

Scarlet Stockings

Louisa May Alcott

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I. HOW THEY WALKED INTO LENNOX'S LIFE.

"COME out for a drive, Harry?"

"Too cold."

"Have a game of billiards?"

"Too tired."

"Go and call on the Fairchilds?"

"Having an unfortunate prejudice against country girls, I respectfully decline."

"What will you do then?"

"Nothing, thank you."

And settling himself more luxuriously upon the couch, Lennox closed his eyes, and appeared to slumber tranquilly. Kate shook her head, and stood regarding her brother, despondently, till a sudden idea made her turn toward the window, exclaiming abruptly,

"Scarlet stockings, Harry!"

"Where?" and, as if the words were a spell to break the deepest day-dream, Lennox hurried to the window, with an unusual expression of interest in his listless face.

"I thought that would succeed! She isn't there, but I've got you up, and you are not to go down again," laughed Kate, taking possession of the sofa.

"Not a bad manoeuvre. I don't mind; it's about time for the one interesting event of the day to occur, so I'll watch for myself, thank you," and Lennox took the easy chair by the window with a shrug and a yawn.

"I'm glad any thing does interest you," said Kate, petulantly, "though I don't think it amounts to much, for, though you perch yourself at the window every day to see that girl pass, you don't care enough about it to ask

her name."

"I've been waiting to be told."

"It's Belle Morgan, the Doctor's daughter, and my dearest friend."

"Then, of course, she is a blue-belle?"

"Don't try to be witty or sarcastic with her, for she will beat you at that."

"Not a dumb-belle then?"

"Quite the reverse; she talks a good deal, and very well too, when she likes."

"She is very pretty; has anybody the right to call her 'Ma belle'?"

"Many would be glad to do so, but she won't have any thing to say to them."

"A Canterbury belle in every sense of the word then?"

"She might be, for all Canterbury loves her, but she isn't fashionable, and has more friends among the poor than among the rich."

"Ah, I see, a diving-bell, who knows how to go down into a sea of troubles, and bring up the pearls worth having."

"I'll tell her that, it will please her. You are really waking up, Harry," and Kate smiled approvingly upon him.

"This page of 'Belle's Life' is rather amusing, so read away," said Lennox, glancing up the street, as if he awaited the appearance of the next edition with pleasure.

"There isn't much to tell; she is a nice, bright, energetic, warm-hearted dear; the pride of the Doctor's heart, and a favorite with every one, though she is odd.

"How odd?"

"Does and says what she likes, is very blunt and honest, has ideas and principles of her own, goes to parties in high dresses, won't dance round dances, and wears red stockings, though Mrs. Plantagenet says it's fast."

"Rather a jolly little person, I fancy. Why haven't we met her at some of the tea-fights and muffin-worries we've been to lately?"

"It may make you angry, but it will do you good, so I'll tell. She didn't care enough about seeing the distinguished stranger to come; that's the truth."

"Sensible girl, to spare herself hours of mortal dullness, gossip, and dyspepsia," was the placid reply.

"She has seen you, though, at church and dawdling about town, and she called you 'Sir Charles Coldstream' on the spot. How does that suit?" asked Kate, maliciously.

"Not bad, I rather like that. Wish she'd call some day, and stir us up."

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"She won't; I asked her, but she said she was very busy, and told Jessy Tudor, she wasn't fond of peacocks."

"I don't exactly see the connection."

"Stupid boy! she meant you, of course."

"Oh, I'm peacocks, am I?"

"I don't wish to be rude, but I really do think you are vain of your good looks, elegant accomplishments, and the impression you make wherever you go. When it's worth while you exert yourself, and are altogether fascinating, but the 'I come — see — and — conquer' air you put on, spoils it all for sensible people."

"It strikes me that Miss Morgan has slightly infected you with her oddity as far as bluntness goes. Fire away, it's rather amusing to be abused when one is dying of ennui."

"That's grateful and complimentary to me, when I have devoted myself to you ever since you came. But every thing bores you, and the only sign of interest you've shown is in those absurd red hose. I should like to know what the charm is," said Kate, sharply.

"Impossible to say; accept the fact calmly as I do, and be grateful that there is one glimpse of color, life, and spirit in this aristocratic tomb of a town."

"You are not obliged to stay in it!" fiercely.

"Begging your pardon, my dove, but I am. I promised to give you my enlivening society for a month, and a Lennox keeps his word, even at the cost of his life."

"I'm sorry I asked such a sacrifice; but I innocently thought that after being away for five long years, you might care to see your orphan sister," and the dove produced her handkerchief with a plaintive sniff.

"Now, my dear creature, don't be melodramatic, I beg of you," cried her brother, imploringly. "I wished to come, I pined to embrace you, and I give you my word, I don't blame you for the stupidity of this confounded place."

"It never was so gay as since you came, for every one has tried to make it pleasant for you," cried Kate, ruffled at his indifference to the hospitable efforts of herself and friends. "But you don't care for any of our simple amusements, because you are spoiled by the flattery, gayety, and nonsense of foreign society. If I didn't know it was half affectation, I should be in despair, you are so blase and absurd. It's always the way with men, if one happens to be handsome, accomplished, and talented, he puts on as many airs, and is as vain as any silly girl."

"Don't you think if you took breath, you'd get on faster, my dear?" asked the imperturbable gentleman, as Kate paused with a gasp.

"I know it's useless for me to talk, as you don't care a straw what I say, but it's true, and some day you'll wish you had done something worth doing all these years. I was so proud of you, so fond of you, that I can't help being disappointed, to find you with no more ambition than to kill time comfortably, no interest in any thing but your own pleasures, and only energy enough to amuse yourself with a pair of scarlet stockings."

Pathetic as poor Kate's face and voice were, it was impossible to help laughing at the comical conclusion of her lament. Lennox tried to hide the smile on his lips by affecting to curl his moustache with care, and to gaze

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pensively out as if touched by her appeal. But he wasn't, oh, bless you, no! she was only his sister, and, though she might have talked with the wisdom of Solomon, and the eloquence of Demosthenes, it wouldn't have done a particle of good. Sisters do very well to work for one, to pet one, and play confidante when one's love affairs need feminine wit to conduct them, but when they begin to reprove, or criticise or moralize, it won't do, and can't be allowed, of course. Lennox never snubbed anybody, but blandly extinguished them by a polite acquiescence in all their affirmations, for the time being, and then went on in his own way as if nothing had been said.

"I dare say you are right; I'll go and think over your very sensible advice," and, as if roused to unwonted exertion by the stings of an accusing conscience, he left the room abruptly.

"I do believe I've made an impression at last! He's actually gone out to think over what I've said. Dear Harry, I was sure he had a heart, if one only knew how to get at it!" and with a sigh of satisfaction Kate went to the window to behold the "dear Harry" going briskly down the street after a pair of scarlet stockings. A spark of anger kindled in her eyes as she watched him, and when he vanished, she still stood knitting her brows in deep thought, for a grand idea was dawning upon her.

It was a dull town; no one could deny that, for everybody was so intensely proper and well-born, that nobody dared to be jolly. All the houses were square, aristocratic mansions with Revolutionary elms in front and spacious coach-houses behind. The knockers had a supercilious perk to their bronze or brass noses, the dandelions on the lawns had a highly connected air, and the very pigs were evidently descended from "our first families." Stately dinner-parties, decorous dances, moral picnics, and much tea-pot gossiping were the social resources of the place. Of course, the young people flirted, for that diversion is apparently irradicable even in the "best society," but it was done with a propriety which was edifying to behold.

One can easily imagine that such a starched state of things would not be particularly attractive to a travelled young gentleman like Lennox, who, as Kate very truly said, had been spoilt by the flattery, luxury, and gayety of foreign society. He did his best, but by the end of the first week ennui claimed him for its own, and passive endurance was all that was left him. From perfect despair he was rescued by the scarlet stockings, which went tripping by one day as he stood at the window, planning some means of escape.

A brisk, blithe-faced girl passed in a grey walking suit with a distracting pair of high-heeled boots and glimpses of scarlet at the ankle. Modest, perfectly so, I assure you, were the glimpses, but the feet were so decidedly pretty that one forgot to look at the face appertaining thereunto. It wasn't a remarkably lovely face, but it was a happy, wholesome one, with all sorts of good little dimples in cheek and chin, sunshiny twinkles in the black eyes, and a decided, yet lovable look about the mouth that was quite satisfactory. A busy, bustling little body she seemed to be, for sack-pockets and muff were full of bundles, and the trim boots tripped briskly over the ground, as if the girl's heart were as light as her heels. Somehow this active, pleasant figure seemed to wake up the whole street, and leave a streak of sunshine behind it, for every one nodded as it passed, and the primmest faces relaxed into smiles, which lingered when the girl had gone.

"Uncommonly pretty feet — she walks well, which American girls seldom do — all waddle or prance — nice face, but the boots are French, and it does my heart good to see 'em."

Lennox made these observations to himself as the young lady approached, nodded to Kate at another window, gave a quick but comprehensive glance at himself and trotted round the corner, leaving the impression on his mind that a whiff of fresh spring air had blown through the street in spite of the December snow. He didn't trouble himself to ask who it was, but fell into the way of lounging in the bay-window at about three P. M., and watching the grey and scarlet figure pass with its blooming cheeks, bright eyes, and elastic step. Having nothing else to do, he took to petting this new whim, and quite depended on the daily stirring-up which the sight of the energetic damsel gave him. Kate saw it all, but took no notice till the day of

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the little tiff above recorded; after that she was as soft as a summer sea, and by some clever stroke had Belle Morgan to tea that very week.

Lennox was one of the best tempered fellows in the world, but the "peacocks" did rather nettle him because there was some truth in the insinuation; so he took care to put on no airs or try to be fascinating in the presence of Miss Belle. In truth he soon forgot himself entirely, and enjoyed her oddities with a relish, after the prim proprieties of the other young ladies who had simpered and sighed before him. For the first time in his life, the "Crusher," as his male friends called him, got crushed; for Belle, with the subtle skill of a quick-witted, keen-sighted girl, soon saw and condemned the elegant affectations which others called foreign polish. A look, a word, a gesture from a pretty woman is often more eloquent and impressive than moral essays or semi-occasional twinges of conscience, and in the presence of one satirical little person, Sir Charles Coldstream soon ceased to deserve the name.

Belle seemed to get over her hurry and to find time for occasional relaxation, but one never knew in what mood he might find her, for the weathercock was not more changeable than she. Lennox liked that, and found the muffin-worries quite endurable with this sauce piquante to relieve their insipidity. Presently he discovered that he was suffering for exercise, and formed the wholesome habit of promenading the town about three P. M.; Kate said, to follow the scarlet stockings.

II. WHERE THEY LED HIM.

"WHITHER away, Miss Morgan?" asked Lennox, as he overtook her one bitter cold day.

"I'm taking my constitutional."

"So am I."

"With a difference," and Belle glanced at the blue-nosed, muffled-up gentleman strolling along beside her with an occasional shiver and shrug.

"After a winter in the south of France one don't find arctic weather like this easy to bear," he said, with a disgusted air.

"I like it, and do my five or six miles a day, which keeps me in what fine ladies call 'rude health,' answered Belle, walking him on at a pace which soon made his furs a burden.

She was a famous pedestrian, and a little proud of her powers, but she outdid all former feats that day, and got over the ground in gallant style. Something in her manner put her escort on his mettle, and his usual lounge was turned into a brisk march which set his blood dancing, face glowing, and spirits effervescing as they had not done for many a day.

"There! you look more like your real self now," said Belle, with the first sign of approval she had ever vouchsafed him, as he rejoined her after a race to recover her veil, which the wind whisked away over hedge and ditch.

"Are you sure you know what my real self is?" he asked, with a touch of the "conquering hero" air.

"Not a doubt of it. I always know a soldier when I see one," returned Belle, decidedly.

"A soldier! that's the last thing I should expect to be accused of," and Lennox looked both surprised and

gratified.

"There's a flash in your eye and a ring to your voice, occasionally, which made me suspect that you had fire and energy enough if you only chose to show it, and the spirit with which you have just executed the 'Morgan Quick step' proves that I was right," returned Belle, laughing.

"Then I am not altogether a 'peacock?'" said Lennox, significantly, for during the chat, which had been as brisk as the walk, Belle had given his besetting sins several sly hits, and he couldn't resist one return shot, much as her unexpected compliment pleased him.

Poor Belle blushed up to her forehead, tried to look as if she did not understand, and gladly hid her confusion behind the recovered veil without a word.

There was a decided display both of the "flash" and the "ring," as Lennox looked at the suddenly subdued young lady, and, quite satisfied with his retaliation, gave the order — "Forward, march!" which brought them to the garden-gate breathless, but better friends than before.

The next time the young people met, Belle was in such a hurry that she went round the corner with an abstracted expression which was quite a triumph of art. Just then, off tumbled the lid of the basket she carried, and Lennox, rescuing it from a puddle, obligingly helped readjust it over a funny collection of bottles, dishes, and tidy little rolls of all sorts.

"It's very heavy, mayn't I carry it for you?" he asked, in an insinuating manner.

"No, thank you," was on Belle's lips, but observing that he was got up with unusual elegance to pay calls, she couldn't resist the temptation of making a beast of burden of him, and took him at his word.

"You may, if you like. I've got more bundles to take from the store, and another pair of hands won't come amiss."

Lennox lifted his eyebrows, also the basket, and they went on again, Belle very much absorbed in her business, and her escort wondering where the dickens she was going with all that rubbish. Filling his unoccupied hand with sundry brown paper parcels, much to the detriment of the light kid that covered it, Belle paraded him down the main street before the windows of the most aristocratic mansions, and then dived into a dirty back-lane, where the want and misery of the town was decorously kept out of sight.

"You don't mind scarlet fever, I suppose?" observed Belle, as they approached the unsavory residence of Biddy O'Brien.

"Well, I'm not exactly partial to it," said Lennox, rather taken aback.

"You needn't go in if you are afraid, or speak to me afterwards, so no harm will be done — except to your gloves."

"Why do you come here, if I may ask? It isn't the sort of amusement I should recommend," he began, evidently disapproving of the step.

"Oh, I'm used to it, and like to play nurse where father plays doctor. I'm fond of children, and Mrs. O'Brien's are little dears," returned Belle, briskly, threading her way between ash-heaps and mud-puddles as if bound to a festive scene.

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"Judging from the row in there, I should infer that Mrs. O'Brien had quite a herd of little dears."

"Only nine."

"And all sick?"

"More or less."

"By Jove! it's perfectly heroic in you to visit this hole in spite of dirt, noise, fragrance, and infection," cried Lennox, who devoutly wished that the sense of smell if not of hearing were temporarily denied him.

"Bless you, it's the sort of thing I enjoy, for there's no nonsense here; the work you do is pleasant if you do it heartily, and the thanks you get are worth having, I assure you."

She put out her hand to relieve him of the basket, but he gave it an approving little shake, and said briefly —

"Not yet, I'm coming in."

It's all very well to rhapsodize about the exquisite pleasure of doing good, to give carelessly of one's abundance, and enjoy the delusion of having remembered the poor. But it is a cheap charity, and never brings the genuine satisfaction which those know who give their mite with heart as well as hand, and truly love their neighbor as themselves. Lennox had seen much fashionable benevolence, and laughed at it even while he imitated it, giving generously when it wasn't inconvenient. But this was a new sort of thing entirely, and in spite of the dirt, the noise, and the smells, he forgot the fever, and was glad he came when poor Mrs. O'Brien turned from her sick babies, exclaiming, with Irish fervor at sight of Belle,

"The Lord love ye, darlin, for remimberin us when ivery one, barrin' the doctor, and the praste, turns the cowl'd shouldther in our throuble!"

"Now if you really want to help, just keep this child quiet while I see to the sickest ones," said Belle, dumping a stout infant on to his knee, thrusting an orange into his hand, and leaving him aghast, while she unpacked her little messes, and comforted the maternal bird.

With the calmness of desperation, her aid-de-camp put down his best beaver on the rich soil which covered the floor, pocketed his Paris kids, and making a bib of his cambric handkerchief, gagged young Pat deliciously with bits of orange whenever he opened his mouth to roar. At her first leisure moment, Belle glanced at him to see how he was getting on, and found him so solemnly absorbed in his task that she went off into a burst of such infectious merriment that the O'Briens, sick and well, joined in it to a man.

"Good fun, isn't it?" she asked, turning down her cuffs when the last spoonful of gruel was administered.

"I've no doubt of it, when one is used to the thing. It comes a little hard at first, you know," returned Lennox, wiping his forehead, with a long breath, and seizing his hat as if quite ready to tear himself away.

"You've done very well for a beginner; so kiss the baby and come home," said Belle approvingly.

"No, thank you," muttered Lennox, trying to detach the bedaubed innocent. But little Pat had a grateful heart, and falling upon his new nurse's neck with a rapturous crow clung there like a burr.

"Take him off! Let me out of this! He's one too many for me!" cried the wretched young man in comic despair.

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Being freed with much laughter, he turned and fled, followed by a shower of blessings, from Mrs. O'Brien.

As they came up again into the pleasant highways, Lennox said, awkwardly for him,

"The thanks of the poor are excellent things to have, but I think I'd rather receive them by proxy. Will you kindly spend this for me in making that poor soul comfortable?"

But Belle wouldn't take what he offered her, she put it back, saying earnestly,

"Give it yourself; one can't buy blessings, they must be earned or they are not worth having. Try it, please, and if you find it a failure, then I'll gladly be your almoner."

There was a significance in her words which he could not fail to understand. He neither shrugged, drawled, nor sauntered now, but gave her a look in which respect and self-reproach were mingled, and left her, simply saying, "I'll try it, Miss Morgan."

"Now isn't she odd?" whispered Kate to her brother, as Belle appeared at a little dance at Mrs. Plantagenet's in a high-necked dress, knitting away on an army-sock, as she greeted the friends who crowded round her.

"Charmingly so. Why don't you do that sort of thing when you can?" answered her brother, glancing at her thin, bare shoulders and hands, rendered nearly useless by the tightness of the gloves.

"Gracious, no! It's natural to her to do so, and she carries it off well; I couldn't, therefore I don't try, though I admire it in her. Go and ask her to dance, before she is engaged."

"She doesn't dance round dances you know."

"She is dreadfully prim about some things and so free and easy about others, I can't understand it, do you?"

"Well, yes, I think I do. Here's Forbes coming for you, I'll go and entertain Belle by a quarrel."

He found her in a recess out of the way of the rushing and romping, busy with her work, yet evidently glad to be amused.

"I admire your adherence to principles, Miss Belle, but don't you find it a little hard to sit still while your friends are enjoying themselves?" he asked, sinking luxuriously into the lounging chair beside her.

"Yes, very," answered Belle with characteristic candor. "But father don't approve of that sort of exercise, so I console myself with something useful till my chance comes."

"Your work can't exactly be called ornamental," said Lennox, looking at the big sock.

"Don't laugh at it, sir, it is for the foot of the brave fellow who is going to fight for me and his country."

"Happy fellow! May I ask who he is?" and Lennox sat up with an air of interest.

"My substitute; I don't know his name, for father has not got him yet, but I'm making socks, and towels, and a comfort-bag for him, so that when found he may be off at once."

"You really mean it?" cried Lennox.

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"O course I do; I can't go myself, but I can buy a pair of strong arms to fight for me, and I intend to do it. I only hope he'll have the right sort of courage and be a credit to me."

"What do you call the right sort of courage?" asked Lennox, soberly.

"That which makes a man ready and glad to live or die for a principle. There's a chance for heroes now, if there ever was. When do you join your regiment?" she added abruptly.

"Haven't the least idea," and Lennox subsided again.

"But you intend to do so, of course?"

"Why should I?"

Belle dropped her work. "Why should you? What a question! Because you have health, and strength, and courage, and money to help on the good cause, and every man should give his best, and not dare to stay at home when he is needed."

"You forget that I am an Englishman, and we rather prefer to be strictly neutral just now."

"You are only half English, and for your mother's sake you should be proud and glad to fight for the North," cried Belle warmly.

"I don't remember my mother —"

"That's evident!"

"But I was about to add, I've no objection to lend a hand if it isn't too much trouble to get off," said Lennox indifferently, for he liked to see Belle's color rise, and her eyes kindle while he provoked her.

"Do you expect to go South in a bandbox? You'd better join one of the kid-glove regiments, they say the dandies fight well when the time comes."

"I've been away so long, the patriotic fever hasn't seized me yet, and as the quarrel is none of mine, I think, perhaps I'd better take care of Kate, and let you fight it out among yourselves. Here's the Lancers, may I have the honor?"

But Belle, being very angry at this lukewarmness, answered in her bluntest manner.

"Having reminded me that you are a 'strictly neutral' Englishman, you must excuse me if I decline; I dance only with loyal Americans," and rolling up her work with a defiant flourish, she walked away, leaving him to lament his loss and wonder how he could retrieve it. She did not speak to him again till he stood in the hall waiting for Kate, then Belle came down in the charming little red hood, and going straight up to him with her hand out, a repentant look, and a friendly smile, said frankly —

"I was very rude; I want to beg pardon of the English, and shake hands with the American half."

So peace was declared, and lasted unbroken for the remaining week of his stay, when he proposed to take Kate to the city for a little gayety. Miss Morgan openly approved the plan, but secretly felt as if the town was about to be depopulated, and tried to hide her melancholy in her substitute's socks. They were not large enough, however, to absorb it all, and when Lennox went to make his adieu, it was perfectly evident that the

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Doctor's Belle was out of tune. The young gentleman basely exulted over this, till she gave him something else to think about by saying gravely,

"Before you go, I feel as if I ought to tell you something, since Kate won't. If you are offended about it please don't blame her; she meant it kindly and so did I." Belle paused as if it was not an easy thing to tell, and then went on quickly, with her eyes upon her work.

"Three weeks ago Kate asked me to help her in a little plot, and I consented, for the fun of the thing. She wanted something to amuse and stir you up, and finding that my queer ways diverted you, she begged me to be neighborly and let you do what you liked. I didn't care particularly about amusing you, but I did think you needed rousing, so for her sake I tried to do it, and you very good-naturedly bore my lecturing. I don't like deceit of any kind, so I confess, but I can't say I'm sorry, for I really think you are none the worse for the teasing and teaching you've had."

Belle didn't see him flush and frown as she made her confession, and when she looked up he only said, half gratefully, half reproachfully,

"I'm a good deal the better for it, I dare say, and ought to be very thankful for your friendly exertions. But two against one was hardly fair, now was it?"

"No, it was sly and sinful in the highest degree, but we did it for your good, so I know you'll forgive us, and as a proof of it sing one or two of my favorites for the last time."

"You don't deserve any favor, but I'll do it to show you how much more magnanimous men are than women."

Not at all loth to improve his advantages, Lennox warbled his most melting lays con amore, watching, as he sung, for any sign of sentiment in the girlish face opposite. But Belle wouldn't be sentimental; and sat rattling her knitting-needles industriously, though "The Harbor Bar was Moaning," dolefully, though "Douglas" was touchingly "tender and true," and the "Wind of the Summer Night" sighed romantically through the sitting-room.

"Much obliged. Must you go?" she said, without a sign of soft confusion as he rose.

"I must, but I shall come again before I leave the country. May I?" he asked, holding her hand.

"If you come in a uniform."

"Good night, Belle," tenderly. "Good-bye, Sir Charles," with a wicked twinkle of the eye, which lasted till he closed the hall-door, growling irefully,

"I thought I'd had some experience, but one never can understand these women."

Canterbury did become a desert to Belle after her dear friend had gone; (of course the dear friend's brother had nothing to do with the desolation), and as the weeks dragged slowly, Belle took to reading poetry, practicing plaintive ballads, and dawdling over her work at a certain window which commanded a view of the railway station and hotel.

"You're dull, my dear, run up to town with me to-morrow, and see your young man off," said the Doctor, one evening as Belle sat musing with a half-mended red stocking in her hand.

"My young man?" she ejaculated, turning with a start and a blush.

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"Your substitute, child. Stephens attended to the business for me, and he's off to-morrow. I began to tell you about the fellow last week, but you were wool-gathering, so I stopped."

"Yes, I remember, it was all very nice. Goes to-morrow, does he? I'd like to see him, but do you think we can both leave home at once? Some one might come you know, and I fancy it's going to snow," said Belle, putting her face behind the curtain to inspect the weather.

"You'd better go, the trip will do you good, you can take your things to Tom Jones, and see Kate on the way; she's got back from Philadelphia."

"Has she! I'll go, then; it will please her, and I do need change. You are an old dear, to think of it;" and giving her father a hasty glimpse of a suddenly excited countenance, Belle slipped out of the room to prepare her best array with a most reckless disregard of the impending storm.

It didn't snow on the morrow, and up they went to see the — th regiment off. Belle did not see "her young man," however, for while her father went to carry him her comforts and a patriotic nosegay of red and white flowers, tied up with a smart blue ribbon, she called on Kate. But Miss Lennox was engaged, and sent an urgent request that her friend would call in the afternoon. Much disappointed and a little hurt, Belle then devoted herself to the departing regiment, wishing she was going with it, for she felt in a war-like mood. It was past noon when a burst of martial music, the measured tramp of many feet, and enthusiastic cheers announced that "the boys" were coming. From the balcony where she stood with her father, Belle looked down upon the living stream that flowed by like a broad river with a steely glitter above the blue. All her petty troubles vanished at the sight, her heart beat high, her face glowed, her eyes filled, and she waved her hat as zealously as if she had a dozen friends and lovers in the ranks below.

"Here comes your man; I told him to stick the posy where it would catch my eye, so I could point him out to you. Look, it's the tall fellow at the end of the front line," said the Doctor in an excited tone, as he pointed and beckoned.

Belle looked and gave a little cry, for there, in a private's uniform, with her nosegay at his buttonhole, and on his face a smile she never forgot, was Lennox! For an instant she stood staring at him as pale and startled as if he were a ghost, then the color rushed into her face, she kissed both hands to him, and cried bravely, "Good-bye, good-bye, God bless you, Harry!" and immediately laid her head on her father's shoulder, sobbing as if her heart was broken.

When she looked up, her substitute was lost in the undulating mass below, and for her the spectacle was over.

"Was it really he? Why wasn't I told? What does it all mean?" she demanded, looking bewildered, grieved, and ashamed.

"He's really gone, my dear. It's a surprise of his, and I was bound over to silence. Here, this will explain the joke, I suppose," and the Doctor handed her a cocked-hat note, done up like a military order.

"A Roland for your Oliver, Mademoiselle! I came home for the express purpose of enlisting, and only delayed a month on Kate's account. If I ever return, I will receive my bounty at your hands. Till then please comfort Kate, think as kindly as you can of 'Sir Charles,' and sometimes pray a little prayer for

"Your unworthy

"Substitute."

Belle looked very pale and meek when she put her note in her pocket, but she only said, "I must go and comfort Kate," and the Doctor gladly obeyed, feeling that the joke was more serious than he had imagined.

The moment her friend appeared, Miss Lennox turned on her tears, and "played away" pouring forth lamentations, reproaches, and regrets in a steady stream.

"I hope you are satisfied now, you cruel girl!" she began, refusing to be kissed. "You've sent him off with a broken heart to rush into danger and be shot, or get his arms and legs spoilt. You know he loved you and wanted to tell you so, but you wouldn't let him, and now you've driven him away, and he's gone as an insignificant private with his head shaved, and a heavy knapsack breaking his back, and a horrid gun that will be sure to explode, and he would wear those immense blue socks you sent, for he adores you, and you only teased and laughed at him, my poor deluded, deserted brother!" And quite overwhelmed by the afflicting picture, Kate lifted up her voice and wept again.

"I am satisfied; for he's done what I hoped he would, and he's none the less a gentleman because he's a private and wears my socks. I pray they will keep him safe and bring him home to us when he has done his duty like a man, as I know he will. I'm proud of my brave substitute, and I'll try to be worthy of him," cried Belle, kindling beautifully as she looked out into the wintry sunshine with a new softness in the eyes that still seemed watching that blue-coated figure marching away to danger, perhaps death.

"It's ill playing with edged tools; we meant to amuse him and we may have sent him to destruction. I'll never forgive you for your part, never!" said Kate, with the charming inconsistency of her sex.

But Belle turned away her wrath by a soft answer, as she whispered, with a tender choke in her voice,

"We both loved him, dear; let's comfort one another."

III. WHAT BECAME OF THEM.

PRIVATE Lennox certainly had chosen pretty hard work, for the — th was not a "kid-glove" regiment by any means; fighting in mid-winter was not exactly festive, and camps do not abound in beds of roses even at the best of times. But Belle was right in saying she knew a soldier when she saw him, for now that he was thoroughly waked up, he proved that there was plenty of courage, energy, and endurance in him.

It's my private opinion that he might now and then have slightly regretted the step he had taken, had it not been for certain recollections of a sarcastic tongue and a pair of keen eyes, not to mention the influence of one of the most potent rulers of the human heart, namely, the desire to prove himself worthy of the respect, if nothing more, of somebody at home. Belle's socks did seem to keep him safe, and lead him straight in the narrow path of duty. Belle's comfort-bag was such in very truth, for not one of the stout needles on the tricolored cushion but what seemed to wink its eye approvingly at him; not one of the tidy balls of thread that did not remind him of the little hand he coveted, and the impracticable scissors, were cherished as a good omen, though he felt that the sharpest steel that ever came from Sheffield couldn't cut his love in twain. And Belle's lessons, short as they had been, were not forgotten, but seemed to have been taken up by a sterner mistress, whose rewards were greater if not so sweet as those the girl could give. There was plenty of exercise now—a-days of hard work that left many a tired head asleep forever under the snow. There were many opportunities for diving "into the depths and bringing up pearls worth having" by acts of kindness among the weak, the wicked, and the suffering all about him. He learned now how to earn, not buy, the thanks of the poor, and unconsciously proved in the truest way that a private could be a gentleman. But best of all was the steadfast purpose "to live and die for a principle," which grew and strengthened with each month of bitter hardship, bloody strife, and dearly-bought success. Life grew earnest to him, time seemed precious, self was

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forgotten, and all that was best and bravest rallied round the flag on which his heart inscribed the motto, "Love and Liberty."

Praise and honor he could not fail to win, and had he never gone back to claim his bounty he would have earned the great "Well done," for he kept his oath loyally, did his duty manfully, and loved his lady faithfully, like a knight of the chivalrous times. He knew nothing of her secret, but wore her blue ribbon like an order, never went into battle without first, like many another poor fellow, kissing something which he carried next his heart, and with each day of absence felt himself a better man, and braver soldier, for the fondly foolish romance he had woven about the scarlet stockings.

Belle and Kate did comfort one another, not only with tears and kisses, but with womanly work which kept hearts happy and hands busy. How Belle bribed her to silence will always remain the ninth wonder of the world, but though reams of paper passed between brother and sister during those twelve months not a hint was dropped on one side in reply to artful inquiries from the other. Belle never told her love in words, but she stowed away an unlimited quantity of the article in the big boxes that went to gladden the eyes and — alas for romance! — the stomach of Private Lennox. If pickles could typify passion, cigars prove constancy, and gingerbread reveal the longings of the soul, then would the above-mentioned gentleman have been the happiest of lovers. But camp-life had doubtless dulled his finer intuitions, for he failed to understand the new language of love, and gave away these tender tokens with lavish prodigality. Concealment preyed a trifle on Belle's damask cheek it must be confessed, and the keen eyes grew softer with the secret tears that sometimes dimmed them; the sharp tongue seldom did mischief now, but uttered kindly words to every one as if doing penance for the past, and a sweet seriousness toned down the lively spirit which was learning many things in the sleepless nights that followed when the "little prayer" for the beloved substitute was done.

"I'll wait and see if he is all I hope he will be, before I let him know. I shall read the truth the instant I see him, and if he has stood the test I'll run into his arms and tell him everything," she said to herself with delicious thrills at the idea; but you may be sure she did nothing of the sort when the time came.

A rumor flew through the town one day that Lennox had arrived; upon receipt of which joyful tidings Belle had a panic and hid herself in the garret. But when she had quaked, and cried, and peeped, and listened for an hour or two, finding that no one came to hunt her up, she composed her nerves and descended to pass the afternoon in the parlor and a high state of dignity. All sorts of reports reached her — he was mortally wounded, he had been made a major or a colonel, or a general, no one knew exactly which; he was dead, was going to be married, and hadn't come at all. Belle fully expiated all her small sins by the agonies of suspense she suffered that day, and when at last a note came from Kate begging her "to drop over to see Harry," she put her pride in her pocket and went at once.

The drawing-room was empty and in confusion, there was a murmur of voices up-stairs, a smell of camphor in the air, and an empty wine-glass on the table where a military cap was lying. Belle's heart sunk, and she covertly kissed the faded blue coat as she stood waiting breathlessly, wondering if Harry had any arms for her to run into. She heard the chuckling Biddy lumber up and announce her, then a laugh and a half fond, half exulting — "Ah, ha, I thought she'd come!"

That spoilt it all; Belle took out her pride instant, set her teeth, rubbed a quick color into her white cheeks, and snatching up a newspaper, sat herself down with as expressionless a face as it was possible for an excited young woman to possess. Lennox came running down — "Thank heaven, his legs are safe!" sighed Belle, with her eyes glued to the price of beef. He entered with both hands extended, which relieved her mind upon another point, and he beamed upon her, looking so vigorous, manly, and martial that she cried within herself, "My beautiful brown soldier!" even while she greeted him with an unnecessarily brief "How do you do, Mr. Lennox?"

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The sudden eclipse which passed over his joyful countenance would have been ludicrous if it hadn't been pathetic; but he was used to hard knocks now, and bore this, his hardest, like a man. He shook hands heartily, and as Belle sat down again (not to betray that she was trembling a good deal), he stood at ease before her, talking in a way which soon satisfied her that he had borne the test, and that bliss was waiting for her round the corner. But she had made it such a very sharp corner she couldn't turn it gracefully, and while she pondered how to do so he helped her with a cough. She looked up quickly, discovering all at once that he was very thin, rather pale in spite of the nice tan, and breathed hurriedly as he stood with one hand in his breast.

"Are you ill, wounded, in pain?" she asked, forgetting herself entirely.

"Yes, all three," he answered, after a curious look at her changing color and anxious eyes.

"Sit down — tell me about it — can I do any thing?" and Belle began to plump up the pillows on the couch with nervous eagerness.

"Thank you, I'm past help," was the mournful reply, accompanied by a hollow cough which made her shiver.

"Oh, don't say so! Let me bring father; he is very skilful. Shall I call Kate?"

"He can do nothing; Kate doesn't know this, and I beg you won't tell her. I got a shot in the breast and made light of it, but it will finish me sooner or later. I don't mind telling you, for you are one of the strong, cool sort, you know, and are not affected by such things. But Kate is so fond of me, I don't want to shock and trouble her yet awhile. Let her enjoy my little visit, and after I'm gone you can tell her the truth."

Belle had sat like a statue while he spoke with frequent pauses and an involuntary clutch or two at the suffering breast. As he stopped and passed his hand over his eyes, she said slowly, as if her white lips were stiff,

"Gone! where?"

"Back to my place. I'd rather die fighting than fussed and wailed over by a parcel of women. I expected to stay a week or so, but a battle is coming off sooner than we imagined, so I'm away again to-morrow. As I'm not likely ever to come back, I just wanted to ask you to stand by poor Kate when I'm finished, and to say good-bye to you, Belle, before I go." He put out his hand, but holding it fast in both her own, she laid her tearful face down on it, whispering imploringly,

"Oh, Harry, stay!"

Never mind what happened for the next ten minutes; suffice it to say that the enemy having surrendered, the victor took possession with great jubilation and showed no quarter.

"Bang the field piece, toot the fife, and beat the rolling drum, for ruse number three has succeeded! Come down, Kate, and give us your blessing," called Lennox, taking pity on his sister, who was anxiously awaiting the denouement on the stairs.

In she rushed, and the young ladies laughed and cried, kissed and talked tumultuously, while their idol benignantly looked on, vainly endeavoring to repress all vestiges of unmanly emotion.

"And you are not dying, really, truly?" cried Belle, when fair weather set in after the flurry.

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"Bless your dear heart, no! I'm as sound as a nut, and haven't a wound to boast of, except this ugly slash on the head."

"It's a splendid wound, and I'm proud of it," and Belle set a rosy little seal on the scar which quite reconciled her lover to the disfigurement of his handsome forehead. "You've learned to fib in the army, and I'm disappointed in you," she added, trying to look reproachful and failing entirely.

"No, only the art of strategy. You quenched me by your frosty reception, and I thought it was all up till you put the idea of playing invalid into my head. It succeeded so well that I piled on the agony, resolving to fight it out on that line, and if I failed again to make a masterly retreat. You gave me a lesson in deceit once, so don't complain if I turned the tables and made your heart ache for a minute, as you've made mine for a year."

Belle's spirit was rapidly coming back, so she gave him a capital imitation of his French shrug, and drawled out in his old way —

"I have my doubts about that, mon ami."

"What do you say to this — and this — and this?" he retorted, pulling out and laying before her with a triumphant flourish, a faded blue ribbon, a fat pincushion with a hole through it, and a dainty-painted little picture of a pretty girl in scarlet stockings.

"There, I've carried those treasures in my breast-pocket for a year, and I'm firmly convinced that they have all done their part toward keeping me safe. The blue ribbon bound me fast to you, Belle; the funny cushion caught the bullet that otherwise might have finished me, and the blessed little picture was my comfort during those dreadful marches, my companion on picket-duty with treachery and danger all about me, and my inspiration when the word 'Charge!' went down the line, for in the thickest of the fight I always saw the little grey figure beckoning me on to my duty."

"Oh, Harry, you won't go back to all those horrors, will you? I'm sure you've done enough, and may rest now and enjoy your reward," said Kate, trying not to feel that "two is company and three is none."

"I've enlisted for the war, and shall not rest till either it or I come to an end. As for my reward, I had it when Belle kissed me."

"You are right, I'll wait for you, and love you all the better for the sacrifice," whispered Belle. "I only wish I could share your hardships, dear, for while you fight and suffer I can only love and pray."

"Waiting is harder than working to such as you, so be contented with your share, for the thought of you will glorify the world generally for me. I'll tell you what you can do while I'm away; it's both useful and amusing, so it will occupy and cheer you capitally. Just knit lots of red hose, because I don't intend you to wear any others hereafter, Mrs. Lennox."

"Mine are not worn out yet," laughed Belle, getting merry at the thought.

"No matter for that, those are sacred articles, and henceforth must be treasured as memorials of our love. Frame and hang 'em up; or, if the prejudices of society forbid that flight of romance, lay them carefully away where moths can't devour nor thieves steal 'em, so that years hence, when my descendants praise me for any virtues I may possess, any good I may have done, or any honor I may have earned, I can point to those precious relics and say proudly,

"My children, for all that I am, or hope to be, you must thank your honored mother's scarlet stockings."