Aunt Diana

The Sunshine of the Family

CHAPTER VII.

"Here beginneth the first chapter of Alison's failures," whispered Alison, in a funny little voice, as she encountered Roger on her way downstairs on Monday morning, and she laughed merrily as she shook her key basket exultantly in his face. Roger opened his eyes very widely at this, then he stepped back a few paces and looked at her admiringly.

"How ever did you get possession of that thing?" he exclaimed. "Do you know, Allie, my dear, that shabby little brown basket has been a bone of contention between Miss Leigh and Missie for the last month. Miss Leigh clings to it as her sole hope, and refuses to give it up. It has ended by Missie's neatly abstracting it at night. She has done it three or four times."

"Yes, I know. Poppie told me all about it. Well," in an amused tone, "I have only paid Missie in her own coin. Thanks to my good habits, I was dressed before she thought of waking, so I stole in, got my key basket, and wished Missie good morning at the same time. I am afraid she will come down dreadfully cross."

"As though that were anything new," returned Roger, contemptuously, as he took up the paper and retired with it to the window, while Alison busied herself with the coffee pot. Shortly afterward there was an unwonted sound on the stairs.

"If it were not perfectly incredible, I should say that was Rudel's footstep," Roger observed, in a doubtful tone.

"Oh, yes, it is Rudel," returned Alison, brightly. "I woke him, and made him promise to get up. Miss Leigh says he has got into sad ways. Good boy," as Rudel entered, looking very much pleased at himself, and he bore without making a very wry face his sister's kiss on his forehead. Poppie, who came in a moment afterward with Miss Leigh, was not quite so reticent.

"What is that for?" she asked, with a child's innocency of grammar, but in much surprise, as Alison kissed her warmly, and said, "Good morning, Poppie, dear."

"Poppie means that we are not accustomed to these little civilities," put in Roger, as Alison looked perplexed for a moment, "nobody says good morning to anybody else at The Holms except Miss Leigh and I; we always do, don't we?" shaking hands with her as he spoke. "Father just gives an inclusive good morning at the door."

"I am afraid you are very much shocked, Alison," observed Miss Leigh, mournfully. "Mabel sets Rudel and Poppie such a bad example in this; no one thinks of such a thing except Mr. Roger, and he is always so very thoughtful."

When Mr. Merle came into the room a few minutes later he seemed quite surprised at the unwonted cheerfulness. He nodded to Alison, and then took up his letters, but she was not satisfied.

"You have not kissed me, papa," she said, as she carried him round his cup of coffee.

"Oh, I thought only Pussie cared for kisses," he said, good-humoredly; "Poppie never comes to me for one."

Poppie reddened, and bent over her plate in much confusion. Roger, who was next to her, saw the child's eyes were full of tears.

"I expect Poppie is afraid of bothering you," he observed. "You would like father to kiss you sometimes, as he does Missie," he said, kindly.

"Is that true, my little girl?" asked Mr. Merle, who had just caught sight of Poppie's quivering lip. The poor child, who was very sensitive, was on the point of bursting into tears, but Alison happily interposed.

"Papa is too busy to think much about such things. You must go round to-morrow and ask him for one, as I did to-day; he won't refuse either of us," and she looked laughingly at him from behind her urn.

The brightness seemed to rouse him effectually. He had looked pale and weary when he entered the room, but good-humor is infectious.

"You look very nice, dear," he said, approvingly. "I like to see you there, Alison."

"I like to see her there, too," observed Roger, boldly; "it is her proper place." Missie, who had just opened the door, caught both these remarks; they did not evidently conduce to her amiability. She gave Alison a withering glance as she passed by her, to greet her father, and, taking no notice of her or the others, desired Rudel rather crossly to give her more room, and began her breakfast rather sulkily.

But for once her humors were disregarded. No one troubled themselves about her, and the conversation was renewed with scarcely a break. Perhaps both Roger and Alison were doing their best to carry it on, but their sense of effort was lost in the general good.

When breakfast was over, and Rudel had rushed off to school, and Mr. Merle and Roger had gone over to the mill, Alison asked her sister pleasantly how she proposed to spend the morning.

"That is my affair," she answered, very rudely. "I am not accustomed to give an account of myself to gratify people's curiosity. I may as well tell you, once for all, that I dislike interference."

Alison felt inclined to laugh—there was something comical in Missie's mode of showing her temper, but she knew nothing provokes people more than to laugh at them, so she prudently refrained from showing her mirth. "I am just going round the house with Miss Leigh while Poppie prepares her lessons," she returned, as coolly as though Missie had given her a fair answer. "In another hour I shall be quite at your convenience, if you would like to practice with me."

"Thank you," returned Missie, with freezing politeness. "I have no need to trespass on your valuable time; Eva will be here soon."

"Oh, very well," returned Alison, still in perfect good-humor; "then I will get my easel ready in the school room and paint a little, if Miss Leigh will allow me."

"Of course you must paint in the school room," returned her sister, tartly; "I suppose you do not intend to litter up this room with that great ugly easel, and Eva and I will be in the drawing room."

"I dare say when I have finished you will let me join you there," replied Alison, in a conciliatory tone. As she was bent on making Miss Hardwick's acquaintance for her own purposes she took no notice of sundry remarks in an undertone, that were fully meant to reach her ears, about people never knowing when they were not wanted.

Alison was soon too busy to remember Missie's existence. Miss Leigh, who was desirous of resigning her household duties into Alison's hands, keeping herself in the background and only acting as aide-de-camp, was soon explaining to the bewildered girl all her little pet theories with regard to kitchen and store room.

When Miss Leigh and Poppie went back to the school room, Alison settled herself and her painting apparatus in the furthest window, and tried to forget all her perplexities in hard work, but while Poppie droned over her lessons, Alison's thoughts would stray to a far different scene—to a shady room full of sweet flower scents, with a tall figure standing before an easel. "Oh, Aunt Di, if I were only painting beside you now!" she thought, with a sharp, involuntary pain.

"Oh, how beautiful! if I could only paint like that." The words were spoken, with a sigh, just behind her. Alison started; she had been dreaming indeed; the midday sun was streaming into the room. Poppie had put away her lesson books, and had run off, and Miss Leigh's place was empty, and standing just behind Alison's chair was a young lady dressed very simply in a gray linen dress and a broad-brimmed hat. At Alison's obvious start the young lady blushed and seemed confused.

"Oh," she stammered, "I am afraid I startled you. You were so busy that you did not see me come in. I have been watching you ever so long."

"I must have been painting in my sleep," returned Alison, with a frank laugh, but as she put aside her palette and rose, she cast a scrutinizing glance on the young girl beside her.

She was a slight, pale girl, evidently a little younger than herself; somewhat plain in feature, but with a pleasing, gentle expression, though a painful hesitation in her speech, almost amounting to a stammer, marred the effect of a singularly sweet voice. Even in that first moment Alison, who had a true artistic taste in all matters pertaining to dress, wondered at the bad judgment that could select dull, neutral tints for a complexion so colorless; the large hat overshadowed her features, and hid the soft hair that was her only beauty.

"You are Miss Hardwick, I suppose?" observed Alison, with a shrewd guess that this was the young sister of whom Miss Leigh spoke.

"Not Miss Hardwick," corrected the girl; "I am only Anna. Eva and Mabel sent me here because they wanted to talk to each other, and they always find me in the way. Will it trouble you if I stop here a little and watch you painting?"

"Oh, no; not at all. We shall be nice company for each other," returned Alison, in a friendly voice. "I have only this little bit of background to finish, and then I shall be free to talk to you."

Alison painted for a few minutes silently; she was thinking. Then she laid aside her brush.

"If you will excuse me a moment I want to speak to your sister and Mabel," she said, rather quickly, "and then, if you like, we will go and sit in the garden until luncheon is ready."

CHAPTER VIII.

Missie looked up with a frown as her sister entered the room, but Alison took no notice of her. She walked up straight to Miss Hardwick, and held out her hand with one of her pleasant smiles.

"I have just made acquaintance with your sister," she said, with quiet tact; "we are going in the garden, as the house feels so close this lovely day. I shall be so glad, and I am sure Mabel will be, too, if you will both stay with us to luncheon."

"I thought you knew better, Alison," Missie interrupted, pettishly, before her friend could speak. "Dear papa is so nervous and worried about business and Roger's wretched management that he is not able to bear luncheon visitors. Eva understands this, don't you, dear?"

"Oh, yes, darling," returned Miss Hardwick, with effusion; "but perhaps your sister, being a stranger and not quite used to all the ways at The Holms, has made a mistake. That is very natural."

"Oh, no," returned Alison, trying to keep cool. "I am making no mistake. Papa will not be in to luncheon, or my brother, either, as they have business a little way out of town. So I thought, as we should be quite alone, that it would be a good opportunity, Mabel, for you to have your friends."

Missie's pink cheeks became crimson with vexation; it aggravated her to see Alison taking upon herself so quietly the duties of the mistress of the house; and she was still more injured that her father's movements had not been first notied to herself. She took no notice of her sister's remarks, and added no word, as Miss Hardwick accepted the invitation with great alacrity. When Alison left them, after a few more words, she listened reluctantly to Eva's criticism.

"I had no idea your sister was such a stylish person," she said, when the door closed on Alison; "she has fine eyes and a good figure, and she knows how to suit her own style in dress. She is not as pretty as you, darling, of course, but she has some claims to good looks."

Alison did not return these moderate compliments; she was not at all attracted by Miss Hardwick. She was a large, heavy looking girl, rather handsome, but her face had no play of expression, and her manner was decidedly artificial.

Alison spent a pleasant hour with her new friend under the lime trees. She soon grew interested in Anna's artless talk. She was evidently very young for her age; though she was seventeen, she was still childish in manners. Probably she had been repressed and kept in the background by her sister.

"It is so good of you to let me talk to you," Anna said. "Mamma and Eva say I am such a chatterbox, when I begin to ask them questions. I think I am fonder of talking than most people. Anthony says that makes me so troublesome."

"Who is Anthony?" queried Alison, a little curiously.

"Oh, he is our cousin; he is staying with us now. Eva says it is so nice, because we have no brothers, and he can take us about. Eva and he are great friends; she always calls him Tony. He is such a handsome fellow, with a big black mustache like a cavalry officer. He is in the army, you know. I am dreadfully frightened of him, because he laughs at me, but it is only his way, he means to be good-natured."

Alison prudently refrained from all comments, but said, lightly, "Now we have talked all this time, and I wonder what has become of your sister and Mabel? I propose that we have afternoon tea under these trees, and that you and I, with Sarah's help, should prepare a little surprise for them. Will not Poppie be delighted?"

Anna might have been a child from the way she clapped her hands; she had never enjoyed herself so much in all her life as during the next half hour, as she and Alison dragged chairs across the lawn, and arranged the little tea table, with the nice basket of hot cakes that old Nanny had prepared, some fresh strawberries, and a little vase of roses in the center. Even Missie looked pleased when, on returning from their hot walk, she caught sight of the snowy cloth under the trees.

"That is really a good idea," she observed, in a grudging tone, however; but Eva very nearly made her cross again by saying:

"How delicious of your sister! I really would hug her for this. What a pity we never thought of this before, dear, and then Tony might have joined us!"

When Roger returned from his work, an hour earlier than he expected, he stood quite transfixed on the gravel walk; for certainly such a pleasant little picture had never been seen before in the garden of The Holms.

"You may have my chair by Miss Leigh," exclaimed Poppie, eagerly. "Oh, the cakes are so nice, Roger, and there are two left."

"I must make you some fresh tea, you poor tired day laborer," observed Alison, as Roger threw himself into the wicker chair and removed his hat.

"Oh, let me do it!" exclaimed Anna, eagerly. "I know the way to the kitchen quite well."

"Yes, and I will go, too," added Poppie. "There are some more strawberries, I know."

"Bring me a big plateful," called out Roger, as Poppie frisked away; but he looked after them both rather curiously. His little friend looked different, somehow, he thought. Was it Alison, he wondered, who had put those coquettish looking roses into the little gray gown?

Anna's face looked dimpled and smiling. Her blue eyes quite shone when she came back. She and Alison and Roger had a long talk, while Miss Leigh listened and knitted industriously. Missie and Eva had wandered away again—most likely to avoid Roger. He had addressed Miss Hardwick with studied politeness, but she had tossed her head and hardly answered him. She would make no terms with the enemy who had wounded her vanity so grievously.

"We will take one more turn, darling, and then we must really go," she had said to Missie; and in a few more minutes they heard her calling for Anna.

"Come, Anna, don't dawdle. We must really go now."

"Good by. I have had such a happy afternoon, thank you so much," whispered Anna, with a timid kiss that Alison warmly returned. "One day you will have me again, will you not?"

"Come whenever you like, dear. I am sure we shall be good friends," returned Alison, forgetting the necessity of lowering her voice.

Miss Hardwick laughed affectedly as she heard the speech.

"You are a lucky girl to have got a friend so quickly. Is she not, Mr. Roger? Oh! I forgot; you are her friend, too," with a little spice of venom in her tone.

"I shall be most happy to be considered Miss Anna's friend; and I am sure Alison will say the same," rejoined Roger, in his downright manner. "Good by, Miss Anna."

(To be continued.)

Roumania is said to hold the prize for illiteracy. Two-thirds of the population can neither read nor write.

A giant blue crab of Japan measures 12 feet across the nippers.

SKIBO'S LOVABLE HOSTESS.

Mrs. Andrew Carnegie Supervises Every Detail of Her Home.

One of the happiest women and most ideal wives in the world is Mrs. Andrew Carnegie, if one may believe the friends in this country and in Scotland who pay homage to her many lovable qualities. She is essentially a womanly woman, but for all that she follows a regimen as rigid as any soldier's in her home life at Skibo, as in New York and Pittsburg.

There are many servants at Skibo and in the Fifth avenue mansion, but every detail of the home comes under the direct supervision of the mistress. She has hours as rigidly kept as a fashionable practitioner's when she receives the butler, "the house mother," a sweet Highland way of talking of the prosaic office of housekeeper, and other heads of domestic departments, the grooms and the gardeners and the stewards.

Mrs. Carnegie is fond of outdoor life and intensely interested in all that means better health for rich and poor. But she has never gone in for athletics nor anything which might be called fads. She is devoted to music and,

like her husband, she prefers organ music to any other variety. It has been observed that recently a large portion of Mr. Carnegie's benefactions are taking the shape of fine pipe organs for poor churches. Mrs. Carnegie was his inspiration. She frequently dwells on the divine property of music in soothing sorrow and uplifting the soul, and she has often remarked that she pities a congregation which is suffering from a wheezy organ from the bottom of her heart. Whenever she hears of an afflicted organ, she takes the matter in hand. She investigates in a quiet, systematic way the resources of the congregation, and when she finds that a good musical instrument entails too heavy a demand, she influences Mr. Carnegie in the matter of supplying the deficiency at least in part.

ON THE LOOKOUT.

Fraidcats Among Those Who Inhabit the Region of Tornadoes.

In the region where tornadoes are common, which is a pretty large territory, nearly every family has one member who has a highly developed fear of storms, says a western newspaper writer. When warm weather and the cyclone put in their appearance the scary one begins the preparation of a safe retreat, probably in the cellar under the house; or if he happens to be a 33d degree member of the Amalgamated Order of Fraidcats he has a cave lined with re-enforced concrete constructed somewhere in the back yard.

In his cave or cellar retreat the coward puts a bed, and if he has it bad he is apt to lay in a stock of provisions and a barrel of water. During the day the other members of the family have a good deal of fun chaffing the coward; but he gets even at night by disturbing their sleep.

Among other peculiarities of the cyclone coward is an optical illusion which possesses him about the time the boss begin to bite. From then until harvest time every cloud he sees assumes a funnel shape and he is sure we are going to have a twister. And he never misses a cloud. When he sees one he gets up, gathers up his clothes and the insurance papers and proceeds to try to herd the family to safety.

If the coward happens to be the man of the house he sometimes succeeds in dragging the sleeping wife and children to the cellar while he looks out the door until a gentle summer shower begins to fall. But if the coward is the wife she never has much success with the old man beyond getting him angry, and because of her duty to the children she takes them to the 'fraid hole, abandoning the husband to his fate—and sleep.

About once in 2,000,000 times the cyclone coward makes a good bet, and then his name is numbered with the survivors. But it costs him a lot of good sleep.

Hard to Believe.

More than half the surface of the globe is hidden beneath water two miles deep; 7,000,000 square miles lie at a depth of 18,000 feet or more. Many places have been found five miles and more in depth. The greatest depth yet sounded is 31,200 feet, near the Island of Guam.

If Mt. Everest, the world's highest mountain, were plucked from its seat and dropped into this spot the waves would still roll 2,000 feet above its crest.

Into this terrible abyss the waters press down with a force of more than 10,000 pounds to the square inch. The staunchest ship ever built would be crumbled under this awful pressure like an egg shell under a steam roller.

A pine beam 15 feet long, which held open the mouth of a trawl used in making a cast at a depth of more than 18,000 feet, was crushed flat, as if it had been passed between rollers.

The body of the man who should attempt to venture to such depths would be compressed until the flesh was forced into the interstices of the bones and his trunk was no larger than a rolling-pin. Still, the body would reach the bottom, for anything that will sink in a tub of water will sink to the uttermost depths of the ocean.

When the members of a standing committee meet they usually sit down.

A man is only deceiving himself when he thinks he is deceiving his wife.

BEST FORAGE PLANT.

Washington State Experiment Station Makes Extensive Investigation.

In order to discover a forage plant which will grow and yield profitable crops in the so-called "dry section" of the state, the staff of the State College Experiment Station has carried on extensive investigations at both the local and sub-stations during the past year. Scores of forage plants have been planted and tested, and at the present stage of this experimentation, it is known that milo maize, Jerusalem corn, artichokes, Kaffir corn, and amber cane corn are among the best adapted plants for "dry farming."

The work of the sub-station at Connell has been carried along four lines: First, there has been an effort to determine the best method of handling summer fallow, including a study of the effect of certain tools; second, there has been a study of the adaptability of various well-known dry land forage plants to central Washington conditions; third, a study of the effect of growing a cultivated crop, in place of the summer fallow, upon the wheat crop; fourth, there has been a study of the adaptability and methods of seeding of well-known dry land grasses, and legumes.

Although the past season has been an exceptionally dry one, and the results could not be expected to show forage crops in as favorable a light as the average season would, yet several plants showed up very promising. Among these were Jerusalem corn, milo maize, Kaffir corn, artichokes and amber cane corn. Another promising one was a small, early maturing variety of dent corn.

Other plants tried were cow peas, soy beans, chick pea, common millet, Japanese millet, Hungarian millet, golden millet, common field peas, kale, rape, pongoro and flint corn.

On September 10 the Milo maize showed itself to be the best drouth resister. This plant grows very similar to corn, except that it scatters a great deal more, and is more leafy.

Jerusalem corn and Kaffir corn are both very similar in appearance to common corn, being about midway between common corn and Milo maize in bushiness. Their seed, however, is borne in a large and fairly compact head, or bunch on the end of the stalk. They yield quite heavily in most places, and judging from this year's experience, would mature a fair quantity of seed at Connell, which makes very useful feed for poultry and swine.

The difference in the showing of Jerusalem and Kaffir corn and Milo maize was quite noticeable. While the leaves of the two former plants did not dry up, the inner plants of the plots were about one-third smaller in size than the plants on the outer edge. This showed that their growth had been materially checked by the shortage of moisture. The trial leaves one under the impression that Jerusalem and Kaffir corn are but poorly adapted to central Washington conditions.

Dent corn made almost a perfect stand, but the growth was scanty, and only a small quantity of nubbins matured.

The present season's growth could not be considered a proved crop, but corn of the same strain grown on land adjoining the experiment station last year was a fair crop, and may be taken as a fairly good demonstration of what could be done with dent corn on any good, dry land farm. The seed, however, would have to be adapted to the locality.

The flint corn and the popcorn made a good stand, and matured well, but their growth was so small that they could not be given consideration in comparison with dent corn. The artichokes made an excellent stand, and showed remarkable ability to continue their growth throughout the entire dry season.

Whether it would pay to utilize rain land for the growth of these roots is an open question. The other plants that were used made so light a growth this season that further trial will be necessary before they can be considered as even promising.

Of the non-cultivated forage plants, the most promising was the alfalfa. This made a fairly good stand and continued to grow slowly throughout the entire season. On September 10 it stood about eighteen inches or two feet high. As the first season is needed to establish alfalfa, this is considered an excellent showing. The alfalfa was seeded with a grain drill, which allowed the seed to be conducted down into the shoes of the drill, so that it was deposited in moist soil. It is questionable whether a good stand could be secured by broadcast seeding and harrowing in.

Hairy vetch made a poor stand, but a promising growth. The tenacity with which they cling to the soil when once established makes it rather questionable whether it would pay to seed good grain land to vetch, unless permanent pasture is desired.

Of the grasses, the most promising was the slender wheat grass; smooth brome grass. Neither of these grasses, however, showed up as well as the alfalfa. Another season's growth is needed to determine anything definite regarding their production. Other grasses tried were meadow fescue, orchard grass, tall oat grass. None of these grasses made a show worthy of mention. Since the past season has been exceptionally dry, they will be given another trial.

The only suggestions the station has to make to farmers regarding these forage crops are that alfalfa, brome grass, acclimated dent corn, Milo maize, Jerusalem corn and Kaffir corn are worthy of trial in a small way. The farmer had better learn how to handle them, however, before trying them on a large scale.