CHAPTER XI—Continued.

—14—

It did look horrible, from above as well as below. But Jerry, when he felt the first light twinge as Connie lifted the rope, foresaw what was coming and was ready for it. As he went down, he grabbed a firm hold on the branch on which he had stood, then he dropped to the next, and held again. On the lowest limb he really clung for fifteen seconds, and took in his bearings. Connie had dropped the rope when the twins screamed, so he had nothing more to fear from her. He saw Prudence, white, with wild eyes, both arms stretched out toward him.

"O. K., Prue," he called, and then he dropped. He landed on his feet, a little jolted, but none the worse for his fall.

He ran at once to Prudence. "I'm all right," he cried, really alarmed by the white horror in her face. "Prudence! Prudence!" Then her arms dropped, and with a brave but feeble smile, she swayed a little. Jerry took her in his arms. "Sweetheart!" he whispered. "Little sweetheart! Do—do you love me so much, dearest?"

Prudence raised her hands to his face, and looked intensely into his eyes, all the sweet loving soul of her shining in her own. And Jerry kissed her.

The twins scrambled down from the maple, speechless and cold with terror, and saw Prudence and Jerry! Then they saw Connie, staring at them with interest and amusement.

"I think we'd better go to bed, all three of us," declared Lark sturdily. And they set off heroically around the house. But at the corner Carol turned.

"Take my advice and go into the woodshed," she called, "for all the Averys are looking out of their windows."

Prudence did not hear, but he drew her swiftly to the darkest corner of the side porch—and history repeated itself once more!

At twelve, Jerry went upstairs to bed, his lips tingling with the fervent tenderness of her parting kiss. He stood at his window, looking soberly out into the moonlit parsonage yard. "She is an angel, a pure, sweet, unselfish little angel," he whispered, and his voice was broken, and his eyes were wet, "and she is going to be my wife! Oh, God, teach me how to be good to her, and help me make her as happy as she deserves."

At two o'clock, thinking again the soft shy words she had whispered to him, he dropped lightly asleep and dreamed of her. With the first pale streaks of daylight stealing into his room he awoke. It was after four o'clock. A little later—just a few minutes later—he heard a light tap on his door. It came again, and he bounded out of bed.

"Prudence! Is anything wrong?"

"Hush, Jerry, not so loud!" And what a strange and weary voice. "Come downstairs, will you? I want to tell you something. I'll wait at the foot of the stairs. Be quiet—do not wake father and the girls. Will you be down soon?"

"In two minutes!"

And in two minutes he was down, agonizingly anxious, knowing that something was wrong. Prudence was waiting for him, and as he reached the bottom step she clutched his hands desperately.

"Jerry," she whispered. "I—forgive me—I honestly— Oh, I didn't think what I was saying last night. You were so dear, and I was so happy, and for a while I really believed we could belong to each other. But I can't, you know. I've promised papa and the girls a dozen times that I would never marry. Don't you see how it is? I must take it back."

Jerry smiled a little, it must be admitted. This was so like his conscientious little Prudence!

"Dearest," he said gently. "You love me. Your father would never allow you to sacrifice yourself like that. The girls would not hear of it. They want you to be happy. And you can't be happy without me, can you?"

Suddenly she crushed close to him. "Oh, Jerry," she sobbed, "I will never be happy again, I know. But—it is right for me to stay here and be the mother in the parsonage. It is wicked of me to want you more than all of them. Don't you see it is? They haven't any mother. They haven't anyone but me. Of course, they would not allow it, but they will not know anything about it. I must do it myself. And father especially must never know. I want you to go away this morning before breakfast and —never come again."

She clung to him as she said this, but her voice did not falter. "And you must not write to me any more. For, oh, Jerry, if I see you again I can never let you go, I know it. Will you do this for me?"

"You are nervous and excited," he said tenderly. "Let's wait until after breakfast. Then we'll talk it all over with your father, and it shall be as he says. Won't that be better?"

"Oh, no. For father will say whatever he thinks will make me happy. He must not know a thing about it. Promise, Jerry, that you will never tell him one word."

"I promise, of course, Prudence. I will let you tell him."

But she shook her head. "He will never know. Oh, Jerry! I can't bear to think of never seeing you again, and never getting letters from you, and it seems to kill me inside, just the thought of it."

"Sit here in my lap. Put your head on my shoulder, like that. Let me rub your face a little. You're feverish. You are sick. Go to bed, won't you, sweetheart? We can settle this later on."

"You must go right away, or I cannot let you go at all!"

"Do you mean you want me to get my things and go right now?"

"Yes." She buried her face in his shoulder. "If—if you stay in your room until breakfast time I will lock you in, so you cannot leave me again. I know it. I am crazy today."

"Don't you think you owe me something, as well as your father and sisters? Didn't God bring us together, and make us love each other? Don't you think he intended us for each other? Do you wish you had never met me?"

"Jerry!"

"Then, sweetheart, be reasonable. Your father loved your mother, and married her. That is God's plan for all of us. You have been a wonderfully brave and sweet daughter and sister, I know. But surely Fairy is old enough to take your place now."

"Fairy's going to be a professor, and —the girls do not mind her very well. And she isn't as much comfort to father as I am. It's just because I am most like mother, you see. But anyhow, I promised. I can't leave them."

"Your father expects you to marry, and to marry me. I told him about it myself, long ago. And he was perfectly willing. He didn't say a word against it."

"Of course he wouldn't. That's just like father. But still, I promised. And what would the girls say if I should go back on them? They have trusted me, always. If I fail them, will they ever trust anybody else? If you love me, Jerry, please go, and stay away." But her arm tightened about his neck. "I'll wait here until you get your things, and we can—say goodby. And don't forget your promise."

"Oh, very well, Prudence," he answered, half irritably, "if you insist on ordering me away from the house like this, I can only go. But—"

"Let's not talk any more about it, Jerry. Please. I'll wait until you come down."

When he came down a little later, with his suitcase, his face was white and strained.

She put her arms around his neck. "Jerry," she whispered. "I want to tell you that I love you so much that—I could go away with you, and never see any of them any more, or papa, or the parsonage, and still feel rich, if I just had you! You—everything in me seems to be all yours. I—love you."

Her tremulous lips were pressed against his.

"Oh, sweetheart, this is folly, all folly. But I can't make you see it. It is wrong, it is wickedly wrong, but—"

"But I am all they have, Jerry, and—I promised."

"Whenever you want me, Prudence, just send. I'll never change. I'll always be just the same. God intended you for me, I know, and—I'll be waiting."

"Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!" she whispered passionately, sobbing, quivering in his arms. It was he who drew away.

"Good-by, sweetheart," he said quietly, great pity in his heart for the girl who in her desire to do right was doing such horrible wrong. "Good-by, sweetheart. Remember, I will be waiting. Whenever you send, I will come."

He stepped outside, and closed the door. Prudence stood motionless, her hands clenched, until she could no longer hear his footsteps. Then she dropped on the floor, and lay there, face downward, until she heard Fairy moving in her room upstairs. Then she went into the kitchen and built the fire for breakfast.

CHAPTER XII.

She Comes to Grief.

Fairy was one of those buoyant, warm-blooded girls to whom sleep is indeed the great restorer. Now she stood in the kitchen door, tall, cheeks glowing, eyes sparkling, and smiled at her sister's solemn back.

"You are the little mousey, Prue," she said, in her full rich voice. "I didn't hear you come to bed last night, and I didn't hear you getting out this morning. Why, what is the matter?" For Prudence had turned her face toward her sister, and it was so white and so unnatural that Fairy was shocked.

"Prudence! You are sick! Go to bed and let me get breakfast. Here, get out of this, and I will—"

"There's nothing the matter with me. I had a headache, and did not sleep, but I am all right now. Are the girls up yet?"

Fairy eyed her suspiciously. "Jerry is out unusually early, too, isn't he? His door is open."

"Jerry has gone, Fairy." Prudence's back was presented to view once more, and Prudence was stirring the oatmeal with vicious energy. "He left early this morning—I suppose he is half-way to Des Moines by now."

"Oh!" Fairy's voice was noncommittal. "When is he coming back?"

"He isn't coming back. Please hurry, Fairy, and call the others. The oatmeal is ready."

"Whenever You Send, I Will Come."

Fairy went soberly up the stairs, ostensibly to call her sisters.

"Girls," she began, carefully closing the door of their room behind her. "Jerry has gone, and isn't coming back any more. And for goodness' sake, don't keep asking questions about it. Just eat your breakfast as usual, and have a little tact."

"A lovers' quarrel," suggested Lark, her eyes glittered greedily.

"Nothing of the sort. And don't keep staring at Prue, either. And do not keep talking about Jerry all the time. You mind me, or I will tell papa."

"That's funny," said Carol thoughtfully. "We saw them kissing each other like mad in the back yard last night—and this morning he has gone to return no more. They are crazy."

"Kissing! In the back yard! What are you talking about?"

Carol explained, and Fairy looked still more thoughtful and perturbed.

She opened the door, and called out to them in a loud and breezy voice: "Hurry, girls, for breakfast is ready, and there's no time to waste in a parsonage on Sunday morning." Then she added in a whisper, "And don't you mention Jerry, and don't ask Prudence what makes her so pale, or you'll catch it!"

Then she went to her father's door. "Breakfast is ready, papa," she called clearly. She turned the knob softly, and peeped in. "May I come in a minute?" Standing close beside him, she told him all she knew of what had happened.

"Prudence is ghastly, father, just ghastly. And she can't talk about it yet, so be careful what you say, will you?"

And it was due to Fairy's kindly admonitions that the parsonage family took the departure of Jerry so calmly.

That was the beginning of Prudence's bitter winter, when the brightest sunshine was cheerless and dreary, and when even the laughter of her sisters smote harshly upon her ears. She tried to be as always, but in her eyes the wounded look lingered, and her face grew so pale and thin that her father and Fairy, anxiously watching, were filled with grave concern. She remained almost constantly in the parsonage, reading very little, sitting most of her leisure time staring out the windows.

Fairy had tried to win her confidence, and had failed.

"You are a darling, Fairy, but I really do not want to talk about it. Oh, no, indeed, it is all my own fault. I told him to go, and not come again. No, you are wrong, Fairy, I do not regret it. I do not want him to come any more."

Mr. Starr, too, had tried. "Prudence," he said gently, "you know very often men do things that to women seem wrong and wicked. And maybe they are! But men and women are different by nature, my dear, and we must remember that. I have satisfied myself that Jerry is good, and clean, and manly. I do not think you should let any foolishness of his in the past come between you now."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

MORE THAN NONSENSE MAKER

Edward Lear, Known to Most as Gentle Humorist, Was Also Famed as a Painter.

Most of us when we think of Edward Lear think vaguely of someone who wrote delectable rhymes of nonsense and fun, a man who made queer pictures of impossible creatures to go with his rhymes, who compiled a weird natural history and botany all his own, and spent his life making odd jokes.

We have sung, or heard someone else sing, his "Owl and the Pussy Cat"—and—and—well, that's about all.

But Edward Lear's nonsense books were the very smallest part of the work of a long and busy life, and his real labor was that of a painter rather than a writer.

More than what he did, even, was what he was—a lovable and charming man, adored by children, with the gentlest heart in the world, a great lover of beauty and devoted to his friends. Lear's real character and work have been described in St. Nicholas, by Hildegarde Hawthorne. Though Lear's work was in general so serious, to the end of his life in 1888, Miss Hawthorne says, he continued to write his ridiculous verses and make his funny sketches in letters to his friends.

Great English Monarch.

For years King Alfred warred against the Danes, often defeated, but never failing in courage, not even when driven into the marshes or when he was forced to pay blackmail to buy peace. From his first years upon the throne he worked to build a navy that should wrest from the Danes the mastery of the seas. At last he succeeded, and the heritage that he left to his countrymen has time and again preserved the British isles from invaders.

The Danes were able to hold possession in the middle of England, but Alfred's victories made the English of other hostile kingdoms hail him as their leader. When he died England had for the first time grown into a united land, despite the conquests of the Vikings.

Chews.

During the rush hour, a middle-aged woman entered a subway car accompanied by her eighteen-year-old daughter. Both mother and daughter were forced to stand for awhile opposite a row of men busily intent on chewing gum.

"Virginia," said the matron with cutting emphasis and loud enough for the men to hear, "judging from appearances we have made a mistake. This is presumably the dining car of a chew-chew train."

No wonder that a flustered citizen began reading his evening paper upside down.—New York Times.

Greek Names.

The Greek termination in the six and seven-syllable patronymics with which we have been made familiar by the frequent changes in the cabinet, is said to indicate descent. Thus, M. Caloyeropoulas may count among his ancestors a "caloyer," or at least in a collateral line. A "caloyer" is said to be a monk of the order of St. Basil, an order that exacts four periods of fasting each year, the longest of which is seven weeks. The caloyers have in the Orient the same reputation for asceticism as the Benedictines in the Occident.

Arc Lamps Disappearing.

With the advent of the gas-filled incandescent electric lamp the future of the ordinary inclosed arc lamp as a commercial product dwindled away. Ordinary tungsten lamps of the vacuum type had been competing with the inclosed arc lamp, but not with the degree of success that had attended the gas-filled unit. This new type of lamp has superseded the ordinary inclosed arc lamp for both street and factory lighting.—Electrical World.

Edith's Portion.

"So the lawyers got about all of the estate. Did Edith get anything?" "Oh, yes; she got one of the lawyers."—Boston Transcript.

New Jersey factories employ 232,000 operatives.

A Natural Question.

An Irishman went into a jeweler's shop to buy a clock. The shopman showed him one for $10.

"Murdher! Ten dollars for that bit of a clock? Is there anything wonderful about it?

"Certainly," said the shopman, "that is an eight-day clock."

"And what's that? asked the prospective purchaser.

"Why it goes eight days without winding."

"So much as that?" said the Irishman, scratching his head. "Begorra, there's wan thing I'd like to be after askin' you. If it goes eight days without winding, how long, for the sake of St. Patrick, will it go if ye wind it?"—Pittsburg Chronicle.

Sober.

The Shaw family had recently taken a house in the fashionable residential section of the city. Some weeks later an acquaintance of former years called on Mrs. Shaw and was viewing the treasures in the library.

"Is your husband a bibliomaniac?" queried the visitor.

"Goodness me, no!" ejaculated Mrs. Shaw. "He never nibbles a bit. Oh, of course, I don't say that he wouldn't take a little at his meals if the rest were doin' it; but that's as far as he ever goes in them kind of things."—Harper's Magazine.

Quite So.

"The bride's mother has the advantage of the bridegroom's mother at the ceremony."

"How so?"

"Everybody assumes that the bride is getting a little the worst of it."—Louisville Courier-Journal.