

and he came out with the hard look on his face, shook hands without a word, and drove away with Mr. Bhaer, leaving Nat and Mrs. Jo to look after him with tears in their eyes.

A few days afterwards they received a letter from Mr. Page, saying that Dan was doing well, whereat they all rejoiced. But three weeks later came another letter, saying that Dan had run away, and nothing had been heard of him, whereat they all looked sober, and Mr. Bhaer said —

“Perhaps I ought to have given him another chance.”

Mrs. Bhaer, however, nodded wisely and answered, “Don’t be troubled, Fritz; the boy will come back to us, I’m sure of it.”

But time went on and no Dan came.

CHAPTER VII.

NAUGHTY NAN.

“FRITZ, I’ve got a new idea,” cried Mrs. Bhaer, as she met her husband one day after school.

“Well, my dear, what is it?” and he waited willingly to hear the new plan, for some of Mrs. Jo’s ideas were so droll, it was impossible to help laughing at them, though usually they were quite sensible, and he was glad to carry them out.

“Daisy needs a companion, and the boys would be all the better for another girl among them; you know we believe in bringing up little men and women together, and it is high time we acted up to our belief. They pet and tyrannize over Daisy by turns, and she is getting spoilt. Then they must learn gentle ways, and improve their manners, and having girls about will do it better than any thing else.”

“You are right, as usual. Now, who shall we have?” asked Mr Bhaer, seeing by the look in her eye that Mrs. Jo had some one all ready to propose.

“Little Annie Harding.”

“What! Naughty Nan, as the lads call her?” cried Mr. Bhaer, looking very much amused.

“Yes, she is running wild at home since her mother

died, and is too bright a child to be spoilt by servants. I have had my eye on her for some time, and when I met her father in town the other day I asked him why he did not send her to school. He said he would gladly if he could find as good a school for girls, as ours was for boys. I know he would rejoice to have her come; so suppose we drive over this afternoon and see about it."

"Have not you cares enough now, my Jo, without this little gypsy to torment you?" asked Mr. Bhaer, patting the hand that lay on his arm.

"Oh dear, no," said Mother Bhaer, briskly. "I like it, and never was happier than since I had my wilderness of boys. You see, Fritz, I feel a great sympathy for Nan, because I was such a naughty child myself that I know all about it. She is full of spirits, and only needs to be taught what to do with them to be as nice a little girl as Daisy. Those quick wits of hers would enjoy lessons if they were rightly directed, and what is now a tricky midget would soon become a busy happy child. I know how to manage her, for I remember how my blessed mother managed me, and" —

"And if you succeed half as well as she did, you will have done a magnificent work," interrupted Mr. Bhaer, who labored under the delusion that Mrs. B. was the best and most charming woman alive.

"Now, if you make fun of my plan I'll give you bad coffee for a week, and then where are you, sir?" cried Mrs. Jo, tweaking him by the ear just as if he was one of the boys.

"Won't Daisy's hair stand erect with horror at Nan's wild ways?" asked Mr. Bhaer, presently, when Teddy

had swarmed up his waistcoat, and Rob up his back, for they always flew at their father the minute school was done."

"At first, perhaps, but it will do Posy good. She is getting prim and Bettyish, and needs stirring up a bit. She always has a good time when Nan comes over to play, and the two will help each other without knowing it. Dear me, half the science of teaching is knowing how much children do for one another, and when to mix them."

"I only hope she won't turn out another firebrand."

"My poor Dan! I never can quite forgive myself for letting him go," sighed Mrs. Bhaer.

At the sound of the name, little Teddy, who had never forgotten his friend, struggled down from his father's arms, and trotted to the door, looked out over the sunny lawn with a wistful face, and then trotted back again, saying, as he always did when disappointed of the longed-for sight —

"My Danny's tummin' soon."

"I really think we ought to have kept him, if only for Teddy's sake, he was so fond of him, and perhaps baby's love would have done for him what we failed to do."

"I've sometimes felt that myself; but after keeping the boys in a ferment, and nearly burning up the whole family, I thought it safer to remove the firebrand, for a time at least," said Mr. Bhaer.

"Dinner's ready, let me ring the bell," and Rob began a solo upon that instrument which made it impossible to hear one's self speak.

"Then, I may have Nan, may I?" asked Mrs. Jo

"A dozen Nans if you want them, my dear," answered Mr. Bhaer, who had room in his fatherly heart for all the naughty neglected children in the world.

When Mrs. Bhaer returned from her drive that afternoon, before she could unpack the load of little boys, without whom she seldom moved, a small girl of ten skipped out at the back of the carry-all, and ran into the house, shouting —

"Hi, Daisy! where are you?"

Daisy came, and looked pleased to see her guest, but also a trifle alarmed, when Nan said, still prancing, as if it was impossible to keep still —

"I'm going to stay here always, papa says I may, and my box is coming to-morrow, all my things had to be washed and mended, and your aunt came and carried me off. Isn't it great fun?"

"Why, yes. Did you bring your big doll?" asked Daisy, hoping she had, for on the last visit Nan had ravaged the baby house, and insisted on washing Blanche Matilda's plaster face, which spoilt the poor dear's complexion for ever.

"Yes, she's somewhere round," returned Nan, with most unmaternal carelessness. "I made you a ring coming along, and pulled the hairs out of Dobbin's tail. Don't you want it?" and Nan presented a horse-hair ring in token of friendship, as they had both vowed they would never speak to one another again when they last parted.

Won by the beauty of the offering, Daisy grew more cordial, and proposed retiring to the nursery, but Nan said, "No, I want to see the boys, and the barn," and ran off, swinging her hat by one string till it broke when she left it to its fate on the grass.

"Hullo! Nan!" cried the boys as she bounced in among them with the announcement —

"I'm going to stay."

"Hooray!" bawled Tommy from the wall on which he was perched, for Nan was a kindred spirit, and he foresaw "larks" in the future.

"I can bat; let me play," said Nan, who could turn her hand to any thing, and did not mind hard knocks.

"We ain't playing now, and our side beat without you."

"I can beat you in running, any way," returned Nan, falling back on her strong point.

"Can she?" asked Nat of Jack.

"She runs very well for a girl," answered Jack, who looked down upon Nan with condescending approval.

"Will you try?" said Nan, longing to display her powers.

"It's too hot," and Tommy languished against the wall as if quite exhausted.

"What's the matter with Stuffy?" asked Nan, whose quick eyes were roving from face to face.

"Ball hurt his hand; he howls at every thing," answered Jack, scornfully.

"I don't, I never cry, no matter how much I'm hurt; it's babyish," said Nan, loftily.

"Pooh! I could make you cry in two minutes," returned Stuffy, rousing up.

"See if you can."

"Go and pick that bunch of nettles then," and Stuffy pointed to a sturdy specimen of that prickly plant growing by the wall.

Nan instantly "grasped the nettle," pulled it up, and

held it with a defiant gesture, in spite of the almost unbearable sting.

"Good for you," cried the boys, quick to acknowledge courage even in one of the weaker sex.

More nettled than she was, Stuffy determined to get a cry out of her somehow, and he said tauntingly, "You are used to poking your hands into every thing, so that isn't fair. Now go and bump your head real hard against the barn, and see if you don't howl then."

"Don't do it," said Nat, who hated cruelty.

But Nan was off, and running straight at the barn, she gave her head a blow that knocked her flat, and sounded like a battering-ram. Dizzy, but undaunted she staggered up, saying stoutly, though her face was drawn with pain.

"That hurt, but I don't cry."

"Do it again," said Stuffy, angrily; and Nan *would* have done it, but Nat held her; and Tommy, forgetting the heat, flew at Stuffy like a little game-cock, roaring out—

"Stop it, or I'll throw you over the barn!" and so shook and hustled poor Stuffy, that for a minute he did not know whether he was on his head or his heels.

"She told me to," was all he could say, when Tommy let him alone.

"Never mind if she did; it is awfully mean to hurt a little girl," said Demi, reproachfully.

"Ho! I don't mind; I ain't a little girl, I'm older than you and Daisy; so now," cried Nan, ungratefully.

"Don't preach, Deacon, you bully Posy every day of your life," called out the Commodore, who just then hove in sight.

"I don't hurt her; do I, Daisy?" and Demi turned to his sister, who was "pooring" Nan's tingling hands, and recommending water for the purple lump rapidly developing itself on her forehead.

"You are the best boy in the world," promptly answered Daisy; adding, as truth compelled her to do, "You do hurt me sometimes, but you don't mean to."

"Put away the bats and things, and mind what you are about, my hearties. No fighting allowed aboard this ship," said Emil, who rather lorded it over the others.

"How do you do, Madge Wildfire?" said Mr. Bhaer, as Nan came in with the rest to supper. "Give the right hand, little daughter, and mind thy manners," he added, as Nan offered him her left.

"The other hurts me."

"The poor little hand! what has it been doing to get those blisters?" he asked, drawing it from behind her back, where she had put it with a look which made him think she had been in mischief.

Before Nan could think of any excuse, Daisy burst out with the whole story, during which Stuffy tried to hide his face in a bowl of bread and milk. When the tale was finished, Mr. Bhaer looked down the long table towards his wife, and said with a laugh in his eyes—

"This rather belongs to your side of the house, so I won't meddle with it, my dear."

Mrs. Jo knew what he meant, but she liked her little black sheep all the better for her pluck, though she only said in her soberest way—

"Do you know why I asked Nan to come here?"

"To plague me," muttered Stuffy, with his mouth full.

"To help me make little gentlemen of you, and I think you have shown that some of you need it."

Here Stuffy retired into his bowl again, and did not emerge till Demi made them all laugh by saying, in his slow wondering way —

"How can she, when she 's such a tom-boy!"

"That 's just it, she needs help as much as you, and I expect you to set her an example of good manners."

"Is she going to be a little gentleman too?" asked Rob.

"She 'd like it; wouldn't you, Nan?" added Tommy.

"No, I shouldn't; I hate boys!" said Nan, fiercely, for her hand still smarted, and she began to think that she might have shown her courage in some wiser way.

"I am sorry you hate my boys, because they *can* be well-mannered, and most agreeable when they choose. Kindness in looks and words and ways is true politeness, and any one can have it if they only try to treat other people as they like to be treated themselves."

Mrs. Bhaer had addressed herself to Nan, but the boys nudged one another, and appeared to take the hint, for that time at least, and passed the butter; said "please," and "thank you," "yes, sir," and "no, ma'am," with unusual elegance and respect. Nan said nothing, but kept herself quiet and refrained from tickling Demi, though strongly tempted to do so, because of the dignified airs he put on. She also appeared to have forgotten her hatred of boys, and played "I spy" with them till dark. Stuffy was observed to offer her frequent sucks of his candy-ball during the game

which evidently sweetened her temper, for the last thing she said on going to bed was —

"When my battledore and shuttle-cock comes, I'll let you all play with 'em."

Her first remark in the morning was, "Has my box come?" and when told that it would arrive sometime during the day, she fretted and fumed, and whipped her doll, till Daisy was shocked. She managed to exist, however, till five o'clock, when she disappeared, and was not missed till supper-time, because those at home thought she had gone to the hill with Tommy and Demi.

"I saw her going down the avenue alone as hard as she could pelt," said Mary Anne, coming in with the hasty-pudding, and finding every one asking, "Where is Nan?"

"She has run home, little gypsy!" cried Mrs. Bhaer, looking anxious.

"Perhaps she has gone to the station to look after her luggage," suggested Franz.

"That is impossible, she does not know the way, and if she found it she could never carry the box a mile," said Mrs. Bhaer, beginning to think that her new idea might be rather a hard one to carry out.

"It would be like her," and Mr. Bhaer caught up his hat to go and find the child, when a shout from Jack, who was at the window, made every one hurry to the door.

There was Miss Nan, to be sure, tugging along a large band-box tied up in a linen bag. Very hot and dusty and tired did she look, but marched stoutly along, and came puffing up to the steps, where she dropped her

load with a sigh of relief, and sat down upon it, observing as she crossed her tired arms —

"I couldn't wait any longer, so I went and got it."

"But you did not know the way," said Tommy, while the rest stood round enjoying the joke.

"Oh, I found it, I never get lost."

"It's a mile, how could you go so far?"

"Well, it was pretty far, but I rested a good deal."

"Wasn't that thing very heavy?"

"It's so round, I couldn't get hold of it good, and I thought my arms would break right off."

"I don't see how the station-master let you have it," said Tommy.

"I didn't say any thing to him. He was in the little ticket place, and didn't see me, so I just took it off the platform."

"Run down and tell him it is all right, Franz, or old Dodd will think it is stolen," said Mr. Bhaer, joining in the shout of laughter at Nan's coolness.

"I told you we would send for it if it did not come. Another time you must wait, for you will get into trouble if you run away. Promise me this, or I shall not dare to trust you out of my sight," said Mrs. Bhaer, wiping the dust off Nan's little hot face.

"Well, I won't, only papa tells me not to put off doing things, so I don't."

"That is rather a poser; I think you had better give her some supper now, and a private lecture by and by," said Mr. Bhaer, too much amused to be angry at the young lady's exploit.

The boys thought it "great fun," and Nan entertained them all supper-time with an account of her adventures;

for a big dog had barked at her, a man had laughed at her, a woman had given her a doughnut, and her hat had fallen into the brook when she stopped to drink, exhausted with her exertion.

"I fancy you will have your hands full now, my dear, Tommy and Nan are quite enough for one woman," said Mr. Bhaer, half an hour later.

"I know it will take some time to tame the child, but she is such a generous, warm-hearted little thing, I should love her even if she were twice as naughty," answered Mrs. Jo, pointing to the merry group, in the middle of which stood Nan, giving away her things right and left, as lavishly as if the big band-box had no bottom.

It was those good traits that soon made little "Giddy gaddy," as they called her, a favorite with every one. Daisy never complained of being dull again, for Nan invented the most delightful plays, and her pranks rivalled Tommy's, to the amusement of the whole school. She buried her big doll and forgot it for a week, and found it well mildewed when she dug it up. Daisy was in despair, but Nan took it to the painter who was at work about the house, got him to paint it brick red, with staring black eyes, then she dressed it up with feathers, and scarlet flannel, and one of Ned's leaden hatchets; and in the character of an Indian chief, the late Poppydilla tomahawked all the other dolls, and caused the nursery to run red with imaginary gore. She gave away her new shoes to a beggar child, hoping to be allowed to go barefoot, but found it impossible to combine charity and comfort, and was ordered to ask leave before disposing of her clothes. She delighted the boys by making

a fire-ship out of a shingle with two large sails wet with turpentine, which she lighted, and then sent the little vessel floating down the brook at dusk. She harnessed the old turkey-cock to a straw wagon, and made him trot round the house at a tremendous pace. She gave her coral necklace for four unhappy kittens, which had been tormented by some heartless lads, and tended them for days as gently as a mother, dressing their wounds with cold cream, feeding them with a doll's spoon, and mourning over them when they died, till she was consoled by one of Demi's best turtles. She made Silas tattoo an anchor on her arm like his, and begged hard to have a blue star on each cheek, but he dared not do it, though she coaxed and scolded till the soft-hearted fellow longed to give in. She rode every animal on the place, from the big horse Andy to the cross pig, from whom she was rescued with difficulty. Whatever the boys dared her to do she instantly attempted, no matter how dangerous it might be, and they were never tired of testing her courage.

Mr. Bhaer suggested that they should see who would study best, and Nan found as much pleasure in using her quick wits and fine memory as her active feet and merry tongue, while the lads had to do their best to keep their places, for Nan showed them that girls could do most things as well as boys, and some things better. There were no rewards in school, but Mr. Bhaer's "Well done!" and Mrs. Bhaer's good report on the conscience book, taught them to love duty for its own sake, and try to do it faithfully, sure that sooner or later the recompense would come. Little Nan was quick to feel the new atmosphere, to enjoy it, to show that it was

what she needed; for this little garden was full of sweet flowers, half hidden by the weeds; and when kind hands gently began to cultivate it, all sorts of green shoots sprung up, promising to blossom beautifully in the warmth of love and care, the best climate for young hearts and souls all the world over.