

And there were the rare days when Priscilla went to the city—with her father and saw Punch and Judy, the State House, and went to the gorgeous hotel for dinner, and spent the dollar so carefully saved for this purpose—the dollar which could buy such a number of things—the glass breastpin for Mrs. Larkins, with its star of red, white, and blue, in a German silver setting, and which, later, it gave Priscilla such heartfelt joy and satisfaction to see fastening the broad collar of knitted lace which that lady wore on state occasions. And the top for Paul Jenkins around the corner—he would call her Miss Shiny Griny Shoes because she did not have copper-toed shoes for every day as all the other children had, but he had saved her doll once from a big red-headed boy who was holding her over the pond near the schoolhouse, and just lately had brought her a lump of shoemakers' wax to chew. And there was her dear Betty Lord—she must get her the cornelian ring she craved; and her father—oh, she must manage to slip over to the counter where they sold handkerchiefs and buy him one with a border all birds and butterflies in colors. Priscilla was very much in awe of the young man who waited on her with such a grand manner, and wore such a wonderful purple necktie. And just as the handkerchief was wrapped and paid for—oh, how fortunate it was not a moment sooner! the father appeared.

'Well, Priscilla, almost through? What have you bought for yourself?' he would ask, and then Priscilla, looking into her purse, would see just a dime left—how quickly a dollar did go anyhow.

'Oh, I haven't bought mine yet,' she would say, 'but I can get ever so much for ten cents.' But when about to buy the little doll with blue eyes, Priscilla would suddenly remember Mrs. Larkins' little niece who never had anything, and the dime would go for two tiny dolls instead, one of which could be sent to Eliza Amanda. Oh, those were golden days! Priscilla never quite realised how golden until the day when she was sent away to school.

How she begged and prayed that she might be always with her father! And how pale and sad the father looked when he said, in that voice so rarely used, but which when used was final, 'No, my dear, the school is the place for you now. You need another atmosphere and different conditions, and you must learn to rely on yourself more.' But at the end of two years, the father appeared in the city where the school was, and to Priscilla's joy informed her that he had gone into partnership with an old friend—a lawyer—and would be with her. And one eventful day, when he and Priscilla were out for one of their old-time jaunts, the father led her up the steps to a plain, city house, unlocked the door and said: 'Well, Priscilla, how do you like our new home?' And before Priscilla's astonished eyes was the old furniture she knew so well, and there, calm and grave as of old, Mrs. Larkins.

And then the choosing new and pretty things for the home, and her taking her place at the head of the table and pouring the coffee, and the twilight talks before the fire.

'What do girls do who haven't a father like mine to go to in their troubles?' she asked once, reckless of grammar, as she sat beside him in the big chair, her head on his broad shoulder. She had been telling him one of hers, and lo! the wrinkles were smoothed out as if by magic.

'And what do fathers do who haven't daughters to tell them such pretty things as mine does to her old, silly, grey-haired—'

But Priscilla's soft hand was over his mouth—'her fine-looking, distinguished father'—she corrected. 'And then she went on dreamily: 'I remembered the other night of how, when I was a little girl and would waken from a horrible dream and feel that I could not bear the fright, I would muster all my courage to run into your room, and your arms would be held so tightly about me, and you would soothe me and I would feel so safe, so relieved, so rested.'

'It is the same way, isn't it, Pris, dear'—the father hesitated, for it was not easy for him to touch on such subjects—or something like it, about these new troubles of yours? You say that the question of the Trinity and the subject of free will worry and bewilder you. The Trinity puzzles us all; but isn't it like you, with your bad dreams and your fright? We come close to our Father in Heaven and trust that He knows and will somehow bring it all right in the end, and that we are His children and He loves us, and that brings us peace.'

'But I want to know,' cried Priscilla.

'You remember how you used to come to me,' her father went on, 'with questions, and I would say, "Trust me, wait till you are older and then you can understand," and you waited and you did understand.

Well, isn't it the same way now, Pris? We must wait until we know more and can understand, must wait until we can drop this earthly part of us which clogs and darkens our understanding, until we reach home, and then we will cry out in wonder and say, "How plain it seems now! how perfect it all is!" You know St. Paul says, "For now we see through a glass darkly but then face to face."

There was a silence, and Priscilla's hand pressed the strong one holding hers. 'It does seem—simple—a matter of faith in one's father, isn't it? I'll try and remember.'

The little maid came in to turn on the lights.

'Bless my soul,' said the father suddenly. 'I came near forgetting the treat we have ahead of us. I've bought tickets for the grand concert and we haven't much time. Fly, little princess.'

Priscilla flashed her gratitude. 'Father, what an extravagant dear you are,' and she was gone, only to reappear soon in her 'finery,' as her father called it, and stand laughing under his inspection.

'Priscilla,' he asked gravely, 'is that a hat or a flower garden?' And then they went laughing out into the street.

'I declare, I don't know which is the childishest,' said Mrs. Larkins, in her solemn voice, as she carefully locked the door after them and went back to her 'Six Days of Creation,' over which she slept regularly night after night, but which she reminded herself was not frivolous or light-minded, anyhow.

But the school days could not last forever. The father tried to hold back Priscilla's, but they seemed only to fly past him more swiftly. And then there were such wonderful, such bewildering, such perplexing things which followed. Priscilla's theological problems were far simpler! For men came to the house, not on business, but to see Priscilla. The father could not grasp the situation. Why, Priscilla was only a child yet, and men were so commonplace, so uncertain.

Priscilla was steadfast and innocent, and unused to hiding her feelings. He watched Priscilla in the days that followed with wonder and amazement. Where did she learn that indescribable manner, half dignity, half witchery, wholly charm with these young fellows who seemed to him so crude and uninformed in spite of their polished manner and college training?

And then he grew troubled and secretly half jealous. 'We're going over to England next week, Priscilla,' he abruptly announced one day.

'How lovely!' cried the girl; 'you're always thinking of surprises for me! I can't believe that we're to run off together, father.' Her gratitude and happiness were so genuine that the father felt ashamed and almost like begging her pardon.

'She isn't carried away by all this admiration and gaiety. Priscilla is too sensible to care for any of these young fools,' he thought with a triumph which had in it a touch of malice.

He was astonished at his feelings; he, who had been noted among men for his sunny temper and optimism, was now alert, suspicious, and at times irritable. But Priscilla was unchanged. They wandered through England the happiest of mortals; and then in London the genus man appeared, and once more the father grew uneasy.

'Of course, Pris won't care for one of them,' he said. But why did she go with them? He was too just and kind to lay any commands upon this most loving and obedient of daughters, but he chafed under it all.

They were back at home again when the blow fell.

Priscilla had been unlike herself for days. When questioned she said that she was well, oh, quite well.

On the day that the blow fell, she was nervous, something unheard of for the healthy, well-poised Priscilla. She started at sounds, and when Mrs. Larkins' solemn face announced a gentleman in the library 'to see your pa,' she turned white.

Priscilla never knew how long she sat there; then the door burst open and her father entered.

'A young man has just been here, Pris—the impertinence of him! asking to marry you. Nothing cool about that! He went on about taking care of you and watching over you and—and—loving you.'

There was a pause, and Priscilla, very pale, asked: 'And what did you say, father?'

'Say! well, I told that young man some truths he never heard before, I guess. I told him that you had had the care of one man's life and weren't pining for another to my knowledge; and that you were a tenderly reared plant which must have unusual handling; and that you were all I had on earth, and that he didn't realise what it meant to walk into my house and ask for the greatest treasure in it.'

'And what, did he say?' asked Priscilla.