

for your papa and your big brother; don't you think so?"

"All right," said Evalina, who felt that she had been shopping a very long time.

"And now what have we here for your mamma and your big sister?" purred the clerk. "I'm afraid we haven't a thing except black or white!"

"I'll take white," decided Evalina.

Meanwhile Mrs. Spicer was weighing a delicate matter. When she set out she had fully decided on only the most practical and serviceable quality in her gifts; but the bewildering holiday display played an unforeseen part in her calculations. The varied and shimmering shades, the delicate stripes, were like lovely webs set out to enmesh her.

"A pair apiece," thought Mrs. Spicer, "in their bureau drawers, all folded over—what a touch it would give—like a lemon-geranium leaf in a Sunday handkerchief——"

Mrs. Spicer, who was about to buy silk stockings with her silk-dress money, and who was entangled in the spidery web, experienced only the liveliest pleasure in her plight. Curiously enough she selected for Mr. Spicer the identical ruby color that had appealed to Fanny, and purchased a tigerish gold and black for Jed. With a vision of Nettie Devore's slim, silken ankles, she chose white silk for Fanny, and completed her purchase with Evalina's favorite blue.

"I don't know when I've had such a call for stockings," the clerk confided to her as she wrapped the fragile purchase; "they seem to be serving them this year family style!"

"Couldn't anything be nicer," said Mrs. Spicer, feeling improvident but happy.

The Spicers always had their gifts at breakfast Christmas morning. Fanny had wrapped her gifts in tissue, seals and rib-

bons; Jed's and Mr. Spicer's remained in the rudely disposed wrappings of their original purchase; Mrs. Spicer had carefully folded and retied hers with plebeian cord; and Evalina's were in gay, poinsettia bundles. They looked knobby, flat or symmetrical, according to the skill of the donor.

Mr. Spicer opened one of his gifts first.

" 'Hang up the baby's stocking!' " he began facetiously, displaying the ruby hose.

"O-e-e-e, blue ones!" squealed Evalina.

"Looky!" grinned Jed, holding up the lavender socks, which showed an opalescent sheen in the light.

"O me!" marveled Mrs. Spicer at sight of Jed's clocked, amazing present to her.

"O my!" echoed Fanny.

"Duplicates!" shouted Mr. Spicer, discovering the second ruby pair. "It's like a weddin'!"

In aghast silence the unwrapping now

proceeded. The floor was strewn with papers and the table with hosiery; it was like a bargain counter or a rainbow repair shop where scraps of sunset colors mingled.

Suddenly Mr. Spicer was observed to be shaking; he was too far gone for audible laughter; his shoulders contracted in a sort of rhythm and he waved from time to time a helpless hand.

But Jed roared; his guffaws shook the ceiling; and Fanny, after her first irate and fiery indignation had subsided, joined him in a sweet, shrill treble laughter. Evalina, who had been close to tears, remembered the fruit and candy and the stuffed fowl in the pantry, and vented her feelings in little cataracts of giggles. And, seeing now that all was well, Mrs. Spicer, too, soundlessly and helplessly had her laugh out.

"You just naturally got to be a blue stocking now, Evalina," argued Jed, who was se-

cretly very proud of his little sister's literary proclivities.

"I got one pink pair!" chirruped Evalina happily.

"I believe these green ones are just like Nettie's!" declared Fanny. "They come done up lovely in a holly box. Nettie was so curious she couldn't wait to open it, and all it said was 'From a Friend.' She's just wild! She thinks it's some rich and mysterious stranger and that their stations separate them but it'll all come out right in the end."

"Stations!" exclaimed Jed scornfully. "Let Nettie get started on the right track a-working like the other girls, and her 'station' will take care of itself!"

"You ain't hardly fair to Nettie, Jed," reproved his mother.

"Jed never did have no use for Nettie," declared Fanny decisively.

"Jed's a kid," said Mr. Spicer in defense of his son. "He ain't got girls on the brain."

"I think Nettie's real pretty!" piped up Evalina, raising her eyes from her blue pile of stockings. "*Why* don't you like her, Jed?"

"A-w-w!" snorted Jed.

"One thing I *am* thankful for," declared Mrs. Spicer, after another comfortable laugh over the Christmas stockings, "we come of a long-lived fam'ly. Grandfather Kibbey lived to be ninety, and Grandma Livensbee danced the Virginia reel her last Christmas, and she was nearly ninety-five. So it's likely we'll get our stockings all wore out 'fore any of our funerals!"

III

THE LADY ANNETTE

"Nettie is admired by one far above her in worldly station!" sighed Mrs. Hovey to Mrs. Spicer the next time she dropped in. "Mercy! What's that?"

"It's only Jed—he's washing up at the sink—he must of swallered it," said Mrs. Spicer in unconscious hyperbole. "What was that you was saying about Nettie, Mrs. Hovey?"

Mrs. Hovey pitched her strident tones to a low and mysterious key. "Know what Nettie got for Chris'mus? A pair of green silk stockings."

"So did Fanny," put in Mrs. Spicer.

"Yes, but Fanny knows who give 'er 'em!"

"Sure she does! It was her brother Jed."

"And who give Nettie hers?" propounded Mrs. Hovey darkly.

"I dunno, I'm sure," returned Mrs. Spicer, a little taken aback. "Who did?"

"'A Friend'!" was Mrs. Hovey's sole response; but in effect it was as if she had said, "The prince and rightful heir of all these possessions."

"Do tell!" exclaimed Mrs. Spicer, slightly dashed.

"Nettie has tried and tried and *tried,* and she can't think who it could be!" went on Mrs. Hovey triumphantly.

"Mebbe it was a mistake; mebbe they weren't meant for her," suggested Mrs. Spicer lamely.

"It says on the box—a holly box it was—'Miss Nettie Devore, care Mrs. Hovey, 119 Maple Avenue,'" declared Mrs. Hovey with spirit.

"Well, has she wore 'em?" asked Mrs. Spicer practically. "Do they fit?"

"Wore 'em! Do you think Nettie would put 'em *on?*" demanded Mrs. Hovey in a rapid crescendo. "She's laid 'em away, just as they come, card 'n' all. Just s'pose she put 'em on and wore 'em out before she met him! But, O Mrs. Spicer, that's not what I come over to talk about! It's John." At that, Mrs. Hovey's voice dropped like a plummet to some hitherto unsounded depths of woe. "Him and Nettie's had wo-o-rds!"

"There, there," said Mrs. Spicer soothingly. "What's words? They're soon forgot."

"I know I spoiled Nettie!" sobbed Mrs. Hovey. "But she was all I had till I married again; and John's been like an own father to her. And we let her quit school, because she complained the studyin' hurt her eyes—Nettie's delicate. And John

says, if studyin' hurts 'em, so does readin'; and Nettie's an invertebrate reader."

Mrs. Hovey's meaning was obvious, and the slip passed unnoticed; in the matter of language, Mrs. Spicer, like her friend, was no purist.

"And Mr. Rainey down at the Ladies' Outfitters offered Nettie a position—she's most a model." Mrs. Hovey's pride momentarily assuaged her tears. "But Nettie says who ever heard of a heiress taking a position, and she's going to take her money that was left her from her father's estate—three hundred dollars in her own right, Mrs. Spicer—and learn music and art in the city!"

"It'll keep her humping, I guess," Mrs. Spicer interjected dryly.

"And John says he's never had no lady folks about him, and if Nettie feels that way the sooner she goes the better it'll suit him.

O Mrs. Spicer, I'm a miser'ble, unhappy woman! He ca-calls her 'the Lady Annette'!"

"There, there," said Mrs. Spicer vaguely.

She might have recalled to Mrs. Hovey's mind the Biblical injunction about spoiling the child; she might in some sort have criticized plain, honest, tactless John Hovey; she might have blamed Nettie. But, after all, was Nettie so much to be blamed? There was the unfortunate three hundred dollars; Mrs. Spicer reflected what the Scriptures had to say about money and the root of evil; if it had not been for the three hundred dollars, Nettie would stay at home and take the position at the Ladies' Outfitters, and all would be well.

"One thing I *am* thankful for," said Mrs. Spicer to herself; "we have our troubles, but money ain't one of them!"

The situation called for diplomacy. Mrs.

Spicer was no diplomat, but she was a good friend. "Cheer up, Mrs. Hovey," said she. "I shouldn't wonder but Nettie would learn a lot besides music and art. She's a sensible girl at bottom, and she's got a good heart."

"But, oh, think if Nettie got to be a opery singer and went on tours and never lived at home again! How would I ever stand it?"

"I shouldn't think about that now if I was you," Mrs. Spicer counseled her. "Just you chirk up and be cheerful and let Nettie see what a nice home she's leaving, and she'll maybe be glad to get back to it."

Mrs. Hovey laid the words of her friend to her heart. From being an abode of gloom, tears and recriminations, the Hovey mansion came to shine as the stars in the firmament. Mrs. Hovey, who was by nature inclined to indolence, set about her new business with alacrity. As Nettie was expending part of her fortune on clothes for her artistic

venture, the machine whirred in the little sewing room. Mrs. Hovey dished up such meals as the neighborhood seamstress had not dreamed her capable of; and over all the rooms lay a shining order.

In the intervals of her work Mrs. Hovey lent a hand at the basting and conversed cheerfully on topics that were far from her thoughts. Nettie was not a little amazed at her mother's change of front, but it was far more comfortable than the old wrangling. The world looked very big and inviting to Nettie, and she felt no qualms as the day of departure neared.

On a morning of late summer, Nettie Devore set out to discover her new world. In her new suit and with the old-rose felt hat set jauntily on her blonde head, she already looked somewhat citified. As she stood on the station platform among a group of buzzing friends who had come to see her off, Jed

Spicer happened by. He had come down on some business of the creamery connected with certain consignments. Jed was in his working clothes, but he was scrupulously neat; he had recently been advanced at the creamery and no longer wore the denim and gingham of his earlier days.

"Why, hello, Nettie!" said Jed. "Seems to me I did hear something of your going away. Good luck to you!"

Nettie learned very rapidly in the city. She learned that things that she had taken as a matter of course at home, like shelter and care and food, commanded a high price in the open market. And the ministrations of her teachers—at an unbelievable price the half hour—effected scarcely more than the old-fashioned instruction back home. In truth, Nettie was destined neither for the studio nor for the stage. Her little plump, closely knit hands and her pleasant voice

had, if she had only known it, a humbler, happier mission. One thing Nettie found very easy, and that was to spend money. Her fortune went like fluttering green and yellow leaves.

"Nettie's decided to give up art," Mrs. Hovey confided to Mrs. Spicer, "and I'm glad of it! I'm afraid it's affecting her health. Nettie's delicate."

Late in the fall Nettie sent home a communication of such supreme significance that Mrs. Hovey brought the document over for Mrs. Spicer to read.

"I've about decided to give up the old music," wrote Nettie recklessly. "I'd expected to sing the Miserere from *Trovatore* in a black dress and lace scarf with a tenor in a tower, but all they give me is just ah-a-a-a out of an old yellow Concone! Besides, it's frightfully expensive. I guess I'm parted from my money all right, like it says

in Proverbs. I'm thinking of taking a position in a swell store here. The girls all wear black dresses with white collars and cuffs and look too sweet. Of course if you'd rather I didn't——"

"I was for sending for Nettie to come right home," said Mrs. Hovey. "But John says in his odd way—'Let the leaven work a little longer. Nettie's a-learnin' fast.' And she givin' up art and music both! O Mrs. Spicer, I'm a miser'ble——"

"There, there," said Mrs. Spicer, "I shouldn't wonder but he's right. If Nettie's a-learnin' and a-workin', I guess that's worth more to her than all your art and music!"

Mrs. Hovey assented, but with a sore heart. And since she could not at this stage summon her daughter home, she threw all her strength of love and longing into a mighty upheaval of the Hovey household

gods. She sunned and aired and pounded and polished, but Nettie's room was her final triumph. Every bit of paint did Mrs. Hovey scrape from baseboard, window frame and lintel. It was old paint, and it was scaling, and, moreover, it was an ugly chocolate brown. Her arms ached and her fingers grew numb, but she only rejoiced the more. And she stripped the paper from the walls until Nettie's room resembled an empty box.

With his own hands, Mr. Hovey, who was a carpenter, laid over the scarred old floor a shining floor of pine and repapered the room. Mrs. Hovey with her own hands laid a dull, egg-like coat of white over the woodwork, and spread the braided blue rugs and rehung the pictures and dotted curtains, and recovered the window box with a splashy pattern of rose and ivory, and spread the bed with her best marseilles.

"It's fit for a queen!" thought Mrs. Hovey jubilantly, "but none too good for Nettie."

Meanwhile Nettie had moved for purely commercial reasons, and she felt that her habitation was the wilderness, a wilderness of dusty halls and musty smells. The room she shared with one of the girls was not neat, and it had an ancient odor. The meals served in the basement dining room were all alike—watery soup, watery coffee, watery potatoes; even the napkins were damp. Nettie wore the black dress and the white collar and cuffs that had looked so attractive; but her heart grew heavy under its black vestment, and her feet grew weary behind the glittering show cases.

One afternoon of early winter she looked up to see Jed Spicer standing before her counter.

"Why, hello, Nettie!" said Jed awkwardly. "I just kind of thought I'd drop in."

A rapid succession of changes passed over Nettie's face. She was afraid she was going to cry and even more afraid that Jed would see it. Her throat within its soft, white, open collar swelled a little. But Nettie had learned self-control, too, among the other lessons, and she was able to say unsteadily, "I'm so gl-glad to see you, Jed! On a shopping trip?"

"Just come up on business for the creamery," replied Jed. "Say, Nettie, I've got to go back to-night, and I promised your mother I'd be sure to see you. Couldn't we go somewhere to supper—a regular bang-up restaurant—and have a little spread? Then I can tell you all the news, and you can load me down with messages. What say? Or would you rather I'd call at your boarding house this evening?"

Nettie shuddered at the thought of seeing Jed in that funereal parlor, with its broken-

"Why, hello, Nettie," said Jed awkwardly

springed, red-plush furniture, its dingy windows hung with cotton brocade, its perpetual odor of gas.

"The restaurant would be jolliest," said Nettie in her most careful, Lady Annette manner; but her cheeks had blossomed and her blue eyes were alight. It seemed to Jed that her blonde head was all a-shimmer like sunlight.

"I'll come back for you at closing time, then," said Jed. "I'll just look round till then."

Nettie's eyes followed him as he shouldered his way through the crowded aisle—the holiday trade was beginning. There was a capable yet gentle air about him. "Why," thought Nettie, "he looks like a gentleman, but he's just Jeddie Spicer!"

Jed "looked round" for Nettie's boarding house; Mrs. Hovey had given him the address. It was a grim, brick barracks, with

the pavement running high above the basement window. Jed, peering down, could see the twisted, yellowed curtains and many dingy tables.

He was waiting for her in the entrance of the store. She looked pretty and smart, but, he thought, a little thinner. He had chosen the restaurant, an excellent and long-established hostelry, and conducted Nettie thither; but once seated, he gave her the card with an entirely frank and unabashed laugh.

"Look here, Nettie, I don't know a thing about these things. But you think up everything you want, and I guess they've got it all right."

"Steak!" said Nettie, with clarion-like suddenness.

"With French-fried potatoes?" interposed the waiter, with soft insistence.

"No, plain boiled, and some corn bread

and apple sauce and hominy. That will do to start on."

"Same here," said Jed.

"Of course I could have ordered those fancy dishes," said Nettie casually, "and got away with it. But I'm just plain hungry, and that's the truth; and when I'm hungry I want plain food."

"Me, too," said Jed.

They ate joyously and steadily in a spirit of comradeship. Back home they had been friends and neighbors, and friends and neighbors they were to-night. Jed wished very much to add some unaccustomed luxury to the simple meal, but Nettie opposed the suggestion.

"I don't want to forget the homey taste of this," explained Nettie. "And, Jed, don't say anything to my mother about what I said 'bout being hungry. I get enough to eat—only I don't eat enough of it."

"Sure!" agreed Jed. "I'll tell her you was looking fine and had a fine appetite."

He bade her good night at the dingy brick barracks; he half hoped she would invite him in, but she did not. Perhaps she feared to lose in such surroundings the homey sense of which she had spoken. And when she reached her room she cried, not unhappily, a long time.

Jed's report brought solace to Mrs. Hovey and unbelieving amazement to the Spicers.

"Actually a-workin'!" marveled Mr. Spicer.

"And a-stickin' it out!" amended Mrs. Spicer.

"How Jed ever come to look her up is what I want to know!" cried Fanny.

"And, O Jed, is she even beautifuller now she's a city girl?" asked Evalina.

"Aw-w-w!" retorted Jed. "She looked

well enough. Course she's a-workin'. Nettie wasn't lazy; she was only spoiled. And o' course she's a-stickin' it out. Nettie's got spirit! And why shouldn't I look her up? Ain't our folks neighbors?"

"It was the nicest thing ever for you to think of it, Jed!" Mrs. Spicer declared. "One thing I *am* thankful for—it's like the Book says: silver and gold we get none, but such as we have we give. And I'll warrant it done Nettie more good."

Jed could not forget the brick barracks or the submerged dining room with the dingy curtains, and of a sudden a great thought came to him. But he must have an accomplice.

"Maw," spoke up Jed, coming upon her alone one day, "fix me up a nice box—the kind folks send their kids at boarding school —home cookin'."

"For the land sakes!" ejaculated Mrs. Spicer. "Who for?"

"For me!" said Jed boldly. "And for a little city girl that eats in a basement."

And he told her about the pavement above the windows, the stringy, yellow curtains and the ancient odors.

"I'd ask Mrs. Hovey, only she'd think Nettie was starving," explained Jed.

"Trust me!" exclaimed Mrs. Spicer fervently. "I'd start in this minute, only they'd find it out. I'll do it to-morrow morning, when they're all at work and Evalina's at school."

She already spoke darkly, like a true conspirator. A delightful spirit of bravado possessed her. Jed heard her rummaging in the pantry among her extracts and cookbooks; and Evalina was sent on various errands on her return from school.

Mrs. Hovey's olfactory sense was keen.

She came over about ten o'clock the next morning full of an appetizing curiosity.

"I just took a notion to bake up some things," said Mrs. Spicer in an offhand way.

"Jelly roll, I declare!" exclaimed Mrs. Hovey gloatingly. "Nettie's favor-ite!"

"Why, so it is!" said Mrs. Spicer. "I remember when her and Fanny was little they'd watch me roll up my jelly cake and set and eat their piece like little ladies."

That picture moved Mrs. Hovey to tears.

"There—there," said Mrs. Spicer soothingly. "Don't cry, Mrs. Hovey. You just set down and write Nettie the cheerfulest letter you know how and tell her her scarlet sage is the purtiest it's ever been. And mind you remember all our folks to her!"

"I'll do that!" promised Mrs. Hovey. "I shouldn't wonder but what I could ketch the

next mail. I promise you Nettie'll get something to-morrow."

"Sure she will!" agreed Mrs. Spicer.

Mrs. Spicer worked fast and furiously. By noon everything was set away in readiness in the pantry, and the house had a fragrant, Thanksgiving smell.

It had rushed Mrs. Spicer to prepare a dinner and a box, but she had accomplished the feat; and by five o'clock the box was packed. Into it had gone much fine tissue paper, a whole bouquet of fragrant odors, a pack of homely, pungent tastes. Her finest, whitest, most perfect loaf was there, her rarest pot of jam, the jelly cake done up in a fragrant scroll, and greatest triumph of all, a roasted fowl in its casing of bronzed, crackly skin. There were other more precious commodities in the box also —love, and understanding, and Mrs. Spicer's habitual thankfulness for service.

Jed, arriving at home early, took the box down to the office; and out of the surplus the Spicers had tarts and jelly roll for tea.

When Nettie opened her box in her room at the barracks—it was a Thursday night, cabbage-soup night—she first took her fill of looking and of perceiving those intangible things that Mrs. Spicer had packed in with the food. She was so happy that she cried; then, fearing the dolorous effect of tears, she laughed.

"I guess I'm the prodigal daughter, all right," thought Nettie, with a humorous quirk of the eyebrow, "and this is a revised version where they send the fatted calf on ahead. One thing sure—husks haven't got anything on cabbage soup!" She shared her box with two "chums"; Nettie had the social instinct.

"Believe me, if I could get such home cooking as this, I'd travel right back to

where they manufacture it!" proclaimed one of the girls.

"You can see how they want me!" Nettie said exultantly; for she never doubted that the box had been filled from the maternal larder.

"Here's where I quit!" continued Nettie, and then she reflected. She had learned many things of late, and not the least among them were consideration and fairness. Nettie had proved a capable clerk, and her department was just then conducting a sale.

"When I quit," she amended, "I shall go back. And I shall have jelly roll every night for tea!"

Meanwhile, she busied herself after hours with putting her wardrobe in order; for in the city a suit soon loses its freshness, and old-rose felt hats take on an ashy look.

The day came at last, and the car window, backed by a sliding line of freight cars, mir-

rored an eager and expectant face. The slightly weary eyes, the slightly paler cheeks, gave her a gentler, more womanly air. Nettie addressed the mirrored face:

"No airs, my lady," she remarked severely. "Remember, you're plain Nettie Devore!"

" 'Plain'?" jeered impishly the face in the window frame.

Nettie dimpled; and so did the mirrored face. It was something to be young, to be pretty, and to be going home. Besides, romance was not yet dead; the silken lure of it, untarnished by base wear, was hers still, in the guise of the green silk stockings.

Mrs. Hovey hailed Mrs. Spicer over the Monday wash line:

"Nettie was just wild over her room, Mrs. Spicer—she fairly cried. She says she learnt in the city to cry when she was happy and laugh when she was miser'ble. And she's

got a position at the Ladies' Outfitters—Nettie's almost a model." A natural pride mellowed Mrs. Hovey's tones. "But that ain't what I started to tell you." A mysterious note crept in. "Nettie's had another offering—a box!"

"A box!" repeated Mrs. Spicer faintly.

"A box!" affirmed Mrs. Hovey darkly. "First, there was the green silk stockings; and now comes a box chock-full, Nettie says, of the loveliest things to eat she ever tasted! And *no name*—not a *word!* The stockings said, 'A Friend'; it's getting intimater and intimater all the time! Now I want to ask you—as one mother to another—what do you make of that?"

"Now I wonder!" exclaimed Mrs. Spicer.

IV

MRS. SPICER PURCHASES A SILK GOWN

The mail carrier on his rounds reached the Spicers' on his noon return trip; consequently, the whole family were convened at luncheon when Mrs. Spicer's astounding invitation arrived, and all shared in the excitement.

"Who's going to get married?" asked Mr. Spicer, marveling at its fair, square outlines.

"Maybe Nettie's mysterious unknown has declared himself!" hazarded Fanny.

"Humph!" exclaimed Jed.

"Why don't you open it?" inquired Evalina.

Accepting that suggestion, Mrs. Spicer slit the envelope delicately with her knife.

Mrs. Henry Edward Folsom
Thursday, the twentieth of October
Washington Avenue and Seventh Street
Tea from three until six o'clock

"What does it mean?" asked Mrs. Spicer helplessly.

"Mrs. Folsom's sister's visiting them, and Mr. Folsom's sister's here, too! she's having some folks in to meet them," explained Fanny, fixing gloating eyes on the magic card.

"There must be some mistake!" declared Mrs. Spicer. "You know we ain't society folks."

"No mistake about it!" said Fanny crisply. "Mrs. Folsom's a friend and a neighbor, if she is rich, and she wants her folks to know you, or she wouldn't 've asked you."

"What do I do?" asked Mrs. Spicer, gazing at the thick square envelope.

"You go," said Fanny; "but not the first. And when you get there, you do like the rest."

"Bring me something home!" begged Evalina.

"Evalina Spicer," Fanny exclaimed, "I'm astonished at you! Do you want to disgrace us? Do you think maw can wrap up slices of cake in her handkerchief at a reception?"

"Never mind, Evalina," said Mrs. Spicer. "I'll bake up something nice for you before I go."

"Now, maw," expostulated Fanny, "don't go to doing anything extra. There's just about time to get ready. Now, you just naturally got to get your silk dress."

"So do!" approved Mr. Spicer.

"Whoopee!" exclaimed Jed.

"O Fanny!" pleaded Mrs. Spicer. "I just can't bear to spend all that money on myself!"

"Don't let her off, Fanny!" Jed cried, in delight. "I tell you that silk-dress money

in the sugar bowl ain't safe so near to Christmas."

"I can see her in it now," said Mr. Spicer exultantly. "In the dress, I mean, not the sugar bowl."

Evalina giggled happily. Mr. Spicer could always depend upon his youngest to applaud his little jokes.

"I'll try to get off an hour or two to-morrow," said Fanny. "And we'll look at every piece of silk in town. And I'll engage Delia Miller to come to the house—there's some style about her sewing."

"All is," Mr. Spicer warned her, "don't you let Delia give maw too much style. Style's cheap; you can buy it ready-made. Your maw's got something better."

"I guess you'll know me, all right," laughed Mrs. Spicer. "I know I couldn't feel any different, no matter how I looked."

"Thanks be!" said Mr. Spicer.

Mrs. Spicer Purchases a Silk Gown

"Mr. Charlie," asked the stenographer for Folsom & Son that evening as she made ready to go, "could you spare me a couple of hours to-morrow afternoon?"

"I expect I could," replied the junior partner—"that is, if it is very important."

"Oh, it's very important indeed!" said Fanny earnestly. "It's to buy a silk dress."

"A silk dress!" said the junior partner.

"For a long time," Fanny went on frankly, "we've been saving up in the sugar bowl to buy maw a silk dress, and every time, just before we get enough, she up and spends it."

"Very reprehensible!" murmured her employer.

"On us," continued Fanny, "or the house, or the coal, or the groceries. Seems like she never will save it up for herself. And now comes a chance in a lifetime."

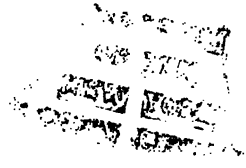
For so loomed Mrs. Folsom's tea before Fanny's dazzled eyes.

"By all means, grasp it," advised Charlie Folsom.

So it happened that on the next afternoon two heads—Fanny's, with its bright, transparent waves, and Mrs. Spicer's, dulled and tarnished by the years—bent above sinuous lengths of silks of various weights and weaves; and whenever a fabric triumphed over this critical appraisal, forthwith a bit of a sample was snipped off and popped into the depths of Fanny's black bag.

That night the Spicer family sat in solemn conclave and passed upon the merits of each candidate. Some they rejected as too fussy, others as too stiff; at last, with remarkable unanimity, they chose the smoothest, dullest, most supple of the lot—a soft, flowing black, shining as water. The sugar-bowl bank proved to contain enough to survive even that run upon it; but Fanny im-

"There's the proposition. What do you think of it?"



mediately put down the balance to the account of shoes and gloves.

"But I don't need 'em," protested Mrs. Spicer. "I got good shoes and gloves."

"They're scuffy," pronounced the critical Fanny. "And now, what you s'pose Nettie's done?"

"What?" asked Jed explosively.

Fanny looked at him suspiciously. "You're always expecting Nettie to do something foolish!" she complained. "Well, she had Delia Miller engaged to make her new blue dress, and when it come out about maw's silk she just up and insisted that we take her time and she'd wait. What do you think of that for Nettie?"

"Nettie's coming on," responded Mr. Spicer.

"I always said Nettie had it in her," declared Mrs. Spicer.

"Now, maw, you take your sample and

go down to Crawford's right away in the morning, or would you rather I'd get it for you?"

Mrs. Spicer clutched the sugar-bowl jealously. "No," she hastily declared, "I'll go, Fanny; I'd kinda like to—'taint every day I get to buy myself a silk dress."

"Have you got it?" asked the Spicers, big and little, at noon the next day.

Mrs. Spicer smiled indulgently. "I thought I'd go this afternoon—seemed like, having a silk dress in the house, one ought to kind of fix up for it; so I done general sweeping this morning and straightened up the bureau drawers. I'm a-going to enjoy myself this afternoon; I feel like I'll enjoy buying the dress more than I shall the tea. I ain't so sure about the tea."

"Wait till you've been," counseled Fanny.

By half past two o'clock Mrs. Spicer was ready for the excursion. She locked the

front door and dropped the key jangling into the mail box. As she passed the Ladies' Outfitting establishment where Nettie Devore worked, she decided to stop and thank the girl for her generous offer.

"Something, Mrs. Spicer?" Nettie asked, with her pleasant smile.

"I just wanted to thank you, Nettie, for letting me have your turn with Delia."

"Don't mention it," said Nettie. "I think it's lovely for you to be having a silk dress. Fanny told me."

"How nice your things look, and how reasonable they are!" exclaimed Mrs. Spicer, examining the tags of garments with growing enthusiasm. "Now here's just the skirt I wish Fanny had to wear to the office—good and plain, and yet with a sort of air about it."

Nettie held it up against her slender

height. "It's just about Fanny's size, too," she observed.

"I've a notion to take it," said Mrs. Spicer recklessly. "It's a small enough return in all reason when she helped get my silk dress. Yes, I'll take it."

"If it should need any alterations, we'll attend to them. Sha'n't we send it up, Mrs. Spicer? You'll get it this evening."

"All right," said Mrs. Spicer. "I dunno when I've seen anything that's pleased me more."

"Wait till you see it on Fanny," said Nettie gayly.

"I must get along," thought Mrs. Spicer, hurrying past alluring windows. "But wasn't it lucky I stopped to see Nettie, or I'd never have thought of Fanny's skirt. My sakes! There's the very coat for Evalina—blue and warm and woolly—and with velvet buttons! I can fairly see her in it!"

Mrs. Spicer Purchases a Silk Gown

It was more than impulse—it was the realization of a dream—that urged Mrs. Spicer up the stairs and into the Children's Department.

"Blue coat?" questioned the saleslady. "Certainly. This way. Blue's always good, and this season we have some specially nifty garments for children."

"This one has velvet buttons," said Mrs. Spicer, "and a velvet collar and a belt."

"Just so," agreed the saleslady. "How old is your little girl, madam?"

"Evalina's ten," replied Mrs. Spicer, with maternal pride.

"Andy," said the clerk, "there's a ten-year-old model in the window downstairs. Bring it up, will you?"

"That's it!" cried Mrs. Spicer, when the boy returned carrying the glorious blue and woolly garment with the velvet buttons that stuck out so jauntily.

"The very prettiest thing in the store," declared the clerk.

Mrs. Spicer examined the price tag, and her mother's heart exulted. To think of it —the coat and all the joy of purchasing it for such a paltry sum!

"I can hardly wait," said Mrs. Spicer as she concluded the purchase, "to get Evalina into it."

"We'll send it out on the next delivery," promised the clerk.

"I really must get along," thought Mrs. Spicer. "But how tidy that Andy did look in his sweater coat! I always did love that shade of gray. I've a notion—there's some now—I wonder—would Jed like a red one, you s'pose? Mebbe they'd exchange. 'Twouldn't hurt to ask."

"Why certainly," said the clerk affably to her query. "I lean to gray myself. He's nineteen, you say? You want 'em roomy,

you know. Now, I should say something on this order."

"That's just it," agreed Mrs. Spicer enthusiastically. "It's warm as toast, and a creamery is a terrible cold place to work."

"He'll think it's June in this," the clerk assured her; "and if he prefers the red, he has only to exchange it."

"A whole winter's comfort!" exulted Mrs. Spicer. "And all for a few dollars. What's them?"

"These are smoking jackets," said the clerk, displaying a ruby-colored garment with a neat plaid design on its collar and cuffs.

"One thing I *am* thankful for," said Mrs. Spicer, "and that is, Leander don't smoke; but then, he wouldn't have to smoke to wear one of 'em."

"Certainly not," the clerk assured her. "Many of our customers find them just the

thing to slip on for evenings at home and Sunday mornings."

"And they're so sort of dressy," said Mrs. Spicer. "I declare! I can just see Leander eating Sunday breakfast in one. Sunday's Leander's day of rest, and I aim to make him comf'table."

"I'm sure you do," agreed the clerk. "Well, this will make him so if anything will."

"That's just what I think," agreed Mrs. Spicer heartily. "And Leander's so fond of red, too, and this is a lovely red."

"On the claret," said the clerk judicially.

"Even so, it's a pretty color," said Mrs. Spicer. "I'm temperance myself, but I got no objection to the color. One thing I *am* thankful for—a person can have principles without being cranky."

To Mrs. Spicer's delight, the smoking jacket, despite its dressy appearance, was not

exorbitant in price. She opened her bag, extracted a bill, and stood peering down into the shabby black depths.

"Missed something?" asked the clerk sympathetically.

"N-no," responded Mrs. Spicer. "I just happened to remember something."

What Mrs. Spicer had remembered too late was the silk dress.

It had actually taken Mrs. Spicer a full moment to comprehend the fact that her original purpose had been to buy herself a silk dress and several more moments to reckon up her balance. Mrs. Spicer had never been good at figures, but it was really a very small sum that she now had to compute.

She sat down in a comparatively obscure corner in order to perform the arithmetical computation. When she had finished, an expression curiously compounded of beati-

fication and recklessness overspread her features.

"It's a good joke on me," she declared. "And anyway, I had all the fun of spending the money, and I got four times as much. It's as good as a silk dress to have 'em think of it for me—and besides, if I had it I couldn't set and look at myself, while this way I'll be seeing one or tother of 'em a good share of the time. One thing I *am* thankful for, and that is, a person can enjoy things without havin' 'em. Now, I don't know when I've enjoyed anything like I have my silk dress I ain't got."

Evalina was swinging impatiently on the gate when her mother reached home. "Have you got the new dress, maw? Have you got it?" she screamed shrilly.

"Now you wait, Evalina," said Mrs. Spicer.

Fanny poked her head out. "Where is it?" she demanded.

"You just wait," repeated Mrs. Spicer. "What—supper most ready?"

"I got off early," said Fanny. "I've been looking at the fashion books Delia lent me."

"If here ain't paw!" exclaimed Mrs. Spicer. "I must hurry and change."

On Mrs. Spicer's reentry, clad in serviceable gray percale, the family drew up to the cheery, lighted table.

"Here it is now!" cried Jed at sight of a smart delivery cart. "Maw's silk dress is coming home in style."

Evalina hurried to the door, and came back tugging a fair-sized bundle.

"Why, there's another!" exclaimed Fanny. "There must be some mistake." She accepted the package unwillingly from the delivery boy.

"There's Nettie!" exclaimed Jed.

Nettie came breezily into the room. Two red roses were printed on her smooth cheeks, and her blown hair was like a silver veil. She carried a large package.

"Maw's gone and bought herself three silk dresses," said Mr. Spicer.

"The wagon was so late, I just thought I'd bring it up myself, Mrs. Spicer," said Nettie brightly. "How cozy you all look! Well, I must get along to my own supper."

"Set up, Nettie," urged Mrs. Spicer hospitably, seconded by a chorus from the rest.

"I'd love to," said Nettie; "but the folks —well, they just sort of make a gala time of it at supper; and I tell them all the news."

"I know just how it is," said Mrs. Spicer, beaming. "I feel the same way about Leander and Fanny and Jed and Evalina, here."

"But if you don't mind," begged Nettie, "I will take a piece of jelly cake to eat on the way home. You know what a hand I always was for jelly cake, Mrs. Spicer."

Mr. Spicer gallantly handed up the plate; and Nettie daintily separated the ribbon-like scroll. "No one ever made jelly roll just like you," said Nettie; and as she sped by she gave Mrs. Spicer a little affectionate pat.

"O-o-o, looky!" breathed Evalina. Little by little she had pulled away the wrapping from one of the bundles, and now she held to view the dressy smoking jacket.

"Evalina," said Mrs. Spicer, "now you got it out, go help your father slip it on."

According to his comfortable custom, Mr. Spicer was eating supper in his shirt sleeves.

"Anything for me?" asked Jed, with a grin, as his father, too astonished for once

to say anything, drew on the bright jacket.

"L-looky!" chanted Evalina, dragging out the gray sweater.

"Maw!" exclaimed Fanny, disinterring the skirt.

"Evalina, honey, this here's yourn," said Mrs. Spicer, unable longer to withstand the temptation of seeing her youngest adorned with the velvet buttons.

Across the table, they stared at one another—Jed in his sweater and Mr. Spicer in his jacket, Fanny with the smart skirt extended at arm's length, and Evalina cloaked in blue and velvet.

"Maw!" said Fanny in her young, vibrant voice. "Where's your silk dress?"

"This here's my silk dress," said Mrs. Spicer, looking fondly at them all. "I reelly meant to buy it, much as anything, but I found something I'd ruther have, and so

I got it, four times as much for the money, and a hundred times the fun."

"We might 'a' known it!" groaned Fanny. "Oh, why did we ever trust her with the money?"

"Now, see here," Mr. Spicer chided them. "Where's all our manners? I, for one, expect to take solid comfort out of this here jacket when I get the hang of it; and, maw, I thank ye, I reelly do."

"That's the ticket!" exclaimed Jed. "You couldn't have suited me better, and thanky, maw."

"O mumpie, mumpie!" cried Evalina, and ran over and burrowed into her mother's lap.

"We don't deserve you!" quavered Fanny. "But, O maw, I do thank you! Nice clothes is part of a business education, but oh, what about Mrs. Folsom's tea?"

"Why, I feel more resigned now to go,"

eagerly explained Mrs. Spicer. "Mrs. Folsom knows me, and she knows just what I got to wear; and if she wants I should go, I'll just wear my black Henrietta and feel more at home than if I was finer. I want to do you credit," she added hastily, "and I aim to press my dress and wear my moss-agate pin and crimp my hair. But I won't deny I'll be glad when it's over. One thing I *am* thankful for, and that is, I ain't invited to a tea every day."

On the fateful day, Mrs. Spicer, arrayed in the Henrietta and the moss-agate pin, stormed the breastworks of society by attending Mrs. Folsom's tea. The stately colonial doors opened to her and closed behind her, and what happened thereafter is best set forth in her own words delivered that same evening in the bosom of her family.

"When I got to the grand steps with

carpet stretched down to the walk, I felt I never could go up 'em. And in the door was a colored man in a dress suit swinging a basket for cards—and you couldn't guess who he was! Lem Sprague—that beats rugs and cleans offices. And the minute I laid eyes on him, I knew just what to do. If Lem Sprague could do his part, I guessed I could do mine. So I followed some others that had just come in, and we went upstairs and took off our wraps, and every one spoke nice and sociable as could be.

"Then we went downstairs, and there was Mrs. Folsom and her sister and his, standing in a line. Her sister is stylish and all that, but his is just folks. And would you believe—she just had a nice gray wool dress and nice gray wavy hair and spectacles and a common way about her. And afterwards Mrs. Folsom says, 'I want you

V

BLUESTOCKING

"If she was mine," said Mrs. Hovey, denoting Evalina by a backward quirk of the head, "she'd be nursing dolls 'stead of filling her head with books and such nonsense! Ain't six hours of schoolin' a day enough, but she must curl up with a book directly she's home? I declare, Evalina, if you ain't careful, you'll get shut up in one o' them big books some day by mistake!"

Evalina smiled absently. "I'm not sure I care to be in a book myself, Mrs. Hovey," she said doubtfully; "I couldn't put myself in—unless it was an autobiography, and they're not interesting—very—they're too real. But some day I'm going to put Nettie in one, for a heroine; heroines must be beautiful, and Nettie is!"

"Why—I'm sure—" parleyed Mrs. Hovey, much edified, for her daughter Nettie was the pride of her heart; and though she entertained a healthy scorn for books in the abstract, the thought of Nettie flitting through printed pages was not without a curious delight.

"It ain't in nature," resumed Mrs. Hovey, but in a lower and more tranquil key. "Dolls and clothes—what more does a girl need—keep 'em little girls, I say—better dolls than a young lady too soon!" She fixed Mrs. Spicer with a triumphant gleam.

"Yes—yes!" agreed Mrs. Spicer, pacifically; "Fanny played with her dolls till she was so big she was ashamed to be seen with 'em. But what you goin' to do with a child like Evalina? If she ain't a-readin' she's a-writin'! She's a-writin' now."

Mrs. Hovey sighed and brightened; Nettie had been a great reader of books, but

the creative faculty had been denied her. Mrs. Hovey never doubted that some day Evalina would immortalize her in a book, and to be the heroine of a book to Mrs. Hovey's mind, was more to be desired than to be the author of one. Nevertheless, she did not leave the Spicer home without a word of warning: "Next time you get Evalina a book," she charged paradoxically, "let it be a doll!"

Through a peculiar combination of circumstances, Evalina might be said to have no vested rights in such a possession as a doll. Her dolls had come to her by inheritance, being indeed Fanny's old ones, carefully repaired in the Spicer work-shop, and redressed in the old but freshly done-up doll-clothes. If Evalina ever noticed the curious resemblance of her dolls to previous ones of Fanny's, she showed no embarrassing curiosity; why should there not be a

resemblance between dolls of the same family? Evalina, on the occasion of a fresh gift, was accustomed to remove painstakingly to the last stitch, her new charge's clothing, as painstakingly to replace it, and then settle down to her new book. Mrs. Spicer, pondering these things in her heart, was at last constrained to make a confidant of Fanny, her eldest daughter.

"Maybe we ain't done right by Evalina," said Evalina's mother.

Fanny considered; she was a business woman now, albeit a very young one, and she applied her business acumen to the matter in hand. Fanny was well and even smartly dressed; her simple dark skirt had a tailored air, and Mrs. Spicer congratulated herself that she had got a good "do-up" on Fanny's blouse. Fanny's slender feet, well-shod, tapped the floor, and her head with its smoothly disposed masses of

transparent red hair, was bent consideringly.

"There is something," conceded Fanny at last, "in new things—new, fresh things—not made-overs. I shouldn't wonder but we'd better get Evalina a new doll before she gets too old for it—it'll be her last—we don't want Evalina growing up too soon. We'll get it on her birthday, and Evalina will have her first real doll when she's twelve."

The house of Spicer in solemn conclave assembled, after Evalina had gone to bed, was of a divided mind. Mr. Spicer and Jed took issue with Mrs. Hovey's contention about the doll and the book; Mrs. Spicer and Fanny supported it. Finally a compromise was effected.

"One thing I *am* thankful for," sighed Mrs. Spicer, "and that is unity in families. If it should be Evalina didn't care for Paw and Jed's book, why there's the doll. Or mebbe if she'd ruther have something else

than Fanny's and my doll, why there's the book! And ever'body pleased all round."

But Evalina's bereft and doll-less state little by little got about in her small world. Little girls, gathered about the desk in the Pubic Library on Saturday afternoons, were wont to nudge each other and whisper at Evalina's entry—"Just think! She never had an own doll!" The very teacher who graded Evalina's compositions, realizing in the light of Evalina's birthright of originality, how mediocre a gift criticism really is, used to watch her little charge, half curiously, half pityingly. And the neighbors, watching Evalina, a pleasant little figure enough, going to and from school, shod and cloaked and capped and braided like any other little girl, wondered vaguely whether Evalina was really "different" after all.

Some hint of it even assailed the ears of Charlie Folsom, who looked upon Evalina

as a protégée of his. He had long taken it upon himself to select the small company of books that came to stand by the side of R. L. S. and his pleasant garden.

"What's this I hear?" spoke out Charlie, in the midst of a dictation, "sending Evalina back to the nursery?"

"Evalina is only a little girl," said Fanny, primly; "all the books say a child's mind mustn't be forced."

"Who's forcing?" expostulated Charlie; "Evalina's not a hot-house plant—she's a daisy!"

Nevertheless he gave ear to Fanny's exposition of Evalina's truly doll-less state. "A sort of second-hand mother—I see the point!" conceded Charlie generously. "Of course I'm with Jed and your father—dolls are nonsense. But childhood's wrongs must be redressed! You buy the doll—I'll pro-

vide the coach—but I won't promise not to slip a book under the seat!"

Fanny bought the doll—an exquisite creature with thick, stiff lashes and an engaging smile that revealed the perfect teeth; such a doll in short, as would compensate for all those doll-less, adoptive years. Mrs. Hovey, who was clever with her needle, bespoke the making of the wardrobe, and Mrs. Spicer in odd moments, ran up pink bunny wrappers and a wonderful buggy-robe with tufted bows. Even Jed caught the infection, and presented a pair of real kid boots with tiny heels, and Mr. Spicer capitulated before a display of dolls' bonnets in a store window, and presented the new addition to the Spicer household with her first millinery. Evalina moved serene and undisturbed through these whispering, secretive days. Matters of greater moment even than a

birthday occupied her mind. Evalina was engaged in a contest.

The new superintendent of schools had instituted this measure in the interest of the good old-fashioned art of essay-writing; and all the intermediate grades were invited to compete. Each contestant was pledged to secrecy as to the manner and matter of his effort, and the final result was to be adjudged by a committe of disinterested citizens. The winning essays were to be read by their authors before an audience composed of parents and teachers, and the auditorium of the High School was selected for the performance of this rite. The prizes were to be books, or their equivalent in good honest coin.

Evalina's birthday fell upon a Wednesday; the prize essay announcement was to be made upon the following Friday. It was impossible not to think of Evalina as one

of the fortunate three. Still the uncertainty of the outcome of contests is proverbial. Evalina recited excerpts from her essay in her sleep; these excerpts sounded decidedly bookish. It was determined to combine the celebration of the birthday and the contest, and to hold the festival upon the Friday. This plan seemed the more feasible, since should Evalina, by some unprecedented whim of fortune, fail to receive a prize, there would still be awaiting her a birthday feast and a bona fide doll.

Evalina concurred; she alone was of a tranquil mind. She had not written for the prize, but for the sake of writing. "After all," said Evalina, regarding her troubled and adoring family, "I had all the pleasure of writing it!"

On Friday afternoon, the auditorium was packed. The elder Folsom was President of the School Board, and the Folsom In-

vestment Company had declared a quarter holiday; Charlie was there in his role of litterateur; Fanny and Mrs. Spicer were there to represent the family; Jed was there because he was a little girl's Big Brother. The Presbyterian minister's wife caught sight of Fanny and her mother, and endeavored to speak across the intervening seats; the minister had been one of the judges.

Fanny finally caught her question. "No, Paw couldn't come," she said regretfully.

There was a little delay; as is usual in such gatherings, belated ones streamed through the doors. Fanny clutched her mother's arm—"Maw—there's Paw!"

It was indeed, no other than Mr. Spicer, and Mr. Spicer in his working clothes; the minister had him in tow. They were placing chairs in the aisles, and into the nearest one of these Mr. Spicer dropped.

"Maw—what does it mean?" whispered

Fanny. "The minister's gone and got him in his car, I just know!"

"Be still, Fanny," cautioned Mrs. Spicer; "I'm afraid to think! There's Superintendent Sterling getting up—they're going to announce the prizes!"

"As you know—" began the Superintendent; and as they all did know, he tactfully made his speech short, and announced the winner of the third prize. Mrs. Spicer's mouth opened; Fanny winked violently; but it was not Evalina's name that ensued——

"Adrian Greenbaum—'Country versus City Life'."

Adrian's country experience had been limited to a summer vacation at his grandparents', and his native place does not rank with cities of the first class; but his essay, while it might have permitted of greater research, was clearly all his own, and generous applause greeted its oratorical close.

The second prize essayist proved to be Annabelle Hoover, who was of an introspective turn; Annabelle's essay, which was entitled "Fling Away Ambition", teemed with earnest advice, fearful examples, and quotations from Shakespeare and other English bards—and behold her reward!

One last chance remained to Evalina. Fanny pinched her mother's arm fiercely; she was conscious of a great, protecting surge of feeling for Evalina. "Any way, whatever happens, I'll always believe Evalina's was the best," she thought. And then it happened——

"The first prize essay is the work of Evalina Spicer."

Jed's first conscious thought was—"If the kid ain't actually pretty!"

Evalina was tall for her age; the baby roundness of her face had altered of late, leaving it a pure oval. Evalina's hair had

not the transparent golden flame of Fanny's —it was a pale brown, smoothly braided and parted under its blue bow; her gray eyes, candid, wide apart, and with a compelling intensity of gaze, looked quietly away over her audience. She announced her subject in a sweet, grave little voice that had a curious singing quality:

"Paper Dolls."

If it had been any one except Evalina, the doll-less! Imagine the consternation of the Spicer family, and of Mrs. Hovey who was in the birthday secret; of Charlie Folsom, who had contributed a doll coach; of the giggling little girls who had pitied Evalina, and of the English teacher who corrected and envied her. For before Evalina had proceeded through many sentences, they realized that this little girl had played with and loved more dolls than they had ever dreamed of possessing.

Evalina was destined to be a poet and an historian; and a poet and historian she was this afternoon. For who but a poet would have found, between the sober covers of books, the enchanting game of paper dolls that came alive? Evalina had early discovered, with the uncanny insight of a searcher after truth, the fatal defect in the sawdust doll, that stays where it is put—an unresponsive bit of painted bisque. But as she named the long roll of her storied favorites, there were grown-ups who recalled out of their forgotten past, certain old acquaintances of their own among them—for there were Alice of Wonderland fame, and Little Eva; Tim and Oliver and Little Nell tumbling out of an old green and gold Dickens; a generation of Peppers, and many moderns. There was something delightfully ghostly in the reappearance of some of the elder ones, like Sinbad and Crusoe and

Christian—as if the air were full of tiny wings.

Evalina's effort was pronounced by the critical English teacher, to be full of whimsical originality; and no one was the least surprised that Evalina, given her choice of books or a money prize, should respond—"I'll take the books, please."

The President of the School Board made a congratulatory speech, and announced his intention of getting into the paper doll game himself; and Adrian and Annabelle and Evalina received the warm felicitations of many friendly voices; and the Spicer family went proudly home to their celebration.

Nettie slipped over that evening to see the new addition to the Spicer household. The feast was over now, and the dishes set away. The Spicers were about their usual avocations—Mr. Spicer, in stocking-footed comfort, enjoying his paper; Mrs. Spicer as

usual, engaged with a sober bit of mending; Jed could be heard splitting the matutinal kindling in the little lean-to, and Fanny was putting the finishing touches to a new waist.

But Evalina sat a little apart, in the wicker chair that had been an earlier birthday gift. Her foot rested on a spoke of the new doll-coach, joggling it gently from time to time. Within lay the birthday doll beneath its beribboned robe. Evalina wore a small ruffled cap that had been among her gifts; it gave her a sober, maternal look.

But except for the cap and the jogging foot, there seemed little of the maternal about Evalina. At her side stood a stack of books, and in her lap one lay open; her eyes were bent upon its pages. Evalina had gone back to her paper dolls.

VI

FANNY LOSES HER JOB

"Fanny," said Charlie Folsom, junior member of the Folsom & Son Investment Company, "you're fired!"

Fanny Spicer, with her pencil poised above her pad awaiting dictation, fixed on him a considering gaze from her clear gray eyes and waited for the answer; she thought that her employer was propounding some sort of conundrum.

"The question naturally arises," continued Charlie, putting his finger tips together in a judicial manner, "why? The answer is not far to seek: you are too good to waste on us. How old are you, Fanny?"

"Eighteen," replied Fanny.

"Eighteen," mused Charlie. "Let's see —you have been with us three years—"

"Three years and three months," said Fanny, instantly producing the exact fact from the orderly files of her mind.

"It was your class that was graduated in June, wasn't it?" asked Charlie irrelevantly.

Fanny assented. There had been excellent reason for her stopping high school in the middle of her freshman year. That was the winter when even the redoubtable Mrs. Spicer almost forgot to be thankful for first Jed, then Fanny, and finally Mrs. Spicer herself had succumbed to a severe attack of grippe. So long was Fanny's illness that she had mistrusted her ability to catch up with her class. Mr. Spicer's purchase of a typewriter had clinched the matter of Fanny's business career.

It had seemed very wonderful to be earning wages when other girls of her age were working problems out of a book; but

Fanny had had a wistful moment when she saw her old schoolmates in their graduating white, with flowers, upon the stage on commencement evening.

"Fanny," said Charlie, "let's come to business—let's come right down to bottom facts. You can take a letter—you can get it out in proper shape; you know the routine of office work; you are dependable; you are efficient. In short, you are thoroughly at home in an office with clerks and employees and business folk. But are you always as much at home, Fanny, with people? Sociable ones, I mean,—not the business sort—well, yes—I mean society—we're all in it—we've all got the social instinct."

Fanny shook her head; she had always been a little stiff in company.

"About books, now; had any time to read? And then, there's Evalina,—re-

member we've got to live up to Evalina; it's not every family has a budding author in it. But what I was coming to is this: you know father's sister, my Aunt Julia—mother gave a party, tea, what you call it, for her when she was visiting here a year or so ago?"

Fanny nodded. Well she remembered that interesting occasion and the silk dress that Mrs. Spicer did not wear!

"She took a great notion to your mother," continued Charlie, "and to you two girls. She'll be alone this winter; her last chick has left her, married, and wants her mother to come and live with her. Aunt Julia's very, very wise; she knows that if you want to keep a home you've got to stay in it. And she thought if she could get some young girl for company it might be an advantage to both. There's a fine school there, Grafton Academy; my aunt attended

it as a girl. Well, it's a sort of puzzle picture: there's the home and there's the school—find the girl."

Fanny looked up with a question in her eyes.

"About the cost," proceeded Charlie sagaciously, "money couldn't buy such a home as my Aunt Julia's; neither could it procure just the qualities my aunt requires in the girl; such things can only be freely offered, never bought—no such commodities in the open market. As for the tuition, it's not prohibitive—it's not that kind of school; you can easily manage everything. There's the proposition. What do you think of it?"

"An excellent investment!" said Fanny.

"Gilt-edged!" agreed Charlie enthusiastically. "Now to put you two into communication."

Charlie Folsom's prophetic eye saw op-

portunity writ in large letters in the horoscopes of those two. Here was Aunt Julia, whose children refused to let her live alone, but who insisted on keeping her home, and here was Fanny, whose native intelligence and shrewd estimates could never entirely make up for deficiencies in schooling. Charlie's plan had met the instant approval of the elder Folsom and the cordial commendation of his mother; his Aunt Julia regarded it as direct answer to prayer. To Aunt Julia it meant maintaining a home as opposed to becoming the inmate of one. She remembered Fanny—a girl deft, capable and unassuming, who combined with her mother's optimism a shrewd power of observation that made her an excellent judge of values. When she tried to recall to mind the girl's looks, one characteristic stood out preeminent.

"Fanny, I want to ask you if you would consider a position with me"

"She looks—genuine," thought Aunt Julia, with a thrill of elation.

The effect on the Spicers was as if Fanny had received an invitation to be present at court.

"Well, what you goin' to do about it?" inquired Jed, with ill-concealed elation.

"Be still, Jed," commanded his mother. "This here's a time for prayer and fasting, like the Book says. Who knows but it may change Fanny's whole life?"

"I don't want Fanny changed!" suddenly wailed Evalina. "I want her just as she is!"

Fanny smiled and gave Evalina one of her old, maternal caresses.

"It's the parting of the ways," said Mr. Spicer sagely. "There's the crossroads, and there's the sign, 'This way to an eddication.' I never went down that road myself," he admitted a little ruefully; "neither

did maw, here. I take it we couldn't 'a' been no happier if we had, but we might 'a' been a little usefuller."

"I guess you two's useful enough, all right!" interposed Jed in a gruff voice of loyalty; and the Spicers, big and little, went seriously into the matter.

On the one hand was Fanny's weekly stipend, which suddenly loomed to princely proportions; on the other, were the signboard that Mr. Spicer had pointed out and the magic road beyond. At times Mrs. Spicer lifted a furtive, blue-checked gingham hem to her eyes, and Mr. Spicer blew defiant blasts into his handkerchief. Jed split an unnecessary amount of kindling by way of giving vent to his feelings, and Evalina left her entrancing paper-doll game and came and sat with her smooth head against her sister's arm.

"It *is* queer, now," mused Mrs. Spicer,

"how folks can be so glad and yet so miserable both to once!"

Their little world soon knew that Fanny Spicer was going away to school. Mrs. Hovey and Nettie came over to spend an evening; Mrs. Hovey was doubtful about the wisdom of Fanny's choice, but Nettie glowed with generous enthusiasm. Nettie had once gone away herself to study art and music in a neighboring city, and Nettie knew that it had been very much worth her while—although not, indeed, from the point of view of art and music, for those things were not Nettie's forte. Queer as it may seem, Nettie had learned in a strange and lonesome city more about her own home than all the years of her careless girlhood had taught her. Distance had given her perspective.

The day came, as even the most important days eventually will come, slipping up

out of the east like any other day, and Fanny stood upon the station platform. She did not stand alone at this crossroads of Mr. Spicer's designation. The clan of Spicer was there; and Charlie Folsom and his father, the impressive senior member of the firm; and Mrs. Folsom, beautiful and serene as ever, but with a brighter light in her eyes because of the strange sympathy that was in her; Mrs. Hovey, properly lugubrious, according to her code of partings; and Nettie, with two glowing sparks of courage in her eyes and an unwonted flare of color in her cheeks. Nettie heartily disapproved of the unsoldierly and effeminate attitude of the womenfolk, now that Fanny had been called to the colors.

Well, it was over. The wheels moved under Fanny, and, straining for a last glimpse through the smudgy window, she saw the little rank and file of her escort,

with Nettie standing stiffly as if at salute, slip from sight.

"Well, I s'pose that's another thing you're thankful for," observed Mrs. Hovey, with bitter sympathy.

"I'm a-tryin' hard to be," admitted Mrs. Spicer. "After all, Fanny's only a little farther away and a little longer gone; she'll come back when her work's done," she finished hopefully.

"Will she git her old job back?" asked Mrs. Hovey darkly.

"You know," Mrs. Spicer declared with conviction, "the way things has opened up for Fanny, I wouldn't presume to choose for her, not if it was the finest job in the city. I feel I can trust the job to Fanny."

"I dunno but you're right," conceded Mrs. Hovey.

At nineteen years of age Fanny suffered the curious and disconcerting ailment of

homesickness. Fanny's case was a peculiarly aggravated one; it was not the young girl's instinctive self-pity, but a sort of maternal yearning over her family. Fanny had been so long grown up, so long a wage earner; she had stood shoulder to shoulder with Mrs. Spicer, comrade as well as daughter. Her fingers ached every morning with the longing to braid and button and bundle Evalina. On Sundays in church she caught herself wondering whether Jed would remember to brush the shoulders of his coat. And oh, to hook up her mother and to pull her father's necktie down in the back!

But she caught herself up grimly. "This here's my new job," she said, and tackled it.

Aunt Julia, too, had her little battle to fight. Here was a new step and a new face and a new presence, instead of the old

familiar one. But Aunt Julia was game. So well did they stay by their jobs, those two, that, as might be expected, they mastered them.

Fanny's light step moved with Aunt Julia's heavy one through the daily round of housework; Aunt Julia, as noon approached, fell into a pleasant habit of watching the gate; Fanny hooked Aunt Julia's Sunday silk and pinned her Sunday collar; Aunt Julia, as the long afternoon lengthened to tea time, planned pleasant excursions into the kitchen, and a warm, pungent, gingery odor sent its spicy welcome to Fanny almost before she had opened the door.

Aunt Julia's latest-married daughter was moved to pique and wrote to her elder sister, "Tell me, is she such a paragon?" And the elder sister responded warmly, "I wouldn't say 'paragon,' it has such an edgy,

geometrical sound; I guess Fanny's just a sort of 'angel unawares.'"

In April of the following year Charlie Folsom made a business trip east. Although it was a little out of his way, Charlie contrived on the return trip to run down to his Aunt Julia's. It was mid-morning of a springlike day; Aunt Julia, in sunbonnet and gloves, was training rambler roses. Charlie clicked the gate and strode forward; Aunt Julia pushed back her bonnet, and her withered old rose of a face lighted with welcome.

"See you've got a job on your hands!" called Charlie gayly.

"Young man," declared Aunt Julia, fixing him seriously over her second-best spectacles, "I wouldn't be without one; that's what keeps me young." Charlie agreed enthusiastically.

"If you want to see Fanny at hers," said

Aunt Julia sagely, "she's up at the academy." An expression of pride and tenderness came over her face.

Charlie was presently off like a schoolboy. Aunt Julia laid aside the bonnet and gloves, and there followed a bubbling and a steaming from the kitchen. Aunt Julia was engaged upon her greatest delight—one of her famous company dinners.

Charlie knew well the academy with its fine old central building. He had even attended some of its commencements on boyhood visits back east. It was a session period, and the corridors were deserted; Charlie turned to the office. A girl was busily typewriting at a desk near the open window. It might have been the office of the Folsom & Son Investment Company back home. There was something familiar about the bent, bright head, the austere daintiness of well-brushed serge, the or-

dered precision of the work, at once facile and deliberate. It might have been Fanny sitting there.

It was Fanny. Shade of Mr. Spicer's ancient purchase, the old, poor relation of a typewriter that had paved the way to such a consummation! Fanny's nimble fingers were earning her tuition for her by an hour of work each day.

Fanny looked up and gave a little cry. But when she spoke, her voice was oddly tremulous, but controlled. It would not have been warm-hearted Fanny without the tremulous quality, and neither would it have been Fanny without the control.

"O Mr. Charlie!"

"Miss Spicer, I believe?" said Charlie grandly, and their hands met.

It was an enchanted morning. Charlie attended classes with ever-increasing pride. More even than her excellent work, the

spirit of it impressed him, the loyalty to school ideals. "She's got the real thing," thought Charlie delightedly, "the school spirit!"

Later in the day he met the president of the school, and remained for a time in conversation with him. When Fanny had left them, the president said to Charlie:

"One of the most remarkable girls in the school. Her early wage-earning years seem to have left this curious impression with her: she sees everything as a plain business proposition—in short, as a job. She had to begin in the Preparatory Department among younger girls. Her greatest gift is just plain application, but it did the work. She made her class; she has a sort of maturity of mind that grasps the essential thing. The old academy is proud to send such young women out into the world—real working women."

"Doctor," said Charlie modestly, "I discovered that girl."

The president looked at him quizzically with a look that seemed to say, "Young man, I wonder if you really have!"

VII

NETTIE'S KIND OF FOLKS

"Wasn't that Charlie Folsom that you were walking up with this noon?" Mrs. Hovey asked her daughter, Nettie.

Nettie nodded. She had pushed away her plate and was regarding with interest the crowning feature of the noonday meal —a double-decker strawberry shortcake.

"What'd he say?" pursued Mrs. Hovey as the sacrificial knife hovered over this culmination of her morning's labors.

"Say?" repeated Nettie absently. "Oh, he said that Fanny would be home week after next; his aunt had written, and she's coming, too, to visit the Folsoms."

"It beats all," observed Mrs. Hovey bitterly, "how some folks has time to visit.

I ain't been a-visitin' since that time I went to Wellport to my Aunt Sereny's funeral, and that's——"

"Come, come!" urged Mr. Hovey impatiently. "Carve the possum, carve 'im!"

Mrs. Hovey gashed ruthlessly, and the scarlet juices laved the satiny crust. When she had served the impatient Mr. Hovey with a generous piece, she finished her interrupted remark:

"Five years ago come August."

"They had no more funerals," said Mr. Hovey.

"I got cousins in Wellport," Mrs. Hovey continued, sampling the shortcake critically; "but how'm I to know if they're alive or dead?"

"Write to 'em," suggested Mr. Hovey. "You'll know if they answer, and you'll know if they don't."

"Nettie," asked Mrs. Hovey eagerly

when the epigrammatic Mr. Hovey had taken his departure, "did you ever think it might be *him?*"

"Him?" repeated Nettie, mystified. "What do you mean, ma—who might be what?"

Mrs. Hovey lowered her voice.

"Charlie Folsom!" she whispered. "The mysterious unknown!"

"Charlie Folsom!" exclaimed Nettie. "Mother, you're dreaming!"

"The silk stockings, and the Christmas box that time you was clerking in the city, and the printed silk scarf, and the blue book"—by which term Mrs. Hovey was wont to designate the blue morocco Lucile that had been her daughter's latest Christmas gift—"were *they* dreams?" demanded Mrs. Hovey.

Nettie patted her mother's plump should-

er. "Now don't go to getting notions into your head!" she said gayly.

"Why shouldn't it be Charlie?" her mother challenged.

"It just isn't Charlie, for one thing," said Nettie. "And for another, I don't want it to be."

"Maybe you know some one you *would* like it to be!" suggested Mrs. Hovey jealously.

"Maybe I do," Nettie admitted. "But it wouldn't do to say till he's told me."

"All I got to say," returned her mother, with heavy dignity, "he's taking his time."

Nettie was obliged to concede that point. The gifts she had received at Christmas for the past four years had borne the sole inscription, "From a Friend." Nor did the long intervening months supply the least inkling who that mysterious friend could be.

Nettie's Kind of Folks

On her way down to the Ladies' Outfitters, where she worked, Nettie stepped into the bookstore; she had a few minutes to spare, and she was in search of a modest graduation gift. The counters were checkered with varicolored volumes, and through the shining glass of the show case gleamed the delicate covers of gift books. The proprietor stepped affably forward; he was a wizened little man, like a thin, duodecimo volume that had received hard usage.

Nettie's eyes, moving over the volumes beneath the glass of the show case, suddenly widened. She had discovered the exact counterpart of her Lucile—the blue morocco covers, rounded at the corners, the gilt of edge and the gold of the lettering. The shopkeeper, following her gaze, inserted his hand and brought the treasure to light.

"It's the only one left!" mourned Mr.

Downing. "For a long time I had a pair of 'em—young Spicer got the other, holiday time."

"Well, I won't bereave you, Mr. Downing," said Nettie brightly and chose another at random. "I'll take one of these others."

So, after all, Jed was the mysterious unknown! For a second Nettie's little world rocked—that pleasant world of dreams in which dwelt a mysterious and undeclared Prince Charming. It might have dashed a girl of less romantic strain to find Prince Charming to be only her next-door neighbor, after all. But, in spite of her romanticism, Nettie had a fund of good common sense; and there was something knightly, too, in the long, silent worship of Jed Spicer. Jed had none of the trappings of romance; there was nothing heroic about

him, except the everyday heroism of the worker; but he was very tender to his little sister, Evalina, and very loyal to the house of Spicer; and at the creamery, of which he was the local manager, he was characterized as being always "on the job."

But, then, Jed had never made any pretensions to the heroic or the romantic. Those gifts of his had been inscribed simply "From a Friend." In a sudden illuminating moment Nettie saw the gifts in a new light. There was the pair of green silk hose that year when the Spicers' Christmas had run to stockings; there was the box with its home-made dainties, the winter that she had been working in the city; there was the silk scarf printed with blue flowers—the nearest thing to a floral offering that Jed had ever made; and there was the blue morocco Lucile. Perhaps that

last gift had been instigated by the known literary proclivities of the Spicer family.

"Anyway," thought matter-of-fact Nettie, "it's only fair to acknowledge my Christmas gifts, and I'll do it this very night."

It was early in June. In the dusk, the flowers in her mother's little round flower beds seemed as vague and as motionless as those printed ones upon her scarf. Nettie, composing her Christmas acknowledgments in the ordered daintiness of her room, herself a very pink of neatness, passed a distracting moment of consideration. She did not know how to begin her note. "Dear Mr. Spicer" sounded too formal, and "Dear Jed" too intimate—at least just yet. "Call him 'Jed,' as you always do," whispered Nettie's mentor, her young common sense. So Nettie wrote:

I want to thank you, Jed, for the pretty Christmas remembrance you sent me. I have enjoyed Lucile, and I would have acknowledged it sooner if I had known it was you.

Your friend,

NETTIE DEVORE.

The slight ambiguity of the last sentence did not trouble Nettie, who was not at all concerned with rules of rhetoric, but merely with those of generous appreciation. The whole note read very convincingly to her (she had decided it wiser at this time to say nothing of those earlier gifts), and she sealed, stamped and addressed it in the friendliest spirit.

Jed read Nettie's note of thanks at noon on the following day; the Spicer family, with the exception of Fanny, the elder daughter, who was attending school at a distance, were assembled at that hour. Throughout dinner, although Evalina had set her curious wits to work and Mr. Spicer

was mildly inquisitive, Jed maintained a determined silence as to the contents of the dainty communication. Mrs. Spicer complacently bided her time.

At the end of the meal Jed retired to his room, and a moment later Mrs. Spicer received her summons. She gave Mr. Spicer and Evalina a compelling look and vanished.

"Maw," said Jed, "here—read this!" He thrust Nettie's note into her hands.

Mrs. Spicer took the dainty sheet of paper between a pinch of gingham apron, adjusted her spectacles and silently perused it.

"If that ain't just like Nettie!" said Mrs. Spicer admiringly. "That's what I like most about her—she's fair."

"What do I do?" asked Jed helplessly.

Mrs. Spicer considered. "If I was you,

Jed," she counseled, "I should just happen in at Nettie's, friendly like, for a chat."

"And then what?" pursued Jed eagerly.

Mrs. Spicer gave him a knowing look. "Nothing 'tall—'cept just to let things happen."

"I'll do it this very night!" declared Jed, the man of action.

But when the others had gone about their various occupations, Mrs. Spicer took down her huge dishpan, deposited therein a cake of soap and a handful of borax, made a suds, and proceeded to do up Jed's Sunday shirt. Her heart sang with joy above her homely task.

"One thing I *am* thankful for," she said to herself exultantly. "They don't even outgrow their mothers when they start to courting!"

The Hoveys had a rounded porch, a porch swing and two comfortable old

painted rockers in which they were wont to take the air on fine spring evenings. Mr. Hovey, looking up from his daily paper, recognized Jed.

"How are ye, Jed! Have a chair!" he said and cordially shoved the second rocker forward.

Jed, attired in his Sunday best, preserved a brave front in the face of Mrs. Hovey's startled interest and collapsed into the sheltering arms of the old rocker with something of the effect of the closing of a jackknife.

"How's all your folks?" inquired Mrs. Hovey, who had already exchanged the compliments of the day with Mrs. Spicer across the dividing fence. But Mrs. Hovey had her inflexible code of manners, and that query was Article I.

"Well," replied Jed briefly.

He tried to think of something that

would serve to modify the bald comprehensiveness of that statement; but he was by nature a man of few words, and his training had led him to exercise the utmost economy in that regard. With Jed it had been to do and not to say. He stole a glance at Nettie and felt miserably exultant.

Nettie, in thin, twilight blue, swaying a little with the movement of the creaking porch swing, smiled back in the friendliest manner and continued her interrupted conversation with her mother; she contrived, however, to include them all, as if Jed's presence were nothing out of the ordinary.

"John," spoke up Mrs. Hovey, whose habit of mind would not permit her to enjoy unalloyed happiness, "that swing had ought to be oiled; it squeaks something terrible!"

"That ain't the swing; it's the crickets," remonstrated Mr. Hovey comfortably.

"I guess I can tell a swing from a cricket, if some folks can't!" said Mrs. Hovey distantly.

Jed had been pleasantly aware of the crunching of Mr. Hovey's rockers and the creaking of Nettie's swing. The warm, fragrant night and the drowsy night sounds, the yellow flare of light in a neighboring window, the shadowy passers-by—all made up a homely symphony through which even the familiar motif of Mrs. Hovey's complaint ran like a queer minor melody.

Presently Mrs. Hovey rose and went indoors. There followed a clinking sound, as of glass and ice; a spurt of water from a faucet and a vigorous stirring, as of a stout silver spoon. When she reappeared she bore a great pitcher of lemonade; Mrs. Hovey, no less than Mrs. Spicer, possessed

the mother instinct. When she went away, she prodded Mr. Hovey significantly.

Mr. Hovey rose reluctantly. He was not a man of vision. A fiercely whispered controversy sifted out through the screen.

"Why'n't you say so, then," growled Mr. Hovey, "and not prod and nudge and badger a man out'n his chair? Where *do* I set?"

"We'll go and visit the Spicers!" decided Mrs. Hovey, with triumphant inspiration.

Jed was saying, "But, Nettie, I—I—was afraid to own up. You were so—so—"

"Go on, Jed," urged Nettie encouragingly.

"So pretty!" blurted Jed.

"Of course I'm pretty," said Nettie in matter-of-fact tones, much as she would have said, "I am quite well, thank you." "I'm not clever like Fanny or gifted like Evalina; we must just take the gifts as

they come, and this happened to be mine." She smiled reassuringly. "But it's fast color, Jed; it'll wash, only of course, after a long, long time, it'll fade a little, Jed."

Jed could not think what to say to that; so, in accordance with his usual and eminently successful method, he said nothing. For had not his long silence vindicated itself? It had taken Nettie all of those four years to know herself, and to know Jed, and also, perhaps, to realize how imperceptibly romance merges into everyday happiness.

Meanwhile the ancient bond between the houses of Hovey and Spicer was being pledged anew.

"D'ye remember," mused Mrs. Hovey, "the time when it seemed like Nettie didn't have congenial company, and Jed spoke up,—he was washin' up at the sink,—'Why

don't she get intrusted in her own kind of folks?"

"Sho! He never did!" exclaimed Mr. Spicer delightedly.

"Good enough!" approved Mr. Hovey.

"Jeddie was always fond of Nettie," apologized Mrs. Spicer, in view of this apparently heartless statement.

"Well," finished Mrs. Hovey oracularly, "she done it!"

"Just plain, common, everyday kind of folks, we are," declared Mr. Spicer.

"That's where Nettie showed sense," commented Mr. Hovey.

"Our kind of folks," said Mrs. Spicer, with a great surge of generous feeling that seemed to include the whole world.

Mrs. Hovey's ethics prescribed a proper solemnity for such occasions; so she silently mopped her eyes. Perhaps she, too, had been learning during those four years, and

the handkerchief flirting at the corner of her eyelids may really have been waving farewell to those airy and inconsequent dreams that had vanished before a real and everyday happiness.

VIII

MR. SPICER IN THE TITLE ROLE

"Land sake, you ain't through, paw, are you?" inquired Mrs. Spicer in real consternation.

"I don't feel hungry," admitted Mr. Spicer apologetically.

He tried a spoonful of tea, but it seemed to have a brackish taste. The crumbling squares of corn bread and the hashed potatoes sent up a pungent steam; this homely kitchen incense had of a sudden become noxious to him.

"I'll be bound he's coming down with something!" was Mrs. Spicer's swift intuition.

Mr. Spicer, in common with his sex, resented coddling, and Mrs. Spicer was hard

put to it to find means of expending her energies in practical ministrations. There was a certain brew of her own concoction, however, that she relied upon in simple domestic crises.

"Clean off the table, Evalina," she said, "while I stir up your paw a draft."

Mr. Spicer hovered miserably over the hot stove, and from time to time a hoarse coughing seized him. Evalina piled the dishes into a neat structure and took down the tin dish pan.

"Leave the dishes set, honey," urged Mrs. Spicer. "Ain't you got something you need to do?"

"Yes," said Evalina, testing the water with a pink forefinger, "this is it."

Before Mrs. Spicer could respond, Jed entered. Since his marriage Jed had been a frequent visitor.

"Finished?" asked Jed disappointedly.

"Nettie sent something over—thought it'd be in time for your supper. Hello—paw sick?"

"Not sick, Jed—exac'ly," said Mr. Spicer.

"How do you feel?" inquired Jed in his direct fashion.

"Kind of funny," admitted Mr. Spicer unwillingly.

"You don't look funny," rejoined Jed. "That cough sounds bronchial to me. Better let Doc Basnett have a look at you."

"Your maw'll fix me up," averred Mr. Spicer with superb confidence.

Mrs. Spicer administered the hot draft, and Mr. Spicer, faintly protesting, was urged to bed. When Jed left, his mother, with her apron thrown about her head for protection against the night air, followed him out.

"Do you think he had ought to have the doctor, Jed?"

"You can't never tell," said Jed cautiously. "How long's it been goin' on?"

"He's been keepin' up for several days," replied Mrs. Spicer. "You know your paw —he won't never let on anything ails him till he can't eat! I had corn bread and hashed potatoes and gingerbread and peach sauce, and you know yourself a person has to feel pretty bad not to eat them."

"He has that!" agreed Jed.

"And you know yourself how much he sets by Nettie's floating island—don't forget to thank Nettie, Jed." A hoarse paroxysm of coughing sounded from the room beyond. "Mebbe we better have the doctor to-night."

"It wouldn't do no harm," agreed Jed. "I can go right by and get him."

Jed went off whistling; but once out of

earshot of the anxious little dwelling, he grew strangely silent. The doctor was at his belated supper, but he cheerfully crowded the long-warmed remnants into his mouth and plunged into the old round.

It had been Mrs. Spicer's task to prepare Mr. Spicer for the visit. To her surprise, Mr. Spicer received her suggestion that he see the doctor in a most conciliatory spirit.

"He must be awful bad!" thought Mrs. Spicer, with a sinking of the heart. But her housewifely pride had not forsaken her. "One thing I *am* thankful for," Mrs. Spicer said to herself consolingly. "It's early in the week, and the sheets ain't scarcely mussed."

She smoothed out the folds of a fresh spread above the rising-sun quilt that served as counterpane, straightened the window shade, passed her gingham apron over the

chair destined for the doctor and waited.

When Jed ushered Dr. Basnett in, Evalina was sitting alone at the red-and-white-checked table with her schoolbooks. Dr. Basnett was fairly electrified by the compelling quality of her gaze. It was as if she had invested him with a more than human attribute—the divine attribute of healing. He was a stodgy little man of the type known as sandy, and he was habitually overworked; of late years he had grown a little careless in the matter of dress. Sometimes, as he felt age stealing over him, he had come to have a feeling of depression. Evalina's look was like a call to the colors. Jed remained behind with Evalina; the doctor entered alone.

Dr. Basnett privately thought that Mrs. Spicer looked almost as ill as the patient; he patted her shoulder with a pudgy paw like a playful bear's and remarked cheer-

ily, regarding Mr. Spicer, "What have we here?"

"Am I goin' to—to—die?" inquired Mr. Spicer feebly.

"Sure thing," said the doctor reassuringly. "We're all mortal. But not this time, I hope. Pretty shabby trick, I should call it—leave a nice fam'ly like you got—that nice little girl in there. She's as pretty," declared the doctor, searching for a suitable comparison, "as a spotted puppy."

All the while the doctor's tongue moved his pudgy, efficient hands were busy likewise, and his sharp, boring little eyes and his scooplike ears; and while he talked at Mr. Spicer he was learning a great deal more than he cared to impart. When he had made his patient as comfortable as possible for the night and had shut the door of the sick room behind him, he met the

same impelling look in Jed's eyes that he had met in Evalina's.

It was always most embarrassing to Dr. Basnett to give adverse decisions. He cleared his throat, hesitated and suggested awkwardly, "Er—I think he'll have a pretty fair night."

"Is it pneumonia?" demanded the direct Jed.

"It could be pneumonia," admitted Dr. Basnett cautiously.

"Shall we send for Fanny?" pursued Jed.

"It couldn't do any harm," said Dr. Basnett.

Mr. Spicer followed the profession of hauling. Wherever a stately building block, church or public library reared massive walls in his community, Mr. Spicer and his team, Jack and Jerry, had been before. Standing erect in his wagon, holding the reins loosely over the backs of Jack and

Jerry, Mr. Spicer was a familiar sight. He enjoyed a wide acquaintance, and among his friends, by reason doubtless of his scrawny build and the obvious impracticability of his Christian name of Leander, he was known as Lean Spicer. Mr. Spicer was only a very ordinary man, with such ordinary talents as honesty, industry and devotion to his family.

The more remarkable, then, the stir that the illness of Mr. Spicer occasioned. Mr. Hovey, who might be said to belong to the order of Loyal Neighbors, made the care of Jack and Jerry his specific concern; and Mrs. Spicer, about to replenish her fires, found miraculously filled buckets of coal at the very door. When Mrs. Hovey disappeared after spelling Mrs. Spicer at her watch, the large weekly wash disappeared with her. The Folsoms had desired to send a trained nurse to care for their old neigh-

bor, but the Spicers were of the old school (as Dr. Basnett was also), and Mrs. Spicer, Jed and Nettie clung jealously to the ancient family rites. The Daily Bugle chronicled Mr. Spicer's illness in pleasant, friendly, optimistic fashion, and Mr. Spicer's competitors in the hauling profession, with whom digging was second nature, dug up a substantial little purse among them, as a delicate expression of esteem.

"We ain't been thankful enough!" mourned Mrs. Spicer to Mrs. Hovey. "Seems like if things was only like they had been all these years, even with the work and the worry and all that goes to bringin' up a fam'ly, I'd never have an ungrateful thought."

"Oh, you'd soon forget it!" declared the pessimistic Mrs. Hovey, depositing a fine pan of rolls upon Mrs. Spicer's kitchen ta-

ble. "My baking turned out so good, I thought I'd just bring you over a taste."

"Ever'one's too good!" gulped Mrs. Spicer. "These here rolls, with Nettie's marmalade and a cup of tea, and lunch is got."

But all the time in the Spicer household there stalked an unbidden guest whose name was Fear; and Mr. Spicer dreamed dreams and saw visions; and hurrying through the dismal nights—and the even longer and more dismal days—was Fanny, who had never dreamed of such a home-coming as this.

Charlie Folsom met her at the station. Charlie had to be both kind and cruel. He looked away from his little friend's speaking eyes, and said:

"We don't know, yet, but you're in time, Fanny."

They were all waiting in the old kitchen, neat and shining as Nettie's capable hands

could make it—Jed and Nettie—pretty Nettie, who had taken on a noble, matronly look—and Evalina, who still regarded Dr. Basnett as only next lower in authority than God. The door into her father's room opened silently, and Fanny entered.

But what strange and potent energy had this eager, vivid girl brought with her? It was as if a fresh, strong wind had blown through that narrow room. Mr. Spicer stirred, gazed. "Fanny!" he croaked feebly, and a moment later added, "Well, Fanny, I got home."

The two travelers looked upon each other; they had come strange ways.

Dr. Basnet's face lightened; an eager, alert expression crossed it. What had won in that room at the last? Not his skill. Perhaps Evalina had been right; perhaps it was a divine agency that had brought Mr.

Spicer and his daughter Fanny safe home again.

"Are they all in, maw?" inquired Mr. Spicer anxiously; for it was a tenet of the house of Spicer that at night-time the whereabouts of all its members should be ascertained; and the dim room to Mr. Spicer's dim eyes argued nightfall.

"All in!" joyously answered Mrs. Spicer.

Mr. Spicer began to speak, but Dr. Basnett silenced him. He wondered what his younger colleagues would think of what he was about to do. "It's my case—and the Lord's!" reflected Dr. Basnett and stepped to the door.

His beaming face reassured them. "Quietly, now, mind!" he warned them, and Jed and Nettie and Evalina filed in. Charlie hesitated on the threshold. "You, too!"

said Dr. Basnett. "I'll not discriminate," he said to himself slyly. "Dasn't!"

Mr. Spicer looked gratified; at that moment it was his dominant expression. "Fam'ly group!" he gloated hoarsely. "Who's that?"

Charlie moved forward. "Just me—just Charlie Folsom."

"One of the fam'ly, like," approved Mr. Spicer kindly. "Well, now ever'body's in, let's go to sleep."

Mr. Spicer went to sleep, but the others went to work; for that is one of life's little ways. When he woke again, Dr. Basnett threatened to dismiss the case.

"The idea!" he stormed. "A busy doctor wasting time on a man that's got nothing the matter with him! I don't know why I come."

"Come just to be sociable, doc," wheedled Mr. Spicer. "I like to see you round."

"I'll haf to scratch gravel harder than

ever," Mr. Spicer, ruefully jocular, confided to Mrs. Spicer on the occasion of their first long talk.

So Mrs. Spicer revealed all the details of that pleasant conspiracy which had been going on during Mr. Spicer's late travels.

"Wha' fer?" gasped Mr. Spicer.

"Fer you!" said Mrs. Spicer proudly.

"Me!" marveled Mr. Spicer. "No, maw, it ain't—it can't be! It's just nachelly out of the goodness of folks' hearts."

The Spicers' calendar showed red-letter days not generally observed outside the Spicer household. The celebration in honor of Mr. Spicer's recovery was set for a certain Sunday. Mr. Spicer, in the undimmed splendor of the dressy smoking jacket that had been Mrs. Spicer's gift, occupied his old place at the table, which had been lengthened a leaf. Mrs. Spicer, in shining percale, presided proudly at hers. Jed and

Nettie occupied one side, and Fanny and Evalina faced them. All was proportion,—both the seating and the setting,—true harmonious arrangement. That first Sunday dinner was more than a dinner; it was, in reality, a sacrament. A little cloud of steam went up from the savory dishes like a homely incense. Mr. Spicer glanced proudly round; they were all there—each in his place. He bent his head, and all the heads were bent. He began grace.

It was an old grace that had served for many years, but to-day it seemed not entirely adequate. Mr. Spicer paused,—new phrases did not come readily to his lips,—and continued:

"And we thank Thee—that we again surround this table—an unbroken family circle."

"Amen!" responded Mrs. Spicer, resorting to the trusty gingham-apron hem.

"That's what I say—Amen!" intoned Jed in a sort of boisterous reverence; and Nettie nodded in wifely approbation.

"Me, too!" chimed in Fanny in the homely Spicer idiom.

"Come, now, Evalina," urged Jed. "Give us a verse! This here's one of those occasions the laureate fellows in England celebrate."

"I'm too happy!" breathed Evalina, snuggling her bright head against her father's arm. "To write poetry gives you a solemn feeling."

"I guess we had enough solemn feelings for one while," observed Mrs. Spicer briskly. "What say, Nettie?"

"I said," repeated Nettie, looking prettier if possible than they had ever seen her before, "how glad I am to be a thankful Spicer, too!"

IX

FANNY ACCEPTS A POSITION

"She's not going back!" exclaimed Mrs. Hovey, with some disapprobation.

"Not just now," explained Mrs. Spicer cheerfully. "You see, when Miss Whitney at the school here got sick, the board thought right off of Fanny for substitute; they want Fanny to finish the spring term."

"But what about Fanny's gradu*ate*ing?" persisted Mrs. Hovey. "All that eddication gone for nothing!"

"I don't call seventy-five dollars a month nothing," rejoined Mrs. Spicer in proud satisfaction.

"I had counted on seeing Fanny in a gradu*ate*ing dress," declared Mrs. Hovey mournfully. "Well, one never knows what a day will bring forth!"

Fanny Accepts a Position

"She had her trunk all packed," Mrs. Spicer confided to her.

"Was she much disappointed?" asked Mrs. Hovey, with gloating sympathy.

"She never said," Mrs. Spicer replied. "Fanny's like Jed: them two don't talk much, but they git things done."

"I s'pose Fanny's salary will come in handy—after Mr. Spicer's being sick and all," suggested Mrs. Hovey delicately.

"It will," said Mrs. Spicer.

Fanny Spicer, summoned home in the spring of her last year at school on account of the illness of her father, had strangely found her commencement right at hand. There was a stage—the platform of a schoolroom; and there was an audience—the irrepressible seventh grade that had tried poor, little, inefficient Miss Whitney to the breaking point; and there was the

graduating dress—not the floating white of her dreams, beneath the black, scholastic robe, but stout serge under a mannish sweater. The mischievous little boys in the seventh grade and the delightfully scandalized little girls recognized new and untried depths in Miss Spicer and curiously felt no immediate inclination to plumb them; Miss Spicer's comradely smile and matter-of-fact way and brisk presence carried with them an intangible reminder that they were there for work. Never had the desks of the seventh graders supported more studious elbows.

Fanny was used to desks. Her work at the desk of the Folsom & Son Investment Company had kept her pretty busy. She decided that her success in school work was a matter of keeping her pupils busy, —busy and cheerful,—as she herself had been and was still. Her clear gray eyes

had an open, welcoming look; her lips had a wide and generous curve; her bright hair, of a sheen-like transparency, lighted up dingy, blackboarded corners; and the serviceable serge was relieved by a fine, white, frilly collar. The little girls in whispered confidences decided that teacher was pretty; and the boys said manfully, "What of it?" and thought so, too. Mrs. Hovey continued to mourn the gradu*ate*-ing dress, and the Spicers' sitting room achieved a new rug and fresh paper.

Fanny, it is true, had at first considered "cramming" a little, so that she could perhaps join her class in June; but her good business sense rejected the suggestion as impracticable. The house of Spicer was not a scholastic institution, but rather a social one; Jed and Nettie were always running in, and Mrs. Hovey and John, as the fine spring lengthened, made neighborly, lingering vis-

its, which the Spicers returned in like spirit.

Mr. Spicer liked to read excerpts to his clever daughter from his favorite newspaper; and Mrs. Spicer, over the exquisite darning that was her sole accomplishment in fancy work, sustained meanwhile a happy, inconsequent conversation; and there was Evalina, forever pursuing an illusive X through the waste places of an inhospitable algebra. Only Fanny, who had been away from home, knew the priceless worth of these golden evenings.

"Books will keep," thought Fanny, out of the grim wisdom derived from homesick, studious hours; and she joined the lamp-lit, magic circle as an intimate.

"Well, Fanny," asked Charlie Folsom, "how's the thesis progressing?" He had met her by chance on one of her homeward walks, and turned to walk with her.

"Thesis?" questioned Fanny.

"Let's see—aren't you pursuing original research work down there in that old brick barracks of a school?" inquired Charlie, with a wise look.

Fanny met it with one as wise.

"I hadn't just put that name to it," she confessed. "Thank you, Charlie; it makes the work much more interesting."

"What name had you put to it?" inquired Charlie, with interest.

"A smug one, I'm afraid," admitted Fanny, with her generous smile; "I didn't see it just right at first—I didn't count it so much a privilege—as——"

"It is a smug word, you're right, Fanny—the way we're inclined to use it. Let's revise it—d-u-t-y—duty, a privilege. That's better, isn't it?"

Fanny smiled her generous smile and gave him her gray, comradely glance. They had reached the Spicer gate; Mrs. Spicer,

shooing with a housewifely apron, opened the screen to peer out; Evalina could be heard laying the plates; the hoarse wheezing of the kitchen pump testified to Mr. Spicer's noon ablutions. Charlie went on, but he continued to see the frank face with its friendly gray gaze, its generous smile, its thin, fine flush, with the golden powder of freckles across the tilted nose.

"Queer!' thought Charlie. "I can't remember ever thinking of Fanny Spicer as pretty before!"

The tardy spring culminated in sudden, arid heat. Under such conditions, research work among her seventh graders became acutely trying to Miss Spicer. She pitied the fidgety little boys and the languid little girls; but an ogerish necessity known as Requirements for Promotion threatened the hapless students. Fanny's research work became very original indeed; she instituted

new and unheard-of measures. Drills to music interrupted dreary study periods; certain stereotyped observances were retired indefinitely. She encouraged study by occasionally springing agreeable surprises, which took the shape of some clever bit of reading, a story, or a game sober enough for scholastic halls. The seventh graders responded to a man; and Fanny, when the time came for the final tests, led her forces through to victory.

Her modest achievement was not allowed to remain unheralded; the seventh graders, in grateful acknowledgment of her generalship, bestowed upon her a manicure set of fearful and wonderful proportions; and gratified parents stopped her on the street to solicit advice as to their children's future careers. The school board voted her a substantial increase of salary; and the calendar

of the house of Spicer was enriched by yet another red-letter day.

One evening about dusk Charlie Folsom stepped over and added his congratulations to the rest. The Spicers and the Hoveys and Jed and Nettie and the baby had retired to the back yard, where Mr. Spicer had his early garden bed, and Mrs. Spicer her flowers and her tented cypress vine. It was so green and pleasant and quiet there that Evalina had brought out chairs. Mr. Spicer surveyed the company and demanded:

"Where's Fanny?"

Mrs. Spicer, a little flustered, said, "Oh, Fanny's out on the porch! I thought I heard some one talking. I guess she's got company." At that, Mrs. Hovey looked very wise.

"What company?" persisted Mr. Spicer.

"It's only Charlie," said Evalina happily.

Mr. Spicer looked gratified and made a pretense of sparring at young Jed.

"You haven't accepted yet?" asked Charlie, nipping a leaf from the rope of morning-glory vines.

"Not yet; but I shall, of course," said Fanny. "I couldn't expect a better offer."

"Let me ask you to reconsider the matter," said Charlie thoughtfully.

"Reconsider?" said Fanny, puzzled.

"There's a proposition I wanted to make you," went on Charlie, with business-like deliberation.

Fanny looked up curiously. She was an expert typist; still it had never occurred to her to go back to that earlier employment. There was an appeal in the shuffling little feet and wildly waving hands of her pupils that no business office could give.

"Fanny, I want to ask you if you would consider a position with me?"

"With you?" breathed Fanny. For Charlie's old businesslike manner was gone —his old businesslike look, his old businesslike voice—but the old businesslike directness was still there.

"Fact is—I want you—need you in the business—business of making us a home, Fanny."

Fanny's quick mind leaped to all that meant—busy, housewifely mornings and leisurely afternoons, little graces of living that she had never known.

"O Charlie!" gasped Fanny. "My—my work!"

Charlie's throat emitted a strangled sound. He saw Fanny—a slim girl of fifteen, gawky and angular in her outgrown skirts—bent over the books of the Folsom & Son Investment Company; he saw a later Fanny, putting by her girlish ambition and finishing her last school year on an obscure

stage; and he saw yet another Fanny, who should be the promise and fulfillment of the old.

"I guess you've demonstrated your willingness to work, Fanny," said Charlie dryly. "Let's declare a holiday—you'll find you've got pretty considerable of a job, after all. What do you say, Fanny? The offer's open."

"I accept the position," said Fanny.

The Spicers and the Hoveys and Jed and Nettie and the baby, conversing decorously in the little garden, were presently joined by the new firm; for Charlie and Fanny were generous in their happiness, and such secrets do not keep in small and intimate households. There was little ceremony in Fanny's announcement party where the guests were only kindly neighbors and the home folks. Mr. Spicer beamed impartially upon every one and concealed a slight

diffidence by frequent recourse to a spotted blue-and-white handkerchief; Mrs. Spicer's apron hem came into happy requisition; and Mrs. Hovey conceded regretfully:

"Well, Fanny, I guess you got to make a weddin' dress do in place of a gradu*ate*ing one."

Mr. Hovey, unread in the proprieties of such occasions, fell back upon what he felt to be a conservative topic and remarked happily, "It's fine weather we're having."

And Jed and Nettie proudly and happily, and the baby in the superior, bored way of babies in general, added their good wishes to all the other common, kindly ones.

"Evalina, honey, what you thinking 'bout?" inquired Mrs. Spicer happily.

"Evalina looks like she's seeing spirits," teased Jed.

Evalina, with her eyes of a seeress fixed beyond the homely garden plot and the

homely folk within it, bristled importantly.

"Don't bother me!" said Evalina joyously. "I'm writing an epithal—what-you-ma-call-it, a marriage poem, like Mr. Spenser's!"