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ROLLING THE STONE UP-HILL

AND she awoke radiantly happy. For a sensitive nature reflects Nature's moods and the martins had kept their promise. The emerald earth was flashing through a crystal morning. It was a little later than usual for her to get up and she dressed in great haste. Yet when she came out on the front porch she could not help stopping and standing still for a moment — to drink in all the beauty and sweetness. There were roses everywhere, the garden lay close by and the blooming clover fields not far off. The fresh fragrance was like some magic wine. She felt equal now to meeting any trials that might come. With a bright smile she turned and went along the passage to the dining room, if the poor little corner of the old house in which the table stood might be called by so formal a name.

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The breakfast was ready and the table laid with care. That was a pleasant surprise and she turned to the cook in beaming gratitude. She thought it most kind of her to have taken all this trouble, considering her natural feeling toward an addition to the family which must greatly increase her work. Now the truth was that the cook had done everything for the express purpose of showing the intruders what she could do when she liked, so that they would know how much they missed when she never did it again. But of course Phœbe had no suspicion of any such deep duplicity. She believed everybody to be as sincere as she was herself. And she now thanked the cook so heartily that even that hardened deceiver felt rather ashamed for the moment. Then the little mistress said with the fine tact that a kind heart gives the simplest, that there was not a single thing left for *her* to do, unless it might be to get a bunch of spice pinks still sparkling with dewdrops to put on the table. That would take only a moment, she gayly called back over her shoulder, darting into the garden.

But that was just one moment too long. On

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coming back she found Mother Rowan already seated at the table, and looking highly indignant at having found no one to receive her. Even the sulky cook had retreated as far as the kitchen and now stood peeping at her through the half-open door. She merely nodded huffily in response to Phœbe's greeting and apology and hardly looked up. Her snapping eyes were making a close and critical survey of the table. It was easy to see that she did not like what was on it, but she said nothing until Phœbe — in a nervous flurry — offered her the dish of eggs.

"No, thank you," she said stiffly, pursing up her mouth. "I couldn't think of beginning a day that's bound to be as worrying as this day's bound to be — by eating eggs fried on both sides," she went on, raising her voice so that every word might be distinctly heard in the kitchen. "According to *my* notion of cooking the only way to make a fried egg fit to go into a human stomach is to fry it on *one* side."

Phœbe sprang up and ran to shut the kitchen door but failed to reach it in time.

The eavesdropper's head popped through the space: "Yes, M'am. To be sure. Thank

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you, M'am, for telling me," said the cook with withering sarcasm. "And are you very particular *which* side?"

That was a bad beginning and Phœbe made it worse by smiling herself. But she managed to turn her face away and she gave the cook an imploring look as she shut the kitchen door. Then, going back to her seat at the table, she admitted with disarming humility that there was room for improvement in her house-keeping. In the sweetest sincerity she said how grateful she would be for advice. With winning gentleness she pleaded that it had hardly seemed worth while to think much about the house or the food — while there had been no one except herself. But all this would be entirely different now — she beamed — with a real family of her very own to think for.

It was pretty to see the light in her soft eyes and hear the pride in her sweet voice as she said this. Yet even as she promised that everything should be just as Mother Rowan wished, she could not help looking round with a start fearing lest the cook might have overheard. There was good reason to fear more trouble from that formidable source. Thus reminded,

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Phœbe uneasily began to wonder how all the changes demanded were to be brought about without a violent breach of the domestic peace. She knew from experience that there was only one means of inducing the cook to do what she did not like. This was to give her something that she liked better than having her own way. And that was hard to do because she liked her own way so much that it was well-nigh impossible to find anything that she liked more. And the little mistress was poor though she had never realized the fact until this greatest emergency of her life — which had never been easy — had come upon her.

With a gold piece or two, or even a few bits of silver the difficulty might perhaps have been overcome. But that whole community relied singularly little upon the coin of the realm. Phœbe had never had a gold piece, the cook had never seen one and neither the mistress nor the maid ever thought of having an extra penny. So that Phœbe could only think about her clothes and wonder what she had that the cook would have. She sighed, thinking of the meagre little row of plain black garments hanging against the white wall of the shed-room.

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The cook would not look at anything so sombre. Her Sunday plumage was as gay as that of a bird of paradise. Then Phœbe tried to recollect just what there was among her colored things, which had been folded away when she had gone into mourning in the early spring. And so the thought of her fine white muslin strewn with moss rosebuds naturally crossed her mind. That was the prettiest thing she had ever had — or ever expected to have — and it lay now carefully folded at the very bottom of her hair-covered trunk, with delicate sprigs of sweet alyssum between the soft folds. But of course she did not think of giving *that* away. It was the very pride of her heart and its being laid aside for a year or two would make no difference in its beauty and fashion. No, she certainly had no thought of giving that away even to keep the peace. Yet in another moment a sudden fear came like an actually physical pain. What if the cook would not accept anything else!

While these troubled thoughts racked Phœbe's perplexed head her brown eyes were wistfully gazing in the old woman's face, and she was bravely doing her best to follow what she

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said. But now — with this cruel fancy — her eyes grew so misty with unshed tears that she could not see and her heart beat so fast that she could hardly hear, and much that Mother Rowan said was lost. For in all seriousness it took the utmost strength of mind and body that poor little Phœbe had to submit to this supreme sacrifice. And let none of us make light of her struggle. For who among the strongest and bravest of us can give up his most cherished possession without a cruel wrench? And this poor bit of painted muslin — a mere rosy cloud — was the most precious of her possessions. She went on miserably wondering whether she was after all bound to make the sacrifice. For a moment she thought not, but in another moment she knew that there could be no turning from the steep path in which she had set her feet. The old people must be made happy. There was no other way to make up for the wrong she had done.

Her eyes, brimming now and quite blind with tears, were still uplifted to meet the gaze of the sharp black ones, though they saw nothing but the rosebud muslin. Then suddenly she remembered how small it was and hastily

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glanced down at her own little figure thinking of the cook's size and shape. With this the absurdity of it all touched her quick sense of humor. Instantly her wet eyes lit up and began dancing, and her pretty dimples darted out of their hiding-places and began playing. The change was so sudden that it startled Mother Rowan and led her to demand with increased huffiness, what there was in bad housekeeping to laugh at.

It was lucky for Phœbe that Father Rowan called her just at that moment and she could run to see what he wanted. He already found many pretexts to call her and she was more than ready to respond. The instinctive liking between them grew fast. The merry twinkling of his kind eyes cheered her and he was emboldened by her quick response. A love of simple fun is a great bond between guileless hearts. And it forges its strong tie all the more quickly when a heart that is naturally light happens to be as heavy as Phœbe's was now. Then there were other and more subtle things drawing them together — things that both felt and neither understood. For her full heart fairly ached with its yearning to lavish

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love and service — which makes the whole happiness of a nature like hers. And his empty heart was actually starved by its craving for sympathy and tenderness — which he had sought his whole life through and never found before. Their meeting was the coming together of food and hunger, of drink and thirst. No wonder then that they became friends at sight, and that they instantly and unconsciously entered into a conspiracy against the Oppressor.

Phœbe could hardly have told what made her think Father Rowan the victim of too strict a discipline. And she knew from the outset that whatever Mother Rowan exacted was wholly for his good — or that firm lady thought so — which amounted to the same thing in his present helpless condition. Yet knowing this only caused her to feel wicked when she helped him break his wife's wise rules: it did not prevent her giving him whatever he wanted as nearly as she could. On this second morning she aided him in rebellion. Mother Rowan had hardly gone into the garden to see how much more room there would be for vegetables if all the flowers were pulled up, when Father Rowan asked Phœbe to give him his pipe

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which had been purposely put out of reach. And she not only gave it to him — laughing delightedly — but ran to fetch some of her uncle's fine tobacco. Worst of all, she also brought him a handful of ruby-red plums, though she had heard his wife forbid him to eat a morsel of fresh fruit.

“Quick!” she cried merrily: “I saw them as I ran through the kitchen — where the cook's making jelly. They are very sweet and ripe.”

“Won't she catch us?” asked the old man chuckling yet eating as fast as he could.

“Wait — I'll see,” said Phœbe going to the back window. “No — not if you make haste. She's way over at the other side of the garden. But hurry — or there won't be time for your pipe,” she added, quickly filling it with her own little fingers which had not lost their skill: “There now — be quick.”

The old man swallowed the last of the plums almost whole and eagerly seizing the pipe, began forthwith to take long deep pulls of complete content.

Phœbe hung over him breathing the smoke and enjoying it almost as much as he did:

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"My! — It does smell sweet! And it's so long since I've been near anybody that smoked. Uncle's tobacco always smelt like a flower. Smelling it now brings back the last summer evenings when we used to sit on the porch together. I wasn't lonely then."

She patted his shoulder with yearning affection. He sank deeper among the soft cushions with infinite satisfaction. They were both very happy, far happier than either had been for many a day. But nothing more was said until they heard a firm footstep on the end of the front porch. Then the old man hurriedly gave her the pipe and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand in guilty haste. She flew to put the pipe in its place on the high mantelpiece which she could barely reach by standing on tiptoe. Flying back to his side she suddenly realized that the room was full of the sweet-smelling smoke. There was no hasty way to hide that. She looked around in dismay. For the footsteps which had halted but for a moment came on. The old shoulder shrunk under her hand and she thought it trembled a little too. Her tender heart forgot fear for herself.

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"Never mind," she whispered. "It was *my* fault. Leave it to me. I'll take the whole blame."

But Mother Rowan did not notice the smoke. She was a singularly one-ideal person and her mind was absorbed by something more important. Coming in she merely gave her husband the usual glance of general disapproval. She had always been almost as exacting with him as with herself in all matters of duty and conscience. But she had never been able to bring him quite up to her own Spartan standard until he had broken his leg. That mishap had greatly weakened his power of resistance and had totally taken away his former means of escape. So that after years of futile striving, she now held him in such merciless bondage as only the fanatically conscientious would ever dream of trying to impose upon the incurably irresponsible.

There came a smothered growl and a defiant look even out of his limbo. But Mother Rowan was too much absorbed to notice these either. Going straight to the tottering old wardrobe she took out her queer bonnet and her rusty veil and put them on, scorning a glimpse in