

brother; but, you see, he was never called Murray, and you didn't give your brother's first name."

"No, I never thought to inquire if you knew him, for I supposed he lived at Butte; his letters were always mailed there."

"His route ended there, and I presume his home was there, and probably he intended to settle there," said Mr. Burt.

Miss Murray did not eat any supper, but lay on the lounge, occupied with her own thoughts. Neither she nor her new friends thought of her taking the stage that night, and Mrs. Burt kindly helped her to bed.

She did not get up next morning, and it was two weeks before she was able to leave her room, weak and pale and thin. Then she had a long talk with Mrs. Burt. She had no "own home," as she expressed it, and she dreaded to make the long journey back in cold weather. She had now no reason to go to Butte, and "would Mrs. Burt—"

But Mrs. Burt delicately anticipated the request, and said, gently—

"Stay with me until spring, my dear. Your board shall cost you nothing, and you shall be as welcome as roses in December."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Agnes, gratefully. "If I can help you enough to earn my board, I will gladly accept your offer."

"I can keep you busy," smiled Mrs. Burt. "Is it settled?"

"Yes, indeed," assented Agnes, extending a thin little hand, which Mrs. Burt grasped warmly.

And so, Agnes stayed, growing stronger each day, and becoming quite like a daughter of the house, as she relieved Mrs. Burt of many little duties, and brightened up the house with her taste and skill.

Little by little, as they became more intimate, Agnes gave her history, and at last she told her friend that she had been engaged two years to a gentleman who came West with her brother. He had written her, just before her brother's last letter came, telling her he was going to some new mines—that was the latter part of June—and might not be able to write to her often, but he would get word to Ben as often as possible.

"And he said," continued Agnes, "he said that I must come out and stay with Ben, this winter, as he wanted me to, and in the spring we would be married. He hoped to 'strike it,' he said."

"And where is he, now?" asked Mrs. Burt.

"I don't know," replied Agnes. "I have never heard from him since. But I do not expect ever to see him again," she added, with a sigh. "He has probably met some terrible fate like poor Ben."

Mrs. Burt did not attempt to console her, for she

felt it was only too probable her surmise was true. She told her husband of Agnes' confidence.

"Did she tell you his name?" asked Mr. Burt.

"Yes. It was Harry Ashton."

"The very fellow!" exclaimed Mr. Burt. "He passed here on his way to the mines. Came with a saddle horse and pack animal. He stopped for a bit of a chat when he paid his toll. He asked me if I knew Ben—and, by the way, that is the only time I ever heard the name Murray in connection with him. He told me he came out West with Ben, and that he was on his way to the new mines. I remember it all distinctly."

"But it won't do to tell Agnes, it would only distract her more than ever," said wise Mrs. Burt.

The days passed, and Christmas came and went, with some little gifts and pleasing diversions, and New Year approached.

"We'll keep open house," said Mrs. Burt, "and treat the stage drivers and any chance callers."

So they arranged a little round table charmingly in the sitting room, with various kinds of cake, nuts and candies, and had plenty of delicious, amber coffee, hot and strong.

Mrs. Burt and Agnes were temperance women, and "would not offer the stuff that might endanger people's lives."

New Year's was a clear, cold day, and it chanced that quite a number of gentlemen did call at Burt's bridge, and were treated handsomely. All were struck with the beauty of the lady-like Agnes, and privately made inquiries of the host concerning her. He simply told them she was a friend of theirs, who would be with them until spring.

Toward evening, while Mrs. Burt was busy with some household duties, and Mr. Burt was glancing over a paper, in front of the fire, Agnes took a book and lounged on the comfortable old sofa in the corner, back of the stove. She found it too dark to read, so her book dropped, unheeded, to the carpet, and her thoughts wandered off to other, and happier, New Year's days.

Suddenly a knock resounded on the front door. Mr. Burt went into the entry to open it.

"Ah! How do you do?" she heard Mr. Burt say.

Then a voice that sent the blood flying to her head, responded—

"Quite well. I called—"

"Walk in, walk in," said Mr. Burt, hospitably.

Agnes felt as if she would fly. She felt faint and sick, and feared she could not walk across the floor. Perhaps she would not be noticed in this dark corner, and she would like to know the reason of his long silence.