

The Storyteller.

THE FRAULEIN.

(By DAWN GRAVE, in the *Ave Maria*.)

VI.—WITH THE HEART'S HANDS.

As is often the case in Washington, December came that year warm as April,—fleece white clouds, with never a thought of snow in them, guided by southern breezes across the bluest of blue skies. Sunshine, mellow and life-giving as rare old wine, poured into the Fräulein's windows, coaxing its row of scarlet geraniums and pink begonias to bloom, and throwing the canary into a frenzy of glad song. Indeed, the only sad thing to be seen was the Fräulein's face bent above Margaret's pillow.

"Now you must not grieve, dearest," said the child. "I'll be better soon; and I'm just as happy now as Earnest there, only I can't sing. Have not I everything to be happy with? You, and papa's long letters, and Harold, and Father Connelly with his lovely books. Then, the day after to-morrow is Christmas. Ah! I do wish I was strong, and able to make you something beautiful—you and Harold."

"What would *you* think was something most beautiful?" asked Fräulein.

"I don't know; I don't care for anything," replied Margaret, after a moment.

"Sometimes I think a big doll would be pretty to take care of while you're out. Papa will buy me one when he's rich again. But what must I ask the Blessed Mother to send you?"

"Resignation," exclaimed the Fräulein, bursting into tears and sinking down by Margaret's bedside. Anxiety and too much work were telling on the delicate nerves. "There, it is all now over!" she whispered at last. "But I can not help asking what I do, what I do without you, my comfort, my angel—me such a little thing in this big world all alone? And I forget that the dear Christmas was so near us."

Behind a screen in one corner of her room stood the Fräulein's trunk, very foreign-looking with its various French and German railway tags—a brown bit of the Fatherland, towards which she never glanced without homesick sigh; and locked therein were all the Fräulein's treasures. She raised the lid, tossed over its contents till from the very bottom she drew a long box of some dark red wood, beautifully polished and carved. Within lay the most exquisite doll, fast asleep; it's waxen cheeks flushed as with the very hus of life, the parted lips disclosing two of the tiniest seed-pearl teeth—its head—fascinatingly bald—protected from droughts by one of those droll little crotchet caps that German babies wear, tied under the dimpled chin with faded blue ribbon. But—oh, horror!—too much handling of old, or travelling of late, had broken some hidden mechanism in the movable neck. As she lifted it, head and body parted. She uttered a cry.

"What's the matter, dear? Have you hurt yourself?" called Margaret.

"Yes—no: I am not hurt. I find what I seek in my trunk, and I am busy thinking—thinking. Go back to sleep some more, dear."

And while Margaret slept the Fräulein, cloaked and bonneted, stole noiselessly from the room. In the hall below Harold stopped her.

"Come in—won't you, please?—and see what I'm going to give Margaret to-morrow. I made it from a picture. Father Connelly says it's a seboner; and mama's making an Old Glory to fly at the mainmast—a real silk flag with all the stars on it. Do you think it's good enough for Margaret, Fräulein? I wish it could be the finest thing in the world for *her*!" he added, with an upward glance of his large brown eyes.

The Fräulein clasped closer the bundle concealed beneath her cape.

"It is the finest thing," she answered, kissing the boy's transparent brow; "for you have made it for her with love. There is no work so precious, so beautiful, Harold, as that what we do with the heart's hands."

Once, walking with the Marvin children in an unfrequented street, the Fräulein had noticed a dilapidated old house, from whose second story swung the large blue sign lettered in white, "Dolls' Hospital. Fractures reduced. Lost limbs supplied. Skilful surgeon." And, aided by a good memory for localities, she soon found herself in the small, bright room dignified by such quaint title. Busily engaged before a table covered with rosy-cheeked patients in various stages of convalescence, sat a round-eyed youth, the portrait of good-nature.

"Yessum," he said, cheerfully; "yessum, we can mend any doll that's living. The complaints that they complains of is most generally always the same. This is a mighty delicate job, though," he added, examining the Fräulein's doll. "But my boss can fix anything in a twinkle. He's gone to Baltimore this afternoon, but he'll be back to-morrow; and he'll take good care of it, and fetch it home sure in the evening. What's the address? Miss Liederkrantz, 2114 18th Street, N. W. All right, um. Much obliged."

VII.—A RED-LETTER DAY.

With aching head resting on one blue-veined hand, the Fräulein sat by the window, watching a scarlet-hooded sun nod drowsily westward behind the tower of St. Paul's, sighing as its last rays faded into twilight. To-morrow would be such a different day from what she had wished to make it for Margaret. No word of encouragement for the future had yet come from Mr. Marvin, and her glowing dream of a Christmas tree (the neglected child had never seen one) long since faded into the gray reality of doctor's bills and all the incidental expenses of illness. There could be nothing—

nothing but the doll and Harold's ship, and perhaps some remembrance from Father—

"O Fräulein! there's a man downstairs wants to see you; he's waiting in the parlour. And he's got a long bundle under his arm with a bunch of holly hanging through the string. I'm sure it's a Christmas present for you, Fräulein dear—a real Christmas present. Oh, I hope it is!"

"For me? I think not, Harold. Nothing could come for me," said the Fräulein, smiling. "Ah, yes! I know," she added, after a minute—"I know. Go in and stay with Margaret till I come, dear." And she passed swiftly down the stairs—a graceful, charming figure, so *petite* as to seem scarcely more than a child's.

"You have brought back to me my doll, sir?" she remarked, pausing on the threshold of the dimly lit parlour. He sprang forward, while a torrent of broken words followed fast upon the utterance of her name.

"Elsa! Elsa! Elsa! Is it again I see you—I find you at last in the new land, when I think the world so large we no more meet? *Nein, nein*, you have not forgot me! *Ach*, you have never read dose letter I write you to your aunt. And I—I think you no more remember your poor humble Ernest, that forgets you not in dis life or life to come. And all the while, through long years, you part not mit my little offering; you keep it safe! *Ach*, Elsa Fräulein, what a Christmas gift of joy the Father in heaven have sent me! And once again they were standing with tear-wet faces, hand in hand, side by side, as on that gloomy afternoon under the cherry-trees in the old garden corner of Nuremberg.

"An hour—an hour away! Is it possible?" cried the Fräulein. "And it seemed so but a moment. For, Margaret, Margaret, such a wonderful, wonderful good has found me!" And, laying the doll on Margaret's breast, she told her story.

"Poor dear, poor dear!" murmured the child, when all was said. "It is beautiful—beautiful; all except that naughty aunt, making you run away and be a governess rather than marry somebody you didn't want to. But of course you forgave her long ago, and you'll never feel 'all alone' in the big world any more. Oh, I'm so happy—so happy for you, darling! And that was why you named the canary Ernest, wasn't it?"

But all these happy happenings happened that Christmas Eve before the hour set by Jack Kennon and the others for the night's rejoicing to begin. When Harold, in response to a gentle ring opened the door and beheld a silver-bearded, fur-clad Santa Claus, he uttered a low cry of dismay. When next appeared a charmingly, shawled and bonneted lady, in a satin mask, followed by several "Greeks bearing gifts"—or, to speak more literally, laughing Africans laden with huge baskets—and a most symmetrical Norway pine, his joy broke into words.

"I prayed for it so, Father Connelly said you'd come!" he cried. "O, Mr. Santa Claus, it's all for Margaret—for Margaret and the Fräulein!"

"Maybe my bag holds a thing or two for you," answered a deep bass voice. "There's a white mark opposite your name in my good book, Sir Harold." And the boy often wondered afterwards how his name was known.

"Father Connelly," said Jack Kennon next morning, "every Christmas, from now until I'm superannuated, put me down for the part you gave me to play last night. It was fine, fine. Mrs. Eaton suggested arranging the tree upstairs, in the hall opposite Margaret's room; and, when all was ready, they opened her door. I tell you, Father"—and the young athlete threw out his strong white arm with emphasis—"the well in health, and the well off in fortune don't realise their blessings till they come in contact with sufferings and want. If one thought of it he could not be grateful enough for the mere power of motion—the free use of his limbs. It ploughed up my heart for new seed to see that little lame boy limping to and fro from the tree to Margaret's bedside, carrying her the bundles, and watching her face, with such rapture on his own. The Fräulein cried for joy to find she had so many friends in the world when she thought she hadn't one."

A visible answer to many prayers, it seemed, that Margaret was left with them until May, the month in which she and Harold were to make their First Communion. Toward the close of that blessed day, her last on earth, she lay among the great branches of arbutus and wild flowers that Ernest had found among the Virginia hills, and, smiling, gave her peace to all gathered in the little white-draped room.

"The pain is there," she replied to the doctor's question; "but it does not hurt. I only need to stay now till papa comes."

But when she knew he would not arrive in time, she wrote a few lines to him on the back of one of her German exercises, and asked Father Connelly to give it to him. Then she kissed everyone—even the doll that had brought such happiness to Fräulein—kissed everyone "good-night" and fell asleep.

"I wonder not you weep," whispered Ernest, gently but firmly drawing the Fräulein away. "I, too, weep; I, too, so love her. She was all perfectness like you; and like sweet music, she have died away and left us yet one another, *herz liebe*—one another, is it not?"

But the poor father's grief was full of heart-break.

"A half year more, and I may be on my feet again," he said, looking hopelessly from one to another of his sympathisers. "I may have as much money as before, and I could have done everything for her I didn't do. I married the second time to give Margaret a mother; and, as it proved, she was not even a friend, but cruelly neglected her. Now I might have taken her abroad myself next year, tried all the doctors and all the waters; they might have cured her. But it's all over. No matter what good befalls me, it's too late—too late for *her*; only you"—he clasped the Fräulein's hands,—"you and yours shall have everything my own daughter would have had—you that loved her and nursed her and worked for her. God knows that's all that gives me strength to go back to work again—the one comforting thought; and I'll look after that lame boy, too, that cried so at the funeral."