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I.

THIS WAY, AND THAT.

The parlor blinds were shut, and all the windows of the third-story rooms were shaded; but the pantry window, looking out on a long low shed, such as city houses have to keep their wood in and to dry their clothes upon, was open; and out at this window had come two little girls, with quiet steps and hushed voices, and carried their books and crickets to the very further end, establishing themselves there, where the shade of a tall, round fir tree, planted at the foot of the yard below, fell across the building of a morning.

"It was prettier down on the bricks," Luclarion had told them. But they thought otherwise.

"Luclarion doesn't know," said Frank. "People *don't* know things, I think. I wonder why, when they've got old, and ought to? It's like the sea-shore here, I guess, only the stones are all stuck down, and you mustn't pick up the loose ones either."

Frank touched lightly, as she spoke, the white and black and gray bits of gravel that covered the flat roof.

"And it smells—like the pine forests!"

The sun was hot and bright upon the fir branches and along the tar-cemented roof.

"How do you know about sea-shores and pine forests?" asked Laura, with crushing common sense.

"I don't know; but I do," said Frank.

"You don't know anything but stories and pictures and one tree, and a little gravel, all stuck down tight."

"I'm glad I've got one tree. And the rest of it,—why listen! It's in the *word*, Laura. *Forest*. Doesn't that sound like thousands of them, all fresh and rustling? And Ellen went to the sea-shore, in that book; and picked up pebbles; and the sea came up to her feet, just as the

air comes up here, and you can't get any farther,"—said Frank, walking to the very edge and putting one foot out over, while the wind blew in her face up the long opening between rows of brick houses of which theirs was in the midst upon one side.

"A great sea!" exclaimed Laura, contemptuously. "With all those other wood-sheds right out in it, all the way down!"

"Well, there's another side to the sea; and capes, and islands," answered Frank, turning back. "Besides, I don't pretend it *is*; I only think it seems a little bit like it. I'm often put in mind of things. I don't know why."

"I'll tell you what it is like," said Laura. "It's like the gallery at church, where the singers stand up in a row, and look down, and all the people look up at them. I like high places. I like Cecilia, in the 'Bracelets,' sitting at the top, behind, when her name was called out for the prize; and 'they all made way, and she was on the floor in an instant.' I should like to have been Cecilia!"

"Leonora was a great deal the best."

"I know it; but she don't *stand out*."

"Laura! You're just like the Pharisees! You're always wishing for long clothes and high seats!"

"There ain't any Pharisees, nowadays," said Laura, securely. After which, of course, there was nothing more to be insisted.

Mrs. Lake, the housekeeper, came to the middle upper window, and moved the blind a little. Frank and Laura were behind the fir. They saw her through the branches. She, through the farther thickness of the tree, did not notice them.

"That was good," said Laura. "She would have beckoned us in. I hate that forefinger of hers; it's always hushing or beckoning. It's only two inches long. What makes us have to mind it so?"

"She puts it all into those two inches," answered Frank. "All the *must* there is in the house. And then you've got to."

"I wouldn't—if father wasn't sick."

"Laura," said Frank, gravely, "I don't believe father is going to get well. What do you suppose they're letting us stay at home from school for?"

"O, that," said Laura, "was because Mrs. Lake didn't have time to sew the sleeves into your brown dress."

"I could have worn my gingham, Laura. What if he should die pretty soon? I heard her tell Luclarion that there must be a change before long. They talk in little bits, Laura, and they say it solemn."

The children were silent for a few minutes. Frank sat looking through the fir-tree at the far-off flecks of blue.

Mr. Shiere had been ill a long time. They could hardly think, now, what it would seem again not to have a sick father; and they had had no mother for several years,—many out of their short remembrance of life. Mrs. Lake had kept the house, and mended their clothes, and held up her forefinger at them. Even when Mr. Shiere was well, he had been a reserved man, much absorbed in business since his wife's death, he had been a very sad man. He loved his children, but he was very little with them. Frank and Laura could not feel the shock and loss that children feel when death comes and robs them suddenly of a close companionship.

"What do you suppose would happen then?" asked Laura, after awhile. "We shouldn't be anybody's children."

"Yes, we should," said Frank; "we should be God's."

"Everybody else is that,—*besides*," said Laura.

"We shall have black silk pantalets again, I suppose,"—she began, afresh, looking down at her white ones with double crimped ruffles,— "and Mrs. Gibbs will come in and help, and we shall have to pipe and overcast."

"O, Laura, how nice it was ever so long ago!" cried Frank, suddenly, never heeding the pantalets, "when mother sent us out to ask company to tea,—that pleasant Saturday, you know,—and made lace pelerines for our dolls while we were gone! It's horrid, when other girls have mothers, only to have a *housekeeper*! And pretty soon we sha'n't have anything, only a little corner, away back, that we can't hardly recollect."

"They'll do something with us; they always do," said Laura, composedly.

The children of this world, even *as* children, are wisest in their generation. Frank believed they would be God's children; she could not see exactly what was to come of that, though, practically. Laura knew that people always did something; something would be sure to be done with them. She was not frightened; she was even a little curious.

A head came up at the corner of the shed behind them, a pair of shoulders,—high, square, turned forward; a pair of arms, long thence to the elbows, as they say women's are who might be good nurses of children; the hands held on to the sides of the steep steps that led up from the bricked yard. The young woman's face was thin and strong; two great, clear, hazel eyes looked straight out, like arrow shots; it was a clear, undeviating glance; it never wandered, or searched, or wavered, any more than a sunbeam; it struck full upon whatever was there; it struck *through* many things that were transparent to their quality. She had square, white, strong teeth, that set together like the faces of a die; they showed easily when she spoke, but the lips closed over them absolutely and firmly. Yet they were pleasant lips, and had a smile in them that never went quite out; it lay in all the muscles of the mouth and chin; it lay behind, in the living spirit that had moulded to itself the muscles.

This was Luclarion.

"Your Aunt Oldways and Mrs. Oferr have come. Hurry in!"

Now Mrs. Oldways was only an uncle's wife; Mrs. Oferr was their father's sister. But Mrs. Oferr was a rich woman who lived in New York, and who came on grand and potent, with a scarf or a pair of shoe-bows for each of the children in her big trunk, and a hundred and one suggestions for their ordering and behavior at her tongue's end, once a year. Mrs. Oldways lived up in the country, and was "aunt" to half the neighborhood at home, and turned into an aunt instantly, wherever she went and found children. If there were no children, perhaps older folks did not call her by the name, but they felt the special human kinship that is of no-blood or law, but is next to motherhood in the spirit.

Mrs. Oferr found the open pantry window, before the children had got in.

"Out there!" she exclaimed, "in the eyes of all the neighbors in the circumstances of the family! Who does, or *don't* look after you?"

"Hearts'-sake!" came up the pleasant tones of Mrs. Oldways from behind, "how can they help it? There isn't any other out-doors. If they were down at Homesworth now, there'd be the lilac garden and the old chestnuts, and the seat under the wall. Poor little souls!" she added, pitifully, as she lifted them in, and kissed them. "It's well they can take any comfort. Let 'em have all there is."

Mrs. Oferr drew the blinds, and closed the window.

Frank and Laura remembered the strangeness of that day all their lives. How they sat, shy and silent, while Luclarion brought in cake and wine; how Mrs. Oferr sat in the large morocco easy-chair and took some; and Mrs. Oldways lifted Laura, great girl as she was, into her lap first, and broke a slice for her; how Mrs. Oldways went up-stairs to Mrs. Lake, and then down into the kitchen to do something that was needed; and Mrs. Oferr, after she had visited her brother, lay down in the spare chamber for a nap, tired with her long journey from New York, though it had been by boat and cars, while there was a long staging from Homesworth down to Nashua, on Mrs. Oldways' route. Mrs. Oldways, however, was "used," she said, "to stepping round." It was the sitting that had tired her.

How they were told not to go out any more, or to run up and down-stairs; and how they sat in the front windows, looking out through the green slats at so much of the street world as they could see in strips; how they obtained surreptitious bits of bread from dinner, and opened a bit of the sash, and shoved out crumbs under the blinds for the pigeons that flew down upon the sidewalk; how they wondered what kind of a day it was in other houses, where there were not circumstances in the family, where children played, and fathers were not ill, but came and went to and from their stores; and where two aunts had not come, both at once, from great ways off, to wait for something strange and awful that was likely to befall.

When they were taken in, at bedtime, to kiss their father and say good-night, there was something portentous in the stillness there; in the look of the sick man, raised high against the pillows, and turning his eyes wistfully toward them, with no slightest movement of the head; in the waiting aspect of all things,—the appearance as of everybody being to sit up all night except themselves.

Edward Shiere brought his children close to him with the magnetism of that look; they bent down to receive his kiss and his good-night, so long and solemn. He had not been in the way of talking to them about religion in his life. He had only insisted on their truth and obedience; that was the beginning of all religion. Now it was given him in the hour of his death what he should speak; and because he had never said many such words to them before, they fell like the very touch of the Holy Ghost upon their young spirits now,—

"Love God, and keep His commandments. Good-by."

In the morning, when they woke, Mrs. Lake was in their room, talking in a low voice with Mrs. Oferr, who stood by an open bureau. They heard Luclarion dusting down the stairs.

Who was taking care of their father?

They did not ask. In the night, he had been taken care of. It was morning with him, now, also.

Mrs. Lake and Mrs. Oferr were calculating,—about black pantallets, and other things.

This story is not with the details of their early orphan life. When Edward Shiere was buried came family consultations. The two aunts were the nearest friends. Nobody thought of Mr. Titus Oldways. He never was counted. He was Mrs. Shiere's uncle,—Aunt Oldways' uncle-in-law, therefore, and grand-uncle to these children. But Titus Oldways never took up any family responsibilities; he had been shy of them all his single, solitary life. He seemed to think he could not drop them as he could other things, if he did not find them satisfactory. Besides, what would he know about two young girls?

He saw the death in the paper, and came to the funeral; then he went away again to his house in Greenley Street at the far West End, and to his stiff old housekeeper, Mrs. Froke, who knew his stiff old ways. And, turning his back on everybody, everybody forgot all about him. Except as now and then, at intervals of years, there broke out here or there, at some distant point in some family crisis, a sudden recollection from which would spring a half suggestion, "Why, there's Uncle Titus! If he was only,"—or, "if he would only,"—and there it ended. Much as it might be with a housewife, who says of some stored-away possession forty times, perhaps, before it ever turns out available, "Why, there's that old gray taffety! If it were only green, now!" or, "If there were three or four yards more of it!"

Uncle Titus was just Uncle Titus, neither more nor less; so Mrs. Oferr and Aunt Oldways consulted about their own measures and materials; and never reckoned the old taffety at all. There was money enough to clothe and educate; little more.

"I will take home *one*," said Mrs. Oferr, distinctly.

So, they were to be separated?

They did not realize what this was, however. They were told of letters and visits; of sweet country-living, of city sights and pleasures; of kittens and birds' nests, and the great barns; of music and dancing lessons, and little parties,— "by-and-by, when it was proper."

"Let me go to Homesworth," whispered Frank to Aunt Oldways.

Laura gravitated as surely to the streets and shops, and the great school of young ladies.

"One taken and the other left," quoted Luclarion, over the packing of the two small trunks.

"We're both going," says Laura, surprised. "*One* taken? Where?"

"Where the carcass is," answered Luclarion.

"There's one thing you'll have to see to for yourselves. I can't pack it. It won't go into the trunks."

"What, Luclarion?"

"What your father said to you that night."

They were silent. Presently Frank answered, softly,— "I hope I shan't forget that."

Laura, the pause once broken, remarked, rather glibly, that she "was afraid there wouldn't be much chance to recollect things at Aunt Oferr's."

"She isn't exactly what I call a heavenly-minded woman," said Luclarion, quietly.

"She is very much *occupied*," replied Laura, grandly taking up the Oferr style. "She visits a great deal, and she goes out in the carriage. You have to change your dress every day for dinner, and I'm to take French lessons."

The absurd little sinner was actually proud of her magnificent temptations. She was only a child. Men and women never are, of course.

"I'm afraid it will be pretty hard to remember," repeated Laura, with condescension.

"*That's* your stump!"

Luclarion fixed the steadfast arrow of her look straight upon her, and drew the bow with this twang.

II.

LUCLARION.

How Mrs. Grapp ever came to, was the wonder. Her having the baby was nothing. Her having the name for it was the astonishment.

Her own name was Lucy; her husband's Luther: that, perhaps, accounted for the first syllable; afterwards, whether her mind lapsed

off into combinations of such outshining appellatives as "Clara" and "Marion," or whether Mr. Grapp having played the clarinet, and wooed her sweetly with it in her youth, had anything to do with it, cannot be told; but in those prescriptive days of quiet which followed the domestic advent, the name did somehow grow together in the fancy of Mrs. Luther; and in due time the life-atom which had been born indistinguishable into the natural world, was baptized into the Christian Church as "Luclarion" Grapp. Thenceforth, and no wonder, it took to itself a very especial individuality, and became what this story will partly tell.

Marcus Grapp, who had the start of Luclarion in this "meander,"—as their father called the vale of tears,—by just two years' time, and was *y-clipped*, by everybody but his mother "Mark,"—in his turn, as they grew old together, cut his sister down to "Luke." Then Luther Grapp called them both "The Apostles." And not far wrong; since if ever the kingdom of heaven does send forth its Apostles—nay, its little Christs—into the work on earth, in these days, it is as little children into loving homes.

The Apostles got up early one autumn morning, when Mark was about six years old, and Luke four. They crept out of their small trundle-bed in their mother's room adjoining the great kitchen, and made their way out softly to the warm wide hearth.

There were new shoes, a pair apiece, brought home from the Mills the night before, set under the little crickets in the corners. These had got into their dreams, somehow, and into the red rooster's first halloo from the end room roof, and into the streak of pale daylight that just stirred and lifted the darkness, and showed doors and windows, but not yet the blue meeting-houses on the yellow wall-paper, by which they always knew when it was really morning; and while Mrs. Grapp was taking that last beguiling nap in which one is conscious that one means to get up presently, and rests so sweetly on one's good intentions, letting the hazy mirage of the day's work that is to be done play along the horizon of dim thoughts with its unrisen activities,—two little flannel night-gowns were cuddled in small heaps by the chimney-side, little bare feet were trying themselves into the new shoes, and lifting themselves up, crippled with two inches of stout string between the heels.

Then the shoes were turned into spans of horses, and chirruped and trotted softly into their cricket-stables; and then—what else was there to do, until the strings were cut, and the flannel night-gowns taken off?

It was so still out here, in the big, busy, day-time room; it was like getting back where the world had not begun; surely one must do something wonderful with the materials all lying round, and such an opportunity as that.

It was old-time then, when kitchens had fire-places; or rather the house was chiefly fire-place, in front of and about which was more or less of kitchen-space. In the deep fire-place lay a huge mound of gray ashes, a Vesuvius, under which red bowels of fire lay hidden. In one corner of the chimney leaned an iron bar, used sometimes in some forgotten, old fashioned way, across dogs or pothooks,—who knows now? At any rate, there it always was.

Mark, ambitious, put all his little strength to it this morning and drew it down, carefully, without much clatter, on the hearth. Then he thought how it would turn red under those ashes, where the big coals were, and how it would shine and sparkle when he pulled it out again, like the red-hot, hissing iron Jack-the-Giant-Killer struck into the one-eyed monster's eye. So he shoved it in; and forgot it there, while he told Luke—very much twisted and dislocated, and misjoined—the leading incidents of the giant story; and then lapsed off, by some queer association, into the Scripture narrative of Joseph and his brethren, who "pulled his red coat off, and put him in a *fit*, and left him there."

"And then what?" says Luke.

"Then,—O, my iron's done! See here, Luke!"—and taking it prudently with the tongs, he pulled back the rod, till the glowing end, a foot or more of live, palpitating, flamy red, lay out upon the broad open bricks.

"There, Luke! You daresn't put your foot on *that*!"

Dear little Luke, who wouldn't, at even four years old, be dared!

And dear little white, tender, pink-and-lily foot!

The next instant, a shriek of pain shot through Mrs. Grapp's ears, and sent her out of her dreams and out of her bed, and with one single impulse into the kitchen, with her own bare feet, and in her night-gown.

The little foot had only touched; a dainty, timid, yet most resolute touch; but the sweet flesh shriveled, and the fierce anguish ran up every fibre of the baby body, to the very heart and brain.

"O! O, O!" came the long, pitiful, shivering cries, as the mother gathered her in her arms.

"What is it? What did you do? How came you to?" And all the while she moved quickly here and there, to cupboard and press-drawer, holding the child fast, and picking up as she could with one hand, cotton wool, and sweet-oil flask, and old linen bits; and so she bound it up, saying still, every now and again, as all she could say,—"What *did* you do? How came you to?"

Till, in a little lull of the fearful smart, as the air was shut away, and the oil felt momentarily cool upon the ache, Luke answered her,—

"He hed I dare-hn't, and ho I did!"

"You little fool!"

The rough word was half reaction of relief, that the child could speak at all, half horrible spasm of all her own motherly nerves that thrilled through and through with every pang that touched the little frame, hers also. Mothers never do part bonds with babies they have borne. Until the day they die, each quiver of their life goes back straight to the heart beside which it began.

"You Marcus! What did you mean?"

"I meant she darsn't; and she no business to 'a dars't," said Mark, pale with remorse and fright, but standing up stiff and manful, with bare common sense, when brought to bay. And then he marched away into his mother's bedroom, plunged his head down into the clothes, and cried,—harder than Luclarion.

Nobody wore any new shoes that day; Mark for a punishment,—though he flouted at the penalty as such, with an, "I guess you'd see

me!" And there were many days before poor little Luclarion could wear any shoes at all.

The foot got well, however, without hindrance. But Luke was the same little fool as ever; that was not burnt out. She would never be "dared" to anything.

They called it "stumps" as they grew older. They played "stumps" all through the barns and woods and meadows; over walls and rocks, and rafters and house-roofs. But the burnt foot saved Luke's neck scores of times, doubtless. Mark remembered it; he never "stumped" her to any certain hurt, or where he could not lead the way himself.

The mischief they got into and out of is no part of my story; but one day something happened—things do happen as far back in lives as that—which gave Luclarion her clew to the world.

They had got into the best parlor,—that sacred place of the New England farm-house, that is only entered by the high-priests themselves on solemn festivals, weddings and burials, Thanksgivings and quiltings; or devoutly, now and then to set the shrine in order, shut the blinds again, and so depart, leaving it to gather the gloom and grandeur that things and places and people do when they are good for nothing else.

The children had been left alone; for their mother had gone to a sewing society, and Grashy, the girl, was up-stairs in her kitchen-chamber-bedroom, with a nail over the door-latch to keep them out while she "fixed over" her best gown.

"Le's play Lake Ontario," says Marcus.

Now Lake Ontario, however they had pitched upon it, stood with them for all the waters that are upon the face of the earth, and all the confusion and peril of them. To play it, they turned the room into one vast shipwreck, of upset and piled up chairs, stools, boxes, buckets, and what else they could lay hands on; and among and over them they navigated their difficult and hilarious way. By no means were they to touch the floor; that was the Lake,—that were to drown.

It was Columbus sometimes; sometimes it was Captain Cook; to-day, it was no less than Jason sailing after the golden fleece.

Out of odd volumes in the garret, and out of "best books" taken down from the secretary in the "settin'-room," and put into their hands, with charges, of a Sunday, to keep them still, they had got these things, jumbled into strange far-off and near fantasies in their childish minds. "Lake Ontario" included and connected all.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Marcus, tumbling up against the parlor door and an idea at once. "In here!"

"What?" asked Luke, breathless, without looking up, and paddling with the shovel, from an inverted rocking-chair.

"The golden thing! Hush!"

At this moment Grashy came into the kitchen, took a little tin kettle from a nail over the dresser, and her sun-bonnet from another behind the door, and made her way through the apartment as well as she could for bristling chair-legs, with exemplary placidity. She was used to "Lake Ontario."

"Don't get into any mischief, you Apostles," was her injunction. "I'm goin' down to Miss Ruddock's for some 'east."

"Good,;" says Mark, the instant the door was shut "Now this is Colchis, and I'm going in."

He pronounced it much like "cold-cheese," and it never occurred to him that he was naming any unusual or ancient locality. There was a "Jason" in the Mills Village. He kept a grocer's shop. Colchis might be close by for all he knew; out beyond the wall, perhaps, among the old barrels. Children *place* all they read or hear about, or even all they imagine, within a very limited horizon. They cannot go beyond their world. Why should they? Neither could those very venerable ancients.

"'Tain't," says Luclarion, with unbeguiled practicality. "It's just ma's best parlor, and you mustn't."

It was the "mustn't" that was the whole of it. If Mark had asserted that the back kitchen, or the cellar-way closet was Colchis, she would have indorsed it with enthusiasm, and followed on like a loyal Argonaut, as she was. But her imagination here was prepos-

sessed. Nothing in old fable could be more envired with awe and mystery than this best parlor.

"And, besides," said Luclarion, "I don't care for the golden fleece; I'm tired of it. Let's play something else."

"I'll tell you what there is in here," persisted Mark. "There's two enchanted children. I've seen 'em!"

"Just as though," said Luke contemptuously. "Ma ain't a witch."

"Tain't ma. She don't know. They ain't visible to her. *She* thinks it's nothing but the best parlor. But it opens out, right into the witch country,—not for her. 'Twill if we go. See if it don't."

He had got hold of her now; Luclarion could not resist that. Anything might be true of that wonderful best room, after all. It was the farthest Euxine, the witch-land, everything, to them.

So Mark turned the latch and they crept in

"We must open a shutter," Mark said, groping his way.

"Grashy will be back," suggested Luke, fearfully.

"Guess so!" said Mark. "She ain't got coaxed to take her sun-bonnet off yet, an' it'll take her ninety-'leven hours to get it on again."

He had let in the light now from the south window.

The red carpet on the floor; the high sofa of figured hair-cloth, with brass-headed nails, and brass rosettes in the ends of the hard, cylinder pillows; the tall, carved cupboard press, its doors and drawers glittering with hanging brass handles; right opposite the door by which they had come in, the large, leaning mirror, gilt—garnished with grooved and beaded rim and an eagle and ball-chains over the top,—all this, opening right in from the familiar every-day kitchen and their Lake Ontario,—it certainly meant something that such a place should be. It meant a great deal more than sixteen feet square could hold, and what it really was did not stop short at the gray-and-crimson stenciled walls.

The two were all alone in it; perhaps they had never been all alone in it before. I think, notwithstanding their mischief and enterprise, they never had.