

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

FIVE LITTLE  
PEPPERS MIDWAY

Margaret Sidney

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

# Five Little Peppers Midway

---

MARGARET SIDNEY



## CONTENTS

1.	PHRONSIE'S PIE	1
2.	COUSIN EUNICE CHATTERTON	9
3.	THE REHEARSAL	15
4.	WELCOME HOME!	23
5.	AFTER THE PLAY	32
6.	THE LITTLE BROWN HOUSE	40
7.	OLD TIMES AGAIN	48
8.	SOME BADGERTOWN CALLS	56
9.	A SUDDEN BLOW	64
10.	THE PARTY SEPARATES	71
11.	POOR POLLY!	78
12.	NEW WORK FOR POLLY	86
13.	A PIECE OF NEWS	95
14.	MAMSIE'S WEDDING	102
15.	MRS. CHATTERTON HAS A NEW PLAN	111
16.	WHERE IS PHRONSIE?	117
17.	PHRONSIE IS FOUND	124
18.	THE GIRLS HAVE POLLY AGAIN	131
19.	PHRONSIE IS WELL AGAIN	138
20.	THE SECRET	145
21.	THE WHITNEYS' LITTLE PLAN	152
22.	JOEL	160
23.	OF MANY THINGS	169
24.	AWAY	178

## THE LITTLE BROWN HOUSE

They were all sitting around the library fire; Polly under the pretext of holding Phronsie's head in her lap, was sitting on the rug beside her, the boys on either hand; old Mr. King was marching up and down the long room, and looking at them. The merriest of stories had been told, Polly urging on all the school records of jolly times, and those not so enjoyable; songs had been sung, and all sorts of nonsense aired. At last Joel sprang up and ran over to pace by the old gentleman's side.

"Christmas was good enough," said the boy, by way of beginning conversation.

"Hey?" responded the old gentleman, looking down at him, "I should think it was. Well, and how about the wonderful play on the twenty-first? And that was good enough, too, I dare say."

"That was well enough," said Joel indifferently, "I don't care for such stuff, though."

"Tut—tut!" cried Mr. King in pretended anger, "now I won't have anything said against that wonderful production. Not a thing, sir, do you hear?"

Joel laughed, his chubby face twinkling all over in secret amusement. "Well, I know something better, if you'll only let us do it, sir, than a hundred old plays."

"And pray what is it?" demanded Mr. King, "let's have it at once. But the idea of surpassing the play! Oh, no, no, it can't be done, sir!"

"It's to go and see the little brown house," said Joel, standing up on his tiptoes to a level with the old gentleman's ear, and one eye looking backward to see that nobody heard.

Mr. King started, pulled his handsome moustache thoughtfully, looked at Joel sharply, and then over at the group in the firelight.

"They don't know anything about it," cried the boy in a whisper, "don't tell them. It's my secret, and yours," he added generously. "Oh! if we might only go and look at it."

"It's winter," observed the old gentleman, and stepping to the window he put aside the draperies, to peer out into the black evening. "Yes, it

really is winter," he added with a shiver, to the boy who was close behind, and as if no longer in doubt about it, he added most emphatically, "it really is winter, Joel."

"Well, but you never saw anything like it, how magnificent winter is in Badgertown," cried Joel in an excited whisper. "Such hills to coast down; the snow is always crisp there, sir, not like this dirty town mud. And the air is as dry as punk," he added artfully. "Oh! 'twould be such a lark;" he actually clasped his hands.

"Badgertown isn't so very far off," said Mr. King thoughtfully, "I'll think about it and see if we can manage it."

"Ugh-ow!" squealed Joel, utterly forgetful of his caution of secrecy, "we can, we can; we can open the little brown house, and build great fires there, and"—But he got no further. Into the midst of Van's liveliest sally, came the words "little brown house," bringing all the young people to their feet, Phronsie running to the old gentleman's side, with, "What is it, Grandpapa? He said the little brown house."

"Get away!" cried Joel crossly to the besiegers, each and all wildly clamoring. "What is it? What are you talking about? It's my secret," he cried, "and his," pointing with a dismayed finger to Mr. King.

"Well, it isn't a secret any longer," cried Polly, flushing with excitement. "You said 'little brown house,' we heard you just as plainly; and you're getting up something, I know you are." "People don't usually select a roomful of listeners, and then shout out their secrets," said Jasper. "You are in for it now, Joe, and no mistake. Go ahead, old fellow, and give us the rest of it."

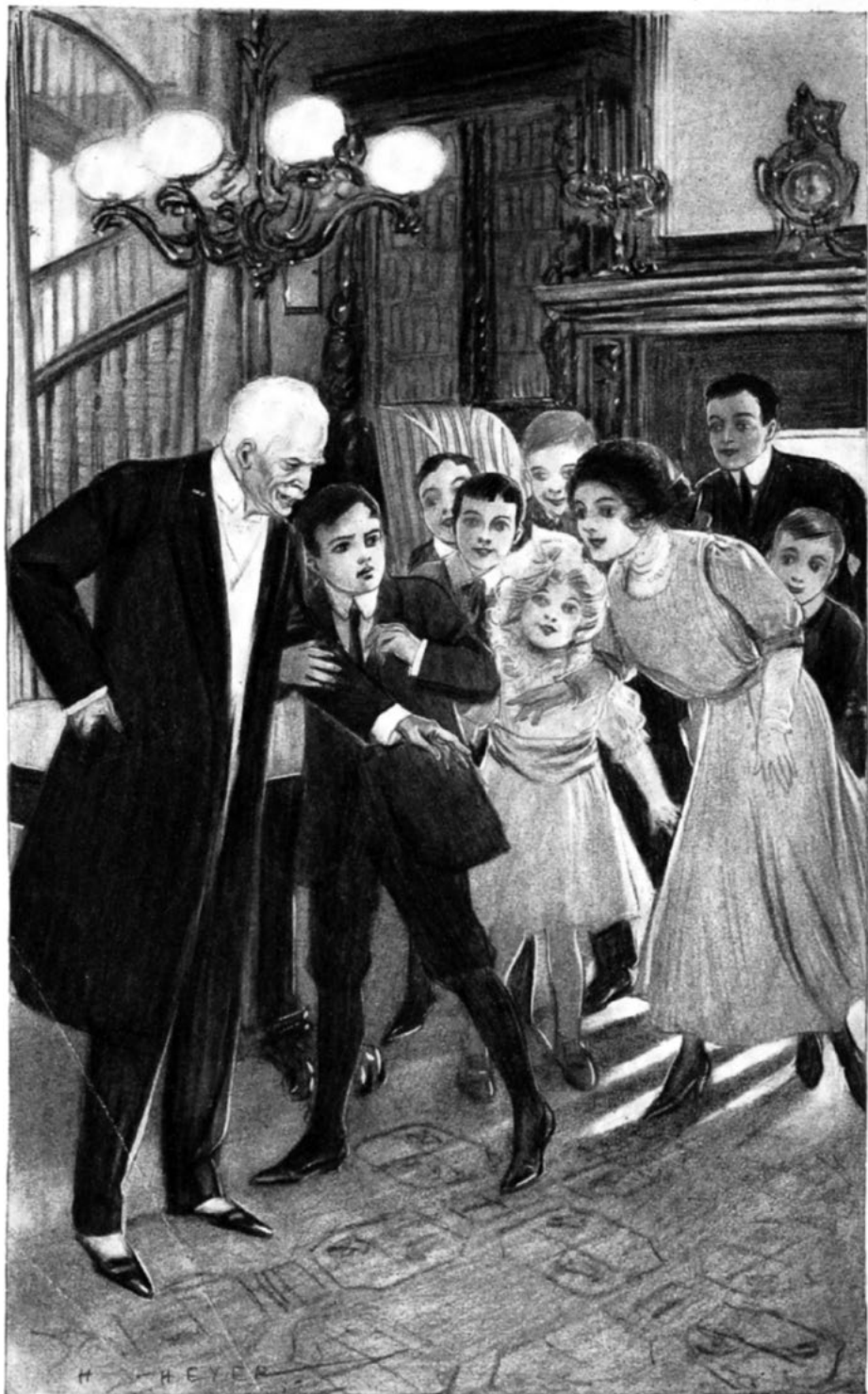
Joel whirled away from them all in desperation. "You might as well," laughed the old gentleman, "the mischief is done now, and no mistake."

So Joel, thus set upon, allowed the whole beautiful plan to be wrung from him, by slow and torturing installments; how they all were to go to Badgertown, open the little brown house, and stay there—here he glanced at Mr. King—"perhaps a week," he brought out suddenly, filling the time with all sorts of frolics, and playing they were there again, and really and truly living in the old home.

At last it was all out, to be received in different ways by the listeners.

"Oh, Joel!" cried Davie with shining eyes. "We never could come away again if we once get there, never!"

Polly stood quite still, a mist gathering before her glad eyes, out of which she dimly saw the little brown house arise and beckon to her.



"YOU SAID 'LITTLE BROWN HOUSE,'" CRIED POLLY.

Phronsie jumped up and down and clapped her hands in glee. "Oh, Grandpapa, Grandpapa!" she screamed, "please take us to the little brown house, please!"

That settled it. "I do not think we need to consider it longer," said Mr. King, glancing at Ben, whose face told what he thought, "children, we will go—that is, if Mrs. Pepper says yes.

"I will ask her," cried Joel with a howl, springing off.

"Come on," cried Jasper, "let's all 'be in at the death.'" And the library was deserted in a twinkling.

But mother was nowhere to be found. "Upstairs, downstairs, and in the lady's chamber," they sought her wildly.

"Oh! I forgot," exclaimed Polly, when at last they gathered in the wide hall, disposing themselves on the chairs and along the stairs, all tired out. "She has gone to evening meeting with Auntie. How stupid of me not to remember that."

"Well, I declare!" cried a voice above them, and looking up they met the cold blue eyes of Mrs. Chatterton regarding them over the railing. "Cousin Horatio, do you keep a menagerie, or a well-ordered house, I beg to inquire?"

"A menagerie," said Mr. King coolly, leaning on the balustrade at the foot of the stairs, and looking up at her. "All sorts of strange animals wander in here, Cousin."

"Hum; I understand. I'm not so dull as you think. Well, you've changed, let me tell you, vastly, and not for the better either, in the last six years. Who would ever suppose I see before me fastidious Horatio King!" she exclaimed, lifting her long thin hands to show him their horror-stricken palms.

"I dare say, I dare say, Cousin Eunice," assented Mr. King carelessly, "but I consider all you say as a compliment."

"Compliment?" she repeated disdainfully, and added with a rising note of anger, forgetting herself, "there's no fool like an old fool."

"So I think," said Mr. King in the same tone as before. "Children, come into my room now, and close the door." And Cousin Eunice was left to air further opinions to her own ear.

But when Mother Pepper and Mrs. Whitney did come home from the meeting, oh! what a time there was. They all fell upon her, as soon as the door opened, and the whole air was filled with "little brown house." "May we—may we?" "A whole week." "Two days, Mamsie, do say yes,"

and Phronsie's glad little chirp "Grandpapa wants to go, he does!" ending every other exclamation.

"What a babel," cried Mrs. Pepper, her black eyes roving over the excited group. "Now what is it all about? Baby, you tell mother first."

Phronsie was not too big to jump into the comfortable lap, and while her fingers played with the bonnet strings, she laid the whole delightful plan open, the others hanging over them in ill-suppressed excitement.

"Well, you see, Mamsie," she began deliberately.

"Oh! you are so slow, Phronsie," exclaimed Polly, "do hurry."

"Let her take her own time," said Mr. King, "go on, child."

"Dear Grandpapa," proceeded Phronsie, turning her yellow head to look at him, her hand yet among the bonnet strings, "is going to take us all, every single one, to see the little brown house, and just touch it once, and be sure it's there, and peek in the doors and windows and"—

"No, no," roared Joel, "we're going to stay, and a week too," hopping confidently up and down.

"Oh, Joe! not a week," corrected Polly with glowing cheeks, "perhaps two days; we don't know yet."

"Three—three," begged Van, pushing his head further into the center of the group. "Mrs. Pepper, do say you want to stay three days," he begged.

"I haven't said I wanted to go yet," she answered with a smile.

"Now, every one of you keep quiet," commanded Mr. King, raising his hand, "or you'll spoil the whole thing. Phronsie shall tell her story as she likes."

Thereupon the rest, with the shadow of his warning that the whole might be spoiled, fell back to a vigorous restraint once more.

"Perhaps," cried Phronsie with shining eyes, and grasping the strings tighter she leaned forward and pressed her red lips on the mother's mouth, "we'll go in and stay. Oh, Mamsie!"

That "Oh, Mamsie!" carried the day, and every one hanging on the conversation knew as soon as they heard it that a victory had been won.

"It's no use to contend against the Fates," said Mrs. Whitney, laughing, "Mrs. Pepper, you and I know that."

"That's so," cried old Mr. King, "and whoever finds it out early in life, is the lucky one. Now, children, off with you and talk it over," he cried, dismissing them as if they were all below their teens. "I want to talk with Mrs. Pepper now."

And in two days they were ready to go. Mrs. Chatterton with nose



high in the air, and plentiful expressions of disgust at such a mid-winter expedition, taking herself off to make a visit of corresponding length to some distant relatives.

"I hope and pray this may not get into a society paper," she cried at the last, as she was seated in the carriage, "but of course it will; outre things always do. And we shall be disgraced for life. One comfort remains to me, I am not in it."

Mr. King, holding the carriage door, laughed long and loudly. "No, Cousin Eunice," he said, "you are not in it. Take comfort in that thought. Good-by," and the carriage rolled off.

Mother Pepper and the five little Peppers were going back to the little brown house. "Really and truly we are," as Phronsie kept saying over and over again with every revolution of the car-wheels, in a crooning fashion, and making it impossible for Mr. King to shiver in apprehension at the step he was taking. Were not two cases of blankets and household comforts safely packed away in the luggage car? "It's not such a dreadful risk," said the old gentleman gruffly to himself, "it's quite a common occurrence nowadays to take a winter outing in the country. We're all right," and he re-enforced himself further by frequent glances at Mrs. Pepper's black bonnet, two seats off.

It was to be a three-days' frolic, after all. Not that the whole party were to stay in the little brown house. O dear, no! how could they? It was only big enough for the Peppers. So Mrs. Whitney and her three boys, with Mr. King, and Jasper, who concealed many disappointed feelings, planned to settle down in the old hotel at Hingham.

And before anybody imagined they could reach there so soon, there they were at Badgertown Center, to find Mr. Tisbett waiting there on his stage-box as if he had not stirred from it for five years.

"Sho, now!" he called out from his elevated position to Mrs. Pepper, as she stepped down from the car, "it's good to see you, though. Land! how many of ye be there? And is that Phronsie? Sho, now!"

"Did you get my letter?" exclaimed Mother Pepper to Mrs. Henderson, who was pressing up to grasp her hand, and preparing to fall on the young folks separately. The parson stood just back, biding his time with a smile.

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed; "are these tall boys and girls the five little Peppers? It can't be, Mrs. Pepper," as at last he had her hand. "You are imposing on us."

And then the village people who had held back until their pastor and

his wife paid their respects, rushed up and claimed their rights, and it was high holiday indeed for Badgertown.

“My goodness!” exclaimed Mr. King at a little remove and viewing the scene with great disfavor, “this is worse than the danger of taking cold. Have they no sense, to carry on like this?”

“They’re so glad to see the Peppers again, father,” said Mrs. Whitney with bright eyes. “You took them away from all these good people, you know; it’s but fair to give them up for one day.”

The old gentleman fumed and fretted, however, in a subdued fashion; at last wisely turning his back, he began to stalk down the platform, under pretense of examining the landscape.

“Your friends will stay with us,” Mrs. Henderson was saying in a gently decisive manner, “the old parsonage is big enough,” she added with a laugh.

“Oh! you are so good and thoughtful, dear Mrs. Henderson,” cried Mrs. Pepper with delight at the thought of the homelike warmth of the parsonage life awaiting the old gentleman, for whom she was dreading the dreary hotel.

“I’m good to ourselves,” declared the parson’s wife gaily.

Jasper gave a shout when the new arrangement was declared, as it presently was by Percy and Van, who flung themselves after him as he was seeing to the luggage with Ben, and his face glowed with the greatest satisfaction.

“That is jolly,” he exclaimed, “and that’s a fact! Now, Ben, we’re but a stone’s throw apart. Rather different, isn’t it, old fellow, from the time when I used to race over from Hingham with Prince at my heels?”

Dr. Fisher’s little thin, wiry figure was now seen advancing upon the central group, and everybody fell away to let him have his chance to welcome the Peppers.

“I couldn’t get here before,” he cried, his eyes glowing behind his spectacles. “I’ve left a very sick patient. This is good,” he took them all in with a loving glance, but his hand held to Polly. “Now I’m going to drive you down in my gig,” he said to her at last. “Will you come?”

“Yes, indeed,” cried Polly in delight, as her mother smiled approval, and she ran off to let him help her in. “It’s only yesterday since you took me to drive, Dr. Fisher, and you gave me my stove—is it?” And so she rambled on, the little doctor quite charmed to hear it all.

But Mr. Tisbett had a truly dreadful time placing his party in the old

stage, as the townsfolk, fearful that so good a chance for seeing the Peppers would not happen during the three days' stay, insisted on crowding up close to the ancient vehicle, and getting in everybody's way, thereby calling forth some exclamations from Mr. King that could not be regarded as exactly complimentary. And quite sure that he was a frightful tyrant, they fell back with many a pitying glance at the Pepper family whom he was endeavoring to assist into their places.

At last it was all accomplished in some way, and Mr. Tisbett cracked his whip, Mrs. Pepper and Phronsie leaned out of the window to bow right and left into smiling faces, Ben and Davie did the same over their heads.

"Good-by," sang out Joel, whom the stage driver had taken up beside him. "Here we are, off for the little brown house. G'lang!"

## OLD TIMES AGAIN

“Don’t let me look—oh! don’t let me look,” cried Polly in the old gig, and twisting around, she hid her face against the faded green cloth side. “I ought not to see the little brown house before Mamsie and the others do.”

“I’ll turn down the lane,” said the little doctor, “so”; and suiting the action to the word, Polly could feel that they were winding down the narrow little road over toward Grandma Bascom’s. She could almost smell the violets and anemones under the carpet of snow, and could scarcely restrain herself from jumping out for a riotous run.

“Don’t go too far away,” she cried in sudden alarm. “We must be there by the time the stage does.” And she applied her eye to the little circular glass in the back of the gig. “Will it never come—oh! here it is, here it is, dear Dr. Fisher.” And with a quick flourish around of the old horse, they were soon before the little brown house, and helping out the inmates of the stage, who with more speed than grace were hurrying over the steps.

Joel was down before Mr. Tisbett had fairly drawn up in front of the gate. “Hold on,” roared the stage driver, “I don’t want you to break your neck with me.”

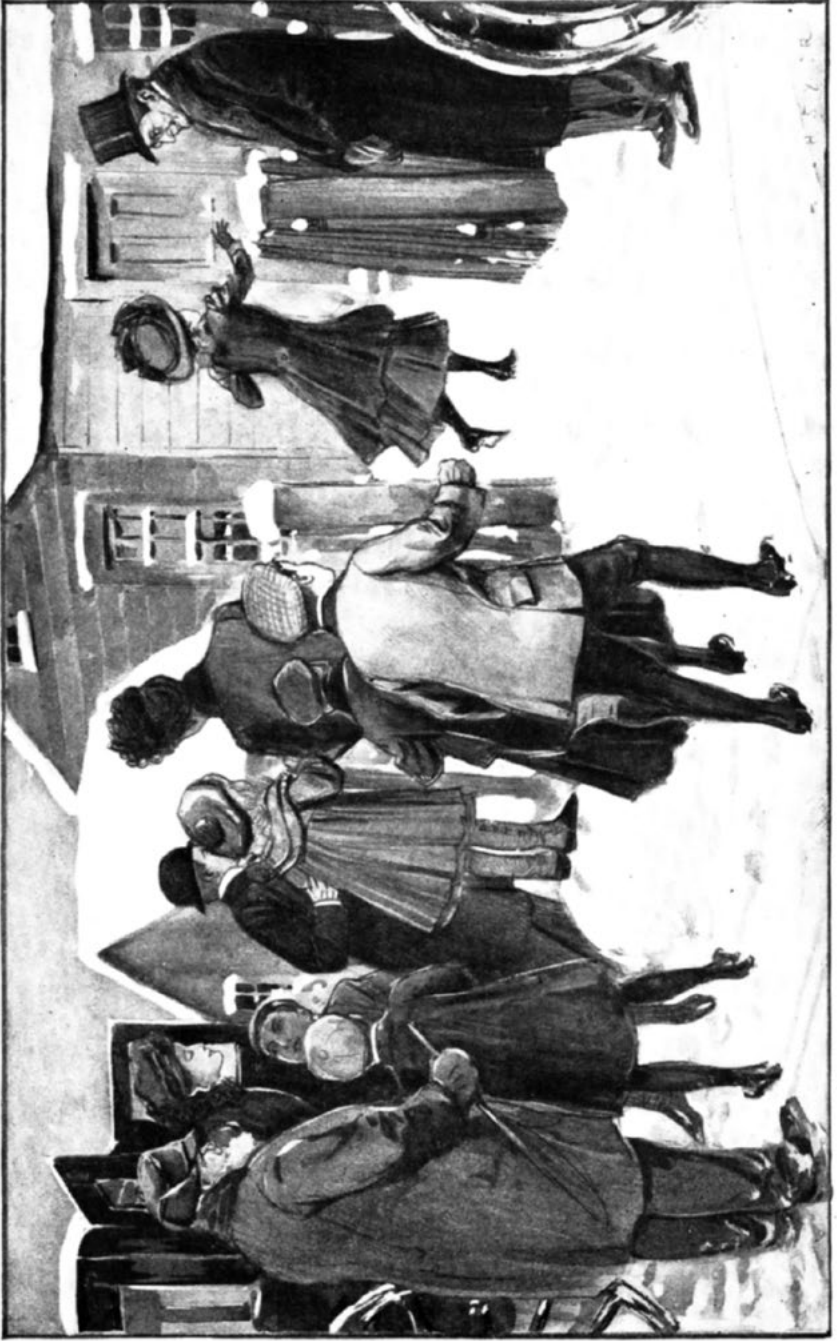
“It’s really here!” cried Phronsie with wide eyes, standing quite still on a hummock of frozen snow, with her eyes riveted on the house. “It really is!” Polly had raced up the winding path, and over the flat stone to drop a kiss on the little old door.

“Oh! oh! Mamsie, do come!” she cried to Mrs. Pepper on the path.

“Hum! I think, Jasper, you and I will let them alone for a few moments,” said Mr. King, who was still within the stage. “Here, my good fellow,” to Mr. Tisbett, “you say it’s all comfortable in there for them?”

“Yes, yes, sir,” said Mr. Tisbett heartily. “Good land! Mis’ Henderson had her boys come down airly this mornin’ and make the fires; and there’s a mighty sight of things to eat.” The stage-driver put one foot on the hind wheel to facilitate conversation, and smacked his lips.

“All very well. Now you may drive us down the road a bit,” said Mr. King, withdrawing his head to the depths of the lumbering old vehicle again.



"IT'S REALLY HERE!" CRIED PHRONSE.

"Ain't goin' in?" cried Mr. Tisbett, opening his round eyes at him in astonishment.

"Get up and drive us on, I say," commanded the old gentleman, "and cease your talking," which had the effect to send honest Mr. Tisbett clambering expeditiously up to the box, where he presently revenged himself by driving furiously over all the hard frozen ruts he could quickly select, determined not to stop till he was obliged to.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Mr. King within, holding to the strap at the side, as well as to the leather band of the swinging seat in front. "What an abominable road!"

"The road is well enough," said Jasper, who couldn't bear to have a word uttered against Badgertown, "it's the fellow's driving that makes it rough. Here, can't you be a little more careful to keep the road?" he called, thrusting his head out of the window. But he only narrowly escaped losing his brown traveling cap for his pains, as the stage gave a worse lurch than before, to introduce a series of creakings and joltings hitherto unparalleled.

"I cannot endure this much longer," said old Mr. King, growing white around the mouth, and wishing he had strength for one-half the exclamations he felt inwardly capable of. Outside, honest Mr. Tisbett was taking solid comfort in the reflection that he was teaching a rich city man that he could not approach with anything less than respect a citizen of Badgertown.

"Ain't I as good as he?" cried Mr. Tisbett to himself, with an extra cut to the off horse, as he spied a sharp ragged edge of ice along the cart track in front of him. "Now that's good; that'll shake him," he added cheerfully. "Land! but I hain't been spoke to so since I was sassed at school by Jim Bently, and then I licked him enough to pay twice over. G'lang there—easy!"

The first thing he knew, one of the glass windows was shattered to fragments; the bits flying off along the quiet road, to fall a gleaming shower upon the snow.

"Whoa!" called Mr. Tisbett, to his smoking horses, and leaning over, he cried, "What's the matter in there?"

"The matter is," said Jasper, putting his face out, "that as I could not possibly make you hear my calls, I chose to break the window. Have the goodness to let my father and me at once out of this vehicle."

Mr. Tisbett got down slowly over the wheel. "Beg your pardon," he said awkwardly, pulling open the door, "ain't you goin' to ride back?"

"Heavens!" cried Mr. King. He was glad to find he could ejaculate so much as he tremblingly worked his way out to terra firma. "Nothing on earth would tempt me to step foot inside there again."

"Here is the money for your window," said Jasper, putting a bill into the fur mitten, covering Mr. Tisbett's brawny right hand. "Kindly bring our traps to the little brown house; here, father, take my arm," and he ran after the tall figure, picking its way along the frozen road.

"Hey—what's this?" exclaimed Mr. Tisbett, looking into the center of his fur mitten, "five dollars! Gee—thumps! I ain't a-goin' to take it, after shaking that old party almost to pieces."

He stood staring at the bill in stupid perplexity till the uneasy movements of his horses warned him that his position was not exactly the proper one for a stage-driver who was on his box from morning till night, so he clambered over the wheel, full of vexed thoughts, and carefully tucked the bill under the old cushion before he took his seat.

"Ill give it back to him, that's cert'in," he said, picking up the reins, "and p'raps they've had enough walkin' so they'll let me pick 'em up," which raised him out of his depression not a little.

But the stern faces of the old gentleman and the tall boy smote him with a chill, long before he passed them, and he drove by silently, well knowing it would not do to broach the subject by so much as a look.

Not daring to go near the little brown house without the occupants of the stage who had driven down the road with him, Mr. Tisbett drew up miserably to a convenient angle, and waited till the two came up. Then without trusting himself to think, he sprang to the ground, and with shame written all over his honest face, called out, "See here, you young chap, I want to speak to you, when you've got him in the house."

"I will see you then," said Jasper, as the two hurried on to meet the Peppers rushing out from the little brown house, and down the small path.

"I've made an awful mess for 'em all, and they just come home," groaned Mr. Tisbett; drawing his fur mitten across his eyes, and leading his horses, he followed at a funeral pace, careful not to stop at the gate until the door was closed, when he began furiously to unload.

A footstep crunching the snow, broke into the noise he was making. "Hoh! well," he exclaimed, pausing with a trunk half-off the rack, "it's a mighty awkward thing for a man to say he's sorry, but you bet I be, as cert'in as my name's John Tisbett." His face became so very red that

Jasper hastened to put his young shoulder under the trunk, a movement that only added to the stage-driver's distress.

"It don't pay to get mad, now I tell you," declared Mr. Tisbett, dumping the trunk down on the snow, and then drawing himself to his full height; "fust place, your pa sassed me, and"—

"He didn't intend to," cried Jasper eagerly, "and I'll apologize for him, if that's what you want." He laid his strong right hand in the old fur mitten.

"Good land! Tain't what I want," cried honest John, but he gripped the hand nevertheless, a fact that the boy never forgot; "I say I'm sorry I shook up your pa."

"His age ought to have protected him," said the boy simply.

"Sho! that's a fact," cried Mr. Tisbett, sinking in deeper distress, "but how is anybody to remember he's so old, when he steps so almighty high, as if he owned all Badgertown—say!"

"I think we shall be good friends, Mr. Tisbett," said Jasper cordially, as he turned to wave his hand toward the little brown house; simultaneously the door opened, and all the young Peppers and Whitneys rushed out to help in the delightful unloading.

It was well along in the afternoon. The dusk of the December twilight shut down speedily, around the little brown house and its happy occupants, but no one wanted the candles lighted till the last moment.

"Oh, Polly!" cried Joel, who was prancing as of old over the kitchen floor, "don't you remember that night when you said you wished you had two hundred candles, and you'd light them all at once?"

"I said a good many silly things in those days," said Polly meditatively, and smoothing Phronsie's yellow hair that was lying across her lap.

"Some silly ones, and a good many wise ones," observed Mother Pepper, over in her little old rocker in the west window, where she used to sit sewing up coats and sacks for the village storekeeper. "You kept us together many a time, Polly, when nothing else could."

"Oh! no, I didn't, Mamsie," protested Polly, guilty of contradicting, "you and Bessie did. I just washed dishes, and swept up, and"—

"Baked and brewed, and fussed and stewed," finished Joel, afraid of being too sentimental.

"Polly was just lovely in those days," said Davie, coming across the room to lay a cool cheek against her rosy one. "I liked the rainy days best when we all could stay in the house, and hear her sing and tell stories while she was working."



"She was cross sometimes," cried Joel, determined not to let reminiscences become too comfortable; "she used to scold me just awfully, I know."

Polly broke into a merry laugh; yet she exclaimed, "You poor Joey, I suppose I was dreadful!"

"You didn't catch one half as bad scoldings as belonged to you," put in Ben, thrusting another stick in the stove. "You were a bad lot, Joe, in those days."

"And not over good in these," cried old Mr. King, ensconced in the snugest corner in the seat of honor, the high-backed rocker that comforted Phronsie after her little toe was hurt. "There, now, my boy, how's that?" with a grim smile.

"Do you remember when the old stove used to plague you, Polly?" cried Joel, suddenly changing the conversation. "And how Ben's putty was everlastingly tumbling out? Hoh—hoh!"

"And you two boys were always stuffing up the holes for me, when Ben was away," cried Polly, with affectionate glances at Davie and Joel.

"I didn't so much," said Joel honestly, "Dave was always giving boot-tops and such things."

"Boot-tops!" repeated Mr. King in astonishment. "Bless me, I didn't know that they had anything in common with stoves."

"Oh! that was before we knew you," said Joel, ready in advance of any one else with the explanation; "it wasn't this stove. Dr. Fisher gave Polly this one after she had the measles; but it was a lumbering old affair that was full of holes that had to be stopped up with anything we could get. And leather was the best; and Davie saved all the old boot- heels and tops he could find, you know."

"Oh!" said the old gentleman, wondering if other revelations would come to light about the early days of the Peppers.

"Isn't Dr. Fisher lovely?" cried Polly, with sparkling eyes, "just the same as ever. Mamsie, I ought to do something for him."

"He is as good as gold," assented Mrs. Pepper heartily. "You've done something, I'm sure, Polly. The medical books you bought out of your pocket money, and sent him, pleased him more than anything you could give him."

"But I want to do something now," said Polly. "Oh! just think how good he was to us."

"May we never forget it!" exclaimed Mrs. Pepper, wiping her eyes.

“But he’s very unwise,” said Mr. King a trifle testily, “not to take up with my offer to establish him in the town. A man like him could easily hold a good practice, because the fellow’s got ability.”

“Oh! Dr. Fisher wouldn’t leave Badgertown,” cried all the Peppers in a bunch. “And what would the poor people here do without him?” finished Polly.

“Well, well, never mind, he won’t come to town, and that’s enough,” said the old gentleman quickly. “Aside from that, he’s a sensible chap, and one quite to my liking.”

“Oh, Polly!” cried Phronsie suddenly, and lifting her head, she fastened her brown eyes on the face above her, “wasn’t Mamsie’s birthday cake good?”

“The flowers were pretty, but the cake was heavy, don’t you remember?” said Polly, who hadn’t recovered from that grief even yet.

“I thought it was just beautiful,” cried Mrs. Pepper hastily. “No one could have baked it better in the old stove you had. I’m sure we ate it all up, every crumb.”

“We kept it in the old cupboard,” cried Joel, rushing over to the corner to swing the door open. “And we never once peeked, Mamsie, so afraid you’d suspect.”

“You kept staring at the cupboard door all the evening, Joe, you know you did,” cried Ben; “you were just within a hair’s breadth of letting the whole thing out ever so many times. Polly and I had to drag you away. We were glad enough when you went to bed, I can tell you.”

“You were always sending me off to bed in those days,” said Joel, taking his head out of the cupboard to throw vindictive glances over to the group around the stove.

“I wish we could do so now,” said Ben.

“And those two,” Joel went on, pointing to Polly and Ben, “used to go whispering around a lot of old secrets, that they wouldn’t tell us. Oh! it was perfectly awful, wasn’t it, Dave?” bestowing a small pinch on that individual’s shoulder.

“I liked the secrets best not to know them till Polly and Ben got ready to tell us,” said David slowly; “then they were just magnificent.”

Phronsie had laid her head back in the waiting lap, and was crooning softly to herself.

“I want to go and see dear good Mr. Beebe,” she said presently, “and nice Mrs. Beebe, can I, Mamsie?” looking over at her.

"To be sure," cried Mrs. Pepper, "you shall indeed, child."

"Beebe-Beebe, and who is he, pray?" demanded Mr. King.

"Oh! he keeps the shoe shop over in the Center," explained three or four voices, "and Phronsie's new shoes were bought there, you know."

"And he gave me pink and white candy-sticks," said Phronsie, "and he was very nice; and I like him very much."

"And Mrs. Beebe gave us doughnuts all around," communicated Joel; "I don't know but that I liked those best. There was more to them."

"So you always bought your new shoes of the Beebes?" asked the old gentleman, a question that brought all the five Peppers around his chair at once.

"We didn't ever have new shoes that I can remember," said Joel quickly, "except Phronsie's, and once Ben had a new pair. He had to, because he was the oldest, you know."

"Oh!" said Mr. King.

"You see," said Phronsie, shaking her head gravely, while she laid one hand on his knee, "we were very poor, Grandpapa dear. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, yes, child," said old Mr. King; "there, get up here," and he took her within his arms.

"No, no, you're not going to talk yet," seeing Percy and Van beginning violent efforts to join in the conversation. "Let the Peppers have a chance to talk over old times first. See how good Jasper is to wait."

"I would much prefer to hear the Peppers talk forever," said Jasper, smiling down on the two Whitneys, "than to have the gates opened for a general flood. Go on, do, Polly and Ben, and the rest of you."

"Oh! there is so much," said Polly despairingly, clasping her hands, "we shouldn't get through if we talked ten years, should we, Ben? Mamsie," and she rushed over to her, "can we have a baking time to-morrow, just as we used to in the old days? Oh! do say yes."

"Yes, do say yes," echoed Jasper, also rushing to the side of the little rocking-chair. "You will, won't you, Mrs. Pepper?"

"Hoh! hoh!" cried the two Whitneys derisively, "I thought you could 'hear the Peppers talk forever.' That's great, Jasper."

"Well, when it comes to hearing a proposal for a baking frolic, my principles are thrown to the wind," said Jasper recklessly. "Why, boys, that's the first thing I remember about the little brown house. Do say yes, Mrs. Pepper!"