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A TRUE WOMAN

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CHAPTER I.

Hush, Dorcas! is that rain? It sounds as if some giant were dashing pails of water against the casements.

“It’s rain, Guy. The equinoctial storm you know.”

“And that dreary moaning down the chimney—is it wind?”

The boy shivered a little, drew the bed-clothes up around his chin.

The red flames from the blazing log on the hearth danced up and down like a magic-lantern; the shaded lamp burned steadily on the table. Dorcas Wenter stitched quietly away at her sewing without looking up.

“It must be an awful tempest, Dorcas,” uttered the lad, as a fresh gust of wind seemed to shake the octagonal tower to its very foundations.

“It is, Guy. I heard old Captain Lake say that the tide had not been so high since the Royal Victoria was wrecked off Paine Point.”

“It is better to be here, even with a broken leg,” said Guy Paley, slightly lifting his eye brows, “than out to the sea in such a blow as this.”

“A good deal better, Guy.”

“Not that I am a coward, Dorcas!” cried the boy. “There are worse things than a storm at sea, and I have an instinct that I shall be a sailor yet. But this sickness has taught me—this sickness and—

Dorcas—that it’s better to go for a thing in an honest, straightforward way than to reach it by sneaking. But I always supposed it was a fine thing to run away to sea, or else I shouldn’t have tried the get-out-of-the-window-by-mid-night dodge and broken my leg. I’m wiser now.”

Dorcas smiled at him with melting hazel eyes and rose-red lips revealing a line of pearls.

“Poor Guy!” said she. “It was a hard lesson, wasn’t it?”

I think I needed it, Dorcas. If ever there was a through-paced young ruffian it was I,” groaned the boy. “But, you see, nobody ever talked to me. Scoldings without end I got, I grant you, but no one ever talked common sense to me before. You are the only one who seemed to think me worth reasoning with; and you shall see, Dorcas, that I am worth the trouble. Once I’m up from this scrape I’ll tackle my lessons in real earnest, and try to do something better. And I say Dorcas—”

“Yes, Guy.”

“You’re the prettiest girl I ever saw.”

“Nonsense, Guy!”

“O but you are! and the sweetest and most sensible. I can’t think how you ever came to be a housemaid in a place like this.”

Dorcas colored a little.

“Shall I tell you, Guy? I came as a governess to the primary department, but I had no discipline, they told me. The younger boys did exactly as they pleased. I’ve always thought that Mrs. Vial, who succeeded to the position, had something to do about the bad reports of my management that reached Dr. Delfer’s ears. But it can’t be proved neither can’t it be helped. I was alone here and friendless, and I was glad to accept a vacant position under the housekeeper to mend linen, care for the occasional cases in the infirmary, and make myself generally useful.”

“I knew you were a lady!” exultantly cried the boy. “I could see it in your face.”

“I would rather you would call me a true woman, Guy, than a lady,” said Dorcas, moving the lamp a

few inches further back, so that the light would not shine in Guy’s eyes.

“But I say, Dorcas, how old are you?”

“Rather young I’m afraid, Guy—only nineteen!”

“And I am fourteen, Dorcas. Will you wait seven years for me?”

“Guy!”

“I shall be twenty-one then, and my own master,” eagerly added the boy; “and I’ll work like a slave to get a good profession, and if you will marry me, Dorcas, I’ll make the best husband that ever was to you, for I’m desperately in love with you, I am that.”

Dorcas burst into laughter.

“Guy,” she said, “what a child you are!”

“But you do love me, don’t you?”

“Yes, of course I love you; but not a bit more than I do Celia Parker or little Frankie Gaines.”

“Dorcas!”

“Well, a trifle more, perhaps, because I’ve had all the care of you these four weeks, and you’ve really behaved very decently, but—”

“Promise me, Dorcas.”

“I won’t, Guy.”

“We’re engaged, all the same,”

said Guy, with a deep sigh of relief; “it’s a bargain. And now you may get me a gown.”

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