'In the wash!' said I, in a fretful tone. 'How came it in the wash?'

'It was dirty.'

'No, it wasn't any such thing. It would have done very well for her to put on as a change to-day and to-morrow.'

'Well, ma'am, it's in the wash, and no help for it now,' said Netty, quite pertly.

I was dreadfully provoked with her, and had it on my tongue to order her to leave my presence instantly. But I choked down my rising indignation.

'Take the red and white one, then,' said I.

'The sleeve's nearly torn off of that. There isn't any one that she can wear except her white muslin.'

'Oh dear! It's too bad! What shall I do? The children are all in rags and tatters!'

And in this style I fretted away for three or four minutes, while Netty stood waiting for my decision as to what Alice was to wear.

'Shall she put on the white muslin?' she at length asked.

'No, indeed! Certainly not! A pretty condition she'd have it in before night! Go and get me the red and white frock, and I will mend it. You ought to have told me it was torn this morning. You knew there was nothing for the child to put on but this. I never saw such a set as you are!'

Netty flitted away, grumbling to herself. When she came in, she threw the frock into my lap with a manner so insolent and provoking that I could hardly keep from breaking out upon her and rating her soundly. One thing that helped to restrain me was the recollection of sundry ebullitions of a like nature that had neither produced good effects nor left my mind in a state of much self-respect or tranquillity.

I repaired the torn sleeve, while Netty stood by. It was the work of but five minutes.

'Be sure,' said I, as I handed the garment to Netty, 'to see that one of Alice's frocks is ironed the first thing to-morrow morning.'

The girl heard, of course, but she made no answer. That was rather more of a condescension than she was willing to make just then.

Instead of thinking how easily the difficulty of the clean frock for Alice had been gotten over, I began fretting myself because I had not been able to procure a seamstress, although the children were all in rags and tatters.

'What is to be done?' I said, half crying, as I began to rock myself backward and forward in the great rocking chair. 'I am out of all heart.'

So, after worrying for a whole hour about what I should do, and where I should begin, I abandoned the idea of attempting anything myself, in despair, and concluded the perplexing debate by taking another hearty crying spell.

The dusky twilight had begun to fall, and I was still sitting idly in my chamber, and as unhappy as I could be. I felt completely discouraged. How was I to get along? I had been trying for weeks, in vain, to get a good seamstress; and yet had no prospect of obtaining one. I was going to lose my cook, and, in all probability, my chambermaid. What would I do? No light broke in through the cloudy veil that overhung my mind. The door opened, and Agnes, who had come up to my room, said

'Mrs. Partridge is done.'

I took out my purse, and had selected therefrom the change necessary to pay the washerwoman, when a thought of her caused me to say

'Tell Mrs. Partridge to come up and see me.'

My thoughts and feelings were changing. By the time the washerwoman came in, my interest in her was alive again.

'Sit down,' said I, to the tired looking creature who sank into a chair, evidently much wearied.'

'It's hard work, Mrs. Partridge,' said I.

'Yes, ma'am, it is rather hard. But I am thankful for health and strength to enable me to go through with it. I know some poor women who have to work as hard as I do, and yet do not know what it is to feel well for an hour at a time.'

'Poor creatures!' said I. 'It is very hard! How in the world can they do it?'

'We can do a great deal, ma'am, when it comes to the pinch; and it is much pleasanter to do, I find, than to think about it. If I were to think much I should give up in despair. But I pray the Lord each morning to give me my daily bread, and thus far He has done it, and will, I am sure, continue to do it to the end.'

'Happy it is for you that you can so think and feel,' I replied. 'But I am sure I could not be as you are, Mrs. Partridge. It would kill me.'

'I sincerely trust, ma'am that you will never be called to pass through what I have,' said Mrs. Partridge. 'And yet there are those who have it still harder. There was a time when the thought of being as poor as I now am, and of having to work so hard, would have been terrible to me; and yet I do not know that I was so very much happier then than I am now, though I confess I ought to have been. I had full and plenty of everything brought into the house by my husband, and had only to dispense in my family the blessings of God sent to us. But I let things annoy me then more than they do now.'

'But how can you help being worried, Mrs. Partridge? To be away from my children as you have been away from yours all day would set me wild. I would be sure some of them would be killed or dreadfully hurt.'

'Such fears are wonderfully projected,' said Mrs. Partridge, in a cheerful voice.

'So they are. But to think of four little children, the youngest seven months and the oldest not [illegible], all alone, for a whole day!'

'It is not when we think about it, I know,' returned Mrs. Partridge. 'It looks very bad! But I try and put that view of it out of my mind. When I leave them to go to work they say they will be good children. At dinner time I sometimes find them all [illegible]. I never find them crying, [illegible] the younger ones, and [illegible] the time. In the evening, when I [illegible], there is generally no one [illegible] she has given them the bread and [illegible] and undressed and put [illegible].'

I [illegible] the seventy-five cents she had earned [illegible] and [illegible] in the morning about the [illegible], and I was left again to my own [illegible].

[illegible] a [illegible] received a [illegible] in [illegible] was the first almost audible [illegible] in the [illegible] mind. To think that I, [illegible], and running over with blessings, should make myself and all about me unhappy, because a few [illegible] are not just to my satisfaction, while this woman, who toils like a slave from morning until night, and who can hardly procure food and clothing for her children, from whom she is almost constantly separated, is patient and hopeful, makes me feel as if I deserved to lose what I have refused to enjoy.

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